

LATE ANTIQUE MOTIFS IN YEZIDI ORAL TRADITION



E. Spät

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THE YEZIDIS AND LATE ANTIQUE GNOSIS: INTRODUCTION TO ESZTER SPÄT'S *LATE ANTIQUE MOTIFS IN YEZIDI MYTHOLOGY AND ORAL TRADITION*

PRELIMINARIES

Ten years ago, Eszter Spät embarked upon an adventurous enterprise, begirded by many dangers, intellectual not less than physical. Originally a Latinist and a scholar of Late Antique Gnosis and Manichaeism, she decided to do fieldwork on a contemporary religious and ethnic minority, the Yezidis, a Kurdish group scattered between Iraq, Turkey and Armenia, with its own religion, transmitted via oral tradition. She embarked upon this unusual journey with a hypothesis: from what she learned from the literature that she had read about the Yezidis, she conceived the intuition that the Yezidis may preserve old Gnostic and Manichaean traditions, which, in other parts of the world, only live on as objects of bookish scholarship. As this was going to be a Ph.D. project within the framework of a Department of Medieval Studies, which had an eye on Late Antiquity but not on the contemporary Middle East, this decision caused some apprehensions. Would it be feasible? Would it be methodologically sound? Would Eszter be able to manage to learn the necessary languages and the necessary skills of the anthropologist? Would she be able to manage all the background knowledge on the religious and factual history of medieval and early modern Middle East, without which her work would not be professional research? And last but not least: would she not risk her personal safety going alone to the Kurdish mountains in a situation of quasi-war that, as we all know by now, was soon to turn into a real war, the famous or, rather, ill-famous “War on Iraq.”

The book presently published by Gorgias Press, based on Eszter Spät's Ph.D. thesis defended *summa cum laude* in April 2009 at Central European University, Budapest, is a glamorous response to all these apprehensions. The project has proven feasible; its methodology is sound, at the same time conservative and innovative, Eszter has so well learned the Kurdish dialects that she needed and the skills of the anthropologist that, through her field work, she was able to collect important new data that will most certainly serve as primary material for other researchers too. And Eszter took the risk of going to Northern Iraq in a tense situation, to work there in an NGO and, later, at the University of Dohuk, teaching English and staying there during the war, fleeing together with the Yezidi community to the mountains when the bombings rendered Dohuk unsafe. I am sure that her helpful attitude as an English teacher and the exceptional courage she had shown greatly increased the confidence of her informants, as a result of which now we have gained invaluable new information on the Yezidis, which she has partly published and which, hopefully, she will continue to share with the scholarly community.

SOME REMARKS ON METHODOLOGY

However, the greatest challenge of this research and its most important inherent danger, causing the most intense apprehensions, lied elsewhere than in Eszter's exposing herself to physical insecurity, namely in the combination of bookish research on the history of Gnosis and Manichaeism with contemporary field work. Was it at all possible for one just to go to Iraq and clarify whether or not the Yezidis are a religious group preserving ancient Gnostic traditions? Can one apply to a contemporary oral tradition knowledge gained from fifteen, eighteen centuries-old texts? Undoubtedly, this was the riskiest part of the endeavour and Eszter Spät, in the course of her work, changed her original strong hypothesis into a weaker one. Now she does not speak about "Gnostic traditions," but about "Late Antique motifs." I have little doubt that anybody who carefully reads the present monograph would agree that the author has brilliantly achieved this lesser goal of detecting Late Antique elements in Yezidi oral lore. She has collected, from original texts and secondary literature, a huge material on the Late Antique motifs; this material she combines with information on the Yezidis, partly available before her field work and

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those, whose support has contributed to writing this thesis. I am indebted to the Medieval Studies Department at Central European University for having been open enough to let me write my thesis on a rather unusual and unorthodox subject. My special thanks to Gerhard Jaritz who has painstakingly read through my thesis (or study, as he prefers to call it), drawing my attention to mistakes and helping me shape it in a more academic form. I am grateful to Andrew Palmer for drawing my attention to the topic of the Yezidis, and to István Perczel and György Geréby for their enthusiastic encouragement and advice. I would also like to take this chance to thank János Bak, who was my staunch supporter during my rocky beginnings at the department (although he always claimed otherwise), who insisted that I write my book on the Yezidis, and together with Aziz al-Azmeh found a publisher for it.

I owe special acknowledgment to Philip Kreyenbroek, who generously gave me access to the unpublished Yezidi texts he has collected and translated, and helped with my research in Göttingen. My conversations with Christine Allison helped me develop a wider perspective of the Yezidis, while the regular Kurdish workshops she organized in Paris made it possible for me to acquaint myself with other aspects of Kurdish Studies.

My research was greatly helped by the financial help I received from the Open Society Foundation and the Kurdish Institute of Paris. I must express my appreciation to the latter not only for their generous financial help, but even more importantly for helping me find lodgings while in Iraqi Kurdistan, not an easy task, without which my field research there would not have been possible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AJSLL	The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
BSOAS	Bulleting of the School of Oriental and African Studies
JA	Journal Asiatique
JAOS	Journal of American Oriental Society
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
RMM	Revue du Monde Musulman
RSO	Rivista degli Studii Orientali
SC	Sources Chretiennes

INTRODUCTION

Yezidis are a Kurdish-speaking religious minority of a few hundred thousand souls, living mainly in northern Iraq, but also in Syria, Turkey, Iran and in the Caucasus, where they emigrated in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Today there is also a sizeable Yezidi community living in Europe, primarily in Germany. Yezidis are not Muslims, neither may they be considered Jews or Christians. Rather they follow an oral religion of their own which may be assigned to none of these categories. These people, accused of being “devil-worshippers”¹ by their Muslim and Christian neighbors, have for a couple of centuries, since the first reports of European travelers, exercised the imagination of European researchers and scholars.

The aim of this work is to throw light on the meaning of some elements in Yezidi religion through tracing their origins in Late Antiquity. Yezidi mythology and religious imagery have incorporated and adapted to their particular religious system some myths and motifs which once enjoyed widespread popularity in the wider region, but which have since been mostly been relegated to oblivion, except among students of late antique religions. The study

¹ The Peacock Angel (*Tawnsi Melek*), believed to be the chief of angels, God’s viceroy on earth, and the special protector of the Yezidis, is habitually identified with the devil by the Yezidi’s Muslim neighbors. As personally I have seen nothing among the Yezidis or in Yezidi texts that would even distantly imply that there was any truth in this accusation of worshipping the devil, or identifying the Peacock Angel with him, I mostly consider this accusation a time-honored method of discrediting the “other” (or rather “another faith”) along with the charge of sexual licentiousness, both wide spread since Late Antiquity, and shall not deal with it in this thesis.

of such motifs and myths would help to explain some elements of the Yezidi faith which have previously been considered obscure, confusing, occasionally even childish, and were deemed to be the results of Yezidis' misunderstanding or distorting legends or myths taken from other religions (that is from Islam or Judeo-Christianity), or were simply dismissed since interpreting them proved too difficult.

These motifs fall into place within the Yezidi system of beliefs and become easier to understand once light is shed on their origin. Placing these motifs in the context of a religious language originating in Late Antiquity could be the key to a better understanding of Yezidi religion and the way it developed, as well as of the working of oral tradition in the region. In this context, establishing the late antique origins of some motifs demonstrates the way literacy interacted with orality in the region.

Finally, it may be of interest, especially for students of Late Antiquity and the Hellenistic *oikumene*, to see that even the Yezidi Kurds, living much later on what used to be the periphery of the Hellenistic world, have inherited their share of a common culture which contributed so much to the development of both the Christian and Islamic cultures.

Naturally, through Christianity and especially Islam, which contributed much to the development of Yezidi religion, Yezidis have inherited a great deal from late antique religious thought, as is obvious to anyone slightly familiar with Yezidi myths. However, the present study aims at studying motifs where such a connection is not immediately apparent because these motifs have since sunk into oblivion in mainstream Islam or Christianity.

To appreciate the relevance of such a piece of research, it is necessary to place it against the background of Yezidi studies: Yezidism, a religion based on oral tradition,² has always proved difficult to understand for people educated according to the premises of book-based religion, whether Muslim or Christian. Interpreting

² Not only did Yezidis not have written books, but even reading and writing (and especially the writing of religious texts) was forbidden them, with the exception of the Adani lineage of *sheikhs*. Religious knowledge was transmitted orally by special "experts." See chapter "Yezidi Religion."

Yezidi oral tradition and comprehending their religion was, until recently, to a large extent hampered by a lack of material. Researchers had to base their studies on the two alleged “sacred books” of the Yezidis, that is, two short tracts which surfaced at the end of the nineteenth century, on some brief and generally not too accurate observations from the pen of travelers in the region, and scant reports, even less accurate and reliable, from mostly hostile Muslim sources. Another problem was that Yezidi “teachings” were subjected to the same criteria as religions based on written texts and, as oral traditions function along rather different lines, Yezidi religious concepts were promptly found wanting coherence and even essence.

As a result, Western researchers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century tended to dismiss Yezidi religious texts³ as inadequate, because they did not conform to their ideas of scholarly theology. G.R. Driver writes (referring to myths, some of which will be discussed in this study): “Their beliefs seem to be a confused medley of Jewish legends overlaid with the crassest superstitions, of many of which it is now quite impossible to trace the source.”⁴ R. Lescot, in his seminal work on the Yezidi tribes of the Sinjar and Syria, speaks of the incoherence of the texts, their confusion and naïveté.⁵ The editor of M.N. Siouffi’s “Notice sur des Yézidis,” in the *Journal Asiatique*, the first detailed account of Yezidi mythology, applies the term “puérilité” in the introduction to the article, where he offers an apology for publishing such childish myths.⁶ Such opinions were shared by most students of Yezidi religion, who were at a loss what to make of the little they could gather of oral Yezidi mythology. As C. Allison writes: “Little sensitivity to the conventions of the genres in which these texts were composed was

³ Following the conventions of linguistics I will use “text” for both written text and speech, that is, spoken text.

⁴ G.R. Driver, “The Religion of the Kurds,” *BJOAS* 2.2 (1922): 200-201.

⁵ R. Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yezîdis de Syrie et du Djebel Sinjar* (Beyrouth: Institut Français de Damas, 1936), 54, 55, 60.

⁶ M. N. Siouffi, “Notice sur des Yézidis,” *Journal Asiatique* ser. 7. vol. 20 (1882): 252.

shown ... Little attention was paid to the ways in which Yezidis understood, interpreted and used these traditions.”⁷

Yezidi religion eventually came to be seen as “degenerated” and, as a result, academic interest in Yezidis eventually dwindled. This situation was gradually changed in the last few decades by the publication of Yezidi texts collected in Iraq and Armenia and, most importantly, by P. Kreyenbroek’s two books *Yezidism, Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) and *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2005). These books contain dozens of sacred texts, in Kurdish and English, as well as information collected from Iraqi Yezidis on their religious literary genres, caste and social system, rituals, holidays, and a list of holy beings. Besides making Yezidi religion far more accessible to researchers, Kreyenbroek’s work has been also of great relevance in as much as it has drawn attention to the fact that Yezidism was essentially an oral religion and should be evaluated and studied as such. Furthermore, while not denying the far-reaching influence of Islam, and especially of Sufism on Yezidism, he pointed out that Yezidi oral tradition retained ideas which could be traced to Pre-Islamic (and in fact pre-Zoroastrian) Western Iranian mythology. Thus, for example, Kreyenbroek’s comparison of the Yezidi and Ahl-i Haqq⁸ cosmological creation myth with the Avesta and Rig Veda demonstrated the presence of a very important Iranian substratum in Yezidi mythology, transmitted orally through the centuries.⁹ Kreyenbroek’s work opened up new direc-

⁷ C. Allison, *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan* (Richmond: Curson Press, 2001), 36.

⁸ Ahl-i Haqq, or Kakai, as they are known in Iraqi Kurdistan, are a Kurdish people who follow a heterodox form of Islam. Though officially, unlike Yezidis, they prefer to be considered Muslims, their religious system shows a number of peculiarities which are foreign to Islam, but very similar to Yezidi beliefs. Just like Yezidis they are considered “devil-worshippers” by some Muslims or at least *ghulat*, or extreme Shiites, following ideas that are not acceptable to the main body of Muslims, whether Sunni or Shiia.

⁹ Kreyenbroek, “Mithra and Ahreman, Binyāmīn and Malak Tāwūs,” in *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions: From Mazdaism to Sufism*, ed. P. Gi-

tions for research, partly due to the relative abundance of texts it made available, and partly because it made it possible to see Yezidism as an oral tradition, which integrated motifs from different epochs in its history into a complex whole, as is typical of oral traditions in general.

My study, relying to a large extent on the texts published by Kreyenbroek, as well as myths and other information collected during my field research, intends to add to the understanding of Yezidi religion. It aims to demonstrate that beside the Islamic and Iranian background, Yezidi religion also shows the influence of late antique religious thought and literature, tying Yezidis to the prolific world of late Mediterranean Hellenistic culture. It will also try to show that motifs coming from this common culture are not purposeless relics adopted haphazardly and whimsically by the Yezidis, but elements that fit into the pattern of a religion based on oral tradition and should be interpreted within the context of the interplay between literacy and orality.

Late antique influence has, of course, already been suggested by several researchers. Finding common points between Christianity and Yezidism is hardly surprising, as Yezidis live in places where the presence of Christianity goes back a long way, and Yezidi-Christian relations have usually been good (probably due more to a shared sense of persecution than shared theological points).¹⁰ The strongly “exotic” character of Yezidis has also prompted some students of their system to speak of late antique “dualistic,” that is, of Gnostic and/or Manichaean influences or even origin. It must be stated, however, that such suggestions were either based on some misunderstood aspects of Yezidism, on generalities or just on general impressions, not on a detailed analysis of Yezidi ideas.

gnoux (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes: 1992), 57-79; idem, *Yezidism*, 52-59.

¹⁰ However, the most easily observable points of such a shared religious culture, baptism and the revered position of Jesus in Yezidism, can be misleading, as they do not necessarily designate a Christian origin. The respect Yezidis tended to evince toward Christian holy places and saints is again more a religio-social phenomenon than any kind of indication of a common past.

One of the features of Yezidism which induced researchers to look for a dualistic origin was the controversial figure of the Peacock Angel, the chief angel of the Yezidis, identified with Satan by Muslims. A. v. Haxthausen, a mid-nineteenth-century Prussian agronomist who became familiar with Transcaucasian Yezidis, thought that the reverence paid to the Peacock Angel could be connected with the Gnostic doctrine of the Demiurgos (the evil maker of the material world), rather disregarding the fact that Gnostics were very far from revering the Demiurgos.¹¹ A. Neander interpreting the Yezidi's reverence for the Peacock Angel as a cult of the Fallen Angel links Yezidis with Medieval Bogomils and Paulicians, who were accused of being Manichaeans.¹² N. Marr, who argues for Yezidism as an "authentic Kurdish religion" actually turned Neander's argument around and suggested that the appearance of such heretical movements as Paulicians, Tondrakites, and so on (accused of being dualists) in Greater Armenia should be attributed to the influence of an indigenous pagan religion "de la même essence que le yézidisme kurde" on Armenian Christianity.¹³ A. Grant saw some strong resemblances to the Manichaeans (though he ultimately ascribes to them a Jewish origin as one of the lost tribes) based on the figure of the Peacock Angel (whom he saw as an angel of light), the geographical position of the Yezidis, and the similarity of Sheikh Adi's (the holiest figure of the Yezidis)

¹¹ A.v. Haxthausen, *Transkaukasien* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1856), referred to in W. Ainsworth, "The Assyrian Origin of the Izedis or Yezidis – the so-called 'Devil Worshipers,'" in *Transaction of the Ethnological Society of London* Vol 1 (London: Ethnological Society, 1861), 42.

¹² A. Neander, "Über die Elemente, aus denen die Lehren der Yezidis hervorgegangen zu sein scheinen," in *Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen*, ed. J.L. Jacobi (Berlin, Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen 1851), referred to in Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 5.

¹³ N. Marr, "Yescho o Slove 'chelebi,'" (Again about the word "chelebi") *Zapiski Vostochnovo Otdeleniya Imperatorskovo Russkovo Arkheologicheskovo Obshestva* 20 (1910): 99-151, quoted by B. Nikitine, *Les Kurdes: Étude Sociologique et Historique* (Paris: Éditions d'Aujourd'hui, 1956), 230-31.

name with that of Addai, one of Mani's apostles sent to northern Mesopotamia.¹⁴

A. Mingana, following a different line of argument, thought that the name applied to the Yezidis in the Mosul district "Daisanites" ("Dasenis") was related to the second-century heresiarch of Edessa, Bardaisan, who displayed an interest in astrology, and had what were seen as gnosticizing tendencies.¹⁵ He was also said to have established a sect known as the Daysaniyya. (Bardaisan was actually considered the spiritual teacher or predecessor of Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, by St. Ephram.) He argued that this claim was supported by the "daily worship which these Yezidis direct to the stars, to the sun and the moon." (Yezidis pray toward the rising and setting sun, but no such reverence is given to the moon or the stars.) He also stated that Yezidis were "greatly influenced in the second century by some aberrations of Gnostic thought" but he failed to support his statement with any concrete details.¹⁶ The arguments about the name "Daisanites" and a "Manichaean" origin were also raised by D. Chwolsohn.¹⁷

Sabaeen influence is also often quoted by authors, though what they mean by Sabaeans is unclear as there have been a great many different ideas on the identity and teachings of the mysterious Sabaeans throughout the ages. For example, Driver speaks of the Sabaeans of Harran.¹⁸ A. Layard who equates the Sabaeans with the Mandaeans of South Iraq and attributes a Sabaeen or Chal-

¹⁴ A. Grant, *The Nestorians; or, the Lost Tribes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841.)

¹⁵ Actually it was not so much Gnosticism, but Hermetic doctrines and Platonic philosophy that attracted the Edessan intellectual's attention, see J. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 13.

¹⁶ A. Mingana, "Devil-worshippers: their Beliefs and Their Sacred Books," *JRAS* (1916): 512 and 516.

¹⁷ D. Chwolsohn, *Die Sabier und der Sabismus* (St Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1856), quoted in T. Bois, "Les Yézidis. Essai historique et sociologique sur leur origine religieuse," *Al Machriq* 55 (1961): 123.

¹⁸ Driver, "Religion of the Kurds," 212; See also Chwolsohn, *Die Sabier und der Sabismus*.

daean origin to Yezidis, actually says (though without giving explicit arguments): “There is in them a strange mixture of Sabaeanism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, with a tincture of the doctrines of the Gnostics and Manichaeans. Sabaeanism, however, appears to be the prevailing feature. And it is not improbable that the sect may be a remnant of the ancient Chaldees.” Layard bases his claim for a Sabaeon/Mandaean origin on a Yezidi tradition that he had heard, namely that Yezidis originally came from the south, from the region of Basrah.¹⁹ G. Badger thought Yezidism came from Zoroastrianism, but was corrupted by the Sabaeans.²⁰

It must be added that most of these authors displayed limited knowledge both of Yezidi mythology and late antique dualistic religions (which is hardly surprising, as most of the authors lived before the discovery of new texts made the study of Yezidis, Gnosticism and Manichaeism possible.) G. Gasparro, writing much later, had more material at her disposal, and her suggestion of a Gnostic influence is the only one which I think merits serious reflection. Gasparro is induced to look for Gnostic origins by the cosmic Pearl of divine light in Yezidi cosmology, from which God created the world. For Gasparro this presents typological affinity to the Gnostic image of the pearl which symbolized the consubstantiality between the Godhead and its emanations. Gasparro finds the closest parallel in Mandaean texts, where the pearl symbol is widely utilized.²¹ However, the pearl plays a completely different role in Yezidi cosmology than in Gnostic and related texts. For the Gnostics it is the symbol of human soul, rather than the material and the scene of creation.²²

¹⁹ A. Layard, *Niniveh and its Remains* (London: Muray, 1849), vol. I. 306-07.

²⁰ G. Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals: With the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Cordistan in 1842-1844*, vol 1. (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), 126.

²¹ G. Gasparro, “I Miti Cosmogonici degli Yezidi,” *Numen* 21.3 (1974): 221.

²² For an interpretation of the pearl as the Indo-Iranian concept of “stone sky” enclosing the world like an eggshell, see P. Kreyenbroek, “Mithra and Ahreman, Binyāmīn and Malak Tāwūs.”

In this study, instead of making sweeping generalizations, I will analyze the possible influence of late antique religiosity on concrete Yezidi myths and motifs, making a detailed comparison of the late antique and Yezidi material. Unlike some of my forerunners, I have no wish to look for the origins of the Yezidis as a group. Such a search for origins, once very fashionable in the field of religious studies, is no longer thought to contribute toward understanding religious phenomena, but rather to distort it. On the other hand, identifying the elements Yezidi religion has in common with the other religions of the region, either living or past, and examining what Yezidis made of them, can be relevant for understanding the way Yezidi religious oral tradition is constructed and works.

It must also be understood that this study does not claim to present Yezidis as the direct and sole inheritors of the motifs discussed in the following chapters and certainly does not suggest that Yezidis are an exceptional, isolated case, the lone survival of a long gone culture. I do not wish to present the Yezidis as a group of people who mysteriously preserved some curious religious concepts, tenaciously clinging to them while surrounded by people for whom such strange beliefs meant as little as they do to the modern observer. In other words, I lay no claim to saying that Yezidis, who appear in our sources only in the second half of the Middle Ages as a Sufi group given to heretical tendencies, are in effect some crypto-Gnostic or Manichaean group, even if most of the motifs analyzed in this work can be connected to these dualistic movements. Furthermore, I believe there is no reason to assume that the late antique elements necessarily made their way from written religious texts directly into Yezidi religious tradition – seeing that this tradition is unlikely to have emerged in a full-fledged form before the thirteenth or fourteenth century at the earliest. Rather, I argue, supported by the meager sources available to researchers, that the motifs discussed in the following chapters once enjoyed a widespread currency in the region and formed part of a common cultural substratum shared by and understandable to many different groups (including the proto-Yezidis). Known to us from literary sources, whether Christian, Jewish, Gnostic or Manichaean, they must have infiltrated “popular” religion and became an integral part of the religious oral tradition of the region due to the interaction between literary and oral, between “high” and “low”, culture. Many of the motifs discussed in the subsequent chapters can still

be found among other groups in the Middle East, from so-called heterodox Islamic groups to “popular” beliefs²³ current among “mainstream” Sunni Kurds. Sadly, the study of non-mainstream religious groups such as the Kurdish Ahl-i Haqq, the Turkoman-Kurdish-Arabic Shabak, the Kurdish-Turkish Alevi,²⁴ and the Arabic Alawites (Nusayrîs) has so far been rather limited.²⁵ The same is

²³ The use of the word “popular” has become increasingly questioned by historians of culture, who claim that the notion of “popular” was the “creation” of the elites, and it presupposes a kind of binary opposition between the culture of the elite and the “general populace,” while also giving a false impression of homogeneity within these two, artificially constructed classes. (See P. Burke, “Popular Culture Reconsidered,” in *Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit: Leben – Alltag – Kultur*, ed. G. Jaritz (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 181-91. However, I argue that in the present study it is justified to use the adjective “popular” to talk about the different beliefs of the non-literate classes. The emphasis here is exactly on the fact that they did not (and in the case of rural Muslim Kurds do not) belong to the literate elite, and consequently their beliefs, which may have significantly differed (or still differ) from those laid down in “canonized” texts, were seen by the elite as ideas of the ignorant and were only exceptionally recorded in writing. This lack of documentation means that one has to try to reconstruct the different “popular” ideas professed by the non-literate classes throughout the centuries with the help of what little was recorded by members of the elite, and the findings of modern ethnologists.. My use of “popular” is also far from denying the interaction between the elite and the other classes (yet another frequent argument against the use of “popular,”) since the core idea of this work is to demonstrate how ideas developed in a literary culture may have become incorporated in the oral tradition of non-literate people.

²⁴ Turkish Alevi have to a certain degree been studied in the past decades, though most studies concentrate on sociological elements, rather than on mythological ones. As for Kurdish Alevi who probably have traditions peculiar only to them, little study has been carried out, no doubt due to the sensitive political situation in Kurdish regions. As recently as 2001, Dersim (Tunceli), the heartland of the Zaza Alevi, was strictly off limits to visitors.

²⁵ This is partly due, no doubt, to political considerations, but also to the fact that these groups traditionally practice *taqiyya*, or concealment and have been reluctant to divulge their teachings to foreigners. The same was true of the Yezidis, though the last few decades have seen great changes.

true (perhaps even to a greater extent) of the “popular” religious beliefs and myths of the Muslim and Christian population.²⁶ As Allison writes: “the religiosity of the vast majority of Sunni Muslims, with their low literacy rates, their thriving Sufi brotherhoods, and their religious practices which bear a close resemblance to those of their non-Muslim neighbors, has hardly been studied at all.”²⁷ Hamzeh’ee corroborates this statement: “Oral traditions have not received the attention they deserve among social scientists. Unfortunately, one of the most neglected areas in this respect is the Near East. In 1961 Stith Thompson wrote in his introduction to Antti Aarne’s book on folktales that Iranian folk literature is ‘almost completely unexplored’. Even after 35 years, this statement is still valid today.”²⁸ Nevertheless, there is enough information at our disposal to at least indicate that the motifs analyzed in this work are not exclusively peculiar to the Yezidis, but are generally shared by one or more of the other religious groups as well, including “non-official” or “popular” beliefs current among majority Muslims.

Naturally, such an unusual study, combining an analysis of late antique and early Medieval texts and of contemporary oral tradition, raises a great number of questions and difficulties which will

²⁶ Speaking of Christian oral traditions in Iraq, J. Walker states that “studies of the ‘oral literature’ of the Kurdistan Jews support the hypothesis that the Christians of late antique Iraq also possessed a rich and diverse oral culture.” J. T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 78. As Kurdistan Jews were mostly studied in the second half of the twentieth century, there is no reason to suppose that such a rich oral and diverse oral culture among Christians would have been restricted to Late Antiquity and not be found much later as well.

²⁷ C. Allison, “Oral History Methodologies and Islamic Groups,” in *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice*, ed. A. Zhelyazkova and J. Nielsen. (Sofia: IMIR, 2001), 442.

²⁸ M. R. Fariborz Hamzeh’ee, “Methodological Notes on Interdisciplinary Research,” in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, ed. K. Kehl-Bodrogi, B. Kellner-Heinkele, A. Otter-Beaujean (Brill: Leiden, 1997), 111.

have to be addressed as far as possible. These include the following, related research problems:

“LATE ANTIQUE” MOTIFS

When I started my research my aim was to work on Gnostic motifs in Yezidi mythology. However, I soon came to realize that while some of the motifs I have found are clearly of Gnostic origin, others were shared by a variety of other groups, that is, they were part of the religious language in the cultural milieu of Late Antiquity, especially in the East, in the regions of Syria, Mesopotamia and Iran. My readers have to be aware that I use “Late antique” as an auxiliary collective term to designate such different but still interrelated religious movements as Judaism, Christianity (or rather the varieties of Christianity), Gnosticism, Manichaeism and everything in between.²⁹

It would not be feasible to pinpoint the exact origin of any of the motifs analyzed. Some of them are clearly of a dualistic character, but it would be impossible to say if they reflect ideas from Gnosticism or Manichaeism, and if the former, then which school

²⁹ Gnosticism (which is usually dated as roughly lasting from the mid-second century AD to the fifth century) and Manichaeism (starting in the second half of the third century and slowly disappearing in the Middle East only after the coming of Islam) are both labeled late antique spiritual movements in the literature, hence my choice of the term. Although they cannot be labeled “proper” late antique religions, I will also consider the influences of Christianity and Judaism, for both of them not only coexisted (and were mixed) with Gnosticism and Manichaeism during this period, but also shared a number of common features and motifs with them. J. Reeves, talking of shared forms of mythological expressions and expositions ultimately rooted in Jewish biblical exegesis, uses the term “Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis” and “Syro-Mesopotamian” to label what he defines as “a regional trajectory that expresses itself in a series of discrete ideological formulations within the religious discourse of confessionally disparate communities in Syria (including Palestine), Mesopotamia, and Iran during late antiquity and even into the medieval era.” Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 209.

of Gnosticism. Other motifs are equally likely to have come from Judaism, Syriac Christianity, Gnosticism and Manichaeism alike. In fact, it is even feasible that they are the result of an amalgamation of all these different religious traditions, with ideas and motifs fusing into each other and producing ever new forms over the centuries.

It should not come as surprise that it might be impossible to unravel which late antique religious movement left its mark on Yezidi mythology, since a veritable vista of religious syncretism opens up before us in late antique Syria and Mesopotamia.³⁰ “The East also became the home of a variety of gnostic groups, all of which display tantalizing hints of genetic connections with earlier Jewish, Jewish–Christian and/or pagan currents,”³¹ lived side by side and drew on the same sources. Furthermore, it may be assumed that these movements, at least in their embryonic form, influenced each other as well. They converged, mixing and producing ever-new forms of religious expression that shared many common points and facets. What seems to be a clear-cut border between what we call orthodoxy and “heresy” today may not have been perceived as clearly back then.³² As Reeves said, there existed a “com-

³⁰ Though we know practically nothing of the history of the Kurdish mountains during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, it cannot be doubted that the different ideas fermenting in the intellectually fertile world of Syria and the Mesopotamian plains at the foot of these hills could not have failed to penetrate the mountains. Possibly they may have even served as a refuge for those who were persecuted for their particular religious views in the lowlands either by Christian, Zoroastrian or later Islamic authorities.

³¹ Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 46.

³² On the question of “varieties of Christianity” and the problem of “orthodoxy” and “heresy,” especially in the Syriac speaking territories, see W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.) The best documented example for the shifting boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is perhaps the fourth-century Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library from Egypt, which includes works traced to different Gnostic schools, as well as works of Hermetic, encratite (Thomas) Christian, Platonic and Jewish origin. What is more, the codices probably belonged not to a Gnostic community, but to a nearby Pa-

plex ‘symbiosis’ wherein Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, Gnostic and pagan currents feed off of and reinforce each other to form strange, hybrid ideological structures.”³³ One result of this symbiosis was that boundaries between “orthodox” Syriac Christianity, dualistic movements and other schools of thoughts are sometimes extremely hard to distinguish between. This is clearly demonstrated by a number of literary works,³⁴ whose provenance is much debated among scholars. They have been ascribed to a number of theoretically distinct schools of thought. The ideas and motifs they contain may have come from Syriac Gnostic groups or Manichaeans, but they may have equally come from mainstream Syrian Christianity, or may even have an Iranian background.

Two more important factors must also be taken into consideration. First, we have at our disposal only a fraction of the religious literature of Late Antiquity (and the early Middle Ages) especially as regards those of a “heterodox” nature; consequently our knowledge of the religious landscape of late antique Mesopotamia is rather limited. Secondly, we must also keep in mind that the majority of the people must have been illiterate, at least from the functional point of view.³⁵ According to W. Harris, orality played a more important role than written works even in the spread of Christianity, a theoretically book-based religion. As most ordinary

chomian monastery, proving that heterodox works were once routinely read and copied in orthodox communities.

³³ Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 48. Speaking of motifs of ultimately Jewish origin - one of those characteristic features which these movements have in common (and which play an important part in the present study) - Reeves also adds: “a prime vehicle through which Second Temple pseudepigraphic traditions reached Mesopotamian, Iranian, and even Arabian soil was gnostic, often Manichaean, in character, and the subsequent manipulation of these motifs was governed by principles coherent with this origin.” See also F. E. Peters, “Hermes and Harran,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 64-65.

³⁴ For example, the *Odes of Solomon*, or the *Hymn of the Pearl*, probably both composed in Syriac.

³⁵ W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Christians would have been illiterate, or semi-literate, “the church’s leaders recognized that if Christian writings were to have much effect on the masses they would have to be transmitted orally. In the second century scriptures were normally *heard*.”³⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century, realizing that some Christians could not read the scriptures, “tells them to learn by heart a short summary of the dogma. In Augustine’s time, pamphlets describing miraculous events (aretalogies) were read out to the faithful. These were all ways in which the church brought the written word to bear on its partly illiterate public.”³⁷ Harris’ examples, naturally, come mostly from urban centers or at least from highly populated regions around the Mediterranean. It could hardly be doubted that the rate of literacy must have been even lower in the countryside of Mesopotamia and Syria, and the preponderance of orality even higher. It was an oral world, with all the characteristics of religions based on oral tradition. If the literate world (that is the written evidence surviving from Late Antiquity) gives evidence of shifting religious boundaries, oral religion respected boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy, and between different religious movements even less.

Of course, the world of the written word and the world of orality were not rigidly separated from each other. We know that there was a continuum between “elite” (literate) and “non-elite” (oral) culture in Late Antiquity as well as throughout the Middle Ages, and they mutually influenced each other, though we know little about the mechanism of this interaction. Nor do we know much about how orality and “popular” religion functioned in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, especially in the Middle East. Our sources from this period are all written and consequently reflect the literary culture of elites.

³⁶ Ibid., 305.

³⁷ Ibid.

THE NATURE OF ORAL TRADITION: TRADITION AND CHANGE

It must be understood that oral tradition, whether today, in Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages functions in ways which are quite distinct from literate tradition. The particular, defining characteristics of oral tradition must be kept in mind in order to appreciate how elements originating in late antique literate culture could have come to be absorbed into the oral world of the Middle East, and then into Yezidi mythology.

Oral tradition is characterized by an intricate balance of stability and change (creativity).³⁸

Stability: Oral tradition may contain elements of considerable antiquity. Thus, for example, it is widely accepted today that the Old Testament, and especially Genesis, contains material shared with ancient Mesopotamian cultures and transmitted orally. Similarly, the Zoroastrian Avesta (or the fraction which has survived), which was not written down at least until the era of the Sassanians, was for long centuries transmitted orally from generation to generation. Though no doubt its text is “corrupted” (and the oldest texts, the Gathas, pose a serious linguistic barrier not only to modern interpreters but already to their Pahlavi commentators),³⁹ no researcher seriously doubts that at least some of the traditions represented by these texts can be traced back to the founder of the movement, Zoroaster, in the second millennium before our era,⁴⁰ or at the very least to the early period of Zoroastrianism. The Iranian-speaking regions of the Middle East appear to be rich in oral tradition going back many hundreds of years. A famous example is that of the epic *Irradiant*, the story of the drawn-out war between

³⁸ R. Finnigan, “What is Oral Literature Anyway?” in *Oral Literature and the Formula*, ed. B. Stolz and R. Shannon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976), 129.

³⁹ R. Zachner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 26.

⁴⁰ Zachner dates Zoroaster to the seventh century BC, but Mary Boyce argued for a date around 1500 BC. M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.)

the Heavenly God and Lionish God, written in English by a man from Luristan, based on the stories he heard from his grandfather as a child. As R. Zaehner has demonstrated, there is an unmistakable likeness between Zoroastrian Cosmogony and the *Irradiant*. The material of the *Irradiant*, transmitted either as a secret religious lore or simply as a folktale but certainly orally, is the evidence of the survival of a “substratum of ancient lore” through centuries of Islam.⁴¹ Similarly, as Kreyenbroek has demonstrated, the religious oral traditions of groups like the Yezidis and the Ahl-i Haqq retain ideas going back to a pre-Zoroastrian Western Iranian substratum.

Creativity and Change. In counterbalance to stability stand creativity and change. The most distinguishing feature of oral tradition is, as has become an axiom of oral literature studies since the publication of A.B. Lord’s *Singer of Tales*,⁴² the absence of a single correct version. Oral tradition as a rule produces many different variants, none of which can be identified as the “true,” “right” or “wrong” version. Oral tradition is characterized by variability and all variants are equally valid. Oral “pieces” are constantly being transformed by the narrators. Many researchers of oral tradition have remarked on how the words in an oral story differ not only from narrator to narrator, but also between the performances of the same narrator, new elements are constantly being introduced. The same is true as regards the sequences of the episodes in case of longer “pieces.” Two performers rarely follow the same order.⁴³ Such variability and creativity inevitably means that the content of oral tradition is open to change. Non-literate religions are far more prone to change than literate religions, with their fixed points of reference.⁴⁴ This change includes both discarding old elements and absorbing new ones.

⁴¹ R. Zaehner, “Zoroastrian Survivals in Iranian Folklore,” *Iran* 3 (1965): 87-96; and “Zoroastrian Survivals in Iranian Folklore II,” *Iran* 30 (1992): 65-75.

⁴² A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1960.)

⁴³ This is a phenomenon noted and written about by many researchers. See also the transcript of the interviews I made with Feqir Haji on one and the same myth and attached in the appendix.

⁴⁴ J. Goody, “Introduction: The Technology of the Intellect,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. J. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 1-26.

While oral tradition, and especially religious oral tradition, which is more conservative by nature than oral history, may retain very old elements, it does not necessarily retain *all* the old elements, rather there is a process of selection. As W. Ong put it, oral societies can be characterized as homeostatic: "Oral societies live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium of homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance."⁴⁵

At the same time, oral religions (as oral tradition in general) show a strong propensity to absorb new data from other traditions.⁴⁶ New elements can be absorbed into the old system, where they are adapted and woven into the tapestry of older motifs, forming a new, complex whole.⁴⁷ While one oral tradition may easily borrow from another one, it is equally possible that an oral tradition borrow from a literate one (either directly or indirectly). In fact, in societies living on the margin of literate culture, literacy can play an important role in the process of borrowing. As orality and literacy (or oral and written traditions) are not two invariably separated entities, they may (and often do) actually influence each other.⁴⁸ Research carried out in oral communities of Africa, Oceania and the Americas has yielded countless examples of how literate cultures (especially Islam and Christianity) influence oral traditions (both oral history and oral religion.)⁴⁹ A special, and relatively

⁴⁵ W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 46.

⁴⁶ D. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Traditions: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 99.

⁴⁷ Ibid., chapter "Literacy, Indirect, Rule, and the Political Role of Antiquity in Oral Tradition," 95-120.

⁴⁸ J. Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially chapters "The Impact of Islamic Writing on Oral Cultures," 123-38, "Literacy and the Non-Literate: The Impact of European Schooling," 139-47; Finnigan, "What is Oral Literature Anyway?"

⁴⁹ Thus, Biblical and Quranic figures and episodes can be found in the oral traditions of Oceanic peoples, Aztecs or the people of Western Africa. It was this phenomenon which the advocates of cultural diffusion

recent form of such influence is feedback,⁵⁰ when information deriving from the work (and imagination) of missionaries, travelers, colonial administrators, or anthropologists writing on a people eventually comes to be incorporated into the oral tradition of the same people, and comes to be seen as an integral and ancient part of their own oral tradition.⁵¹

The influence of literate cultures on oral tradition must be kept in mind when considering the case of the Yezidis. Even though the impact of literacy on Yezidi oral tradition must have been considerably weaker in the past than today, there can be no doubt that written religions did influence Yezidis and their ancestors in the past, even if such an influence was less direct and more subtle.

The influence of Sufism on Yezidis (or rather proto-Yezidis), in approximately the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, is beyond doubt, and it is generally assumed that Yezidis, as an organized religious community, developed out of a Sufi brotherhood.⁵² At least some of the first followers of such a Sufi brotherhood would have been literate. We have no idea when the Yezidi religious ban on writing was imposed, but most likely there was a period when, while this Sufi brotherhood slowly evolved into a distinctly non-Islamic movement, literacy could not have been completely foreign to the whole of the community. Furthermore, there existed other groups (Christians, Jews, and possibly heterodox groups as well) in the Kurdish mountains and their vicinity down on the plains, which utilized written religious texts. These literary religious traditions may have influenced the Yezidis, as may have earlier oral cultures of the region who then may have served as intermediaries in transmitting these originally literary motifs in an oral milieu.

used to support their thesis. D. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longman, 1982), 82-84.

⁵⁰ Henige defines feedback as "the co-opting of extraneous printed or written information into previously oral accounts." D. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Traditions*, 96.

⁵¹ For a list of instances of "feedback," see Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 80-87.

⁵² See Chapter 3 "The Origin of the Yezidis."

Unfortunately, due to the complete lack of (written) evidence, we know practically nothing of how oral religion and culture would have functioned in this region in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This is exactly the reason why observing the way Yezidi oral tradition functions today has great relevance, supplying clues to a better understanding how Yezidi oral tradition works. Therefore, before starting a detailed analysis of late antique motifs in Yezidi religious lore, a whole chapter will be devoted to the way Yezidi oral tradition reacts today to the impact of literacy and the encroachment of modernization, highlighting the motivations and considerations that trigger changes.

THE TIME GAP

Yet another difficulty facing us when we try to trace late antique motifs in religious oral lore, either specifically among the Yezidis or in the Middle East in general, is that of chronology. That is, we may have (relatively speaking) plenty of evidence for the present, and then plenty of evidence in the literature of Late Antiquity, and perhaps the Early Middle Ages,⁵³ but there is a gap of many centuries between these two epochs, religious minorities, especially oral ones, being very poorly documented in the surviving literary works.

The lack of sources presents a great difficulty for the study of Yezidi religion and mythology. There is precious little evidence of what Yezidis may have believed or the rituals they may have practiced, let alone details of their mythology, until the nineteenth century, when European travelers started turning their attention toward the Yezidis. Even these first travelers managed to learn extremely little about Yezidi mythology itself. As for the earlier periods, Muslim authors furnish hardly more than a few commonplace accusations, remarks about Yezidis rejecting Islamic law and its

⁵³ In fact, even “plenty of evidence” for Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages must be qualified, for we know exceedingly little of Mesopotamian forms of Gnosis, most of our evidence having come from Egypt (though some of the works from there are believed to have been originally composed in Syriac speaking territories.)

representatives and paying exaggerated veneration to some of the early leaders of the community. The translation of a sixteenth-century *fatwa* against the Yezidis recently published in the *Journal of Kurdish Studies* is a good example.⁵⁴ Though aimed against Yezidis, we learn more about how orthodox Muslims of the time saw Yezidis, and heretics and unbelievers in general, than about actual Yezidi teaching itself. As for Yezidi mythology, the *fatwa* says nothing. In fact the author does not even imply if Yezidis professed flagrantly different ideas about the creation of the world and mankind than their Muslim brothers.

Though in theory it cannot be ruled out that more informative tracts yet may surface in some archives, in effect this does not seem too probable. In the first place, expecting learned men of the period, often men of religion, to display a modern “anthropological” interest in the “doctrines” of heretical sects (as the Yezidis were perceived at the time), would be somewhat anachronistic. Those writing on the Yezidis were more interested in making plain their rejection of this “extremist” group than in delving into the mysteries of their teachings. In fact, if one considers that it takes a long time and intensive contact with the people, with plenty of field research thrown in, for modern researchers to get to know Yezidi (or any other) religion and customs, it would be highly unreasonable to expect descriptions of Yezidi religious ideas from medieval or early modern Muslim writers. After all, which mullah, imam, or even educated secular Muslim man would have gone and lived among the Yezidis with the sole intention of writing about their despicable ways? The mountainous, inhospitable and not easily accessible region where most of the Yezidis resided, was hardly a land that attracted much learned attention in any case. And as Yezidis probably possessed no written books, scholars with an antiquarian interest were unlikely to come across such writings and expound them in their books. Thus, by force, our knowledge of Yezidi religion prior to the late-nineteenth century is, and will probably remain, extremely scanty.

⁵⁴ M. Dehqan, “Fatwā of Malā Sālih al-Kurdī al-Hakkārī: An Arabic Manuscript on the Yezidi religion,” *The Journal of Kurdish Studies* 6 (2008): 140-62.

Some may protest against the validity of trying to establish a connection between late antique and modern mythologies, if we cannot find the missing links, in other words trace how and in what way these motifs found their way to their “final destination.” Researchers, familiar with either oral tradition or the difficulties of trying to trace the transmission of ideas in poorly documented epochs, reason otherwise. The headache of time gap is not restricted to the study of the Yezidis alone. The manner of transmission between two or several groups is often a mysterious question, even if the fact of a transmission having taken place is considered an established truth. Henige writes on this problem: “In many oral societies large numbers of variant traditions co-exist. In these cases the historian will compare and contrast these in his quest for common features: names sequences, motifs. When he finds these, he can provisionally assume that they are clichés of surviving elements of an earlier – perhaps even an original – version. But this must always be by inference, the result of the historian’s applied judgment, and cannot be demonstrated by a series of links from the time of the event recorded until the present.”⁵⁵

As I have said, not only oral historians, but historians working with solid, that is written, evidence may face the problem of missing links, often losing centuries in their “chain of descent.” Establishing a connection between two systems without being able to pinpoint the exact path of transmission is not an uncommon phenomenon in the history of religions. Often researchers find such pronounced parallels in thought, language or mythology in systems separated by many centuries that a close correlation may safely be assumed, while at the same time, they have to admit to not being able to trace the exact channels through which these traditions were transmitted.

A very good example of such an approach, also concerning assumed Gnostic origins of some religious thought in the Middle East, is furnished by H. Halm. In his work he has successfully demonstrated the presence of Gnostic mythological elements in Ismaili cosmogony. However, as regards the exact origins and the transmission of Gnostic ideas, he simply says: “we may assume that

⁵⁵ Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 76.

the Gnostic pattern which provides its basis is of Mesopotamian origin.” Then he adds that more cannot be said, because there is simply not enough information existing on Mesopotamian Gnosis to determine the exact origin of these Gnostic thoughts, nor how they reached Ismailism, which started in the ninth century, that is, long centuries after the heyday of the Gnostic movement.⁵⁶

Similar cases of “established origins, but missing transmission” are, for example, provided by A. Wensinck and S. Brock, albeit in different fields of research. According to A. Wensinck, the figure of the “servant of God” (universally identified with al-Khidr) in the Quran 18.60-82 is based on the Gilgamesh Epic (which in fact is separated from the time of the Quran’s conception by a much greater gap of time than Yezidi from Late Antiquity).⁵⁷ Brock, writing of Jewish traditions in native Syriac literature, says “for the most part there appear to be no clear means for judging just how these traditions were transmitted”⁵⁸ (despite the fact that both are amply documented in writing).

In the case of the Yezidis, there is also another consideration which may help bridge the time gap, at least to a certain extent: comparison with other groups in the region. As mentioned above, Yezidis are not an isolated case. They are not the only group that has preserved “quaint” ideas long forgotten by everybody else. Rather they drew many of their ideas from a common substratum shared by the people of the region. Demonstrating that motifs which presumably can be traced back to late antique traditions may be found not only among the Yezidis, but also among other groups, would make the question of when these motifs were adopted somewhat irrelevant. Before they became a part of Yezidi religion they might have already been part of religious oral lore in the region, and Yezidis “inherited” them not straight from the writ-

⁵⁶ H. Halm, “The Cosmology of the pre-Fatimid Ismā’īliya,” in *Medieval Ismā’īli History and Thought*, ed. F. Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 82.

⁵⁷ A. J. Wensinck, “Al-Khadir,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 902-3.

⁵⁸ S. Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 225.

ten sources, but rather from the oral traditions of other people. Thus, I propose to follow the method advocated by Henige. I shall compare and contrast motifs in late antique works in the Yezidi mythology of today, and in the mythologies of other Middle East groups (including both “heterodox” movements and “popular” beliefs among Muslims) in search of common features. Such common features would suggest a shared origin, even if the individual links in the chain from Late Antiquity to the present cannot always be traced.

SOURCES ON YEZIDI RELIGION

Yezidi religion was in all probability traditionally based on oral transmission, with the writing down of religious texts actually banned.⁵⁹ Among many other consequences, this ban has also led to a dearth of information for researchers. As a result, anyone who wants to study Yezidi religion has to make do with unusually limited material. Furthermore, the material I have used for my study comes almost exclusively from the Iraqi region. It is possible that Yezidis of Turkey, Syria or the Caucasus may not be familiar with some of the material presented in this work, or may even have other myths and motifs with roots in Late Antiquity which are not known in Iraq.

The “Sacred Books:” The Mes’hefa Resh and the Jelwa

Until the end of the twentieth century, the most important source of Yezidi religious lore in Western scholarship was provided by the two so-called “Sacred Books” of the Yezidis, the *Mes’hefa Resh* (*Black Book*) and the *Jelwa* (*Splendour* or *Revelation*)⁶⁰ “discovered” at the end of the nineteenth century. The former contains an account of Yezidi cosmogony, the beginnings of mankind and Yezidis, a short account of ancient Yezidi history and a list of prohibitions.

⁵⁹ See chapter 4 on “Yezidi Religion.”

⁶⁰ Both titles are in Arabic, not in Kurdish.

The second is a text written in the first person singular, that proclaims the sovereignty and omnipotence of a divine figure, who is identified by tradition with the Peacock Angel.

These two books surfaced in a number of manuscripts (probably going back to the same source), when Europeans living or traveling in Iraq first started to display a serious interest in Yezidis and their religion. The authenticity of these texts as genuine “sacred books” has since been seriously questioned.⁶¹ It seems likely that they were written down by a non-Yezidi familiar with the Yezidi faith and sacred texts. However, today researchers agree that even if the manuscripts are forgeries, and Yezidis themselves never put their sacred texts down in writing, these two books reflect Yezidi oral lore faithfully.⁶² In any case, these two “sacred texts” quickly became standard sources among scholars. Thus, many articles appearing after their publication seem to repeat the same information over and over again, while other variants of the myths they contained, for example the variant of the myth of Adam to be treated later, escaped the attention of researchers.

In this study I use the following translations of the sacred books:

- the translation of Isya Joseph based on an Arabic manuscript given him by a friend from Mosul. His manuscript also contains an Appendix with materials on Yezidi belief and practice, a poem in praise of Sheikh Adi, the alleged principal prayer of the Yezidis, a description of the Yezidi “sacerdotal system,” and the 1872 Petition, which Yezidi leaders addressed to the

⁶¹ For an evaluation of the authenticity and nature of the “sacred books,” see A. Mingana, “Devil-worshippers: Their Beliefs and Their Sacred Books,” *JRAS* (1916): 505-26; P. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 10-15.

⁶² Kreyenbroek, “Yezidism,” 14-15. (As a matter of fact some, or perhaps many, Yezidis today in Iraq think of these books as their real and original sacred texts, while others claim that originally these texts were written, but later they had to be destroyed lest they fell into enemy hands, and the texts themselves were memorized and transmitted orally. The latter group does not reflect the circumstances of the publication of the books.)

- Ottoman government to exempt them from military service.⁶³
- the translation of Anis Frayha of the two sacred books (in Arabic) contained in the three manuscripts brought by the anthropologist Henry Field from Sinjar, Iraq. According to Field, the manuscripts were copied by a local scribe from three original documents, two of which were written on paper and one on gazelle skin.⁶⁴
- the translation of R. Ebied and J. Young of an Arabic text found in a nineteenth-century manuscript obtained by W. Budge during his visit to the Middle East. The whole manuscript contains miscellaneous material in Arabic and Syriac, including a piece in Syriac entitled: An Extract from the Story of the Yazīdīs.⁶⁵

Accounts on Yezidis

Further information is added to the “sacred books” by the reports of travelers and researchers working on Yezidis. By far the most important of these for the present study is the report of the French consul, M. N. Siouffi, which was published shortly before the appearance of the “sacred books” and contains independent information collected by Siouffi himself (unlike many later articles which were heavily influenced by the “sacred texts”).⁶⁶

There is also the “The History of the Yezidis” edited and translated by J. Chabot based on two Syriac manuscripts, described by Chabot as “d’ailleurs tout modernes” from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.⁶⁷ The text, which according to Chabot was

⁶³ I. Joseph, “Yezidi Texts,” *The American Journal of Semitic Language and Literatures* 25.2 (1909): 111-56, 218-54.

⁶⁴ A. Frayha, “New Yezidī Texts from Beled Sinjār, ‘Iraq,” *JAOS* 66 (1946): 18-43.

⁶⁵ R. Ebied, and J. Young, “An Account of the History and Rituals of the Yazīdīs of Mosul,” *Le Muséon* 85 (1972): 481-522.

⁶⁶ Siouffi, M. N. “Notice sur des Yézidis.” *JA* ser. 7. vol. 20 (1882): 252-68.

⁶⁷ J.-B. Chabot, “Notice sur les Yézidis: publiée d’après deux manuscrits Syriaques de la Bibliothèque Nationale,” *Journal Asiatique* Sér. ix, t. vii (1896): 100-132. With slight variations, Chabot’s text corresponds to

translated to Syriac from Arabic, contained some information on the mythology of the Yezidis as well as the description of some of their religious customs. The author of these tractates was evidently not a Yezidi, though he undoubtedly was quite familiar with them.

Of much more recent date, the doctoral thesis of Jasim Murad Elias, an Iraqi Yezidi, on Yezidi religious oral tradition must also be mentioned in this context. The interviews he carried out with Yezidis from Turkey and Iraq living in Germany were especially valuable for my work.⁶⁸

Kreyenbroek's translations

The impact of Philip Kreyenbroek's works has already been mentioned above. His translations and publications of Yezidi sacred texts (in *Yezidism, Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* and *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition*) are extensively utilized in this study.

Texts Collected through Fieldwork

In order to familiarize myself with Yezidi culture and religion, I carried out research fieldwork in Northern Iraq, in what is colloquially referred to as "Iraqi Kurdistan," between August 2002 and June 2003, April/May 2004 and September 2006. As I was staying in Duhok, a town near the Turkish border in the Kurdish Autonomy,⁶⁹ my research initially concentrated on the Yezidi collective

the translation of a similar text by E.S. Browne in the Appendix to O. Parry's book, *Six Months in a Syrian Monastery* (London: Gorgias Press, 1895), 380-83.

⁶⁸ Jasim Murad Elias, "The Sacred Poems of the Yezidis: An Anthropological Approach," PhD thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1993.

⁶⁹ The (unofficial) Kurdish Autonomy (*Herêma Kurdistanê*) existed between 1992 and 2003 in the northern No-Fly Zone of Iraq.

villages⁷⁰ of Shariye and Khanke near Duhok, and Baadra, the traditional village of Yezidi princes on the southern border of the Autonomy.⁷¹ I was also able to take part in the one-week-long Autumn Festival and in the Feast of Sacrifice celebrated at Lalish, the holy valley of the Yezidis. On these occasions, men of religion and common Yezidis alike congregate in Lalish, making it an ideal place for research.⁷² After the first Gulf War and the collapse of the Saddam regime, I was able to visit the settlement of the Sheikhan district,⁷³ as well as the twin villages of Beshiqe-Behzani, where the qewwals or singers of the sacred songs live, near Mosul. Beside the Duhok and Sheikhan regions, a considerable population of Yezidis also lives in the Sinjar mountain area near the Syrian-Iraqi border. Due to the uncertain situation west of the Tigris, I could pay only two visits to the Sinjar. On the second visit, however, I was able to witness the important ceremony of the Parading of the Peacock.⁷⁴

Among the Yezidis, formal religious education has never been a demand. Consequently, most Yezidi “laymen,” those without an active connection with religion, know very little about it. The little they do know is acquired in bits and pieces, apropos of holidays, pilgrimages and even folktales. As a result they do not possess a coherently structured knowledge of their own faith. Instead of knowledge of a mythological or theological nature, Yezidi identity can rather be said to be defined by a sense of separateness from

⁷⁰ Collective villages or *mujama'ats* came into existence when Saddam destroyed the Yezidi villages (many of them in the mountains) suspected of aiding the Kurdish guerilla forces, and forced them into collective villages on the plain where Iraqi authorities could monitor their activities more closely.

⁷¹ Though this village is a part of the Sheikhan region which remained under Saddam's rule, Baadra was included in the Autonomy, with Iraqi military checkpoints just down the road.

⁷² Though the territories under Saddam's rule were theoretically sealed off from the Kurdish Autonomy where Lalish could be found, during these holidays, Yezidis were allowed by the Iraqi authorities to cross the border.

⁷³ Sheikhan is the “heart” of Yezidi land. Tradition holds that it received its name because of the many Yezidi sheikhs living there.

⁷⁴ See more on this ceremony in the chapter on “Yezidi Religion.”

other people, especially Muslims, coupled with a sense of constant persecution. To this is added the observance of a number of taboos, most of all the marriage taboos, observance of the Yezidi holidays and some connected beliefs as well as adherence to the caste system peculiar to the Yezidis. It is orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy which makes most Yezidis a Yezidi.⁷⁵ Notwithstanding, during the course of intensive fieldwork and prolonged contact, even such laymen can furnish many interesting details on Yezidi religion, especially as regards the way they see their own religion and how this perception is influenced by increasing contact with the non-Yezidi world.

When it comes to longer, more coherent accounts of myths and religious ideas on God, His Angels and their connection with the human world, it is better to rely on "religious experts." Such experts may be *qenwals* (the class of religious singers), men from the cast of *sheikhs* and *pîrs*⁷⁶ who fulfill hereditary religious positions, *mijenwirs* (the guardian of shrines dedicated to Yezidi holy beings,) *feqirs* (religious ascetics), and increasingly (this may be a modern development) simple laymen with an interest in religion and the Yezidi inheritance. I was lucky enough to have made the acquaintance of a number of such men, the most important of whom I would like to name here, expressing my thanks to them and to all those Yezidis who tried to help me.

Feqir Haji was my most important source. He is from Baadra, the traditional village of the Yezidi princes, not far from Mosul in Northern Iraq. Though he is not a *qenwal*, that is, a religious singer, he has professed a deep interest in religion and religious texts since

⁷⁵ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 18.

⁷⁶ Yezidis have a strict caste system: *sheikh*, *pîr*, *murid*. Each *murid* (commoner, layman) must have a *sheikh* and a *pîr*. The choice of one's *sheikh* and a *pîr* is not arbitrary, but is inherited within family lineages. *Sheikhs* and a *pîrs* fulfill certain religious obligations on behalf of their *murids* and receive regular alms in exchange. Religious positions are inherited within the first two castes. The class of *qenwals* and *feqirs* cuts diagonally across these three castes, but they are also classes one has to be born into. For more information about the Yezidi caste system, see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 129-135; E. Spät, *The Yezidis* (London: Saqi, 2005), 42-48.

his early youth. He comes from a *feqir* family, and has opted for actually becoming a *feqir*, that is, an ascetic or man of religion.⁷⁷ Feqir Haji is one of the best known experts of Yezidi lore in the community. During my fieldwork, none of my other informants paralleled his immense knowledge of Yezidi hymns and legends. He has a prodigious memory for religious texts, and just as important, he learned what he knows as a young man listening to his elders, as he said, and not from books, being from a generation that received no schooling. Though even his accounts occasionally reflected the influence of literary traditions on oral lore (notably, when he talked about the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia having been Yezidis),⁷⁸ overall he seemed to have been much less influenced by the recent publications on the Yezidi faith than people of younger generations.⁷⁹ This is a very important consideration, for – as it will be shown in the chapter on oral tradition and literacy among Yezidis – the ideas generated by these publications, aiming

⁷⁷ *Feqir* literally means “the poor one” and the word originally referred to dervishes, that is, Sufi holy men and ascetics. It is assumed that once any Yezidi who felt an ascetic inclination could become a *feqir* (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 133.) Today, only the members of certain tribes and families have the right to be initiated as *feqirs*. However, no member of a *feqir* tribe is under any obligation to actually become a *feqir*; it is purely a matter of choice. *Feqirs*, who enjoy great respect, are expected to lead a life of piety and abstinence, by fasting, refraining from drinking and smoking as well as avoiding any violent behavior.

⁷⁸ The idea that Yezidism was originally the religion of the region (“the original Kurdish religion”) and that the old civilizations of the Middle East were in fact followers of this faith, and contemporary Yezidis are their descendants still faithful to this faith but much diminished in number, is closely tied up with modern Kurdish nationalism. Furthermore, his mention of peoples like Assyrians, Babylonians and especially Mitannis as having been Yezidis, clearly indicates that even the more traditional forms of Yezidi religious knowledge has absorbed certain modern influences in the past decades or century, an example of the above-mentioned feedback.

⁷⁹ Nor did he feel that he had to offer an “apology,” talking about the moral excellence and pious message of Yezidi religion, like many younger religious experts did. He simply recounted his myth without a flicker of self-awareness.

at modernizing Yezidi faith, often lead people to “re-edit” religion, discarding or reinterpreting traditional myths and notions. (A collection of sacred texts known by Feqir Haji was published by his son,⁸⁰ and Yezidi periodicals have also used him as a source for their publication of sacred hymns.)

Arab Khidir could perhaps be called the diametrical opposite of Feqir Haji. Originally from the Sinjar, he married and settled in Beshiqe-Behzani, the twin-villages where the *qennwals* have traditionally resided. Arabi Khidir is a school-educated man, but merely a layman, not from a family of men of religion, or even a *sheikh* or *pîr*. He started collecting Yezidi texts on his own initiative, dismayed by the apparent demise of the ancient lore. He strove to interpret these texts, much in the way a person with a Western-style education would do, and tried to construct a coherent philosophical framework, complete with a moral message based on these texts within which he could place Yezidi religion. Paradoxically, this also means that he is more prone to weed out some old elements which in his view do not conform to a coherent, “Westernized” understanding of the world and religion.

Sheikh Deshti from the collective village of Khanke on the bank of the Tigris, near Duhok, is a *mijewir*, that is, a guardian of the shrines of Bayazid Bastami (a Sufi saint “turned Yezidi”) and Mehmedê Jindal (the lord of jinns). Sheikh Deshti, who is regarded as an expert on Yezidi lore by the villagers, is one of those who mixes traditional oral learning with modern methods, that is, avid reading of materials published on and mainly by, Yezidis. Though serving in a traditional role as a *mijewir*, he followed the untraditional practice of consulting his handwritten collection of Yezidi hymns whenever he was quoting sacred texts or explaining religious questions. He also regularly visited the Lalish Center in Duhok, a Yezidi cultural center funded by the Kurdish government, where Yezidi periodicals are being published.

⁸⁰ Bedelê Feqîr Hecî, *Bawerî û Mîtolojiya Êzîdîyan* (The Faith and Mythology of the Yezidis. Dihok (Iraq): Caphxana Hawar, 2002.)

Pîr Jafo was an octogenarian *mijewir* of the shrine of Mem Shîvan in the collective village of Khanke. He was a representative of traditional, non-school-educated generation.

Qenwal Suleyman, from Beshiqe-Bahzani, is the head of the *qenwals*. He was considered an influential figure who had also traveled to Germany in the 1990s leading a group of *qenwals* on a visit to the Yezidi community there.

The *Baba Sheikh* is the “father of the sheikhs,” and responsible for the spiritual side of the faith.⁸¹ This position is inherited within a certain branch of *sheikh* family. The present *Baba Sheikh* resides in ‘Eyn Sifni, a town in central Sheikhan which until the Gulf War was under Saddam’s rule. I first met him in Lalish and following the war I was able to visit him in ‘Eyn Sifni as well.

Qenwal Hussein is a very friendly and welcoming *qenwal* whom I first met in Lalish during the Sheikh Adi Festival where he was performing his music in the rituals. Later, I also visited him in his home in Behzani.

Qenwal Qenwal was an aged *qenwal* in Behzani. He was eager to share his knowledge with me – sadly, too much of what he said was in Arabic instead of Kurdish. He died not long after my visit. People present at his funeral claim that the sounds of the flute and tambour – the sacred Yezidi instruments – could be heard coming from his empty house at that time.

Mamoste Sabah is an English teacher at the Yezidi highschool in Baadra. His views represent the way a newly emerging, educated Yezidi professional middle-class sees, or wishes to see the Yezidi religion as a faith on a par with the “religions of the Book,” and furthermore as a religion offering not only moral, but also scientific truths.

⁸¹ Western travelers liked to refer to him as “the Yezidi Pope,” though such a term is, of course, rather misleading.

Pîr Haji is an aged *pîr* from the Mahad, a collective village in the Sheikhan formerly under Saddam. He is known as a traditional and religious man, and his followers claim he is a great expert of Yezidi sacred texts.

* * *

During my fieldwork I made many hours worth of recordings. Evidently, it would be both impossible and unnecessary to reproduce all the material here. However, two of the chapters in this study will be based on the myth of the creation of the first human (Adam) and the Yezidi nation. As this myth is as yet only partially known to Western scholarship and the variants I collected contained many new and intriguing elements, I felt it necessary to transcribe and translate three versions of this myth. These versions may be found in the Appendix.

2 RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Yezidi religion developed in the Kurdish mountains northeast of Mosul (ancient Niniveh,) a region near the shifting border of different empires and cultures. The center of the Yezidi religion, both from the historical and the religious aspect, is the valley of Lalish, sixty kilometers northeast of Mosul, at the bases of the mountains. Lalish itself can be found in what is generally thought of as the heartland of the Yezidis, the Sheikhan region, a transition zone linking the mountain chains of Southern Kurdistan to the Mosul plain. Historical sources indicate that this is where the core of Yezidism, as an organized religion, must have first developed in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. From here it soon spread northward, over the eastern Taurus mountain range (of the Kurdish mountains), reaching south-eastern Anatolia. It was in this extended and mostly mountainous region where Kurdish-speaking Yezidi tribes were numerous and powerful until the fifteenth century.⁸² From here Yezidis eventually spread northward, through the eastern Anatolian plateau (eventually reaching the Caucasian region), and westward, through northern Mesopotamia to northern Syria and the Aleppo region.

The historical development of Yezidi religion cannot be considered without taking into account the various external influences which affected the seemingly isolated mountainous regions known

⁸² See chapter 3, "The Origin of Yezidis and of Yezidi Studies."

as Kurdistan. The Kurdish mountains,⁸³ while in a way “outside history,” have always existed on – and between – the borders of the great civilizations and religions of the wider region. From west and south lay Mesopotamia (a region where diverse civilizations clashed and merged), to the east the Iranian world, and to the north Armenia. All these regions, their cultures and religious systems, inevitably exerted their influence on the mountains and its population, even if the terrain checked the ambitions of any conqueror. In fact, it may have been this very inaccessibility, which – while making day-to-day control by remote governments tenuous at best – made it possible that Kurdistan serve as “a refuge for various religiously and politically dissident groups throughout the age.”⁸⁴

Kurdistan was clearly a place of many influences. Assyrian rock engravings at the foothills in South Kurdistan demonstrate the influence of Mesopotamian cultures from an early date. Presumably this influence never ceased throughout the varied history of Mesopotamia, especially in the low-lying transition zone linking the plains to the mountains, just like the region east of Nineveh, where Yezidism first took root. Beside the cultural influences seeping in from Mesopotamia, whether Semitic, Hellenistic or Roman, the Kurdish mountains also repeatedly came, at least formally, under the control of the successive Iranian empires (the Median, the Achaemenid, the Parthian and the Sassanian). This must have brought Zoroastrianism, partially supplanting, or at least influencing, the proto-Iranian religion of the mountain dwellers. More importantly for the purpose of this study, Judaism, Christianity (and no doubt related spiritual movements) also found their ways to Kurdistan from Mesopotamia⁸⁵ (and possibly from Armenia to the north). Though little is known about the early penetration of these religions into the Kurdish highlands, important information can be

⁸³ Encompassing the Zagros mountains and the eastern Taurus mountain ranges.

⁸⁴ Yona Sabar, *The Folk Literature of Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology*, Yale Judaica Series 23 (New Haven: Yale, 1982), xiv.

⁸⁵ For centuries during Late Antiquity, Mesopotamia was divided between the Roman and the Sassanian Empire, with the border even moving due to the repeated attacks and counterattacks.

gained from the history of the kingdom (or *satrapy*) of Adiabene at the foot the Kurdish mountains. This Semitic speaking kingdom lay principally east of the Tigris in the north of ancient Assyria, spreading between the Upper and Lower Zab rivers, with the Zagros mountains as its northeastern border. Its capital was Arbela, today's Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. Originally the Tigris formed Adiabene's southwestern boundary, but with time Adiabene spread westward, and incorporated Nisibis in the first century AD.⁸⁶

There were large numbers of Jews settled in the kingdom of Adiabene since Assyrian times, when the Assyrians deposited the ten tribes of Northern Israel there.⁸⁷ Their center was in Nisibis (modern Nusaybin), in Western Adiabene, but there must have been a considerable community in the capital of Adiabene, Arbela as well. According to Josephus Flavius, in the first century AD even the royal house of Adiabene converted to Judaism, and later Adiabene was the only community to provide help to the Jews during the Roman siege of Jerusalem.⁸⁸ There is no exact record available on when Judaism penetrated the Kurdish mountains themselves, but it is reasonable to believe that it could not have been much later than the original settlement of Jews in Adiabene. Certainly, the Jews of Kurdistan traditionally believe themselves descended from the Ten Tribes.⁸⁹ Very little is known about the history of the Jews of Kurdistan, even the *Talmud* is silent on them, but the fact that they spoke their own dialect of Aramaic (containing many Kurdish loanwords), indicates that they must have developed as a group/cultural entity independent from the Kurdish

⁸⁶ See J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia: I. The Parthian Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 59.

⁸⁷ Neusner, *The History of Jews*, 13-15. For the geography of Jewish settlement in Iraq in general, see A. Oppenheimer, B. Isaac and M. Lecker, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1983.)

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 14, 59-61; *idem*, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism: A New Perspective," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83.1 (1964): 60-66.

⁸⁹ Neusner, *The History of the Jews*, 59, Note 1; and Sabar, *Folk Literature of Kurdistan Jews*, xv-xvi.

communities of Mesopotamia before the Arab conquest.⁹⁰ Kurdish Jews, who were generally poor given the limited economic possibilities of the region, worked as artisans, weavers, peddlers, as well as farmers (possessing their own lands), loggers, rafters⁹¹ and even as nomadic shepherds – occupations almost unknown in other Jewish communities.⁹² The most interesting feature of Kurdistan Jews was the fact that illiteracy was exceptionally high among them (that is, for a Jewish community),⁹³ while oral tradition played an unusually strong role in maintaining their religion.⁹⁴

Judaism must have paved the way for Christianity (in its many forms) and related movements, such as Gnosticism and Manichaeism. Christianity spread all over Northern Mesopotamia at an early date, and it didn't tarry in reaching Adiabene. It had fil-

⁹⁰ Down on the Mesopotamian plains, Arabic superseded Aramaic as the language of the Jewish communities before 1000 AD, and Aramaic survived as a spoken language (both of Jews and Christians) only in the mountains of Kurdistan. See Sabar, *Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews*, xvi-xvii. In the twelfth century the great Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, reported that there were about a hundred Jewish settlements in Kurdistan, and the town of Amadiya had 25 000 Jews, though his reports were based only on hearsay. Considering that at the time of their forced emigration to Israel in the early 1950s the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan numbered 25 000, Benjamin Tudela's figure appears to be an exaggeration.

⁹¹ Transporting huge logs down the Khabur River toward the plains.

⁹² Sabar, *Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews*, xxi-xxiv.

⁹³ Ibid. xxv-xxvi. Sabar attributes this to the lack of physical security, poor economic conditions and communication with the outside world, and the small size of the population. Sabar, *Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews*, xxv. There were exceptions as well, of course. For example, the famous rabbi family of the Barzanis of Mosul, who gave one of the first female rabbis to the Jewish community, Rabbi Asenath Barzani of the seventeenth century, evidently hailed from the Barzan district of the Kurdish mountains, and she was actually buried in Amadiyah.

⁹⁴ Ibid. xxvi-xxix. According to Sabar, "even the written literature recorded in manuscripts from Kurdistan had originated in oral tradition. Likewise, the translation of the Bible into various Neo-Aramaic dialects was transmitted orally from generation to generation with little change in style and vocabulary, and was only recently written down... Reading and – much less – writing were not common. Usually only the hakamim were literate." Sabar, *Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews*, xxxii.

tered into Parthian Adiabene and taken root among the region's Jewish community by the end of the second century.⁹⁵ It is assumed that the church of Adiabene attracted many of its converts from the region's substantial Jewish population.⁹⁶ Other early converts may have come from among the polytheists and Zoroastrians of Adiabene. J. T. Walker is of the opinion that "by the late Sasanian period, Christians probably formed the majority of the region's population, with smaller pockets of Zoroastrians and Jews."⁹⁷

As regards the region where Yezidism first developed, Sheikhan, the Yezidi heartland, was divided between two Nestorian dioceses from the early centuries on. The lands east of the Gomel River belonged to the diocese of Marga, which stretched as far as the Greater Zab. The western part of the Sheikhan belonged to the diocese of Bu Nuhadra. The village of 'Eyn Sifni⁹⁸ and its environment, including the holy valley of Lalish, was known as Bet Rustaqa (geographically located in Bu Nuhadra, but administered by the diocese of Marga until the seventh-eight century). It was this Bet Rustaqa which was then first renamed Sheikhan, that is, "the

⁹⁵ M-L. Chaumont, *Christianisation de l'empire iranien, Des origines aux grandes persécutions du IV^e siècle* CSCO 499, Subsidia 80 (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1988). 52–53; Neusner proposes 100 AD. Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity," *Numen* 13 (1966): 144–50. However, his dating is based on the *Chronicle of Arbela*. The authenticity of the *Chronicle of Arbela*, an allegedly sixth-century document of Syriac Christianity in Erbil, is very much contended by some researchers, while others accept it. There is no scholarly consent on this question as yet.

⁹⁶ Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity"; idem, *The History of the Jews*, 168–69; and Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 107.

⁹⁷ Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 107. In any case, Christianity was firmly established by the early third century in the Western parts of the Sasanian Empire in general. Episcopal records show that by 224 AD there were twenty bishops in eighty-one sees in the Western satrapies of Iran. See Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity," 147.

⁹⁸ 'Eyn Sifni is the "capital" of the Sheikhan region, where the *Baba Sheikh* resides today. Before the war of 2003 and the unification of the Kurdish territories formerly under Saddam and the Kurdish Autonomy, respectively, the Yezidi prince also had his official residence in 'Eyn Sifni. According to Yezidi legends the Flood of Noah also started in 'Eyn Sifni.

house of the Sheikhs” in the fifteenth century, as the number of the tombs or sanctuaries belonging to Yezidi sheikhs increased in the region.⁹⁹

The other important Yezidi conglomeration of northern Iraq can be found in the Sinjar mountain (ancient Singara), a mountain range in northern Mesopotamia (on the northern border of Iraq and Syria today). According to Fuccaro, Yezidi infiltration to this predominantly Christian region may have started as early as the thirteenth century, and the mountain was gradually settled by Yezidi tribal groups escaping persecution in the Mosul plain and the Sheikhan.¹⁰⁰ As early as the fourth century Sinjar was part of the Nestorian diocese of Beth Arbeye, whose center was Nisibis. For centuries after the Islamic conquest the Nestorian community of Sinjar flourished, but the Yezidi occupation of the mountain range eventually led to the marginalization of the Sinjari Christians. In the first half of the seventeenth century the Nestorian diocese of the Sinjar ceased to exist, a phenomenon which partly attributed to the advance of the Jacobites and partly to Yezidi proselytizing among the Nestorian population.¹⁰¹

As regards the Kurdish mountains proper (which later proved to be a fertile ground for Yezidism emanating from the Sheikhan), the exact time when Christianity arrived is uncertain. However, the *History of Mar Qardagh*, a late Sassanian Syriac work giving an account of the life of the fourth-century Nestorian saint and martyr, Qardagh,¹⁰² attests to the fact that Christianity had already made

⁹⁹ J. M. Fiey, *Asyrie chrétienne: Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l'Iraq* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1965–68) vol. 1, 227 and vol. 2, 785–87. Interestingly, according to Fuccaro, in the twentieth century the Christian population of mixed settlements, like ‘Eyn Sifni, or Beshiqe and Behzani was not Chaldaean (Nestorians returned to Rome), but mostly Jacobite and Syrian Catholic (Jacobites returned to Rome.) See Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 45–46.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 47–48. Ibid., 47–48.

¹⁰² The legend of the saint Mar Qardagh originated in the region of Adiabene, near Arbela, during the late Sasanian period. An anonymous East-Syrian author gave the legend its definitive written form, the *History*

inroads deep into the mountains. What is more, this work is in fact a testimony to the perennial function of the Kurdish mountains as a refuge of the persecuted. The *History of Mar Qardagh* talks about a certain Abdisho, a blessed man (hermit) living in a cave in Beth Bgash (later the hero, Qardagh himself comes to engage in ascetic training in this region). Beth Bgash was the name of shehe mountainous highlands lying north and east of Arbela, between the upper reaches of the Greater Zab River and Lake Urmiye, overlapping the modern Iran-Iraq-Turkey border.¹⁰³ This is the very heartland of Kurdistan, the Kurdish mountains from where Kurds eventually descended onto the plains lying below. The words of the sainted Abdisho, when he recounts his life to Qardagh, imply that the first Christians arrived in this mountainous heart of Kurdistan as refugees fleeing for their safety:

But the blessed Abdisho answered and said to him, "As it was told to me by my parents, they were from Hazza, a village in the lands of the Assyrians. But because they were Christians, they were driven out by impious pagans, and went and settled in Tamanon, a village in the land of the Kurds."¹⁰⁴

of Mar Qardagh, during the early decades of the seventh century. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 11.

¹⁰³ Walker identifies it with the Hakkari district, see *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 24, Note 26, and 108. See also J. M. Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus: Répertoire des diocèses syriaques orientaux et occidentaux* (Beirut and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 61; idem, "Proto-histoire chrétienne du Hakkari turc," *L'Orient Syrien* 9 (1964): 448–54. The diocese of Beth Bgash was first attested at the synod of 410, the diocese appears regularly in East-Syrian synodical records. Its bishops participated in the synods of 424, 486, 497, 544, 585, and 605. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 108, Note 88.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 26. The town of Haza is twelve kilometers southwest of Arbela, and had a Christian community from at least the early fourth century and preceded Arbela as the metropolitan see of Adiabene. See Fiey, *Asyrie chrétienne*, 166–67. The village Tamanon lies just north of the modern Iraqi-Turkish border, at the base of Jebel Judi, the mountain where Noah's ark landed according to Syrian Christian and Kurdish traditions. There were important monasteries in its vicinity from the seventh century. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 26, Note 34.

This function of the Kurdish mountains as a refuge for those persecuted for their religious affiliations is of paramount importance for the religious history of Kurdistan, for it seems likely that wave after wave of refugees followed each other seeking relative security (and sowing their own beliefs in their turn). So, for example, the Jews of Syria and Palestine took refuge in Babylonia and Kurdistan when the Christian Crusaders threatened their community.¹⁰⁵ Sabar also assumes that the Jewish population of urban centers on the plain at the foot of the hills, like Mosul, fled deeper into the mountains between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at the time of the Mongol raids, creating new rural settlements there.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, when the Mongol armies devastated the Christian (Nestorian) communities of Mesopotamia and Northern Syria, survivors fled to the mountains north of Niniveh (into the Kurdish mountains) to join their fellow believers.¹⁰⁷ Historical documents preserving the memory of all waves of religious refugees are not available, but there can be little doubt that there were many successive movements, with people fleeing not only marauding armies, but also central powers intolerant of religious dissent and perceived heterodoxy. The mountains may have thus provided a convenient refuge for Gnostics, Manichaeans and other religious “non-conformists” taking with them some of the heterodox ideas to be discussed below.

FROM Gnostics TO ISLAMIC GHULAT

In the course of this study a number of different religious movements will be referred to. Religions like Christianity, Judaism or

¹⁰⁵ Sabar, *Folk Literature of Kurdistan Jews*, xvii.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁰⁷ Though there is no solid historical evidence that this influx of Jews and Christian – who may have preserved some non-canonical ideas in their oral lore – had an impact on the development of Yezidism, it is certainly worth noting that it coincided with the period when the dervish order founded by Sheikh Adi started to grow into a religious movement of a non-Islamic nature.

Islam need not be explained to the reader. The same may not be true of the other religious groups mentioned in this study. This subchapter merely aims to give a short introduction to these religious movements.

Gnostics - Gnosticism

The terms Gnostics and Gnosticism are hard to define, there being many different opinions and approaches to their exact meaning. Though the term “Gnostic” was already used in Late Antiquity by the heresiologists to refer to certain dualistic groups they described as heretical, the term “Gnosticism” to denote a religious phenomenon was only coined by Henry More in the seventeenth century to be used against Catholics.¹⁰⁸ Eventually the words “Gnosticism” and “Gnostics” came to refer to the phenomenon of late antique religious dualism in the works of historians of religion, though there was never a unanimous consensus among researchers as to which groups and teachings these words exactly covered. The different “sects” as described by the Church Fathers (the main source on “Gnostics” until recently) appear to have diverged too widely from each other to make such a definition an easy one. The twentieth century discovery of numerous works considered of Gnostic origin further confused, rather than cleared up this issue. For example, texts from the Nag Hammadi library, the greatest discovery in Gnostic studies, not only show an amazing variety of writings, but at the same time “individual tractates place together opinions and myths which, according to the heresiologists, belonged to different sects.”¹⁰⁹ Battles have been raging not only about the distinguishing phenomenological features of Gnostic religion, but also about the different categories within Gnosticism (Valentinian, Bar-

¹⁰⁸ B. Layton “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,” in *The Social World of the First Christians*, ed. M. White and L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 335.

¹⁰⁹ Frederik Wisse, “The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 25.3 (1971): 209.

belo-Gnostic, Sethian, Basilidean etc.),¹¹⁰ its roots and connection with other religions and cultures,¹¹¹ its dating,¹¹² the identity of the different tracts, and whether this word was used as a self-designation by the authors of the texts treated today as Gnostics writings.

All these uncertainties about the definition of Gnosticism have led a number of researchers to doubt even the validity of the term "Gnosticism" and whether it is possible to refer to a "Gnostic religion."¹¹³ In line with post-modern thinking many, who could hardly be called experts on Gnosticism, have taken up this theme and begin to protest at the mere mention of the word "Gnosticism."

It must be emphasized, however, that researchers using the term "Gnosticism" do not do so in the belief that it refers to a single, undifferentiated entity. They are perfectly aware that Gnosticism is an umbrella term, and is used for the sake of simplicity to refer to a religious phenomenon which comprises different dualistic movements or schools, which may have ascribed to different mythologies, but agreed on some basic tenets, and shared a number of distinguishing characteristics. Doing away with the term "Gnosticism" without offering a viable alternative to describe this peculiar religious phenomenon of Late Antiquity would debilitate discourse

¹¹⁰ For example Pearson writes about the Cainites, "There never was such a thing as a particular Cainite sect of Gnostics. There were instead, varieties of Gnostic heretics who could, from time to time, be labeled generically as Cainites..." B. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 105. The same could be said of all the other sub-groups or categories known from the writings of the heresiologists, it being clear from Gnostic texts that Gnostics themselves never thought of themselves along these categories, or along any categories at all.

¹¹¹ Judaism, Christianity, Greek philosophy, Iranian religions, etc.

¹¹² Some scholars talk of pre-Christian Gnosis, pushing back the beginnings of Gnosis to before our era, while others think it should strictly be dated after the appearance of Christianity.

¹¹³ See for example M. A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996); K. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.)

on it, and any alternative terminology and definition offered so far has proved to be similarly or even more open to criticism.¹¹⁴

What makes defining Gnosticism so difficult is the very character of this spiritual movement. The Church Father's comparison of the Gnostics to a many-headed hydra¹¹⁵ was perhaps more apt than any other description of Gnosticism so far produced. The question of categories and boundaries, and the need to adhere to strictly defined doctrines in general were of little relevance for the Gnostics, who ultimately believed that it was the underlying message (the shared body of the hydra) that mattered, not the "outward garb." This is the reason why the individual Gnostic myths (the heads of the hydra) were expressed in manifold ways, and Gnostic works were characterized by a proliferation of myths, which - although all based on the same anti-cosmic attitude - often differed from each other to a great deal concerning plot, devolve-ment, the role of protagonists and many other points. These myths were to be interpreted as allegories and symbols, rather than the literal and unchangeable expressions of the truth, as the Biblical

¹¹⁴ See King, *What is Gnosticism*, passim. As Gershom Scholem sums up succinctly: "Of course, everyone agrees by now that 'Gnosticism' in the comprehensive sense in which it is used in the history of religion, is a rather loose term. Only a few of the several sects, groups, and tendencies, now considered 'Gnostic' were known as such in their own time. But this does not preclude the use of this convenient term for the religious movement that proclaimed a mystical esotericism for the elect based on illumination and the acquisition of a higher knowledge of things heavenly and divine. It is to this knowledge that the very term 'Gnosis' meaning 'knowledge,' that is to say, knowledge of an esoteric and at the same time soteric (redeeming) character alludes." G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), 1. While Scholem stresses the importance of Gnosis, Pearson, emphasizes the other distinguishing feature of what usually is referred to as late antique Gnosticism, radical dualism, when he argues that "there are definite advantages in retaining the term because 'Gnosticism' (or the Gnostic religion) can then be usefully distinguished from the kinds of 'gnosis'...that do not share in the radical dualism or other essential features properly reserved for 'Gnosticism'!" B. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30.15; Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* V.11

texts of Judaism and Christianity. As Irenaeus complains after describing various Gnostic interpretations and representations of the Genesis myth:

And saying such things about the Creation, each day each one of them invents, as much as he can, something new; for among them no one is seen as “perfected” unless he makes use of the greatest falsehoods.¹¹⁶

What was the lower body of this hydra then, from which its different heads grew, which formed the basic framework of what came to be called Gnosis by its adherents, or Gnosticism by modern historians?¹¹⁷ This basic framework entails the idea of dualism, that is, “a radical disjunction between divinity and the powers that create and govern the cosmos.”¹¹⁸ This manifested itself in Gnostic thought in an unrelenting opposition between the spiritual and material realm (of Light and Darkness). The material world, conceived of as evil, included not only the matter itself, but also its creator (god, the demiurge, the chief ruler) and his helpers (the angels, also referred to as rulers, archons, often identified with the heavenly planets and stars). To the classic question “whence evil?” they maintained that whatever is bad and imperfect cannot come from

¹¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Adversus Hæreses* I.18.1. *Et de conditione quidem talia dicentes, quotidie adinvenit unusquisque eorum, quemadmodum potest, aliquid novi: perfectus enim nemo, nisi qui maxima mendacia apud eos fructificarent.* Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 1, tome 2, ed. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, SC 264 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 272. Modern researchers have been more lenient toward Gnostic ways of exegesis and compiling texts. As Elaine Pagels has put it: “Gnostic Christians neither sought nor found any consensus concerning what the story meant but regarded Genesis 1-3 rather like a fugal melody upon which they continually improvised new variations, all of which, bishop Irenaeus said, were ‘full of blasphemy.’” E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 64.

¹¹⁷ For works explaining what Gnosis entails and the different Gnostic schools, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press 1958) (still the best book for initiates into Gnosticism); K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.)

¹¹⁸ A. McGuire, “Conversion and Gnosis in the ‘Gospel of Truth,’” *Novum Testamentum* 28.4 (1986): 343.

the Good and Perfect (the spiritual realm of Light), in other words the material world was not created by the transcendent God, but by an inferior creature of the matter, the demiurge or the creator. Furthermore, Gnostics believed that the human soul (or rather “spirit”, *pneuma*) was a particle of Light, which “fell” from the Realm of Light through some tragic primal accident, and became imprisoned in matter. The 1966 Messina Congress on the Origins of Gnosticism mentioned as the central idea of Gnosticism:

the idea of the presence in man of a divine “spark”..., which has proceeded from the divine world and has fallen into this world of destiny, birth and death and which must be reawakened... in order to be finally restored. This idea... is ontologically based on the conception of a downward development of the divine whose periphery... has fatally fallen victim to a crisis and must - even if only indirectly - produce this world, in which it then cannot be disinterested, in that it must once gain recover the divine “spark” (often designated as *pneuma*, “spirit”).¹¹⁹

Gnostic view of history is one of a never-ceasing struggle between the imprisoned Light trying to escape, the representatives of the Light world endeavoring to help it and the rulers of the matters intent on keeping the Light imprisoned. The means of escape from matter, of redemption, is the Gnosis itself, that is, illuminating *knowledge*, which redeems and liberates its possessor.¹²⁰ This Gnosis

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 57.

¹²⁰ The term “gnosis” as spiritual knowledge, a transcendent form of knowledge (or understanding) derived from the contemplation of the divine, was also used by Christian authors, who referred to the Gnosis of Gnostics as “gnosis falsely so called.” “*Marifab*” (or *marifat*) used by Sufi philosophy to describe mystical intuitive knowledge of spiritual truth is also translated into English as “gnosis.” Neither the Christian, nor the Sufi usage of this term includes seeing this “knowledge” as the means of salvation or salvation itself, unlike in Gnosticism. As in the course of this study I shall repeatedly mention Sufi *marifab* (which has its place in Yezidi religious language), in order to avoid confusion, I shall refer to “knowledge as a means of salvation” in Gnostic systems as “Gnosis,” and to the mystical, esoteric knowledge in Sufism (and Yezidism) as “gnosis.”

cannot be reached through the usual exercise of the faculties of thinking, learning and logic, rather it is given by divine revelation, and is available only to the elect capable of receiving it. The content of this knowledge aims at revealing the true nature of the world and of the human soul. It is seen as the awakening of the soul wrapped in the forgetfulness of the matter. Thus Gnosis is both the means of salvation and salvation itself. "What liberates is the knowledge of who we were, what we became; where we were, whereinto we have been thrown; whereto we speed, wherefrom we are redeemed; what birth is, and what rebirth,"¹²¹ says a Gnostic extract preserved by the second-century Clement of Alexandria, while a Nag Hammadi text exhorts, "before everything (else), know your birth. Know yourself, that is, from what substance you are, or from what race, or from what species."¹²²

This is the basic theme around which the different Gnostic myths unfold, offering a unity of cosmogony, anthropogony and soterology.¹²³ These myths, dominated by dualism, tell of the expansion of the first principle, the Godhead, the "unknown" God, filling the spiritual universe (*Pleroma*, "Fullness," the world of Light) with his divine power through his hypostases emanating from him. They tell of how the tragic fall of a part of this divine power (or light) below, into the Chaos (darkness and primal matter) came about, often through the mistake or error of Sophia (Wisdom) or Ennoia (Epinoia, Forethought), the last of the divine emanations in the *Pleroma*. The myths tell in many different ways how this parcel of Light fallen below animated the matter and brought about the creation of the cosmos (always seen as negative) by the forces of Darkness. The forces (the rulers) are ultimately nothing but the shadows or abortions of the light world, the unfortunate results of a downward movement. Their existence depends on the possession

¹²¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 78,2 quoted in Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 45.

¹²² *The Teachings of Silvanus* 92,10 -14, trans. M. Peel and J. Zandee, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, NHS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 299.

¹²³ The individual myths may contain all three, only two, or even only one of these themes, the underlying idea being that the reader is already familiar with the basic framework of the myth.

of the fallen power of Light, now enclosed in matter, and makes them resort to various ruses, including the creation of mankind, and all the tribulation men are henceforth subjected to.

As shall be seen when studying late antique motifs in Yezidi religious tradition, these Gnostic cosmogonies make ample use of Biblical material, especially of the Genesis.¹²⁴ However, the use the Gnostics made of Biblical texts is hardly conventional. They were conceived in terms of a revolt, where anti-Judaism and a rejection of the Old Testament creator and his laws was an aspect of the general anti-cosmic attitude. Accordingly, most Old Testament motifs and stories are utilized in Gnostic writings in a “round-about-way,” where black becomes white and white becomes black. Gnostics achieved such an interpretation of the Old Testament with the help of spiritual allegory, taking “each line of the Scriptures as an enigma, a riddle pointing to a deeper meaning.”¹²⁵

Manichaeism

It is debated by scholars whether Manichaeism should be included among Gnostic religions, or should rather be seen as an inheritor of Gnostic ideas. Certainly, unlike the Gnostic phenomenon so hard to grasp or define, Manichaeism appears as a concrete relig-

¹²⁴ In fact, the presence and role of motifs taken from the Old Testament is so striking that it has led Hans Jonas to declare that Gnosticism is likely to have originated in “*close vicinity* and partial reaction to Judaism,” hence the “impression of ambivalent proximity to Judaism.” H. Jonas, “Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon – Typological and Historical,” in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 102. Other scholars like Quispel, Pearson and Segal went so far as to argue for a Jewish origin for Gnosticism, though this conclusion is rejected by other researchers. See E. M. Yamauchi, “Jewish Gnosticism: The Prologue of John, Mandaean Parallels, and the Trimorphic Proténnoia,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, ed. R. van Den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 467-97. See also Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, NHMS 58 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

¹²⁵ Pagels, *Adam, Eve*, 64.

ion, with a founder, a canon of texts, a definite mythological system, and a church organized along a rigid hierarchy. It was founded by Mani (210-276), who was born in Persian-occupied southern Mesopotamia in Ctesiphon and brought up among a baptizing Jewish Christian sect (probably the Elchasaites).¹²⁶ Mani, whose teachings were strongly influenced by both Christian¹²⁷ and Gnostic ideas,¹²⁸ saw himself as the Seal of the Prophets, who was sent to found a universal religion among all the peoples of the earth. One of the ten reasons he considered his own religion superior to earlier ones was that unlike his predecessors he set down his teachings in writing.¹²⁹ He composed eight works,¹³⁰ thus providing his followers with a textual canon and clearly delineated doctrines. Though Manichaean communities produced numerous holy texts in the subsequent centuries, adapting them to local cultures, these works never deviated from the basic myth taught by Mani.

¹²⁶ A. Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973): 23-59.

¹²⁷ An extensive range of motifs, images, expressions, ideas from the New Testament and especially from the Pauline Epistles have been identified in Mani's *Šābuhragān* as well as in the different Coptic writings and even in works from Central Asia. See M. Heuser and H.-J. Klimkeit, "The Use of the Scripture in Manichaeism" in *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, NHMS 46 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 111-22; K. Coyle, "The Cologne Mani Codex and Mani's Christian Connections," *Église e Théologie* 10 (1979): 179-93.

¹²⁸ For the influence of Gnostic mythology on Manichaean mythology, see G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*. (Leiden: Brill, 1984), especially the chapter "Gnostic Myth in Manichaean Garb," 145-67; P. Brown, "Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 49 (1969): 92-96; S. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), chapter "Gnostic and Other Christian Influences on Mani," 37-54; and *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994), 51-69.

¹²⁹ M. Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 29-30.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13. He also drew the *Ardabang*, a picture book illustrating Manichaean cosmogony. On Mani's works, also see M. Tardieu, *Le Manichéisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), chapter "Les Oeuvres de Mani," 45-64.

Unlike classical Gnosticism, which was “dualism on a monistic background”¹³¹ and knew only one principle, Manichaeism taught the primeval existence of two principles, good and evil, prompting Hans Jonas to speak of Syrio-Egyptian type and Iranian type of dualism. In the Iranian type of dualism evil is not derived from good – as the consequence of the fall of a part of the divine power to a lower state. It is the antithesis or opponent of good from the very beginning. From the very outset God and Evil, Light and Darkness, Spirit and Matter are opposed to each other as two “primal natures” or principles. But, just as in earlier forms of Gnosis, man exists in a state of “mixture,” and the Light enclosed in his material body is the cause or aim of the struggle fought between the two principles within the framework of creation.¹³²

According to the Manichaean myth, there existed two principles (or natures) side by side at the beginning. The Good Principle, Father of Light, dwelled in the Kingdom of Light, surrounded by his Five Glories (Intelligence/Mind, Knowledge, Reason, Thought, Deliberation). The Evil Principle dwelt in the Kingdom of Darkness, surrounded by dark powers. The powers of Darkness, having once glimpsed the Kingdom of Light, are filled with a desire to possess it and start waging a war. To stop its attack, the Father sends his hypostases. First there emanates the Mother of Life from the Father, then the Primal Man, and finally the five sons of the latter, who are also called the five basic elements and also correspond to the Five Glories.¹³³ The Primal Man, putting on his five sons as a sort of armor, descends to take up the fight with Darkness. The Primal Man is eventually overcome by the powers of Darkness. The Primal Man then turns to guile, sets up a trap offering himself as a bait, letting the sons of Darkness devour him and

¹³¹ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 58.

¹³² On Manichaean religion and mythology, see Heuser-Klimkeit, *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*; H. Puech, *Le Manichéisme. Son Fondateur - sa doctrine* (Paris: Civilisations du Sud, S.A.E.P, 1949), Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, chapter “Creation, World History, and Salvation according to Mani,” 206-37.

¹³³ “The five elements of Light which the Primal Man puts on as an armor are, as it were, denser representations of the original five hypostases of the deity, the Sh’kinas.” Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 218, Note 15.

his armor. With the help of this ruse the Primal Man manages to stop the attack of Darkness weakened by the Light they have devoured. However, as a result of his sacrifice, the Primal Man himself is trapped, becomes a prisoner of the evil powers. To rescue him, the Father sends his second son, the Living Spirit (*Spiritus Vivens*) to his aid. The Living Spirit awakens the unconscious divine warrior with his Cry and rescues the divine warrior from the prison of matter. His rescue however is not complete, his armor, his soul (his Five Sons) remains in the deep, a prisoner of the powers of Darkness. The human (and all animate) soul is a part of this armor of divine light imprisoned in matter. This armor or robe, symbolizing the sum of the particles of light imprisoned in matter, is also referred to as the Living Soul. It is this Living Soul (armor) which has to be freed from its prison, so that it can again unite with the Primal Man and return with him to the Land of Light. The cosmos is then created by the Father to help along the separation of matter and Light, while the Lord of Darkness, in an effort to prevent this separation, creates man from matter and imprisons a portion of the captured Light in his body. Henceforward human history, just like in Gnosticism, is one of a constant struggle fought for the liberation of the Light particles (human soul.)

Manichaeism was characterized by an extraordinary missionary zeal. Already Mani sent out a number of missionaries, and his religion spread far and wide after his death. Not only did Manichaeism pose a serious threat to Christianity around the Mediterranean, in Mesopotamia, Persia and Armenia, it eventually spread to Central Asia and China as well.¹³⁴ Its missionary efforts were greatly facilitated by Manichaeism's ability to adapt itself to local religions. Without altering the basic mythological framework of message of Manichaeism, its missionaries were ready to adopt new motifs, and displayed a great aptitude for presenting their doctrines in such a form that their audience, of whichever religious background, could readily comprehend and absorb them. Some Parthian texts even show that Manichaeism was perfectly capable

¹³⁴ On the history of Manichaeism, see S. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, and *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East*.

of camouflaging its message with Islamic concepts and images, when persecution by Muslims made it necessary.¹³⁵ This ability to adopt and adapt also made Manichaeans very important literary intermediaries between different cultures.¹³⁶

These characteristics, missionary zeal, flexibility and openness toward local culture, make Manichaeism a likely candidate for being a vehicle of transmission between (pre-Islamic) Kurds living in the mountains bordering Northern Mesopotamia and late antique religious traditions.

The Dualistic Movements after the Advent of Islam

Late antique Mesopotamia and Syria (as well as Armenia to the North and Iran to the East) were home to different Gnostic groups and Manichaeans despite periodic efforts by both Christian and Zoroastrian authorities to exile them. Heterodox groups continued to exist alongside “mainstream” Christianity even after the coming of Islam. The Nestorian bishop, Theodore bar Khoni (*Liber Scholiorum*, AD 792) and the Muslim scholar, Ibn an-Nadim (*Fihrist*, AD 988) give accounts in their works of a number of “heretical” sects, the Manichaeans the most prominent among them, still living in the region at their time. As Reeves succinctly puts it, “the persistent and recurrent flowering during the course of the first post-Christian millennium of a bewildering diversity of seemingly “native” forms of Gnosticism - e.g., Manichaeism, Mazdakism, Mandaeism, the Islamic extremist *ghulat* sects, the Jewish groups associated with the production of the *Ma'aseh Bereshit* literature... - indicates the vibrant vitality of Gnostic ideologies throughout this region during this period.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ See H.-J. Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Texts from Central Asia* (San Francisco: Harpercollins, 1993), 52.

¹³⁶ See J. Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature: Representative Texts Chiefly from Middle Persian and Parthian Writings* (Delmar NY: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975), chapter “Manichaeism as Literary Intermediary,” 37-46.

¹³⁷ Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 209.

Heterodox groups certainly enjoyed a higher degree of tolerance under early Islamic rule than before the advent of Islam. The Umayyads are known to have practiced tolerance toward Manichaeans (as well as others). Some of those Manichaeans who had left for Khorasan at the time of the Sassanian persecutions even returned to Mesopotamia.¹³⁸ At the end of the seventh century the community enjoyed the patronage of the governor of Iraq, and the *archegos* (the head of the Manichaean community, who traditionally resided in the Twin-Cities of Seleuceia-Ctesiphon, then moved to the new capital Baghdad under the Abbasids) even received items of luxury from him as gifts.¹³⁹ The Abbasids, who took over from the Umayyads in 750, were far less tolerant than their predecessors, and Manichaeans were persecuted as *ẓanadiqa*.¹⁴⁰ However, despite official persecutions and forced conversions, which became especially severe between 783-87, the Manichaean community remained influential and philosophically productive well into the ninth century.¹⁴¹ The Caliphate of al-Muqtadir (908-32) brought the close of Iraqi Manichaeism in Iraq. The *archegos* had to leave Baghdad around the year 908.¹⁴² According to an-Nadim, those few who stayed in Iraq kept their identity secret, while the majority left the region.¹⁴³ He claims to have still personally known three hundred *ẓindiqs* (heretics, not all of whom may have been Manichaeans) in the mid-tenth century, but by the time of the

¹³⁸ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 112.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 112-13.

¹⁴⁰ The plural of *ẓindiq*, a term borrowed from the Sassanians. Though originally applied to refer to those who espoused a dualistic ascetic religious conviction, it eventually came to signify all heresies which were seen as threatening the Islamic state, which makes it hard to know if all those later references to *ẓindiq* are indeed an indication of flourishing dualism, or merely a general term, much like "Manichaean" became freely applied to different heretical tendencies in Christendom.

¹⁴¹ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 114.

¹⁴² Cyril Glassé, "Crypto-Manicheism in the Abbasid Empire," in *Manicheismo e Oriente Cristiano Antico*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. van Tongerloo (Louvain-Naples: Brepols, 1997), 110.

¹⁴³ Ibn an-Nadim. *Kitab al-Fihrist*. Ed. and trans. Buyard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 802.

composition of his *Fibriſt* at the close of the first millennium, he had only five left among his friends.¹⁴⁴ Most Manichaeans deemed it better either to hide their identity for good or to leave the region.¹⁴⁵

Not only did Gnostic and Manichaean groups survive well into Islamic times, they also seem to have seriously influenced some *ghulat*¹⁴⁶ movements. Some researchers see a strong Manichaean influence in the emergence of such Islamic movements as the Ismailis, the Qarmatis and even the Sufi movement. Cyril Glassé argues that such emblematic figures of the Sufi movement Bayazid Bastami (804-874), Sahl Tutsari (d. 896) and as Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) were in fact crypto-Manichaeans, in active contact with other Manichaeans both in the Abbasid Empire and outside it.¹⁴⁷ Even the invisible Sufi spiritual hierarchies are believed to resemble the descriptions of the Manichaean hierarchy.¹⁴⁸ However, narrowing down the possible source of Gnosticizing influence to Manichaeans alone presents a rather oversimplified image of this region, where many different religious schools coexisted, and often overlapped. What seems certain is that ideas of a Gnostic origin mixed with local forms of paganism in Iraq, giving

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 803.

¹⁴⁵ The majority went to Central Asia, where the Manichaeans of the time enjoyed the protection of the Uighur kingdom, though their reception by those already settled there was not always enthusiastic. (Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 114.) We cannot rule out, however, even if we would have no surviving written evidence left of this, that some could have taken refuge in the Kurdish mountains that were only nominally Islamicised at the time.

¹⁴⁶ Sg. *Ghulamm*, “extremists,” “exaggerators.” It is used to denote Islamic movements, which ascribe divine characteristics to a member of Muhammad’s family, generally Ali.

¹⁴⁷ Cyril Glassé, “Crypto-Manicheism in the Abbasid Empire,” 105-223. See also M. Browder-Hampon, “The Formulation of Manichaeism in Late Umayyad Islam,” in *Studia Manichaica II*, ed. G. Wiessner and H.-J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 328-33.

¹⁴⁸ G. Monnot, “Matoridi et le Manichéisme,” *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominician d’Études Orientales du Caire* 13 (1977): 39-65, quoted in Glassé, “Crypto-Manicheism in the Abbasid Empire,” 123.

birth to the formation of new sects.¹⁴⁹ Gnosticizing Islamic sects appeared from the early eighth century on, including such powerful movements as the Ismaili and the Nusayrî,¹⁵⁰ as well as smaller, less known groups and figures.¹⁵¹ For example, Wasserstrom writes of Mughîra b. Sa'îd (d. 736), one of the "first Gnostics of Islam," whose central teaching is an Islamicized reworking of a nearly unaltered Gnostic cosmology, that he "emerged out of the Aramaic milieu of late antiquity, in which such Gnostic teachings and the syncretistic 'transposition' of their forms were common features,"¹⁵² adding that "Mughîra's religion is an amalgam that comprises demonstrable elements of Jewish, Gnostic, Manichaean, and native Mesopotamian mythologies, in a baptist context."¹⁵³ Wasserstrom also emphasizes that the "free borrowing of formulae," "transposition of forms" and syncretism in general was one of the distinguishing features of "the Aramaicized multicultural matrix of late antique Mesopotamia."¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ M. Morony, *Iraq After The Muslim Conquest* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias, 2005), 408-409.

¹⁵⁰ H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten* (Zurich: Artemis & Winkler Verlag, 1982); idem, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismailiya* (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1978); H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time & Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul, 1983). (I must add, though, that in my opinion Corbin's work is not quite convincing).

¹⁵¹ Morony, *Iraq*, chapter "Pagans and Gnostics," 384-429.

¹⁵² S. Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughîra b. Sa'îd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myth of its Rejection," *History of Religions* 25.1 (1985): 4.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Of course, our knowledge of heterodox communities, limited as it is, is restricted to the domain of written religion. Nothing is known of oral culture, among the illiterate population who, at least on the surface, assimilated to the Islam or Christianity to avoid persecution.

CONTEMPORARY HETERODOX RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

It may also be necessary to say a few words about the different heterodox movements of the region, with whom Yezidis have displayed connections of varying degrees.

Ahl-i Haqq

The Ahl-i Haqq¹⁵⁵ (literally the "People of the Truth," also known as Yaresan, and in Iraqi Kurdistan as Kakai) are a Kurdish speaking religious minority in Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan, who are considered as *ghulat*, or Shiite extremists by some Muslim theologians. Ahl-i Haqq adherents themselves are not unanimous on their position vis-à-vis Islam. Some distance themselves from Islamic tradition and define their religion as a separate creed, others try to present the faith as in accordance with Shiia orthodoxies, but enriched with a mystical message.¹⁵⁶ Very little is known of their origin, though its

¹⁵⁵ For studies of the Ahl-i Haqq, see R. Hamzeh'ee, *The Yaresan: A Sociological, Historical and Religio-Historical Study of a Kurdish Community* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1990); V. Minorsky, "Notes sur la Secte des Ahle-Haqq," *Revue du Monde Musulman* 40-41 (1920): 20-97, and 45 (1921): 205-302; W. Ivanow, *The Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan* (Leiden: The Ismaili Society, 1955); C. Edmonds, "The Beliefs and Practices of the Ahl-i Haqq of Iraq," *Iran* 7 (1969): 87-106; V. Minorsky, "Ahl-i Hakk," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 260-63.

¹⁵⁶ The latter position is the one taken by the so-called reformists, who belong to the school-educated, literate layer of the movement, and who are also intent on transforming Ahl-i Haqq from a basically oral religion to a written one. Traditional, rural communities tend to subscribe to the first view. As Jean During writes, "the written official discourse of the elite may not reflect the illiterate or oral tradition of the people." J. During, "A Critical Survey on Ahle Haqq Studies in Europe and Iran," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. T. Olson, E. Özdalga, C. Raudvere (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1996), 110. The Kakai in Iraq are officially considered Muslims at their own request, notwithstanding, they see themselves as a separate community and do not intermarry with other Muslim groups. Kurdish nationalists, on the other hand, stress the ancient Kurdish or Iranian aspects of Ahl-i Haqq, calling

formation is generally dated by scholars to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, a period of power vacuum giving rise to many heterodox movements in the region. Just like Yezidism, the Ahl-i Haqq is believed to have started as a variant of Sufism, appealing to nomadic tribesman and peasants, though in their case a strong Shiia influence is also undeniable.¹⁵⁷

Despite their association with extreme Shiism – unlike Yezidis, who seem to have emerged from an orthodox Sunni background¹⁵⁸ – the Ahl-i Haqq show a striking resemblance with Yezidis both as regards their religious teachings and their socio-religious institutions.¹⁵⁹ Just like Yezidis, they teach the successive manifestation of the Divinity (or of the divine essence) in human form (as religious leaders), with each manifestation accompanied by incarnated angels, the angels themselves being the emanations of the Divinity. They profess the metempsychosis of human souls as well.¹⁶⁰ Their creation myth, recounting the creation of the world from a primeval Pearl is beyond doubt related to the creation myth of the Yezidis, and probably going back to the same West Iranian mythological background.¹⁶¹ They also have a number of other myths in common with Yezidis. Ahl-i Haqq society is stratified according to a hereditary religious caste system, which may have had its root in Sufi hierarchy, dividing it into *murids* (followers) and *pîrs*. Each member of the community must have a *pîr* from one of the Khandans, that is, Sayyid families (who trace their descent to

it (along with Yezidism and Alevism) the “Cult of Angels,” a term and notion coined by M. Izady, who tried to create a national mythology for Kurdish speakers in his book much read by Kurds. M. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis, 1992.), 145-57.

¹⁵⁷ Ivanow (*Truth Worshipers*, 69-74) is convinced that it was primarily the Ismailism, an extreme Shiite movement, which influenced the Ahl-i Haqq.

¹⁵⁸ See chapter 3 “The Origin of Yezidis.”

¹⁵⁹ For details on Yezidi religion, see chapter 4 “Yezidi Religion.”

¹⁶⁰ Unlike Yezidis, however, they claim that people were created with different natures. Those of yellow clay have the possibility of reaching purification through repeated incarnation, which increases their luminous state, while those made of black earth are irredeemably evil.

¹⁶¹ See Introduction.

one of the incarnations of the Divinity). Like Yezidis they also have the institution of "brother/sister of hereafter," which is a must for all adherents. The Ahl-i Haqq also have a number of festivals and rites, some of them possibly also of an ancient Iranian origin, in common with the Yezidis.¹⁶²

The Ahl-i Haqq possess a rich oral tradition in the form of the so-called *kalam*s (lit. "words"), their religious poetry. *Kalam*s and accompanying myths were originally transmitted orally from generation to generation. They were committed to writing probably only in the nineteenth century.¹⁶³ The manuscripts of the *kalam*s were then jealously guarded by the Sayyids, the caste of religious leaders, and the *kalam-khwan* (kalam-reciters), who were the traditional keepers of the tradition.¹⁶⁴ Until today most of Ahl-i Haqq literature is available only in Kurdish or Persian.¹⁶⁵ Studying the sect and sacred texts was also hampered by the principle of *taqiyya* or secrecy, dissimulation, practiced by them as well as by Yezidis and practically all the persecuted heterodox religious groups of the Middle East.

¹⁶² See Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 52-54, and idem, "On the Study of Some Heterodox Sects in Kurdistan," *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam* INALCO-ERISM 5 (1998): 163-84.

¹⁶³ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Faith and Culture and the Ahl-e Haqq," in *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, ed. C. Allison and P. Kreyenbroek (London: Zed Books, 1996), 118.

¹⁶⁴ The *kalam-khwan* appear to be the Ahl-i Haqq equivalent of the Yezidis *qewwal* class.

¹⁶⁵ Notable exceptions being the translations of Hamzeh'ee, Ivanow, Mokri and Minorsky. For the state of publication and study of Ahl-i Haqq texts, see During, "A Critical Survey on Ahle Haqq Studies," 105-111.

Nusayrîs

Nusayrîs,¹⁶⁶ also known as Alawîs, are an extreme Shiia sect, who venerate Ali bin Talib as supreme God. Nusayrîs consider Ali the incarnation of God, or rather think that he is the highest member of the divine trinity, who periodically manifests himself in the form of prophets in the human world, his last manifestation being Ali bin Talib, son-in-law of Mohamed. Nusayrîs are believed to have been strongly influenced by some heretical movements of early Christianity, including late antique Gnosticism.¹⁶⁷ Just like Yezidis and other much-persecuted heterodox religious groups of the Middle East, they practice *taqiyya*, or dissimulation, so it has not been easy to learn about the details of their doctrines, though some manuscripts have come to light since the nineteenth century. Nusayrîs teach the periodical manifestation of the Divinity on earth. In each of its earthly manifestations (seven altogether) God (the Essence, *ma'nā*) is accompanied by two subordinate hypostases, the Name and the Veil/Gate. Nusayrîs also teach that the soul of the Nusayrîs were lights, surrounding and praising God, but then due to their insubordination and ignorance they fell, were closed in material bodies and condemned to metempsychosis. From this cycle of continual rebirths, only the elect, those who become capable of recognizing the true Essence of God behind the Name and the Veil, will break free. The freed soul will journey back across the seven heavens, and arrive at its ultimate destination, the contemplation of the divine light.

¹⁶⁶ For a detailed treatment of the different aspects of Nusayrî faith, based on the analysis of a number of Nusayrî manuscripts, see M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, *The Nusayrî-'Alawî Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); and T. Olsson, "The Gnosis of Mountaineers and Townspeople. The Religion of the Syrian Alawites, or the Nusayrîs," in *Alawî Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. T. Olsson, E. Özdalga and C. Raudvere (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1997), 167-83; and H. Halm, "Nusayriyya" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* vol. 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 145-48.

¹⁶⁷ Halm, *Gnosis*, 298-300. T. Olsson, "The Gnosis of Mountaineers and Townspeople," M. Maróth, "Alaviták" (Alawites), in *Iráni Föld – Perzsa Kultúra* (Iranian Land – Persian Culture), ed. Éva Jeremiás M. (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Oriental Institute, 2007), 360.

According to their tradition, the sect was probably formed in Iraq in the ninth century by Muhammad ibn Nusayr (d. 883, a supporter of the tenth Shiia imam), from where they later spread westward. Though today Nusayrîs live in Syria and Lebanon and in Southern Turkey,¹⁶⁸ with the heart of their land being in the mountain range, the Jabal al-Nusayriya, running parallel to the Syrian seacoast, they could once be found over a much wider area. There must have been Nusayrîs in Northern Mesopotamia, near Kurdistan, as according to our sources in the thirteenth century a number of Nusayrî tribes moved from the Sinjar Mountain to Syria, under the leadership of Amir Hasan Yusuf al-Makhzun, in order to help their co-religionists in their struggle against the oppression of the Kurds.¹⁶⁹ Though traditionally considered heretics and even idolaters by Sunni Muslims, today it is the minority Alawi who rule the Syrian military, and consequently Syria, with the Alawi Assad family at the helm.

Mandaeans

Mandaeans (also referred to as Sabaeans) are a group that could fit both categories, that of contemporary heterodox movements in the Middle East, as well as that of late antique dualistic religious movements. Mandaeans, today living in the south of Iraq, in the swamp region between the Euphrates and Tigris running into the Persian Gulf, are often referred to as the last surviving Gnostic sect.¹⁷⁰ They hold strongly dualistic views, see the human soul as a

¹⁶⁸ In the vicinity of Antakya, Adana and Iskandurun.

¹⁶⁹ Maróth, "Alaviták," 360.

¹⁷⁰ Studies on Mandaeans are far more numerous than on other heterodox groups in the region. See, e. g., M. Lidzbarski, *Mandaïsche Liturgien* (Berlin: Weidman, 1920); E. S. Drower, *The secret Adam, a study of Nasoraean Gnosis* (London: Clarendon Press, 1960); eadem, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden: Brill, 1959); eadem, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic Legends, and Folklore* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002); K. Rudolph, *Mandaeism*, *Iconography of Religions* 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); J. Buckley, *The Mandaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); E. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004).

captive in the material world, from which it strives to break free, through reaching Gnosis, and return to the World of Light and the Supreme Entity. Interestingly enough, their texts display not only strong anti-Jewish feelings, but they also condemn Jesus as a false prophet, who perverted the teaching of John the Baptist, whom they revere as a true messenger bringing divine revelation.

Mandaean religion is based on a strong scriptural tradition. Attempts to reconstruct the chronology of this literature have so far been unsuccessful, but research (comparing themes, script, and consulting colophons) suggests that it may be dated back to the second or third century AD.¹⁷¹ The fact that they were considered *ahl al-kitab* (people of the Book) by Muslims also indicates that written material played an important part in the transmission of Mandaean religion from an early date.

For a while, Mandaeans were thought to be the descendants of Manichaeans, but today the consensus is that they should probably be identified with the “Baptists” of Mani. In other words, the baptizing sect Mani grew up with must have been very similar, even if not identical, to the ancestors of today’s Mandaeans. Very little is known about their origin and early history. Despite the rather pronounced anti-Judaism of Mandaean texts, researchers today agree that the community is of Jewish origin. Like other heretical Jewish sects opposing official Judaism, it must have been very open to the reception of non-Jewish influences, above all Iranian and Gnostic. It is assumed that they must have emigrated as a result of religious persecution (or at least opposition) around the first century AD from the Jordan region to the East.¹⁷² It is possible that their road didn’t lead from the Jordan straight to the swampland of southern Mesopotamia, but during their exodus the

¹⁷¹ Buckley, *The Mandaeans*, 4-5, 12; Rudolph, *Mandaeism*, 3.

¹⁷² As a sect of repeated baptism, they still refer to the baptismal water as “Jordan.” It may be worth mentioning that Yezidis, just like Mandaeans, have repeated baptism. The first one, usually at a young age, is for initiatory purposes. Later baptisms, however, have a purificatory aim, to wash away sins. Both types of baptisms (*mor kirin*) are carried out in the *Kaniya Spi*, or “White Spring” in Lalish. For those who couldn’t go there, baptism with the help of water taken from the White Spring was possible.

Mandaeans may have made a sojourn to more northern -lying territories and lived for a while near to the Kurdish -inhabited regions. One of their sacred texts, the *Haran Gawaita*, reports that during the rule of a Parthian king Ardaban (Artabanus)¹⁷³ a large group, “sixty thousand of Nasoreans,” fled from the Jewish rulers to the “inner Haran” territory or the “Median hill-country.”¹⁷⁴ Rudolph understands “Median Hills” to refer to north-West Iranian territory between Haran (near Edessa, today’s Urfa) and Nisibis (Nusaybin).¹⁷⁵

Several scholars have already remarked on a possible relationship between the Yezidis and Mandaeans. However, the extent of possible parallels between Mandaeans and Yezidis has never been seriously studied. Lady Drower, who has studied Mandeans and their texts extensively, paid a few shorter visits to the Yezidis as well. Though her trips to the Yezidis were more of a recreational adventure tourism type rather than the in-depth research she carried out among the Mandaeans, she does point out a few similarities between the two groups. The most interesting point is perhaps the fact that according to her one of the holy books of the Mandaean portrays the Peacock Angel (Malka Tausa for the Mandaeans) as a “spirit concerned with the destinies of this world, a prince of the world of light, who, because of divinely appointed destiny, plunged into the darkness of matter.”¹⁷⁶

This is not to say that Mandaeans could have exercised a direct influence on Yezidis, since their putative sojourn in the north was divided by centuries from the appearance of the al-Adawiyya tariqat in the Kurdish mountains. Rather it should be taken as an indication of the presence of wildly heterodox and gnosticizing ideas in the region. It also supports the theory that groups possessing Gnostic ideas may have survived well past Late Antiquity.

¹⁷³ Unfortunately there were five Ardabans.

¹⁷⁴ Rudolph, *Mandaeism*, 364.

¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately Rudolph does not explain why he identifies the “Median hills” with this rather flat region, rather than the Kurdish mountains to the east of the Tigris.

¹⁷⁶ E. S. Drower, *Peacock Angel* (London: John Murray, 1941), 6; see also eadem, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, 257-8.

Other Heterodox Islamic Groups

There are a number of other heterodox Islamic groups living in the regions where Yezidis can also be found, which may share some characteristics and myths with the Yezidis. These groups will not be referred to in this study, for it was not possible to study their mythologies thoroughly enough to find parallels for the topics treated in this work. This is not to assert, however, that such parallels do not exist, merely that the field is open for further research. Of all these groups, the best known are the Alevis of Turkey (not to be confused with the Alawis).¹⁷⁷ Alevis are a Twelver Shiia group living in Turkey, whose members comprise both Turkish and Kurdish speakers. Though of a different historical origin, and officially considered an extreme Twelver Shiia group,¹⁷⁸ who venerate and divinize Ali, they show some significant similarities to both Yezidis and Ahl-i Haqq, an observation which hints at a common substratum.

¹⁷⁷ Alevis, who played an important role in the leftist movements of Turkey, have been widely studied, but mainly from a sociological point of view. Even studies of their religion mostly concentrated on their religious institutions, and collecting myths, or folktales was not a priority. Furthermore, it is mostly Turkish Alevis who have been studied, while Kurdish Alevis, especially those living in the rural communities of the volatile South-East are much less known. Though Alevis have written texts (the so-called *Bıyruks*, a compilation of heterogeneous texts) oral tradition probably played a more important role in sustaining religious memory: "the traditional identification of Alevi religious and social life was based on the oral transmission of knowledge, including the esoteric religious teaching. Which was handed down ritually from person to person." T. Olsson, Epilogue: The Scripturalization of Ali-oriented religions," in *Alevi Identity*, 200.

¹⁷⁸ Alevis, also known as "Kizilbash" ("red-heads" from their head-gear), were the followers of Shah Ismail, the founder of the Saffavid dynasty, who played a key role in the rise of Twelver Shiism in Iran. As allies of the Shiite and Iranian foe they were persecuted by Selim the Grim and his successors. Curiously, at the same time they are seen as a rural form of the Bektashi dervish order, a Sufi brotherhood much respected in the Ottoman Empire, to which the Janissary corps actually belonged.

Just like the Yezidis and the Ahl-i Haqq, they believe in the repeated manifestation, or reincarnation of God in human form, and in metempsychosis. They have a hereditary spiritual hierarchy, where the spiritual leaders (*murshids*) are known as *pîr* or *dede*. Ordinary Alevis owe allegiance to a particular *dede* lineage on the basis of pre-existing family relations. They also follow the religious institution of brother and sister of the hereafter (*musahiplik* or *ahiret kardeşliği*).¹⁷⁹ Some of their rituals¹⁸⁰ also show strong resemblances.

Though no parallels will be brought up in this work between Yezidis and Alevis, they clearly share a number of important myths as well. For example, all three, Yezidis, Ahl-i Haqq and Alevis, relate the important cosmogonic myth of the angel Gabriel (Jibrail, or in some cases Tawusi Melek) flying around a world covered by water at the very beginning of creation and being confronted by God, whom Gabriel failed to recognize. He could only enter Paradise (or sit on the tree where God was sitting in the form of a bird) after a question-and-answer ordeal, during which he acknowledged that his existence originated from God.¹⁸¹ Similarly, all three communities tell the myth of local religious leaders challenging a quasi-divine figure of the community (Sheikh Adi, Sultan Sahak and Haji Bek-tash respectively) to a miracle-working contest riding lions and wielding snakes as whips, which the quasi-divine figure counters by

¹⁷⁹ See Kreyenbroek, "On the Study of Some Heterodox Sects in Kurdistan."

¹⁸⁰ For example, the feast of Khidir Ilyas, or Hızır Nebi for Turkish Alevis. See Irène Mélikoff's description of Alevis celebrating Hızır Nabi's feast, which shows a striking resemblance to my description of Khidir Ilyas' feast among the Yezidis in the village of Khanke in Northern Iraq. Irène Mélikoff, *Sur les Traces du Soufisme Turc: Recherches sur l'Islam populaire en Anatolie* (Istanbul: Isis, 1992) 38; and Spät, *Yezidis*, 63.

¹⁸¹ Yuri Stoyanov, "Islamic and Christian Heterodox Water Cosmogonies from the Ottoman Period: Parallels and Contrasts," *BSOAS* 64.1 (2001): 19-33, and "Problems in the Study of the Interrelations between Medieval Christian Heterodoxies and Heterodox Islam in the Early Ottoman Balkan-Anatolian Region," *Scripta & eScripta* 2 (2004): 171-218; Mélikoff, *Sur les Traces du Soufisme Turc*, 48. Yezidis also share this myth with the Ahl-i Haqq, see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 54; Lescot, *Les Yezidis*, 57-8.

riding a rock or wall.¹⁸² Further studies would probably bring to light more myths shared by these different groups.

Northern Iraq (or Iraqi Kurdistan) offers a bewildering number and variety of small, heterodox religious groups. However, hardly any research has been carried out and very little is known about minority religious groups like the Shabak, Sarli or Bajalan.¹⁸³ The latter two are said to be sub-branches of the Ahl-i Haqq and the Shabak respectively, though others contest this. The Shabak community, like that of the Yezidis, the Ahl-i Haqq and the Alevis, is organized along the lines of a hereditary spiritual hierarchy reminiscent of Sufi orders. They have hereditary classes of religious specialists of different ranks; their laymen are associated with such religious specialists. Each adult is affiliated with a *pîr*. They do not observe the five pillars of Islam, but instead have five prescribed obligations of their own (just like the Yezidis, though the actual rules are different.) Bruinessen argues that they are closely related to the Anatolian Alevis.¹⁸⁴ They are multilingual; their mother language is said to be Gurani,¹⁸⁵ but the language of their prayers and rituals is Turkish. Unlike the Alevis, however, they are not Twelver Shiia, though they have urban patrons from Mosul (for whom they are share-croppers) who belong to Twelver Shiism. According to Bruinessen today a gradual Shi'isation is taking place among them.

¹⁸² M. Bruinessen, "When Haji Bektash Still Bore the Name of Sultan Sahak: Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran district," in *Bektachîyya: études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, ed. A. Popovic & G. Veinstein (Istanbul: Éditions Isis, 1995), 117-138.

¹⁸³ M. Leezenberg, "Between Assimilation and Deportation: The Shabak and the Kakais in Northern Iraq," 155, in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, ed. K. Kehl-Bodrogi, B. Kellner-Heinkele and A. Otter-Beaujean (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 155-74. While in Iraq I heard only of the Shabaks. They were mentioned in rather hostile tones by some villagers in the Yezidi village of Behzani as Arabs and Shiites, when talking about the lack of security in the region. They certainly did not seem to share the idea of affinity between Yezidi and Shabak religion remarked upon by Leezenberg and other researchers.

¹⁸⁴ M. Bruinessen, "A Kizilbash Community in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Shabak," *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam* 5 (1998): 185-196.

¹⁸⁵ Gurani is Western Iranian language, related to Kurdish, the language also spoken by many Ahl-i Haqq, the Sarli and the Bajalan.

Further study of the religious system of these little-known heterodox groups, as well as of “popular religion” among the “orthodox” Sunni and Shiia Muslims of the region could yield more valuable information on the common motifs inherited by the Yezidis and other Middle East religious groups from late antique religious traditions.

3 THE ORIGIN OF THE YEZIDIS AND OF YEZIDI STUDIES

THE HISTORY OF THE YEZIDIS¹⁸⁶

Yezidis themselves trace their origin to the very beginning of mankind, to the miraculously conceived son of Adam, Shehid bin Jer.¹⁸⁷ Today less traditional views claim that they descend from the Zoroastrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, or Sumerians, in other words from the great civilizations of Ancient Middle East.¹⁸⁸

Non-Yezidi researchers have ascribed a number of different origins to the Yezidis, involving a number of ancient peoples and cults of the wider region. However, today the *communis opinio* among academics is to think of “the arrival of the Sufi Sheikh ‘Adi bin Musāfir, as the first of a chain of events which eventually resulted in the emergence of Yezidism.”¹⁸⁹ It was Sheikh Adi, a

¹⁸⁶ For a very detailed study of Yezidi history and the events surrounding it, see J. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis* (London: Kegan Paul, 1993), a book which makes thorough use of all available information, whether coming from Arabic theologians, Nestorian bishops, Ottoman archives, or the report of European travelers. For a more concise account of the early history of Yezidis, see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, chapter “The Early History: Factual and Legendary Accounts.”

¹⁸⁷ See chapter 9 on “The Yezidi Origin Myth.”

¹⁸⁸ See chapter 5 on “Oral Tradition and Literacy.”

¹⁸⁹ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 27. For Yezidis Sheikh Adi is an extremely important figure, who could be said to stand in the center of their religion. He is seen as an incarnated angel, a quasi-divine figure, and the most relevant historical leader of the community. His grave is a place of pilgrimage, and sacred hymns make frequent mention of his name. There is no men-

twelfth-century Sufi mystic from the Be'eka valley in Lebanon, who founded a Sufi order in Lalish, in the Kurdish mountains not far from Mosul.¹⁹⁰ It was this Sufi order, the al-Adawiyya, which made possible the beginnings of the Yezidis as an organized religious community with a conscious sense of identity.¹⁹¹ Even today Yezidism retains a social structure modeled on a Sufi brotherhood, a mythology crowded with great Sufi figures, and a religious language that is rich in Sufi images, symbols and terminology, even if all these seem to have undergone some profound metamorphoses, and acquired new significance and connotations.

tion of Sheikh Adi having been a Muslim in Yezidi lore, nor is there any reference to the period when he lived, though some hymns do mention his having come from Syria. Several travelers mentioned that Yezidis claimed he had lived before the Prophet Muhammad. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the French vice-consul of Mosul, N. Siouffi successfully identified the Yezidi Sheikh Adi with a historical figure, the Sufi Sheikh Adi bin Musafir. N. Siouffi, "Notice sur le Chéikh Adi et la Secte des Yézidis," *JA* ser. 8, vol. 5 (1885): 78-100. This identification is today accepted by educated Yezidis, but upsets those of a more traditional background. (Professor Kreyenbroek has told me, how at a talk he gave on Yezidi faith to Yezidis living in Germany, an older Yezidi became outraged when he happened to mention the Muslim origin of Sheikh Adi.)

¹⁹⁰ Some Christian sources claim that Sheikh Adi seized a Christian monastery in Lalish, or perhaps converted its monks. I. Joseph, *Devil Worship: Sacred Books and Traditions of the Yezidiz* (Boston: Badger, 1919) 98-99; Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 30-31; Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 14. Yezidi oral tradition also makes mention of figures like Mar Mati (the founder of the Mar Mati monastery on the Meqlub mountain a couple of miles from Lalish) in connection with Sheikh Adi, implying that there may indeed have been some connection, and even rivalry between the early Adawiyya and local Christians. As regards the idea that Lalish was originally the site of a Christian church or monastery, Birgül Acikyildiz, a Turkish art historian, is of the opinion that the layout of the Central Sanctuary in Lalish indicates a Sufi convent or *tekke*. Given the natural beauty of this green valley, watered by springs in an otherwise arid region, it is likely that this valley has been a place of worship since times immemorial.

¹⁹¹ Tracing the beginnings of the Yezidi community to a twelfth-century Sufi mystic and his order does not preclude accepting that many ideas, institutions and rituals of the Yezidis may well be older.

Sheikh Adi (1073-1160), of Umayyad descent, was a Sufi mystic, whose orthodoxy as a Sunni Muslim, as his own writings and the works of contemporaries attest, was never in question. He studied in Baghdad from the same teacher as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, and may have known a number of celebrated Sufi scholars and philosophers. He arrived in the Hakkari Mountains not long after the turn of the century, and founded the Sufi order named after him.

When Sheikh Adi founded his order, the Kurdish inhabitants of the mountains were only partly Islamicized, and those who were Muslims occasionally displayed some variance from "mainstream" Islam. According to contemporary reports there were groups of Kurds who paid excessive worship to the Umayyad dynasty, and to Yezid bin Muawiya, the caliph held responsible for the tragedy of Karbala.¹⁹² A large group of tribal Kurds, on the other hand, were still following their pre-Islamic religion, whatever that could have been.¹⁹³ Beside the Kurds, there were of course Aramaic speaking Jewish and Christian communities living in the mountains in considerable numbers.

The al-Adawiyya dervish order founded by Sheikh Adi spread from the Hakkari mountains all over the Middle East. Today, there is still a branch of al-Adawiyya functioning as an ordinary Sufi order in Egypt, quite orthodox in nature. The Kurdish branch of Sheikh Adi's Sufi order, however, was to have a different career, one which led away from Islam, until it became a system which could be described with some exaggeration by Lescot, as one which in "its present form... shows no similarity whatever with Islam."¹⁹⁴ Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries the order founded by Sheikh Adi gradually grew both increasingly heterodox and very popular among the Kurds, not only in the immediate vicinity of

¹⁹² Report by al-Sam'ani, quoted in Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 27-28.

¹⁹³ Reported by Bar Hebraeus, quoted *ibid.* It is worth noting that as late as the end of the seventeenth century there were a hundred families in Mardin who practiced a sun-worshipping cult. As they were not "people of the Book," Sultan Murad IV was ready to exile or massacre them, but the Jacobite patriarch agreed to admit them into his community. (Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds*, 58.)

¹⁹⁴ Lescot, *Les Yezidis*, 19.

Lalish (the Sheikhan district), but in a much wider radius. According to the *Sherefnameh*, the sixteenth-century “Chronicle of the Kurds,” written by the emir of Bitlis, seven of the most powerful Kurdish tribes were Yezidis during this period, and for a brief time in the fourteenth century Yezidism became the official religion of the principality of Jezire (today's Cizre in south-east Turkey.)¹⁹⁵ In order to understand the pull the al-Adawiyya order exercised on local, tribal Kurds, one must be aware of the immense role Sufism played in the Islamization of the Kurdish tribes after the Muslim conquest of Kurdistan. According to Fuccaro, “religious institutions such as the ‘Adawiyya brotherhood functioned as veritable socio-economic and religious points of reference for the rural population. As the ethnic and religious composition of northern Iraq was extremely diversified, brotherhoods represented an ideal venue for cultural and religious osmosis given the central role they played in the development of important economic processes, primarily in the exchanges between nomadic/semi-nomadic and agricultural communities.”¹⁹⁶ Besides the socio-economic considerations, there was another reason why Sufism was so favorably received by the local population. This was the “tendency of Sufi orders to emphasize the experiential, emotional side of religion rather than the question of dogma.”¹⁹⁷ This special characteristics of Sufism doubtlessly made the absorption of non-Islamic, local thoughts (whether of Iranian origin or other) into an originally Muslim belief system much easier – no doubt, this is what happened in the case of the Yezidis.

It is also possible, that adherents of pre-Islamic religion consciously chose to hide behind the outer form of Sufism, trying to

¹⁹⁵ Guest, *Survival of Yezidism*, 45; Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 10.

¹⁹⁶ Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 13. It must be noted that Sufi brotherhoods continued to play an important social role throughout Kurdish history well into the twentieth century, including even several Kurdish nationalist risings. See M. Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State* (London: Zed Books, 1992) chapter “Shaikhs: Mystics, Saints and Politicians.” It is not by mere chance that the leaders of the two ruling Iraqi Kurdish political parties today, Talabani and Barzani, both come from celebrated lineages of Sufi *sheikhs*.

¹⁹⁷ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 33.

preserve their religious identity, while appearing to have joined Islam in the eyes of the outside world. Naturally, it would not be possible to say, if looked at from this point of view, if Yezidism was originally a Sufi order which incorporated so many pre-Islamic elements with time that it lost its Islamic identity, or if – conversely – it was a native, presumably Western Iranian form of religion, which hid behind the mask of Sufism and in the process absorbed so many Sufi and Islamic elements, that its original character changed and it appeared Islamic to the superficial observer.¹⁹⁸ Perception depends on the view of the observer in this case.

We know very little of what may have actually happened in the first centuries after Sheikh Adi, but it is certain that this turbulent period, which was characterized by political instability and lack of central rule as successive waves of conquerors followed each other, was favorable to the unchecked growth of religious movements with heterodox tendencies.¹⁹⁹

We know that Sheikh Adi was succeeded by his nephew, a pious Muslim, as the head of the order, who in his turn was succeeded by his son, the second Sheikh Adi. It was the latter's son, the fourth leader of the order, Al-Hasan b. 'Adi (Sheikh Hassan), who first came into conflict with the outside world, and was executed by the Zangid Atabeg of Mosul, Badr al-Din Lu'lu, who probably felt threatened by the large number of Sheikh Hassan's followers. Badr al-Din Lu'lu also ordered the execution of two hundred of the order's followers and had Sheikh Adi's bones burned. Our sources also indicate that the influence of the order and its leader was increasing among the local Kurdish population.²⁰⁰ At the middle of the thirteenth century chronicles speak of

¹⁹⁸ When discussing the question of "Sufism incorporated by pre-Islamic elements" versus "native religion hiding behind a façade of Sufism" with Mihaly Dobrovits, an expert on Central Asian religions, I had to compare this question to mixing coffee with milk. So, was it coffee or milk then? To which I promptly received the answer "cappuccino." Yezidis then may be seen as the cappuccino of Sufi Islam meeting previous religious beliefs in the region.

¹⁹⁹ On the impact of the Mongols on the local power structures, see Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds*, 20-27.

²⁰⁰ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 31-32.

the successors of Sheikh Adi only as regards their military and political activities concerning the new Mongol conquerors. Following this date there is a long silence, then al-Maqrizi, writing of the year 1415, reports of the growing hostility between the followers of orthodox Islam and the Adawiyya order or, as it was also known at the time, the al-Sohbetiye, “the companions.” In that year a campaign was organized against the followers of Sheikh Adi, many of them were massacred, Sheikh Adi’s tomb and sanctuary were destroyed, and any bones they could find were burned. However, as al-Maqrizi reports, the “companions” soon rallied, rebuilt the sanctuary, and became sworn enemies of those “who bore the title of *faqih*.”²⁰¹

It is worth noting that Al-Maqrizi, though a strict orthodox much inclined to cry heresy, speaks only of the excessive worship that the followers of the Adawiyya order paid to the figure of Sheikh Adi and his descendants, and even cites this extreme adoration as the explanation for the order belittling the laws of *Sharia* and for sexual immorality. He makes no mention of devil-worship, and sees them as Muslims who veered from the right road, but hardly as a distinct religion.²⁰²

The sixteenth century brought a marked change in both the situation and perception of the Yezidis. The turbulent period brought on by the Mongol invasions, accompanied by political uncertainty, power vacuum and mass migrations of people with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, which saw the emergence of a number of heterodox communities, was drawing to a close. In the late fifteenth to sixteenth centuries two new strong multinational states, the Sunni Ottoman and the Shiia Saffavid Empires, emerged, which – by means of military might and shrewd diplomacy – managed to extend their authority over the Kurdish mountains. Most Yezidi tribes lived in the territories which now belonged to the Ottomans, who were staunch Sunnis. With this the gradual marginalization of Yezidis had started, and many of the

²⁰¹ Ibid., 35. *Faqihs* are experts in Islamic law, literally jurists. Here, however, the term probably refers either to Islamic authorities, or orthodox followers of the *Sharia* or Islamic law.

²⁰² Kreyenbroek, Yezidism, 34-35.

Yezidi tribes converted to Islam, either voluntarily or under pressure, a fact attested by the *Sherefnameh*. Though Sheref Bitlisi, its author, mentions a couple of Yezidi tribes, the most important of whom were the Daseni, in the vicinity of Mosul,²⁰³ he puts the Yezidis' days of glory in the past, when seven of the most powerful Kurdish tribes *used* to be Yezidi, and the emirate of Jezire *was* Yezidi as well.²⁰⁴

What is really interesting is the description of "those who maintain the doctrine of Yezidism" by Bitlisi in his Prologue:²⁰⁵

They are followers of Shaykh 'Adi b. Musāfir ... and ascribe themselves to him. Their wrongful belief is that Shaykh 'Adi...has done for us in his own days the requisite daily prayers and the fasting. Thus on the Day of Judgment, we will be taken into Paradise without being reproached or questioned.' They bear unlimited animosity towards the exoteric ulema [that is to the Shariya or Islamic law.]²⁰⁶

It is clear that in Bitlisi's age Yezidis were still not associated with devil-worship, or he would have certainly mentioned it. The *Sherefnameh* does not even accuse them of being *kafirs*, that is, unbelievers, rather they are simply seen as belonging to one of the extremist

²⁰³ Sharaf al-Dīn Bitlisi, *Sharafnāma: Or the History of the Kurdish Nation*, trans. M. R. Izady (Costa Mesa (Cal.): Mazda Publishers, 2005), 36. Sadly, the *Sherefnameh's* chapter dealing with the Daseni has been lost (or else never written), as it is missing from all manuscripts (ibid., 36, note 2.) There were also Yezidi tribes around Batman and Silvan (south-east Turkey), Yezidis possessed the castle of Hosap near Lake Van, and there were Yezidis west of the Lake Urmia, as well as in Northern Syria, in the mountainous Jebel Seman.

²⁰⁴ Guest, *Survival of Yezidism*, 45; Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 10.

²⁰⁵ The term "Yezidi" to denote the followers of Sheikh Adi seems to have been in use by the sixteenth century, as it can be found in anti-Yezidi texts. See below.

²⁰⁶ Bitlisi, *Sharafnāma*, 36-38. (While this latter remark holds true for today's Yezidis, the assertion that they are not afraid of the Day of Judgment, or see no need for fasts, contradicts my own experiences, though some travelers of the nineteenth and twentieth century claimed that Yezidis believed they could delegate their duties to fast to the so-called men of religion in exchange of some alms.)

groups of Islam. Even more telling is the assertion that, according to the testimony of the *Sherefnameh*, is that during the period of Ottoman conquest Yezidi leaders were appointed in very high positions in the recently conquered territories. Sultan Selim the Grim, famed for his orthodoxy and persecution of the Shiites of Anatolia, made a Yezidi, Sheikh Izz ed-Din the “emir of the Kurds” instead of the orthodox Qasim beg (who was executed as a result of the intrigues of the Yezidi chief) in the newly conquered district of Aleppo.²⁰⁷ Selim’s successor, Suleiman the Magnificent, upon conquering Iraq, made another Yezidi, Hussein beg from the Daseni tribe, the governor of Erbil. A little later Suleiman added the emirate of Soran (of the Sorani Kurds to the South) to the *sanjak* of Erbil, and made Hussein beg his appointed ruler over the whole territory.²⁰⁸ These events certainly throw interesting light on the perception of the Yezidis in the sixteenth century by the Sunni community. While hardly considered orthodox in their ways, they must still have been seen as part of the Muslim (and Sunni) community for Sultan Selim and Suleiman the Magnificent, both known as zealous defenders of orthodox Sunni faith, unlikely to support *kafirs*, especially devil-worshippers, to elevate them into high positions.

Paradoxically (and confusingly), not withstanding the surprisingly magnanimous treatment these Sultans accorded to at least some of their Yezidi subjects, the sixteenth century was also a time of anti-Yezidi *fatwā* and *radd* (treatises of religious character) being compiled by Muslim scholars.²⁰⁹ The recently published sixteenth-century *Fatwā* of Malā Sālih (identified as a Kurdish *mufti* by the editor of the text) is a good example of how Yezidis were viewed at

²⁰⁷ Chèref-ou’ddine Prince de Bidlîs, *Chèref-Nâme: Ou Fastes de la Nation Kourde*, Tome II, Partie I, trans. F. B. Charmoy (St-Petersburg: Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1873), 68-69.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 129.

²⁰⁹ Dehqan, “Fatwā of Malā Sālih,” 141, note 4. Unfortunately the author does not quote other examples. (Guest as yet knows only of the *Sherefnameh* as a sixteenth-century text dealing with the Yezidis.) Neither is it clear on what basis the sixteenth century is identified as the time the manuscript was composed, as according to the author we have no other information on Malā Sālih.

the time by some religious authorities of Kurdistan (and how little actually was known about them).

Most of the points brought up against the Yezidis do not contain anything new. According to Malā Sālīh they deny the Koran and the *Sharia*, instead “they believe in absurd statements such as those of Fakhr al-Dīn, and the like; to which they think they must cling.”²¹⁰ What these statements, obviously coming from their sheikhs or leaders, were, Malā Sālīh does not say (probably does not know in the first place). Furthermore, according to Malā Sālīh, they are hostile toward the *ulema*, and destroy Islamic books if they come into their hands. They prefer Sheikh Adi over the Prophet, have no need for prayer, but believe they will be carried to Paradise by Sheikh Adi. They make pilgrimage to Lalish instead of the Kaba. Some of the charges brought up seem to be no more than common places of anti-heretical literature, such as accusing Yezidis of attributing to God such qualities as eating, drinking, standing, sitting, and the like, which are related to the body, and of course the ubiquitous accusation of sexual licentiousness.

By far the most important part of the tract is the one dealing with the person of Sheikh Adi. Yezidis are said to be divided into three sects based on their belief concerning his person:²¹¹

One consists of the Ghulāt (Extremists), who say that ‘Adī b. Musāfir is God. Secondly, (there are) those who say that he shares divinity with God. (That is) that the heavens are in the hands of God and the earth is in the hands of Sheikh ‘Adī. Thirdly, (there are) those who say that he is neither God nor His partner, but that he is the great minister of God and no af-

²¹⁰ Dehqan, “The Fatwā of Malā Sālīh,” 144.

²¹¹ It is really hard to know what kind of three-fold division the author is thinking of here. The only one that comes to mind is the traditional division of Yezidis into three castes that, however, has nothing to do with how Sheikh Adi is perceived. It is more likely that it was outsiders who had three different concepts about how Sheikh Adi was viewed by his followers.

fair whatever comes from God without his approval and counsel.²¹²

This statement implies that by this time the notion that Sheikh Adi was the incarnation of the divine had developed among the Yezidis. This theory is also supported by another comment to the effect that: “the basis on which their religion rests (and I researched this) is reincarnation, and because of this, they are close to the Christians and share some of their beliefs.”²¹³ The translation here is not clear, but the reference to Christians makes it likely that it refers to the incarnation of the divine, rather than the repeated reincarnation of the soul. Then the text takes a surprising turn asking: “Are they Muslims just because on the outside they outwardly show Islamic behaviour and pronounce the *shahādatayn* (i.e. the Islamic Creed)?” In other words, Yezidis of the time may have still considered themselves Muslims, if they recited the Muslim Creed. The rest of the tract is devoted to debating if Yezidis are apostates (who turned away from Islam) or unbelievers (who are godless) and to expounding that in either case it is legitimate to prosecute them, confiscate their property, and either convert or kill them.

For all its enmity toward Yezidis, one cannot fail to notice that one important element is missing. There is still no mention of worshipping the devil. However, this latter accusation seems to have reared its head by the mid-seventeenth century, when Evliya Chelebi, the famous traveler and writer, describes his encounters with the Yezidis. In his account of the military campaign against the Yezidis of Sinjar he simply calls them “godless.” (It must be added that the cause of the campaign was not religion, simply the Yezidis’ failure to pay the taxes.) However, Evliya also paid a friendly visit to the leader of the Yezidi Daseni tribe in Duhok, in the province of Mosul. It is in his account of the visit that Evliya

²¹² Dehqan, “The Fatwā of Malā Sālih,” 148. The above statement on Yezidis attributing human qualities to God could, of course, refer to His incarnation as Sheikh Adi, however, as the two things are mentioned in completely separate passages, it is more likely that the mufti was just repeating some stock phrases of heresiologists, rather than thinking of the veneration of Sheikh Adi.

²¹³ Dehqan, “The Fatwā of Malā Sālih,” 149.

mentions, far as I know first among those who wrote about the Yezidis, how they would kill anyone cursing the Satan (which Muslims tended and still tend to interpret as an indication that Yezidi worship the aforementioned evil angel).²¹⁴

In 1671 the head of the Carmelite and Franciscan missions in Aleppo, who had earlier had some designs of converting Yezidis to Christianity, reported that “there was little chance of achieving anything with the devil-worshipping Yezidis.”²¹⁵ In 1674 Michele Febvre, an Italian traveler, published his book, *Specchio, o vero descrizione della Turchia*, giving an account of his travels in the Ottoman Empire. In the book he describes the Yezidis of the Aleppo district, who appear to have extremely bad relations with the Muslim majority, and there is no suggestion here of any possible Islamic background. While rather sympathetic toward the Yezidis, the author equates the Peacock Angel,²¹⁶ the highest angel of the Yezidi “pantheon” and the protector of the Yezidis, with the devil.²¹⁷ As the Yezidis themselves are extremely unlikely to have called themselves devil-worshippers or indicate that their Peacock Angel was in fact the devil, it is obvious that the accusation of the Yezidis being “devil-worshippers” must have been commonly accepted among the non-Yezidi inhabitants of the region, from whom the European travelers must have learned it.

Later reports from Western travelers regularly echo this accusation of devil-worship (which most of them took at face value). They also report rather tense relations between the Yezidis and the Muslims, especially Muslim authorities, with the nineteenth century bringing an increased persecution of Yezidis, complete with several military conflicts against them.

²¹⁴ Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds*, 50-51. Evliya also report some extremely curious bans about stepping on an onion or striking a black dog.

²¹⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, 56.

²¹⁶ Far as I could ascertain, this is the first written mention of the Peacock Angel of the Yezidis.

²¹⁷ M. Febvre, *Theatre De la Turquie* (Paris: Couterot, 1682), 367-68..

YEZIDIS AND WESTERN “YEZIDI STUDIES”

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the growing interest of European powers in the Middle East and its people, the attention of the West was increasingly drawn to the Yezidis. Quite a few travelers in the region remarked upon this curious group, despised by their neighbors as adorators of the devil,²¹⁸ even if they were unable to provide much solid information.²¹⁹

The most valuable information on the social organization, customs, and religious rituals of the Yezidis, from this period comes from the famous archeologist A. Layard,²²⁰ who was a great friend of the Yezidis, and from the Protestant missionaries W. Ainsworth²²¹ and G. Badger,²²² whose primary work was among the Nestorians, but who wondered if the Yezidis might be won for their cause. What they can say on actual Yezidi beliefs is sadly less informative. Layard, while genuinely liking Yezidis, accepted their being devil-worshippers without much ado, while the two Protestant preachers were dismayed at what they saw as a lack of interest in religion and an indifference toward the Creator. Layard, as well as O. Parry decades later, described the persecution to which the Yezidis were subjected by the Ottoman authorities while they were staying in the region, including military campaigns that they witnessed.

²¹⁸ There can be little doubt that it was this peculiar epithet awarded to Yezidis by neighboring Muslims which primarily raised (and still raises) Western interest in the Yezidis. It suffices to surf the internet for news articles today on this group. Not a single one refrains from mentioning the accusation of devil worship, and more than one even refers to this in the title of the article.

²¹⁹ For a list of early travelers, see Ainsworth, “The Assyrian Origin of the Izedis or Yezidis,” 12.

²²⁰ A. Layard, *A “popular” Account of Discoveries at Nineveh* (New York: Derby, 1854); idem, *Discoveries Among the Ruins of Niniveh and Babylon* (London: Murray, 1853); idem, *Niniveh and its Remains*.

²²¹ W. Ainsworth, “The Assyrian Origin of the Izedis or Yezidis – the so-called ‘Devil Worshippers.’”

²²² G. Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*.

In the 1880s important steps were taken forward in Yezidi studies thanks to N. Siouffi, the French vice-consul of Mosul. In 1882 he published some fascinating information on Yezidi religion and mythology. Three years later he came forward with an article in which he identified the mysterious Sheikh Adi of Yezidis with the twelfth-century Sufi saint, Sheikh Adi bin Musafir.²²³ A few decades later R. Frank's study consolidated Siouffi's finding,²²⁴ rounding out the information concerning the figure of Sheikh Adi. Definitely identifying Sheikh Adi's person helped to establish the great influence Sufism exerted on this peculiar Kurdish religion known under the name of Yezidism. (Less fortunately, this finding also opened the way to seeing Yezidi religion as merely a peculiar, corrupted form of Islam, which became a dominant view during the better part of the twentieth century).

In 1872 more information came to light about the Yezidis from an unusual source. It was the attempt of the Ottoman government, trying to bring about reforms, to draft Yezidis into the army, which triggered this event. Yezidis, desperately opposed to this plan, asked Western diplomats to intervene on their behalf, and drew up a petition asking for exemption on religious grounds. This document, which came to be known as the 1872 Petition, is of little interest to a student of Yezidi mythology, but contains a valuable exposition on the main observances of the Yezidi faith. As an authentic document beyond doubts originating from the Yezidis, it was reproduced many times in articles in English, German, French and Italian works dealing with the Yezidis.²²⁵

²²³ N. Siouffi, "Notice sur le Chéikh⁷ Adi et la Secte des Yézidis." He also published an article containing very valuable information on religion and mythology collected from Yezidis: "Notice sur des Yézidis." *JA* ser. 7. vol. 20. (1882): 252-68.

²²⁴ R. Frank, *Scheich Adi der grosse Heilige der Jezîdis* (Berlin: Kirchhain, 1911).

²²⁵ It was published by Brown, in Parry, *Six Months*; Lidzbarsky, "Ein Exposé der Yesiden," *ZDMG* 51 (1897): 592-604; Joseph ("Yezidi Texts,"); Driver, "The Religion of the Kurds,;" F. Nau and J. Tfinkdji, "Recueil de textes et de documents sur les Yézidis," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* ser. 2. vol. 20 (1915-7): 142-200, 225-75; Furlani, *Testi Religiosi dei Yezîdi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1930).

The importance of the 1872 Petition and the reports of travelers were soon to be eclipsed by a far more spectacular discovery, that of the Sacred Books of the Yezidis.²²⁶ In 1889 a curious character called Jeremiah Shamir, a former East Syrian monk, and a dealer of manuscripts (among other things) helped procure some manuscripts for Wallis Budge, an official of the British Museum. One of these manuscripts included a number of treatises dealing with the Yezidis, including a copy of the 1872 Petition, and what was purported to be the text of two (or rather *the* two) Yezidi holy books, the *Mes'hefa Resh* and the *Jelwa*. A colophon to the manuscript states that it was copied by Gabriel Jeremiah (son of Jeremiah Shamir) in Mosul.

In 1891 the Bibliothèque Nationale acquired a manuscript copied by one Abdul Aziz, a Jacobite living in the Yezidi village of Beshiqe and a work acquaintance of Jeremiah Shamir. The manuscript contained a portion dealing with the Yezidis, the material being virtually identical with comparable portions of Budge's manuscript.

In 1892 Oswald Parry, a young priest from England, sent to inspect the work of the Syrian Patriarchate Educational Society, one of the several little missionary societies that sprang up in England at the end of the nineteenth century to help the Oriental churches, acquired a number of manuscripts in Mosul. One of them included versions of the *Mes'hefa Resh* (*Black Book*) and the *Jelwa* (*Splendour*), that were very similar to those found in the two earlier manuscripts. Eventually Parry's manuscript was published in E. G. Brown's translation, included in the Appendix to *Six Months in a Syrian Monastery*, becoming the first published version of the Yezidi Sacred Books.

Soon other copies of the two books, displaying some variations in the text, appeared, along with new translations. By the beginning of the twentieth century there were at least half a dozen manuscripts of the so-called Yezidi Sacred Books in existence.²²⁷

²²⁶ For an account of the successive surfacing of manuscripts, see J. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds*, chapter "The Publication of the Sacred Books," 146-63.

²²⁷ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 11.

Then, in 1911, Père Anastase Marie announced that he had discovered the original Kurdish version of the Sacred Books (all previous manuscripts were in Arabic). He claimed that the text was written in an archaic Kurdish dialect.²²⁸

Refutation was quick to come, not just of the authenticity of Anastase's text, but of the Sacred Books in general, from A. Mingana, an orientalist of oriental origin. Mingana demonstrated that the manuscripts could not have represented an ancient scriptural tradition, but were probably forgeries. He used both internal (linguistic and philological) and external (reference to the Yezidi costumes, information from Christians living in close proximity with the Yezidis) arguments to question the authenticity of the Sacred Books.²²⁹ It was probably the interest of Western researchers in the reputed existence of the Sacred Books which motivated the forger (whom he thought to identify with Jeremias Shamir.) Later Edmonds pointed out that the "archaic Kurdish dialect" of Anastase's manuscript was in fact present-day Sorani, spoken by the Kurds of the South, but not by the Yezidis, who are Kurmanji speakers.²³⁰ Needless to say, students of Yezidism, eager for new information, were reluctant to repudiate the Sacred Books as forgeries, and authors continued to refer to the *Mes'hef-a Resh* and the *Jelwa* as if they were documents similar to the Bible or the Quran. These two "sacred texts" quickly became standard sources among scholars and many articles appearing after their publication seem to repeat the information they contained over and over again, while different mythological variants, like those published by Siouffi, received scant attention.

Though today the Sacred Books' authenticity as secret manuscripts is considered implausible, there is little doubt that they represent genuine Yezidi tradition. The sacred hymns (*qewls*) and other orally-transmitted religious texts support the cosmogonical content

²²⁸ M. Anastase, "La découverte récente des deux livres sacrés des Yézidis," *Anthropos* 6 (1911): 1-39.

²²⁹ A. Mingana, "Devil-worshippers; Their Beliefs and their Sacred Books," *JRAS* (1916): 505-26.

²³⁰ C. Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1967): 88.

of the *Black Book*. The structuring of the texts, displaying the characteristics of orally transmitted tradition, indicates that they existed as oral, rather than written texts. It is likely that both texts were committed to heart and recited as oral texts, perhaps even under these same titles.²³¹

Another document was published in 1908, when Ismail beg, the rebel of the princely family, who had his eyes on the position of the Yezidi Prince, drew up a document for the Armenian Yezidis. This document was similar to the 1872 Petition, but differed on some interesting points. From the religio-historical perspective the most remarkable aspect of the document is its attestation to the increasing influence that written monotheistic religions (Christianity in this case) had on the more educated Yezidi layers, who had a growing contact with the non-Yezidi world (Ismail beg used to serve in the British Levies in Iraq). It starts with the confession: "We believe in one God, the Creator of Heaven, Earth and all that is alive."²³²

During the time of the Mandate, attempts by some disgruntled groups (mostly from Sinjar) to remove the Yezidi prince, who was seen to have failed his people and to have displayed questionable moral conduct, prompted the British to suggest that the Yezidis form a spiritual council, like the other religious groups of Iraq, regulating the appointment and dismissal of the Yezidi Prince, as well as the administration of religious revenues. However, religious leaders, most of whom came from the Sheikhan, finally closed ranks and issued a proclamation called the Sheikhan Memorial in 1931. The Memorial not only declared that the Prince was the unquestionable head of the community, who could be removed only by death, but also spelled out the religious laws of the community.²³³

²³¹ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 14-16.

²³² Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 8. I know of no similarly-worded "creed" among Yezidis hymns. Ismail's opening sentence is clearly a contemporary nod toward Christians and their Nicene Creed.

²³³ For the text of the Sheikhan Memorial, see Edmonds, *Pilgrimage to Lalish*, 25-27; for the circumstances, see Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 138-44.

Though still meager, the amount of data gained from these documents and from the writings of travelers enabled scholars to write erudite works on the Yezidis. Most of these focused not so much on the functioning of the Yezidis' religious system, the construct of their mythology, or the interpretation of particular myths, but rather on the origin of Yezidi religion, or the ethnic roots of this origin.

While Muslim scholars were mostly inclined to see Yezidis as apostates²³⁴ and local Christians claimed that the Yezidis were originally Christians who went astray,²³⁵ early researchers tended to ascribe an ancient origin to Yezidis, seeing them as a fascinating relic of a forgotten era. As early as 1827 the Austrian orientalist, Hammer-Purgstall in his *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*²³⁶ regarded them as descendants of the Mardi, an old Persian sect whom Strabo and others mention, and who were said to worship the principle of the evil.²³⁷ A Zoroastrian, or at least Iranian, origin was suggested by Layard and Badger,²³⁸ though mixed with Sabaeen or Christian and Muslim elements respectively. W. Jackson also advocated an Iranian origin, identifying the Yezidis with the opponents of Zoroaster's religious reform, whom the Prophet called devil-worshippers.²³⁹ Others, like Neander, Chwolsohn, Haxthausen, and Mingana, looked toward the dualistic movements of the Middle

²³⁴ See Joseph, *Devil Worship*, chapter "The Dogmatic View of the Mahommedan Scholars," especially 118-21. I must add that most Iraqi Kurdish Muslims, at least today, simply consider Yezidis pagans and devil-worshippers. I cannot recall anyone claiming that they were originally Muslims, who lost the right road.

²³⁵ See, for example, Joseph, *Devil Worship*, 97-104. This view is still current at least among some of the Iraqi Christians, though it is not possible to say if perhaps there are some practical or political considerations behind this (looking for a natural ally in another religious minority). Some Christians used to hold that Sheik Adi was in fact Mar Addai, the Apostle of Mesopotamian Christianity. Meanwhile Armenians in the region of Van considered Yezidis to be the apostates of the Armenian Church.

²³⁶ Pest: Hartleben, 1827-35.

²³⁷ Referred to in G.R. Driver, "The Religion of the Kurds," 200.

²³⁸ At the same time Badger thought that the Yezidis' ethnic origin was Assyrian (as of Kurds in general).

²³⁹ W. Jackson, *Persia, Past and Present* (New York: MacMillan, 1906).

East.²⁴⁰ Nau and Anastase stressed the influence of Christianity, while Grant looked toward Judaism. Ainsworth was convinced of the Assyrian (as in Babylonian) origin of Yezidi religion, and quoted a dozen of rather arbitrary similarities he perceived between Assyrians (Babylonians) and the Yezidis. Marr saw Yezidism as the representative of an indigenous religion predating the literary religions of the region.

Another branch of researchers was predisposed to seeing Yezidism as a heretical form of Islam. This view, starting with Siouffi's identification of the Yezidi Sheikh Adi with the Sufi Sheikh Adi bin Musafir, eventually grew to be the dominant one. The second phase of Yezidi research, from the 1930s onwards, favored an interpretation of Yezidism as an offshoot of Islam. This view of Yezidism as an aberrant form of extremist Islam was shared by Muslim and European writers alike. The pioneer of this approach among Western scholars was the Islamist M. Guidi, who laid the emphasis on Islamic roots, connecting Yezidis with Yazid bin Omayyad, and tracing the beginnings of the Yezidis back to an exaggerated veneration for the Umayyads.²⁴¹ While Guidi agreed that the cult displayed a non-Islamic substratum of beliefs, presumably of Iranian or "Kurdish" origin, and admitted the influence of "Iranian dualism," he paid little attention to these phenomena. This notion of "Umayyad *ghulat*" became entrenched when the Kurdologist R. Lescot endorsed Guidi's views, adding that Yezidism was channeled toward mysticism by Sheik Adi. It must be added that despite being an expert on the Yezidis of the Jebel Sinjar and Siman (Syria), Lescot's interest in their religion was limited. Sensitive as his study is of the social and tribal organization, political and social establishments of the Yezidis, it takes a skeptical and rather superior view of Yezidi religion, which, as he declares, Yezidis themselves are not familiar with.²⁴² T. Bois also cast his

²⁴⁰ See Introduction.

²⁴¹ M. Guidi, "Origine dei Yazidi Storia Religiosa dell'Islam e del Dualismo," *RSO* 12 (1932): 266-300.

²⁴² This, of course, is true to a certain extent, but not true of "all classes" as he claims (Lescot, *Les Yezidis*, 7) as for Yezidis religion stays strictly in the domain of the "religious experts."

vote for an Islamic origin, putting the emphasis on Sufism, evident in the social organization of the Yezidis, their devotional practice and religious language. A special case is constituted by Furlani who - while realizing the importance of the Islamic component - emphasizes the presence of Iranian and Nestorian Christian elements.²⁴³ Even more interestingly, he seems to find the roots of the Yezidi concept of Satan in the teachings of Origen.²⁴⁴

The State of Yezidi Research Today

As has been said above, all these scholars had to make do with precious little information actually originating from the Yezidis themselves, a fact which greatly hindered both their work, and the growth of Yezidi studies as a discipline. This situation slowly started to change (though there is still a long way to go) toward the close of the millennium. In the Soviet Union, the Armenian Yezidi researchers, the brothers Ordekhan and Jelîlê Jelîl included a number of *qewls*, that is, Yezidi hymns, which are of paramount importance for the transmission of Yezidi religion, in their collection *Kurdskij Folklor* (Moskow, 1978.) At the same time in Iraq two young Yezidi university graduates, Pîr Khidr Silêman and Dr Khelil Jindî Rashow, realizing that the transition to a modern lifestyle represented a serious threat to Yezidi oral tradition, managed to convince the spiritual leaders (residing in Northern Iraq) to allow them to publish Yezidi sacred texts. The result was *Êzîdiyati* (Baghdad, 1979) to be followed by *Gundiyatî* by Silêman (Baghdad, 1985.) These collections, and the work of recording and publishing hymns and other texts which followed, are of great value for preserving Yezidi religious tradition from oblivion. These new texts, and the horizons they opened for research, were made available to Western researchers with the first translations published by P. Kreyenbroek.

The approach of recent researchers has become more subtle, and the idea of seeing Yezidism as the final product of a many-

²⁴³ Furlani, *Testi religiosi dei Yezidi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1930) and "Sui Yezidi," RSO 13 (1932): 97-132.

²⁴⁴ Furlani, "Origene e i Yezidi," *Rendiconto dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* series 8, vol. 2 (1952): 7-14.

layered cultural and religious syncretism has advanced. Authors no longer try to trace back Yezidism to a single source, but see it as a special synthesis of diverse elements, which resulted in the existence of a novel, independent system, a religion “of its own.” This approach does not deny the strong influence of Islam, specifically of Sufism, but simultaneously looks for other pre-Islamic elements that contributed to the development of Yezidi mythology and determined the ethos particular to it. The fact that Yezidism is an orally-transmitted religion is also in the forefront of interest, along with analyzing what this entails from the perspective of content and structure.

The past decade or so has also seen a fast-growing interest in Yezidis in academic circles. In 2001 Christine Allison published her *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan*, a detailed analysis of non-religious Yezidi oral tradition, as well as number of articles on this topic.²⁴⁵ Presently she has turned her attention toward the oral history of Caucasian Yezidis. Research on Armenian Yezidis is also being carried out by Garnik Asatryan²⁴⁶ and Victoria Arakelova.²⁴⁷ The music of Armenian Yezidis is being studied by Estelle de la Brèteque²⁴⁸ and Nahro Zagros. Birgül Acikyildiz²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Her articles include “Old and New Oral Traditions in Badinan,” in *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, ed. P. Kreyenbroek and C. Allison (London: Zed Books, 1996), 29-47; “Unbelievable Slowness of Mind: Yezidi studies, from Nineteenth to Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of Kurdish Studies* 6 (2009): 1-24; “Orality, Literacy and Textual Authority amongst the Yezidis,” in *Proceedings of the 2007 workshop on Ritual and Alevism*, University of Heidelberg, ed. P. Langer and J. Karolewski, forthcoming.

²⁴⁶ G. Asatryan, “The Holy Brotherhood: The Yezidi Religious Institution of the ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister’ of the ‘Next World,’” *Iran and the Caucasus* 3 -4 (1999 – 2000): 79-96; G. Asatryan and V. Arakelova, “Malak Tāwūs: The Peacock Angel of the Yezidis,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 7.1-2 (2003): 1-36; and “The Yezidi Pantheon,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 8.2 (2004): 231-79.

²⁴⁷ V. Arakelova, “Three figures from the Yezidi Folk Pantheon,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 6.1-2 (2002): 57 – 73; “Notes on the Yezidi Religious Syncretism,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 8.1 (2004): 19-28.

²⁴⁸ E. Brèteque, “Chants pour la maisonnée au chevet du défunt La communauté et l’exil dans les funérailles des Yézidis d’Arménie,” *Frontières* 20.2 (2008): 60-66, <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018336ar>

has prepared her PhD thesis on Yezidi sacral architecture. The work of collecting and publishing has also started in Turkey among the remaining few hundred Yezidis by Amed Gökçen and Esra Danacıoğlu and others. A growing number of researchers are beginning to pay attention to Yezidi history within the framework of the Ottoman Empire, while others are dealing with the fascinating phenomenon of the Yezidi diaspora in Europe, a minority of minorities among emigrant Kurds from Iraq and Turkey.²⁵⁰ Presently there are several Master and Doctoral theses being prepared on the Yezidis at various institution of higher education in Europe.

²⁴⁹ “Le Yézidisme, son patrimoine architectural et ses stèles funéraires,” *The Journal of Kurdish Studies* 4 (2009): 94-104; “The Sanctuary of Shaykh ‘Adî at Lalish: Centre of Pilgrimage of the Yezidis,” *The BSOAS* 72.2 (2009): 302-333; *The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion*, forthcoming.

²⁵⁰ A. Ackermann, “A Double Minority: Notes on the Emerging Yezidi Diaspora,” in *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, ed. W. Kokot, K. Tölölyan, C. Alfonso (London: Routledge, 2004), 156 – 69; “Yeziden in Deutschland: Von der Minderheit zur Diaspora,” *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 49 (2003): 157 – 77.

4 THE RELIGION OF THE YEZIDIS

This chapter does not aspire to give a comprehensive, all-encompassing description of Yezidi Religion. My aim is simply to give a concise analysis of those aspects of Yezidi religion which are indispensable for understanding the questions analyzed in the subsequent parts of this study. These topics are

- orality
- the relationship between God (the Godhead) and His Angels and between the Angels and the *kebas*, that is, their incarnation on earth as Yezidi leaders.

ORALITY

The most important aspect of Yezidi religion is its oral nature. Despite rumors about the existence of holy books already reported by nineteenth-century travelers,²⁵¹ and despite the late nineteenth-century discovery of the alleged sacred books, the *Jelwa* and the *Meshefa Resh* or *Black Book*, all evidence points toward the fact that

²⁵¹ Such claims probably reflect the influence of the surrounding “Religions of the Book.” (One must remember that in the Ottoman Empire following the rules of *Sharia*, religions considered “of the Book” had a much more prestigious, and certainly a much safer legal position.) Thus for example, already the Arabic poem purporting to be an eulogy of Sheikh Adi, and translated by Badger (*Nestorians and their Rituals*, 113) mentions a Book of Glad Tidings, a work which is still referred to by some Yezidis (under the title *Mijde*) as the “original” Yezidi sacred book, now probably lost. The title of the work strongly indicates that it was conceived after the fashion of the *Evangelium* (Good News) probably under strong Christian influence.

Yezidi religion has been based on oral transmission for centuries. Yezidis, with the sole exception of the Adani sheikh lineage, have been banned by religious precepts from even learning to read and write.²⁵² As the *Jelwa* itself says: “I guide without a book.”²⁵³ This orality has had far-reaching consequences.

²⁵² Some Adani *sheikhs* today claim that they were not only allowed to read and write, but were in fact the keepers of sacred texts. However, so far no genuine Yezidi manuscript has surfaced. Furthermore, as the transmission of the sacred texts was primarily the task of the *qenwals*, or singers (on whom see more below), the existence of any written texts in the hands of the Adani *sheikhs* would have been basically irrelevant as far as the oral nature and oral transmission of Yezidi religion and sacred texts is concerned. Some *pîr* families also possess a special book called *Mishuri*. I was not able to see any such book, but according to one old *pîr* lady, who possessed such a *Mishuri*, allegedly 800-year-old, the book consisted – besides a few prayers – of lists of tribes, and of the *sheikhs* and *pîrs* whom each of these tribes followed. All of it in Arabic! However, it contained no religious instructions, hymns, or cosmological/mythological material. According to her, the book could be opened only once a year, on the feast day of the holy patron of this lineage of *pîrs*, when anybody could read from it. However, as it turned out, neither the *pîr*, nor her late husband, his father, grandfather or other people around them could read, and even she was doubtful about how the book was read in the past. Furthermore, her description of the book indicated a printed book, rather than a manuscript (which would mean nineteenth century as the earliest date in this region.) My impression was confirmed by the well-known Armenian Kur-dologist, Jelîlê Jelîl, who told me in Paris that he had seen the same book, and it was indeed a printed one. Philip Kreyenbroek also saw another *Mishuri* when he was in Iraq in 2006. From what he said I gathered the impression that this book was used for fortune telling (something Muslims also do with the Quran, though officially this is *haram*) rather than as a source of religious knowledge. Allison recounts that Adani *sheikhs* make (or made) a similar use of books they referred to as the *Jelwa*. (Allison, *Yezîdî Oral Tradition*, 48.) Of course, doubting the ancient nature of such *Jelwas* and *Mishuris* as sources of religious knowledge does not make their existence any less interesting as a phenomenon, but it seems unlikely that they could have served as transmitters of religious knowledge. Both the Adani’s claim to have preserved a written tradition, and claims about the *Mishuri* of the *pîrs* seem to be more in keeping with the desire to meet the image of a “Religion of the Book” and the intellectual demands brought about by modernity, school-education, and increased contacts with book-

Lack of Sources

The most important, and from the researcher's point of view unfortunate, consequence of orality is the dire lack of sources. Even today, when the collection (and translation) of texts has become possible and some headway has been made, a researcher, especially a non-Yezidi researcher, can be familiar with only a fraction of the existing material. As for the past, this orality simply means that we have no sources for Yezidi religion, mythology, sacred hymns and so on, before the late nineteenth century at the earliest, when the alleged holy books appeared, and no sources for first-hand accounts before the 1970s. Thus the reconstruction of Yezidi history, that is, the history of Yezidi religion prior to these dates, is a work of mere conjecture, where the researcher cannot simply rely on earlier sources, unlike in many other fields of historical enquiry. Finally this lack of sources has, naturally, resulted in a corresponding lack of secondary literature. Though Yezidis have fascinated the imagination of Western scholars since at least the early nineteenth century, the lack of sources hindered the development of scholarly debate and serious work. What little appeared, mainly after the publication of the Sacred Books, tends to be repetitive, and of limited interest today, as - lacking material to sink its teeth into - the majority of past scholarship in Yezidis was concerned with the putative origins of the Yezidis, most of which cannot be taken seriously today.

ish traditions, especially in the diaspora, rather than with the actual facts, (see chapter 5 on "Oral Tradition and Literacy").

²⁵³ Frayha, "New Yezidi Texts," 24; Joseph's translation ("Yezidi Texts," 220) says: "I lead to the straight path without a revealed book." Today most Yezidis, especially older ones, claim that the "hymns cannot be written." Others claim that Yezidis used to possess such books, but they were destroyed or lost during the many persecutions (*ferman*) inflicted on the Yezidis, or they destroyed them as a safety measure and decided to keep the sacred texts in their heart. A minority, though, believes that the sacred texts are indeed written books which survived the centuries hidden by some high-ranking families of religion.

Variability

The lack of written texts has led to a lack of a “universally” accepted canon, which has led to the lack of a corpus of theological and exegetical works, which in its turn has led to an absence of a unified theological system or a coherent dogma. As Kreyenbroek summarizes: “The Yezidi tradition can only be understood as the product of a long period of oral transmission. The lack of a written tradition has... prevented the development of formal theology, or the emergence of a single, monolithic system of beliefs.”²⁵⁴ In other words, there exist side by side not only many different versions of the same myth, hymn, motif, but even basic religious ideas and concepts come in many, often contradictory forms. People as well as sacred texts may describe certain concepts in different ways. What is more, the virtual absence of an “official body” of teachings can occasionally result in the same person offering statements which sharply contradict each other, or at least lead to inconsistencies.²⁵⁵

The variability of Yezidi faith is certainly perplexing. There is not even universal agreement on the names of the Seven Holy Angels of the Yezidi “Pantheon.”²⁵⁶ Holy beings and Angels, who are considered very important in one region, may not be so in another

²⁵⁴ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 19.

²⁵⁵ Kreyenbroek (ibid.) contributes such inconsistencies to the lack of an “official” form of faith, where “different people have been taught different things... not having been trained in Aristotelian logic, some Yezidis seem capable of holding mutually exclusive beliefs at the same time.” However, in my experience, such blatant contradictions were more likely to occur with educated people who tried to “tailor” traditional ideas to the demands of modernity, but occasionally “forgot themselves,” and information not conforming to their “modernized” version of Yezidism slipped out.

²⁵⁶ For different lists of names, see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 99; Edmonds, *Pilgrimage to Lalish*, 4; Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 24; Lescot, *Les Yezidis*, 46-47.

one.²⁵⁷ There is no universally-accepted form of prayer, even prayer times are debated,²⁵⁸ a fact that missionaries of the past found “shocking to a Christian mind.”²⁵⁹ Recently a book was published in Georgia, containing a collection of different variants of the “Confession of Faith” (*Şe’detiya Dîn*), a sort of prayer recited by Yezidis from the region.²⁶⁰ This little book alone contained thirty-one different variants of the same text, some of them showing quite considerable variations.²⁶¹ Little is known about textual tradition in Turkey, as Turkish Yezidis had mostly fled to Europe as a consequence of the ongoing civil war before it was possible to carry out research among them. However, recently some work has been started among the remaining community. The results were made known at a Yezidi conference in Frankfurt (2007), where one of the researchers, Amed Gökçen, demonstrated that hymns recited in Turkey, though bearing the same title as hymns published on the basis of material collected in Iraq, showed a number of variations when compared to hymns recited over the border.²⁶²

Of course, if one considers the extent of land inhabited by Yezidis with its widely dispersed communities,²⁶³ the lack of a real central power with actual, rather than merely a spiritual authority over these communities, and finally the lack of written texts which would have made the transmission and retention of knowl-

²⁵⁷ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 69; Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 34.

²⁵⁸ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 70-71. Lescot (*Les Yezidis*, 70, note 1) even claimed, probably under the impression of information he received in the Sinjar, that “ces invocations sont soumises à la libre invention de chacun.”

²⁵⁹ Badger, “*The Nestorians and Their Rituals*,” 117-118.

²⁶⁰ *Meselêd bona Pêzanîna H’ebandîna Dînê Êzîdîyê: Şe’detiya Dîn* (Material for Making the Yezidi Faith Known and Appreciated,) ed. K’eremê Anqosî (Tbilisi: Pirtûkxana Êzdiya, 2005).

²⁶¹ Kreyenbroek’s collection also contains a “Declaration of Faith” (*Yezidism*, 226-29). This, of course, is yet another variant.

²⁶² This triggered off violent protest by Iraqi Yezidi researchers, who promptly claimed the Turkish variants were “wrong,” despite the fact that oral tradition knows no “wrong” or “right” variants.

²⁶³ From Aleppo in the West to the North and North-East of Syria, to Northern Iraq, to South-East Anatolia, to the Caucasian region, and possible Western Iran in the past.

edge, and the comparison of variants easier, the very existence of Yezidism as a relatively coherent religious phenomenon is amazing. In fact, one has to marvel that Yezidism has at all survived as a religion which is perceived by its adherents as a unified faith, and that being a follower of Yezidism provides a clear-cut religious (and in this region: ethnic) identity. That retaining even this much unity was at all possible, and despite all these difficulties, or rather “absences” one can still talk about “Yezidi religion” is due in a large extent to the existence of two crucial, distinctive Yezidi institutions: One is a special class of people, that of the *qewwals* or singers, the other is what could be termed a ritual, the so-called Parading of the Peacock (or *tawûs gerran*).

Qewwals

The class of *qewwals*, or singers and keepers of religious knowledge, sacred hymns, songs and stories, constitutes the living memory of Yezidi religion.²⁶⁴ During religious ceremonies, most of which would not be complete without the presence of the *qewwals*, they sing the sacred hymns, and perform on their sacred instruments, the flute and the tambourine (*def û shibab*). *Qewwals* transmit their lore from father to son, and no one born from a non-*qewwal* lineage may become a *qewwal*. Previously *qewwals* could marry only among each other, but this restriction is no longer observed. These singers, to whom European travelers somewhat erroneously alluded to as “teachers of the doctrines of the sect,”²⁶⁵ traditionally resided in the twin villages of Beshiqe-Behzani near Mosul, from whence they traveled to other villages. Interestingly, these twin-villages, the traditional residence of the *qewwals*, who recite the sacred hymns

²⁶⁴ The word *qewwal*, literally “the one who chants or recites” – from Arabic *qawl*, “speech,” “word” – originally referred to Sufi singers who sang ecstatic poems during *semas*, that is, spiritual sessions.

²⁶⁵ A. Layard, *A “Popular” Account of Discoveries at Nineveh* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), 193.

composed in Kurdish, are the sole Yezidi settlements where the people speak Arabic as a mother tongue.²⁶⁶

Of course, *qenwals* are not the only ones who know sacred texts. Religious leaders (whose position is also hereditary within the lineage), like the *Baba Sheikh*, *Peshiman*, *Baba Chanush* and so on, are also versed in religious lore, while many *sheikhs* and *pîrs* know at least a few hymns, which they need at occasions (birth, circumcision, marriage, death) when they perform rituals on the behalf of their followers, or *murids*. Today some *murids*, like Arab Khidir, one of my most important sources, can also become experts of religion, but this is probably a modern development. Still, it was the *qenwals* whose very *raison d'être* as a class was memorizing, performing and transmitting texts.

Qenwals officiate at the religious ceremonies during the different festivals held at Lalish, at burials, and at the ceremonial mourning in graveyards on the morning of New Year. However, these activities were (and are) usually confined to their immediate district (Sheikhan and possibly the Sinjar). It was only during the Parading of the Peacock that these singers really ventured far from home, from Aleppo to the Muscovy *sanjak* in the Transcaucasian region.

²⁶⁶ The language situation in Beshiqe-Behzani is a rather obscure one. Possibly the percentage of the population speaking Kurdish or Arabic as a mother tongue has shifted with time. Lady Drower visited the villages during the Second World War, and reported that she had difficulty in speaking with some of the inhabitants, as they spoke only Kurdish. (Drower, *Peacock Angel*, passim.) Kreyenbroek writes that the *qenwals* are drawn from two families of the villages, the Kurdish-speaking Dimli, and the Arabic-speaking Tazhi family. (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 132). However, when I visited the villages, people claimed that all inhabitants (born there) traditionally spoke Arabic as their mother language (of course *qenwals*, and most of the older men spoke Kurdish as well. Women and younger people tended to speak little Kurdish, if at all). Furthermore, I was told by someone from Behzani, that the word *tazhi* – meaning greyhound, the only kind of dog that enjoys respect among the Kurds – is a term the people of the villages generally use to refer to themselves, not only to one *qenwal* family, because they came from the Be'eka valley following Sheikh Adi like loyal dogs.

Parading of the Peacock

The Parading of the Peacock refers to the ritual when the *sanjak*,²⁶⁷ that is, a bronze image of a peacock, revered as the symbol of the Peacock Angel, the protecting angel of the Yezidis, is taken around the Yezidi villages. The Peacock *sanjak* is the most sacred object of Yezidis, usually well-hidden from the prying eyes of strangers. Originally, there were seven bronze peacocks, corresponding to the seven Yezidi districts, also known as *sanjaks* (a word probably adopted from Ottoman administrative terminology).²⁶⁸ There seems to be some disagreement as to the original identity of these seven geographical *sanjaks*, but they covered all the territories where Yezidis lived, from Aleppo to Iran and from Iraq to the Muscovy *sanjak* (that is, the Caucasus Mountains).²⁶⁹ The *sanjaks* were traditionally kept in Lalish, the sacred valley of the Yezidis near Mosul, or at other times in the house of the Yezidi Prince at Baadra, also near Mosul, in whose possessions they officially were.

At regular intervals the *sanjaks* were taken on tour to visit the Yezidi villages, each one in its own district, accompanied by a group of *qenwals*. This was called the Parading of the Peacock or *tawûs gerran*. The *sanjaks* belonging to districts near the center were paraded two or three times a year. Those for districts further away

²⁶⁷ In literature on Yezidis this object is referred to as *sanjak*, while Yezidis today usually talk about it as *Tawûs*, that is, "Peacock."

²⁶⁸ The *sanjaks* had a troubled history. They were the favourite spoils of the hostile Ottoman armies, and even of warring Yezidi fractions. Five of the *sanjaks* kept in Lalish were for example taken as war spoils to Baghdad in 1892, though they are said to have been returned later (Guest, *Survival among the Kurds*, 166, 171). Today some of the original *sanjaks* seem to have been lost for good, though it is impossible to know how many are actually left. Fuccaro (*The Other Kurds*, 139) writes that in the 1920s only three of them toured the Yezidi districts. My Yezidi friends in Iraq claimed that today only two are left, those of the Sheikhan and Sinjar district in Iraq, while Jasim Murad ("Sacred Poems," 129) claims that the Aleppo and Diyarbakir *sanjaks* are still left and occasionally visit their district.

²⁶⁹ Today the Peacock visits only the two districts in Iraq, and perhaps Syria.

went only once, or, when there were political troubles even less often.

During the touring of the *sanjak*, the envoys stop at every village²⁷⁰ on their way and perform the rituals of the *tawûs gerran*.²⁷¹ After the small bronze image of the Peacock is ceremoniously set up in a guest room of the village and the appropriate prayer recited, believers arrive in long queues to pay their respect, that is, to kiss the standard and the hand of the leading *qemwal*, and leave some money as well. Later on the *qemwals* perform some religious hymns accompanied by the flute and the tambour. The highlight of the event is the sermon, or *mishabel*²⁷² preached by the leading *qemwal*. The topic is chosen after consulting the wishes of the audience, and the recitation of the sacred hymns is mixed with the retelling of myths and learned expositions on the subject. A ceremonial meal consumed together with the guests is usually part of the proceedings as well. (In the Sheikhan following the meal there is another session of hymn singing, when the elderly men present can request which hymns they would like to hear. These usually centre around Sheikh Adi, the Peacock Angel, and Yezidi ancestors, and a special hymn is recited in honour of the ancestor *sheikh* to whose lineage the host belongs.)²⁷³ Once the allotted time is over and the trickle of visitors dries up, the Peacock is carefully wrapped in its protective sacred clothes and taken to a new house or a new village, where the proceedings are repeated.

The Parading of the Peacock provided (and in some isolated places still provides) one of the rare opportunities when common

²⁷⁰ In collective villages the Peacock *sanjak* spends one day in each of the units corresponding to the former villages.

²⁷¹ The following short description is based on my own observances in the Sinjar, in 2004. For a longer and more detailed description, see E. Spät, "The Role of the Peacock 'Sanjak' in Yezidi Religious Memory: Maintaining Yezidi Oral Tradition," in *Materializing Memory: Archaeological Material Culture and the Semantics of the Past*, BAR International Series 1977, ed. I. Barbiera, A. Choyke, J. Rasson (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), 105-16.

²⁷² A combination of myth narrated in prose, recital of hymns, and possibly moral exhortations.

²⁷³ Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 134-135.

Yezidis could get some form of religious instruction. Thus, the rituals surrounding the holy object of the *sanjak*, when the village community assembled to see the Peacock, and the *qemwals* sang hymns and recited sermons explaining Yezidi myths and concepts, were of great importance in preserving Yezidi religion as they secured the continuance of the oral tradition by providing an opportunity for the recitation of oral texts.

The relevance of the ritual of the Parading of the Peacock in keeping alive and “regulating” religious knowledge in the Yezidi community is highlighted by the fieldwork carried out by Jasim Murad among the German diaspora, which demonstrates how important a source of religious knowledge the visit of the *qemwals* was for the outlying communities. Speaking of young Yezidis, who grew up in Germany, he notes that they know practically nothing of their religion. He is of the opinion that this can be attributed to the fact that these youngsters, living in an alien cultural environment, were excluded from the ritual life their parents could still experience in their native villages. It is telling that of all the ceremonial occasions it is the Parading of the Peacock he singles out for mention: “For example, the Standard of the Peacock Angel does not circulate among them, a ritual containing a major source for hearing the sacred poems as well as being instructed in the basic doctrines of the religion.”²⁷⁴ This is corroborated by the interviews made with older Yezidis now living in Germany. Most of them mentioned the Parading of the Peacock as among the most important aspects of their earlier life “living as Yezidis” in their homeland, and the main source of their (limited) knowledge of Yezidi faith.²⁷⁵ It apparently also served to reinforce their collective identity as Yezidis: “It was during the ritual of the Peacock Angel that my feelings as a Yazidi would become strengthened.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 381.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 388-91.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 390. It is also worth noting that as the *sanjak* was in the possession of the Yezidi Prince, who represents the Peacock Angel on earth, the Parading of the Peacock “emphasized the prince’s links with the supernatural power of... [the Peacock Angel] thus, strengthening his authority vis-à-vis the believers.” Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 21. Furthermore,

It is clear that the Parading of the Peacock was an important tool for religious standardization and maintaining the unity of Yezidi religion, as far as this is possible in an oral tradition, through ensuring a continuous contact between the religious centre and periphery, limiting independent religious development in the latter.²⁷⁷

Genres of Yezidi Oral Tradition:

Yezidis have their own terms for different categories of religious texts. The most important literary genres of Yezidi oral tradition are the *qewl*, *beyt* and *chirok*.²⁷⁸ Their language is invariably Kurdish, though the two former genres contain many Arabic expressions.

Qewls: The word *qewl* is translated into English as “hymn” or “sacred poem.” *Qewls* are, ideally, transmitted verbatim, in a fixed form by the *qewmvals* and other religious experts.

The language of the *qewls* is excruciatingly difficult to understand. They use plenty of Arabic expressions, while in some places the texts may seem corrupt, or perhaps they employ old Kurdish

these tours have always provided the prince with an opportunity to intervene in the life of Yezidi communities far from the centre, through the intermediary of the *qewmvals* chosen by the prince, and occasionally other dignitaries accompanying the Peacock. The strengthening of the Prince’s authority over outlying communities also contributed if not to the continuation of religious oral tradition, then at least to a sense of unity as a community under a single leader, the Yezidi Prince.

²⁷⁷ Religious festivals which included ceremonial gatherings in the holy valley of Lalish could have acted in the same way. However, it is highly questionable how many Yezidis, and from how far, could have attended these in the past, before the appearance of modern vehicles and a road system. It is also worth noting that the Yezidi tribes of Armenia, shut off from the centre after the creation of the Soviet Union, went through an independent development that is most intriguing for researchers.

²⁷⁸ For a list of the different Yezidi genres and their description, see Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 49-53.

forms no longer easily interpreted. Also, many "*Qewls* are based upon a *chirok*, ("tale") consisting of poetic allusions which are largely incomprehensible to those who are not familiar with the *chirok*,"²⁷⁹ that is, to the average Yezidi layman, who receives no formal religious education whatsoever. As a result, most Yezidi laymen have little idea about the exact content of the hymns, in fact, evidence suggest that they feel little incentive even to try and understand the texts of the *qewls* heard during ritual performances.²⁸⁰

The time of the composition of the *qewls* is hard to define. Their language indicates that they must have been composed after the coming of Islam. The literary images and expressions employed by these hymns, the reference to Sufi figures and often their very themes strongly suggest the influence of Sufi poetry and altogether of Sufism. As for the *ante quam* of their composition, "in the case of several *Qewls* the relatively consistent use of terms and symbols with obviously pre-modern Islamic associations, such as 'the Sunna' for the community itself and the pejorative 'Radifites' for Shi'ies, strongly suggest that an important part of the *Qewl* tradition goes back to a time when questions of identity could still be meaningfully expressed in terms of Islamic discourse."²⁸¹

Yezidi tradition itself is ambiguous about the origin of the hymns. Some people claim that they were composed by "wise and saintly men from the 'time of Sheikh Adi'" or perhaps Sheikh Adi himself.²⁸² More traditional Yezidis, however, insist that these

²⁷⁹ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 50. In fact, numerous comments Kreyenbroek has attached to his translation make it clear that even Yezidis versed in religious lore may occasionally be at a loss as to the exact meaning of an expression. Presumably, they refer to stories no longer remembered.

²⁸⁰ See Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 45. His statement is also supported by my own experience in the course of fieldwork.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁸² Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 49. Currently this seems to be the opinion favoured by Yezidi intellectuals of Iraqi origin, who are intent on shaping Yezidism into a modern, "scientific" religion. See chapter 5 on "Oral Tradition and Literacy."

hymns were revealed from the sky, as a sort of divine revelation,²⁸³ or were perhaps brought to mankind by the Angels.²⁸⁴ This view is also supported by the very content of the hymns themselves:

Thus speaks my King,²⁸⁵ the Lord of Foundations:

Indeed, Fekhr,²⁸⁶ I shall reveal to the earth

The *Qewls* and the *Khirqes*²⁸⁷

So that the House of Tradition²⁸⁸ may

Adhere to it, rejoice and believe in it...

He fashioned the *Qewls* and *khirqes*

And revealed them on the earth

He entrusted them to Melik Fekhrudin²⁸⁹

Melik Fekhrudin entrusted them to the holy men of Sheikh Adi

The holy men of Sheikh Adi adhered to them and had faith in them.²⁹⁰

²⁸³ According to Arab Khidir "just as the Christians say New Testament, and Jews say Old Testament (*Ehdi*, Promise, Alliance,) our hymns are like an Alliance of God, God sent us down the hymns (*qewl*)... instead of Books." According to Pîr Hâjî from Mahad, the *qewls* are *semavi*, that is, from heaven (meaning that they are revealed texts.)

²⁸⁴ Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 1-2; Bedelê Feqîr Hecî, *Bawerî*, 199. I was told the same by many Yezidis I interviewed on the matter. As the Seven Angels became incarnate as Sheikh Adi and his companions, that is, as "holy men" (see below), this view is in fact easy to reconcile with the statement that the hymns were composed by Sheikh Adi and saintly men from his time. However, the traditional approach sees these religious leaders as incarnate angels, and would never say that the hymns were written by "human beings" and were not "revealed" texts, as the adherents of the first view do.

²⁸⁵ I.e., God.

²⁸⁶ Melek (Angel) Fekhrudin, one of the Seven Angels of God. See more below.

²⁸⁷ The sacred black shirts worn by the *feqirs*.

²⁸⁸ *Sunnethxane* (pron. "sunnethkhane") – a Muslim expression Yezidis apply to themselves.

²⁸⁹ Angel Fekhrudin.

²⁹⁰ *Hymn of the Black Furqan*, 37, 41 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 100-101.) For the hymns translated by Kreyenbroek and quoted in this study, see Appendix II.

Beyt: As far as literary compositions are concerned, *beyts*, translated into English as “songs,” cannot be distinguished from *qewls* on the mere basis of formal characteristics. Their categorization as *beyts* is a question of tradition. Theoretically *beyts* are considered generally “less holy” and less important. It must be added however that some compositions known as *beyts*²⁹¹ are fairly important and are performed on a regular basis by men of religion, unlike many *qewls*.

Chirok (*çirok*): *Chirok* (also called *destan*.) can literally be translated as tales, folktales. Yezidis use the word *chirok* to refer to prose narratives of Yezidi myths, which are transmitted in the form of storylines. The exact wording of a *chirok* changes from performance to performances and may depend on a number of criteria. In fact, the same narrator may tell the same *chirok* in different ways at different times.

There is a widespread belief among many (though not all) Yezidis today that *qewls* are older than the *chiroks*. Some of them also claim that *qewls* are more sacred and “authentically Yezidi,” or even that *chiroks* are not sacred at all, they are merely historical accounts of events. They are seen as old and also as true, but they have no “revealed” nature nor are they peculiar to Yezidis.²⁹²

Both claims are debatable. As regards the age and content of the *chiroks*, one cannot but agree with Kreyenbroek’s observation: “Perhaps the most essential constituent element of the Yezidi religious tradition is the *chirok*.”²⁹³ *Chiroks* contain such myths as the creation of the world, of mankind and of the Yezidis. There are also *chiroks* concerning incarnate angelic beings and their role in Yezidi history. In short they are the very skeleton of Yezidi relig-

²⁹¹ For example, the *Beyta Cindî* (Song of the Commoner.), *Beyta Êvarî* (Song of the Evening.) *Beyta Sibê* (Song of the Morning.)

²⁹² Yezidis realize that figures like Ibrahim Khalil, Moses, Noah and so on also appear in the tradition of other religions, but they are not familiar enough with these religions to tell that some of the Yezidi myths concerning these figures cannot be found in them, at least not in their written, canonicalized books.

²⁹³ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 49.

ion. As regards the origin of the *chiroks*, it is possible that some *chiroks* may have been recently constructed to explain no longer understood references in *qewls*. Other *chiroks*, however, clearly contain myths from a pre-Islamic religious milieu (whether Western-Iranian or late antique.) On the other hand the strongly Sufi language and imagery employed by the *qewls*, the references to the community of the Sunna, and the very Arabic words they use indicate that the hymns were composed at a more recent date, that is, after exposure to Islam and Sufism.

The relationship between *qewls* and *chiroks* is intriguing. The two are closely intertwined. Many, though not all, *qewls* are based on *chiroks* and cannot be understood without them. At the same time, *qewls*, with their fixed and memorized texts, help remember storylines in a more or less stable form. "Thus the *Qewl* and *chirok* traditions are complementary, each ensuring the preservation and appreciation of the other."²⁹⁴

As I have said, there is also a theory that only the *qewls* and their content constitute a valid sacred tradition. However, when one gets down to the details, there is no agreement on what is contained by *qewls*, which is hardly surprising given that no person can be familiar with all the different hymns, and even Yezidis suspect that some hymns may have become lost with time. There is also a disagreement on what constitutes a *qewl*. So, for example, the story of Ibrahim Khalil was considered a *chirok* by some, a *mishabet* by others, while Feqir Haji called it a *Qewl of Prophet Ibrahim*, even though his recital consisted mostly of prose and only of a limited amount of hymns quoted.

It seems likely that the verbatim transmission and theoretically fixed nature of the *qewls* greatly contributed to the view held by some that only the hymns are of a sacred nature and they are older or more "authentic" than *chiroks*. This probably reflects the influence of the "Religions of the Book," where only fixed texts, learned and transmitted verbatim are considered sacred and revealed. Today, when considerable and conscious efforts are being made to turn Yezidi religion into a religion modeled on Christianity and

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 50.

Islam, complete with a fixed canon of sacred texts, it is probable that this view will become increasingly universal.

GOD, THE ANGELS AND THE *KHAS* IN TRADITIONAL YEZIDI BELIEF

A very important caveat must be kept in mind, when writing about Yezidi angels, and their relationship with God and the *kebas*, or the holy beings of Yezidi sacred history. As Yezidis do not have (as yet) a coherent theology and theological language,²⁹⁵ comparable to that of Judaism, Christianity or Islam, for example, it is inevitable that one occasionally uses terminology taken from the language of other theological or philosophical systems. Such expressions, for example, as “emanation” or “manifestation” are somewhat misleading, as no Yezidi would (today) use such terms. However, they are also inevitable for describing a Yezidi religious phenomenon in terms understandable to non-Yezidis. Furthermore, apart from the “alien” terminology, describing religious ideas in a sterile, academic construct would also be alien to the traditional Yezidi way of speaking about religion, which uses myths and hymns to express ideas, with no thought of giving Western-style definitions and concise explanations. Finally, as is the wont of oral religion, different people may have different ideas about the same thing, though it is possible to draw up “schools of thought” with loose boundaries.

Still, I will here try to give a short summary of the traditional religious view on the nature of the angels, holy beings and their relationship to God, as without understanding the peculiar Yezidi position on these questions, the following chapters would be hard to understand.

²⁹⁵ As Lady Drower put it so charmingly “one of the charms of the Yazidis is that they are never positive about theology.” Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 6.

The Godhead and its Seven Angel or Seven Mysteries.

One of the most original and interesting aspect of Yezidi religion is the nature of angels, and their connection, or identity with the Godhead. The Yezidi creation myth, expressed by the *Black Book* and by many hymns, speaks about the Seven Angels (*Heptad*)²⁹⁶ who came into being during (or just before) the process of the creation of the world. Even though sacred texts, as well as Yezidis talking about the creation of the angels, use the word “to create,”²⁹⁷ the *Heptad* of Yezidi mythology are not created beings, as the angels of Judaism, Christianity or Islam, but rather emanations or hypostases of the Godhead. This is made clear by the *Black Book*, which declares, in Joseph’s translation: “In the beginning he created six gods from himself and from his light, and their creation was as one lights a light from another light.”²⁹⁸ Another manuscript, in Ebied and Young’s translation says: “God... created six gods from his essence and from his light. Their creation took place as a man kindles a candle from another candle.”²⁹⁹ In other words, the Angels come into being from the very light or essence of God, implying consubstantiality between the Godhead and his Angels. They are different entities, but identical in their essence. It is also worth noting that the *Black Book* mentions the creation of six, not of seven angels, just as the *Hymn of the Creation of the World*,³⁰⁰ even though all sources agree that the number of the Angels was seven (Seven Angels, *Heptad*), and many Yezidis can recite their seven

²⁹⁶ This Zoroastrian term, originally used to designate the *Amesa Spentas*, or Bounteous Immortals, who are the characteristic attributes and inseparable aspect of God (Ahura Mazda), is applied by Kreyenbroek to the Seven Angels, but far as I know is not used by the Yezidis. (On the other hand the Ahl-i Haqq do use the word *Haftan* to designate the Seven Divine Angels of their system, who resemble the Yezidi Seven Angels.)

²⁹⁷ *Afirandin, xolokandin, çêkirin*.

²⁹⁸ I. Joseph, “Yezidi Texts,” 224.

²⁹⁹ Ebied –Young, “An Account of the History and Rituals of the Yazidis of Mosul,” 521.

³⁰⁰ “Our Lord is the Eternal Lord, He created six Angels, He separated Hell and Paradise.” *Hymn of the Creation of the World* 19, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 185.

names (even if not necessarily always the same seven.) This may imply that – at least at one point, at some stage of the tradition – God was thought of as one of the Seven.³⁰¹

Contemporary discourse on the Angels also supports the view that the Angels are the emanations of God. As Sheikh Deshti of Khanke said: “The Lord of the World created all the Seven Angels from his own light (*nûr*), that is, from his own power (*quwet*), from his own miraculous might (*keramet*).”³⁰² Similarly Qewwal Qewwal declared that Tawusi Melek, that is, the Peacock Angel, the leader of the Seven Angels and the protector of the Yezidis, “came into existence from the light (of God.)”³⁰³ Another telling, though rather different, description was provided by Feqir Ali, one of the old Yezidis living in Germany interviewed by Jasim Murad: “The universe was a total void in which the light of God was shining. God turned from His right side and prayed to himself and from his shoulder Tawusi Melek, i.e. Angel Gabrail, was born.”³⁰⁴ Though this account of the Peacock Angel’s birth is far less abstract than the above statements on the Angels being created from God’s light and essence, the fact that he is said to have been born from God’s shoulder also implies a close, essential connection between them, translated into the language of folktales.

³⁰¹ Similarly, in Zoroastrian tradition, Ahura Mazda, God, was one of the Heptad, the seven Amesha Spentas, or Bounteous Immortals, the other six abstractions of the Heptad being thought into existence by Ahura Mazda, the supreme being himself. See R. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 34-35, 45-50.

³⁰² *Rabul alemi her heft milyaket ji nûra xwe çêkirine, yanî ji quweta xwe, ji kerema xwe çêkirine.*

³⁰³ *Tawûsî Melek ji nûr çêbû.* The Peacock Angel is traditionally identified with the Satan by Muslims, and Yezidis are accused of worshipping the devil. Many early studies on the Yezidis thought that they worshipped the Peacock Angel in order to propitiate the force of evil. However, there is nothing in Yezidi religion which would support the idea that the Peacock Angel is a malevolent spirit out to lead humans into temptation and destruction, like the Satan or Devil of Judeo-Christianity and Islam.

³⁰⁴ Jasim Murad, “Sacred Poems,” 288. The Peacock Angels is often, though not always, identified with the Angel Jibrail, that is, Gabriel.

Yezidi hymns elaborate the identity between the Supreme Divine Being and His Angels in many different ways. *The Hymn of Sheykh Obek*³⁰⁵ talks of how one angel became two, two angels became three and so on, until the number seven is reached, and explains how these angels are identical, that is, the expressions (or manifestations) of the same essence:

My King³⁰⁶ is the almighty,
There were four angels, they became five.
All five shared another's character and qualities

My heart is happy because of this:
There were five angels, they became six.
All six became the angels of the Throne.

My King made (his) speech pleasant
They were seated together in Love.
There were six angels, they became seven.

All seven, when they were created,
Were exactly alike.
In Love, gazing at one another, they passed the time.³⁰⁷

Individual Angels (of the *Heptad*) are routinely described with words and expressions befitting God, rather than one of his creations, in the hymns dedicated to the Angels.³⁰⁸ For example, the Hymn addressed to Tawusi Melek, describes the Peacock Angel in terms of God, attributing to him all the "characteristics" and deeds of God. It is not possible to quote the whole hymn here, but three stanzas would perhaps be enough to convey the general tone of the hymn:

Oh my Lord, by your eminence, by your rank and by your sovereignty,
Oh my Lord, you are generous, you are merciful,

³⁰⁵ *The Hymn of Sheykh Obek*, r 16-22 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 211-13).

³⁰⁶ The term "King" (*Sultan*) is used to denote God.

³⁰⁷ *The Hymn of Sheykh Obek* 19-22, (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 211-13).

³⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, 84, and chapter "A Survey of Prominent Yezidi Holy Beings," 91-124.

Oh my Lord, you are forever God,
 You are forever worthy of praise and homage.

Oh my Lord, you are the angel who is the king of the world,
 Oh my Lord, you are the angel who is generous king,
 You are the angel of the awesome Throne,
 Oh my Lord, from pre-eternity you have always been the an-
 cient one.³⁰⁹

Oh my Lord, you are higher than the sky,
 You have no attributes, you are everywhere,
 You do not give birth, you are alive without having been
 born.³¹⁰

This hymn does not only describe Tawusi Melek in a way which is in keeping with Muslim (as well as Jewish and Christian) traditions of praising God as the Lord of all the creation, but point blank declares him to be “forever God.” Furthermore, in accordance with the theological traditions of describing God as the all encompassing one, the Peacock Angel appears as a being who has no attributes, as it is only what was created that can be assigned attributes (that is, can be described by them). What is even more remarkable, the hymn – by declaring that the Peacock Angel gives no birth and was not born – even employs a crucial term used to portray God from one of the best known Suras: “He begetteth not, nor is He begotten”³¹¹ – meant to refute Christian ideas on God the Father begetting Jesus the Son.

Similarly, the hymn addressed to Sheikh Shems, another of the Seven, represents him as the Creator:

Oh Sheykh Shems, you are merciful,
 You are my creator from ancient times.

³⁰⁹ *The Hymn of Melek Tawus* 1-2, *ibid.*, 245.

³¹⁰ *The Hymn of Melek Tawus* 8, *ibid.* (The original text of the last line is corrupt, the translation is made on the basis of an emendated text based on discussing the text with informants (Kreyenbroek, Note 7 for Kurdish text, 248; Note 7 for English text 249) but given the context there is no reason to seriously doubt the validity of this emendation.)

³¹¹ Sura 112.003.

Oh Sheykh Shems, you are compassionate,
 You are my dear creator,
 For all ills you are my remedy,
 To all creatures you are merciful.

Oh Sheykh Shems, you are a refuge,
 You are my creator for ever and ever,
 You give sustenance and you take it away.³¹²

There are many ways to describe the essential oneness of the Godhead and His Angels. Texts and people alike mention “light” (*nûr*) very often, people also refer to the power (*quwet*) or miraculous might (*keramet*) of God,³¹³ but by far the most important word is *sur*. *Sur* comes from a Sufi word *sirr*, meaning (divine) “mystery,” “secret” hidden from those unworthy of knowing it. As mystery, it refers to the substance of God’s grace, and approaching this *sirr* is a kind of gnosis for the Sufi. In its sense as “secret,” *sirr* may allude to divine love, the intimate relation between the mystic and God. Finally it can also mean the innermost part of heart, meaning not the physical heart, but the locus of spiritual revelation, a human faculty for fixing on the spiritual realm.³¹⁴

In Yezidi lore *sur*’s meaning, however, is slightly different. When asked, most Yezidis would define (both in Kurdish and English) *sur* as *nûr*, that is, light, adding that it is the light of God.³¹⁵ Some added “power of God” (*quwet*, *qudret*), and occasionally “miraculous power” (*keramet*) to the “light,” and even “spirit” in English.

³¹² *The Hymn of Sheykh Shems of Tabriz* 3-5 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 259), see the whole of the hymn as well.

³¹³ These latter two expressions are used in contemporary discourse rather than in the hymns.

³¹⁴ See *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. J. L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 297; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, “Sirr” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 12, Supplement (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 752-53.

³¹⁵ The only person who translated *sur* in its traditional sense, mystery, was Mamoste Sabah, the English teacher from Baadra. Another young, English-speaking Yezidi made a distinction between the two words. He considered *sirr*, to be an Arabic word, meaning “secret,” while *sur* he defined as a Yezidi word meaning “light.”

A careful analysis of Yezidi texts and Yezidi discourse on the question of the *sur* leads to the conclusion that *sur* can best be translated as “divine essence” or as “the essence of the divine.” In Kreyenbroek’s definition it “refers to the mysterious nature of the members of a Heptad of divine beings,”³¹⁶ while in the Index of his book it is defined as “the ‘essence’ of a holy being.”³¹⁷ In my opinion, *sur* ultimately refers to the essence of the Divine itself, that is, God (or the Godhead), an essence in which his emanations, the divine or holy beings (angels) share. It is the divine *sur* (from here on translated as light or divine essence) that the angels were created from, or rather, emanated forth from.

As Feqir Haji said about the creation of the Seven Angels “the Great Lord created the seven Angels from his own *Light*, from his own *Sur*.”³¹⁸ The Seven Angels are in fact often simply referred to as “*Heft Sur*” (“Seven *Sur*”)³¹⁹ in the sacred hymns. Again, these hymns make the consubstantiality between God and his emanations, the angels, unambiguous, by referring to both as *sur*. For example, *The Hymn of Sheikh Obekir* 15 says of God: “My King is a Mystery (*Sur*) in Heaven,”³²⁰ while his angels in turn are also often referred to in the hymns as *sur*:

My King, ever since he was the Prince
Was the leader of a vast army.
With the Seven Mysteries (*sur*) of Sultan Êzîd,³²¹ he was the
knowing one.³²²

³¹⁶ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 52.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 342. On the “holy beings” or *kbas*, see below.

³¹⁸ *Rabul Alemî heft miyaketa çekir(in), ji sura xwe xolokandin, ji nûra xwe xolokandin.*

³¹⁹ Translated by Kreyenbroek as *Seven Mysteries*, though this is probably due to the lack of a more fitting expression in the English language.

³²⁰ *padşê min surr li sema* (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 211).

³²¹ Note how Sultan Êzîd here too appears as God, the head, or possessor of the Seven *Sur*, rather than one of the Seven Angels.

³²² *Hymn of Sheikh Obekir* 11 and 14, (Kreybroek, *Yezidism*, 211.)

The *Khas* – the Holy Beings, or Incarnate Angels

The *sur*, the divine essence or light manifesting itself in the emanation of the Godhead, plays a crucial role throughout Yezidi history in the interplay between the human and the divine spheres. It is the key to understanding the nature of the protagonists of Yezidi sacred history. Such personages, who may be known to non-Yezidis from Judaism³²³ and Islamic history,³²⁴ or may be specifically Yezidi figures (often wearing the same name as the Seven Angels), are called *khas*,³²⁵ literally “good, holy beings.”³²⁶ The *khas* are in effect the incarnation of angels (that is of divine emanations) whether they go by the same name like their divine counterparts³²⁷ or are known by another name (often adopted from Christian or Islamic figures.) Periodically they appear on earth in human form to lead people (that is, Yezidis) on the road of true faith.³²⁸

³²³ For example, Noah, Ibrahim Khalil, that is, Abraham.

³²⁴ For example, Yezid bin Muawiya, or various Sufi figures, from Sheikh Adi to Rabia al-Adawiyya, Bayazid Bastami, Shems of Tebriz, Mansur al-Hallaj.

³²⁵ The other word to designate them is *mêr* (literally “man”), though in my experience this designation can be found in the sacred hymns, but was not typically used by the Yezidis I interviewed.

³²⁶ *Khas* is originally an Arabic term, meaning “good.” Among the Nusayrîs, the so-called “Khāss” alludes to the elect (sons of light) according to the *Kitab al-Usus*, see Bar-Asher – Kofsky, *The Nusayrî-ʿAlawî Religion*, 56.

³²⁷ Sheikh Adi’s companions bore the names of the *Heptad*.

³²⁸ This idea of the successive manifestations of the deity (divine essence, light) in human form is also present among contemporary and medieval extreme Shiite groups, where researchers often suggest a strong Gnostic influence. It is indeed very tempting to call this simply a Gnostic/Manichaean motif, as both taught the periodical manifestation of divine “illuminators” on earth to reveal Gnosis to mankind. However, unlike concrete myths and literary motifs, such a “philosophical” concept could have been born autonomously, leading to what would resemble Gnostic ideas. The fact that the idea of the “manifestation of divine essence” is widespread among religious movements with an Iranian background implies that this may be an autochthon feature, which draws its inspiration, at least partially, from old Iranian beliefs (though this notion

The operative idea here seems to be the *sur*, that is, the divine essence, light of God, from which the Angels were created, and which eventually became manifest on earth whenever these Angels incarnated as human leaders. As one of my informants said of the holy beings, who descend on earth from time to time in order to reincarnate in human form: “their soul is from heaven,³²⁹ from the *sur* of God, the *sur* of the Angels, they came into being from the light of God, their souls are not like ours, these (are) heavenly souls.”³³⁰

The most salient example of the identity between the *khas* on earth, the Angels, and ultimately God, is furnished by what could perhaps be called the “trinity” of Sultan Êzî (one of the names used to designate God),³³¹ Tawusi Melek, and Sheikh Adi, the three

cannot be found in Zoroastrianism) or equally, that the two different traditions may have merged and reinforced each other in producing new religious forms. This thesis deals only with concrete myths and mythological motifs, and not with abstract philosophical ideas whose origin is much more uncertain to trace.

³²⁹ *Behîst*, or heaven, for him was the place where the special, divine souls (and they alone) reside, and periodically come forth. Others attribute the same function, as the treasury of holy souls, to the *Qendil* (“the light Throne of God,) on which see more later.

³³⁰ Qewwal Hussein, *ruhê wan ji bebesti ye, ji sura Xwedê, sura miyaketa, ji nûra Xwedê çêbûne, na wekê yê me ye, ew ruhê bebestî*.

³³¹ Kreyenbroek (*Yezidism*, 95-96) identifies Sultan Êzî(d) as a holy being other than God, who takes his name from Yazid bin Mu’awiya, the fourth caliph. However, several of my informants claimed that Sultan Êzî was in effect one of the names of God. *Sultan Êzî navê Xwedê ye*. Already Layard reports that a *qewwal* asserted that the ancient Yezidi name for God was “Azed” (Ainsworth, “Assyrian Origins,” 41). The description of Sultan Êzî in the hymns also implies this. The *Hymn of Erebeg Entush* 1 opens with the statement that Sulan Êzîd is the King, the perfect one (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 275), King (*padşa*) being one of the terms used to refer to God. He is called the “Yezidi faith” and “Yezidis religion” in the *Hymn of The Mill of Love* 31 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 384). In *The Hymn of Sheykh Obekr* 11-14 he is not only described as a King, yet again, the Seven Angels are called the Seven Angels of Sultan Êzîd, under his command (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 211). *The Hymn of the Faith* (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 83-89) depicts his role as the creator in the creation of the world. Also in *The Hymn of the Black Ferqan* Sultan Êzî ap-

being repeatedly identified or fused with each other in Yezidi hymns. For example, the *Hymn on the Laughter of the Snakes* declares, leaving little doubt as to the essential identity of the three:

Sheikh Adi,³³² Tawusi Melek and Sultan Ezi (God) are one
Don't you regard them as separate,
They quickly make wishes come true.³³³

Arab Khidir's exegesis on these lines was based on the concept of the *sur*: "They are one light, one *sur*. If I say, Melek (angel) Adi, Sultan Êzî and Tawusi Melek are one, it means they they are from the light of God, one *sur*, they are all from the light of God."³³⁴

The *Hymn of the Faith* does not state this identity as openly, but its portrayal of Sheikh Adi is one befitting God:

What is the colour of faith?
It is the pre-eternal Word,³³⁵
It is the name of Sheykh Adi
Sheykh Adi is truly Sultan³³⁶

pears as someone who already existed before the foundation of the world, before the angels and holy beings. Yezidi children are baptized at the White Spring in his name (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 159,) and at circumcision the boy undergoing the ritual also says "I am the lamb of the Red Sultan Êzîd" (ibid., 96). (Feqir Haji, on the other hand, claimed that the light of Êzî came from the Peacock Angel, whose light came from God – thus proving that with oral tradition, especially with Yezidi oral tradition, it is rather difficult to make generalizing statements on any possible question, especially when it comes to the obscure relation between different divine beings.)

³³² On the identity between Sheikh Adi, or other Yezidis leaders, and the Angels, see more below.

³³³ *Hymn of the Laughter of the Snakes* 4 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 392.). Furthermore, Tawusi Melek's shrine in the holy valley of Lalish is said to belong to Sultan Êzî as well, for the two are identical. See Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 96.

³³⁴ *Ek nûr in, ek sur in. Ew car beke me got, Melek Adî, Sultan Êzî û Tawûsî Melek ek in, yani ji nûra Xwedê, ek sur, hemî ji nûra Xwedê ne.*

³³⁵ Pre-eternal Word here is not the Christian Logos (unless indirectly, through indirect influences), but an Islamic notion. It was this Pre-eternal Word which was revealed through the Quran.

He brought forth the fourteen spheres of earth and heaven.
 There was neither Tablet nor Pen.
 "I was with you for as much as ninety thousand years."³³⁷

Another version of the same hymn compares Sheikh Adi with the ocean, a traditional literary device to describe God (one that is also employed by the Yezidi *Hymn of the Oceans* 14-15, where god appears as a great, endless, deep ocean³³⁸):

Sultan Sheikh Adi himself is the faith
 His ocean is a mighty ocean
 Divers have brought forth pearls from it³³⁹

 Divers brought forth pearls from it
 Anyone who shares the secrets of his King
 Has brought forth a pearl from the oceans.³⁴⁰

While Sheikh Adi is the most important of all the *khas*, whose eventual identity with Tawusi Melek and God is emphasized by many hymns, he is by far not the only one whose appearance among Yezidis during their history is interpreted as the earthly manifestation of the divine *sur*. Sheikh Adi's companions, for ex-

³³⁶ *Şêxê Edî xwe sultane* may literally be translated as "Sheikh Adi is the Sultan himself." Sultan is one of the epithets of God.

³³⁷ *Hymn of the Faith* 2-3 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 195). In *The Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 7 it is Sultan Êzî who is identified with the Pen, while Sheikh Hesên (Sin) – one of the Seven and a *khas* as well – is also known as the Lord of the Tablet and Pen. See *ibid.*, 105.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 202-207.

³³⁹ Pearl as a literary metaphor of the human soul goes back to Late Antiquity. It was employed, for example, by the famous *Hymn of the Pearl*. Sufism continued, though slightly modified, this tradition. The image of the pearl (believed to develop from raindrops that fall in the sea) as the human soul, which starts its spiritual journey in the sea, then passes through the clouds, to eventually drop back into the sea "its home, changed into jewels, unable to live without the ocean yet distinct from it," was a much-liked metaphor of Sufi poets for describing the human soul's relation to God, their basic unity and temporary differentiations. A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 284.

³⁴⁰ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 85.

ample, the ancestors of the sheikhly lineages, are considered the incarnation of the six others of the Seven *Sur* or Angels. The basic line is that all the *khas* or holy beings are believed to possess *sur* (or to be the physical manifestation of the *sur*.) This is perhaps the most poetically, and explicitly, expressed in the case of Yezid (or Êzîd, Êzî) bin Muawiya, the manifestation of the “*sur* of Êzî,” that is, Sultan Êzî, God. The fourth caliph (who, after the battle of Karbala became anathema in the eyes of the Shiite, and did not enjoy a very good reputation among most Sunnis either) appears in Yezidi mythology as a subverter of soulless Islamic *Sharia*, and a true Yezidi leader, who turns people from Islam back to the true religion. According to Feqir Haji, Yezid was conceived when at the order of God the *sur* “entered the body of his mother,”³⁴¹ the ninety-year-old wife of Muawiya, who turned into a fourteen year old virgin on her wedding night. “Ezîd himself was *sur*, *sur*, which came down from the sky.”³⁴² The *qenl* and the *chirok* or “tale” on the birth and deeds of Yezid attribute a great importance to the *sur*.³⁴³ Muawiya chases away his wife, Mehwer, when he realizes she is carrying a being of *sur*, who will turn away people from Islam:

When Sultan Ezi appeared in his mother's body
The mystery (*sur*) became apparent to Mu'awiya
Mu'awiya was overcome with fear.³⁴⁴

Thus Yezid's mother was abandoned in the desert carrying the “mystery (*sur*) of Sultan Êzî.”³⁴⁵ The daughter of the judge of Basra, a most pious and devoted maiden, always performed her prayers to “Tawusi Melek and to the Lord of that Mystery (*sur*)” “on rooftops and hills, so she would be able to see the mystery (*sur*) as soon as it arrived.”³⁴⁶ Then, one day, she saw the pregnant Mehwer riding nearby toward the city with light shining on her forehead, and she

³⁴¹ *Rabul Alemî emrê kir ew sur bkefte bedena wê.*

³⁴² *Ezîd sur bû, sur ji ezmana hate xwar.*

³⁴³ The title of the *çirok* translated by Kreyenbroek even bears the title *The Story of the Appearance of the Mystery (sur) of Ezî* (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 131).

³⁴⁴ *The Great Hymn* 3, *ibid.*, 158.

³⁴⁵ *The Great Hymn* 9, *ibid.*, 158.

³⁴⁶ *The Story of the Appearance of the Mystery (sur) of Ezî*, *ibid.*, 144.

realized at once that the other woman was the bearer of the *sur*.³⁴⁷ She took her home to Basra, and that very night all domestic animals in Basra gave birth to two female young, and all pregnant women had twin sons, a miracle due to the presence of the *sur*. Once grown, Yezidi goes to Damascus to confront his father and Islam and introduces himself saying "I am light, my essence is light... It is I, and my sweet name is Sultan Ezi."³⁴⁸ Then he goes on to perform a number of miracles, including turning the river into wine, through his *sur*,³⁴⁹ bemusing the Muslim population of the city, and finally turning them away from Islam (back) to Yezidi faith. Both the hymn and the *çîrok* repeatedly emphasize that Yezidi is the *sur* of Sultan Êzî, manifestation of the Mystery (*sur*) of Truth.

The *Hymn of Abu Bakr* 23-29 expounds the successive manifestation of the eternal divine *sur* in the form of *khas*, or holy beings throughout the course of history:

I say a few things out of many (?)
 They were bewildered by that mystery (*sur*)
 I was present there when
 I was created from the Pearl.³⁵⁰
 I existed before all foundations
 When he established earth and heaven
 I was made to inhabit so many animate creatures.

 I existed, I was there before all time
 I existed before joy and grief
 He was one; together with him I made two.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ The idea that this divine substance can be seen shining on the forehead of the woman pregnant with the true possessor of the *sur* (that is, the person in whom it will become incarnate) is probably showing an influence of the Islamic concept of the "light of Muhammad." For more on this concept and its influence on Yezidi mythology, see the chapter entitled "The Yezidi Creation Myth of Adam."

³⁴⁸ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi* and 149.

³⁴⁹ Feqir Haji too says "through the *sur* of God this water became wine" (*bi surek Xwedê ev av(a) bû şarap*).

³⁵⁰ That is, existed when God created the Pearl encompassing him before the creation of the world.

I exist and shall always exist
 I am a person whose ego-soul is acceptable
 I am Hussayn al-Hallaj
 I am Mansur al-Hallaj³⁵²
 I am the Turkish Tartar³⁵³
 I am the ship that came to rest on Mt Judi³⁵⁴
 Gold and silver and copper am I.

 I am gold, my origin is copper
 The ignorant saw this mystery and did not recognise it
 Thus they rejected the truth of Sultan Ezi.

 I am Mullah Abu Bekir of Jezire³⁵⁵
 In essence I am Adi
 Praise be to God and thanks that I am a Yezidi.

 I was Mullah Abu Bekir of Jezire
 In essence I was a Qurayshi³⁵⁶
 Praise be to God and thanks that I am a Yezidi.³⁵⁷

The dividing line between the Angels and the *kebas* is often blurred in the hymns. As the historical manifestations of the Seven Angels may wear the same name on earth as their heavenly counterpart, it is often impossible to distinguish if a sacred hymn speaks of the angels in heaven, or their incarnation on earth as historical

³⁵¹ Presumably this means God and his *sur*.

³⁵² A famous Persian Sufi mystic, executed for his claim "En el Haq" (I am God). Yezidis claim he was a Yezidi.

³⁵³ Shems of Tabriz, a Sufi mystic who was the friend of the great Sufi master, Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi. See Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 98.

³⁵⁴ Yezidis, as well as some Muslims Kurds, hold that Noah's Ark came to rest on Mount Judi (today in southeast Turkey.)

³⁵⁵ Possibly Abu Bekr, the father-in-law of Muhammad and the first caliph.

³⁵⁶ The Quraish are the tribe of Muhammad, enjoying great respect among Muslims. However, Yezidis claim that the Quraish were Yezidis too (probably an indication of strong Islamic influence centuries ago). See the interviews in the Appendix.

³⁵⁷ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 177-78.

persons, the *kebas*. This is true, for example, of the *Hymn of the Lights*:

What a pristine light it is;
My King ³⁵⁸made it in his mercy and compassion
He also made Sheikh Obekir. [literally: He made Sheikh
Obekir *from it*.]

What a golden light it is:
It came from the Throne above
Sheikh Obekir became the Mirebbi³⁵⁹ of Sheikh Shems
the Tartar.

What a brilliant light it is:
It appeared from heaven
Sheikh Obekir became the Mirebbi
Of Shemsedin and Melik Fekhredin.
What a significant light it is;
It came down from Heaven
Sheikh Obekir became the Mirebbi of all four brothers.

What a shining light it is;
It came down from the Throne
Its guardian is Sheikh Fekhr³⁶⁰ the black.

What a great light it is;
It is the mercy and compassion of my King
He also created Melik Sheikh Sin.³⁶¹

This hymn tells how the Seven Angels were successively created from light (i.e. the Light of God.) That is, the text repeatedly refers to angels (*Melik*), and Sheikh Obekir, Shemsedin, Melik Fekhredin

³⁵⁸ I. e. God.

³⁵⁹ A “master” who leads his followers, this is one of the five obligatory religious relationships a Yezidi is supposed to have (besides a *sheikh*, *pîr*, brother/sister of the hereafter, and *bosta*). However, when in Iraq I never heard any Yezidi refer to his or her *mirebbi*, so it is quite likely that this institution no longer exists in practice.

³⁶⁰ I.e. Fekhredin.

³⁶¹ *The Hymn of the Lights* 5-10, Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 90-91.

and Melik Sheikh Sin are well-known names of the Seven Angels or Seven Mysteries (*surs*). On the other hand, these angels bore the same name on earth (without the prefix *melik*), the text talks about the light coming “down from heaven,” which would indicate that it is earthly figures the hymn is about, and Sheikh Shems the Tartar is considered an earthly manifestation (*khas*) of Angel Sheikh Shem (also known as Angel Shemsedin.) Furthermore the “four brothers” mentioned in the text probably refers to the four sons of Êzdîna Mîr, Shemsedin, Fekhredin, Sejadin, and Nesradin, companions of Sheikh Adî, who became the eponyms of four branches of the Shemseni sheikhs. Originally Angels (*sur*) in the sky, the word “brothers” is more likely to refer to their manifestation on earth as *khas*. Of course, as both the Angels in the sky and the *khas* on earth are ultimately derived from the light and power of God, are His manifestations, such a distinction is ultimately irrelevant from the point of view of traditional Yezidi faith.

The fact that the angels are in fact emanations of the Godhead, come into being from His *sur*, while the *khas*, personages of Yezidi sacred history are in their turn the earthly manifestations of the same *sur*, explains what has confused so many researchers in the past: namely why the different divine and angelic personalities of Yezidi myths and sacred texts are often interchangeable. After all, if they all represent the same divine *sur*, there is not much point making sharp distinctions between the different figures. As Kreyenbroek writes “All holy beings are... regarded as representatives of the Divine which, in the minds of the believers, presumably limits the relevance of their individual personalities.”³⁶² This fusing of identities, that is, the interchangeability of the different holy beings, is one of the cardinal traits of Yezidi faith (and texts.)

Metempsychosis,³⁶³ that is, the idea that the same angel (or rather his divine essence, *sur*) was incarnated again and again during the course of history as human being (that is, as a *khas*), further contributes to the blurring of the different identities of Yezidi religious history. Thus, for example, Sheikh Hesên (also known as Sheikh Sin) is simultaneously one of the Seven Angels, one of the

³⁶² Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 84.

³⁶³ *Don/kiras guhartîn* (to change one's clothes).

companions of Sheikh Adi (on earth),³⁶⁴ who became the eponymous ancestor of a lineage of Sheikhs (the Adani sheikhs), and is at the same time, according to Edmond,³⁶⁵ identified with al-Hasan al-Basri,³⁶⁶ and with the Prophet Muhammad. This Yezidi form of metempsychosis makes the sort of linear chronology European historicity is based on redundant.³⁶⁷

This explains why the same mythical events and acts are often associated with different angelic figures (or rather, names), or why the same angelic person may be associated with events that took place at different epochs of sacred history. Thus, for instance, when I asked the octogenarian Pîr Jafo, the guardian of the shrine of Mem Shîvan, when exactly Pîrê Libnan,³⁶⁸ the *kebas* he was just talking about, lived, he answered: "From the beginning of the world until today, for he appeared again and again at different intervals." On another occasion, I was confused when shown two *qobs* or shrines in the village of Kheter, both of them dedicated to Babê Shehid (Shehid Father), the ancestor of Yezidis.³⁶⁹ As I was explained, there were two shrines because they were dedicated to two different persons. One of them was Sheikh Hesên – that is,

³⁶⁴ Though in effect he was one of the successors of Sheikh Adi as the leader of the community nearly a century later, see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 31-33.

³⁶⁵ Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish*, 33 and 49.

³⁶⁶ A famous Islamic scholar and ascetic, one of the most important religious figures of early Islam (AD 642-728 or 737.)

³⁶⁷ As Edmonds (*Pilgrimage*, 6) writes: "For people who believe in the transmigration of souls what appears to us to be the most appalling inconsistencies and anachronism present no difficulty whatever: it is silly to say that Sheykh X and Shaykh Y whose appearance on earth seems to have been separated by one or more centuries, or even the archangel Gabriel and Shaykh Sajâdin, cannot be 'the same' as to try to make out that Mr Jones who was seen last night in tails... cannot be the same as Mr Jones who was seen the day before in a lounge suit or last summer in shorts and an open shirt."

³⁶⁸ Pîrê Libnan is another *kebas*, whom Pîr Jafo called a *melek*, that is, an angel. He was not one of the Seven Angels, but a "minor" one.

³⁶⁹ For a detailed study of Shehid, forefather of Yezidis, and his conception from the *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin, see chapter 9 on the "Origin Myth of the Yezidis."

Angel Sheikh Sin, from whose *sur* Shehid bin Jer was created. The other was a certain Pîr Suleyman, who “recognized himself” and realized that he was channeling the spirit of Shehid, or rather Shehid’s “*sur* and *keramet* has reached him,” and became a religious leader of the region. As they were two different persons, though ultimately possessing the same *sur*, local Yezidis thought it expedient to erect two different *qobs* in their memories, both being dedicated to Babê Shehid.

As this last mention of Shehid bin Jer, forefather of the Yezidis foreshadows, the *sur* played an important role in Yezidi history not only as far as the *kebas* are concerned, but both in the creation of the first human, Adam, and the creation of the Yezidi people itself - questions which will be analysed in details in subsequent chapters.

5 RELIGIOUS ORAL TRADITION AND LITERACY AMONG THE YEZIDIS OF IRAQ

This chapter will analyse how external influences, especially literacy and written texts and the traditions of literate societies, are affecting the religious oral tradition of the Yezidis of Iraqi Kurdistan³⁷⁰ today. It will look at the issues of establishing a canonical corpus of texts, modernizing mythology, adopting new elements for being useful, discarding old ones for being deemed obsolete or non-scientific, and rejecting myth perceived to be of Islamic origin. Finally it will deal with the question of how new myths are constructed to meet the new needs raised by modern education and increased contact with the outside world. Though what is happening today is by necessity different in some ways from what may have happened in the past, when different cultures and traditions met and mingled, still such an analysis can help present-day researchers form some idea on the mechanics of how oral tradition was shaped and affected by “external” influences and how it absorbed alien traditions, often originating in literate cultures.

As has already been explained, one of the most important characteristics of Yezidi religion is its oral nature. Until quite recently the faith of the Yezidis was based on oral tradition. Sacred

³⁷⁰ That is, in the Duhok and Sheikhan regions in Iraq. On the other hand my research didn't cover the Sinjar mountain west of the Tiger, near the Syrian border, surrounded by Arab and Turkoman settlements. In this isolated refuge of Yezidis, where the influence of the modern world is less obvious, the changes which I have observed among Iraqi Yezidis living in more accessible and affluent regions may not apply, or at least to a lesser degree. It may also be assumed that Yezidis living in other regions, like Syria, Georgia or Germany for example, are exposed to different external influences, and therefore their traditions may see different changes

texts were memorised and transmitted from father to son by the *qenmals*, or singers (of sacred texts) of the Yezidis. This oral nature, which shaped the structure and nature of Yezidi belief system, has undergone profound changes in the last few decades, thanks to the spread of compulsory education, general literacy, the interest of outsiders in Yezidi faith, and the interest of literate Yezidis on what outsiders had to say about them. As a result Yezidism can no longer be called a purely oral religion.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, especially in the area of the former Autonomy, school education is the norm today, especially among the young and younger middle-aged generation, and illiteracy is slowly becoming a thing of the past. With school education many modern ideas inevitably intrude into the Yezidi world-view. Even more importantly, educated Yezidis, influenced by the demands of the so-called “written religions” and modern life, started putting their own religion into writing – something that was unimaginable not so long ago. The revolutionary change came in the 1970s when two Yezidis university graduates managed to secure the permission of the Yezidi religious leaders to record Yezidi religious texts in writing. The first publication was soon followed by several others. Many of these publications are easily available to most Yezidis in the above-mentioned region. (Today, for example, *Lalish* and *Roj* magazines, which publish sacred hymns, religious tales, folktales, and essays on Yezidi religion can be found in many Yezidi homes.)

The process of putting Yezidi religion into writing was further accelerated by the sizeable Yezidi diaspora living in the West, especially in Germany. These Yezidis are cut off from all the old forms of Yezidi religious life, where holiday rituals, visits to holy places or being visited by religious leaders play a central role. At the same time, living in close proximity to other religions for the first time, Yezidis in the West are becoming more and more acutely aware of the fact that, unlike other religions, they lack a holy book to which they could refer, or a clear idea of the history of their own religion. Their children, brought up in a culture of books and confronted by Western schoolmates or friends with more profound religious education, are increasingly turning to written texts trying to find in-

formation.³⁷¹ There is also a general wish to be able to present a holy book, just like other religions. While in the past even the idea of putting a sacred text into writing would have been anathema, today in Yezidi households in the diaspora it is not unusual, for example, to find the two Yezidi “holy texts,” the Jelwa and the Mes’hefa Resh, which contain genuine oral tradition albeit written down by outsiders in the nineteenth century.³⁷² Others claim to have found the original Yezidi holy book in the form of the Zoroastrian Zend-Avesta.³⁷³ The diaspora, in its turn, further influences Yezidis back in the home country. This has all led to a changing attitude toward books and oral tradition in general, at least in the Iraqi Sheikhan and in the European diaspora,³⁷⁴ where the place accorded to oral tradition is fast becoming usurped by books written on and mainly by Yezidis. With this development profound

³⁷¹ For example, one of the interviewees of Jasim Murad stated (“Sacred Poems,” 384-5): “when in the German school my classmates would ask me about my religion. I would tell them that I am a Yazidi and then they would ask me the details of my religion and I would just remain silent. That of course irritated me for these classmates know who Christ is and the history of Christianity and I did not know, for example, who Sheikh Adi or Ta’us Melek is. Then I decided to search for the history and origins of our religion. I went to the libraries and checked out some books written in German about the Yezidis. From these sources I learned that we worship God and believe in seven angels headed by Ta’us Melek. I also found the two holy books Mishaf Rash and Jalwa.” Professor Philip Kreyenbroek also confirmed in several conversations that the search for an identity among the young and the need for books was a strong driving force behind the birth of Yezidi religious literature in Germany. On the role of writing in Yezidi culture in the West, see also Kreyenbroek (*Sheikh Adi*: 45-6.)

³⁷² Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 12-25

³⁷³ Jasim Murad, “Sacred Poems,” 396. “...many informants have viewed the two manuscripts and declare them to be authentic books of their religion. Those informants wrapped the two books in silk garment and carefully stored them on a sacred shelf beyond the reach of children.”

³⁷⁴ The isolated and impoverished Sinjar mountain on the Iraqi-Syrian border, that has been a refuge of Yezidis for centuries and was under Saddam’s rule until recently, seems to present a more traditional picture at present, though this may also change in the near future.

changes have appeared which seem to alter the centuries-old nature and content of Yezidi religion.

THE APPEARANCE OF “CANONICAL” TEXTS

As it is well known for all researchers of oral tradition, the most characteristic feature of tradition based on orality is the simultaneous existence of many different versions of the same motif or story. This holds, or at least used to hold, true for Yezidis as well, as many travellers and researchers of the past have noticed. With the publication of Yezidi sacred texts a new development appeared. People have started to insist on the written version as the only correct and authentic one. The written version acquires the nature and reputation of a holy scripture – all other versions are compared to this and any divergence is commented on as “It is wrong” “He (i.e. the source) is mistaken.”³⁷⁵ It is possible, though it would be hard to prove, that the wish for one, canonised body of writings can sub-consciously be connected with a wish to refute one of the most popular Muslim accusations against Yezidis, namely that they have *no written scriptures*, and are therefore *kafirs* or unbelievers. This accusation is of such great relevance in Kurdish culture that even Christians speak about this characteristic of Yezidism in a negative way.

This novel notion of an “authentic version” includes not only the written text itself but is also beginning to influence the way sources are viewed as well. The idea, characteristic of all “literizing” societies, that orality is inferior to literacy³⁷⁶ is extended to religious experts. *Qenwals*, the traditional keepers of religious lore, most of whom are still illiterate, enjoy ever less respect.³⁷⁷ On the other

³⁷⁵ Similar observations were also made by Christine Allison a decade earlier (Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 19).

³⁷⁶ D. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Traditions*, 100.

³⁷⁷ During my trip to Beshiqe-Behzani, the twin-villages where *qenwals* traditionally reside, for example, local people generally preferred to introduce me to “laymen,” whom for some reason they saw as knowledgeable about the topic of religion, and accompanied me to meet *qenwals*

hand, literate persons, who – due to a number of factors – have become known as “experts on Yezidi texts,” that is, they are often quoted in writing in periodicals published by Yezidis, are seen as the only authentic sources when it comes to differences between two versions. Yezidis constantly tried to discourage me from trying to interview other, less well-known persons, on the basis that “they know less than X.” I met repeatedly with confusion and perplexity when I wanted to speak with yet another person, after having spoken with a more valued authority, especially if he was known to “have published” about Yezidi religion. My explanation that there may be “a different version” was even understood to mean that I found the version already told incorrect.

Such an attitude, which insists on one fixed version coming from one accredited source, will eventually lead to the weeding out of “non-canonical” versions and an impoverishment, or at least simplification, of Yezidi lore. But it is not merely the amount of differing variants that is being affected by these changes.

BOOKS ON THE YEZIDIS AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Another far-reaching development of literacy is that the written word has started influencing the self-perception of Yezidis, and it has become a source of knowledge even for so-called religious experts. Books and periodicals are read enthusiastically by many these days. The written word enjoys great respect and is trusted far more than the memory and knowledge of a living person. (I have even seen a *mijewir*, or guardian of a shrine, take out his hand-written collection of hymns – despite the traditional ban on writing.)

I would like to quote a few telling examples to demonstrate the general interest among literate (though not necessarily very

only at my own request. Some even expressed an opinion to the effect that *qenwals* (and religious leaders for that matter) were no longer what they used to be, and their knowledge can in no way be compared to the *qenwals* of the past. In the Yezidi “Sunday School” in Beshiqe, a school set up in the 90’s to teach the children of the twin-villages their religion, children are now taught from books by laymen, and not by *qenwals*.

educated) Yezidis in all forms of literature regarding Yezidis, their history, and religion. In Shariye, a collective village near Duhok, I was shown the book of the late American researcher, John Guest, *Survival among the Kurds*. My host proudly claimed having read its contents with the aid of a dictionary, and called attention to the fact that it contained a number of sacred hymns. He even offered me the book so that I could gain from it what he called good information on Yezidis and their religion (regardless of the fact that the book belonged not to him, but to his neighbor, as his mother pointed out). Admittedly, of all Yezidi settlements Shariye is the one where contact with foreigners has been the most frequent in the last decade, and where perhaps there are more people speaking or understanding some English than in other villages. This is due both to its proximity to Duhok, in the former Kurdish Autonomy, with its international NGOs and the UN, an important source of jobs for nearly a decade, and to the fact that Shariye was one of the four Yezidi settlements that foreign researchers could dream of setting their feet into.

But even if the presence of a piece of Western scholarship can be called an exception, books and periodicals written by Yezidis, or even by outsiders in Arabic (provided they wrote of Yezidis in a favourable light) have definitely found their way into many Yezidi households around Duhok and in the Sheikhan. Just like in the case of Guest's book, these writings are often seen by younger people as the best way to obtain knowledge about Yezidi traditions. In the course of my field research I was repeatedly referred to the two Yezidi periodicals, *Lalish* and *Roj*, as the "best sources of information." In one case a university undergraduate even painstakingly translated a folktale, sentence by sentence, for my sake from *Roj* magazine. Sheikh Mîrza of Baadra, who claimed to be the descendant of the seventeenth-century Yezidi hero, Êzdi Mîrza, leafed through a number of books written in Kurdish to look for his family-tree and other information on his illustrious forebear. (This is all the more surprising because in my experience family and tribal history generally still belong to the realm of oral tradition among the Iraqi Yezidis.)

This phenomenon poses a new "caveat" for unsuspecting researchers: one that is known as "feedback" among researchers of oral tradition. "Feedback may be defined as the co-opting of extraneous printed or written information into previously oral ac-

counts,”³⁷⁸ and has been widely studied among oral groups who came under the influence of literate cultures. The influence of books that become sources of new tradition in their turn, that is feedback, is not a recent phenomenon among the Yezidis – it was first noticed when a literate elite appeared in the first half of the twentieth century, though we cannot rule out an earlier appearance. Lescot, writing on the book “*El Yazdîyya*” by the black sheep of the Yezidi princely family, Ismail Chol beg, published in 1934, warned that “l’auteur a eu connaissance d’articles sur la secte édités dans des revues arabes; il a naturellement accepté toutes les erreurs qu’ils contenaient et les a fidèlement reproduites.”³⁷⁹ Just around the same time the anthropologist Henry Field purchased a Yezidi book in the Beled Sinjar.³⁸⁰ Upon showing it to Father Anstase-Marie al-Carmali, an expert on Yezidi texts, he exploded “this is a very bad joke, an insult... this is a careless translation into Arabic of my article on the Yazidiyah in the Encyclopedia of Islam.”³⁸¹

With the growing influence of literacy, such feedback has become a common phenomenon. For example, on several occasions I was told by “experts”³⁸² that the black *kbirge*, the sacred garment of the Yezidi holy men or ascetics, the *fegirs*, was a symbol of the original darkness that surrounded the pearl, that is, God himself, before the creation started. In other words the black shirt symbolizes the primordial darkness covering God. This was an idea that I had never before encountered in the literature on Yezidis,³⁸³ and considered it, rather proudly, an interesting new piece of information on Yezidi religion. It was only by chance that later on in Göt-

³⁷⁸ Henige, *Chronology of Oral Traditions*, 96.

³⁷⁹ Lescot, *Les Yezidis*, 6.

³⁸⁰ The “capital” of the Sinjar mountain that has a sizeable Yezidi population, and where Yezidi-Christian relations have traditionally been very good.

³⁸¹ Henry Field’s “Foreword” vii to Ahmed, *The Yezidis*.

³⁸² Once by Sheikh Deshti, the guardian of a shrine in Khanke, and once by Arab KHidir, a village teacher collecting religious texts, see below.

³⁸³ Yezidi hymns do in fact say that the *kbirge* was the garment of God (see chapter “*Kbirge* as a Garment of Faith,”) but it (or its colour) is not connected with the darkness covering God before creation.

tingen Dr Khalil Jindy Rashow (known among Yezidis as Sheikh Khalil Jindy), a Yezidi researcher presently living in Germany, but publishing in Kurdish, heard this recorded on my tape. He told me that this was not an original piece of Yezidi mythology, but his own idea or interpretation of the black shirt of the *fegirs*, which he had published in the *Roj* magazine. My two informants had obviously read it in the magazine, and they passed it on as an authentic bit of Yezidi mythology. (It is worth noting that one of my informants was from Behzani, under Saddam's rule until 2003, which means that Yezidi publications have reached even there, despite the official policy of trying to repress Yezidi identity.) Through those who read Yezidi publications or publications on Yezidis, usually considered the "local intelligentsia," the information is quick to reach others and eventually become part of oral tradition.

Not only do books take the place of oral tradition where gaining concrete information on Yezidi religion is concerned, but they have started influencing Yezidi identity as well. Thus, for example, the English teacher of the high school in Baadra, Mamoste Sabah, claimed that the content of the Three Holy Books, that is, the Old and New Testament and the Quran, can all be traced back to the sacred books (i.e. mythology) of the Sumerians. At the same time, Sumerian sacred texts (just as later Babylonian and Assyrian texts) mention the word "ezid," which had been solved to mean "pure souls," those "who go on the right path." In other words, they refer to the Yezidis, who are thus proven to be the fountainhead of Sumerian religion and consequently of the three religions based on the above mentioned Holy Books. According to Mamoste Sabah, the source of his knowledge on this matter was a book written by Dr Khalil Jindy Rashow. Unfortunately, I had no way to ascertain the exact content of the book, but this certainly demonstrates the great impact of the written word (especially if written by authors well-known to the community) on disseminating new ideas and forming Yezidi identity as regards their own religion and past.

Interestingly enough, some of the books that seem to have exerted a great influence on how Yezidis view their own mythology and religion were written by non-Yezidis. An example of such an author is George Habibi, a Christian, whose theory of the Assyrian origin of the Yezidis, also put forward by other non-Yezidi authors, enjoys great popularity among the Yezidis (who quote him, or read from his book, to support their claim of an Assyrian origin). It may

have been in a similar way that the Sufi interpretation of Lucifer's Fall reached Yezidism. (Lucifer's role is here taken by the Peacock Angel of the Yezidis, identified with the devil by Muslims.) Though the Yezidi view of creation originally did not accept the existence of the devil or any evil principle, now quite a few Yezidis will repeat a rather daring interpretation of the myth on Lucifer's Fall that can probably be traced back to the Sufi philosopher al-Hallaj. According to this interpretation, when Lucifer refused to worship Adam, despite having been ordered to do so by God, he was in fact just being loyal to God, who earlier commanded him not to worship any other being. Though this is a very interesting interpretation of Lucifer's Fall, it simply does not fit into Yezidi mythology, where there is absolutely no place for evil. In all probability, it was from the work of Muslim authors, who had tried to explain the obviously false accusation of devil worship among the Yezidis that Yezidis picked up this nice sounding story. Today it is repeated by many Yezidis (though not by the most conservative ones³⁸⁴) and also by some educated Muslims.

MODERNIZING YEZIDI MYTHOLOGY: SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATION

The other salient feature of this transition from oral to written tradition is a "rewriting," one could say a "modernization" by the Yezidis of their own mythology. For long centuries, the Yezidi community was relatively isolated, and had limited contact with their – often hostile – Muslim neighbors,³⁸⁵ and even less with the

³⁸⁴ For example Feqir Haji, one of the best known and most quoted experts on Yezidi religious lore, emphatically denied this story, and none of those older people who acquired their knowledge, much or little, on Yezidi religion in the traditional (oral) way repeated this myth. On the other hand it was quoted by a number of people who read publications on Yezidis and were obviously influenced by what they had read.

³⁸⁵ This is not to say, of course, that there was no contact at all, even if many Iraqi Yezidis today claim to have lived completely separated from Muslim Kurds in the past. Thus, for example, great tribal confederations

world outside the Kurdish mountains. Today, there is an ever-increasing exposure to the external world, and what is more important, a growing participation in it (both in Europe and in Iraq).

This increased contact with the world at large has led to an attempt at modernization and similarly at trying to avoid ridicule. Yezidis who have attended school and have extensive, everyday contact with non-Yezidis (Muslims or Christians) tend to modernize or rewrite their legends so that they conform to the expectation of outsiders and also to their newly acquired knowledge of history and science. Some Yezidi intellectuals leading this trend like to refer to it as “reforming” Yezidi faith.³⁸⁶ As a part of this process some myths are slowly being discarded as absurd, while others receive new interpretation. These novel interpretations sometimes seem to contradict the ethos of Yezidi hymns and tales, while they are more in keeping with Christian and Muslim notions on the divine and its relationship with the created world.

An arresting feature of such attempts to make Yezidi faith “up-to-date” is the wish to give a modern scientific interpretation to Yezidi legends, so that they are fit for consumption by people whose world view is determined by compulsory school education. How educated Yezidis of a modern turn of mind wish to see their own religion, and have it seen by outsiders, was eloquently demonstrated by the principal of a school in ‘Eyn Sifni. The principal,

included both Muslim Kurdish and Yezidi tribes (as well as Christians), and in some regions there were close contacts between Yezidis and the Turkoman and Arabic population as well. (See Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 51-54; see also Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 45.) The institution of *kerin* (the *kerin* acts as a sort of “godfather” when a child is circumcised – Yezidi children often had and have Muslims as their *kerins*, a tactic providing them with a certain measure of protection from outside their own religious group) also implies continuous communication between the two communities.

³⁸⁶ Thus, from example, Pîr Mamou Othman at a conference on Yezidis at Frankfurt (Yezidism in Transition, 12-17 April, 2007, Frobenius Institute, Frankfurt) talked of the need of “reformation of religion” and repeatedly referred to the influence of Martin Luther and the Reformation of Christianity in Europe, drawing a parallel to the need of a similar “Reformation” in the framework of Yezidi religion.

who formerly taught in the Yezidi village of Baadra (the Kurdish Autonomy), instructed me to write about Yezidis in a “scientific way” (*alemi*), and not like other researchers. When asked, what exactly he meant by this, he expressed his distaste against what he called “old men’s fancy” about people flying up to the sky and similar absurd tales (or myths as a researcher would call them), and explained that researchers must call attention to the fact that Yezidi hymns express scientific truth only recently known to modern science. For example hymns on the creation talk of the world first being an endless sea above which God was travelling in a ship, while modern science has only recently “proven” that water was the beginning of life on earth. Accordingly, he wished me to talk about the ancient scientific knowledge coated in ceremonial language in Yezidi hymns, instead of what he viewed as fairy-tale-like accounts on incarnated angels and their miraculous deeds.

His endeavours at a scientific interpretation of Yezidi religious traditions are not unique among today’s educated Yezidis. Arab Khidir, a volunteer collector of sacred hymns and a teacher at the religious Yezidi school in Beshiqe-Behzani, who is known for his exceptional interest in Yezidi lore, expressed similar opinions. Rather proudly, he related that Yezidi hymns contain a hidden, deeper understanding of the universe that has become known to the greater masses only recently. He quoted a hymn on the death of Sheikh Hassan at the hands of Badradin Lulu, mentioning a “black star” (*sterê resh*), which he claimed to refer to the phenomenon known as “black hole” centuries before Western science realized its existence. The popular tale of Mîr Mih, the young prince looking for a place where no death exists, and who spends four hundred years at the abode of Fortune as if it were four, was interpreted by him as an allegory of Einstein’s concept of relativity. Similarly he claimed that Yezidi *qewls* speaking of the Seven Angels and God prove that Yezidis had a heliocentric view long before Copernicus. This ancient knowledge was also indicated by the *sema*, the religious dance, as well, where the line of the seven men circumambulating the sacred fire symbolizes the stars turning around the sun. As a further proof he mentioned that while all other religions speak of water as the element out of which the world was created, Yezidi hymns alone name the air (*ba*), which, “as we now know, is the basis of water (H₂O) and all other elements.” Of course, this latter information is at variance with the one volunteered by the school

principal mentioned above, but in both cases we meet the same concept: Yezidi *qewls* indicate a divinely-inspired scientific understanding of the universe that is unique among religious texts.

How fast this approach is gaining ground was demonstrated by a young university student of physics from Duhok University. During an interview (concerning the creation of the world), where she helped me with translation, she referred to the divine Pearl of the hymns from which the world was created as an “atom,” to the creation as the “Big Boom,” or the barren period before vegetation was created as the “Ice Age.” Typically, she did not really translate what was said (as I later ascertained listening to my tapes), rather she told me her own ideas, which were clearly influenced by her wish to adjust her faith to her scientific knowledge. Whether such attempts at a modern, scientific interpretation of ancient sacred texts are culturally influenced by similar attempts among Muslims to find references to all modern scientific phenomena in the holy text of the Quran (such as rockets for example) is an open question.

Not only the content, but even the very origin of these sacred hymns has become a bone of contention in the quest of making a “scientific religion” out of Yezidi faith. Some reformist go as far as to claim that Yezidi tradition attributes the authorship of Yezidi sacred hymns to different human beings, and Yezidis have no tradition of their sacred texts being revealed by Angels or sent from heaven, despite clear (and recorded) evidence to the contrary.³⁸⁷

PRE-ISLAMIC ORIGIN AND ISLAM AS AN ALIEN ELEMENT

Finally, this modern “rewriting” of Yezidi lore entails another phenomenon, namely, rejecting any notions of Islamic origin or Muslim influence. Yezidi–Muslim relationships have traditionally been

³⁸⁷ This view was put forward, for example, by Mamou Othman at the Frankfurt conference. It is debatable, however, if such an extremely rationalist view would be embraced by the majority of the Yezidis, especially as they feel the need to become a “religion of the book,” as noticed above.

rather strained, as Yezidis were considered either *kafirs* or heretics, that is, Muslims who deviated from the right path, a capital sin in Islam, and even worshippers of the devil. In fact, this view still holds, despite the official propaganda that declares Yezidi faith to be the “original Kurdish religion.”³⁸⁸ Today, when understanding and dealing with religion has become more conscious among the educated, Yezidis seem to be “taking their revenge” in a novel way. They claim that anything that appears to be connected with Islam is a “foreign body” added to pure Yezidi religion either to mislead the Muslims, or as a result of aggressive Muslim proselytising.

This re-interpretation is best reflected in the way the figure of Sheikh Adi, the most important religious figure of Yezidi faith, is treated today. Sheikh Adi was traditionally considered a divine being incarnated in human form, the earthly manifestation of Tawusi Melek (the Peacock Angel), the head of the Seven Angels.³⁸⁹ He has been identified by scholars as a historical person, a twelfth-century Sufi mystic of Arabic origin, and the founder of the al-Adawiyya brotherhood. On the other hand, in the 1930s, the Bedirxan brothers, in their search for a unified Kurdish identity, came up with the idea that Yezidism was in fact the original, pre-Islamic Kurdish religion.³⁹⁰ During the struggle for Kurdish independence in the last few decades, much was made of this theory, and it was enthusiastically embraced by many Yezidis as well, at least in the Sheikhan region.³⁹¹ For Yezidis keen about this “original Kurdish religion image,” the presence of Sheikh Adi, an Arab and a Muslim, proved somewhat confusing, or even embarrassing.

³⁸⁸ Some people actually manage to endorse both views simultaneously. That is, they proudly claim that Yezidism, the original Kurdish faith, is much older than Islam and Christianity, or even Judaism and Zoroastrianism while insisting that Yezidis worship the devil.

³⁸⁹ See chapter “Yezidi Religion.”

³⁹⁰ Kamiran Bedirxan, “Zerdeşt û rêya Zerdeşt,” (“Zarahustra and the way of Zarahustra”) *Hawar* 4.26 (1935): 9-10; and “Le Soleil Noir,” *Hawar* 4.26 (1935): 11-14. See also M. Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity: Heroes, and Patriots, Traitors and Foes* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 167.

³⁹¹ I found that in the Sinjar mountain, for example, the situation is somewhat different.

All the more so as the Saddam regime tried to present the Yezidis as people of an Arab origin, and Sheikh Adi's figure was quite useful for this purpose. As a result, today educated Yezidis who wish to distance themselves from any allegation that Yezidi faith is a deviation of Islam, not only reject the divinity of Sheikh Adi, but also stress that he was a "reformer," and no more, of the Yezidi religion. The presence of many elements perceived as coming from Islam is thus attributed to the outside influence of Sheikh Adi. The idea of Sheikh Adi as a mere reformer leads to another curious development. There seems to be a new theory among the Yezidis of there being two clearly separate stages in the history of Yezidis: one before and one after Sheikh Adi. Sometimes the two different versions of the same myth are being explained as one belonging to the substratum before Sheikh Adi and the other to the one after him.

Younger, educated, and secular Yezidis, with a strong Kurdish consciousness, go even further in rejecting Sheikh Adi. For example, talking of certain taboos, like not eating fish, one young man claimed "these do not have to be followed, because they are not ancient Yezidi ideas, but come from Sheikh Adi, who was an Arab."³⁹² Even the idea that Sheikh Adi "corrupted" pure Yezidi faith is voiced occasionally. For example, some state that Yezidi hymns are not authentic, as Sheikh Adi used the old Yezidi texts and mixed them with quotations taken from the Quran. They base this assertion on the presence of Arabic words and expressions in the hymns, the references to Islam and the Sunna, and some coincidences they claim to see in the Quranic text and the hymns, saying that the two use the same words and expressions.

Such a bias against Islam may even lead to the rejection of legends and hymns which should by rights be considered authentic Yezidi legends, as their content clearly echoes the Yezidi ethos. But these are still rejected by "modernizing" Yezidis – often with their exact content unknown – as "late insertions" simply because the heroes of such works bear the names of Islamic historical figures.

³⁹² Similar observations were made by Allison (*Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 39). Another solution, among those of a more traditional mind, who are not ready to deny Sheikh Adi, is to claim that his family originally hailed from Hakkari and he was born among the Kurds of Lebanon.

The so-called *Qewlê Mezin*, or Great Hymn, is a perfect example. This hymn on Yezid bin Muawiya was declared a “forgery” by a young university graduate, who is an editor of the Yezidi periodical *Lalish*, and writes articles on the faith of the Yezidis. He claimed the hymn was the product of attempts on the part of Yezidis to placate Muslims by inserting the name of a Muslim personage, the second Umayyad caliph into their system. This view was shared by Arab Khidir, mentioned above, who was of the opinion that the Great Hymn itself was an authentic hymn, but the name of Yezid bin Muawiya was inserted into it later on by Muslims. No attention was paid to the fact that the hymn is built around the figure and reputation (as a drunkard given to lewd and irresponsible ways) of Yezid bin Muawiya. Similarly neither of my informants seemed to recall that the caliph has never enjoyed a very good reputation in Islamic history, and the role attributed to him in this Yezidi hymn is a plain rejection and mockery of the Islamic *Sharia* and could have hardly won over any Muslim heart.

NEW ORIGIN MYTHS OF THE YEZIDIS

The idea of a pre-Islamic origin leads almost automatically to a tendency to try to relate Yezidism to other, ancient religious movements of the region, often following the suggestion of non-Yezidi writers.³⁹³ Naturally, the notion of the ancient origin of the Yezidi faith is a traditional one. The above-mentioned Yezidi origin myth traces the lineage of the Yezidis straight to the son of Adam. The words, “Our faith is old, very old,” is a sentence a researcher hears everywhere, from fellow travellers in shared taxis travelling to Yezidi villages to university-educated Yezidis. Similarly, most Yezidis will be ready to tell anyone interested that Yezidis used to be far more numerous in the past, and their numbers have been reduced dramatically due to repeated persecutions and forced conversions. Today, many will even mention that originally all Kurds were Yezidis, a notion that enjoys official patronage from the

³⁹³ See also Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 36, 40.

Kurdish state intent on building up a national myth. Of course, these statements do not lack a historical foundation, as persecutions are still vividly remembered, and many people, even the younger ones, have some idea when and where their tribe came from (Turkey, other parts of Iraq³⁹⁴) following a wave of massacres and forced conversions. However, there is a marked difference between communal memory regarding past, but more-or-less concrete events transmitted by word of mouth and the new Yezidi myth of an ancient and glorious past that is being constructed by educated Yezidis who are writing or reading articles about their people and religion. While simple people are satisfied with stressing the fact that their religion is very old or even the oldest one, and that they used to be far more numerous, educated Yezidis try to trace the lineage of their faith to the once glorious cultures and religions of the Middle East, the cradle of modern civilization, or what is more, they try to argue for a Yezidi origin for these cultures.

Yezidis are neither the only nor the first ones to try to trace their descent from the long gone empires of the Middle East. Claiming a glorious ancestry is a source of prestige in the region.³⁹⁵ In a clear instance of feedback, Christians have identified themselves with Assyrians since the nineteenth century, when European reserachers first put the theory of their Assyrian origin forward. Zoroastrian descent is popular among Kurds, while others struggle

³⁹⁴ Or even, surprisingly, Russia, as an older Dina woman, of the *pîr* class, originally from a Syrian village near the Iraqi border, claimed. According to her, her people originated in Russia, and came to what was once the Ottoman Empire only after a persecution finished off all the *pîrs* of her tribe. Another young Yezidi pointed out on a trip to the mountains just next to the Turkish border, around Kani Masi, that there used to be many Yezidi villages these less than a century ago, and many settlements still have the same names as Yezidi villages today more to the South. I had no way of checking the truth content of this statement. Yet again another Yezidi claimed that Hatra, once an important town of the Assyrians, well South of Mosul, used to be Yezidi until its inhabitants were moved north, to the Yezidi village of Kheter, a few kilometres north of Mosul. This is obviously a case of false etymological reasoning.

³⁹⁵ Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 36, 41.

to prove that Kurds are no other than the descendants of the Medes. A Sumerian origin is claimed by all and sundry in the region (including even some Turkish researchers). Among Yezidis, a disconcerting number of theories are circulating today. Some talk enthusiastically of the Assyrians, who have long been promoted as the putative grandfathers of the Yezidis by some Western researchers.³⁹⁶ Sumerians and the “ancient religions” of Mesopotamia are also often mentioned (boundaries between different deities and nations seem to have become somewhat obscure here). Others put great energy into discovering the Zoroastrian,³⁹⁷ or even “Mithraean” origins of their faith.³⁹⁸ A constructed past needs its own myths, and in the attempt to prove such relationships the Yezidi talent for creating myth seems to spring to life again. So, for example, I was told in all seriousness that there were ancient Assyrian pictograms on the wall of the Lalish sanctuary, only they were covered by white plaster so that Muslims would not become jealous. On another occasion I was told that the Assyrian rock carvings in the mountain side above Duhok represented the Seven Holy Angels of the Yezidis (actually each of the three panels showed *eight* figures.) The conviction that the legend of Mîr Mih, a young prince who went in search of eternal life, is in fact the same myth as the Gilgamesh epic was voiced by several people.

Some of the most ambitious reformers are not satisfied with merely tracing the origin of the Yezidis to ancient civilizations, but, conversely, set out to prove that these very civilizations were in fact Yezidis. The notion, that Yezidis are the “original Kurds,” in other

³⁹⁶ Some Assyrian Christians also embrace the notion of the Assyrian origin of the Yezidis, though it is hard to tell if they do so out of genuine conviction, or political consideration.

³⁹⁷ Zoroastrians have also been proposed by early researchers, like Rev. Empson (*The Cult of the Peacock Angel*, passim,) as the putative ancestors of the Yezidis.

³⁹⁸ Yezidis are not the only Kurdish heterodox group to seek links with pre-Islamic cults. The Ahl-i Haqq of Southern Kurdistan also “like to emphasize the endogeneity of their culture and spirituality, and minimise the Arabo-Islamic lore” thus securing themselves a respected space among the Muslim, but nationalist majority. (J.During, “A Critical Survey on Ahl-e Haqq Studies,” 111.)

words all Kurds were once Yezidis, has for some time enjoyed popularity not only among Yezidis, but - since the foundation of the Kurdish Autonomy in 1991, and the need for constructing a national myth - among Sunni Kurds as well.³⁹⁹ But some origin-searching Yezidis are no longer content with this and have lately tried to lay claim to more "originality."

One example of Yezidis having provided other religions with their mythology through the Sumerians has been mentioned above. Another one, rather unsettling for Western ears, is that of Aryan (*Arî*) ancestry. The notion of the Aryan ancestry of the Yezidis, or rather of Yezidi faith being the original and unadulterated Aryan religion, seems to have gained a surprising popularity.⁴⁰⁰ I have heard fleeting references to such ancestry several times (but interestingly, never from Muslim Kurds, though they belong to the group of Indo-European speakers too). The most coherent picture of Yezidis as Aryans, and Aryans as Yezidis was furnished by Arab Khidir. He gave a very good example of how traditional Yezidi mythology and bits and pieces from modern linguistic and historical writings⁴⁰¹ can be worked into a complex fabric to meet the demands of the new Yezidi self-image. He related that the Forty Men, well-known figures of Yezidi mythology, who travelled in the boat of Noah, became the forefathers of the Aryan people.⁴⁰² These Aryan people, who included, according to my informant, the

³⁹⁹ Allison, *Yezidi Oral Religion*, 38, 41. It must be noted that while Yezidis in the Sheikhan and the Duhok are enthusiastically embracing this notion, Sinjari Yezidis insist that they are a people apart, and since the fall of the Saddam regime has managed to infuriate their brethren by stubbornly refusing to be labelled Kurds.

⁴⁰⁰ I can only assume that Yezidis are unaware of the negative images this word, and especially casual references to Germans as Aryans, conjure up in those familiar with European history.

⁴⁰¹ Unfortunately I don't know what his sources were, though I managed to ascertain that he read Yezidi publication like *Lalish* and *Roj*.

⁴⁰² There are different opinions as to whom the Forty Men, or *Chil Mêr* to whom a high peak in the Sinjar is consecrated, exactly were. According to Feqir Haji they were companions of Sheikh Adi, but the *Baba Sheikh* also spoke of them in connection of the Flood. See also Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 100-101.

Sumerians, the Hurrians, the Guti, the Elami, the Mittanni and a host of other ancient peoples of the Middle East, were all Yezidis, that is monotheists, “Ezi” (or Êzi) being the name of God, whose unity and oneness they worshipped. Here my informant quoted the story of the destruction of the Tower of Babel. In his interpretation this tale referred to the fact that originally all these people were of the same religion, that is, worshipped God and God alone, but then were dispersed and lost their original faith.⁴⁰³ In this way an ancient myth combined with modern historiography leads to the birth of a new myth. The story of the Tower of Babel, adapted from one of the Semitic religions, is not rejected, but retold in a different way. With time, and the arrival of the Semi people and the Semitic religions the number of Yezidi Aryans dwindled, and today’s Kurdish Yezidis are their sole survivors. Other Aryans, who once peopled Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Caucasia, and Europe have strayed from the path of the righteous religion. (A sentiment calling to mind the view Islam takes on the “Religions of Book.”) He claimed that the name of these once glorious peoples survived among the tribe names of the Yezidis, thus proving that Yezidis were in fact the descendants of these groups, who had once played the role of protagonists at the dawn of our culture. Thus originally the Reshke of Sinjar were the Ashak (??), the Horka were the Horri, the Haweri were the Hurin, the Haltî were the Mittani, and the Smokan were the Sumeri. Using similar etymological reasoning, he pointed to the alleged fact that Sumerians used many Kurdish words, a further proof of common origins. Thus the name of Gilgamesh means “buffalo.” The name of Ibrahim Khalil, that is, of Abraham, a Yezidi himself, was in Kurdish as well, meaning the “brother of all” (*birayê hemî*).

Although in the course of my research I heard the most coherent and full exposition of the theory of Aryan ancestry from Arab Khidir, such ideas were presumably not all his own, but more likely they formed a part of the current literature on Yezidis, for similar opinions were voiced by others as well in the Sheikhan-Duhok region. While some contented themselves with an oblique

⁴⁰³ This interpretation of the Tower of Babel was in fact current during the Late Antiquity.

reference to their Aryan descent and their German relatives, others also spoke of the Mittanis, Hurrians and so on. During a debate on the question of mixed marriages, the fact that a Mittani king gave his daughter in marriage to the pharaoh of Egypt was mentioned as a proof that Yezidis had not always been opposed to marriage with non-Yezidis. An article published in the Lalish magazine dispensed with the Aryan origins, but repeated the Kurdish etymology of Ibrahim's name, trying to link the patriarch, an alleged sun-worshipper, to Yezidis, ancient sun-worshippers.

Such academic origin-searching can eventually become a part of everyday religious consciousness. The idea that Christians were originally Yezidis seems to have gained currency, no doubt partly due to the traditionally good relations between the two minorities. An even more eloquent example is the theory that Yezidism was originally a form of sun-worship – a very popular theory if one is to go by the content of Lalish magazine. So, for example, the guardian of a shrine in Khanke, Sheikh Deshti, explained to me that Bayazid Bastami, a well-known Sufi saint of the ninth century, was a Yezidi, and a Shemseni. The so-called Shemseni sheikhs trace their lineage to Sheikh Shems, a companion of Sheikh Adi, who lived much later than Bayazid Bastami. According to Sheikh Deshti's explanation, however, the tribe of the Shemsenis is in fact much older, for it means "sun-worshippers." In other words it refers to Yezidis, who were the ancient sun-worshippers of the region, and Bayazid Bastami, a sun worshipper, was one of them.

Though vestiges of sun worship can indeed be found in the Yezidi belief system, it is unlikely that a Yezidi a hundred years ago, for example, would have quite expressed himself in this way. At least, there is nothing in the accounts of past travellers to imply this. The notion of Shemsenis as ancient sun worshippers clearly shows an external influence, that is, how non-Yezidi writings on the origins of Yezidis eventually come to influence the self – perception of the Yezidis which - in its turn - reflects on the retelling of the mythology.

* * *

To sum it all up, while in the past it was the oral way of transmitting tradition that shaped Yezidi religion and gave it its peculiar characteristics, today one can witness the very opposite. The sud-

den appearance of literacy seems to be reshaping not only the way traditions are transmitted, through the vehicle of books and publications instead of the oral way, but the very content of these traditions themselves. While we witness a certain simplification of Yezidi lore, as many variants perceived as superfluous are eventually rejected, and the same happens to those myth that would be perceived as ridiculous or unfit to modern, "scientific thinking", new elements are taking their place. These elements are usually the result of research on Yezidis (generally carried out by Yezidis as well) and first appear in some publication and then go on to become a part of Yezidi lore. They aim at constructing (or reconstructing) Yezidi history and providing Yezidis with a "modern and scientific" religion.

The "modernization" or rewriting of Yezidi religious lore can offer a glimpse not only of the future but of the past of Yezidi religion as well. This is not the first time in history that Yezidis came to be influenced by the outside world. As researchers have pointed out, there are countless motifs in their mythology and religious poetry that can be traced to the religions that succeeded each other in the region. True, it is certain that outside influence has never been as penetrating as now, in the age of mass-communication. But we can still assume that what we witness today may serve as a model for how oral religions in the past managed to incorporate and adapt numerous motifs from other religions.

These days we can watch the mythmaking in the process in an accelerated way. Above we have seen several instances of how certain new elements can become incorporated into Yezidi mythology, and retold as part of the myth themselves. The idea that the *khirqe* or sacred shirt symbolizes the darkness surrounding the original Pearl is mentioned not as a possible explanation of a motif (taken from a learned article), but as part of the tradition. The destruction of the Tower of Babel is now retold as the end of the primeval monotheism originally confessed by all Aryans. The concept of Yezidis being sun-worshippers is apparently on its way to becoming a popular element, and the same is true about notions that Sheikh Adi's advent marked a new stage in the history of Yezidi religion and mythology. Many other examples could be mentioned.

While these motifs were probably originally offered as explanations or theories, they are no longer seen as mere hypotheses, attempts at interpreting the mythology or mythical history of

Yezidis, but now show all the characteristics of becoming integral part of the mythology. They are being recounted in exactly the same way as, say, the legend of a mythical ancestor, or the story of a *kebas*, or holy being connected with some sacred place, would be recounted by an older Yezidi.

It is not unreasonable to assume that the process of adopting new motifs and creating new myths, or rather modifying older myths and mythology according to new ideas and concepts coming from outside, is not altogether unlike what happened in earlier centuries, even if the vehicle of transmission, writing, is a relatively new one.

6 THE YEZIDI CREATION MYTH OF ADAM

The Yezidi myth of Adam's creation, his Fall and punishment might strike outsiders as an *ad hoc* patchwork of ill-fitting and sometimes senseless details. However, if analyzed with sufficient care and with regard of the religious history of the region, this myth proves to be a repository of the colorful mythological inheritance of the Middle East.

It has never been questioned that the Yezidi myth on the creation and fall of Adam ultimately derives from Biblical (or Quranic) sources. But the “quaint” details, at odds with the version known to all “peoples of the Book” were seen as the mere results of Yezidi imagination, both childishly overactive and theologically uninformed.⁴⁰⁴ Accordingly this myth has never received the attention it deserved as a living testimony of how long-forgotten myths of another era can live on in a new guise, bridging the centuries and weaving a fragile network between the cultures and religions that followed each other in the region.

ADAM'S CREATION AND FALL

As it is characteristic of oral tradition, the Adam myth has several different versions. The following version was collected by me in

⁴⁰⁴ As has been mentioned in the Introduction, the editor of Siouffi's article (“Notice sur des Yézidis,” 252), employs the term “puérilité” to describe the myths contained in the article, including the one to be described below, while Lescot speaks of the incoherence of the texts, their confusion and naïveté. (R. Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yezidis*, 54, 55, 60).

the course of my field-work from Feqir Haji, famous for his acquaintance with Yezidi sacred lore. This variant has so far not appeared in print, apart from a few sketchy and obscure references.⁴⁰⁵

The myth as told by Feqir Haji starts with a description of how God created the Seven Angels from his own light, as if lighting seven candles from one, then created the world, and then finally molded Adam's body from the four elements, which was first inert and lifeless as it had no soul.⁴⁰⁶ In order to revive it, one of the Seven Angels, Sheik Sin, entered Adam's body, albeit reluctantly,⁴⁰⁷ on the condition that he, as Adam, would live in Paradise, be guided by the Peacock Angel, and wear the *kehrqe*, or holy shirt.⁴⁰⁸

Sheikh Sin is from goodness. He was modeled after the Pearl [that hid God before creation]. He existed before men and women. Sheikh Sin was created from Goodness, and his Light was staying in the Divine Light... In heaven he was the king of true religion. On earth he gave power to the prophet of the Ummah.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁵ See below.

⁴⁰⁶ Both Jewish and Islamic traditions agree that Adam passed through a stage when his body was an immobile, inert body or golem. See L. N. B. Chipman, "Mythic aspects of the process of Adam's creation in Judaism and Islam," *Studia Islamica* 93 (2001): 17.

⁴⁰⁷ The idea that the soul was reluctant to enter the body can be found not only in Yezidi tradition, but also among Muslims. According to Muslim tradition the soul was loath to enter the body, for its orifices are cramped and narrow. "Allah forces it to enter saying 'as you entered unwillingly, so you shall come out unwillingly,'" Chipman, "Mythic Aspects," 19.

⁴⁰⁸ The myth below is a summary of what I was told during different interviews with Feqir Haji. His style of recounting the myth, in a way truly typical of oral traditions, would take up too much space to be literally quoted here. For a transcript and translation of the myth as told by Feqir Haji, see Appendix.

⁴⁰⁹ Ummah is a Muslim expression for the community of believers. Yezidi religious terminology reflects the influence of Islam, especially Sufism. These first lines Feqir Haji recited in verse form, they are probably part of a sacred hymn. It was followed by an explanation and mythical account in prose form.

The prophet of the Ummah was no other than Adam. The divine light and mysterious power [*sur*] of Melek [Angel] Sheikh Sin came from heaven into the forehead of Adam.

God created Adam's body between Saturday and Friday. After seven hundred years, a soul entered this body. This soul was an angel that came from heaven. The soul did not want to enter the body. The Seven Angels stood around the body and they said to this angel, "you have to enter into this body so that the world (mankind) may be established." This soul was the soul of Melek Sheikh Sin.

For seven hundred years the soul (Sheikh Sin) did not go into Adam, but then God and the Peacock Angel commanded he must go into it. Before the soul [or light, *sur*] of Melek Sheikh Sin entered Adam, it made conditions for entering the body and said to God and the Peacock Angel, "take me to Paradise then." They consented. He said "put the *khirqe* [the sacred black shirt of the Yezidi holy men, the *feqirs*] on me." They consented. He said, "and let the Peacock Angel be my imam and show my way around Paradise." They consented.

So finally Melek Sheik Sin consented. Then he brought his divine power and light, that is, is his *sur*, and put it into Adam's forehead and stayed in Adam's forehead. And they put the *khirqe* on Adam. The *khirqe* became Adam's cloth. And the Peacock Angel took Adam to Paradise and became his imam.

Adam stayed in Paradise for a hundred years. Then God said to the Peacock Angel, "go, and bring Adam out of Paradise, so that mankind may be established." The Peacock Angel went to Adam and asked him, "have you eaten from the wheat?"⁴¹⁰

⁴¹⁰ The Tree of Knowledge often appears in Islamic tradition as a tree of grain or wheat. See J. Knappert, *Islamic Legends, Histories of the Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 37; and B. Lewis, "An Ismaili Interpretation of the Fall of Adam," *BSOAS* 9.3 (1938): 692. Some rabbinic tradition also identified the Tree of Knowledge as wheat, see Zofja Ameisenowa, "The Tree of Life in Jewish Iconography," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2.4 (1939): 336; and Alexander Haggerty Krappe, "The Story of the Fall," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 43.3 (1927): 238. Interestingly, the only mention of tasting the forbidden fruit in Yezidi myth, which comes from the *Evening Prayer* 5, says, "Call to

Adam said, "no." The Peacock Angel said, "eat from it." Adam said, "I won't." So then the Peacock Angel used a trick. He became invisible and threw a grain of wheat into Adam's mouth, who ate it.⁴¹¹ Then his stomach became enlarged, and the Peacock Angel took him out of Paradise, for he was not supposed to dirty Paradise with his needs.

Then the Peacock Angel took away the *khirqe* of Adam, and he took away the divine light, the *sur*, in Adam's forehead. As long as Adam was in Paradise, he was like a great angel, for the divine light of Sheikh Melek Sin inside him was great. But after the Peacock Angel took away the *sur* from his forehead, and his *khirqe*, he became like the empty shell of a snail. He became a human.

A part of Feqir Haji's story has already been well known to Western scholarship since the publication of the alleged Yezidi sacred book, the *Mes'hefa Resh*, or *Black Book*, at the end of the nineteenth century. As has already been mentioned,⁴¹² this work was probably a forgery, written by a non-Yezidi. However, its content reflects genuine Yezidi mythological traditions. The myth of Adam as reported by the *Black Book* was then repeated by many authors on Yezidi religion, while the other variant escaped the attention of researchers.⁴¹³ The *Black Book* describes Adam's creation and his expulsion from Paradise as follows:

At this time the Lord came down to the Holy Land (al-Kuds), and commanded Gabriel to bring earth from the four corners of the world, earth, air, fire, and water. He created it and put in

mind Paradise and the Tree" (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 221) indicating that the two different versions existed side by side.

⁴¹¹ The story of Adam's expulsion from Paradise was also told by a *qemwal* during the religious ceremony accompanying the Parading of the Peacock (when the sacred image of a peacock, symbolizing the Peacock Angel, is taken around Yezidi villages). In his version it was also the Peacock Angel who threw the grain into the mouth of the unsuspecting Adam.

⁴¹² See chapters "Introduction" and "Origin of the Yezidis."

⁴¹³ It must be noted that no effort was made at interpreting even this published variant, or trying to place it in its religious-historical context.

it the spirit of his own power, and called it Adam. Then he commanded Gabriel to escort Adam into Paradise, and to tell him that he could eat from all the trees but not of wheat. Here Adam remained for a hundred years. Thereupon, Melek Ta'us asked God how Adam could multiply and have descendants if he were forbidden to eat of the grain. God answered, "I have put the whole matter into thy hands." Thereupon Melek Ta'us visited Adam and said, "Have you eaten of the grain?" He answered, "No, God forbade me." Melek Ta'us replied and said, "Eat of the grain and all shall go better with thee." Then Adam ate of the grain and immediately his belly was inflated. But Melek Ta'us drove him out of the garden, and leaving him, ascended into heaven. Now Adam was troubled because his belly was inflated, for he had no outlet. God therefore sent a bird to him which pecked at his anus and made an outlet, and Adam was relieved.⁴¹⁴

Tasting the Forbidden Grain

The two variants, Feqir Haji's version and the one in the *Black Book*, differ on a number of points (concerning the "incarceration" of Sheikh Sin in Adam's body), but both agree on a striking detail: Adam's expulsion from Paradise being part of a divine plan, and being brought about not by the enticement of an evil figure (the devil) wishing him ill, but by the intervention of a divine being, the Peacock Angel, acting at God's command. This part of the myth is well known among Yezidis today,⁴¹⁵ who like to add that Adam had to leave Paradise, because he needed to go to the toilet urgently, but he could not soil Paradise with such an unclean act. So the Peacock Angel caught hold of him and put him outside Paradise

⁴¹⁴ I. Joseph, "Yezidi Texts," *AJSLL* 25.3 (1909), 222-223.

⁴¹⁵ That is, it is well known among older Yezidis, and those who are interested in Yezidi traditions, as many younger Yezidis have only the vaguest notion of Yezidi lore.

and then a bird came to help Adam.⁴¹⁶ The most interesting motif, though, is that all Yezidis, at least today (starting with the *Baba Sheikh*, the “Yezidi Pope”), seem to agree that Adam’s expulsion from Paradise was a positive act and a part of the divine plan for mankind. How otherwise, they say, could men have multiplied and filled the earth, after all “in Paradise there is no marriage.”

This is certainly a novel and radically different, almost inverted, way of interpreting the Biblical story of Adam’s Fall. However, the Yezidis were not the first to give such a positive interpretation of Original Sin, seeing it as a part of a greater divine plan aimed at the good of mankind. A very similar “revolutionary” or, if we like, “antinomian” interpretation of the Biblical story of the Fall was one of the core-myths of Gnostic anthropogony in Late Antiquity.

Gnosticism borrowed extensively from Jewish scriptures and exegetical traditions, but reinterpreted the borrowed elements in a revolutionary way, in the spirit of the Gnostic revolt against the material world and its creator. One of the most salient examples of such a treatment is the Gnostic version of the creation and fate of Adam, the first human, which faithfully reflects the Gnostics’ view of the world and man’s place in it.

In the Gnostics’ understanding of the creation of the material world, the Demiurge, or the Gnostic creator, an aborted monster expelled from the *Pleroma*, or the World of Light, stole a part of this Light when he fell below, into the world of soul-less matter⁴¹⁷ from which he later created the material world. This Light is later imprisoned in man, a being created by the Evil Creator from matter.

⁴¹⁶ Others claim that after putting him outside Paradise, the Peacock Angel advised Adam to stick his own finger into his backside thereby creating an outlet for his pain.

⁴¹⁷ While some Gnostic sources speak about the theft of Light, others see the descent of Light into matter within the framework of a pre-cosmic fall. Such differences fit easily into Gnosticism that put the stress on its message, that is, on the idea that the human spirit is a particle of Light imprisoned in matter and waiting to be rescued, while the individual myth was simply seen as a vehicle of expressing this truth, and variations in the text and details of the different myths were far more acceptable than in text-based Judaism or Christianity.

Thus human soul (or rather “spirit,” *pneuma*) is a particle of Light imprisoned in matter, and despite the humble material origin of man’s body, man is still potentially superior to his creator due to the element of light in him. Human history is nothing more than a constant war between the world of Light and the Evil Archons of matter to regain or retain this Light. The Gnostic version of the Fall of Adam is embedded within this struggle.

According to the “classic” Gnostic myth,⁴¹⁸ after the demons of Darkness put together Adam’s body, their product remained inactive and immobile for a long time (an idea paralleled in Jewish Biblical exegesis)⁴¹⁹ until one of the powers of the Light World, Sophia, or Mother Wisdom, devised a plan to retrieve the part of light stolen by the evil Demiurge. To carry out this plan she convinced the Evil Creator to blow some of his spirit into Adam’s face, so the body would rise. When the Creator blew his spirit or power, the stolen Light, into Adam, Adam became possessed of a *pneuma*, a light soul. When the powers of Darkness realized that Adam was superior to them they became jealous and clothed him in a material body that served as a prison of forgetfulness and ignorance of his true being. Then they placed this mortal Adam in Paradise. The powers of Light, however, answered this trick with another of their own. An envoy of the Light, that appeared as an eagle,⁴²⁰ or in other versions took the body of the serpent,⁴²¹ convinced Adam and Eve to taste the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Acquaintance (or Gnosis), so that they would know themselves,

⁴¹⁸ On Gnostic creation theory and anthropology, see K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: the Nature and History of Gnosticism*; and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*.

For Gnostic accounts of Adam’s creation, see for example the following Nag Hammadi texts: *Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *On the Origin of the World*.

⁴¹⁹ See Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism*, chapter “Biblical Exegesis in Gnostic Literature,” 29-38.

⁴²⁰ *Apocryphon of John* II 23.27

⁴²¹ In most Gnostic accounts this envoy is Sophia, or Mother Wisdom, but for example in the *Testimony of Truth* 49 the serpent, the saving principle, symbolizes Christ.

that is know that their soul (spirit) came from the World of Light, but it was enslaved in its material form:

Then the female spiritual principle came (in) the snake, the instructor, and it taught (them) saying, "What did it (say to) you? Was it, 'From every tree in the garden (paradise) shall you eat; yet from (the tree) of recognising evil and good do not eat'?"... And the snake, the instructor, said, "With death you shall not die; for it was out of jealousy that it said this to you. Rather, your eyes shall open and you come to be like gods, recognizing evil and good." And the female instructing principle was taken away from the snake and she left it behind merely a thing of the earth.⁴²²

A very similar description is presented in another work, the *On the Origin of the World*,⁴²³ with the difference that there the envoy is a figure, called the Beast Zoe, who addresses Eve.⁴²⁴ It also gives a

⁴²² *Hypostasis of the Archons* 89.31-90.17, trans. and ed. B. Layton, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, vol. 1. (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 243. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* is a Gnostic interpretation of Genesis 1-6, dating probably from the 3rd century, and composed in Greek, in Egypt.

⁴²³ This Nag Hammadi text was composed in Greek, probably in Alexandria, and then translated into Coptic. Certain ideas in the tract appear to presuppose Manichaean theology. Thus it was probably not composed before the time Manichaeism started to have influence in Egypt, that is, the end of third century AD, but is presumably not later than early fourth century. See H.-G. Bethge, "Introduction," 13 (*On the Origin of the World*, trans. B. Layton, and H.-G. Bethge, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, vol. 2. NHS 21. Leiden, Brill: 1989.)

⁴²⁴ "What did God say to you? Was it 'Do not eat from the tree of acquaintance (*gnōsis*)'?" She said, "He said not only, 'Do not eat from it,' but, 'Do not touch it, lest you die.'" He said to her, "Do not be afraid. In death you shall not die. For he knows that when you eat from it, your intellect will become sober and you will come to be like gods, recognizing the difference that obtains between evil men and good ones. Indeed, it was in jealousy that he said this to you, so that you would not eat from it." *On the Origin of the World* 102-103, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, vol. 2. 73-5. See also *Apocryphon of John II* 21-24. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.30.7; 1.30.15; *The Testimony of Truth* 46.

detailed description of what happens after Eve follows the advice of the envoy of light:

Now Eve had confidence in the words of the instructor. She gazed at the tree and saw that it was beautiful and appetizing, and liked it; she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she gave some also to her husband, and he too ate it. Then their intellect became open. For when they had eaten, the light of acquaintance (gnōsis) had shone upon them. When they clothed themselves with shame, they knew that they were naked of acquaintance (gnōsis). When they became sober, they saw that they were naked and became enamored of one another. When they saw that the ones who had modelled them had the form of beasts, they loathed them: they were very aware.⁴²⁵

When the Demiurge and his rulers understood that the enlightened Adam had withdrawn from them, the creators of his body, they cast him and Eve out of Paradise and clothed them in the matter of oblivion, so they would forget all they had learnt when tasting the forbidden fruit of Gnosis.⁴²⁶ After this the history of humankind is one of constant struggle between the powers of Darkness and Light, and the trophy is the possession of man's soul, that is the Light imprisoned in matter.

⁴²⁵ *On the Origin of the World* 104, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*. 2-7, vol. 2. 73-5.

⁴²⁶ *On the Origin of the World* says: "now, when the rulers saw that Adam had entered into an alien state of acquaintance... they became troubled... 'behold Adam. He has come to be like one of us, so that he knows the difference between light and darkness... Come, let us expel him from paradise down to the land from which he was taken, so that henceforth he might not be able to recognize anything better than we can.'" *On the Origin of the World* 110-11, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*. 2-7, vol. 2. 75-77. See also *Apocryphon of John* II.24,7-8. This is a classical example of Gnostic interpretation of the Old Testament, and its Creator or God, whom they rejected as evil, or at least deficient. According to Gnostic logic it could not have been the perfect and good God, the Father of the Fullness, who denied mankind the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Such an act can only be ascribed to an inferior being, the Demiurge, or creator of the imperfect material world.

Such an inverted, positive interpretation of the Fall of Adam can be found among the Manichaeans as well, the spiritual heirs of the Gnostics, who also professed a radical dualism of two opposing principles, of Light and Darkness. Manichaeans were obviously familiar with the Gnostic version of tasting the forbidden fruit and incorporated it into their own system. Theodore bar Khoni, the eighth-ninth-century Nestorian bishop from Kashkar (Iraq), when describing the teachings of Mani, writes the following: "He says that Jesus the resplendent approached the innocent Adam and awoke him from the sleep of death... He says that Jesus made him rise and taste the the Tree of Life."⁴²⁷ References to tasting the fruit of the Tree of Life⁴²⁸ can also be found in the Coptic Manichaean Texts. One Coptic Psalm describes the fight between the powers of the Darkness and the envoy of Light for human soul in the following way:

When Adam and Eve were created and put in Paradise, who was it that ordered them "eat not of the tree" that they might not distinguish the evil from the good? Another fought against him and made them eat from the Tree.⁴²⁹

In the *Kephalaia*, or Chapters, Mani, the founder of the movement, describes how the living Paraclete "unveiled to me the mystery of the light and the darkness.... The mystery of the fashioning of Adam, the first man. He also informed me about the mystery of

⁴²⁷ *Liber Scholiorum* II. Mimra XI.59, in Théodore Bar Khoni, *Livre des Scolies (Liber Scholiorum)*, *Mimré VI-XI*, Recension de Séert, trad. and ed. Robert Hespel – René Draguet. CSCO vol. 432, *Scriptores Syri*, tomus 188. (Lovanii: Peeters, 1982), 237.

⁴²⁸ The Tree of Knowledge was also called the Tree of Life by the Gnostics and the Manichaeans, referring to the idea that knowledge, that is, knowing one's own nature and the nature of the created world, led to the salvation of the soul, that that is, real life in the Kingdom of Light.

⁴²⁹ Psalms to Jesus CCXLVIII, in *Manichaean Psalm-Book: Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection*, ed. and trans. L. R. Allberry (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), vol. II, 57.7-10.

the tree of knowledge, which Adam ate from, his eyes saw.”⁴³⁰ The Good Tree or Tree of Life became a common Manichaean symbol even in non-Christian regions, as attested in texts and even paintings from the Central Asian Turfan Basin.⁴³¹

Adam and His Digestion

There is another striking motif in the Yezidi myth of the Fall, namely the report on how the digestion of Adam started and his intestines and lower bodily openings were formed after he ate from the forbidden fruit. Adam had to leave Paradise in order not to dirty it with his bodily needs.

It is a little-known fact that the story of Adam’s eating from the forbidden wheat, which caused his stomach to inflate so he had to leave Paradise in order to answer nature’s call is current not only among Yezidis but the Muslims of the region as well. So, for example, the story of how Adam’s stomach became inflated after breaking the divine commandment, and how a bird came to open an outlet in his backside, is retold in Southern Turkey, in the Mardin region.⁴³² Diyarbakir Muslims also recount that Adam and Eve refused (or were forbidden) to eat anything while they were in Paradise, so they would not have to go to the toilet. After they broke the commandment, their stomachs blew up, they dirtied Paradise with their excrement, and as a result were expelled.⁴³³ A

⁴³⁰ *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* 15.2-12. The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary. NHMS Vol. 37, ed. and trans. Iain Gardner (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 20-21.

⁴³¹ See H.-J. Klimkeit, *Manichaean Art and Calligraphy*, Iconography of Religions 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1982).

⁴³² I owe this information to my colleague, Loqman Turgut, a PhD student at the Georg-August University of Göttingen, who informed me that his grandmother, from the district of Mardin, used to retell two variants of Adam’s expulsion from Paradise, a Quranic version, and the folk version expounded above.

⁴³³ My informant was a student from Diyarbakir, presently studying in France, who did not wish to divulge her name. Her reluctance to do so is explained by the second “shameful” part of the tale, according to which

young, university-educated Muslim woman from Duhok⁴³⁴ also repeated this hygienic argument when recounting the Quranic story. Though, as a direct question made it clear, she was aware that this explanation of natural needs wasn't to be found in the holy text, she saw it as an integral part of the story, or rather as a commonplace exegesis.

This motif, which obviously enjoys popularity in the region, is probably of a Gnostic background as well. The formation of intestines as a result of trespassing the divine command is mentioned by Irenaeus in his accounts of the Gnostics, where he repeats the version described above and adds that the Mother of Life (acting as the envoy of life here) put on the body of the snake to get near Adam, and in memory of this act of salvation, human intestines, which feed the body the same way Gnosis feeds the soul, resemble the form of a snake:

Some say that it was Wisdom (Sophia) herself who turned into a snake, and therefore she was against the maker of Adam, and introduced acquaintance into humankind... because of the position of our intestines, through which food is processed, and because of their shape, they say this shows the life-producing essence hidden within us in the form of a snake.²⁴³⁵

when Adam and Eve saw how they had dirtied Paradise, they tried to hide their excrement between their legs and under their armpits. This is why humans have hair in these places today.

⁴³⁴ She was originally from a mountain village near the Turkish border, from where her family moved to Duhok in the seventies, during the civil war between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish peshmerga.

⁴³⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.30.15 *Quidam enim ipsam Sophiam serpentem factam dicunt: quapropter et contrariam exstitisse factori Adae, et agnitionem hominibus immisisse.... Sed et propter positionem intestinorum nostrorum, per quae esca infertur, eo quod talem figuram habeant, ostendentem absconsam generatricem Serpentis figurae substantiam in nobis.* Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les Hérésies*, Livre I., ed. Adelin Rousseau et Louis Doutreleau, Sources Chrétiennes 264 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 384. As Layton (*Gnostic Scriptures*, 181.) points out, the reading of this, probably corrupted text is much debated, but its general meaning is held to be clear.

This notion was probably a further development of the idea that the reference in Gen. 3.21 to Adam and Eve putting on garments of skin refers to the first couple donning material bodies. Such a view, of course, cannot be called exclusively Gnostic. For example it was propagated by Philo, and by Origen of Alexandria, the influential Christian philosopher of the late second century.⁴³⁶ However, this exegesis did not enjoy much currency among mainstream Christian writers, and even less in the Syriac church,⁴³⁷ so a Gnostic source is more likely for this idea in Yezidi mythology than a Christian one.

Although both in the Yezidi and the Gnostic-Manichaean mythologies trespassing the divine command, and the consequent beginning of biological functioning (i.e. bodily existence), occurs at the instigation of God and through the intermediary of a Divine messenger, there are some significant differences as well. In Gnostic mythology this act is a revolt against the creator and the means of attaining Gnostic salvation through self-knowledge. In the more optimistic, and we could say prosaic, Yezidi religion, eating of the forbidden wheat, that is, expulsion from Paradise, is simply a precondition for the multiplication of human kind. These differences can, however, be explained easily by the differing ethos of dualistic Gnosticism and Yezidism, which has been termed an anti-dualistic religion by one scholar.⁴³⁸ In the latter, even the existence of evil, as

⁴³⁶ Philo, *De Allegoriis Legum* III. 69; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.40 "they received garments of skin at the time of the fall; i.e. bodies, since before the fall they were spiritual beings." A similar statement is found in Zohar 1.36b "Before the fall they were dressed in garments of light, after the fall in garments of skin, which were useful only for the body, not the soul" quoted in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* vol. 5 (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1947), 103; see also N. 53.

⁴³⁷ Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syrian Tradition," in *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology* (Hampshire: Variorum Reprints, 1992), 17. Furthermore, according to István Perczel (CEU, Budapest), the only occurrence of a similar form of the myth is in an Origenist writing in the Syriac *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*.

⁴³⁸ See G. Furlani, "L'antidualismo dei Yezidi," *Orientalia* 13 (1944): 237-67.

an autonomous being, is denied. As God says in the *Jelwa*, the other Yezidi “sacred book,” “I participate in all the affairs which those who are without call evil because their nature is not such as they approve.”⁴³⁹

Paradoxically it could have been the very difference between the Yezidi and Gnostic message which may have led to the adoption of this myth into Yezidi mythology. In Yezidism there is no need to rebel against the Creator or his creation, but Yezidis, who denied the existence of the devil (and consequently the possibility of his leading the first couple astray), may have adopted this story precisely in order to emphasize their point: Everything that happens is according to the plans of God, even apparently bad events form a part of this plan, so there is no need to “blaspheme” by assuming that there is another, malevolent power at play, in rivalry with God. A change in the message of the story, while preserving the structure, or plot, would therefore be understandable (just as the Gnostics constructed a new myth from the old Biblical tale), if it were indeed the Gnostic myth that came to be adopted into Yezidi mythology, either directly from Gnostic-Manichaean sources or through the intermediary of “popular” traditions which at one point incorporated the half-understood Gnostic myth as part of their lore.

OTHER TEXTS AND OTHER DETAILS

The case for a relationship between the Yezidi Adam myth and late antique literary traditions concerning Adam is certainly made stronger by further analysis of the “strange” details of Feqir Haji’s story regarding the role of Angel Sheikh Sin and the *ķbirqe* or holy shirt. These were not mentioned in the *Black Book* - and consequently never attracted academic attention. Despite this omission

⁴³⁹ Joseph, “Yezidi Texts,” 219. Frayha translates the manuscript in his possession in the following way: “All the phenomena which the outsiders reckon as evil I take part in. They call it thus because these things do not fulfill their designs.” Frayha, “New Yezidi Texts from Beled Sinjâr, ‘Iraq,” 23.

there are some sparse mentions of these details in reports on Yezidi beliefs. While Feqir Haji's version is the most complete, coherent and detailed account of the myth, these fragmentary versions strengthen our case for such a relationship.

One mention comes from the notes of N. Siouffi, the French vice-consul of Mosul in the 1880s. Siouffi, like many other Europeans, was interested in the exotic teachings of the Yezidis. It is worth noting that his, admittedly short, article on the faith and customs of the Yezidis appeared before the surfacing of the sacred books, so he clearly did not derive his knowledge from these two texts. In his article⁴⁴⁰ he writes that God created the body of Adam and asked his companions, the Seven Angels, which one was willing to move into the body: "Je me propose, continuat-il, de créer Adam, mais il faut pur cela qu'un de vous veuille s'incarner en lui." As none of them was ready to take on this role, God commanded that it should be Angel Sheikh Sin who must move into Adam: "C'est toi qui t'incarneras dans Adam á dit alors Dieu au Cheikh Sinn." Sheikh Sin first refused, saying that he had no wish to live in a being who, as well as his descendants, would be given to committing all kinds of sin. Finally, at the insistence of God, he accepted on the condition that God himself accompany him to the body and help him enter it, and that he might live in Paradise. "que tu donneras le paradis pour demuerer au premier homme dans lequel j'habiterai." God acquiesced and Sheikh Sin entered Adam's body, which came to life at once and entered Paradise. Then Adam was clothed in the robe (i.e. *khirqe*) and cap of the *feqirs*: "Pendant tout le séjour qu'il fit dans la demuerer de la félicité, Adam était vêtu et coiffé de la robe et du bonnet des fakirs." After his expulsion from Paradise, God took these clothes away.⁴⁴¹ Siouffi's account is rather

⁴⁴⁰ Siouffi, "Notice sur des Yézidis," *JA*, 252-68. The quotations below come from his account of Adam's creation on pages 256-57.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 256. It is worth noting that, while Siouffi has long been considered one of the most important sources on Yezidis (prior to late 20th century publications), his intriguing account of Adam's story never attracted any scholarly interest. This may exactly be due to its fragmentary nature, and the fact that the information it contains is seemingly alien and impenetrable for people schooled in "orthodox" European theology and philosophy.

elliptical although it clearly refers to the same basic myth as the one told by Feqir Haji.

A more detailed, though even less coherent account of the myth can be found in the unpublished doctoral thesis of Dr Murad Jasim, which contains a collection of Yezidi myths as told by Yezidi immigrants in Germany. One of the versions he collected from a certain Feqir Ali says:

The mud then by the order of God became a body of man but lacked spirit. Then, Angel Dardail entered the body of Adam and clapped both of his hands saying: 'Wake up Adam and put on your body the attire of angels.' Adam awoke and Dirdail clothed him in the attire of angels and the clothes were a *kharqa*, white headgear, a crown and a red belt.⁴⁴² Then Dirdail taught Adam the science of God and brought him to Paradise and said unto him: 'Now you are an angel, do not leave Paradise for if you do so, you shall become a man.'⁴⁴³

The story continues with the well known question of how Adam would be able to multiply while in Paradise and the Peacock Angel's trick. When Adam tried to return to heaven after having made a hole in his backside by rubbing his back against a tree and after relieving himself, the Peacock Angel stopped him saying:

Now you have become a human being and you have lost your angelic nature." Adam endeavored to once again to re-enter Paradise and Tawusi Melek halted him with the same explanation. Then Tawusi Melek stripped Adam of the angelic clothes and left him only with the pearl on his forehead, and then threw him away from the gates of paradise saying to him: "You have lost your access to heaven."⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² The white headgear and the red belt are the insignia of religious dignities (e.g. the *Baba Sheikh*, the *Peshimam*, the *Baba Chanush*, etc).

⁴⁴³ Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 290-91.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

The Divine Origin of Adam's Soul

The first point that should be noted is the angelic origin of Adam's soul, on which all three of my sources agree.⁴⁴⁵ As has been elaborated in the chapter on Yezidi religion, an angelic origin in Yezidi parlance refers to a divine origin, for the angels of Yezidi mythology are not creatures, as in orthodox Judaism, Christianity or Islam, but emanations, hypostases of the Godhead. As the *Mes'hefa Resh* or *Black Book* says "God... created six gods from his essence and from his light. Their creation took place as a man kindles a candle from another candle."⁴⁴⁶ Yezidi hymns also elaborate the identity between the Supreme Divine Being and His Angels in many different ways.⁴⁴⁷ As Feqir Haji himself said, "the Great Lord created the

⁴⁴⁵ Regarding the origin of Adam's soul, a similar tale was related by Shamdin, a Yezidi follower (*murid*) to Jasim Murad ("Sacred Poems," 293): "Then the seven angels made Adam out of the soil. The seven angels entered the body of Adam. Afterwards, six angels came out of the body and one remained in his forehead. And the six angels put Adam in the Paradise."

⁴⁴⁶ Ebied and Young, "An Account of the History and Rituals of the Yazidis of Mosul," 521. Joseph translates, "their creation was as one lights a light from another light." ("Yezidi Texts," 225.) The candle simile was repeated to me by Arab Khidir, a Yezidi from Beshiqe-Behzani devoted to collecting sacred texts, though it is possible that he was influenced by publications on Yezidis, which contain and elaborate on the *Black Book*. Another telling description was provided by Feqir Ali in Dr Jasim Murad's collection: "The universe was a total void in which the light of God was shining. God turned from His right side and prayed to himself and from His shoulder *Tawusi Melek*, i.e. Angel Gabrail, was born." Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 288.

⁴⁴⁷ For example "Sheikh Adi [the earthly incarnation of the Peacock Angel], *Tawusi Melek* [the Peacock Angel] and Sultan Ezi [God] are one; Don't you regard them as separate; They quickly make wishes come true." (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 392.) For further descriptions of the divine beings in terms that make clear their identity with the Creator, see the following hymns: *The Hymn of Faith*; *The Declaration of Faith*, *The Hymn of the Oceans* (in Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*); *Hymn of Faith*, *Hymn of Abu Baker* (in Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*). The Seven Angels are often referred to as "Heft (seven) Sur." *Sur* literally means mystery, but is usually translated by Yezidis as divine light (*nur*), divine power.

seven Angels from his own Light, from his own *sur*⁴⁴⁸ (i.e., divine power, mysterious essence.) In other words, all the sources claim that the soul of Adam, the father of humankind, is of divine origin, a part of the divine.⁴⁴⁹

It must be mentioned here that the Ahl-i Haqq, this Kurdish-speaking heterodox movement in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan with close ties to Yezidis, have a very similar myth on the divine origin of Adam's soul. According to the followers of this movement, when God created Adam he wanted to put a piece of his soul in Adam, however the piece of divine soul refused. Then God asked Angel Jibrail to hide in Adam's body and play on the tambour. The piece of soul became confused. He was attracted by the music and wanted to see where it came from. So he went closer and closer to Adam's body, until the music pulled him inside the body.⁴⁵⁰ A more complicated version of the Ahl-i Haqq myth on the creation

⁴⁴⁸ (*Rabul Alemî emir kîr heft miyaketa xolokandin ji sura xwe, ji nûra xwe.*) Also Sheik Deshti, a guardian of shrines in the Yezidi settlement of Khanke explained that "The Lord of the Universe made Seven Angels from his light, from his miraculous power." (*Rabul Alemî heft miyaketa ji nûra xwe, ji kerameta xwe çêkir.*)

⁴⁴⁹ Though the *qen'ls* published so far do not mention Sheikh Sin, or his *sur* entering Adam and giving him a soul, they do say that it was the *sur* or divine mystery, light, that animated Adam's lifeless body, after he was made to drink from the Cup of Mystery, or Cup of Love: "Our Lord, you are merciful. You brought Adam the cup of the Mystery [*sur*], He drank water from the cup, and came to life... Adam drank from that cup, The Mystery of the cup was agreeable to him, He reached the blessing of the cup, and became conscious." *The Hymn of the Creation of the World* 32, 34 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 189.) As regards the published versions of the *Black Book* (or *Mes'befa Resh*), although they do not make mention of an angel entering Adam's body to give him a thought, they still seem to reflect on the idea that Adam's soul was in some way of divine origin. Thus, for example, Joseph's translation says: "He created it and put in it the spirit of his own power, and called it Adam. Jospheh," (Joseph, "Yezidi Texts," 222.)

⁴⁵⁰ C. Bird, *Ezer lāzadās, ezer sóhaj* (A Thousand Sighs, a Thousand Revolts,) trans. Adam Szieberth (Budapest: General Press, 2005), 184.

of humans recounts that the Seven Angels⁴⁵¹ requested God to manifest himself in human form. But, the Divine Essence was like fire, and the material form would have been burnt. Therefore it was decided to place a soul in Adam's [previously created] body. When the Divine Essence manifests itself in a human body, the soul like water prevents it from being burnt.⁴⁵² The soul too refused to enter Adam's body, so the Haftan entered Adam's heart and began to play mystical music. When the soul heard this music, it went into a mystical trance and entered Adam's body. Then the Haftan came out and the soul remained imprisoned there."⁴⁵³

The idea of the divine origin of the human soul is definitely heretical and untenable in both Christianity and Islam (and Judaism) alike, nor is such a feature a part of the Zoroastrian mythology believed to descend from that same Western Iranian mythology from which the core of Yezidis religion probably hails.⁴⁵⁴ On the other hand, the notion of the divine origin of the human soul is one of the cornerstones of dualistic movements, be it Gnostic or Manichaean. These dualistic religions taught that the human soul was a parcel of the divine light imprisoned below in matter.⁴⁵⁵ The idea of the divinity of Adam's soul therefore is congruent with the radically "inverted" interpretation of the Fall of Adam where tasting the forbidden fruit becomes a positive act, benefiting mankind and the instigator of this act is a divine being.

⁴⁵¹ The *Haftan*, or Seven, who, just like the Yezidi Seven Angels, are the emanations of the Godhead. See Hamzeh'ee, *The Yaresan*, 70-71; and chapter "Yezidi Religion."

⁴⁵² Clearly, the Ahl-i Haqq myth subscribes to the three-part division of humans, consisting of material body, soul (psyche), and spirit (pneuma.) This view was generally accepted by late antique dualistic movements, which considered the spirit (pneuma) of divine origin, providing the link between humans and the world of Light.

⁴⁵³ Hamzeh'ee, *The Yaresan*, 73-74. Yezidi hymns also talk of how the soul refused to enter the body of Adam until the *shibab* and *def* (tambour and flute, the sacred Yezidi instruments) came down from above and started playing.

⁴⁵⁴ See Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 54-59; and P. Kreyenbroek, "Mithra and Ahreman," 57-79.

⁴⁵⁵ See chapter 2 "Religious Movements in the Middle East."

The fact that this *sur* representing the divine essence of Angel Sheikh Sin in Adam's body, acting as his soul, can be found on the forehead of Adam, shining as a drop of light,⁴⁵⁶ is an exciting example of how mythological motifs of different origin could merge and produce new forms of myth in the Middle East. The motif of the light showing on the forehead probably goes back to the speculations on the notion of the *nūr Muhammad*, or "the light of Muhammad," the "primordial luminous substance" of Muhammad, which shone as a blaze of light on the forehead of his forebears from Adam on down to Muhammad's parents.⁴⁵⁷ (Note, however, that in this case there can be no mention of divine essence, as Muhammad, though the first among the prophets, is definitely a human, and the light is merely an exalted symbol of his prophethood, and of his special position vis-à-vis God).

From literary theological speculations on the "light of Muhammad," the motif of the light in the forehead seems to have

⁴⁵⁶ Feqir Haji, as well as many of my other informants, usually explained *sur* as *nūr*, that is, light.

⁴⁵⁷ Already early Muslim sources mention how the spirit of Muhammad, "forming part of the spermatic substance of his ancestors existed in the world as an integral prophetic entity before his birth." (U. Rubin, "Pre-existence and light: Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muhammad," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 67.) This luminous prophetic substance, represented by the light shining on the forehead of its bearer, was first placed in the loins of Adam, from where it passed on to Eve when she conceived with Seth, then to Seth, and so on, until it reached Muhammad. Several of Muhammad's biographers even recount stories regarding how the light shining on the forehead of Abdullah, father of Muhammad, attracted women, until he lost it to Amina at the conception of Muhammad. See U. Rubin, "Pre-existence and light: *Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muhammad*," 62-117; and "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 46-47. Rubin does not deal with the origins of this concept, in my opinion, however, it is possible that it had a Zoroastrian background. See M. Eliade, "Spirit, Light and Seed," *History of Religions* 11.1 (1971), 13-16 on the *xvarenah* (*xvarnah*) the fiery substance (light, glory) of divine beings, giving a radiant aspect to Zoroaster and his mother. In *Yasht* 10.127 dedicated to Mithra, it is stated that from the forehead of the god "goes forth the flaming fire that is the strong royal *xvarenah*." (Eliade, "Spirit," 14.)

gradually spread to the folktales and the oral (often unorthodox) religion of the Middle East. An Islamic folk legend on Ismail, for example, recounts how: “He had the luminous disc of divine light on his forehead, for God had decreed that he would be the first prophet of the Arabian nation”⁴⁵⁸ An Ahl-i Haqq holy text, on the creation of Adam, explains how the soul first refused to enter the body of Adam until “Jibra’il fixed the light of Muhammad the Prophet in Adam’s forehead and ordered the soul to enter his body, which it refused to do until it noticed the light of that Saint.”⁴⁵⁹ Divine light on the forehead obviously also became a motif of non-religious folktales as well. So for example, one of my sources, when asked about the meaning of the *sur*, told me that it was the light shining in the forehead of the Yezidi Angels (yet another indication that Adam, while in Paradise, was in fact a divine Angel). Then he added that he knew this, because in the tales told by his aunt when he was a child, the heroes were described as beings with light shining in their forehead, looking just like the Yezidi Angels.⁴⁶⁰

The *Khirqe* of Adam

There is one more element that seems incongruent, or at least surprising at first sight: the *khirqe* (and the cap) of *feqirs* that Melek Sheikh Sin demanded to wear as a condition for entering the body of Adam, and which were stripped off Adam after his expulsion in Feqir Haji’s story. Siouffi also mentions the robe and the cap of the *feqirs* as the clothing of Adam while in Paradise. The third version talks of the attire of the angels, which is described as a *khirqe* once again, plus white headgear and a red belt. These latter two are also

⁴⁵⁸ Knappert, *Islamic legends*, 78.

⁴⁵⁹ Ivanow, *The Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*, 107.

⁴⁶⁰ My source was a Yezidi from Behzani, but he claimed that the folk tales recounted by his aunt were not specifically Yezidi folk tales. It has also been mentioned in the chapter on “Yezidi Religion” how Mehwer, the mother of Yezid bin Muawiya had the *sur* of Yezid shining on her forehead as long as he was pregnant with Yezid.

sacred clothes though worn not by the *feqirs*, but by religious leaders today.

Khirqe (or *khirka*) is originally a Sufi term, one of the legacies of Sufi influence on Yezidis. Literally meaning “rag,” “tattered piece of cloth,” it denotes the rough cloak of the Sufis, followers of the mystical branch of Islam.⁴⁶¹ Among the Yezidis *khirqe* is the black shirt of the *feqirs*, the order of Yezidi holy men. Its reputation is so great that no one can strike someone wearing a *khirqe* however great the provocation may be. The word *khirqe*, and of course the Yezidi garment itself, may be of Sufi origin but the story of Adam wearing such a sacred shirt, or the attire of the angels, in Paradise, before his expulsion certainly is not.⁴⁶² Are there any parallels to such motifs in late antique mythology? At this point we can no longer confine our search for the roots of the Adam myth to the realm of Gnosticism or dualistic movements. We are dealing here with one of the many motifs that were held in common by many religious movements in the Late Hellenistic period.

Judaism

The garment of Adam before his Fall and the complex symbolism it is linked with falls into the category of motifs shared by various movements that were rooted (at least partially) in Judaism. This is what some scholars dub the “theology of clothing” or the “meta-

⁴⁶¹ For a more detailed analysis of both the Sufi and Yezidi *khirqe*, see the next chapter. The accepted transliteration of the Sufi garment is *khirka* (or *khirqa*), while the Yezidi garment appears as *khirqe*. These are the spellings I will use when referring to the Yezidi and Sufi garment respectively.

⁴⁶² Some Sufi traditions hold that the *khirka* was derived from the “prototypical custom worn by Adam and Eve when they were placed upon on earth,” after the Fall. See Jamal J. Elias, “The Sufi Robe (*Khirqā*) as a Vehicle of Spiritual Authority,” in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 277 and 278. However, this refers to Adam’s state *after*, and not *before* the Fall, and it refers to the fact that Adam was the first in the chain of prophets, and not to his angelic status. In fact, some Sufi writers claim that Adam adopted wearing black wool on the advice on the archangel Gabriel as a symbol of his baseness. (Elias, “The Sufi Robe,” 281.)

phor of garment.”⁴⁶³ The notion of an angelic robe or heavenly garment worn by Adam (and Eve) before the Fall was a *leit-motif* of Jewish apocalyptic tradition, from where it passed on to some schools of orthodox Christian thought. It probably originated with certain interpretations of Genesis 3.21 on the “garments of skin” the Lord made for Adam and Eve. “The older Haggadah speaks of ‘garment of Light,’ which the first pair wore before the fall of man, as bestowed upon them by God in accordance with Gen. 3.21, where עור (skin) is explained as though it were written אור (light). This verse is said to refer to the state before the fall.”⁴⁶⁴ Both the Babylonian and Palestinian Targums (Aramaic translations of the Bible) speak of garments of glory (*lbūšîn d-îqâr*), while the *Genesis Rabbah* (or *Bereshit Rabbah*) 20.12, a *midrash* comprising a collection of ancient rabbinical homiletical interpretations of the book of Genesis, tells how Rabbi Meir was said to possess a manuscript reading the word “light” instead of “skin.”⁴⁶⁵ The *Targum* of Pseudo-Jonathan for Gen. 3, 7, talking of Adam finding himself naked, refers to the loss by Adam of a purple or onyx-coloured robe.⁴⁶⁶ The midrash, *Pirke of Rabbi Eliezer* also speak of shining robes.⁴⁶⁷

Some traditions connected this wonderful garment of Light worn by Adam in Paradise with the shining garments of the angels. The idea of Adam wearing a robe similar to that of the Angels (just as in one of the versions of the Yezidi myth recounted above) is traced by some researchers to the words of Psalm 8. 6: “You cre-

⁴⁶³ On this topic, see Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, especially chapters “XI. Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” 11- 35 and “IV. Jewish Tradition in Syriac Sources,” 212-232; idem, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), chapter “Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac,” 80-108; and B. Murdoch, “The Garment of Paradise: A Note on the *Wiener Genesis* and the *Aneenge*,” *Euphorian* 61 (1967): 375-82.

⁴⁶⁴ Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews* 5, 97, note 69. See also p. 103, note 96.

⁴⁶⁵ Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 14; Murdoch, “Garment of Paradise,” 376.

⁴⁶⁶ Murdoch, “Garment of Paradise,” 376.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.; and R.Graves and R. Patai, *Héber mítoszok* (Hebrew myths: The book of Genesis), trans. István Terényi (Szeged: Szukits, 1994), 70.

ated men a little less than the angels, and in honour and glory did you clothe him,” while some writings describe angels as wearing robes of light. For example, in the Syriac translation of the Bible, the Peshitta text of the *Book of Daniel*,⁴⁶⁸ Daniel’s angelic interlocutor also wears “garments of Glory.” The “garment of Glory/Light” was seen as a symbol of Adam’s high status before the Fall, when he was equal to the angels. “For indeed human beings are not created but to be like angels, permanently to maintain pure and righteous lives.”⁴⁶⁹

Christianity

Though later Jewish tradition preferred interpreting the garment as one provided by God after the Fall, the earlier notion was adopted by Christian, especially Syriac-speaking Christian literary tradition that liked to dwell on the robe of Glory or “robe of light” lost by Adam, (with the difference that the robe of Glory was recovered through the sacrifice of Christ and is put on again by Christians at baptism):⁴⁷⁰

With radiance and glory was Adam clothed at the beginning, before he sinned; the Evil one was envious, led Eve astray and had Adam rejected from Paradise: he was then covered by fig leaves in place of the glory with which he had been clothed.⁴⁷¹

The vehicle of transmission might have been the legendary cycle that grew up around the figures of Adam and Eve (the so called *Adam Books*) and enjoyed great popularity both in Jewish and Christian (and probably also Gnostic) circles. Adam’s “robe of

⁴⁶⁸ Daniel 10.5 and 12.7, see Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” 223.

⁴⁶⁹ *I Enoch* 69,11, trans. E. Isaac, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 48.. For a more detailed treatment of angelic clothing in Jewish literature, see the next chapter.

⁴⁷⁰ On the recovery of the “robe of light,” see the next chapter.

⁴⁷¹ Maronite liturgical text of uncertain date, quoted in Brock, “Jewish Tradition in Syriac Sources,” p. 222

Glory” makes a frequent appearance in the extant Adam-books, particularly those of the Near and Middle East.⁴⁷² In the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Moses* (the Greek version of the *Life of Adam and Eve*) that speaks of the tribulations of the first human pair, Eve describes her trespass of the divine command to her son, Seth:

And at that very moment my eyes were opened and I knew that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed. And I wept saying: “Why have you done this to me, that I have been estranged from my glory with which I was clothed.”⁴⁷³

The *Adam Books* in their turn influenced Syriac Christian literature. The most eloquent example is the famous *Cave of Treasures*, a Syriac collection of Biblical legends⁴⁷⁴ that provides an account of Adam’s creation and fall in the following way:

Adam was created in Jerusalem. There he was arrayed in the apparel of sovereignty, and there was the crown of glory set upon his head, there was he made king, and priest and prophet.⁴⁷⁵

We can form some idea as to what this royal robe and crown looked like on the basis of the passage that says:

When the angels saw Adam’s glorious appearance they were greatly moved by the beauty thereof. For they saw the image of his face burning with glorious splendour like the orb of the

⁴⁷² Ibid. 376, note 15.

⁴⁷³ *Apocalypse of Moses* 20, trans. M. D. Johnson, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol 2. ed. J. H. Charlesworth, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 281.

⁴⁷⁴ The *Cave of Treasures* is believed to have been written in Sassanid Mesopotamia, probably at the Nestorian school of Nisibis in the fifth or sixth century AD. However, it was probably based on an earlier work with a similar character and title.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, trans. Wallis E. A. Budge (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927), 53.

sun, and the light of his eyes was like the light of the sun, and the image of his body was like unto the sparkling of crystal.”⁴⁷⁶

Christian tradition also continued the Jewish concept that Adam in this luminous state must have resembled, or been just like the angels.⁴⁷⁷ Accordingly, luminous garments like that of Adam were also worn by angels (just as in one of the versions of the Yezidi myth recounted above). This is made clear by the story of the rebellious Satan, the prince of the lower order of angels in the *Cave of Treasures*, when he and his followers are cast out of heaven:

The apparel of their glorious state was stripped off them. And his name was called... “Daiwa” because he lost the apparel of his glory. And behold, from that time until the present day, he and all his hosts have stripped of their apparel, and they go naked and have horrible faces.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁷⁷ This is, for example, also expressed by the so-called *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*. This Christian pseudepigraphical work belonging to the Adam-legends cycle, found in Ethiopic and Arabic, dates from the fifth century AD at the earliest, and tells the story and tribulations of Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Paradise. In this work, God reminds Adam of his earlier state as a luminous angel: “Then God said to Adam, ‘While you were under My command and were a bright angel.’” (*First Book of Adam and Eve* 10.5, translated by Dr. S. C. Malan, in *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, ed. R. H. Plat (New York, World Publishing Company, 1927), (Modernized version: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/398/398.txt>)) The same text refers to Adam being filled with “bright light,” to the angels as “angels of light,” and talks about the clothing of Adam and Eve before the Fall as a “garment of Light and glory.”

⁴⁷⁸ Budge, *Cave of Treasures*, 56. The loss of Satan’s glorious apparel is also already foreshadowed in Jewish literature, for example *The Book of Adam and Eve* xii 1-2 (a version of the *Apocalypse of Moses*) speaks of being expelled from his glory: “And with a heavy sigh, the devil spoke: ‘O Adam! all my hostility, envy, and sorrow is for thee, since it is for thee that I have been expelled from my glory, which I possessed in the heavens in the midst of the angels and for thee was I cast out in the earth.’” (<http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/adamnev.htm>)

Adam, as we know, fared hardly better. In a twist on the text of the Genesis, after Eve tasted the forbidden fruit “immediately she found herself stripped naked... and when he (Adam) had eaten he also became naked.”⁴⁷⁹ In other words, they lost their luminous garment and crown. A similar statement on the loss of the garment of Light can be found in the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*. While Adam and Eve are looking for skins to cover their cold and bruised bodies, as instructed by God, they meet Satan who, while attempting to steal and destroy the skins, was bound to the spot and disclosed in his hideous form by God:

Then came the Word of God to Adam and Eve, and said to them, “This is he who was hidden in the serpent, and who deceived you, and stripped you of the garment of Light and glory in which you were. This is he who promised you majesty and divinity. Where, then, is the beauty that was on him? Where is his divinity? Where is his light? Where is the glory that rested on him? Now his figure is hideous; he is become abominable among angels; and he has come to be called Satan.”⁴⁸⁰

However, as shall be seen in the next chapter, in keeping with the Christian theme of Old Adam – New Adam, Adam recovers his robe of Glory when the sacrifice of Christ takes away his sin and he becomes baptized in the water and blood that flowed from Christ’s side:

The blood and the water [from the wound in Christ’s side] ran down into the mouth of Adam, and Adam was redeemed, and put on a garment of glory.⁴⁸¹

The motif of the loss of glory, or loss of the garment of Light, by Adam and Eve became very popular in Christian literature, especially in the Syriac-speaking Church. For example, one of the most emblematic representatives of Syriac Christianity, Ephrem of Syria, liked to refer to “the robe of Glory that was stolen away among the

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁸⁰ *First Book of Adam and Eve*, 51, in *Forgotten Books of Eden*, 34.

⁴⁸¹ Budge, *Cave of Treasures*, 231-32.

trees have you put on in the baptismal water”⁴⁸² and often spoke of the first couple as “clothed in glory.”

Because of that glory with which they were wrapped they felt no shame; but when this was taken away from them after their transgression of the commandment, they felt shame because they have been stripped.⁴⁸³

And when they transgressed the commandment the garment of glory, which had been like a veil for their nakedness, was removed and taken away from them and they [then] knew and understood whence they had fallen.⁴⁸⁴

This description persisted in the writing of the Syrian, Greek, Coptic and Arabic exegetes⁴⁸⁵ and was incorporated into Armenian liturgy, where it appears in the hymn sung while the priest is vesting.⁴⁸⁶ As late as the thirteenth century Solomon of Bosra (or Basra) writes in his *Book of the Bee*, a compilation of Biblical legends: “Adam and Eve were stripped of the fair glory and the glorious light of purity with which they had been clothed.”⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸² Ephrem, *H. Virg.* XVI.9, quoted in Brock, “Jewish Tradition in Syriac Sources,” 221-23.

⁴⁸³ Ephrem, *Comm. Gen.* (ed. R. M. Tonneau), II.14, quoted in Brock “Clothing Metaphors,” 23.

⁴⁸⁴ *The Armenian Commenta on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* [p. 25], trans. Edward. G. Mathews, Jr. CSCO vol. 573, Scrip. Armen. tom. 24 (Lovanii: Peeters, 1998), 27.

⁴⁸⁵ Murdoch, “Garment of Paradise,” 377, see also note 19. The list of later authors making use of this motif include Johannes Chrysostomos; the ninth-century Jacobite bishop Moses bar Kepha from Balad; Sahdona (Martyrius), a Nestorian exegetes from Hakkari; the ninth-century Syrian exegetes Ishodad of Merv; The idea is also found in an anonymous Nestorian commentary on Genesis of the twelfth century. The legend was less “popular” in the West, but it can still be found both in exegetical literature, apocryphal readings, and medieval German poems, See Murdoch, *passim*.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.* note 20. The printed form of this liturgy is dated to the fourteenth century, but as Murdoch points out the Armenian Church has had an established liturgy since the fifth.

⁴⁸⁷ Solomon of Bosra, *Book of the Bee* 16, trans. and ed. W. Budge (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1886), 21.

Gnostics

Gnostics, in all probability influenced by Jewish exegesis, also used the motif of Adam's garment of Light in building up their mythology. However, in their understanding this garment, often described as a kind of luminosity covering Adam's body, refers to Gnosis, or self-knowledge. In a Gnostic twist on Genesis 2.7, the *Apocryphon of John* describes, how the heavenly powers tricked the chief Archon, Sophia's fallen offspring, into breathing the divine power, or Light, he had stolen from the Realm of Light, into Adam's inert body, which then gains strength (i.e., comes to consciousness) and becomes luminous:

The Mother wanted to retrieve the power which she had given to the chief Ruler... [the heavenly powers helping her] said to Yaltabaoth [the chief archon,] "Blow into his [Adam's] face something of your spirit and his body will arise." And he blew into his face the spirit which is the power of his Mother; he did not know (this), for he exists in ignorance. And the power of the mother went out of Yaltabaoth into the psychic body [of Adam].... The body moved and gained strength, and it was luminous... [the evil powers] recognized that he was luminous, and that he could think better than they.⁴⁸⁸

In the *Apocalypse of Adam*⁴⁸⁹ the revelation of Adam to his son Seth starts with the description of his primordial state, when he and

⁴⁸⁸ *Apocryphon of John* II.19,15-20,7, trans. F. Wisse and M. Waldstein, ed. in *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV, 1 with BG 8502,2* (hereafter *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*), NHMS 33. (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 113-17.

⁴⁸⁹ The *Apocalypse of Adam* is a non-Christian Gnostic work, albeit showing a close dependence on Jewish apocalyptic tradition. In MacRae's view it may represent a transitional stage in an evolution from Jewish to Gnostic apocalyptic, and is thus very early, dating from the first or second century AD. See MacRae, *Introduction to Apocalypse of Adam*, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4* (hereafter *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI*), NHS 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 152. Charlesworth, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the *Apocalypse*

Eve were still like the beings of the Realm of Light, the eternal angels, and went about in glory:

When god had created me out of earth along with Eve, your mother, I went about with her in a glory that she had seen in the aeon from which we had come forth... And we resembled the great eternal angels, for we were higher than the god who had created us and the powers with him, whom we did not know.⁴⁹⁰

The loss of this luminous covering is not due to the tasting of the forbidden fruit, but to the jealousy of the Evil Ruler (and his angels), who devises scheme after scheme to deprive Adam of his Light. In the first attempt a body is fashioned so as to enclose luminous Adam in it:

[The evil powers of Matter]...recognized that he (Adam) was luminous, and that he could think better than they, and that he was free from wickedness, they took him and threw him into the lowest region of all matter...⁴⁹¹ This is the tomb of the newly-formed body with which the robbers had clothed the man, the bond of forgetfulness; and he became a mortal man.⁴⁹²

Then Adam is placed in Paradise where the episode of the forbidden fruit of Gnosis occurs. In retribution the Evil Ruler "cast them [Adam and Eve] out of Paradise, and he clothed them in gloomy darkness"⁴⁹³ to make them lose their Gnosis, knowledge of origin and become obedient to him again. This is the final loss of Adam's luminous covering. The Church Father Irenaeus, speaking about

should be dated to the fourth century and its theology resembles Epiphanius' description of the Archontics. The teachings of the Archontics originated in Palestine, from where it was carried to (greater and lesser) Armenia. See Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigraphia* vol. 1, 708.

⁴⁹⁰ *Apocalypse of Adam* 64,6-19, trans. G. MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI*, 155.

⁴⁹¹ *Apocryphon of John* II 20.6-9, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 117.

⁴⁹² *Apocryphon of John* II 21.10-13, *ibid.*, 123.

⁴⁹³ *Apocryphon of John* II 24. 7, *ibid.*, 137. Layton translates "obscure darkness" (*Gnostic Scriptures*, 46).

the Gnostics, reports that Adam and Eve used to have shining forms, their material bodies being formed only after the expulsion:

Previously Adam and Eve had light, shining bodies, like spiritual bodies, as they had first been formed, but when they came hither, these changed into darker, fatter and more sluggish ones.⁴⁹⁴

Finally, references to Adam's "garments of light" are frequent in the sacred texts of the Mandaean, the present-day descendants of late antique Gnosticism.⁴⁹⁵

There seem to be enough parallels between the *khirqe* worn and lost by the Yezidi Adam and the garment of Light that Adam wore before his Fall in Judaeo-Christian and related traditions to justify the conclusion that we are facing the same myth. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, Adam, when first created, wore a garment of Light, or robe of glory that symbolized his high spiritual status before the Fall. According to the testimony of works like the Syriac Cave of Treasures and perhaps the Gnostic Apocalypse of Adam, similar garments of light were worn by the angels as well. After trespassing God's commandment, Adam lost his garment of light, had to leave Paradise, and fell from his high moral and spiritual status to a much lower one. In the Yezidi myth, Adam, while in Paradise, wears the *khirqe*, which is mentioned by one source as the attire not of the *feqirs*, but of the angels. Some Yezidi hymns indeed talk of the Seven Great Angels wearing *khirqes*, or even identify the Angels with the *khirqes*, by describing their creation, or rather emanation, as the creation of *khirqes*.⁴⁹⁶ Furthermore, Angel

⁴⁹⁴ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereres* 1.30.9 "Adam autem et Evam prius quidem habuisse levia et clara et velut spiritualia corpora, quemadmodum et plasmati sunt; venientes autem huc, demutasse in obscurius, et pinguius, et pigrius." Irénée, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 1, tome 2, 374.

⁴⁹⁵ For example, in the Ginza Rabba. See Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 108, 15: 243, 21f.: 261, 7: 488, 12: 489, 31; referred to in Murdoch, "The Garment," 376.

⁴⁹⁶ *Hymn of Qere Ferqan*, 9-10: "My King calls out loudly: The Pearl had waves, it became the Ocean; There was activity and the number of *khirqes* became four; For 90,000 years he hid them in the Lamp; But now he made manifest the four Friends. The four wise Friends were made

Sheik Sin would not enter Adam's body unless as Adam he could don the *khirqe*, thus preserving his position as an Angel. And when Adam leaves Paradise he has to strip off his *khirqe*, loosing his angelic status and becoming a mere human. If Adam's *khirqe* indeed goes back to the garment of Light or robe of Glory of late antique mythology, this would also explain the curious reference to the *khirqe* in the Yezidi hymns as the "luminous or shining (*nûranî*) black *khirqe*,"⁴⁹⁷ and why some hymns talk of the light that emanated from the (black) *khirqe*⁴⁹⁸ which would otherwise be a contradiction of terms.

Of course, the notion that Adam and Eve were clad in clothes of light was not unknown to Muslim tradition, after all this tradition inherited a great deal from Jewish, Christian, especially Syriac Christian sources. The Quran (Sura 7.27) mentions merely that the snake made Adam and Eve lose their robes and appear naked, but does not elaborate on the nature of the robe:

O children of Adam, do not let the devil dupe you as he did when he caused the eviction of your parents from Paradise, and the removal of their garments to expose their bodies.

manifest; Born of the Origin: Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin, Nasirdin and Sejadin; They set this world in motion." (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 95-6), cf. *Hymn of the Ocean* 13-16 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 205) describing the creation of the four Companions (Great Angels). Also, see the next chapter.

⁴⁹⁷ *The Hymn of Faith* 16 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 85), *Hymn of Qere Ferqan* 24 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98).

⁴⁹⁸ *The Hymn of Qere Ferqan* 25-6: "They put on that Mystery, that *khirqe*, They declared their faith in Sultan Ezi, By their light things were revealed before dawn. Before dawn things were revealed by their light. Earth and heaven shuddered, The (holy) men sat down in unity. Together they discussed the true path of Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin." (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98.) Yezidi tradition holds that the black *khirqe* and *kof* ("crown", in this case a conical hat) worn by Sheikh Adi, a divine incarnation and the central figure of Yezidi religious history, used to emanate light. (Tradition also maintains that both the *khirqe* and *kof* worn by the leader of the *feqirs* during the sacred Evening Dance in the Central Sanctuary of Lalish used to belong to Sheikh Adi. They are both made from a black, furry material.)

Interestingly, while there is some consciousness of a lost garment, going back to the interpretation of Gen. 3.21 as losing garments of Light instead of getting garments of skin, the garment in the Quran is not qualified in any way, and certainly not as a garment of Light or Glory, a symbol of Adam's elevated state. Rather, the stress seems to be on the "after the sin" state of Adam, his shame at becoming naked.

The tradition of the robe of light, however, does come up in some Muslim works. Al-Ya'qūbi, a ninth-century Muslim historian writes that Adam and Eve were clad in "clothes of light" in Paradise.⁴⁹⁹ Wahb bin Munabbih of Yemen, a prolific early eighth-century narrator of legends on prophetic figures, mostly drawn from Jewish lore though presented in an Islamic guise,⁵⁰⁰ relates that Allah coated Adam with a very beautiful nail-like substance that shone like the sun. After Adam transgressed God's commandment, this coating was reduced, surviving only on his fingertips.⁵⁰¹ This latter tradition seems to reflect direct Jewish influence. At least the *Genesis Rabbah* compares the smooth surface of the shining robe of Adam and Eve to the smoothness of fingernails,⁵⁰² while the later *Pirqe of Rabbi Eliezer* states:

What was the garment of Adam? Skin of fingernail and the Cloud of Glory covering him. When he ate of the fruit of the tree, the fingernail skin fell off him, and he saw himself naked, while the Cloud of Glory departed from him.⁵⁰³

This inevitably raises the question, whether Islam (that is mainstream Islamic literature) could have been the transmitter between Late Antiquity and Yezidism. Such a possibility, of course, cannot be categorically excluded, but does not seem very likely either. In

⁴⁹⁹ See Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 96.

⁵⁰⁰ R. G. Khoury, "Wahb bin Munabbih," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 34-36.

⁵⁰¹ Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 96.

⁵⁰² *Genesis Rabbah* 196, see Graves-Patai, *Hebrew Myths*, 70-71.

⁵⁰³ *Pesiqta of Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852), 14, quoted in N. Rubin - A. Kosman, "The Clothing of the Primordial Adam as a Symbol of Apocalyptic Time in the Midrashic Sources," *The Harvard Theological Review* 90.2 (1997): 170.

the orthodox Islamic tradition⁵⁰⁴ the legend of Adam and Eve's light robes never became as popular as in earlier, especially in Syrian Christian literature and religious tradition, and speculations on the lost robe and its consequences (for Adam and mankind) never played a central role, as they did in the other traditions. Even more importantly, there is no place in Islamic salvational and eschatological symbolism for the eventual recovery of this shining robe by (or for) the righteous, unlike both among Syriac Christians and Gnostic-Manichaeans, the parallels of which can clearly be found in Yezidi sacred hymns. As we shall see in the next chapter, in late antique tradition Adam's garment of Light was far more than merely the garment lost by Adam, just as the *kebirqe* of the Yezidis is more than the angelic garment Adam wore. These motifs, to the best of my knowledge, cannot be found in orthodox Islam. The robe of Glory or garment of Light functioning as a garment of hope, of salvation, that can be (re)gained and worn by all those who prove themselves deserving, shall constitute the topic of the next chapter.

* * *

I have attempted to demonstrate the late antique origin of a number of "strange" motifs in the Yezidi Adam myth. The inverted interpretation of the breaking of the Divine Command, and the positive understanding of the Fall seem to go back to the Gnostic-Manichaean interpretation of the Adam myth. The same could be true for the idea, which can also be found in the "popular" Islam of the region, that the creation of the material body, especially the beginnings of the bodily functions and digestive system is linked to this fall. The idea of the divine origin of the soul of Adam, shared by the Ahl-i Haqq mythology, is again something that has its parallels in Gnostic ideology. Finally, to make the horizon wider, there is the thought that Adam used to wear an angelic garment while in Paradise, symbolizing his angelic status. This idea was primarily

⁵⁰⁴ That is in the Islamic tradition of the erudite, literate classes, as we have no way of knowing whether it made its way into "popular" lore.

current in Judaism and Christianity, especially Syriac Christianity, though echoes of it can be found in Gnosticism as well.

The next chapter will concentrate on this angelic garment the *kebirge*, its role in Yezidi mythology other than the lost clothing of Adam, and the possible connection of this *kebirge* with late antique religious language.

7 THE *KHIRQE*, OR GARMENT OF FAITH

The idea that Adam's *khirqe* was none other than the garment of Light of Late Antiquity and that this may explain the curious references in the Yezidi hymns to the "luminous black *khirqe*" takes us to the next stage of research into the mystery of the Yezidi *khirqe*. There are many other references to the luminous *khirqe* in Yezidi hymns - as a divine garment of cosmic dimensions, as a means of attaining religious enlightenment, and as an eschatological symbol - that cannot, at first glance at least, be directly connected with the myth of Adam. This chapter will try to trace the roots of this symbolic use of the *khirqe*, and analyze possible late antique influences.

As has already been mentioned, the word *khirka* or *khirqa* originally referred to the patched, woolen shirt of Sufi dervishes, denoting poverty and devotion to God, as well as spiritual adherence to a certain Sufi "path" (*tariqat*, Sufi dervish order). The assumption of the *khirka* symbolized embarking on the "mystical path" or *tariqat*, as well as being a symbol of the spiritual relationship or bond between Sufi master (*murshid*) and disciple (*murid*). The *khirka* was ceremoniously bestowed upon a disciple by his Sufi master, his leader on the mystical path, as part of his initiation, and as a recognition of the attainment of a certain spiritual station (*maqâm*) upon the completion of the disciple's training with the master. In this case the *khirka* "functioned as a kind of credential for the Sufi indicating that he had been trained by an accredited master"⁵⁰⁵ (whose spiritual authority could be traced back to the Prophet), for common Sufi wisdom held, "if a *murid* does not have

⁵⁰⁵ M. Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26.3 (1994): 434.

a *murshid*, the devil will be his *pîr* (spiritual guide).” In other cases the *khirka* was given to the disciple at the beginning of his training with his *murshid*,⁵⁰⁶ in which case it indicated that he had embarked upon the mystical path and had to learn to become utterly dependent upon the *sheikh* as a means of learning to become dependent upon God.”⁵⁰⁷ The *khirka* as a concrete object was occasionally also thought to be imbued with the master’s spiritual qualities, which could have a transformative impact on the disciple who inherited it, helping him attain a higher degree of spiritual advancement.⁵⁰⁸

Used in a metaphorical sense *khirka* was also a symbol of the chain of transmission (*silsila*) of spiritual, mystical teaching. Being given a *khirka* by one’s master could be the proof of being selected as the successor after the latter’s death. More importantly, the handing down and acceptance of the *khirka*, respectively, symbolized the mystical affiliation between successive masters and disciples of a *tarîqat*, a chain that ultimately ended in Muhammad, back to whom all chains of mystical affiliation were traced. Through the *khirka* the master transmits to the initiate/successor the blessing inherited from the prophet.⁵⁰⁹

As shall be seen, Yezidi *khirqe* is closely modeled on its Sufi counterpart. However, the significance of the *khirqe* is far more complex in Yezidi hymns than in Sufi terminology, presenting images and ideas that cannot be traced to Sufism or Islam. I believe that the explanation for this intriguing phenomenon is the fact that the Yezidi *khirqe* has conserved traces of a “garment symbolism” that is much older than Sufi mysticism, and has its roots in late antique religious language. It was this late antique symbolic language of the “theology of garment” that merged with the Sufi *khirka*,

⁵⁰⁶ Or *sheikh* or *pîr*, these terms being by and large synonymous.

⁵⁰⁷ Malamud, “Sufi Organisations,” 434. See also J.L. Michon, “*Khirka*,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 17-18.

⁵⁰⁸ Elias, “The Sufi Robe,” 276, 286.

⁵⁰⁹ Sufis knew many different kinds of *khirka*, each with its own name, as there were many different affiliations, and also different stages of spiritual advancement. Yezidis, however, make no such distinction.

producing the unique and extremely complex image of the Yezidi *khirqe*.

THE *KHIRQE* IN YEZIDI TRADITION

The quest for the meaning of the *khirqe* in Yezidi texts is as long and difficult as any treasure-hunt in view of the nature of such texts. The language of Yezidi hymns is often enigmatic, and references are hard to understand for the “uninitiated.” Furthermore, as Yezidis don’t have what could be dubbed a “formal theology,” there is no concrete and comprehensive “definition” of the *khirqe*, rather we meet shifting images and (apparently) conflicting descriptions. Perhaps the best way to grasp the manifold meaning of the *khirqe* is to envisage different levels that are built on each other:

- *Khirqe* as the clothing and companion of God at the creation;
- *Khirqe* as angelic garment and also a symbol of the Great Angels and their essential unity with the Godhead;
- *Khirqe* as the clothing of Adam in Paradise (a function mentioned only in the myths, not in the hymns);
- *Khirqe* as the garment of angels descended on earth as Yezidi *khas* (angels incarnated as Yezidi heroes or religious leaders), symbolizing the gnosis or religious instruction distributed by these *khas*;
- *Khirqe* as the garment of the truly faithful, that is, the *feqirs*, not in the contemporary sense of the word, but rather meaning all those who have reached true religious enlightenment;
- Finally, closely connected with the previous point, *khirqe* as the “other-worldly” reward of all those who fight for their faith and strive to reach spiritual perfection

That is, *khirqe* is ultimately the symbol of divine *gnosis*, something that first belonged to, was a part of the Godhead and the divine sphere, and eventually served as both the means and reward of religious enlightenment. This perception of the *khirqe* shows many striking parallels with the “garment of glory,” or “robe of Light” of Late Antiquity.

In fact, if we consider that the *khirqe*, the garment of the Yezidi *feqirs*, borrowed many of its characteristics from the garment of Light or robe of Glory which played such an important part in the theology and salvational eschatology of late antique religions,

this would explain a great number of motifs connected with the Yezidi *khirqe*, which have so far puzzled researchers.

Before we can embark on a comparison between the Yezidi *khirqe* and late antique garment theology, it is necessary to give a detailed analysis of Yezidi *khirqe* as it appears in the sacred texts. It is often referred to together with the luminous black crown or headdress (*tac/tanc* or *kof* - as the one worn by Sheikh Adi and also Adam in some of the myth variants mentioned in the previous chapter):

Miserable one! What are you doing in Mecca and Medina?
Your dress is the *khirqe*, you should be clad in the black mantle;
The crown on your head lights up...
Yezidis do not make pilgrimage, except to Lalish the luminous⁵¹⁰
Your dress is the *khirqe*, you should be clad in the black mantle;
The crown on your head is of gold.⁵¹¹

The Khirqe and its Creation at the Beginning of Creation

Yezidi sacred hymns describe the creation of the *khirqe* in different ways, but all descriptions amount to the same thing: the *khirqe* is a part of the divine, inherently connected with it since its moment of creation. Some texts say that the *khirqe* (together with the head-dress, and occasionally a mantle or robe) came forth, emanated from the Pearl, the same Pearl that was the dwelling place of God (which is occasionally called luminous – *nūrani*- just like the *khirqe*) before the beginning of creation:

My King separated the Pearl from himself.
He gazed on it with concentration

⁵¹⁰ The holy valley of the Yezidis.

⁵¹¹ *Beyt of Mir Mih* 6-8 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 338; see also *Hymn of the Faith* 16, 19 (quoted below in the text). (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 85-6.)

He made a mental image and brought it into existence...

The Pearl comes from the word of the King

The *khirqe* appeared from it,

Always holy men receive salutations because of it.⁵¹²

Some hymns describe the *khirqe* as created by God himself, saying that he put his hand into the lamp of power (*Qendil*), brought out a Pearl, and produced from it the crown and the luminous *khirqe*:

Sultan Ezi put his hand to the lamp of power

He brought out a Pearl

Sultan Sheikh Adi placed it in his hand

And produced from it the crown, the robe, and the luminous
khirqes.

They were given to Sheikh Adi's holy men;

As you know, they put them on."⁵¹³

Another hymn says:

Sultan Ezi brought pearls forth from the Oceans

Sheikh Adi put them in the palm of his hand

From them he made: the Crown and the mantle, and the luminous black *khirqe*.

He brought these forth and put them on himself...

My Sultan Ezi put on the *khirqe*;

He placed a luminous black crown of power on his head⁵¹⁴

Here, Sultan Ezi is one of the epithets of God, and Sheikh Adi is to be understood as the hypostasis of the Godhead, that is, these actions are to be understood as the actions of God.⁵¹⁵

Other Yezid hymns state that the *khirqe* first existed together with God, as His sole companion, and the object of his love (which at the same time is His creative power):

My King separated the Pearl from himself

⁵¹² *The Hymn of Sheykh Obekr* 5-6 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 209).

⁵¹³ *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 24 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98).

⁵¹⁴ *Hymn of the Faith* 16-18 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 85-86).

⁵¹⁵ On Sultan Ezi (or Êzî), and the identity between God, his angels and the Yezidi *kbas*, see the chapter on Yezidi religion.

He approved of one Companion⁵¹⁶

He fashioned a luminous [nūranī] *ķbirqe*⁵¹⁷

Melik Fekhrudin stands before the King and asked him a question:

Oh God, you are the One, triumphant

Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens

Before the (holy) men, before the angels

Love was at your disposal: what did you create with it?

Before the foundation of the earths,

Before the heavens

Before the (holy) men, before the angels

My love worshipped the *ķbirqe*.⁵¹⁸

The verse claiming that God worshipped His *ķbirqe* refers to an identity between God and His *ķbirqe*, for – as another hymn puts it – it was Himself that God worshipped with love before the creation of the world:

No world had yet appeared

By himself [God], he knew himself

He worshipped himself

Love was always one and conscious

He became light, worshipping himself.⁵¹⁹

The *Prayer of Pilgrimage* also expresses an identity between God and the *ķbirqe* to which He paid a pilgrimage, as the object of His worship, while making clear that this object was in effect no other than He Himself:

The King speaks thus:

The Throne and Seat are in my hand

⁵¹⁶ The word *yar* may also be translated as “lover”, instead of companion.

⁵¹⁷ *Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 12 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 59).

⁵¹⁸ *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 6- 7 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 95).

⁵¹⁹ *Hymn of B and A* 2-3 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 72).

Before the foundation of the earths and the heavens
 Before the holy men and the angels
 Before the mountains and the foundations
 Before the moon and sun
 What I worshipped was the pilgrimage to the *khirqe*...

God made the Mystery of the Tradition the boundary of pilgrimage
 He had prostrated himself before his King⁵²⁰
 It was always He himself, he was his own object of worship.
 It was always He himself, he was his own object of worship.⁵²¹

There is no clear statement as to the nature of the *khirqe*, but the same *Prayer of Pilgrimage* may imply that the *khirqe*, the garment of God, was “made” of light, as after talking about God worshipping the pilgrimage to the *khirqe*, another verse adds that it was to His light that God made pilgrimage to:

As yet, earth and sky did not exist
 The King was lonely in the Pearl
 He loved to make pilgrimage to his own light
 The angels bore witness to this.⁵²²

The idea that the *khirqe* may be identified with the light of God is born out by the *Hymn of A and B* quoted above, which states that God “became light, worshipping himself,” while other hymns claim it was His *khirqe* God worshipped.

The *khirqe* then is baptized by God in the White Spring,⁵²³ the sacred spring of the Yezidis, where Yezidi children are baptized. According to Yezidi tradition the White Spring was the first thing

⁵²⁰ That is before Himself.

⁵²¹ *Prayer of Pilgrimage* 1 and 12 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 106, 107).

⁵²² *Prayer of Pilgrimage* 9, *ibid*, 107.

⁵²³ It may perhaps be worthwhile to refer here to Christ’s descent into the Jordan at his baptism, which will be discussed later on. As Brock says, “for it is then that Christ deposits the “robe of Glory/light” in the water, thus making available once again for mankind to put on in baptism.” Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 12. The black *khirqe* of the *feqirs* is still baptized in the White Spring in Lalish before *feqirs* can start wearing it.

that was created, while others maintain that it flowed from the throne of God.⁵²⁴ The *kbirqe* then was put on and worn by God himself:

My King ...
 .. removed his *kbirqe* at the Kaniya Sipî,⁵²⁵
 He baptized it with his own hand.⁵²⁶

And:

My King established the pillars on high
 He 'baptised' the *kbirqe*
 The status of the *kbirqe* is way up above
 My Sultan Ezi(d) the Red put it on.

Sheikh Adi will come with the foundations
 He put them up on high, brought the *kbirqe* and 'baptised' it
 The *kbirqe* is the garment of my Sultan Ezi(d) the Red.

Sheikh Adi will come with the foundations
 He put them up on high, brought the *kbirqe* and 'baptised' it
 The *kbirqe* is the garment of my Sultan Ezi(d) the Red.

My Sultan Ezi(d) put on the *kbirqe*
 He placed a luminous black crown of power on his head
 The Feqirs set out on a journey to reach him.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ It should also be noted that some say that the White Spring got its name, because at the time of the Flood, when everything was covered by "black water" (*ava rēš*), the water of this Spring alone remained clear, rising like a tower in the dark water. This image is reminiscent of the living water – turbid water dichotomy of Manichaean and Mandaean terminology, See Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 97, 99. The sacral importance of the White Spring is attested to by statements like: "our direction of prayer is the White Spring." *Hymn of the Mill of Love*, (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 381.) Interestingly, Mandaeans derive all rivers and waters from a prototype, a white, pure river, the Light-Euphrates. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iran and Iran*, xxv.

⁵²⁵ The White Spring.

⁵²⁶ *Hymn of Faith* 15 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 197).

⁵²⁷ *Hymn of the Faith* 17-19 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 85-86).

The *Hymn of the Khirqe*, a hymn so far published only in Kurdish,⁵²⁸ simply calls the *khirqe* the cloth of God, calling it a cloth of light (*nuranî*) which was brought forth from the treasury of (divine) power:

Before the world existed
On that day the *khirqe* was already there
The *khirqe* was the cloth of God itself (or alone)...

Khirqe is a cloth of light (*nuranî*)
It came forth from the treasury of power.⁵²⁹

Contemporary Yezidi lore also maintains – probably based on the content of the hymns – that the *khirqe* was the “cloth of God himself,” (“*xirqe libse Xwedêye*.”)

All this reinforces the idea that there is a strong connection between the Godhead and the *khirqe*. Not only was it directly created by (or emanating from) Him, before all the other created (or emanated) beings (and even before the emanation of the angels), the *khirqe* was His chosen companion as well. Clearly, here companion refers to something that was an “expression,” a part or aspect of the Godhead, identical with His essence, for God’s Love could have hardly worshipped something inferior, or even merely external to Him. This is what the *Prayer of Pilgrimage* seems to imply, when it talks of the *khirqe* as the object of God’s worship. The idea that God wore the *khirqe* as His clothing, presumably also reflects this close connection between *khirqe* and God, where the two exist in inseparable unity.

⁵²⁸ Published in Bedelê Feqîr Hecî , *The Faith and Mythology of the Yezîdîs* (Bawerî û Mîtologiya Êzîdîyan), (Dihok: Hawar - Dihok Publishers, 2002). Bedelê is the son of Feqîr Haji.

⁵²⁹ My translation. *Berî dinya nebû, wê rojê xeqe hebû, Xerqe libse Xwedê bi – xwe bû... Xerqe libse nuranî, ji xezîna qudretê deranî. Qenlê Xerqey 1, 9. Bedelê, Faith and Mythology, 332-34.*

Khirqe and the Angels

The *khirqe* that was God's first companion, or rather the expression of His light, power and love, is also associated with his Great Angels, who are none other than the emanations of the divine light. Some texts even poetically refer to the angels as *khirqes* themselves. To be more exact, the successive emanation of the Angels mentioned in the *Black Book* as lighting many candles from one, and in some *qenls* as four lamps burning with one wick,⁵³⁰ is also described as a multiplication of the original, divine *khirqe*.

My King calls out loudly:
The Pearl had waves, it became the Ocean
There was activity and the number of *khirqes* became four⁵³¹
For 90,000 years he hid them in the Lamp⁵³²

⁵³⁰ *Hymn of the Oceans* 14 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 205).

⁵³¹ I.e. four holy beings came into existence. Many *qenls*, when speaking of the creation, either speak only of the "Four Great Mysteries," or "Four Angels" (e.g. four lamps with (of) one wick; four Friends or Lovers (*yar*), four cornerstones (*erkan*), or four streams from the Ocean of God) or say that first Four came into existence, and finally it was Seven. The number four probably refers to the four elements, earth, water wind and fire, which are often mentioned in texts on the creation of the world. (See Kreyenbroek *Yezidism*, 100.) The exact identity of these Four Great Mysteries is uncertain.) Kreyenbroek thinks they should be identified with four "historical" Yezidi leaders (that is, incarnated angels), the four sons of Ezdina Mîr: Sheykh Shems, Fekhr el-Dîn, Sejadîn and Nasir el-Dîn, but in the hymn quoted above – ever so typically of Yezidi lore – different identities are given.

⁵³² *Qendil* is a term difficult to translate as it has overlapping meanings. Literally it means "lamp," but in Yezidi texts it refers to light or a "body of light." Thus, it may refer to the sun (venerated as an expression of the divine light), but more often it refers to the Light (Essence) of God, from which other divine angels also emanated (see *Hymn o the Lights*), or alternately it is used in a way that parallels the usage of the "throne of God" in Judeo-Christian tradition. According to Sheikh Deshti, for example, divine souls (meaning the members of the *Heptad*, periodically incarnated as important historical figures, *khas*) stay in the *Qendil* and periodically descend from there time and again as "prophets." See *Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 41-42. See also Feqir Haji's account of the "birth" of Angel Sheikh Sin in the Appendix (Interview of Lalish, 2002).

But now he made manifest the four Friends
 The four wise Friends were made manifest
 Born of the Origin: Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin
 Nasirdin and Sejadin
 They set the world in motion...

Thus spoke the King, the luminous one Fekhr and Sultan Ezi
 Put on the Crown and the Robe
 They brought these out of the White Spring
 From then on (holy) men gave them their allegiance and their
 faith⁵³³

And:

By means of faith they brought the *kbirges* into being
 They laid ninety-nine foundations
 From then on the angels believed.
 The angels brought belief into being
 They took the *kbirges* and put them on
 From then on the angels added their own profession of
 faith.⁵³⁴

It was also seen in the previous chapter on the creation of Adam that the *kbirqe* was the clothing of Angels as well. As Melek Sheikh Sin insisted on continuing to wear his angelic clothing, that is, the *kbirqe*, even while he doubled as Adam's soul, the *kbirqe* was also Adam's clothing as long as he retained his angelic nature (that is, he retained Melek Sheikh Sin as his soul, represented by the *sur* in his forehead).

When it comes to the *Khas* (translated as "holy men" in the hymns)⁵³⁵ or Angels incarnated as Yezidi leaders on the earth, the *kbirqe* primarily seems to represent their legitimacy as leaders. One

⁵³³ *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 9-10, 14 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 95-6).

⁵³⁴ *The Prayer of Belief* 8-9 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 105).

⁵³⁵ On the *khas*, see chapter 4 "Yezidi Religion."

hymn refers to the *kbirge* as the symbol of the chain of spiritual authority, a sort of Sufi *silsila*, of Yezidi holy men:

What a cornerstone he made!⁵³⁶

It was pristine at the time of the holy men:

The *kbirge* came to Sheykh Obekr.⁵³⁷

What a cornerstone at that time,

Came to be held dear among the good men:

The *kbirge* came to Sheykh Shelal.⁵³⁸

What a visible cornerstone,

Took his turn among the good men:

The *kbirge* came to Sheims the Tartar.⁵³⁹

My King created a chain of cornerstones.

He removed his *kbirge* at the *Kaniya Sipt*,⁵⁴⁰

He baptized it with his own hand.

He created the descendants of Red Êzid.⁵⁴¹

They bring a cornerstone

They invest him with the *kbirge* of Sheykh Adi,

They send him to the House of the family of Adi.⁵⁴²

A similar transmission of spiritual authority symbolized by the putting on of the *kbirge* is expressed by the *Hymn of Black Furqan* already quoted above, where the expression “Sheikh Adi’s holy men” (*kehas - kehasêt Şêxadi*) probably refers to Sheikh Adi’s compan-

⁵³⁶ *Erkan*, Arabic broken Pl. of *arkan*, refers to pristine institutions and their incumbents. See Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 199, note 14.

⁵³⁷ I.e., Sheikh Obekr became the leader of the community (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 199, note 16).

⁵³⁸ The identity of Shelal is uncertain, unless it stands for Jelal, and refers to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, the great Sufi saint and founder of the Mewlana dervish order in Konya. Ibid., 199, note 17.)

⁵³⁹ Shams-e Tabrîzî, friend of Rūmî, who inspired the latter’s poetry. He is another Sufi figure revered by Yezidis. See ibid. 199, note 18.

⁵⁴⁰ The White Spring.

⁵⁴¹ Êzid, or Sultan Êzi is often referred to as Red.

⁵⁴² *Hymn of the Faith* 12-16 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 197).

ions, who were also considered incarnate angels (and became the eponymous ancestors of the sheikhly lineages):

Sultan Ezi put his hand to the lamp of power
 He brought out a Pearl
 Sultan Sheikh Adi placed it in his hand
 And produced from it the crown, the robe, and the luminous
khirqes.
 They were given to Sheikh Adi's holy men
 As you know, they put them on.⁵⁴³

Occasionally the garment image is employed to express this chain of spiritual legitimacy without any express mention of the *khirqe*. Thus, for example, *The Hymn of the Thousand and One names* uses the expression *khelat* (*khil'a*), a word literally meaning gift, but which often referred to a "robe of honor" or "robe of state" given as a ceremonious gift by rulers.⁵⁴⁴ In *The Hymn of The Thousand and One Names*, the transmission of spiritual power and legitimacy is described as the "Cup" (the "Cup of Love" is often mentioned by Yezidi hymns as a vessel containing the divine essence or mystery)⁵⁴⁵ passing from one *kbas* to another, and twice investiture with robes accompanies the receiving of the Cup.⁵⁴⁶

The khirqe of Sheikh Adi

The *khirqe* is often called the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi, the most important holy figure of the Yezidis. As has been mentioned in the chapter on Yezidi holy beings, for traditional Yezidis Sheikh Adi is an

⁵⁴³ *Hymn of the Black Furqan*, 24 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98).

⁵⁴⁴ See, for example, D. Sourdel, "Robes of Honor in 'Abbasid Baghdad During the Eighth to Eleventh Centuries," in *Robes and Honor*, 137-45; and G. Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara, from Ghazna to Delhi: The *khil'a* Ceremony in the Transmission of Kingly Pomp and Circumstance," in *Robes and Honour*, 193-222.

⁵⁴⁵ The Cup (of wine) is much employed symbol of Sufi poetry. On this, see next chapter.

⁵⁴⁶ *The Hymn of Thousand and One Names* 9-15, 19, 21 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 76-77).

incarnation of the Peacock Angel and thus homomorphic with God.⁵⁴⁷ He has existed since the beginning of time, and, though not a founder of the faith in the strict sense,⁵⁴⁸ it is clear from the hymns and other traditions that the religious beliefs of the Yezidis centered around his person, and his teachings are seen as the foundation of Yezidi faith. When the hymns talk of the *kbirge* as the *kbirge* of Sheik Adi,⁵⁴⁹ or belonging to his house,⁵⁵⁰ the *kbirge* becomes the symbol of Yezidi faith as the path of righteousness leading to God, and of its divine origin:

We have accepted the authority of the angels
Whoever believes in the religion and the foundations of the
kbirge of Sheikh Adi
(Belongs to) the House of Adi, to our Order, for ever and ever.

Don't say: What is the House of Adi?
Oh naive young man
You know nothing of the meaning of the *kbirge* of Sheikh Adi
Why do you say: (It takes) a little zerguz⁵⁵¹ and a bit of wool?

Oh naive young man
You don't know what the meaning of Sheikh Adi's *kbirge* is
They say: The meaning of Sheikh Adi's *kbirge* is a handful of
zerguz and a bit of wool.

Oh young man, young man
The *kbirge* is made of wool, it is baptised with the zerguz

⁵⁴⁷ Thus, Sheikh Adi's *kbirge* is identified with that of Sultan Ezid, the name *qenls* often use to refer to God: "The status of Sultan Sheikh Adi's *kbirge* is indeed high. It is the garment of my Sultan Ezid the red." *Hymn of the Mill of Love* 14 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 382.)

⁵⁴⁸ Yezidis see their religion ultimately originating in the time of Adam, as shall be dealt with in the chapter 9 "The Origin Myth of Yezidis."

⁵⁴⁹ On the luminous nature of Sheikh Adi's *kbirge*, see previous chapter.

⁵⁵⁰ E.g. *Hymn of the Mill of Love* 11-12, *Hymn of Faith* 10 (in *Yezidism*) The *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 24-26 even talks of Sheikh Adi as the one who fashioned the *kbirge*;

⁵⁵¹ A special plant used to dye the *kbirge* black.

The status of the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi is way up above
The *khirqe* is the garment of my Ezi(d) the Red.

This is a strong foundation
It appeared among the Saints
It is the foundation of my Sheikh, Adi⁵⁵²...

Bring the *khirqe*
Put the foundations on it
Send it to the Feqirs
So that the Feqirs will lift it up over their heads.⁵⁵³

The Feqirs have lifted up the *khirqe*
It is a profession of faith in the House of Adi⁵⁵⁴
Khirqe represents the true faith:
Let the House of the family of Adi be witnesses,
The Kaniya Sipî was brought forth
Khirqe is the faith.⁵⁵⁵

And all those who accept the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi, that is, his teachings, and be faithful Yezidis “shall have a share of the protecting hem of the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi.”⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵² The text follows with an enumeration of “historical” Yezidi leaders, that is incarnate Angels, such as Melik Sheikh Sin, Sheikh Obekr, Sheikh Shems, Melik Fekhrudin etc. for all of whom the *khirqe* served as a foundation. See *khirqe* as a symbol of the chain of spiritual authority above.

⁵⁵³ I.e., “will put it on.” (Kreyenbroek, note 142, *Sheikh Adi*, 88.)

⁵⁵⁴ *Hymn of the Faith* 24-35 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 87-88).

⁵⁵⁵ *Hymn of the Faith* 17 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 197). Kreyenbroek translates the Kurdish text, *xerqe îmane*, as “It is the *khirqe* of the faith,” but I think that the literal translation would be “*khirqe* is the faith.” The reason for Kreyenbroek’s translation is to render clearer the intended meaning of the verse, that is, “this miracle [the birth of the White Spring] was the visible manifestation or attribute of the faith” (Kreyenbroek, note 24, 200,) just as *khirqe* is generally understood to be.

⁵⁵⁶ *Hymn of Faith* 21, *ibid.*

Khirqe – the clothing of gnosis

As was seen in the *Hymn of the Faith*, quoted above, the *khirqe* of Sheihk Adi, as a symbol of religion, offers protection to all his followers. This thought takes us to the next layer of the complex system of symbols surrounding the *khirqe*: the role it plays in religion, as a vehicle of religious enlightenment or “gnosis,” ultimately sent by God through his intermediaries (the incarnate Angels.) This is perhaps the most relevant aspect of the Yezidi *khirqe*, as regards our search for symbols and metaphors which presumably date to the religious language of Late Antiquity. The *khirqe* is the symbol of Yezidi faith and its divine origin:

This is the nation that reveres the *khirqe*.
It has instituted the proper use of the *khirqe*, and has put it on.
Sultan Êzîd has power over so many religious schools, so
many faiths, so many sects.⁵⁵⁷

Sultan Ezi is my Pir of the *khirqe*
It has a profound meaning
It is my belief and that of the Mirids

Sultan Ezi is my Pir of the *khirqe*
That is my creed and that of all believers
He is the light of both my eyes.⁵⁵⁸

Khirqe, just like the *qewls* or hymns, constitutes a part of the divine revelation of God among Yezidis. In the words of one of my sources, Arab Khidir of Behzani, “just as the Christians say New Testament, and Jews say Old Testament (*Ehdi*, Promise, Alliance), our hymns are like an Alliance of God, God sent us down the hymns (*qewl*) and the *khirqe* instead of Books.”⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, *khirqe*

⁵⁵⁷ *The Hymn of Sheykh Erebeg Entush* 25 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 279.)

⁵⁵⁸ *The Hymn of the Black Furqan* 22-23 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98.)

⁵⁵⁹ In other words, Yezidi religion is a revealed one, or “semavi,” an Arabic expression used for those religions, which have divinely revealed books, which “came down” from heaven, an important distinction in Islam. Of course, it must be mentioned that my source was clearly influ-

is the sign that Yezidi religion is one that was revealed by God, from heaven, through a chain of revelations, with the ultimate aim of showing the Yezidi community the right road to take. It is the means of distributing divine wisdom:

Thus speaks my King, the Lord of Foundations:

Indeed, Fekhr, I shall reveal to the earth

The *Qewls* and the *Kbirges*

So that the House of Tradition may

Adhere to it, rejoice and believe in it...

The King says: Fekhr, from the sheep and the zerguz I shall
fashion the *khirqe*

The Feqirs shall wear it

The House of the Tradition will believe in it and adhere to it.

He fashioned the *Qewls* and *kbirges*

And revealed them on the earth

He entrusted them to Melik Fekhrudin

Melik Fekhrudin entrusted them to the holy men of Sheikh
Adi⁵⁶⁰

The holy men of Sheikh Adi adhered to them and had faith in
them.

My King fashioned the zerguz

He revealed it on the earth

He entrusted it to Melik Fekhrudin

Melik Fekhrudin entrusted it to the holy men of Sheikh Adi.

The Holy Men of Sheikh Adi entrusted it to the Feqirs

The Feqirs dyed their *kbirges* black with it

The Yezidi community had come to adhere to it and believe in
it.

In this way my King distributed his wisdom:

Among the holy men and the individual souls...

May you be a little mindful of the *khirqe*

enced by the need to express Yezidi concepts in terms understandable to (or even modelled on) written religions.

⁵⁶⁰ Sheikh Adi's companions, the incarnate angels, *kebas*.

Let the quality of the *kehrqe* be such (as it is now)
 And let nothing (bad) come (to it) from me
 And may all four paths come to you as supplicants.⁵⁶¹

The *kehrqe*, along with the crown, then becomes a source of the mystical enlightenment, we could say, of Gnostic knowledge. It is called *sur*,⁵⁶² a word which in other contexts designates the mysterious, divine essence of the angelic beings. The light emanating from it – a metaphor for religious enlightenment and instruction – uncovers mystical truth, and shows the way toward the true path of God to Sheikh Adi's holy men (his companions, the *kehas*) who have declared their faith in God:

Sultan Ezi put his hand to the lamp of power
 He brought out a Pearl
 Sultan Sheikh Adi placed it in his hand,
 And produced from it the crown, the robe, and the luminous
kehrqes.

They were given to Sheikh Adi's holy men
 As you know, they put them on.

They put on that Mystery [*sur*], that *kehrqe*
 They declared their faith in Sultan Ezi
 By their light things were revealed before dawn.⁵⁶³

Before dawn things were revealed by their light.
 Earth and heaven shuddered
 The (holy) men sat down in unity
 Together they discussed the true path of Sheikh Adi and Melik
 Sheikh Sin.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 37-46 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 100-102.)

⁵⁶² "They put on that Mystery, that *kehrqe*" (*Diber xo dikirin ew sure, ew xerqeye*). *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 25 (ibid.)

⁵⁶³ The Kurdish text does not state explicitly what it was that was uncovered by the light from the *kehrqe*, but one may assume that it refers to the true nature of things.

⁵⁶⁴ *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 24-26 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98).

This idea of seeing the *khirqe* as a symbol of divine gnosis is expressed in a different way by the *Hymn of the Faith*. Here the *khirques* are the signs of God left on earth as the “well being” distributed by the angels:

It is morning, the day has five watches,
The holy men and angels distributed *well-being* [*silen*],
The symbols of Sultan Ezid were the *khirques*, they stayed on
earth.

It is morning, five (times) a day they brought down (well being),
The holy men and angels took away well being,
The symbols of Sultan Ezid were the *khirques*, these they left on
earth.⁵⁶⁵

The word used here “*silen*,” Kurdish for *selam* may also mean “salvation, deliverance.” The text is rather obscure, possibly corrupt, but seems to imply the loss of an earlier, original state, when the world still possessed true religion, gnosis or “spiritual well being,” which was later lost. However, the symbol of God, the *khirqe* that was left on earth indicates that the promise of salvation (*silen*) is still held out to all those willing to put on the *khirqe*, that is, to embrace the true faith.

Another hymn says that the *khirqe* will be given to all those “who renounce the desolate, transitory evil,”⁵⁶⁶ that is, to the *feqirs*, the Yezidi holy men, who reject the riches and illusions of the material world, and who bring religious teaching to their followers (common Yezidis). Presumably here *feqir* (literally: poor one) should be understood in the original, Sufi sense of the word, connoting any man who spurned the material world and chose to follow a spiritual path:

My dear, I have needed this world for a long time;
As much gold and riches as I can think of,
I shall give all of it for the sake of the visible *khirqe*.

⁵⁶⁵ *Hymn of the Faith* 22-23 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 199).

⁵⁶⁶ *Hymn of Sheykh Obeker* 9 (ibid., 209).

My dear, I have been listening for this world for a long time.
 As much gold and riches as I can think of,
 I shall relinquish all of it for the sake of the visible *kehrqe*.

The *Feqirs* followed it.
 Thus, he who has renounced the desolate, transitory evil,
 On him they will bestow the keys.⁵⁶⁷

Those keys,
 They will bring to the hands of those commoners.⁵⁶⁸
 All five obligatory acts⁵⁶⁹ of Truth will bear witness for them
 on the Last Day.⁵⁷⁰

It would be a *kehrqe* representing religious truth that the *feqirs*, who renounce the desultory pleasures of this world, will follow in order to become worthy of the keys, the latter being clearly a reference to spiritual understanding. Then they will pass on this understanding, teaching to their fellow Yezidis, the “commoners,” or soldiers, how to follow the true path of the *kehrqe*.

Similar sentiments are expressed by the *Hymn of the Faith*, on the connection between God, His *kehrqe* and black crown, and the *feqirs* - that is, those who are seeking to reach religious enlightenment. The idea that the *kehrqe* and the crown are the clothing of the Godhead is reiterated here. *Feqirs*, in other words, those who have succeeded in conquering the “ego-soul,”⁵⁷¹ that is, their “lower

⁵⁶⁷ Probably the keys of religious enlightenment, gnosis.

⁵⁶⁸ Commoners (*cindî*) may also be translated as soldiers, it is used to refer to the followers of the Yezidi Faith in general; it is usually used in a context that implies fighting for the faith. (See next chapter.)

⁵⁶⁹ The five obligatory acts (*pênc ferzêd*) refer not to the “five pillars” (*ferz*) of Islam (confession of faith, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and alms) but to the five obligatory religious relationships each Yezidi must enter (that is each Yezidi must have – or must have had – a *sheikh*, *pîr*, *mirebbî*, *hosta* and brother/sister of the hereafter).

⁵⁷⁰ *Hymn of Sheyk Obekr* 7-10 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 209.)

⁵⁷¹ *Nefes* of the Kurdish text is the Kurdish variant of Arabic *nafs*, meaning self or soul. In Sufism *nafs* is often described as the “carnal soul” or “lower self,” associated with physical rather than spiritual impulses, by contrast to *ruh*, or “soul,” the “higher self,” and it has to be conquered by the true mystic.

self' or physical nature, set out on a spiritual journey toward this God wearing the *khirqe*. Whoever manages to complete this journey will be protected by the very same *khirqe* worn by God – represented here by Sheikh Adi, who is the source of the ultimate religious truth, as a being homomorphous with God:

My Sultan Ezi(d) put on the *khirqe*
 He placed a luminous black crown of power on his head
 The Feqirs set out on a journey to reach him.

The Feqirs set out to reach him
 Whoever makes his ego-soul a prisoner⁵⁷²
 Will doubtless come before the sight of the Prince.

They descend from that place
 The Four Friends⁵⁷³ stand before it
 We shall have a share of the protecting hem of the *khirqe* of
 Sheikh Adi.⁵⁷⁴

The Khirqe and Yezidi Eschatology

Finally, the promise of the *khirqe*, as a symbol of spiritual enlightenment and protection, is held out to Yezidis not only in the here and now, but on an eschatological plane as well. This is best expressed in the eschatological *Hymn of Sherfedin*. Sheikh Sherfedin, one of the early leaders of Yezidis (d. 1257-8 CE), is identified by Yezidis with the Mahdi, a sort of Messianic figure who will usher in an era of justice and true belief, and restore righteousness just before the Day of Judgment, when evil will be punished and the righteous rewarded.⁵⁷⁵ The arrival of the Mahdi (or Sherfedin) will

⁵⁷² “whoever dominates his lower nature,” (Kreyenbroek, Note 138, *Sheikh Adi*, 86).

⁵⁷³ The Four Angels, who are often mentioned as the Four Friends or Lovers (on the Four, see above).

⁵⁷⁴ *Hymn of the Faith* 19-21 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 86.)

⁵⁷⁵ The concept of Mahdi is an Islamic inheritance in Yezidi religion. The Mahdi is not mentioned in the Quran, but he is an important figure of Muslim eschatology, especially in the Sufi and Shia traditions.

signify the great, final battle between the followers of God (the *fegirs* and the Yezidis in general) and their enemies, ending with the victory of the former.⁵⁷⁶ Those fighting on the side of the Mahdi will then be invested with the *khirqe*:

When the Mehdi arises
Neither lords nor judges will remain
On that day the community of the Tradition⁵⁷⁷ will be comfortable.

The Tradition will be comfortable
To whom Melik Sherfedin shows his mercy and benevolence
He will invest us with spiritual clothes.

We have been invested with spiritual clothes
When Melik Sherfedin appears on the face of the earth
Then (Yezidi) commoners will be happy about it.⁵⁷⁸

Though the text does not literally use the word *khirqe*, instead employing “spiritual clothing,”⁵⁷⁹ it clearly demonstrates that being invested with spiritual clothing, an important motif of late antique Jewish and Christian eschatology, and Gnostic speculations on the return on the final upward journey of the soul, to be discussed later, was part of Yezidi eschatological language. The verses follow-

⁵⁷⁶ On the fight between the Mahdi and the Tercal (Dajjal in Islamic tradition), a sort of Islamic “anti-Christ” or “false-Messiah,” an evil figure who will try to lead people astray at the End of Time, and on the destruction wrought by the army of the Tercal and by Hajuj (Gog and Magog). See the *Hymn of the False Saviour* (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 364-68.) See also Lescot, *Les Yezidis*, 65-6.

⁵⁷⁷ Literally *Sûnetxane*. This is an Islamic expression, but one that is often applied to refer to Yezidi community, yet another indication of the Sufi background of Yezidism. (See Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 62, Note 3.)

⁵⁷⁸ *The Hymn of Sherfedin* 2-4 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 368-69.)

⁵⁷⁹ *Sûliyêt batinê*. *Batin* literally means “hidden, inner, secret.” In Sufi (as well as Shiia thought) it is used to denote the esoteric, hidden, inner aspect of the Quran. In a wider sense, used by Yezidis as well as the Ahl-i Haqq, it came to refer the hidden truth, the spiritual as opposed to the material world (*zâhiri*).

ing almost immediately and still referring to the victorious army of the pious and faithful, do in fact make mention of the *khirqe* when speaking of the virtuous being decked out in splendid clothes, as brides for their wedding:

The riders of the valley are prepared
Let them come and open the boxes for you⁵⁸⁰
So as to adorn you like brides.

Let them come and adorn you like brides
Let them bring out the red and yellow boxes for you
Let them cause (people) to accept for themselves the true path
of Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin.

Here are the green and red boxes
In them there are elegant black *khirques*, consecrated with holy
water⁵⁸¹
The Feqirs will abolish laments and injustice from this world.

The Feqirs will abolish lamentations from this world
They will don the elegant, ..., black *khirques*
They will take truth and their rightful share to that place.⁵⁸²

Similar ideas appear to be expressed by two verses of the *Hymn of the Faith*:

At those times when they will fall out
At those times when they will fight each other,
At those times when (even) holy men will have doubts.

At those times when (even) holy men have doubts,

⁵⁸⁰ Kreyenbroek comments: "The reference is clearly to the Resurrection, when the virtuous will be decked out in splendid clothes. According to this description the army of the good men—i.e. those who are eminently righteous, possibly Feqirs—will bring forth the festive clothes." (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 368, Note 31.)

⁵⁸¹ The *khirqe* of the *feqirs* must be first baptized in the White Spring. Cf. God baptizing his *khirqe* in the White Spring at the time of the creation above.

⁵⁸² *The Hymn of Sherfedin* 6-9 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 369-70.)

Whoever seeks the house of the family of Adi, (seeking to
touch) the hem of their *kehrge*,
Sultan Êzîd will fulfill his wishes (when he is) with him.⁵⁸³

The hymn makes references to a time to come, when people will fall out and fight each other, when all men (or, depending on the translation, even holy men)⁵⁸⁴ will be shaken and tried in their faith. It is reasonable to conclude that the hymn implies the time when the Mahdi and the Tercal will come, and the final battle be fought before Judgment Day. This conclusion is reinforced by the comparison with another version of the *Hymn of the Faith*.⁵⁸⁵ There are significant differences between the two versions, but their main themes are by and large similar, including verses on the origin of the *kehrge* and its passing from *kebas* to *kebas*. This second version of the *Hymn of the Faith* makes very clear references to the eschatological battle led by Sherfedin, the Mahdi:

Let me offer praise to beloved Sherfedin
When will the good tidings come to us
(That) he will leave his occultation in the tent with the golden
sides.⁵⁸⁶

He will leave his occultation in the tent with the golden sides
This world will wage war on him⁵⁸⁷
Even the House of Tradition⁵⁸⁸ itself will have doubts.

The House of Tradition itself will have doubts
Anyone who is a servant of the Creator
Will seek the protection of Sultan Sheikh Adi.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸³ *Hymn of the Faith* 9-10 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 195-97.)

⁵⁸⁴ The Kurdish original writes *mêra*, literally the oblique form of “men,” but according to Kreyenbroek the word often denotes saints or holy men, and the following verses imply this is the sense in which “men” is applied here. (See Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 199, note 10.)

⁵⁸⁵ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 83-89.

⁵⁸⁶ Sherfedin is said to be in occultation until the eschatological battle, hiding either in a cave or in a golden tent.

⁵⁸⁷ The Mahdi will meet great hostility and unbelief when he comes.

⁵⁸⁸ I.e., the Yezidi community.

There can be no doubt that the hymn here describes an eschatological scene, and what is more important, describes it in terms very similar to the ones in the first version of the *Hymn of the Faith*: it mentions a war to come, a time when even the Yezidi community will have doubts, and people will seek the protection of Sheikh Adi. The literal translation of this latter phrase in the second version of the hymn would be: “will seek the skirt or hem (*daman*) of Sheikh Adi”⁵⁹⁰ (that is of Sheikh Adi’s robe). *Daman* is the word applied by the first version of the hymn to talk about the “hem of the *khirqe*.”⁵⁹¹

The message, especially after the comparison of the two texts is clear: At that time of fear and hope, when the world comes to an end and the final battle between evil and good takes place, Sheikh Adi’s *khirqe* will serve to protect all those who have faithfully followed the road of true religion and fought against evil. In other words they will have a share of the *khirqe*, or as earlier hymns already stated, they will be invested with the *khirqe*, the garment of spiritual enlightenment brought down to the earth by the incarnated divine angels as a source, sign, and reward of religion.

The Khirqe in Contemporary Yezidi religious lore

As has already been mentioned several times, *khirqe* is the technical term for the black woolen shirt worn by Yezidi *feqirs*, denoting the sanctity of its wearer. No one can lift his hand against the wearer of a *khirqe* without the danger of instant excommunication, however great the provocation may be. However, *feqirs* may not abuse their position, for it is possible to loose the *khirqe* through behavior that does not meet the high moral standards demanded from *feqirs*, or if a *feqir* does not lead a sufficiently pious life. “If a man is Yezidi, and puts the *khirqe* on himself, he has to walk the road of true faith (*iman*), of the faith that was sent down by God for us. He sent this

⁵⁸⁹ *Hymn of the Faith*, 11-3 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 84-85).

⁵⁹⁰ *Wê gesta damana Siltan Şixadî bike.*

⁵⁹¹ *Herça qesta mala Adiya damina xerqe bike.*

faith through his hymns.”⁵⁹² Small wonder then, that only few people coming from a lineage of *feqirs* actually don the *ķbirqe*. Most do not seem to find in themselves the requisite amount of piousness and religious ardor to take this road, despite having a birthright to do so.

Among those interested in religion, the *ķbirqe* is of course imbued with more meanings than merely being the shirt of the ascetics. The meaning of the *ķbirqe* is interpreted by Arab Khidir on the basis of the hymns and his understanding of Yezidi religion in the following way:⁵⁹³

“*Ķbirqe* is the cloth of God; it is the form/appearance of God.”⁵⁹⁴

“*Ķbirqe* is a material clothing, but its meaning is manifold. It means true faith on the road of God, according to the law of God. If a man has *ķbirqe*, then he has to have faith in God that He is One, that He has no partner.”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² *Mironê ezdi bit, xirqe ber xwe (bi)ket, lazîm pê wê imanê (bi)çit, imana Xwedê bo me nazîl ķir. Ev imane nazîl ķir bi qewla.*

⁵⁹³ It would be tempting to generalize and say that Yezidis today interpret *ķbirqe* in this way. However, due to the peculiarities of Yezidi faith, especially today, such a general statement cannot be made in good faith. In my experience most Yezidis, at least in the Sheikhan district of Iraq, where I carried out most of my research, are so little interested in abstract questions of their faith that most of them would not (or could not) venture any kind of opinion on the *ķbirqe* other than that it is the clothing of *feqirs*. In the case of Yezidis interested in their own tradition, one must progress cautiously as many of them acquired their knowledge of Yezidi faith in an “unorthodox” way, that is through reading, and what they read, both on Yezidism and on other religious and philosophical concepts, influences their views and makes them to strive at formulating their ideas on Yezidism in ways that would be nearer to “Western” or “modern” thinking. This is also true of Arab Khidir. See chapter “Religious Oral Tradition and Literacy” and E. Spät, “Religious Oral Tradition and Literacy among the Yezidis of Iraq,” *Anthropos* 103.2 (2008): 393-404.

⁵⁹⁴ *Xirqe libse Xwedê ye, Xirqe surretê Xwedê ye*

⁵⁹⁵ *Xirqe maddi lebaqe. Mana wê gelek e. Mana wê iman pê rêya Xwedê, bi destura Xwedê. Xirqe hebit, imana wî lazîm e bi Xwedê hebit, anahu ek e, Xwedê bêşerîk e.* The concept of God having no “partner” (*şîrk*) is obviously of Islamic origin, where this doctrine disputes with the teaching of the Chris-

"*Khirqe* is the sign of true faith, and the sign of the Oneness of God."⁵⁹⁶

"Our hymns are the command of God: hymns and the *khirqe* came down in the place of books."⁵⁹⁷

"Just as the Christians say New Testament, and Jews say Old Testament (*Ehdi*, Promise, Alliance,) our hymns are like an Alliance of God, God sent us down the hymns (*qewl*) and the *khirqe* instead of Books."⁵⁹⁸

Undoubtedly, these statements on the meaning of the *khirqe* reflect the influence of modern attempts to create a religious system that conforms to the expectations of literary religions. Emphasizing - of all possible things - the oneness of God as symbolized by the *khirqe*, or how *khirqe* and hymns should be considered as equal to the revealed books of other religions, is probably a new phenomenon, in harmony with the wish to bring Yezidism on par

tian Trinity. As a matter of fact, a statement that the Yezidi God has no partner companion, may not be the best description of Yezidi teachings on God, if we think of the Angels, who are clearly his hypostases, or of the *khirqe* described as God's companion above. Such a stress on the Oneness of God should clearly be attributed to the requirements of modernization and emerging literacy as described in the chapter on the changes of Yezidi oral religion. The concept of the Oneness of God is extremely "popular" among the "reformers," who would like to stress that Yezidism is a monotheist religion, or perhaps the first monotheist religion.

⁵⁹⁶ *Xirqe nişana imanê ye, nişana yeketiya Xwedê ye*

⁵⁹⁷ *qewlê me erd (irada, soz) Xwedê ne, qewl u xirqe hate xware, ji bedela kitaba*

⁵⁹⁸ *çawa falat bêjît Ehdi cadid, cih bêjin Ehdi qadim, Qewlên me jî ehdêt Xwedê ye... Wextê Xwedê khirqe û qewl naxil kirin ... ji bedelê kitaba* The notion that hymns and the *khirqe* have the same role in the religion of the Yezidis as the revealed Books of other religions is based on the content of the sacred hymns. As we have seen above, the *Hymn of the Black Furqan* states that God revealed "The *Qewls* and the *khirqes*, So that the House of Tradition may adhere to it, rejoice and believe in it." However, putting such an emphasis on the *khirqe* and hymns as adequate substitutes for revealed books, probably reflects, yet again, modern Yezidis' wish to appear as equals of the "Religions of the Book," a very important notion in Islamic culture.

with written religions. However, it is still clear behind the modern terminology that *kbirqe* is traditionally understood to stand for more than the mere physical clothing of *feqirs*. It is seen as the potent symbol of a divine message. The way the interpretation of this message is framed may be somewhat novel, but the idea that the *kbirqe* is its vehicle presumably is not.

This theory is proven by some very interesting references to the *kbirqe* among modern Yezidis. One of these occurred during a conversation on *kocheks*, or Yezidi “seers.” *Kocheks* are believed to be able to see events taking place far away in space or time, to tell the cause of mysterious ailments, to speak in tongues, and most importantly, to be cognizant of the fate of a soul after death.⁵⁹⁹ They are able to achieve these marvels through divine inspiration, that is, with the help of their *delil* (divine guide) or *xudan* (owners) who inspire them or even speak through their mouth.⁶⁰⁰ The miraculous deeds and true predictions performed by some of the more famous *kocheks* make topics of conversation, and such *kocheks* are referred to as people “who have *kbirqe*.” I was explained that “having *kbirqe*” in this case does not refer to the physical possession of the sacred garment – as it is strictly only the *feqirs* who are entitled to wear the black woolen shirt. The expression should not be taken in the physical sense, rather it is used to refer to someone who is both good and pure, and possesses some sort of *keramet* (divine grace, miraculous power originating from God) – in this case manifested through the presence of the divine guide, who clearly would never choose to communicate with someone who was not worthy.

⁵⁹⁹ Yezidis believe in the transmigration of the soul, and *kocheks* may be able to tell about the former lives of a soul, or occasionally predict where the soul of a deceased will migrate to next. (For example, I was told by a *kocheke* that in a former life I used to live in Lalish, hence my interest in Yezidis.)

⁶⁰⁰ On one occasion I was able to witness a *kocheke* “speaking tongues” while in trance. It is believed that it was his *delil* who was speaking through his mouth. While I was not quite convinced as to the authenticity of the trance, it is certain that this is one of the ways traditional Yezidis in general envisage a supernatural being communicating through a *kocheke*.

Yet another indication of the importance of the *khirqe* in Yezidi religion is that the Yezidis are said to take oaths on the *khirqe*. Taking a solemn oath on the *khirqe* precludes the possibility of any lie or perfidy.

THE SUFI *KHIRKA* AND THE YEZIDI *KHIRQE*

The influence of Sufism on Yezidi religion is beyond any doubt. After all, Yezidism, in its current form, would hardly exist if there had not been the *tariqat al-Adawiyya*, that is, the mystical Sufi derivative order founded by Sheikh Adi. The same Sufi influence is clearly detectable in this exciting article of clothing of faith – the *khirqe*. Not only its physical manifestation – as the actual woolen shirt of the *feqirs*, or religious ascetics – can clearly be traced back to the clothing of the Sufi mystics, but the same holds true for many of its symbolic aspects.

The Yezidi *khirqe*, just like its Sufi counterpart, is a clothing of true faith, representing piety and implying detachment from worldly interests in favour of seeking the path leading to God. This meaning is easily discernible in the hymns, which speak of the *feqirs* as believers ready to follow the true religion and spurn the world and give up its riches and gold and all transitory evils (*Hymn of Sheikh Obekir*), and conquer their “ego souls” (*nafs*), or carnal nature (*Hymn of the Faith*), all attributes of the true Sufi.⁶⁰¹

For Sufis the *khirka* could also represent the spiritual connection between master and disciple, and eventually symbolized the whole *silsila*, the chain of transmission, leading back to the ultimate source of religious knowledge, the Prophet. This idea is reflected in hymns on the *khirqe* passing from one *khas* (angel incarnated as Yezidi leader) to another (*Hymn of the Faith*, *Hymn of the Thousand and One Name*, *Hymn of the Black Furqan*.) *Khirqe* is here seen as a vehicle, or perhaps symbol, of transmitting spiritual authority, legitimizing

⁶⁰¹ For example, according to a thirteenth-century Sufi work discussing the *khirka*, “the basic Sufi cloak is either black or dark blue, signifying that the wearer has conquered and slain his carnal soul (*nafs*), and is wearing black so as to mourn it symbolically.” Elias, “The Sufi Robe,” 281.

the *khas* as the head of the community and source of valid religious teaching, eventually constituting the same kind of *silsila* as that of Sufi orders. (Seeing these leaders, the inheritors of the *khirqe*, as incarnate angels is, of course, a Yezidi development or characteristic, as no orthodox Islamic Sufism would have countenanced the idea of incarnate angels leading a community.)

The importance attributed to Sheikh Adi's *khirqe* also fits the language of the Sufi *khirka*. Just as the *khirka* received from the head of a Sufi order symbolizes that the dervish has devoted himself to following that order (or as they said rather literally, the "path" or *tariqat*), so the adherence of Yezidis in general (and of Yezidi *feqirs* in particular) to Yezidi faith/path is represented by the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi, the founder of the dervish order that probably provided the organizational background, which made the emergence of this "Kurdish religion" possible. No wonder that Sheikh Adi's *khirqe* was (and is) actually venerated in its physical form in Lalish.⁶⁰²

We have accepted the authority of the angels
Whoever believes in the religion and the
Foundations of the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi
(Belongs to) the House of Adi, to our
Order, for ever and ever.⁶⁰³

Finally, concerning the idea that the *khirqe* came from the supernatural plane, one can perhaps perceive some distant parallels with the speculation concerning the *khirka* of al-Khidr. Al-Khidr, the mysterious figure of Quran 18.64-81, who shows a wisdom superior to prophetic law, was widely respected throughout the Islamic world as an immortal mystical guide.⁶⁰⁴ Investiture with the *khirqe* by al-Khidr (*khirka khidriyya*) was used in a metaphorical sense for saying someone had received spiritual direction directly

⁶⁰² Much like the *Khirka-yi Sherif*, the mantle of Muhammad kept in the Topkapi Palace since Ottoman times.

⁶⁰³ *Hymn of the Faith* 24 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 86.)

⁶⁰⁴ In some sources he was also referred to as "Tutor of the Prophets," for, with the sole exception of Muhammad, all prophets were taught by him.

from Khidr himself, that is not from an earthly source, a living teacher, but through direct intervention from the spiritual world.⁶⁰⁵ In this respect it is obvious that *khirka* was not always understood as an actual physical object, received through a physical investiture, but as a symbol of divine revelation of a mystical nature – an idea that may be compared to the way Yezidi hymns speak about *khirqe*, and receiving the *khirqe* as being tantamount to attaining true religion, or when Yezidis today refer to *kochebs*, generally believed to be guided by some supernatural entity, as possessing *khirqe* in a metaphorical sense. However, as regards seeing the Yezidi *khirqe* as the complementary part of the same revelations as the *qewls*, or hymns, we can find no such comparison between the Quran (or sacred, revealed texts) and the *khirka* in Islamic/Sufi tradition. Furthermore, while for the Yezidis Khidr – or rather Khidr Ilyas – is an important angelic figure with his own holiday, his figure is not mentioned in connection with the *khirqe* in the hymns or in “popular” tradition. This makes it unlikely that the Yezidi *khirqe* reflects traditions connected with the *khirka khidriyya*.

These similarities notwithstanding, there are some aspects of the Yezidi *khirqe* which would be hard to trace to the traditional Sufi *khirka*, rich as this Sufi tradition is:

- Unlike the Yezidi *khirqe*, the Sufi *khirka* is not a garment of God, nor was it created by God at the beginning of time, nor is it an object of God’s love or pilgrimage.
- There are no references to the baptism of the Sufi *khirqe*, either by God or any other holy being.
- The coarse, woolen shirt of the Sufis is not referred to as “luminous” (*nûranî*), nor is it in any way connected with light, unlike the black Yezidi *khirqe*, that is called “luminous” both when spoken of as God’s garment or as Sheikh Adi’s robe. As for the latter, Yezidi oral tradition maintains light was coming from Sheikh Adi’s *khirqe* when he wore it.
- The Sufi *khirka* is not a garment of angels, even less likely would it be identified with the angels themselves.

⁶⁰⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 105-6. For example, Ibn Arabi, claimed to have received one of his *khirqes* from al-Khidr.

- The Sufi *khirka* was not the clothing covering Adam in Paradise, before his Fall (symbolizing his angelic status).⁶⁰⁶
- There is no crown accompanying the Sufi *khirka* unlike in Yezidi texts.
- The Sufi *khirka* did not function as a “connecting link” between the spiritual (*batini*, hidden, esoteric) and material (exoteric, *ẓahiri*) world. It is not a source or form of divine revelation on par with the Sacred Texts (Quran) unlike the Yezidi *khirqe*.⁶⁰⁷ Nor is the Sufi *khirka* the source of spiritual well-being (*silev*).⁶⁰⁸ The *khirka* may be seen as a symbol of having attained gnosis (or, to be more exact, a certain stage of spiritual perfection and knowledge of God), but it was not seen or described as something conferring gnosis (unlike the description of Yezidi *khirqes*).⁶⁰⁹ Furthermore there were a variety of *khirkas*, which were awarded to the Sufi in chronological order, that is, they functioned as a sort of “badge of progress,” as outward signs of the individual’s degree of spiritual advancement on the Sufi path, clearly reflecting a kind of hierarchy – hardly compatible with the idea of the *khirqe* conferring gnosis on the believer (or being identical *per se* with divine gnosis or enlightenment).⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁶ As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, even the sources that see Adam’s clothes as a prototype of the *khirka*, are talking about clothes Adam wore *after* his expulsion from Paradise.

⁶⁰⁷ “I shall reveal to the earth, The *Qewls* and the *Khirqes*, So that the House of Tradition may adhere to it, rejoice and believe in it.” *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 37 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 100.)

⁶⁰⁸ “The holy men and angels distributed well-being, The symbols of Sultan Ezid were the *khirqes*, they stayed on earth.” *Hymn of the Faith* 23 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 199.)

⁶⁰⁹ “By their light things were revealed before dawn.” *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 25 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 98.)

⁶¹⁰ Though some traditions viewed the *khirka* as imbued with the master’s spiritual qualities, which could have a transformative impact on the disciple, this is merely to be understood as an aid in the struggle toward attaining a higher degree of spiritual advancement, but did not confer gnosis on the disciple.

- Finally, the *khirka* of the Sufis was not utilized in Sufi literature as an eschatological symbol, something to be awarded to those who fight for the true faith, either now or at the last battle preceding the Day of Judgment, as their reward – and symbol of their well-earned salvation.
- At last, perhaps not so much a technical, but rather a literary point, the Sufi *khirka*, unlike the Yezidi one, was not a frequent subject of religious poetry.

LATE ANTIQUE GARMENT THEOLOGIES

How can we explain those aspects of the Yezidi *khirqe* that are incongruent with the Sufi tradition concerning the Sufi robe, the *khirka*? Should we see them as independent Yezidi developments, sort of “wild cards,” or can they be fitted into a more complex, far-reaching pattern? As has already been said above, I believe that those aspects of the Yezidi *khirqe* that do not fit the traditions connected with its Sufi prototype (the *khirka*) are rooted in the religious-mythic imagery of Late Antiquity. For it was in Late Antiquity that a most complex “theology of garment” was developed around the theme of the clothing of Light (that is, the garment and crown lost by Adam). In a symbolism that grew extraordinarily rich, this garment of Light came to refer not only to the Fall of Adam, and the loss of his original angelic state, but also to the fate and eschatological future of the individual soul, to the saving grace of religion and baptism, and in some systems even to the complex relation between the human soul and the divine, and the Gnosis connecting the two. It was an innovative fusion of two traditions, that is, Sufi and late antique concepts regarding holy garments (*khirka* and the robe of Glory or garment of Light), that eventually gave birth to the Yezidi *khirqe* with its many-layered, elusive meaning.

Judaism

Angelic Garment

Speculations on the garment of Adam, which some interpreted as a garment of Light⁶¹¹ lost by him at his Fall, have already been mentioned in the previous chapter. As has already been referred to in passing,⁶¹¹ some traditions also attribute such robes of glory to the angels. As Odeberg writes in his commentary on the *Hebrew Enoch*, “in early traditions the ‘garment of glory’ (raiment of honour’ etc.) represents the light substance in which the inhabitants of the high heavens appear; the ‘glory’ is light, splendour, probably conceived of as a reflection, outflow of the Divine Glory, the Splendour of Shekina.”⁶¹² Examples can be found in the Enoch literature.⁶¹³ The *Hebrew Book of Enoch*, belonging to the tradition of Jewish Merkabah mysticism, describes the transformation of Enoch into the angel Metatron. Enoch is translated from earth to heaven and ele-

⁶¹¹ See the paragraph on the clothing of Satan before his Fall in the works *Cave of Treasures* and *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* in the previous chapter.

⁶¹² Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 32.

⁶¹³ The Enoch literature comprises three composite works of an apocalyptic nature (also known as the Ethiopic, Slavonic and Hebrew Book of Enoch after their language of transmission), which were attributed to Enoch of the Old Testament, who “walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” according to Genesis 5.24. This statement was traditionally understood to mean that Enoch was so righteous that he did not die, but was taken up to heaven by God while still alive, and this tradition gave rise to many Haggadic stories. The so-called *Enoch Books* all describe visionary journeys to heaven, complete with revelations about the mysteries of the universe, the future of the world and the course of human history up to the Day of Judgement. The date of their relative composition ranges from third or fourth century BC (*Ethiopic Enoch*) to the fifth or sixth century AD (*Hebrew Enoch*). The *Books of Enoch* were immensely popular reading material in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and exerted a great influence not only on Jewish and Christian literature and theology, but also on Manichaean and Mandaean religious literature.

vated over all the angels as God's "vice-regent." This transformation includes investiture with angelic insignia, including a robe of Glory and a crown:

Metatron, Prince of Presence, said to me: By reason of the love with which the Holy One, blessed be He, loved me more than all the children of heaven. He made me a garment of glory on which were fixed all kinds of lights and He clad me in it. And He made me a robe of honour on which were fixed all kinds of beauty, splendour, brilliance and majesty. And he made me a royal crown in which were fixed forty-nine costly stones like unto the light of the globe of the sun. For its splendour went forth in the four quarters of the *Araboth Raqia*, and in (through) the seven heavens, and in the four quarters of the world. And He put it on my head. And He called me THE LESSER YHWH in the presence of all His heavenly Household.⁶¹⁴

The *Slavonic Enoch* is even more specific on how Enoch's transformation into a celestial being includes investing him with glorious garments – reflecting God's glory⁶¹⁵ - that make him like one of the "glorious ones" (angels):

And the Lord said to Michael: "Go extract Enoch from his earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him in the clothes of my glory." And so Michael did, just as the Lord had said to him. He anointed me and he clothed

⁶¹⁴ 3 Enoch 12, Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 32-3. Cf. The translation of P. Alexander: "Out of the love which he had for me, more than for all the denizens of the heights, the Holy One, blessed be he, fashioned for me a majestic robe in which all kind of luminaries were set, and he clothed me in it. He fashioned for me a kingly crown in which 49 refulgent stones were placed, each like the sun's orb, and its brilliance shone into the four quarters of the heaven of 'Arabot, into the seven heavens, and into the four quarters of the world. He set it upon my head and he called me, 'the lesser YHWH,'" in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 1, 265.

⁶¹⁵ Some researchers even interpret the text to say that Enoch was actually clothed in God's Glory. See A. Orlov and A. Golitzin, "'Many Lamps Are Lightened from the One': Paradigms of the Transformational Vision in Macarian Homilies," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55.3 (2001): 286.

me... And I looked at myself, and I had become like of His glorious ones, and there was no observable difference.⁶¹⁶

As the Enoch Literature attests, speculations that the angels wore luminous garment of Light were not unknown to late antique rabbinical Judaism. Quite likely *The Cave of Treasures*, which likens Adam's robe to that of the angels, also preserves Jewish traditions as is often the case with Syriac literature.⁶¹⁷

Garment of God

It is not only Adam, the angels or the transformed Enoch who may be conceived of as wearing a garment of Light. Late antique Judaism was also familiar with the notion of God wearing a garment of Light, a tradition that can be linked to the so-called *Shiur Qomah* traditions concerning the corporeal body of God. In fact, as has been mentioned above, the light-substance covering the inhabitants of heaven is probably none other than the reflection or outflow of the Splendour of the Shekina. Some writings, however, are more daring (or more anthropomorphic) and, instead of referring to the allusive concept of the Shekina or Divine Glory, speak about the garment of Light of God. This idea is perhaps based on some passages in the Bible, for example, *Psalms* 104.1-2 which says:

Bless the Lord, o my soul. O Lord my God, thou are very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.

Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.

Possibly the *Book of Daniel* (Daniel 7.9), which speaks of the Ancient of Days as dressed in a garment white as snow, could have also influenced speculations concerning the garment of God.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch* 22.8-9, trans. F. I. Andersen, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 1, 138.

⁶¹⁷ See for example Brock, "Jewish traditions in Syriac Sources."

⁶¹⁸ However, Scholem is of the opinion that the garment of light mentioned in the mystical texts of Late Antiquity, quoted below, is not

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

White as snow could be interpreted to refer to the color of light, so God's garment shone white with light, while his throne was also burning with a fiery flame. In any case the Inter-testamental *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, seems to have combined these two different images, white as snow and shining light, when it describes Enoch's vision of God. On his heavenly journey Enoch comes before God sitting on his throne of glory, wearing a white garment shining more brightly than the sun:

And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne – its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun... and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it. And the Great Glory was sitting upon it – as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow.⁶¹⁹

In some mystical writings this garment of Light, covering God, appears to have acquired cosmic dimensions.⁶²⁰ The *Genesis Rabbah* (or *Beresbit Rabbah*), a midrash comprising a collection of

connected with the snow-white garment of the Ancient of the Days in Dan. 7.9, see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism*, 58.

⁶¹⁹ 1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) *Enoch* 14.18-21, trans. E. Isaac, Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 1, 21. A similar tradition is preserved in Matthew 17.1-2, which describes the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, when the disciples perceive that Jesus is in fact the Great Glory of God: "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Mark 9.3 says, "And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them."

⁶²⁰ Scholem, ch. "Aggadic Sayings and Merkabah Hymns: Garment of God," *Jewish Gnosticism* 57-64. On Jewish mystical literature on God's garment, see also Raphael Loewe "The Divine Garment and Shi'ur Qomah." *The Harvard Theological Review* 58.1 (1965): 153-60.

ancient rabbinic homiletic interpretations of the book of Genesis, contains a passage on the creation of light from the divine garment of God. God wrapped Himself in this garment of Light, and with it He illuminated the earth from one end to the other:

Rabi Simeon asked: "... tell me, whence the light was created." R. Samuel said: "The Holy one, blessed be He, wrapped Himself in a white garment [other texts have: as in a garment] and the splendor of his glory shone forth from one end of the world to the other." He said this in a whisper. R. Simeon was bewildered by this. "Is it not said explicitly in Scripture: He covereth Himself with lights as with a garment [Psalms 104:2]?"⁶²¹

The *Pirke of Rabbi Eliezer*, a Haggadic-Midrashic work of the ninth century, contains a similar thought probably based on earlier material:

Whence were the heavens created? From the light of the garment with which he was robed; He took and stretched it like a garment."⁶²²

G. Scholem has shown that these Midrashic passages can be linked to certain hymns preserved in the *Greater Hekhaloth* (*Hekhaloth Rabbati*), which contain accounts of the mystical ascent into heaven. Scholem claims that at least some of this literature originated no later than the second or third century, and reflects a background, which, while monotheistic, also had strong Gnostic resonances. According to Scholem the hymns in the *Greater Hekhaloth* "reflect teachings current in at least the third century CE, provide us with several passages that mention the garment of God as a matter of course and as something generally known to the initiate."⁶²³ The heavenly bearer of this garment is one of the principle objects of the Merkabah vision, and *Hekhaloth* hymns imply that the vision

⁶²¹ *Beresith Rabbah*, ed. Theodor, pp. 19-20, in G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 58.

⁶²² *Pirke Eliezer* ch. 3, G. Friedlander's translation (1916), 15, in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 58.

⁶²³ Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 58.

of this garment arouses the “same numinous qualities as are aroused by the vision of the mystical ‘body of the glory’ itself... the visionary was taught to expect such a garment of Light covering the glory.”⁶²⁴ Furthermore, just as in the *Genesis Rabbah*, this garment has a cosmic function; stars were created by (from) the light that issues from the garment, while the sun and moon issued from His crown:

Who is like unto our King? Who is like unto our Creator? Who is like unto the Lord our God?

The sun and moon is cast out and sent forth by the crown of His head.

The Pleiades and Orion and the Planet of Venus,

Constellations and stars and Zodiac signs

Flow and issue forth from the garment of Him

Who is crowned and [shrouded] in it, sits upon the throne of His glory.⁶²⁵

Another hymn preserved in the *Greater Hekaloth* describes the wonders of creations stemming from Gods’s majesty, His beauty, His stature, His crown, and His garment.⁶²⁶ The crown is occasionally substituted by garland.⁶²⁷ The text of a magical papyrus (in Greek) reads: “Through the power of Jao, the strength of Sabaoth, and the garment of Elohim, and the rules of Adonai, and the garland of Adonai.”⁶²⁸

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁶²⁵ *Greater Hekaloth* ch. 4:2, Ibid., 61.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 61-62.

⁶²⁷ As in Manichaean hymns that speak of the garment/robe of light, diadem, crown and garland as a reward of the true believer, on this see below.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 64. K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, II.161. In a Coptic Christian charm containing a particularly great wealth of Jewish material, the garment and the crown are equally invoked. Ibid., 64.

The Garment of the Righteous After Ascension to a Heavenly Realm

Yet another trend of Jewish thought in the Hellenistic period was given to speculation on the garment of glory the righteous would be rewarded with (or wear) in heaven. The *Book of Ben Sira* (or *Ecclesiasticus*) 6.28-32, composed in the second century before Christ, talks about a robe of Glory (στολή δόξης in the Greek translation) as the reward of those who seek (religious) wisdom:

Search for her [Wisdom], and she shall be made known to thee, and when thou hast gotten her, let her not go: For in the latter end thou shalt find rest in her, and she shall be turned to thy joy. Then shall her fetters be a strong defence for thee, and a firm foundation, and her chain a robe of Glory: For in her is the beauty of life, and her bands are a healthful binding. Thou shalt put her on as a robe of Glory, and thee shalt set her upon thee as a crown of joy.

The *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* is even more explicit on the garment of glory to be given on the Last Day. It offers a vivid description of the Day of Judgment, when the righteous will be clothed with garments of glory which are identified with garments of life:⁶²⁹

The righteous and elect ones shall rise from the earth and shall cease being of downcast face. They shall wear the garments of glory. These garments of yours shall become the garments of Life from the Lord of the Spirits. Neither shall your garments wear out, nor your glory come to an end before the Lord of the Spirits.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ The *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13.14 (see below) and the *New Testament* (Revelations 3: 5) also identify the heavenly vesture with immortality. See J. Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 61.4 (1971): 291.

⁶³⁰ 1 Enoch 62.15-16, Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 1, 44.

Similarly the *Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba*, a semi-mystical tract of the early post-Talmudic period,⁶³¹ which echoes the *Hebrew Book of Enoch*, talks about the banquet of the pious in the Garden of Eden in the world to come:

In that hour the wicked come to the door of the Garden of Eden, and stand and watch the happiness of the pious. And they see all the pious, each one with the face of his glory, in royal robes, and with a royal crown, and with jewels of kingly pearls.⁶³²

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, probably composed in the first century AD, Abraham is shown visions of the future of his people. The angel guiding Abraham scolds Azazel (Satan) when he tries to mislead Abraham, saying that, unlike him, Abraham belongs to heaven, and the garment of life worn earlier by Satan has been transferred on Abraham:

Disgrace upon you, Azazel! For Abraham's lot is in heaven, but yours is upon the earth. For behold, the garment which in heaven was formerly yours [Satan's] has been set aside for him [Abraham], and the corruption which was on him has gone over to you.⁶³³

⁶³¹ D. Stern, "Midrash and Indeterminacy," *Critical Inquiry* 15.1 (1988): 136-7.

⁶³² *Midrash Alpha Beta of Rabbi Akiba* (BH. 3.34), www.jafi.org.il/education/anthology/english/print/E2B-midrash_otiyot_derbi_akiva.pdf - Source: Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, Wayne State University Press, 1979. Last accessed 13 July 2008. Another text, the *Alpha Beta de Metatron*, quoted by Odeberg in his commentary on the *Hebrew Enoch*, after describing the eight garments made out of the splendour of the Shekina and used to clothe Metatron/Enoch, says: "When the righteous part from this world the Prince of the Presence conducts him to the Garden of Eden and there he clothes him in the eight Garments from the splendour of the Shekina." *Alpha Beta de Metatron* (Add. 15299, fol. 81b-a), in Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 32.

⁶³³ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13.14, trans. R. Rubinkiewicz, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 1, 695.

The text here makes a clear reference to the garment of Light or robe of Glory lost by Satan when he rebelled against God.⁶³⁴ Though there is no reference to Adam, perhaps we may infer that the angel in the Apocalypse offers Abraham, “the Friend of God,” the robe of Glory lost not only by Satan but by his (and mankind’s) own ancestor through his folly, upon Abraham’s return to Paradise.

The Jewish portion of the pseudepigraphic work, the *History of the Rechabites*⁶³⁵ recounts the visit of a virtuous man, Zosimus to a Paradise-like island where the Blessed Ones live in complete bliss, as “mortals” who are “purified and spotless,” and as beings who are “Earthly Angels.”⁶³⁶ And they are all naked. A human, who comes to visit the island, asks them “Why are you naked?” He is told, that, in effect, he is the one who is naked, for his own garments are corrupted, but that of his interlocutor, who at this moment appears to have the face of an angel, are not, rather he is wearing a clothing of glory.⁶³⁷ While the other texts, quoted above, make no apparent connection between the lost garment of Light of Adam and Eve, and the robe of Glory given to the righteous, the *History of the Rechabites* provides a link between the two:

these blessed ones are like Adam and Eve before they sinned...⁶³⁸ ‘we are naked not as you suppose, but we are covered with a stole of glory (similar to that) which clothed Adam and Eve before they sinned.’⁶³⁹

⁶³⁴ See previous chapter, especially the part on *The Cave of Treasures*.

⁶³⁵ The *History of Rechabites* is a Christian document based on a Jewish original, parts of which are preserved in the text. Though this work is little known or quoted today, it used to be very popular in the Middle Ages both in the West and in the Middle East. Translations existed, among others, in Syriac, Arabic and Armenian.

⁶³⁶ A. De Conick, and J. Fossum, “Stripped before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45.2 (1991): 131.

⁶³⁷ *History of Rechabites* 5.3-4, trans. J. H. Charlesworth, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2, 452.

⁶³⁸ HR 7.2-3, *ibid.*, 452.

⁶³⁹ HR 12.3, *ibid.*, 457.

In other words these purified mortals had attained the prelapsarian state of blessedness, a state when Adam and Eve were beings covered by glory instead of material clothes. This motif, as we shall see, was a popular theme in Christian, especially in Syriac literature, where they were writing about being redeemed from Adam's sin by Christ's sacrifice.

And finally the Qumran texts could perhaps be mentioned here. One of the texts recounts the rewards to be bestowed upon the "Sons of Truth" including the "crown of glory with a garment of splendor in eternal light."⁶⁴⁰

Christianity

Christianity's rich inheritance from Judaism and Jewish literature includes speculations concerning the garment of Light or robe of Glory: a garment that was like the garments worn by the angels, one that was worn by Adam, and that was going to be given to the purified souls of the righteous elect in the hereafter.

However, Christianity, especially Syriac Christianity, surpassed Judaism by far when it came to garment symbolism, and with time there developed a veritable "theology of garment," a complex synthesis of different, previously somewhat disjointed, motifs. The garment, often along with the crown, became an important symbol of the salvation of the soul, a symbol that had its place in every single stage of the drama of mankind, from creation and the Fall, through the sacrifice of Christ to the salvation of the individual soul and final eschatology.

This rich garment theology is foreshadowed already by the New Testament. In the famous parable of the prodigal son the father tells his servants: "Bring forth the first (usually translated as best) robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:" (Luke 15:22). The Greek for what is today usually translated as "best robe" is τὴν στολὴν τὴν πρῶτην. The primary meaning of "protos" is actually "first," though it may also

⁶⁴⁰ IQS 4:7-8, quoted by John Reeves, "Manichaica Aramaica? Adam and the Magical Deliverance of Seth," *JAOs* 119.3 (1999): 433.

mean “best.” Many of the early Church Fathers understood the text to say “bring on his first robes” referring to the robe worn before falling into sin (that is, Adam’s robe before the Fall).⁶⁴¹

The *Book of Revelations* talks of a “white raiment,” a “raiment of Life” as mentioned above in the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, to be given to the righteous waiting for the final Judgment:

3.5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

7.9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.⁶⁴²

The Crown of Life (or wreath and diadem⁶⁴³ in Greek) is similarly mentioned along with the white raiment as the reward of the faithful in the *Book of Revelations*:

⁶⁴¹ Gregory of Nysse writes “So he <the heavenly Father> runs to him <the prodigal son> and greets him by kissing his neck, which means the rational yoke that is thrown through the mouth [that is, orally] by the evangelic tradition, upon man who had declined the first yoke of the commandment [that is, of the commandment in Paradise] and had shaken off the law that had protected him. And he [that is, man] is also clothed in a garment, no other than the first one, of which he had been stripped because of the transgression, when as soon as he tasted the forbidden fruit, he had to see himself naked.” *De oratione dominica orationes v*, ed. F. Oehler, *Gregor's Bischof's von Nyssa Abhandlung von der Erschaffung des Menschen und fünf Reden auf das Gebet* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1859), 202-314, here: 240. I owe this information and quotation to István Perczel.

⁶⁴² The Epistles of Paul, though not mentioning the lost garment directly, make repeated references to clothing metaphors, like putting on the armor of light, putting on the new man, Christ, incorruptibility, which were made much use of later on when the “theology of garment” was developed.

⁶⁴³ στέφανος, διάδημα. All three symbolize victory and kingship (royalty), divine glory and honor, see Gregory M. Stevenson, “Conceptual background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John 4:4, 10; 14:14,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114.2 (1995): 258.

2.10: Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of Life.

4.4: And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Under the influence of Judaism, the idea of a raiment and a crown like that of the angels that is to be given to the just (or the saints) after their death, or rather after the final Day of Judgement is taken up by the *Ascension of Isaiah*, an early second-century AD work. The portion also called *Visio Dei* (6-11), where Isaiah is granted a vision of Heaven and God, is considered a Christian addition to an older Jewish work (1-5.) Isaiah on his ascent is shown by his angelic guide the garments which he will be given once he will be free of his mortal body, garments that will make him equal to the angels:

And he said: "Hear, then, this also from your companion: when from the body by the will of God you have come up here, then you will receive the robe which you will see, and also other numbered robes placed (there) you will see. And then you will be equal to the angels who (are) in the seventh heaven."⁶⁴⁴

For above all the heavens and their angels is placed your throne, and also your robes and your crown, which you are to see.⁶⁴⁵

Interestingly, while Isaiah is promised the garment and crown upon his own ascension (after death) to heaven, the text also implies that others will have to wait for the Christian redemption, that is for the coming of the Son, before they can put on the heavenly robes and crowns which await them:⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 8.14-15, trans. M. A. Knibb, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2, 168.

⁶⁴⁵ *Isaiah* 7.22, *ibid.*, 167.

⁶⁴⁶ "And the angel who led me knew what I thought and said to me: "If you rejoice over this light, how much more (will you rejoice,) in the seventh heaven when you see the light where the Lord is and His Beloved from where I was sent - who is to be called in the world the Son. Not

Then, in the seventh heaven Isaiah has a vision of Old Testament saints, already clad in the garments of glory making them like angels, but not as yet crowned. Others (future Christians) will only ascend with the Son when the time comes and then receive the garments and crowns already set apart for them:

And there I saw Enoch and all who (were) with him, stripped of (their) robes of the flesh, and I saw them in their robes of the above, and they were like the angels, who stand there in great glory. But they were not sitting on their thrones, nor were their crowns of glory on them. And I asked the angel who (was) with me: "How is it that they have received the robes, but are not on their thrones nor in their crowns?" And he said to me: "They do not receive the crowns and thrones of glory, until the Beloved descends in the form in which you will see Him descend [The Lord will indeed descend] into the world in the last days (he) who is to be called Christ. And thus His descent, as you will see, will be concealed even from the heavens, so that it will not be known who He is. And when He hath plundered the angel of death, He will rise on the third day, and he will remain in that world five hundred and forty-five days. And then many of the righteous will ascend with Him, whose spirits do not receive [their] robes until the Lord Christ ascends and they ascend with Him. Then indeed they will receive their robes and their thrones and their crowns, when He has ascended into the seventh heaven."... And I saw many robes placed there, and many thrones and many crowns. And I said to the angel who led me: "Whose (are) these robes and thrones and crowns?" And he said to me: "As for these robes, there are many from that world who will receive (them) through believing in the words of That One who will be

(yet) hath been manifested he shall be in the corruptible world] and the garments, and the thrones, and the crowns which are laid up for the righteous, for those who trust in that Lord who will descend in your form. For the light which is there is great and wonderful." *Isaiah* 8.25-6, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2, 169: See also E. Goode-nough, "The Crown of Victory in Judaism," *The Art Bulletin*, 28.3. (1946):158, note 157, p. 158

named as I have told you, and they will keep them, and believe in them, and believe in His cross; [for them (are) these] placed.”⁶⁴⁷

The garment (and the crown) offered to the righteous in the Revelations or in the Ascension of Isaiah is not as yet qualitatively different from the garment of the Enoch literature or other Jewish writings, which speculate on the fate and reward of the elect in the hereafter. However, with the passing of time Christianity developed its own distinctive theological literature, and the garment of Light evolved from its biblical roots in novel ways to find its niche in this literature as a metaphor of the Christian salvation drama. As Brock writes “Indeed one can even speak ... of a ‘theology of clothing’, seeing that the entire span of salvation history can be expressed in terms of clothing imagery.”⁶⁴⁸ This “theology of clothing” was a complex synthesis of the different, previously somewhat disjointed, motifs. In this tradition, elaborately worked out in Syriac Christianity,⁶⁴⁹ ideas concerning Adam’s lost garment, also worn by angels, became dynamically intertwined with notions on the garment of Light/Glory to be given to the righteous in the hereafter or on the Day of Judgement. The (lost and potentially regained) garment, often along with the crown, became an important symbol of the salvation of the soul, a symbol that had its own place in every single stage of the drama of mankind, from the creation and fall, through the sacrifice of Christ to the salvation of the individual soul and final eschatology.

⁶⁴⁷ *Isaiah* 9.9-25, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2, 170-71.

⁶⁴⁸ Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 11.

⁶⁴⁹ According to Brock (“Clothing Metaphor,” 11 and 21) while individual elements of the garment theology may be found in Greek and Latin writers, “it is in Syriac tradition that the imagery is the most consistently and fully developed.” And “We have... a remarkably consistent use of the clothing metaphor, and its application to the entire span of salvation history gives it a dynamic quality that would seem to be lacking in the Greek and Latin traditions. It is quite clear that this ‘theology of clothing’ is deeply ingrained in the Syrian tradition.”

Adam's Fall and Salvation

As was seen above, the Jewish tradition, which interpreted Gen 3.21 as "garments of glory/light" that Adam took off as a counterpart to the "garments of skin," which he put on after the Fall, was well known to Christian authors. However, in Christian tradition, where the descent, incarnation and death of Christ redeemed Adam's original sin, this also meant a return to the original, sinless and angelic state, and to the repossession of Adam's lost garment of Light/Glory. As the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* so succinctly put it, Adam regained his robe of Glory through the sacrifice of blood, when he was baptized in the water (and blood) flowing from Christ's side:

The blood and the water [from the wound in Christ's side] ran down into the mouth of Adam, and Adam was redeemed, and put on a garment of glory.⁶⁵⁰

Adam is restored to his former elevated status, when Jesus: "came to find Adam who had got lost, and to return him in the garment of Light to Eden."⁶⁵¹

However, it is not only Adam, who has regained his robe of Glory through the sacrifice of Christ. For Christians, just as Adam's sin can be redeemed by the sacrifice of God's Son, so the lost robe of Glory, symbolizing Adam's sinless, angelic condition (before the Fall) can be regained through the same act.

When Christ puts on Adam (that is, humanity), his aim is to "reclothe mankind in the robe of Glory,"⁶⁵² that is, to return it to

⁶⁵⁰ *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, 231-32, trans. Budge.

⁶⁵¹ Ephrem, HdVIRG XVI.9, quoted in Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 27. In another hymn Ephrem writes: "The wedded pair were adorned in Eden; - but the serpent stole their crown: - yet mercy crushed down the accursed one, - and made the wedded pair goodly in their raiment. - Blessed be He that has mercy on all! They clothed themselves with leaves of necessity; - but the Merciful had pity on their beauty, - and instead of leaves of trees, - He clothed them with glory in the water. - Blessed be He that has mercy on all!" Ephrem, *Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany* 12.3-4, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3704.htm>, last accessed 18 July 2008.

⁶⁵² Brock, "Metaphors of Clothing," 12.

its original, prelapsarian state.⁶⁵³ As Ephrem writes, linking the motif of incarnation with the regaining of the garment of Light: “He (Christ) hid his own glory and gave his swaddling clothes as a robe of Glory to mankind.”⁶⁵⁴ While in the *Hymns of Paradise* he speaks of the new *stole* as one that was woven for Adam by the mother of Christ: “Mary clothed us with an incorruptible robe of Glory.”⁶⁵⁵

Already the early third century Odes of Solomon speak of a reversal of Gen. 3.21. One of the Odes on the salvation of the soul speaks of removing the garments of skin (symbolizing the sinful position of post-Fall man), identical with stripping off darkness and folly – metaphors for religious ignorance – and being dressed in a garment of Light by Christ, which is in its turn seen as being covered by the spirit of Christ:

And I abandoned the folly cast upon the earth,
And I stripped it off and cast it from me.

And the Lord renewed me with his garment,
And possessed me by his light.

And from above he gave me immortal rest,
And I became like the land that blossoms and rejoices in its
fruits.

And I stripped off darkness,
And put on light.

And even I myself acquired members.
In them there was no sickness or affliction or suffering.

And I was covered with the covering of your spirit,
And I removed from me my garments of skin.

Because your right hand raised me,

⁶⁵³ Or return it, indeed, to a higher, more glorious state. These differentiations and the question of linearity in human history, however, is not the subject of the present work.

⁶⁵⁴ Ephrem, *Hymn on Nativity* V,4,5, quoted in Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words,” 100.

⁶⁵⁵ *Hymns of Paradise* IV,5, *ibid.*

And caused sickness to pass from me.⁶⁵⁶

Later, more nuanced writings connected the retrieval of the garment of Light with baptism, linking the recapture of the robe of Glory not so much with the incarnation or Crucifixion of Christ, but rather with his descent and baptism in the waters of the Jordan, to be imitated by the faithful. "The robe of Glory that was stolen away among the trees have you put on in the baptismal water."⁶⁵⁷ When Christ descended into the Jordan to be baptized, he deposited the "robe of Glory/Light," making it available for mankind to put it on in baptism in the water of Jordan (the baptismal font consecrated by the invocation of the Holy Spirit). As a hymn attributed to Ephrem says, referring back again to Gen. 3.7, "instead of the leaves from the trees, he clothed them with glory from the water."⁶⁵⁸ Upon baptism the Christian puts on again his robe of Glory just as he puts on the "new man" (Ep. Eph. 4.24) or Christ (Ep. Rom. 13.14).⁶⁵⁹ As Aphrahat, a fourth-century Syriac author,⁶⁶⁰ put

⁶⁵⁶ *Ode* 21; De Conick - Fossum, "Stripped before God," 125.

⁶⁵⁷ Jacob of Serugh (ed. Bedjan) I.209, quoted in Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syrian Sources," 222.

⁶⁵⁸ Ephrem, HdEPIPH XII.4, in Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 19.

⁶⁵⁹ See Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 12, 16, 18.

⁶⁶⁰ Aphrahat (ca. 270 – ca. 345) was originally from Persia, and was also referred to as the "Persian Sage." Later Syrian tradition holds that he was the bishop of the Monastery of Mar Mattai (or Matti) near Mosul. (See T. D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985): 126.) The Monastery of Mar Mattai (or Matti) is a still functioning monastery on Mount Maqlub, a mountain (or rather hill) separating Beshiqe-Behzani from the Yezidi settlements of the Sheikhan on the other side of the Maqlub. The monastery and Mar Matti figure in some Yezidi religious myths I have collected in Beshiqe. However, it is rather doubtful if Aphrahat could have really been the bishop of the Mar Matti monastery, as it was probably founded by Mar Matti two decades after Aphrahat. Furthermore, Brock is of the opinion that, when Aphrahat speaks of monks, he is referring to ascetics living either individually or in small groups, and not yet in organized, coenobitic monasteries. (See S. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen*, 20.1 (1973): 11.)

it, this “clothing and garment of glory with which the righteous are clothed” is nothing else but Christ himself.⁶⁶¹

Many literary texts dealing with baptism reflect the notion of regaining the garment of Light. The close relationship between Adam’s glorious robe, the garment of the angels, and the clothing of glory the baptized puts on in the waters of the Jordan is made explicit in Ephrems’s *Hymn of the Baptized*:

Your garments glisten, my brethren, as snow;—and fair is your
shining in the likeness of Angels!
In the likeness of Angels, you have come up, beloved,—from
Jordan’s river, in the armour of the Holy Ghost.
The bridal chamber that fails not, my brethren, you have re-
ceived:—and the glory of Adam’s house today you have
put on.⁶⁶²

The expression robe of Glory became commonplace in Syriac literature, especially in a baptismal context. As Ephrem in his *Sermons* writes, “I gaze upon the ‘stole’ of glory that I put on at baptism.”⁶⁶³ A Syrian Orthodox baptismal service says: “You are anointed as a spiritual lamb so that you may put on the robe of Glory from the water;”⁶⁶⁴ while a Nestorian baptismal Service exhorts the faithful to keep the robe of Glory they would receive at baptism unsoiled by sins.⁶⁶⁵

Garment of Light as an Eschatological garment

We have seen how in Enochic literature and some of the rabbinical literature the faithful, who have reached their heavenly rest,

⁶⁶¹ *Demonstrations* XIV. 39 (Patrologia Syriaca I) col. 681, in Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 18

⁶⁶² *Hymn for the Feast of the Epiphany* 13 (Hymn for the Baptised), 1-3. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3704.htm>.

⁶⁶³ Ephrem, *Sermones* I,5,9, quoted in Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words,” 100.

⁶⁶⁴ Syrian Orthodox baptismal service (Homs edition) 42, quoted in Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 27.

⁶⁶⁵ Nestorian baptismal service (Urmiah edition) 74, quoted in Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek words in Syriac,” 99.

were to be clothed in white garments. The theme is taken up by the *Book of Revelations*, and can be found in later literature as well, despite the concurrent theme of Christians receiving their robe of Glory upon baptism. For baptism means merely the *potential* recovery of the robe of Glory, but not yet the full realization of repossessing the lost. (Just as baptism is a prerequisite of salvation, but not its guarantee. The newly-baptized must then live a life that makes him worthy.) The promise of putting on the robe of Glory will be completely fulfilled only after Resurrection when the deserving righteous will be clothed with the same Robe of Light:

[At the Resurrection] the just will put on that glory and light which we said had belonged to Adam before the transgression: had been covered with it, and Moses and Elijah had appeared in it when they came with Jesus.⁶⁶⁶

As it is up to the individual Christian to realize the promise of baptism through his life and pious acts, the faithful are exhorted to keep the robe they (potentially) received at baptism unsullied by sin, and thereby attain salvation and be able to actually put on the robe of Glory at the last reckoning. A Nestorian baptismal service urges the faithful to act in a way so “that they may preserve in purity the robe of Glory with which Thou hast clothed them in thy mercy.”⁶⁶⁷ In Jacob of Serugh’s work Jesus tells the repentant thief, “I will clothe you with a robe of light in the marriage chamber on high.”⁶⁶⁸ The marriage chamber (or bridal chamber) refers to *Matthew* 22, where the resurrection and entrance into the Kingdom of

⁶⁶⁶ Philoxenus, *Commentary on Matthew* (ed. P. Bedjan) I, 275, quoted in Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 27. See also Isaac of Antioch (ed. P. Bedjan) I, 275, quoted in Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 27-8: “Do you, who made garments of skin for Adam and Eve, give garments of light to the departed in your paradise? You allowed Adam to remove his hands from their task of covering his nakedness; thanks to those skins with which you clothed them, Lord you freed their hand by your mercy. Give clothing of glory to the departed, and a robe of light to those buried.”

⁶⁶⁷ Nestorian baptismal service (Urmiah edition) 74, quoted in Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek words in Syriac,” 99.

⁶⁶⁸ Jacob of Serugh (ed. P. Bedjan) V, 669, quoted in Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 27.

Heaven is compared to a royal wedding, where only those who have prepared their wedding garments can enter. In the clothing imagery the wedding garment is the robe of Glory that the faithful receive at their baptism, and which they must preserve unsoiled by sin, so when they arrive at the eschatological banquet, they might be allowed to enter.⁶⁶⁹ Those who do not take good care of their wedding garment will rue their negligence. Ephrem, meditating on the Last Judgment, is assailed by doubts as to his own actions, and describes his vision:

I saw there beautiful people, and I was desirous to of their beauty... I saw their bridal chamber opposite, which no one who has not a lamp may enter; I saw their joy, and I myself sat down in mourning, not possessing works worthy of that bridal chamber. I saw them clothed with the "robe of light," and I was grieved that I had prepared no virtuous raiment.⁶⁷⁰

However, the reality of putting on the robe of Glory can be anticipated by the saints, who preserve their baptismal "robe" unspotted:⁶⁷¹

Among the saints none is naked, for they have put on glory, nor is there any clad in fig leaves, or standing in shame, for they have found, through our Lord, the robe that belongs to Adam and Eve.⁶⁷²

Thus Christians are called on to lead an ascetic and solitary life, modeled on the life of the saints so that they attain the final reward of their struggles, the state where "Your filth, which has been your clothing, has woven you a robe of light."⁶⁷³ For those however, who do not struggle to live a sinless, pious existence, the robe of Glory may be lost forever, despite its promise at baptism. Thus

⁶⁶⁹ Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 20.

⁶⁷⁰ Letter to Publius § 12, quoted in Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 19.

⁶⁷¹ Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 13.

⁶⁷² Ephrem, HdPAR VI.9, quoted in Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 27.

⁶⁷³ Isaac of Antioch (ed. Bedjan) I, 53,14, quoted in Brock, "Some Aspects," 103.

Ephrem laments in his *Hymns of Paradise* how his own sins have lost him the “crown,⁶⁷⁴ the name, the glory, the robe, and the bridechamber of light.”⁶⁷⁵

Summing up, early Christians were able to consistently employ the garment of Light (and crown) as a metaphor spanning the entire salvation history: From Adam’s sin (loss of the garment), through the restitution of his sinless state (and angelic garments) through the sacrifice of Christ, to the promise of redemption (and of the same garments) to the individual Christian at baptism, finally to the eschatological moment when those deserving to be saved can take part in the divine wedding (and will be awarded the robe of Glory, and become like the angels.) Obviously, the “theology of clothing” was deeply ingrained in Christian, especially in Syriac tradition.

Gnosticism

The Gnostic garment of Light (also known as garment of life, armor of light, imperishable clothing, wedding robe, etc.) has much in common with its “brethren” (that is the garment of Light in Judaism and Christianity.) The process of salvation of the Gnostic is often described in the terms of stripping off (i.e. the material body and the earthly soul – which are opposed to the spirit,) followed by investiture with the robe of light, and finally the enthroning and glorifying.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁴ Note, that here again the crown is a recurrent theme, accompanying the robe of light. Ephrem for example speaks of the “Crown of Righteousness” in his *Hymn for the Feast of the Epiphany* 6.19 “to the priest who has toiled in baptizing, - let there come the crown of righteousness!” (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3704.htm>.)

⁶⁷⁵ Ephrem, *Hymns of Paradise* VII.5, quoted in Brock, “Some Aspects,” 104.

⁶⁷⁶ See Alistair H. B. Logan, “The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered” *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), 188; and J. Turner, “Ritual in Gnosticism,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers, 1994*, ed. E. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 136-181.

O my son, strip off the old garment of fornication, and put on the garment which is clean and shining, that you may be beautiful in it. But when you have this garment, protect it well. Release yourself from every bond, so that you may acquire freedom.⁶⁷⁷

Putting on the robe of light (or body of light) is often used as a metaphor for returning to the Realm of Light, from where the human soul, *pneuma*, originates. It is often mentioned in connection with the Gnostic baptism,⁶⁷⁸ as bridal clothing, together with the familiar wedding banquet and bridal chamber allegory:

You will accept robes from those who give robes and the Baptists will baptize you and you will become gloriously glorious, the way you first were when you were <Light>⁶⁷⁹

The Lord said... but when you rid yourselves of jealousy, then you will clothe yourselves in light and enter the bridal chamber.⁶⁸⁰

But the soul - she who has tasted these things - realized that sweet passions are transitory. She had learned about evil; she went away from them and she entered into a new conduct... And she learns about her light, as she goes about stripping off

⁶⁷⁷ *The Teaching of Silvanus* 105, trans. and ed. M. Peel and J. Zandee, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, NHMS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 333. *The Teachings of Silvanus* is one of the few texts from Nag Hammadi which is not entirely Gnostic, though it has gnosticizing tendencies. It is a rare example of early Hellenistic-Christian Wisdom literature, which drew its ideas from a synthesis of Biblical, Late Stoic, and Middle Platonic religious and ethical ideas. The text offers a dogmatic instruction on how to "become like God." (Peel, "Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi VII*, 268). The gnosticizing tendencies are reflected in the tractate's theology, anthropology, cosmology and ascetic ethic. According to Peel the gnosticizing tendencies in the anthropology include the use of the metaphor of sleep. (Peel, Introduction, 269.)

⁶⁷⁸ Considered to confer Gnosis on the believer.

⁶⁷⁹ *Trimorphic Protennoia* 1.45.16-20. trans. J. Turner in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*. NHS 28, (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 423.

⁶⁸⁰ *Dialogue of the Saviour* 50, trans. and ed. St. Emmel in *Nag Hammadi Codex III.5*. NHS 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 77.

this world, while her true garment clothes her within, (and) her bridal clothing is placed upon her in beauty of mind, not in pride of flesh.⁶⁸¹

All these - the garment of Light as the reward of those who transcend the material world, the connection of the garment with baptism, the metaphor of wedding, bridal chamber and bridal clothing, - do not sound very different from the Christian texts quoted above. There is, however, a marked difference between the exact nature of the garment of Light in the Gnostic approach and that of Christianity, just as there is a marked difference between their concepts of salvation (symbolized by the robe of Glory in both of them). For Gnostics, the soul (*pneuma*), a particle of light languishing in the prison of matter, is saved not by the sacrifice of a Saviour,⁶⁸² or by obeying the precepts of religious teachings, but by achieving Gnosis, the knowledge of where it came from, and where it belongs. Gnosis itself is salvation, as it enables the soul to escape the world of matter and return to the *Pleroma* (World of Light.)⁶⁸³

It was already seen in the previous chapter how the light enveloping Adam (or his luminous garment) at the beginning of mankind's history symbolized Adam's Gnosis, the divine spark of understanding the true nature of things. The loss of this luminous garment is another way of referring to the theft of this Gnosis by

⁶⁸¹ *Authoritative Teaching* 31,24-32,8, trans. G. MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*, NHS 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 281. For descriptions of receiving the garment or body/clothing of light in baptism as an instrument of spiritual enlightenment, see also *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, passim; and Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism."

⁶⁸² Though the Saviour figure exists in Gnostic thought, his main function is to bring Gnosis. Typically, Christian Gnostic schools thought of Christ's incarnation and death on the Cross in docetic terms, teaching that he only "appeared" to have been born, to have been crucified or to have died.

⁶⁸³ In Gnostic literature, therefore, there is no place for a Last Judgment, as each soul's escape is an individual one, depending on its eventual enlightenment. Nor is there a Resurrection, as the body as such was seen not only as perishable but also as inimical, a trap tying the soul to the physical world.

the jealous Evil Ruler, who then clothes the first couple in obscure darkness, that is forgetfulness, ignorance of their true origin. Salvation is none other than a regaining of consciousness (Gnosis) as to the origin of human soul (*pneuma*), and the real nature of the created (material world) as opposed to the World of Light. As the *Authoritative Teaching* says: "She had learned about evil... And she learns about her light." The luminous robe is the symbol of this salvation through Gnosis, as well as (at least in some texts) the bringer of this divine revelation, or knowledge (Gnosis), a motif not to be found in the literature quoted above. As the baptismal passage in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*,⁶⁸⁴ one of the Nag Hammadi texts reads:

He who possesses the Five Seals⁶⁸⁵ of these particular names
has stripped off the garments of ignorance and put on a shining light.⁶⁸⁶

When the believer gains Gnosis, he breaks out from the "garments of ignorance,"⁶⁸⁷ and acquires a true understanding of his true nature. As he puts on the robe of light, he remembers everything he has forgotten, and this remembering simultaneously means his return to the Kingdom of Light. In fact, this saving knowledge of one's origin (Gnosis) is identified with the robe of Light itself:

⁶⁸⁴ Baptism here refers to the baptism practiced by Gnostics, as the *Trimorphic Protennoia* must originally have been a non-Christian Gnostic (possibly Sethian) document that was later Christianized by inserting the name of Christ. See J. D. Turner, "Composition," in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, 393-401.

⁶⁸⁵ The Five Seals are associated with the reception of Gnosis in Gnostic baptism, a rite consisting of five stages of enlightenment: investiture, baptism in the spring of the (Living) Water, enthronement, glorification, and ecstatic rapture into the place of Light.

⁶⁸⁶ *Trimorphic Protennoia* 1.49.26-32, in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, 453.

⁶⁸⁷ The "garment of ignorance" may refer both to the material body in which the soul is imprisoned, and to the dense oblivion of its true origin in which it suffers.

I gave⁶⁸⁸ to him from the Water of Life, which strips him of the chaos that is in the uttermost darkness that exists inside the entire abyss, that is, the thought of the corporeal and the psychic. All these I put on. And I stripped him of it [i.e. corporeal thoughts, the psyche] and *I put upon him a shining Light, that is, the knowledge of the Thought of the Fatherhood.*⁶⁸⁹ And I delivered him to those who give robes, Yammon, Elasso, Amenai – and they [covered] him with a robe from the robes of Light.⁶⁹⁰

In some of the Gnostic writings the prototype of this light garment of Gnosis is the garment of the Gnostic Saviour, a being of the Light World, who descends to bring knowledge to mankind and awaken it to its condition. The garment of the Saviour encompasses all the saving Gnosis, the secrets necessary for salvation. In the *Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex*, the Mother (of Life) gives the Son (the Saviour) a garment in which were shown all the forms the knowledge which were needed to descend or ascend.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁸ The speaker is Protennoia, or Forethought (of the Father), the Mother of Life, who descends to deliver the imprisoned souls from the prison of matter through Gnosis.

⁶⁸⁹ Layton translates “acquaintance with thinking about kinship” (Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 99). Kinship, or fatherhood, probably refers to the origin of the soul from the World of Light, the Pleroma.

⁶⁹⁰ *Trimorphic Protennoia* 1.48.10-7, in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, 431.

⁶⁹¹ “Afterwards the mother established her first-born son (...) And she gave to him a garment in which to accomplish all things. And in it were all bodies: the body of fire, and the body of water, and the body of air and the body of earth, and the body of wind, and the body (of angels), and the body of archangels, and the body of powers, and the body of mighty ones, and the body of gods, and the body of lords. In a word, within it were all bodies so that none could hinder him from going to the height or from going down to the abyss.” *Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* ch. 16, text ed. C. Schimdt, trans. V. Macdermot, in *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, NHS 13 (Leiden, Brill, 1978), 256-7.

In the *Paraphrase of Shem*⁶⁹² the garments of Gnosis, which will help the Gnostics attain salvation, are in effect the garments of Derdekeas, the savior figure who descends from the Realm of Light to bring revelation to the chosen. Derdekeas uses various garments (of light and fire). These garments not only protect him as he travels through the clouds, and throw the evil powers into confusion so that they have to shed the powers of the Spirit, but they will also help the race of Shem (the Gnostics) to ascend through the hostile spheres.

That I may teach you, O Shem, from what blindness your race is protected. When I have revealed to you all that has been spoken, then the righteous one will shine upon the world with my garment...⁶⁹³ they who have a free conscience... they will strip off the burden of Darkness; they will put on the Word of the Light; and they will not be kept back in the insignificant place... And they will be taken to them by my garments, those which are in the clouds. It is they who guide their members.⁶⁹⁴

Here the garment is not merely a reward but also an essential instrument of salvation.

The same is true of the third-century *Pistis Sophia*,⁶⁹⁵ a work ascribed to the *Gnostikoi* of Epiphanius, where the risen Christ re-

⁶⁹² This late second or third century text from Nag Hammadi contains the revelations of Derdekeas, a Gnostic Savior to Shem. The text is in Coptic, but the original must have been Greek. It is of special interest, because Wisse contends that its theological content shows some similarities with the Manichaean myth. In Wisse's view this suggests a Syrian or Mesopotamian origin, and he concludes that the "shared concepts and ideas seem to reflect mythological traditions at home in the Persian Empire in late antiquity."

⁶⁹³ *Paraphrase of Shem* 28.20-25, trans. F. Wisse, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, NHMS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 83-85.

⁶⁹⁴ *Paraphrase of Shem* 42.24 – 45.12, *ibid.*, 113-15. The garment of Derdekeas in the *Paraphrase of Shem* reminds us in many ways of the way the garment is used in the Syriac *Hymn of the Pearl*, on which see below.

⁶⁹⁵ The work is available in Coptic, though probably it was translated from a Greek original. See Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, I. 362-3.

veals his esoteric teaching to his disciples. This work devotes much attention to the garment of Light of the Saviour,⁶⁹⁶ which is consistently identified with saving Gnosis and spiritual enlightenment. The Saviour, Jesus, receives his garment of Light that he had left behind in the *Pleroma* (Fullness or World of Light) that is both the instrument of his revelation to mankind and his eventual ascent back to the Light. Even more importantly, one finds here a curious description of the secret mystery written on the garment: "...and I found a mystery in my garment, written in the manner of writing of those of the height," containing the "gnosis of all gnosés," that is, everything the knowledge of which is necessary for attaining Gnosis⁶⁹⁷ - an image that brings to mind the idea in Yezidi tradition that

⁶⁹⁶ Chapters 6-10 contain a discourse by Jesus on his garment of light, chapters 11-16 offer an account of his ascension to Heights wearing the garment of light, and chapters 28-31 give yet another account by Jesus of his passing through the aeons wearing the garment of light.

⁶⁹⁷ "It happened as I was sitting at a short distance from you upon the Mount of Olives, I was thinking of the rank of the service for which I was sent, that it should be completed, and that my garment was not yet sent to me by the First Mystery.... that mystery had not yet sent me the garment, which I had left behind within it until the time was completed... But now - it happened through the command of that mystery, it sent me my garment of light... that I should put it on me, and that I should begin to speak with the race of mankind, and reveal to them all things from the beginning of the truth until its completion... these are the completion of all completions and the Pleroma of all Pleromas and the gnosis of all gnosés, these which are in my garment... great power of light came down, in which was my garment which I had left in the 24th mystery, ... *And I found a mystery in my garment, written in the manner of writing of those of the height* :<.. > whose interpretation is: 'O Mystery which art outside the world , because of which the All exists - this is the whole coming forth and the whole ascent which has emanated all emanations and all that is within them, and because of which all mysteries and all their places exist - come forth to us because we are thy fellow-members....in this garment which we have now sent thee is the glory of the name of the mystery of the informer... And furthermore, there is in that garment the glory of the name of the mystery of all the ranks of the emanations of the Treasury of the Light, and their saviours... And furthermore there is in it the whole glory of the name (of all those) who are on the right, and all those who are in the Midst. And furthermore there is in it the whole glory of the name of the great invis-

the *khirqe* is just as much a part of the divine revelation as the *qewls*, or sacred hymns, both having descended from heaven with the sole aim of bringing true religion to the Yezidis.

The Hymn of the Pearl

The most poetic expression of the garment as a metaphor of salvation through enlightenment is the glorious garment in the *Hymn of the Pearl*. This hymn on the soul's incarnation in material form and its eventual liberation stands in a category all by itself in late antique literature, while at the same time it is an eloquent example that "the dividing line with respect to the usage of religious metaphors between..." Christianity, Gnosticism and Manichaeism "should not be drawn too sharply in the sands of the Syrian desert."⁶⁹⁸ Surviving in a Greek and a Syriac version (of which the Syriac is considered the older and original one), both the date of the *Hymn's* composition and its exact religious provenance are fiercely debated.⁶⁹⁹ Some insist its author must have belonged to Jewish Christianity,

ble one, who is the great forefather... when I saw the mystery, of all these words in the garment which was sent to me, I put it on in that hour, and I gave light exceedingly, and I flew to the height." *Pistis Sophia* I.6-7, I.9-10, I.11, trans. V. Macdermot, text ed. C. Schmidt. NHS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 9-10, 16-18, 20. Note the emphasis on the divine names contained by the garment. The knowledge of the names of both the beings of light and the evil powers of the matter were of great importance for the Gnostics. See, for example, the list of divine names in the baptismal service and hymn included in the *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit or the Egyptian Gospel* (75.24-80.13), or the abundance of esoteric divine names in Gnostic works in general. In the *Pistis Sophia* when the ascending Saviour meets the archons of the heavenly spheres, and those see the mystery of their name on his garment, their powers are annihilated and they all prostrate themselves before him.

⁶⁹⁸ J. Ferreira, *The Hymn of the Pearl*, Early Christian Studies 3. (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 2002), 24.

⁶⁹⁹ For the history of research on the *Hymn of the Pearl* and the different origins ascribed to it, see Ferreira, *Hymn of the Pearl*, 9-25.

with strong encratite overtones and tinged by Jewish colors,⁷⁰⁰ others that it was a midrash on Christian scriptures. It has also been suggested that it was originally written for a non-Christian readership and “presents a Hellenistic myth of the human soul’s entry into bodily incarnation and its eventual disengagement from the body,”⁷⁰¹ or was a work of Iranian mysticism or even a primitive Iranian fairytale. Most researchers, however, see the message of the *Hymn* as fundamentally Gnostic in nature.⁷⁰² Presently all that can be said with certainty is that it “originated in a milieu of diverse influences.”⁷⁰³ While the *Hymn of the Pearl* could be and was read in an orthodox way by Syrian Christians, and was incorporated in the Acts of Thomas, it also became a favourite reading of the dualistic Manichaean community. Its far reaching influence on Manichaean terminology and even on its teaching of soteriology is widely acknowledged by researchers.⁷⁰⁴

The *Hymn of the Pearl*, the soteriological myth of the Saved Saviour, is the story of a young prince of the East sent to Egypt (often presented as the realm of matter and death in Gnostic and related literature)⁷⁰⁵ to find and retrieve a precious Pearl (metaphor

⁷⁰⁰ For example, Quispel, “Gnosticism and the New Testament,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 19.2 (1965): 71-72.

⁷⁰¹ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 366.

⁷⁰² H. Jonas treats it as a poetic example of Iranian type of Gnosis. Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, Chapter 5 “The ‘Hymn of the Pearl,’” 112-29. Ferreira thinks it “belongs to the Manichaean religious trajectory and, in particular, that in its current form it may describe the spiritual journey of an early Manichaean convert and poet.” (J. Ferreira, *Hymn of the Pearl*, 2.) Earlier scholarship (for example, Bevan, Burkitt, Preuschen) looked toward Syro-Egyptian Gnosticism, and attributed the authorship to Bardaisan or to one of his followers.

⁷⁰³ P. Poirier, *L’Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d’histoire des religions, 1981), 166.

⁷⁰⁴ Heuser - Klimkeit, *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, 79-81, Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 361; Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 120, note 89.

⁷⁰⁵ See Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 118.

of the divine soul sunk in matter)⁷⁰⁶ guarded by a dragon or serpent. Upon leaving his home, he has to take off his robe:

They made me strip off the glorious garment,
which in their love they had made for me,
and my purple toga
which was measured [and] woven according to my stature.⁷⁰⁷

However, he is promised:

If you go down to Egypt
and bring [back] the one pearl,
which is in the middle of the sea
surrounded by the hissing serpent,
then you will put on your glorious garment
and your toga which rests (is laid) over it.
And with your brother, our second in command,
You will be heir in our kingdom.⁷⁰⁸

Once in Egypt, he puts on native clothes, so as not to be conspicuous.⁷⁰⁹ Still the locals recognize that the prince is not one of them and poison him with their food. He sinks into a kind of deep sleep, or a state of oblivion, forgetting his origin and mission (that is the Pearl). His family grieves for him and they write him a letter

⁷⁰⁶ Hans Jonas argues that the pearl is the symbol of the soul (of a divine origin) lost and sunk in the material word, just as the real pearl lies hidden in the dark depth of the sea (symbol of matter or of darkness into which the divine has sunk) and great efforts have to be made to bring it up to the light from there. (Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 125-8.) Similarly Manfred Heuser argues that the pearl symbolizes the soul to be redeemed (Heuser - Klimkeit, *Studies in Manichaean Literature*, 79.) The image of the pearl hidden in the deep ocean is recalled by the Yezidi *Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 3 (Kreyenbroek, *Sheikh Adi*, 57), "We shall tell about the great oceans, In it there are pearls and jewels." However, the ocean in this case is referred to in a positive way.

⁷⁰⁷ *Hymn of the Pearl* 9-10, translation of the Syriac version, John Ferreira, *The Hymn of the Pearl*, 40.

⁷⁰⁸ *Hymn of the Pearl* 12-15, *ibid.* 40-2.

⁷⁰⁹ The saviour putting on garments of disguise, usually understood as material bodies, so as to trick and confuse the evil powers on his descent, is another frequent motif of gnosticizing mythologies.

telling him to wake up and remember his mission. The letter takes on the likeness of an eagle and flies to the Prince, where it becomes like a speech of words, with voice and sound. The living letter, or Call, reminds the Prince not only of his family and mission, but also of his lost garment:

Think of your glorious garment
Remember your splendid toga
Which you will put on and wear
When your name is called out from the book of the
combatants (athletes).⁷¹⁰

The Prince awakens, remembers that he is a son of kings and has come to get the Pearl. He manages to overcome the dragon by reading his father's name over the monster, snatches the Pearl and, led by the letter-awakener, return home to his kingdom, where his royal robe is waiting for him at the border. The mere sight of his garment restores the Prince's memory of his childhood, that is, of his true origin and nature (i.e., it confers Gnosis):

And my glorious garment which I had stripped off,
And my toga which was wrapped with it...
My parents sent it there...⁷¹¹

When he sees it he remembers his childhood and his former splendour:

And I was not remembering its fashion,
For in my childhood I had left my father's house.
Then suddenly, as I received it,
The clothing seemed to me like a mirror of myself.
I saw all of it in myself,
And also I received all in it,
Because we were two in distinction,
But we were also one in form.

⁷¹⁰ *Hymn of the Pearl* 46-7, *ibid.* 48.

⁷¹¹ *Hymn of the Pearl* 72-3, *ibid.* 54.

There follows a detailed description of the glorious garment embroidered with splendid colors decorated with precious stones, and more importantly:

And the image of the king of kings
Was brought up and depicted in full all over it.
And also like the surface of the sapphire,
So too were its differing appearances.
I also saw that all over it,
The motions of knowledge were stirring.⁷¹²

The garment and the prince hasten toward each other, and the prince puts it on in an act of union that makes them as one:

And with kingly motions
All of it was moved (spread) towards me.
And upon the hand of its givers,
It hastened that I might receive it.
And also my love urged me
That I should run to meet it that I might receive it.
Then I stretched out and received it,
With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself.
And [with] my toga of bright colours,
I covered myself completely with it.⁷¹³

Thus robed the prince ascends to the palace of his Father the King to appear before him with his pearl.

Hans Jonas argues that the garment put off by the young prince, which later comes to greet the prince and then becomes like one with him, is in fact “the heavenly or eternal self of the person... a kind of double or alter ego preserved in the upper world while he labors down below.”⁷¹⁴ In the *Hymn* this transcendental self of di-

⁷¹² *Hymn of the Pearl* 86-88, *ibid.* 58.

⁷¹³ *Hymn of the Pearl* 93-97, *ibid.* 60.

⁷¹⁴ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 122. He traces this image back to the Zoroastrian teaching about the soul having a counterpart in heaven, the “*Daena*,” representing the religious conscience of man. With this counterpart the soul is united at the moment of death. To the righteous it appears as a beautiful maiden, and to the wicked as a withered old whore, reflecting – and being formed by – the deeds of their human counterparts in the

vine alter-ego appears as the garment, and “the encounter with this divided-off aspect of himself, the recognition of it as his own image, and the reunion with it signify the real moment of his salvation.”⁷¹⁵

However, faithful to the multilayered and complex symbolism of this allegorical journey of salvation, the garment could be reinterpreted to mean more than just the divine alter-ego, or a divine figure symbolizing religious conscience (though the two interpretations are, of course, closely related). Many researchers are of the opinion that the royal robe or garment is also equated with Gnostic self-acquaintance, and plays a central role as the “main salvific symbol of the *Hymn*,”⁷¹⁶ that is, it is a metaphor of salvation through enlightenment. When the young prince leaves for Egypt, he has to leave his jewel-studded garment behind and put on the clothes of the Egyptians, in other words he loses consciousness of his true origins and mission. When the messenger comes from the royal realm to wake him up, he reminds the prince of his garment, “call to mind your garment shot with gold” (i.e. of his origins) so different from his present state. Finally, when he completes his mission, and takes the pearl, he is met by his robe that reminds him of his true origins. Indeed, in the *Hymn of the Pearl* Gnosis is also an attribute of the garment itself,⁷¹⁷ for the prince sees his true self in the garment as in a mirror,⁷¹⁸ as well as the image of the “King of

world below. Carl H. Kraeling “Apocalypse of Paul and the ‘Iranische Erlösungsmysterium,’” *Harvard Theological Review* 24.3 (1931): 219. This doctrine was also taken over by the Manichaeans, where the divine *alter ego* usually appears at the moment of death, in the form of a shining deity, acting as guide (see Bar Khoni, below); Manichaean hymns call it the “living self;” in the Turfan fragment the Persian word applied to this being is *gren*, translated as “self,” or “ego,” denoting the metaphysical, transcendent person; in Chinese Manichaean texts it is referred to as “luminous nature” or “inner nature” (Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 122-4.)

⁷¹⁵ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 122.

⁷¹⁶ Ferrera, *Hymn of the Pearl*, 30, see also Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 366-7.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid. 88, see also 31, 76-7.

⁷¹⁸ Layton’s translation: “Suddenly I saw my garment reflected as in a mirror, I perceived in it my whole self as well, and through it I recognized

Kings" (God) depicted on it, and motions of knowledge – that is Gnosis – stirring all over it. In other words the garment brings the answer to the old Gnostic question "what liberates is the knowledge of who we were, what we became; where we were, whereinto we have been thrown; whereto we speed."⁷¹⁹ By putting on the garment the prince becomes reacquainted with his own self, his true identity and origin, complete with true Gnosis or understanding of the nature of all things divine, and in turn arises to the realm of peace and is reunited with the Divinity.

Manichaeism

The garment of Light as a symbol of the divinity of human soul and its eventual salvation from the fetters of matter also played an important role in Manichaean mythology and is frequently mentioned in Manichaean writings, especially in hymns of a salvational character.

The symbolism of the heavenly robe appears on two levels: in the Manichaean creation myth and in salvational and eschatological hymns (the latter level probably being of more interest to the present research). In the Manichaean creation myth,⁷²⁰ when the powers of Darkness attack the Kingdom of Light, and Primal Man is sent to battle them, he puts on as his armor, also referred to as his garment, his Five Sons representing the divine attributes of the Godhead.⁷²¹ The Primal Man is overpowered by Darkness and then subsequently rescued, but his armor or garment stays behind

(gnosis) and saw myself. For, though we derived from one and the same, we were partially divided; and then we were one again with a single form." (Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 374.)

⁷¹⁹ *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 78.2, quoted in Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 45.

⁷²⁰ See Chapter 2 "Religious Movements."

⁷²¹ "The Primal Man clad himself with five principles, which are the five deities, the ether (zephyr), wind, light, water and fire. He took them as armament." Ibn an-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist* vol. II, 779. Cf. Theodore bar Khoni, *Lib. Schol.* Mimrā XI. 59, trans. Hespel – Draguet, 234 "et le premier Homme appela ses cinq fils, comme quelque'un qui revêt une armure pour le combat."

captive in the matter, waiting to be rescued and to return to the Realm of Light.⁷²²

The second level (not unconnected, of course, with the first) of the robe of light in the Manichaean drama of salvation is probably of more interest for our research here. This aspect of the Manichaean robe of Light may have been influenced by the robe of Glory of Syriac Christian baptismal and eschatological literature,⁷²³ perhaps some Gnostic ideas as well, and was beyond doubt influenced by the garment imagery of the Hymn of the Pearl,⁷²⁴ where the garment is the ultimate symbol of the soul's return to its origin (the word of light) and union with its divine "self." The robe of Glory, together with the garland and/or crown, was a frequent motif of Manichaean salvational and eschatological hymns as the reward of those who follow the true religion and thereby manage to break the bonds of matter and escape from the material world. These hymns reflect the Manichaean myth according to which the soul of the righteous (who breaks the fetters of matter and ascends back to Light) sets out on a journey to the Paradise of Light. On the way it receives the garment of Light, which, as Klimkeit puts, is "the symbol of the soul's spiritual garb, or form, which can also appear as its *alter ego*. The *alter ego* represents the new existential condition for which the soul, hitherto clad in the body, had been

⁷²² "A part therefore went forth from my robe, it went, it lightened their Darkness... for I await my robe until it comes and clothes him that shall wear it. I will await my enlightening Light until it strips itself of their Darkness... When therefore my shining robe comes and clothes him that shall wear it... then I will strike my foot on the earth and sink their Darkness down... I will uproot the Darkness and cast it out and plant the Light in its place." Psalms of Thomas, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 205.22-207.9. See also *Kephalaia* 72 and 175-76, Gardner, *Kephalaia*, 74 and 185-88.

⁷²³ Brock, "Some Aspect," 98, 103

⁷²⁴ *The Hymn of the Pearl*, and the *Thomas Literature* (into which it was incorporated) in general, enjoyed a great popularity and wide circulation in Manichaean circles; so much that the apocryphal writings attributed to Thomas, twin of Jesus, eventually became discredited in orthodox Christian circles due to their association with Manichaeans.

yearning.”⁷²⁵ It is accompanied by the signs of “victory” or symbols of salvation: the diadem, crown and the wreath. “Finally, the soul can unite with its divine *alter ego*, or clothe itself in the heavenly garment.”⁷²⁶

Mani said: When death comes to one of the Elect, Primal Man sends him a light shining deity in the form of the Wise Guide.⁷²⁷ With him are three deities, with whom there are drinking vessel, clothing, headcloth, crown, and diadem of light. There accompanies them a virgin who resembles the soul of that member of the Elect... Then they take the member of the Elect and garb him with the crown, the diadem and the garments.⁷²⁸

The archetype for the victorious journey of the freed Living Soul (the usual term for the light imprisoned in man) breaking free of the material world is provided by the fate of Mani himself, who could be seen not only as the last Prophet, but also as a role-model for all the faithful. A Parthian Manichaean text describes the death of the Manichaean Apostle with these words:

Just like a sovereign who takes off armour and garment and puts on another royal garment, thus the Apostle of Light took off the warlike dress of the body and sat down in a ship of Light and received the divine garment, the diadem of Light, and the beautiful garland. And in great joy he flew together with the Light Gods that are going to the right and to the left (of him).⁷²⁹

Inspired by the myth and by the example of Mani's fate, Manichaean hymns describing the liberated soul receiving its garment of Light (with the garland and/or diadem, wreath) abound

⁷²⁵ Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 19.

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ The Wise Guide may be a sort of “Second Self” or “personified righteousness,” related to the notion of the Divine Alterego in the *Pearl of the Hymn*. (See Klimkeit, *Gnosis*, 18-9.)

⁷²⁸ An-Nadim, *Fihrist* II, 795.

⁷²⁹ T II D 79 = M 5569, Parthian: *MM* III: 860-62; *Cat.* p. 111, Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 55-6.

from Egypt to Central Asia, written in Coptic, Middle-Persian, Parthian and Turkish:

One (angel) holds the prize in his hand. The second bears the light garment. The third is the one who possesses the diadem and the wreath and the crown of light.⁷³⁰

If thou hast set thyself to love me, then I will set upon thee the robe of Glory and the garland of victory, because thou hast believed in the Truth.⁷³¹

When I reached the Land of (lacuna...) before me, they brought a brightness forth (lacuna...) they brought a [Light], they clothed me in it, (lacuna...) and the garland of victory they brought it and set it upon my head; the Living numbered me in their number and set me down among them, Amen.⁷³²

You shall put on a radiant garment and gird on Light; And I shall set upon your head the diadem of sovereignty... A palace is the dominion of the primeval First Born, for in it he clothes himself in gladness and binds on the diadem of sovereignty. And all his friends – he binds diadem upon them, and clothes their bodies in the garment of gladness. And all the believers and the pious Elect he clothes in praise, and binds on them the diadem.⁷³³

They (i.e. the saved) go to the Heaven of Light where the gods abide and are at peace.

They receive their (true) nature (or form), the original splendor of the radiant palace and are joyful.

⁷³⁰ *Kephalaia* 36.12-21, Gardner, *Kephalaia*, 40.

⁷³¹ Psalms to Jesus CCXLV, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book II*, 53.12-15.

⁷³² Psalm of Thomas 18, *ibid.*, 224.10-5.

⁷³³ Huwīdagmān VI c.4-13, quoted in M. Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn Cycles in Parthian*, London Oriental Series 3. (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 103. Cf. Huyadagmān (Turkish version), Canto VI, Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 105-6.

They put on the resplendent garment, and they live in Paradise eternally.⁷³⁴

My soul is saved from all the sins
 which day by day [oppressed] me [ever] in anguish
 And the dark, hot (?) distress is taken from me
 Which at the outset, in the beginning, made me captive in.
 I am clothed with a garment of Light...
 Every kind of... is taken off from me.⁷³⁵

THE GARMENT OF LIGHT AMONG CONTEMPORARY HETERODOX GROUPS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Yezidis are not the only people among today's heterodox groups in the Middle East whose religious texts speak about a garment of Light. It also appears as an eschatological garment in Mandaean and Nusayrî tradition.

Mandaeans:

The garment of Light plays an important role in the baptism ritual (*mašbuta*) of Mandaeans. Mandaeans teach that the water of baptism is an investiture with light garments:

In the name of the Life! Let every man whose strength enables him and who loves his soul come and go down to the *yardna* and be baptised and receive the pure sign, and put on robes of radiant light and set a fresh *kelila* [crown or wreath] on his head.⁷³⁶

According to Buckley, when Mandaean baptismal texts talk about putting on "robes of radiant Light" and "garment of Light," they

⁷³⁴ A Parthian Hymn, in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 60.

⁷³⁵ Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycle*, 66 (Parthian).

⁷³⁶ Drower, *Canonical Prayerbook* p. 13, quoted in J. J. Buckley, "Why Once Is Not Enough: Mandaean Baptism (Mašbuta) as an Example of a Repeated Ritual," *History of Religions* 29.1 (1989): 29.

do not refer to material robes but rather to the water of baptism itself, which is the “Lightworld incarnate,” the garment of Light for the baptized. “It is in the water we clothe ourselves” says a Mandaean text.⁷³⁷

The garment of Light, a garment representing the Lightworld where the Mandaean soul strives to return, is also mentioned in connection with death and the salvation of the human soul (from this material word). Upon its return to the kingdom of light, its native home, the soul, is invested with a garment and a wreath.⁷³⁸ According to the Mandaean text, the *Left Ginza*, after death a “helper” (a sort of saviour figure) meets the soul of the righteous – just like in Manichaean myth – bringing with himself certain apparels of clothing. These are a beautiful garment of splendor, a turban of light, a wreath, and such other things as the Great Life presents to its Uthras (shining angelic spirits). The soul is dressed in these garments before beginning its ascent to heaven, back to the Lightworld.⁷³⁹

Nusayrīs

The religious literature of the Nusayrīs⁷⁴⁰ also makes references to a luminous garment, which Nusayrī souls wore before their fall and imprisonment into the body, and which the soul will eventually regain when it manages to return to its former state of purity. A thirteenth-century treatise of the Nusayrī scholar Yūsuf ibn al-‘Ajūz al-Nashshābī describes the ascent of the Nusayrī gnostic back to

⁷³⁷ Ibid. As a matter of fact the garment is present in a material form during the ritual of (repeated) baptism, though there is no ritual of investiture (after the baptism). Instead, those to undergo the rite of baptism wear a white robe (*rasta*) from the beginning of the baptismal ritual. Buckley explains this practice by the fact that Mandaeans are a baptizing sect, that is, baptisms are usually not initiatory, and participants are usually already Mandaeans, they are not entering a new stage of life.

⁷³⁸ Kurt Rudolph, *Mandaeism*, Iconography of Religions 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 15.

⁷³⁹ *Ginza*, p. 516, 14-19, trans. M. Lidzbarski, 1925, referred to in Kraeling “Apocalypse of Paul,” 217-8, and note 29.

⁷⁴⁰ On Nusayrīs see chapter “Heterodox Movements.”

the word of light. The soul, on its way up as it rises degree by degree in the spiritual world, and seeks to be completely purified and to follow the instruction essential for knowledge of God, will remember the spiritual garment that was once in its possession and its entire existence before the Fall.⁷⁴¹ When the soul will attain perfect gnosis, “one of the fundamental functions of this gnosis is to evoke in the soul of the Nusayrî Gnostic the memory of its distant past and of the *luminous garments* it wore before its imprisonment in the body.”⁷⁴² The so-called “Nusayrî Catechism”⁷⁴³ also makes mention of the garments of light: enlightened souls return to the world of light and put on garments of light:

Q. 80 Where do the souls of our brethren, the believers go upon their departure from their tombs which are their garment of flesh and blood?

A. They go to the great luminous world where they attain happiness and eternal life for ever and ever, and put on the garments of light, which are the stars.⁷⁴⁴

Bar-Asher and Kofsky are also of the opinion that the garment of Light in Nusayrî tradition reflects direct Christian influence: “The goal of the Nusayrî Gnostic is to restore his lost state in the luminous paradise before the Fall.... The use of the term ‘garments of light’ seems to reflect the author’s awareness of the old Jewish Christian motif interpreting Gen. 3.21. This verse mentions the ‘garments of skins’ (*ketnôt ôr*), which were interpreted as garments of light (*ketnôt ôr*).”⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴¹ Bar-Asher, *The Nusayrî-‘Alawî Religion*, 77

⁷⁴² Ibid., 77-78

⁷⁴³ Researchers are of the opinion that while the question-answer form of this nineteenth-century Nusayrî work was influenced by Western Christian catechisms, which circulated in nineteenth-century Syria, the actual contents of the Catechism are genuine Nusayrî doctrines. See *ibid.*, 166.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 192, note 140.

COMPARISON OF THE YEZIDI *KHIRQE* AND THE LATE ANTIQUE ROBE OF GLORY

It has been demonstrated that the garment terminology once enjoyed an immense popularity throughout the Mediterranean, and was a part of the common religious discourse. There is no reason to assume that this motif could not have penetrated what later became Kurdish-Yezidi territory, in the mountains bordering Northern Mesopotamia. Of course, there is no one-to-one correspondence between Yezidi notions concerning the *khirqe* and the different late antique “garment theologies” quoted above – nor can there be. After all, Yezidism is a religion of its own, just like Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism or Manichaeism before it, and as such it reworks and creatively transforms elements inherited from older sources. At the same time late antique garment symbolism is so multi-faceted itself, with so many threads running through and connecting the different traditions, that unraveling one single thread in this complex woven texture would be more than impossible.

Still, just as one can trace the development of the “garment of glory” from the Genesis story through Judaism, Christianity, and dualistic movements to finally contemporary Mandaism, it would also be hard to deny that the Yezidi *khirqe* recalls the garment of Light or robe of Glory on enough points to make a “genetic” relationship more than likely.

Trying to pinpoint a concrete source for these points of similarity would not be possible (or even necessary). Syriac Christianity, with a liturgy where garment theology is present to this day⁷⁴⁶ would certainly have played a strong influence. Jewish groups, especially the scholars of Mosul, could have made their own mark. Gnostics and Manichaeans are in the race as well. Obviously these

⁷⁴⁶ According to Brock: “Although this symbolic approach to theology suffered a set-back with the christological controversies of the fifth and following centuries... it nevertheless continued to be favoured by the liturgical poets... and thus it lives on to the present day, preserved in the liturgical books of the Church of the East” (Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 21-22.)

different movements would have all influenced the population in Northern Mesopotamia and in the bordering Kurdish mountains throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, with ideas from different sources fusing and fusing again through the contact of different groups and traditions, until it was distilled into what is known today as Yezidi religious tradition.

I would like to sum up briefly here only the most salient examples of possible influence, in order to highlight my contention that notions ultimately deriving from late antique garment imagery can be found in Yezidi religious tradition today.

God's robe

As the Yezidi texts quoted above make it clear, the *kbirqe* is a part of the divine, inherently connected with it since its moment of creation. It is the clothing of God – by virtue of being both a part of him, and brought into existence by him. It is the very first thing to be created and it is an integral part of the creational process.

Jewish writings mention God's robe of shining Light. In the *Hekhaloth* hymns and related literature God's garment of Light has cosmic dimensions, it fills the world with light at the time of creation, or, alternatively, heaven or the heavenly light bodies were created from the light of God's garment.

Yezidi hymns do not explicitly mention light coming from the *kbirqe*, but it is repeatedly referred to as *nûranî* – luminous, literally “from light” – and as was seen above, the text of the *Prayer of Pilgrimage* and the *Hymn of A and B* may legitimately lead to the conclusion that *kbirqe* was identified with God's light. There are also many references to light coming from God, or from the Pearl in which God was first hidden, and which was simultaneously also created by him,⁷⁴⁷ and from which the *kbirqe* appeared.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁷ “One day I was pondering night and day, I seek protection with God. What a great ocean he is! He is also an endless light.” *The Hymn of the Oceans* 1-2 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 203.) “In the ocean there was only a pearl... you quickly gave it a soul, You made your own light manifest in it.” *The Hymn of the Creation of the World* 4 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 183.) On

It may also be worthy of attention that parallels of Yezidi beliefs concerning a sacred garment worn by God can also be found among the Ahl-i Haqq, another heterodox Kurdish speaking group.⁷⁴⁹ Ahl-i Haqq texts mention that “for some time He (God) was also in the dress (*libas*) of Adam,” indicating belief in a divine garment that was worn by God, but was also “available” to Adam in his prelapsarian state.⁷⁵⁰

Baptism of the *khirqe* in the White Spring

The baptism of the *khirqe* in the White Spring, where all Yezidis must be baptized (as well as the *khirqes* of the *feqirs*), is another important theme of Yezidi hymns. This association of baptism, sacred spring, garment and God may possibly be traced back to Christian tradition where not only is baptism associated with the garment of Light (just as in Gnosticism,) but Jesus is understood to have deposited the robe of Glory in the water upon his descent into the Jordan for his baptism, making it available for all those to be baptized in the “Jordan” in the future.

Angels and the *khirqe*

Yezidi angels being in possession of the *khirqe* is part of an old tradition. Angels wearing garments of light – just like the garment of Adam before the Fall, and the garment promised to the righteous as their reward in the hereafter – has been known to both Jewish and Christian tradition.

God inundating the world with his Light, see *The Hymn of the Lights* (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 90-93.)

⁷⁴⁸ “My King separated the Pearl from himself, He gazed on it with concentration, He made a mental image and brought in into existence. My King detached the Pearl from himself. The Pearl is a plentiful light, The luminous light is (like) a star. The Pearl comes from the word of the King, The *khirqe* appeared from it. Always holy men receive salutations because of it.” *The Hymn of Sheikh Obekr* 4-6 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 209.)

⁷⁴⁹ See chapter on “Heterodox Movements.”

⁷⁵⁰ Ivanow, *The Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*, 169.

Identifying the angels with the *khirqes*, in hymns where the emanation of the angels is described as the multiplication of the *khirqes*, is a more exciting development. As far as can be ascertained, this is probably a Yezidi innovation, where material inherited from earlier traditions is reworked in a creative way to help best express Yezidi belief concerning the Godhead and its relation with its angelic emanations. Just as the *khirqe* is an expression of God's light, love and very being, so are the angels the emanations or expression of this same primordial existence, hence the image of identifying the appearance of the angels with that of the *khirqe*.

It is just possible, that the Gnostic garment, this external, but still integrally connected "accessory" of the saviour figure, which gains an independent existence when the Saviour⁷⁵¹ descends below, to exist then as a tool of Gnosis and also a divine alterego,⁷⁵² may have influenced the Yezidi notions of the connections between the *khirqe* and the divine emanations of God.

Adam's lost angelic robe

The story of Adam's angelic robe and its loss when he transgressed God's command has already been dealt with in the last chapter. There is no need to reiterate the details here.

Khirqe as a garment of Gnosis / spiritual enlightenment

The comparison of the Yezidi *khirqe* as a garment of divine revelation with the late antique garment of Light as a source of religious Gnosis is a difficult task because of possible parallels with the *khirka*, garment of those who choose to follow the path of the true Sufi, who spurns the world and seeks a life of piety, spiritual enlightenment and mystical perfection. Of course, it is exactly these parallels and similarities between the Sufi *khirka* and late antique garment of Light that may have made the eventual "marriage" of the two diverse traditions easier, contributing to the birth of the

⁷⁵¹ The Saviour himself is of course an emanation of the Godhead, as everything in the World of Light.

⁷⁵² See, for example, *Paraphrase of Shem, Pistis Sophia, Hymn of the Pearl*.

Yezidi *khirqe*. Notwithstanding, some features of this Yezidi garment of religious salvation present characteristics that are peculiar to the garment of Light as a bringer of divine revelation, Gnosis in late antique dualistic writings.

The *khirqe* itself is called *sur*, the word used to denote the “mystery,” the “essence of the divine,” and as a *sur* it is the source of divine revelation.⁷⁵³ *Khirqe* is a part of divine revelation, it brings gnosis just like (or together with) the sacred hymns,⁷⁵⁴ recalling the light garment of the *Paraphrase of Shem, the Untitled Text*, or the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. It is the source of gnosis, the final aim that *feqirs* (all those ready to get rid of their lower soul and seek a higher understanding of themselves and of God) seek for, it is the key to spiritual understanding.⁷⁵⁵ The Yezidi *khas*, or incarnated angels (who are themselves the emanations of God’s essence, *sur*) bring the *khirqe* (also emanated from God and representing an aspect of his *sur*) to the earth in order to distribute divine wisdom⁷⁵⁶ and *silev* (well-being, salvation, deliverance), an image that calls to mind the successive incarnations of divine beings in Gnostic writings, who descend on earth to bring Gnosis:

The holy men and angels distributed well-being
The symbols of Sultad Ezid were the *khirqes*, they stayed on
earth.⁷⁵⁷

Khirqe as an eschatological garment

Finally there is the eschatological aspect: the garment of Light being given as a reward to the righteous, either immediately after death or when the world comes to an end. This aspect can be found in one form or another in all the religious movements men-

⁷⁵³ E.g. *Hymn of Black Furqan* 25.

⁷⁵⁴ E.g. *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 37, 41, 44.

⁷⁵⁵ E.g. *Hymn of the Faith* 19-21; *The Hymn of Sheikh Obekr* 7-10.

⁷⁵⁶ *Hymn of the Black Furqan* 37-46 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 100-02.)

⁷⁵⁷ E.g. *Hymn of the Faith* 22.

tioned above, and it is also present in two other contemporary religious traditions, that of the Mandaeans and of the Nusayrîs.

We have seen that Yezidi mythology and hymns paint a similar image. The eschatological *Hymn of Sherfedin* talks about the *khirqe* accruing to those pure souls who fight on the side of the Mahdi at the End of the World. The two versions of the *Hymn of the Faith* attest to similar beliefs.

Having studied the garment imagery in Christian and Gnosticism hymns, another motif in *The Hymn of Sherfedin* can be mentioned now, which helps further reinforce the argument that such a usage of the *khirqe* can be traced back to late antique religious language. The passage in the hymn dealing with the conferring of the *khirqes* runs as follows:

The riders of the valley are prepared
Let them come and open the boxes for you
So as to adorn you like brides.

Let them come and adorn you like brides
Let them bring out the red and yellow boxes for you
Let them cause (people) to accept for themselves the true path
of Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin.

Here are the green and red boxes
In them there are elegant black *khirqes*, consecrated with holy
water
The Feqirs will abolish laments and injustice from this world.

The Feqirs will abolish lamentations from this world
They will don the elegant, ..., black *khirqes*
They will take truth and their rightful share to that place.⁷⁵⁸

Comparing the conferring of the *khirqe* to the adorning of brides in an eschatological hymn is clearly a distant echo of the wedding garment and eschatological wedding banquet, popular themes in Syriac Christian eschatological literature (and in Gnostic

⁷⁵⁸ *The Hymn of Sherfedin* 6-9 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 369-70.)

writings.)⁷⁵⁹ The choice of the word “bride” to refer to the *feqirs* is rather curious even so – it should be bridegroom, surely, in such a patriarchic society. The image of a bride is an old Christian (and Jewish) allegory. In Christian texts it usually refers to the Church, while Christ is the bridegroom. But it may similarly refer not only to the “collective community of the faithful,” but also to the individual in it, the human soul. The best known example is the allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs*. In Jewish tradition it is an allegory of God’s love for the People of Israel (the bride.) Origen, the famous second-century Christian philosopher of Alexandria understands it in his influential *Homilies on the Song of Songs* as a double allegory of love and wedding between Christ (bridegroom) and the Church (bride), as well as between the believer’s soul (bride) and God. This literary background of the eschatological wedding garment and the bride allegory may account for the surprising image of the *feqirs* (the faithful) being donned in “elegant black *kbirques*” as blushing brides at a wedding in their bridal finery, before taking their rightful place.

* * *

In the previous chapter it was seen how Adam’s *kbirqe* is closely related to the late antique ideas concerning the garment of Light that Adam wore in Paradise and lost as a result of his transgression. In this chapter I demonstrated that, in addition to the myth of Adam, there are many other points where the late antique speculations concerning a garment of Light, or robe of Glory, have probably exerted a profound influence on the Yezidi concept of *kbirqe*. While the concept of *kbirqe* as the shirt of Sufis or *feqirs*, men devoted to the quest of God, is of Sufi origin, its Yezidi manifestation displays a number of aspects that can be much better understood if one looks for their roots in the garment theologies of Late Antiquity. Such aspects include the notion that the *kbirqe* was originally

⁷⁵⁹ In Gnostic literature the wedding imagery seems to refer more to the moment of baptism than to that of death. True, Gnostic texts are little concerned with physical death, as for them the decisive moment is that of receiving the soul-liberating Gnosis, also seen as spiritual baptism.

the cloth of God, a notion well attested in Judaism, being a part of his essence and creative power, as well as the idea that the *khirqe* was then worn by the Angels of God, which can be found in Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism alike. The association of the baptism of the *khirqe* may go back to the image of baptism in the waters of Jordan, where Jesus deposited the robe of Glory. Seeing the *khirqe* as a means of religious enlightenment, a bringer of divine revelation on par with the sacred texts is best paralleled in Gnostic speculations on the garment of Light. Finally the function of the *khirqe* as an eschatological garment, most likely has, once again, its origins in the rich and long-lasting tradition of the robe of Glory given as a reward to the righteous in the hereafter.

8 “THE SONG OF THE COMMONER”: THE MOTIF OF SLEEP AND AWAKENING

THE TITLE AND COMPOSITION OF “THE SONG OF THE COMMONER” (*BEYTA CINDÎ*)

Even the title (*Beyta Cindî*) of this hymn calling on believers to awaken is intriguing. It is called a *beyt*, literally a song, not a hymn. It is a song indeed, in the sense that it has to be sung every morning before sunrise by men of religion.⁷⁶⁰ However, as this practice shows, its relevance and sacredness far surpasses that of ordinary

⁷⁶⁰ I heard the *Beyta Cindî* at Lalish, at the great, week-long Festival of Sheikh Adi in October. While sharing a room with the female members of the Prince's family in the guest house attached to the Central Sanctuary, I was awoken by some strange and insistent chanting of the *qenwals* before dawn. I had no idea what the noise was. In fact, I was somewhat irritated, what an ungodly hour to sing, until the next day, when I learned that what I had heard was in fact nothing else but the *Beyta Cindî*. So I had to return and spend another night there in order to witness and record the ritual. Sadly, there was some uncertainty as to when the song should be performed, so I got up with the help of an alarm clock too early, and spent the next hour worrying if perhaps the ritual was cancelled for some obscure reason. Finally, my endurance paid off, and I was rewarded with the sight of men of religion trying to shake awake all those sleeping in the courtyard in front of the Sanctuary door awake while the *qenwals* carried on their singing. I may have heard *Beyta Cindî* on another occasion, on New Year's dawn while sleeping on a rooftop in Beshiqe-Behzani, but later none of the household could confirm if the distant singing and sound of instruments I had heard before dawn was that of the *Song of the Commoner* sung by the *qenwals* of the village in honour of the holiday. Such an uncertainty about rituals is, by the way, rather typical among lay-Yezidis.

beyts, which are usually ranked lower than hymns.⁷⁶¹ The *Beyta Cindî* is among the most sacred and respected texts. Translating *cindî* as “commoner” is another interesting point. *Cindî* literally means ‘soldier’ in Kurdish⁷⁶² – however, as Yezidi hymns apply this word to “ordinary, hard-working people of no particular distinction,”⁷⁶³ or to “a godfearing Yezidi, with a connotation of poverty, discipline and simplicity,”⁷⁶⁴ Kreyenbroek opted for translating it as “commoner.” (Commoner here corresponds to the English translation of *mirîd*, a Yezidi layman.) Notwithstanding, *cindî* is an appellation that retains a sense of the need to fight for the faith⁷⁶⁵ – a sense very much present in the *Beyta Cindî* that calls on the faithful to wake up from sleep, “confront the harsh world head-on,” and go to war.

The song begins with an exhortation to wake up, and throw off sleep. It condemns sleep as “unlawful” for commoners (soldiers), for good men, for discerning people, that is, for those who are wearing the *kebirge*.⁷⁶⁶ Sleep is “dark” and leading to “severe punishment and hell” says the song. Next, the song describes how in the middle of the night, a voice comes from high – evidently the wake up call belongs to this voice. It reminds the believers of the job waiting for them. The “owner” of the voice is referred to as a cockerel of many colors, calling from the High Throne, where it is in the company of the Greatest Angel. It repeats the wake up call, saying that nights are not for sleeping, rather it is time for the soldiers to go and confront the world head-on and prepare for war. Further expanding on the theme of sleep, the song

⁷⁶¹ See chapter on “Yezidi Religion.”

⁷⁶² It is a word of Arabic origin.

⁷⁶³ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 241, note 1. According to Dr. Khalil Jindî Rashow (oral information) it means the “soldier of God.”

⁷⁶⁴ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 369, Note 29.

⁷⁶⁵ Thus, for example, *The Hymn of Sherfedin*, and eschatological hymn on the end of the world and the last battle between good and evil, repeatedly employs this term to talk about those who will fight on Sherfedin’s side.

⁷⁶⁶ Again, we must remember the Sufi roots of Yezidism, when the adherents of this Sufi dervish order must have all been considered as *seqirs* at least in a loose sense and, thus, possess the *kebirka*.

declares that the soldier, who was asleep, was slack in his service, not willing, and was therefore dismissed by his master from his job. The injunction against sleep is repeated, decreeing “do not sleep at night.” Instead the commoner should look heavenward, to the Eternal Paradise. The next five verses (28-32) leave the subject of sleep, and sing about drinking wine from deep, strong cups - the traditional Sufi symbol of becoming drunk with divine love and ecstasy.⁷⁶⁷

At the thirty-second verse, there is a break in the text. The first part of the *beyt*, the wake up call, ends, and the second begins. This second part, also referred to as the *Hymn of the Headdress*, is said to constitute a separate hymn, though it is recited together with the first part of the *Song of the Commoner*.⁷⁶⁸ There is no more mention of sleep and fight or of the cup of divine intoxication. Instead the text talks about a luminous, heavenly headdress, or crown (*kof*) – around which all the believers and discerning ones have gathered - and future glimpses of heaven. The song ends (44-46) with a description of the holy places in Lالش, though it may be assumed that it is heavenly Lالش (the prototype of the earthly Lالش, also considered the Throne of God) that is being described here, which the soul reaches after ascending to the light of heaven.

To really appreciate this *beyt* and its vague allusions in depth, it is necessary to quote all of the song here:

(1) Oh commoner, get up, it is day!
 Enough, throw off (?) this sleep,
 Sleeping (until just) before morning (leads to) severe punishment and hell.

⁷⁶⁷ “Wine” in Sufi poetry has always stood for divine love and “drunkenness” for mystical intoxication or divine ecstasy. See Omaira Abou-Bakr, “The Symbolic Function of Metaphor in Medieval Sufi Poetry: The Case of Shushtari,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 12 (1992): 46; and A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 58-59.

⁷⁶⁸ “According to one of Silêman and Jindi’s informants, the text from here on constitutes a separate *Qawl*, the ‘Hymn of Headdress’, which is normally recited together with the ‘Song of the Commoner.’” Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 242, note 31. *The Hymn of the Headdress* is also included in the *Hymn of Sheikh Heseni Sultan* with minor variations.

(2) Oh commoner, get up, get up!
 Enough, be content with this (much) sleep,
 Sleeping (until just) before morning (leads to) severe punishment.

(3) Get up from sweet sleep!
 Enough, look at this narrow grave.
 The Feqírs are without anguish, without anger.

(4) Get up from dark sleep!
 Sleep is now unlawful for commoners.
 Oh you men with a livelihood and payments (to take care of).

(5) Get up from sleep in the morning!
 Sleep is now unlawful because of (the obligation to give) praise.
 Oh you men wearing the *khirqe*.

(6) Get up from the sleep of early dawn!
 Sleep is now unlawful for many
 Oh you men wearing *khirques* that have been 'baptised.'

(7) Get up from the sleep of evenings!
 Sleep is now unlawful for good men,
 Oh you men with busy lives.

(8) Get up from... sleep!
 Sleep is now unlawful for discerning⁷⁶⁹ people
 Oh you men of...⁷⁷⁰

(9) My dear, in the middle of the night.
 A voice from on high is coming

(10) Come, your job is waiting for you (?).
 Your livelihood is a good one,

⁷⁶⁹ *Zergûn* is translated as "discerning" by Kreyenbroek. According to Dr Khalil Jindî Rashow (oral communication) this word refers to a true Sufi, someone highly advanced in his journey toward understanding God.

⁷⁷⁰ The Kurdish text has *xudanêd danan û stûna*, which means "gifts and pillars," but Kreyenbroek was of the opinion that these made little sense in this context. See Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 241, note 12.

It is in the service of the Lord.

(11) My dear, the cockerels call you.
These nights are not for sleeping.
The commoners [soldiers] go out into the world.

(12) Commoners [soldiers] do not go to sleep again.
They will go to confront the harsh world head-on.
They do not tell lies to their master.

(13) The cockerel, its feathers are white.
It is calling from the High Throne,
It is with the pre-eternal Angel.⁷⁷¹
Our shouts and cries for help are directed to the assembly of
Sheikh Adî.

(14) The cockerel, its feathers are red.
It is calling from the throne below,
It is with the Angel who presides over baptism.
Our shouts and cries for help are directed to the assembly of
the *qibla* of the full moons.

(15) The cockerel, its feathers are yellow.
It is calling from the throne on high,
It is with the Greatest Angel.
Our shouts and cries for help are directed to Sheykh Shems
the Tartar.

(16) The cockerel its feathers are green.
Do end this sleep!
Get up and ask Sheykh Adî for a livelihood, for *berat*,⁷⁷² and
for sustenance.

(17) The cockerel of the Throne has crowed,
The one on earth has answered.
Sheikh Adî is in Hakkari,
My King is in the merciful heart.

(18) The cockerel, crowing,

⁷⁷¹ *Melkê beriyê* – the angel who was before.

⁷⁷² Little balls of earth from the Central Sanctuary in Lalish.

Is calling to the beloved.
 It faces the Angel above
 Oh my brother, it has made a light I the assembly of Sheykh
 Adi.

(19) The cockerel, its feathers are many-coloured.
 A voice comes from the Throne,
 All who are awake are preparing themselves for war!

(20) My dear, the Feqîrs are clever,
 They do not see their master with their eyes.
 They receive their livelihood from the great Master.

(21) Oh commoner, get up, it is day!
 The Feqîrs have gone to face the sun..
 The fronts of their *khirges*, their buttons and their *khirges* have
 become wet with dew.

(22) Get up from sleep in the morning!
 The Feqîrs have gone to the Doorway⁷⁷³
 The front parts of the *khirges*, their buttons and their *khirges*
 have become wet with dew.

(23) Get up from darkness, friend.
 Head for the streams of water,
 Cleanse your hands and eyes,
 Such has (always) been our custom, comrade.

(24) Oh commoner, you were asleep.
 You are slack in your service,
 That is why the great Master has dismissed you from your job.

(25) I was not willing, that is why I slept.
 Had I been willing, I would not have slept,
 That is why the great Master has dismissed me from my job.

(26) Oh commoner, do not eat by day,
 And do not sleep by night.

⁷⁷³ I.e., the “the doorway of the Prince’ at the Sanctuary, where the Feqîrs stand when they pray in the mornings.” Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 241, note 26.

Each day when the sun comes up,
You shall receive your livelihood from the Great Master.

(27) Oh commoner, do not eat in the daytime,
And do not sleep at night.
Lift your head, look at the properties and gardens (above):
Eternal Paradise is the realm of Sultan Êzid, peace be upon
him.

(28) Oh commoner, you are kind,
We need wine from the deep cups.
Come on, brother, (let us go) to this pond, the property of
Ebû Bekr the Righteous.

(29) Oh, commoner, you are a commoner,
We need wine from the strong cups.
Come on, brother, (let us go) to this pond, the property of ‘Eli
and ‘Umer.

(30) Oh, commoner, you are the guide.
We need wine from special cups.
Come on, brother, (let us go) to his pond, the property of
Khidr-Ilyas.

(31) Oh commoner, you are the one who knows the way,
We need wine from special cups.
Come on, brother (let us go) to this pond, the property of ‘Eli
and ‘Umer.

(32) Oh commoner, you are enlightened,
We need wine from the discerning cups.
Come on, brother, (let us go) to this pond, the property of
Shems el-Dîn and Fekhr el-Dîn.

(33) My heart is full of grief,
The Pîr whose name is (Pîrê) Libnan.
Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
The ornament of the Mystery of Sheykh Mend, the son of
Fekhr.

(34) Your headdress is strong,
The saints have gathered around it
Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
The ornament of the mystery of Sheykh Adi.

(35) Your headdress is in place,
 The Mirîds have gathered around it.
 Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
 The ornament of the mystery of Sultan Êzîd.

(36) Your headdress is great,
 The believers have gathered around it.
 Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
 The ornament of the mystery of Melek Sheykh Hesên.

(37) Your headdress is pristine,
 It has come to be commemorated in the world.
 Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
 The ornament of the mystery of Sheykh Obekr.

(38) Your headdress is luminous
 The discerning ones have gathered around it.
 Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
 The ornament of the mystery of Shems el-Dîn and Fekhr el-Dîn.

(39) Your headdress is in order,
 The good men have taken their share of it.
 O Pîrê Libnan, Khidr-Ilyas himself is (your) *neqîb*.⁷⁷⁴

(40) Your headdress is precious,
 It flew, it went away, it was in Heaven,
 It circled around the Throne

(41) Mîr Seja of Seja,
 Nasural-Dîn of Baban,
 The Lion Mehmed Reshan,
 The Pîr who is the translator,
 Dawûd the son of Derman,
 Have truly surrendered their souls.
 Mîr Hesên Meman
 Is the leader of all forty of us.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁴ *Neqîb* is a Persian word, meaning “chief, leader” or “personal servant.” It is often used in connection with Khidr-Ilyas. See Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 240, note 34.

Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan
The ornament of the Mystery of Sheykh Mend of Fekhr.

(42) I went towards that light.
One cries out in deep emotion.
Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
Oh the forecourt, of the surrounding wall.

(43) I went towards heaven.
That sight pleases me,
The Commoner has become a Prince dressed in Black.

(44) I went on the Roof of the Cave.⁷⁷⁶
We saw the streams of the ocean,⁷⁷⁷
Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan,
Their cups stood on the *gezîr*.⁷⁷⁸

(45) I went to the *Silangeh*,⁷⁷⁹
Our joy in the Spires,⁷⁸⁰
Oh beloved Pîrê Libnan.

(46) At the eternal place, at the eternal foundation,⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁵ Hesên Meman is said to have been the leader of the forty *pîrs* who became the ancestors of today's *pîr* families. The descendants of the Hesên Meman *pîr* lineage are forbidden to marry with other *pîrs*, bringing the lineage to near extinction in our days.

⁷⁷⁶ Part of the Lalish Sanctuary above the sacred Cave.

⁷⁷⁷ According to Kreyenbroek's informant, "the image refers to the streams of pilgrims coming up to the Sanctuary." Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 242, note 44.

⁷⁷⁸ I.e., a special kind of firewood used in Lalish, which may only be handled by selected people qualified to do so. According to Kreyenbroek, "the implication seems to be that all pilgrims had reached such exceptional status." Ibid., note 45.

⁷⁷⁹ The "place of greeting," the stone marking the place on the path leading to Lalish, from where the valley is first sighted. Pilgrims used to fire their rifles at his spot and kiss the stone.

⁷⁸⁰ The Twins Spires of the Central Sanctuary. Many hymns contain references to this conspicuous feature of Lalish.

⁷⁸¹ Kreyenbroek writes: "Both PX and C [his informants] thought that these words referred to actual places in the Lalish valley, although they could only speculate as to the identity of these sites." (Kreyenbroek,

We shall perform worship and prostration for Sultan Sheykh
Adi.

We are deficient, God is perfect.⁷⁸²

How can we interpret the Song of the Commoner? Verses 28-32 can easily be disposed of. Wine, and becoming drunk on wine, normally forbidden by *Sharia*, is a frequently employed symbol of divine love and ecstasy in Sufi poetry. This symbol was borrowed by Yezidi religious poetry where the cup of wine is connected with both divine love and spiritual enlightenment.⁷⁸³ Intoxication is part of seeking the divine mystery:

I am drunk from three cups,
I am overflowing from the white cup
In blackness I found perfection.⁷⁸⁴

I am drunk, I am intoxicated,
I am a hunter of falcons,⁷⁸⁵
I am a lover of the precious Mystery.⁷⁸⁶

Yezidi hymns, as has already been mentioned, describe how Adam's lifeless body became animated when the he was made

Yezidism, 242, note 47.) We must not forget, however, that earthly Lalish is merely a mirror or counterpart of heavenly Lalish, the Throne of God above, and the words "eternal place, eternal foundation" are far more likely to refer to this heavenly Throne.

⁷⁸² *Beyta Cindî*, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 231-39.

⁷⁸³ Which, as shall be seen later, is the theme pursued in the *Song of the Commoner*.

⁷⁸⁴ *The Hymn of Ezdîna Mir 1*, Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 184.

⁷⁸⁵ Kreyenbroek thinks that "the image of the falcon may go back to that bird's association with the concept of *xvarnah* [light or glory] in Zoroastrian literature." (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 271, note 1.) The falcon is also a Sufi symbol. It may refer to the divine wisdom a man must cultivate in himself. In Rumi's poetry it refers to the soul seeking God. In this Yezidi hymn it seems to refer to the divine mystery, in keeping with both the Sufi concept of divine wisdom, and the Zoroastrian concept of *xvarnah*, and hunting for it can be interpreted as sort of seeking for gnosis, divine mystery.

⁷⁸⁶ *The Hymn of Pîr Sheref 1*, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 265.

to drink from the Cup of Love.⁷⁸⁷ Wine also plays an important role as an instrument of spiritual enlightenment in the so-called *Great Hymn* on the deeds of Sultan Ezî (Yazid bin Muawiya), who – running into opposition from the representatives of orthodox Islam and *Sharia* – turns the river of Damascus into wine, making the whole population drunk:

What a wine!
Any creature that has a little of it,
Give his life and his house for it,
In his eyes this world becomes a feast.⁷⁸⁸

A *Sharia* Judge is then sent to Sultan Ezî to turn him back to the right road, but upon tasting a little wine, the size of a fingernail, he himself becomes converted to the faith of Sultan Ezî and an initiate of his mystery:

The Shari’a judge no longer reads papers,
He has become a member of the Friends,
He became a dancer at the feast.

He became a dancer and danced,
He became a diver and dove,
The Shari’a judge became an initiate of that mystery.⁷⁸⁹

Thus the verses speaking of the cup of wine in the middle of the song may be interpreted as referring to religious intoxication, a special, Sufi form of divine enlightenment.

What about the rest of the *beyt*, then? The first part, calling for awakening and inveighing against sleep as unlawful, dark and leading to punishment, and the third part, on the headdress are harder to interpret. Jasim Murad’s interpretation that the poem is “a cul-

⁷⁸⁷ “The Prophet Adam drank from that cup and came to life, He became intoxicated and trembled, Flesh grew on him, blood circulated in his veins. The Prophet Adam drank from that cup, The miraculous power of that cup manifested itself: Thus the Prophet Adam sneezed and through it he became conscious.” *The Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 35-6 (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 177.)

⁷⁸⁸ *The Great Hymn* 87 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 168.)

⁷⁸⁹ *The Great Hymn* 110-1 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 171.)

tural celebration of the Yazidi emphasis on hard work and on living a simple and moral life” and that it “elaborates on the negative consequences of indulging in excessive sleep which, if it occurs will disrupt the daily work of the peasants, deprive the community of the means of production, consequently generating economic crisis”,⁷⁹⁰ can probably be discarded as a rather too materialist approach. Seeing the song as a call for spiritual awakening is a much more likely solution, one shared by most of those very few Yezidis who are actually aware of the song’s content.⁷⁹¹ This is the line I propose to take up here, and demonstrate that once again the theme of spiritual awakening and condemning sleep as an enemy of the truly pious can be traced back to the religious language of Late Antiquity.

SLEEP AND THE “CALL OF AWAKENING” IN LATE ANTIQUITY

The metaphors of sleep and awakening were part of late antique religious language, especially among movements with a dualistic outlook on the opposition of spirit and matter. The image of sleep, being asleep (together with death, oblivion and drunkenness) was understood to symbolize religious ignorance, spiritual unawareness. It was used to express a fundamental feature of existence in the world,⁷⁹² namely man’s total entanglement in the material world, the complete loss of one’s consciousness and awareness of higher things. “The soul slumbers in Matter.”⁷⁹³ Sleep could also serve to describe the sensation that life on the earth is “mere illusions and dreams, though nightmarish ones, which we are powerless to control.”⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹⁰ Jasim Murad, “The Sacred Poems,” 232.

⁷⁹¹ As has been made clear above, the song is not easily accessible to most Yezidis, unless in writing, as very few people would actually hang around at four in the morning in the guest house of Lalish in order to hear it sung.

⁷⁹² Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 69.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

Awakening, on the other hand (or coming back to life, remembering, becoming sober) was a metaphor of conversion, acquiring Gnosis, or spiritual consciousness. The link between sleep and awakening is the “Call from without” intended to break the spell of sleep in this world. It represents the transmundane which “penetrates the enclosure of the word and makes itself heard therein.”⁷⁹⁵ Many literary works (especially Gnostic ones) are in effect appeals of awakening themselves, thus constituting a peculiar genre. Homiletic appeals for religious conversion couched in the traditional language of sleep and awakening are often loosely termed the “Gnostic Call” in modern scholarship, though “in fact [they] transcend narrow sectarian and philosophical boundaries”⁷⁹⁶ and can be found all over the religious spectrum of the age. Already the Apostle Paul utilized the image of sleep and awakening in his Epistles:

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light (Rom. 13: 11-12)

Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. (Eph. 5:14)

The Call of Awakening can be found in some later Christian works as well. An Armenian manuscript on the Harrowing of Hell phrases the words of Paul:

When the earth was cleft down to the foundations, one could see Christ in hell saying: “Awake Adam and arise from the dead; awake, thou that sleepest in darkness that my light may illuminate thee, awake and be strengthened thou that sittest in darkness; awake and be clothed in immortality, thou who sat in the shadow of death; awake and be freed, thou wast bound by

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁹⁶ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 366.

poverty (?) as with iron"; And having said this he ascended to heaven.⁷⁹⁷

In an Easter Eve homily ascribed to Epiphanius, which closely parallels the Armenian text, Christ takes Adam by the hand and raises him, saying the words just cited above and adding:

I, thy God, who for thy sake became thy son... now I say... to the prisoners, Go forth; to those that are in darkness, Show yourselves, to those that sleep, Arise, and to thee, O sleeping one, Arise... let us go hence, from death to life, from corruption to incorruption, from darkness to eternal light, from suffering to joy, from bondage to freedom, from prison to the heavenly Jerusalem, from captivity to the delights of Paradise, from earth to heaven.⁷⁹⁸

The Call of Awakening can also be found in some writings of the so-called *Hermetic Corpus*, the Greek pseudepigraphic literature that arose around the figure of Hermes Trismegistos.⁷⁹⁹ *Poimandres*⁸⁰⁰ (*Pimander* to scholars of Renaissance) is one of the

⁷⁹⁷ S. Nersessian, "An Armenian Version of the Homilies on the Harrowing of Hell," *Dumbarton Oaks Paper* 8 (1954): 218.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., and see also Migne PG 43, 461-4.

⁷⁹⁹ Thrice great Hermes – identified with Thoth, the Egyptian god of learning. The texts of the *Hermetic Corpus* were composed in Egypt, probably between the first and third century AD. The *Corpus* contains a wide-ranging subject-matter from astrological tractates through writings on alchemy, magic or the power of certain gemstones to pseudo-philosophical works, which are based on revelation rather than observation and reason. "Typically, they stress the importance of personal acquaintance (gnosis) with god" (Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 447) and they aim at spiritual rebirth through enlightening the mind. The theological content of these latter works is strongly syncretistic in nature and has been referred to as "intellectualized pagan thought." It shows some affinity to Middle Platonism, the Chaldean Oracles, as well as to classic Gnostic scripture and Valentinian Gnostic writings. Some scholars have postulated a Gnostic influence, but Layton believes it was rather the Hermetic works that influenced emerging Gnosticism. They show no contact with Christianity, and only rare allusions to Jewish scripture.

⁸⁰⁰ *Poimandres* is one of those exceptional Hermetic works that show a dependence on Jewish cosmogony and an influence of Jewish literary

pseudo-philosophical works of the *Corpus*. It deals with the creation of the world and the origins of mankind. At the end of the tract, the author is entrusted with relaying to mankind the revelation disclosed to him by the divine intellect, Poimandres. Accordingly he starts his preaching with these words:

"O people, inhabitants of earth! You have given yourselves up to drunkenness and sleep and to unacquaintance with god. Get sober! Stop carousing, all enchanted by irrational sleep." And they, when they heard me, came to me with one accord.⁸⁰¹

The Gnostics

It is in the works of dualistic character, which were already given to seeing this world as a place of prison, bondage, darkness, spiritual unconsciousness and death, that the metaphor of sleep and awakening becomes really central. In fact, the Gnostic message itself is nothing more than a Call of Awakening, intended to awaken those slumbering in ignorance, hence its modern appellation, "the Gnostic Call." According to Jonas, the Call connects the command to awaken with three doctrinal elements: reminding the soul of its "root" or origin; a promise of salvation;⁸⁰² and a moral instruction to stay awake, that is, to live in conformity with the newly won knowledge.⁸⁰³

The use of these three elements is best exemplified in the *Apocryphon of John*, where the motif of sleep and awakening is carried through the entire work. Here sleep symbolizes the power of the Evil Ruler over Adam (and man), and Adam's (man's) lack of Gnosis (concerning the origin of his spirit), while the Call comes

style. It also shows a strong Platonic influence, especially as regards Plato's *Timaieus*.

⁸⁰¹ *Poimandres*, 27f, in Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 458.

⁸⁰² This may be constituted by a mere reference to either ascension to heaven or baptism.

⁸⁰³ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 81.

from the perfect Pronoia,⁸⁰⁴ a revealer and savior figure, who repeatedly descends into the lower world to awaken Adam, and later mankind, from his deep sleep. Adam's sleep and awakening is an integral part of the Gnostic myth, which, as usual, is an inverted interpretation of the Old Testament legend of Adam. After the creation of Adam the powers of darkness realize that – due to the presence of the light spirit (referred to as “luminous afterthought”) in Adam – he is superior to them, so they decide to enclose Adam in matter, making him a body out of earth, water, fire and fiery wind, and then put him in the garden of Paradise. “This is the tomb of the form of the body with which the robbers had clothed the man, the fetters of forgetfulness.”⁸⁰⁵ Not content with shackling Adam in the fetters of forgetfulness, the Evil Ruler tries to empty him of his light in a passage that gives a typically Gnostic twist to Genesis 2.21 on the creation of Eve:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and from the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

For the Gnostic the sleep referred to in the Old Testament *Genesis* is the state of spiritual unconsciousness, and it is the luminous, spiritual power in Adam that the jealous Ruler is after, not simply his rib:

And he [the Chief Ruler] knew that he [Adam] was disobedient to him [the Chief Ruler] due to the light of Reflection⁸⁰⁶ which is in him, which made him more correct in his thinking than the Chief Ruler. And the Chief Ruler wanted to bring out the

⁸⁰⁴ Providence, also referred to as Epinoia, Afterthought or Reflection.

⁸⁰⁵ *Apocryphon of John* II.21.10-13, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 123.

⁸⁰⁶ Epionia, Layton translates it as “Afterthought,” *Gnostic Scriptures*, 45.

power which he himself had given him. And he brought a “trance” over Adam.⁸⁰⁷

And I said to the saviour “What is ‘trance’?” And he said

“It is not as Moses wrote and you heard. For he said in his first book: ‘He put him to sleep’ but it was in his perception...

And he brought a part of his power out of him. And he made another human form in the shape of a woman... And he brought the part which he had taken from the power of the man into the female form and not as Moses said ‘his rib.’”⁸⁰⁸

Adam is put to sleep, but, according to the Gnostic scheme of Biblical interpretation, deliverance is at hand in the person of Epinoia of light:

And in that moment luminous Reflection (Epinoia) appeared and she lifted the veil which lay over his mind. And he became sober from the drunkenness of darkness...⁸⁰⁹

I appeared in the form of an eagle on the tree of knowledge,

Which is the reflection from the Providence of pure light,

That I might teach them

And awaken them out of the depth of sleep. For they were both in a fallen state and they recognized their nakedness. Reflection appeared to them as light and she awakened their thinking.⁸¹⁰

The story then continues as has already been expounded in the chapter on the creation of Adam. The Chief Ruler, realizing that Adam and Eve have transgressed his commandment, eaten from the tree of knowledge, and have once again become posses-

⁸⁰⁷ Layton translates, “And it caused deep sleep to fall upon Adam,” in *Gnostic Scriptures*, 46.

⁸⁰⁸ *Apocryphon of John* II. 22,15-23,4, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 129-31.

⁸⁰⁹ *Apocryphon of John* II. 23,5-8, *ibid.*, 133.

⁸¹⁰ *Apocryphon of John* II. 23,26-35, *ibid.*, 135-7.

sor of Gnosis, becomes enraged: "And he [the Chief Ruler] cast them out of paradise, and he clothed them in a gloomy darkness."⁸¹¹

With this the next chapter of mankind's history begins, which consists of an unrelenting war between the powers of Darkness continuing to attempt to keep Adam's descendants in the sleep of oblivion, and the powers of Light, struggling to awaken mankind to its origin and condition. Mankind is divided into groups. Some will be strong in spirit and attain salvation. Other souls, however, will be under the power of the counterfeit spirit created by the powers of darkness in order to keep men in the sleep of oblivion, their heart closed to the truth "until it [the soul] awakens from forgetfulness and acquires knowledge. And if thus it becomes perfect, it is saved."⁸¹²

The means of this awakening is, of course, the Call from without (from the *Pleroma*), personified by the Epinoia or Pronoia, the Divine Forethought (or Reflection, referred to in the text as Mother as well), who earlier brought help to Adam. Her message is delivered in a first-person speech at the very end of the *Apocryphon of John*, in what Layton termed as the "Poem of Deliverance"⁸¹³ but could just as well be called a Call of Awakening. G. MacRae argues that this poem must have originally been a Gnostic liturgical hymn, probably recited at a ceremony of initiation or Gnostic baptism.⁸¹⁴ The hymn describes Pronoia's repeated descents to the material world and her attempts at bringing Gnosis, until she finally succeeds on the third try:

⁸¹¹ *Apocryphon of John* II. 24, 7-8, *ibid.*, 137.

⁸¹² *Apocryphon of John* II.27,9-11, *ibid.*, 155.

⁸¹³ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 50.

⁸¹⁴ G. MacRae, "Sleep and Awakening in Gnostic Texts," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 502. The hymnic quality of the passage was already noticed by J. Doresse, though he did not identify it as cultic (*ibid.*) MacRae points to the hypothetical reconstruction of Gnostic mystery-initiation by P. Pokorny based on the Naasene Homily recorded in Hippolytus' anti-heretical tract and the Hermetic tractates I and XIII, and contends that the hymn would perfectly fit the framework of such a ceremony, at the heart of which is the Call of Awakening.

I, therefore, the perfect Providence (Pronoia) of the all... I am the richness of the light, I am the remembrance of the pleroma...⁸¹⁵ And I entered into the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body. And I said, “He who hears, let him get up from the deep sleep.” And he wept and shed tears... and he said, “Who is it that calls my name, and from where has this hope come to me, while I am in the chains of the prison?” And I said, “I am the Providence (Pronoia) of the pure light... Arise and remember that it is you who hearkened, and follow your root, which is I, the Merciful One, and guard yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and beware of the deep sleep and the enclosure of the inside of Hades.”

And I raised him up, and sealed him in the light of the water with five seals, in order that death might not have power over him from this time on.⁸¹⁶

Both “sleeping themes” of the Apocryphon of John, the sleep of Adam and his awakening by an envoy the Light World, and the sleep of man and his awakening by the message of the Savior were popular themes of Gnostic literature. The sleep of Adam and his awakening to a revelation of knowledge, based on the exegesis of the Gen. 2.21 story, is a recurrent theme of Gnostic literary works which display a demonstrable Jewish influence. This makes some scholars conclude that it may even have been the Gnostic (or gnosticizing Jewish) interpretation of Gen. 2.21, which gave birth to the metaphor of sleep for spiritual ignorance.⁸¹⁷ In any case, in all the published Coptic Gnostic works expounding the myth of human

⁸¹⁵ *Apocryphon of John* II.30,1-4, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 169.

⁸¹⁶ *Apocryphon of John* II.31.1-25, *ibid.*, 171-175. As MacRae points out (“Sleep and Awakening,” 497) this is a classic example of the Call of awakening, as it contains all the three elements outlined by Jonas.

⁸¹⁷ MacRae, “Sleep and Awakening,” 498-99. MacRae even goes as far as to tentatively suggest that Eph. 5.14 (quoted above,) which scholars believe is citing an early liturgical work, most likely a baptismal hymn, is actually borrowing its language from some kind of Gnostic liturgical homily or hymn. (*ibid.*, 505-6.)

origins, the sleep of Adam is part of the Paradise story.⁸¹⁸ In some texts the sleep of Adam is taken out of its original framework originating in Gen. 2.21, demonstrating how deeply imbedded this motif became in Gnostic mythological language. Thus, for example, in the *Apocalypse of Adam* the sleep of Adam is mentioned only after Adam has lost his glory, that is after tasting the forbidden fruit. In this work Adam tells his son Seth about his life, how he and Eve went about in glory (a reference to the garment of Light) and resembled the great eternal angels. But then the evil god, the ruler of the aeons (that is of the material world) enslaved them, enveloped them in forgetfulness, and they lost their glory:

After these (events) we became darkened in our heart(s). Now I slept in the thought of my heart. And I saw three men before me whose likeness I was unable to recognise, since they were not from the powers of the God who had [created] [us]⁸¹⁹... saying to me "Arise, Adam, from the sleep of death, and hear about the aeon and the seed of that man to whom life has come, who came from you and from Eve, your wife."⁸²⁰

Describing enlightenment and salvation (that is, the receiving of Gnosis) of the individual man as an awakening, and the Gnostic Savior, who saves by bringing Gnosis, as a figure who awakens those who are asleep is another frequent motif. Thus, in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, when Barbelo, the First Thought, is described in the opening hymn, which Layton terms the "Wisdom Monologue,"⁸²¹ his aspect as a savior is expressed with the following words:

I am the life of my Epinoia (i.e., afterthought) that dwells within every Power and every eternal movement... I walk up-

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 503.

⁸¹⁹ That is, they are envoys of the Light World, and not belonging to the rulers of matter.

⁸²⁰ *Apocalypse of Adam* 65,22-66,8, in *Nag Hammadi Codices* V,2-5 and VI, 159. The second part of the sentence refers to Seth, the inheritor of the Gnosis lost by Adam and Eve, and his immovable race. On this topic, see the next chapter.

⁸²¹ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 86.

right and those who sleep I [awaken]. And I am the sight of those who dwell in sleep.⁸²²

In the *Paraphrase of Shem*, Shem, the receiver of the divine message, feels as if he awakened from sleep:

And I, Shem, awoke as if from a deep sleep. I marveled when I received the power of the Light and his whole thought. And I proceeded in faith to shine with me. And the righteous one followed us with my invincible garment.⁸²³

In the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, a Christian Gnostic homily, where the ascended Christ speaks to his followers on earth, the crucifixion of the Son of Majesty, the ultimate sacrifice of the divine (albeit in a docetic sense) brings an end to the sleep of mankind:

They nailed him to the cross, and they fastened him with four nails of bronze. The veil of his temple he tore with his hands. There was a trembling that overcame the chaos of the earth, for the souls which were in the sleep below were released, and they were resurrected. They walked about boldly, having laid aside jealousy of ignorance and unlearnedness beside the dead tombs, having put on the new man, having come to know that perfect blessed and perfect one of the eternal and incomprehensible Father and of the boundless light, which I am.⁸²⁴

Gnosis is therefore awakening (or rather awakening is Gnosis). The Gospel of Truth, a homily describing the reception of Gnosis through metaphors familiar from biblical and philosophical traditions, and attributed to the second-century Valentinus,⁸²⁵ even

⁸²² *Trimorphic Protennoia* 35.12-22 in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, 403.

⁸²³ *Paraphrase of Shem* 41.22-3 (see also 47.11) in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 111. Note the reference to the invincible garment given to the awakened Shem.

⁸²⁴ *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 58.24-59.9, trans. G. Riley in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 171-73.

⁸²⁵ Valentinus (d. circa 170 AD) and his immediate followers, whose aim was to raise Christian theology to the level of pagan philosophical

gives what could be termed an “exegesis” of the Gnostic use of the sleep-awakening metaphor. The classic Gnostic myth, as expounded above, is absent from the Gospel of Truth. Its place is taken by a mysticism that centers on salvation through Gnosis (acquaintance) of the savior, the self and God. Dispensing with the mythological scenes known from non-Valentinian Gnostic texts, sleep is described as a void, lacking reality by comparison to truth. It originates in error, the “evil actor” of the Gospel of Truth. Awakening is the turn from ignorance to Gnosis, the very opposite of sleep.⁸²⁶ “Gnosis awakens one from the intoxication, anxiety, nightmares, and blindness of ignorance and calls one to turn back to the true source of one's existence and repose, the Father of the Entirety.”⁸²⁷

Such is the way of those who have cast ignorance from them like sleep, not esteeming it as anything, nor do they esteem its works as solid things either. But, they leave them behind like a dream in the night. The knowledge of the Father they value as the dawn. This is the way each one has acted, as though being asleep at the time when he was ignorant. And this is the way he has <come to knowledge> as if he had awakened. {And}

studies, still considered themselves members of the universal Christian Church, and not as members of a rival religion in the second and third centuries. Eventually, however, the Valentinian school became far removed from the established Church. Their followers could be found all over the Roman world, including Syria and Mesopotamia. See Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 267-70.

⁸²⁶ The sleep induced by the evil rulers when they tried to steal the spirit hidden in Adam is already referred to as “Ignorance” in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*: “The rulers took counsel with one another and said, ‘Come, let us cause a deep sleep to fall upon Adam.’ And he slept. - Now the deep sleep that they ‘caused to fall upon him, and he slept’ is Ignorance. - They opened his side like a living woman. And they built up his side with some flesh in place of her, and Adam came to be endowed only with soul.” *Hypostasis of the Archons* 89.4-19, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, vol. 1, 241.

⁸²⁷ A. McGuire, “Conversion and Gnosis in the ‘Gospel of Truth,’” *Novum Testamentum* 28.4 (1986): 345.

Good for the man who will return and awaken. And blessed is he who has opened the eyes of the blind.⁸²⁸

Exhortations against sleep addressed at man in general also occur in many Gnostic works:

My son, listen to my teaching, which is good and useful, and end the sleep which weighs heavily upon you.... Do not become desirous of gold and silver, which are profitless, but clothe yourself with wisdom like a robe; put knowledge on yourself like a crown, and be seated upon a throne of perception.⁸²⁹

Then beware, lest somehow you fall into the hands of robbers. Do not allow sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids, that you may be saved like a gazelle from snares, and like a bird from a trap. Fight the great fight as long as the fight lasts, while all the powers are staring after you - not only the holy ones, but also all the powers of the Adversary ... Listen, my son, and do not be slow with your ears.⁸³⁰

The Hymn of the Pearl

The *Hymn of the Pearl* provides perhaps the most eloquent literary adaptation of the metaphor of sleep and awakening, while the whole work itself is probably nothing else but a literary Call of Awakening. When the young prince, after taking off his glorious garment, descends to the land of Egypt to take the pearl from the serpent, he is found out by the natives to be a stranger in their

⁸²⁸ *Gospel of Truth* 29.32-30.16, tr. H. W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)*, NHS 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 99-101.

⁸²⁹ *The Teachings of Silvanus* 88.22-89.4, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 291-93.

⁸³⁰ *Teachings of Silvanus* 113.31-114.17, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 357-59. Note the reference to war, a recurrent motif in the text.

midst, and his sufferings at their hand is described in the language of sleep:

But in some way or another,
 They perceived that I was not of their county
 So they mingled their deceit with me,
 And they made me eat their food.
 I forgot that I was a son of kings,
 And I served their king.
 And I forgot the pearl,
 On account of which my parents had sent me
 Because of the burden of their exhortations,
 I fell into a deep sleep.⁸³¹

Seeing their son's plight, his heavenly parents then send a letter to awaken him:

Awake and arise from your sleep,
 and hear the words of our letter.
 Remember that you are a song of kings,
 Consider the slavery you are serving.
 Remember the pearl,
 On account of which you were sent to Egypt.
 Think of your glorious garments,
 Remember your splendid toga,
 Which you will put on and wear
 When your name is called out from the book of the
 Combatants (athletes).
 And with your brother, our viceroy,
 With him, you will be in our kingdom.⁸³²

As we can see, the letter (which will then become the Call from Without)⁸³³ comprises all the three elements that make up the Gnostic Call in Jonas' definition: it reminds the prince of its origins, calls attention to the task awaiting him, which he had forgot-

⁸³¹ *Hymn of the Pearl* 31-35, trans. Ferreira, 46.

⁸³² *Hymn of the Pearl* 43-8, *ibid.*, 48

⁸³³ The letter as a metaphor for the message of salvation can already be found in the *Ode of Solomon* 23.

ten about, and finally promises redemption, when it talks of the prince regaining his glorious garment, and of becoming viceroy along with his brother in the heavenly kingdom. Transforming into a “Call,” the letter becomes an eagle, making it very clear that this message is no ordinary letter, but a voice coming from outside of our world:

And my letter [was] a letter,⁸³⁴
Which the king sealed with his right hand...
It flew in the likeness of an eagle,
the king of birds.
It flew and alighted beside me,
and all of it became speech (words) for me.
At its voice and the sound of its rustling,
I awoke and rose from my sleep...
I remembered that I was a son of kings,
and my free soul longed for its natural state.
I remembered the pearl,
on account of which I was sent to Egypt.⁸³⁵

As we know the awakened young prince then manages to charm the serpent, snatch the pearl and return to him home, led by his letter, his “awakener:”

And my letter, my awakener,
I found before me on the road.
And as with its voice it had awakened us,
So also with its light it was leading me.
Because of the royal silk,
It was shining before me with its appearance (form).
And with its voice and with its guidance,
It was also encouraging me to hurry.⁸³⁶

⁸³⁴ The Greek version says: “Like a messenger was the letter” (Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 75.) The Greek wording makes it even more pronounced that the letter is personified as a savior.

⁸³⁵ *Hymn of the Pearl* 49-7, *ibid.*, 50.

⁸³⁶ *Hymn of the Pearl?* 64-7, *ibid.*, 52-4.

Led by the letter, the prince reaches the border of the kingdom, where his glorious garment is already waiting for him so that they can become one again.

The Manichaeans

According to the classic work of Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, “the symbol of the call as the form in which the transmundane makes its appearance within the world is so fundamental to Eastern Gnosticism that we may even designate the Mandaean and Manichaean religions as ‘religions of the call’”⁸³⁷

Manichaeans went so far as to hypostatize “Call” and “Answer,” which became two separate divinities in the Manichaean pantheon. According to the Manichaean myth, after the Primal Man descended to fight the Power of Darkness, which was threatening the Realm of Light, and was overcome and eaten by Darkness, he fell into a deep unconsciousness. But the King of Light had mercy on the Primal Man and, in order to liberate him, the Living Spirit, a new divine trinity was called forth, and sent to his rescue:

Then al-Bahījah⁸³⁸ and the Spirit of Life journeyed to the brink, where they looked into the depths of that nether hall and saw Primal man and the angels, whom the Devil (Iblīs) and the exceedingly evil satanic creatures and iniquitous life had surrounded ... The Spirit of Life called to Primal Man with a raised voice, which was like lightning in its swiftness and which became another deity.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁷ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 74. Jonas adds that “‘Caller of the Call’ is the title of the Manichaean missionary; and as late as in Islam the word for mission is ‘call,’ and for missionary, ‘caller.’” Ibid. note 27.

⁸³⁸ I.e., the Mother of Life, see Dodge, an-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist* II, 780, note 172.

⁸³⁹ An-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist* vol. II, 780. According to the summary of Theodore bar Khoni: “They came on the earth of darkness, and they found the Primal Man and his five sons sunk in the darkness. Then the

The issuing of the Call and the Answer of the imprisoned light (Primal Man) – henceforward existing as independent deities⁸⁴⁰ – are the archetypes in Manichaean mythology of the call of the Savior and the (positive) response of the one to be saved.⁸⁴¹ The Call of Awakening and the Answer is then repeated again and again in Manichaean history, or rather in the history of the imprisoned light, for even though the Primal Man became free, his armor, his Five Sons, were left behind as light particles enclosed in the matter, which still had to be awakened, that is, to be rescued. Thus, for example, the awakening of the Primal Man by the Spirit of Life is duplicated later on by the awakening of Adam by Jesus the luminous. In this archetypal episode Jesus the Splendor approaches

Living Spirit called out with his voice, and the voice of the Living Spirit became like a sharp double-edged sword, and it evoked the lifeless effigy of the Primal Man and said to him: “Hailings to you, good one among the evil, light among the darkness, god who is staying among the animals of anger, who do not realize what a honour this is for them.” The Primal Man answered: ‘Hailings to you, who bring peace and salvation in return.’... and the Living Spirit and the Call and the Answer accompanied each other mounted toward the Mother of Life and the Living Spirit, and the Living Spirit re clothed the Call, and the Mother of Life re clothed the Answer, her beloved son.” Theodore Bar Khoni, *Liber Scholiorum* Mimra XI. 59, trans. Hespel – Draguet, 235. A Middle Persian hymn writes: “And they (the Mother of the Living Spirit and the Living Spirit) send Khvandag (Call, Khrôshtag) to him (i.e. the First Man), as one shoots a letter with an arrow into a town. Quickly, [in] haste he came down [like] a big rock (thrown) into the sea.” (M 819, Middle Persian: Ed. W. Sundermann, lines 797-805; *Cat.* p. 55, Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 121.) The letter- saving message simile has already been mentioned above in connection with the letter of the *Hymn of the Pearl*.

⁸⁴⁰ “Call and his Answer together form what the texts term ‘the thought of life’... ‘The thought of life’ is opposed, then, to ‘the thought of death’... which is characteristic of the Realm of Darkness.” Klimket, *Gnosis*, 12.

⁸⁴¹ Thus, for example, even Mani’s message is described as a Cry or Call: “I heard the cry of the physician (i.e. Mani), the cry of an exorcist, coming to [me. I] heard the cry of a physician healing his poor ones” Psalms of Thomas XIV, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 220.25-30. Similarly, the message of Jesus is described as a Cry, see below, quoted in the text.

Adam, unconscious after his creation, with the divine light, his soul, trapped inside his body. In this Manichaean version of the tasting the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, one can recognize the Gnostic interpretation of Gen. 3, known from the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, or the *Origin of the World* and other classic Gnostic texts. Jesus awakens the sleeping Adam to the saving knowledge of his own conditions:

(Mani) says that Jesus the Splendour approached the innocent Adam, and awoke him from the sleep of death, so that he might be saved from an excessive nature;⁸⁴² as if a righteous man were found to be possessed of a violent devil and might be calmed by one's skill. Thus was Adam also, when the beloved found him in a profound sleep, roused him, and shook him and awakened him... And then Adam looked closely at himself and he knew who (he was). And (Jesus) showed him the Father on high, and his own self... mingled and imprisoned in everything that exists, shackled in the corruption of darkness. (Mani) says that he made him arise and taste the tree of life.⁸⁴³

A Coptic Manichaean Psalm giving an account of Jesus prompting Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree, writes: "The light has shone forth for you, o you that sleep in Hell, the knowledge of the Paraclete, the ray of Light, drink of the water of memory, cast away oblivion."⁸⁴⁴

Just like the drama of Primal Man's awakening by the Call from the Light World is repeated in the myth of Adam, so again it is repeated in the awakening of the individual soul, a particle of

⁸⁴² That is, of Darkness.

⁸⁴³ Theodore bar Khoni, *Lib. Schol.* XI. CSCO 69, pp 317,14-318,4, trans. in *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, I. Gardner and S. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17.

⁸⁴⁴ Psalm to Jesus CCXLVIII, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 57.19-21. Note the reference to the "water of memory" and compare it with the references to the cup of wine in the *Beyta Cindî*. A possible merging of Sufi (wine) and Manichaean (water of memory/life) traditions cannot be ruled out here, though this is only a tentative suggestion, one that would need much more research.

light from Primal Man’s armor. Manichaean thinking draws a parallel between the fate of the Primal Man and the individual soul, the former serving as a mythical model for the latter. This is exemplified in the Coptic Psalm of Heracleides, which is addressed to the First (Primal) Man, but its mention of the “news,” that is the Evangelium, the message of true religion brought by the prophet, implies that its real addressee is the individual:

Awake, you that slumber and sleep in the... (lacuna) that you may be told the news. Lo, the news-bearer has been sent with the news of the Lord of Light to tell us the news of the skies ...

‘Rise up, o First Man, open thy gates that are shut that I may tell you the news.

‘Rise up, o First Man, arouse thy beloved ones, that I may tell thee the news.

‘Rise up, o First Man, sound, o trumpet of peace, that I may tell thee the news.⁸⁴⁵

Detached from the mythological framework, but echoing its message, the Call addressed to the individual human soul, imprisoned in the fetters of matter, is a frequently recurrent theme of Manichaean liturgical texts from Egypt to Central Asia, prompting Jonas to speak of a “religion of the call:”

Let us not slumber and sleep until our Lord takes us across, his garland upon his head, his palm in his hand, wearing the robe of Glory, and we go within the bride-chamber and reign with him, all of us together.⁸⁴⁶

I went forth to plant a garden beyond the confines of this world, choosing and planting in it the plants that grew in the Living ones. I will give orders to the gardener: Attend to my trees, my new plants, attend to my new plants that they sleep

⁸⁴⁵ Psalm of Heracleides, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 197.16-29.

⁸⁴⁶ Psalm of Heracleides, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 193.10.

not nor slumber, they sleep not nor slumber, [that] they forget
not the order that has been given them.⁸⁴⁷

Come, oh souls, to this ship of Light!⁸⁴⁸

My most beloved soul, (who is) happy and noble, where have
you gone?

Return!

Awake, dear soul, from the sleep if drunkenness into which
you have fallen!... reach (your) home, the (heavenly)
earth created by the Word, where you were in the beginning⁸⁴⁹

As was expounded above, the Call of Awakening often contains a moral instruction as to the duties of the believer, the spiritual task awaiting him. Exhortations against being slack in their service – that is, in performing their religious duties, and devoting themselves to liberating the imprisoned light – and a fear of having failed their duty are frequent motifs of Manichaean hymns:

The Light is come and near the leader. Arise, brethren, give
praise!

Abandon sleep, awake, behold the Light which is drawn near.

He has come to the world!

All the sons of Darkness hide.

The Light is come and near the dawn! Arise, brethren, give
praise!⁸⁵⁰

Reminding the faithful to give praise is far more than a mere flourish of words.⁸⁵¹ Just like for Yezidis in the *Beyta Cindî*,⁸⁵² neglecting one's (religious) obligations leads to dire consequences according to the Manichaean teaching. Those who fail their duties,

⁸⁴⁷ *The Church unto the Apostle*, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II.15-21.

⁸⁴⁸ The Ships of Light (the sun and the moon) were seen as vehicles transporting the cleansed souls, or light, back to the Realm of Light.

⁸⁴⁹ Parthian liturgical hymn, in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 147.

⁸⁵⁰ M 30, Parthian, Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 142.

⁸⁵¹ "Sleep is now unlawful because of (the obligation to give) praise" says *Beyta Cindî* 5.

⁸⁵² "You are slack in your service, that is why the Great Master has dismissed you from your job, Oh soldier, you were asleep." *Beyta Cindî* 24.

that is fail to heed the Call or Cry, lose the promise of salvation, and will be “dismissed” from the group of those who are to reach the Light World again. *The Psalm of Thomas*, describing the Cry of the physician (Mani), says of them: “He into whose ears they shall call, if he hears not, shall be divided in all the worlds. He shall suffer, for they called into his ears, he did not hear.”⁸⁵³

A Manichaean parable even tells the story of such a faithful, who grows slack in his service, with near tragic consequences: A man gave a banquet for his king and his entourage, lavishing them with presents. The king and his men enjoy the banquet, but when dusk comes, the host forgets to light the lamps, arousing the ire of his master:

They went and enjoyed a banquet (and) received presents. They were happy. When the sun set, the man, in his contentment, did not light his lamps immediately. The king became suspicious. His intimate friends said, “This man has prepared an excellent banquet (and) has given (us) gifts, but he has not lit his lamps. Does he intend to commit a crime?” The man heard them, became afraid (and) fell unconscious.

Luckily for the negligent host, his servants bring the lamps, and the king realizes that his negligence resulted from mere forgetfulness, it was not a deliberate act. As is the habit of Manichaean parables, an interpretation is offered at the end:

The interpretation: The lowly born man represents the auditors,⁸⁵⁴ the king is... the messengers of the king(?).. The mes-

⁸⁵³ Psalms of Thomas XIV, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 220.27-30. The text refers to the final conflagration, when the material world and all those light particles that could not be saved will be devoured by fire. Concerning Manichaean eschatology and the doctrine of “bolos” (a conglomerate and undigested mass of darkness/matter and the small amount of unpurified light mixed with it, to be burned), see Williams Jackson, “The Doctrine of the Bolos in Manichaean Eschatology,” *JOAS* 58.2 (1938): 225-34.

⁸⁵⁴ Auditor, or Hearer, is the name given to the Manichaean faithful at the lowest rank of the religious hierarchy, who did not carry any spiritual offices. The term roughly corresponds to the Yezidi *mirîd* or “commoner, denoting a simple follower.

senger [is the] Apostle... of the gods... The lamp is wisdom. The (lamp) that is not lit immediately is that of the auditors.⁸⁵⁵ From time to time they become slack and forgetful in their works. (They) are (then) called to account (for their negligence.) They gain victory (salvation) thereupon and are redeemed.⁸⁵⁶

The Mandaeans

Calls for awakening are also numerous in Mandaean literature. The voice of the transmundane penetrating the world is referred to as the “Call of Life” in Mandaean texts. Sometimes it is addressed to Adam, at other times at the believers:

Arise, ye sleepers who lie there.
 Rise up, ye stumblers who have stumbled,
 Arise, worship and praise the Great Life
 And praise His Counterpart, that is the image of the Life
 Which shineth forth and is expressed
 In sublime light.⁸⁵⁷

They bestowed upon the guardians a sublime call, to shake up and make rise those that slumber. They were to awaken the souls that had stumbled away from the place of light. They were to awaken them and shake them up, that they might lift their faces to the place of light.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁵ Note the close similarities between the wording of *Beyta Cindt* and this Manichaean parable.

⁸⁵⁶ “Parable of the lowly born rich man” (Persian), in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 191-92.

⁸⁵⁷ E.S. Drower, *Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*, Leiden: 1959. The Rus’hma, chapter 114. The Gnostic Society Library (online), <http://www.gnosis.org/library/ginzarba.htm>, accessed 03.07.2008. See also: “I am a word, a son of words... The great Life called, charged and prepared me... It sent me forth to watch over this era, to shake out of their sleep and raise up those that slumber.” (Ginza 295, *ibid*, 80).

⁸⁵⁸ Ginza 308, *ibid*.

Sometimes the Call is simply referred to as a “voice,” reminding one of the wording of the *Beyta Cindê*:

According to what thou, great Life, saidst unto me, would that a voice might come daily to me to awaken me, that I may not stumble, if you callest unto me, the evil worlds will not entrap me and I shall not fall prey to the Aeons.⁸⁵⁹

The Call frequently includes a moral instruction, sometimes short, sometimes growing into “lengthy moral homilies which monopolize the entire content of the Call.”⁸⁶⁰

I sent a call out into the world: Let every man be watchful of himself. Whosoever is watchful of himself shall be saved from the devouring fire.⁸⁶¹

Do not slumber nor sleep, and do not forget that thy master hath commanded thee.⁸⁶²

The Call of Awakening is of such a crucial importance in Mandaean religion that even the so-called *Rabmia* (the daily prayers recited at the three prayer-times daily for each day of the week) bids the faithful to be aware of sleep and forgetting.⁸⁶³

⁸⁵⁹ Ginza 485, in Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 70.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 84. In the Ginza 16-27 there are, for example, over twelve pages of exhortations, warnings, and commandments. See Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 84-5, note 84.

⁸⁶¹ Ginza 58, *ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁶² Book of John, p. 225, *Ginza* p. 387, quoted in A. Altmann, “The Gnostic background of Rabbinic Adam legends,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 35.4 (1945): 389.

⁸⁶³ E. S. Drower, “Mandaean Polemic,” *BSOAS* 25.1/3 (1962): 445.

Beyta Cindî and the Call of Awakening

Wake up call, warning against sleep and the “voice of the without”

There can be little doubt that the *Beyta Cindî* fits into the late antique tradition of the Call of Awakening. Its form as a hymn or song is well in keeping with the literary traditions of the Call. It was seen how often the Call of Awakening is phrased within the framework of a hymn, from the baptismal hymn of the *Apocryphon of John* (the Poem of Deliverance) through Manichaean hymns and psalms calling for the awakening of the soul down to Mandaean prayers. The *Beyta Cindî*, as a hymn/song of awakening (which could even be called liturgical in context, as part of a ritual heralding in the first rays of sun) would perfectly fit as a continuation of this tradition.

Having analyzed the so-called Gnostic Call of Late Antiquity, and accepted that *Beyta Cindî* is a perpetuation of this tradition, it is much easier to interpret the often vague or confusing allusions of the wake up call of the *Beyta Cindî*. Now it is easier to understand why sleep is characterized as “dark,” “unlawful for soldiers”⁸⁶⁴ and for “men wearing the *kehrqe*,”⁸⁶⁵ something that “leads to... severe punishment and hell.” Sleep, after all, is a state of spiritual unconsciousness, irreligiosity, an idea also hinted at in other Yezidi hymns.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶⁴ I find the word “soldier” more apt here than “commoner,” for it expresses the idea of spiritual fight for faith, much better.

⁸⁶⁵ Here again, “men wearing the *kehrqe*” doesn’t not refer only to today’s *feqirs*, but all the faithful, those whose behavior makes them worthy of the *kehrqe*.

⁸⁶⁶ Sleep, as a metaphor of spiritual slackness, ignorance can also be found in a number of other Yezidi hymns, even if there it does not take such a central place as in the *Beyta Cindî*. It is used in *The Hymn of the Mill of Love*, a hymn which deals with the need for the faithful to be pure of heart and loyal to the House of Adi (that is, the true religion). The hymn opens with a few stanzas declaring that not even the most expensive gifts given as a sacrifice to religious institutions will benefit a man who has no faith in his heart. It accuses the *Sharia* (orthodox, non-Sufi Muslims, who follow the

If the *Beyta Cindî* is seen as a literary Call of Awakening, it also becomes clear why it is “in the middle of the night” that “a voice from on high is coming,” despite the fact that the song is not sung in the middle of the night, rather at the very end of it, just before dawn, and other lines speak about “early dawn.” But if one thinks of all the negative spiritual qualities attributed to darkness and night, making it a personification of evil, or at least of a lack of spirituality in all the religious-literary traditions that utilized the metaphor of sleep, it becomes evident that the sleep referred to in the *Song*, which is cut into half by the Call, is nothing else than an immersion in, a total abandonment to this spiritual darkness. The Call pierces through this total darkness, bringing it to an end, bringing morning. Just as the Manichaean hymn containing a Call of Awakening says “Awake, morning has come... morning is the Truth, the truth is the commandments [i.e., of the religion].”⁸⁶⁷

The same interpretation can be used to elucidate the rather mysterious statement “these nights are not for sleeping.” Clearly, nights are meant by nature for sleeping, unless far more is understood by sleep than the mere physical rest of mind and body. Be-

Islamic law blindly) of only caring for possession, unlike the Sunna (that is, the Yezidis), and it utilizes the metaphor of sleep to describe orthodox Muslims, who only care for material things, and who are incapable of perceiving the mystical truth: “People of the Shari’a are lovers of possessions, The Sunna truly goes its own way, God willing, my King will pardon the Sunna, O lover (of God), I go straight ahead! Their (i.e., the other group’s) hearts are preoccupied with commerce; The chests and heads... are asleep.” (*The Hymn of the Mill of Love* 5-6, Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 380.) The traditional interpretation of sleep as a metaphor of ignorance, of religious unawareness, may also help shed light on the mysterious statement in some Yezidi hymns on the connection between baptism and Angels or divine beings preventing the faithful from sleeping. After all, baptism may be seen as one of the means to help awaken man from spiritual ignorance: “The baptism of Sheyk Shems falls on one, The holy men and the angels, because they are actively busy, They do not allow one to sleep.” (*They Hymn of Sheikh Shems Tabriz* 11, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 259.) “The baptism of Sheyk Shems falls on one, The Great Ones are (actively) busy, they do not allow you to sleep.” (*The Morning Prayer* 7, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 217.)

⁸⁶⁷ *Psalmoi Sarakotôn*, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 146.20.

sides the injunction against sleep as a metaphor for spiritual coma, the text seems to retain here a trace of dualistic, anti-cosmic tendency, where nature and the natural order is seen as alien, even contrary to God and everything divine.⁸⁶⁸ The same anti-cosmic attitude may also explain the even more mysterious lines: "Oh commoner, do not eat by day, and do not sleep by night," as eating, as well as sleeping, are signs of men's subjection to the laws of nature, that is the laws of matter.

At this point it is reasonable to ask whose voice is coming from high in the middle of the night. The text writes a "cockrel," which is of course the bird singing, or rather crowing, before dawn. But the detailed description of the cockrel leads to the conclusion that the text refers not so much to the alert king of the poultry-yard, but rather to the mysterious voice of the transmudane, whose message is penetrating into our world and being heard here:

The cockrel, its feathers are white.
Is calling from the High Throne
It is with the pre-eternal Angel...
It is with the Angel who presides over baptism...
It is calling from the throne on high,
It is with the Greatest Angel...
The cockrel of the Throne has crowed,
The one on earth has answered...
The cockrel, crowing,
Is calling to the beloved.⁸⁶⁹
It faces the Angel above.
Oh my brother, it has made a light in the assembly of Sheikh
Adi.

⁸⁶⁸ Cosmos in Gnostic parlance, taken over from the Greeks, refers to the material world. On the negative Gnostic view of the cosmos and nature, that is, "anti-cosmic" Gnostic dualism, see Jones, "The Gnostic Revaluation," in *Gnostic Religion*, 250-54; and Kurt Rudolph, "Dualism" in *Gnosis*, 59-67.

⁸⁶⁹ Beloved is a common term applied to God by Sufis, who see the relationship between the Sufi (or one seeking religious illumination) and God as that of the lover and the beloved.

All these references to the Throne on High (God's Throne), to being in the company of the Greatest, pre-eternal Angel (God) make it obvious that the owner of the voice is a divine being, a companion of God himself, one of His Angels, calling from the world of beyond, or to be more exact, from the throne of God. Possibly, the cockerel calling from the Throne of God could be *Tavusi Melek*, the Peacock Angel, who acts as a bringer of gnosis in the creation myth of Adam.⁸⁷⁰ The voice of the earthly cockerel is merely an echo of the divine message, heralding dawn, light after darkness, both in its physical and abstract sense.⁸⁷¹ The description of the plumage of the cockerel also points in this direction:

The cockerel, its feathers are white...
 The cockerel, its feathers are red...
 The cockerel, its feathers are yellow...
 The cockerel, its feathers are green...
 The cockerel, its feathers are many-colored.

Such a riot of colors would generally be associated with peacocks rather than roosters.⁸⁷²

⁸⁷⁰ See chapter 6 on the “Yezidi Creation Myth of Adam.”

⁸⁷¹ Fusing the boundaries between the actual or physical with the abstract or spiritual is one of the charms of the *Beyta Cindî*. Thus, references to a spiritual awakening and fight are mixed with references, for example, to the morning prayer and cleansing (verses 21-3), which could be taken both in the concrete and abstract sense.

⁸⁷² The Cockerel of the Throne is also mentioned in *The Hymn of Rabi'a al'Adawiyya* (the 8th century female Sufi mystic from Basra, who is also commemorated by Yezidi religious tradition). Rabi'a seeks for the mystery of God everywhere, finally finding it when the pregnant mother of Ezi (Yezid bin Muawiyya), bearing the divine *sur* of Ezi, arrives at Basra one dawn, when the divine cockerel crows to announce a new dawn: “Rabi'a is a beautiful young woman, She is yearning very much for that mystery, She had wandered from alley to alley (looking for it), Until the cockerel at the Throne crowed.” *The Hymn of Rabi'a al'Adawiyya* 5 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 197.) Mélikoff reports that one of her old informants from Siirt claimed that Tavusi Melek was called a “cock” in Anatolia. (“Melek Tavus'a *Horoz* diyorlar”, Mélikoff, *Soufisme Turc*, 39.)

Moral Instruction: Serving God

The Call of Awakening has been defined above as often containing one or more of the following three doctrinal elements: a reminder of the soul's origin, a moral instruction, and the promise of salvation (or heavenly reward in the case of Yezidis.). The *Song of the Commoner* also contains at least two of the three doctrinal elements associated with the Gnostic Call: The moral instruction and the promise of salvation - or heavenly reward in the case of Yezidis. As concerns the third element, the reminder of the soul's origin, it must be emphasized that (known) Yezidi hymns do not speculate on the origins of the individual human soul.⁸⁷³ The same seems to be true of the present *Song*, though there is a most intriguing sentence toward the end of the hymn, which, if the present analysis of the text is not mistaken, may after all be a reference to the divine origin of the soul.

The moral instruction, prompting the believer to remember his religious duties, is clearly present in the text:

Get up from the sleep in the morning!

Sleep is now unlawful because of (the obligation to give)
praise.

Oh you men wearing the *kbirqe*.

As was seen above, both Manichaean and Mandaean texts utilize the notion of the duty of giving praise to God in their Calls of Awakening as a means to remind the faithful of their religious obli-

⁸⁷³ Even though Yezidis seem to have inherited the Gnostic idea of the heavenly origin of Adam's soul in their Adam myth (and as shall be seen later also in the myth concerning Shehid bin Jer, the mythical forefather of the Yezidis), the existing (or published) sacred hymns do not seem to be concerned with the origin or nature of the human soul in general. Feqir Haji, talking of the origin of the Yezidis from the *sur* of Adam and his son, Shehid bin Jer (see next chapter) expressed the opinion that this *sur* has been transmitted to Yezidis in general, but he did not offer any opinion on the nature of the human soul (Yezidi or otherwise) in general. Some of my informants referred to the humans soul as deriving from the "light (*nûr*) of God," but it is hard to tell if this is a traditional point of view or just a personal conviction, part of the recent effort to create a unified and consistent Yezidi theology.

gations. “The Light is come and near the dawn! Arise, brethren, give praise”⁸⁷⁴ exhort the Manichaeans, “Arise, worship and praise the Great Life, And praise his Counterpart, that is the image of the Life”⁸⁷⁵ counter the Mandaeans. After the reminder of the duty to give praise, the *Beyta Cindî* becomes more explicit and reminds those who have to awaken of the jobs waiting for them in the service of God:

Come, your job is waiting for you
Your livelihood⁸⁷⁶ is a good one,
It is in the service of the Lord.

The usual threat of the dire fate awaiting those who fail to heed the call, prefer to abandon themselves to sleep, and prove negligent in carrying out the job assigned to them in the service of the Lord is also present. They will be dismissed from the service of their Master/God, just like the negligent dinner-host of the Manichaean parable, that is, they will be excluded from among the true believers:

Oh commoner, you were asleep.
You are slack in your service,
That is why the great Master has dismissed you from your job.

I was not willing, that is why I slept.
Had I been willing, I would not have slept,
That is why the great Master⁸⁷⁷ has dismissed me from my job.

⁸⁷⁴ M 30, Parthian, Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 142.

⁸⁷⁵ E.S. Drower, *Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*. The Rus’hma, chapter 114. The Gnostic Society Library (online), <http://www.gnosis.org/library/ginzarba.htm>, accessed 03. 07.2008.

⁸⁷⁶ Livelihood – Kurdish *maş*, Arabic *maaş* – literally ‘salary’ is difficult to interpret. It may refer to the *maş* Sheikh Adi provided his companions and friends with. These salaries refer to the ability to cure different kind of ills or to bestow fertility, inherited from their angelic forebears by the *sheikh* and *pîr* families. When used in this sense Yezidi *maş* simultaneously means “salary” and “duty, religious work” with the two meanings overlapping. (On the *maş*, see E. Spät, *Yezidis* (London: Saqi, 2005), 44.) But it is also possible that here *maş* simply refers to the reward given to the faithful in the hereafter. In this case, this could be a reference to the third element of the Call, the promise of salvation.

[Literally, has he dismissed me from my *maş*]

It is open to debate whether the last sentence, dismissing the slack servant from his livelihood or job, refers to the *maş* given to Sheikh Adî's companions on this earth, or to some eschatological reward. However, it is clear that it is delivered as a warning against those who are not willing to fulfill their religious obligations, who have abandoned themselves to sleep.

Moral Instruction: The Fight for Faith

The second doctrinal element of the Call (i.e., the moral instruction) referring to the duties awaiting the believer who awakens can also explain the allusions to war and fighting, which give such an eschatological flavor to the song:

My dear, the cockerels call you.
 These nights are not for sleeping.
 The commoners [soldiers] go out into the world.

 Commoners [soldiers] do not go to sleep again.
 They will go to confront the harsh world head-on...

 A voice comes from the Throne,
 All who are awake are preparing themselves for [literally coming to] war!

The translation, based on the interpretation of Kreyenbroek's informants, talks about confronting the world in the first two verses. Interesting as this interpretation is from our point of view, the original text makes it even more compelling. According to one of Kreyenbroek's informants, the literal translation of *cindî bolê distînin* in the third line of the first stanza would be "the soldiers take (grab) the polo sticks," while the Kurdish dictionary of Izoli translates *bol* as "square, playing field"⁸⁷⁸ ("they take the field."). The second sentence of the second stanza, *dê bi serê xo çine gewê*, is translated by one of Kreyenbroek's informants as "they will go with

⁸⁷⁷ Literally *mîr*, Prince.

⁸⁷⁸ Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 241, note 15.

their heads to (meet) a wooden ball.”⁸⁷⁹ Thus we have two statements on taking part in some athletic competition,⁸⁸⁰ which are interpreted by Yezidis versed in the religious language as encouragements to confront the harsh world head-on. This is followed a little later by an unequivocal call to go to war.⁸⁸¹

The language of war and athletic contest was not alien to the late antique world of spirituality. Saint Paul actually connects awakening from sleep with going to war in his Call of Awakening (1 Thess. 5: 5-8), where he implies that rejecting sleep (and drunkenness) means going to fight, where faith, love and salvation serve as the protective armor of the soldier:

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5: 5-8)

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., note 16. *Gen* does not figure in my Kurdish-Turkish dictionary (Izoli, Istanbul, 2000), but Kreyebroek’s informant understood it as a variant of *go*, that is ball.

⁸⁸⁰ Polo, which first developed in Central Asia, was a favourite game of the Sassanian elite in Late Antiquity. Excelling in polo was an important sign of nobility, a motif much employed in Sassanian literature. (Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 127.) The heroic ideal of Iranian epic tradition, as well as the tradition of peoples influenced by Sassanian cultural and artistic models, are Iranian kings and heroes who excelled on the battlefield, the hunt and the polo field (ibid., 122). The description of polo found its way even into the seventh-century Syriac work on the life of the Sassanian Christian saint, Mar Qardagh, born as a noble man, who first drew the attention of the shah by excelling in polo – thereby showing his superiority to other men – and then lost his ability to play the game when he persecuted a Christian monk (ibid., 21, 25-6).

⁸⁸¹ According to Khalil Jindî Rashow this call to war refers to the time when Muslim rulers came to fight Sheikh Adi (oral communication), but the fact that the song lacks any references to concrete historical events, even if only mythical ones, makes this conclusion doubtful, and suggests that ‘war’ should be understood in a more general sense, as a “form of conduct.”

The notion that spiritual awakening was a form of going to war was taken up by later generations. A distinctive feature of Syriac Christianity, especially in its monastic (or ascetic) form, was its preoccupation with what they called the “contest,” the struggle that an ascetic had to fight against the temptations and distractions of the world as well as his inner demons. The vocabulary to describe this struggle borrows from the language of athletic contests, as well as from the language of war. “Athletes” (of Christ) was a popular term for the first of the martyrs, then of the monks in the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire.⁸⁸² Thus, for example, his biographer writes about Rabbula, the early fifth-century bishop of Edessa, that after his conversion from paganism “he went into the desert in order to fight there as an athlete ‘with evil spirits within and without’”⁸⁸³ In the *Syriac Life of St Simeon Stylites* the expressions “athlete” and “combatant” are repeatedly used to describe the saint (as well as his fellow monks). “For he stood like a valiant man and was brave like a combatant and trained like an athlete and armed like a warrior in the army of the Lord.”⁸⁸⁴ The use of “athlete,” however, was not restricted to literature dealing with monasticism or to describing monks and ascetics. It was seen above how the Syriac version of the *Hymn of the Pearl*⁸⁸⁵ talks about the “combatants” or “athletes,” when it reminds the sleeping Prince of his splendid toga, which he will put on again when his “name is called out from the book of the Combatants (athletes).”

War was another frequent metaphor. A treatise written by Aphrahat contains portions from a liturgy of baptism, which admonishes those who were called for “contest” to turn their back on

⁸⁸² S. Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” *Numen* 20.1 (1973): 2.

⁸⁸³ A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1958-60), 135.

⁸⁸⁴ *The Syriac Life of Saint Simeon Stylites* 45, trans. in Robert Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Cistercian Publications 129 (Kalamazoo MI: 1992.)

⁸⁸⁵ Though of a highly debated origin, the *Hymn of the Pearl* is probably not connected with the monastic movement or monks, despite its possibly encratite nature.

the world, as if they were being recruited for war.⁸⁸⁶ Only those whose heart is set on the war, and not on what they leave behind, should venture to join the army:

Anyone who is afraid, let him retreat from the struggle... and anyone who plants a vineyard, let him retreat from his work, that he might not think of it and would be conquered in the war... And anyone who builds a house let him retreat to it, that he might not remember his house and would not fight wholly. The struggle is suitable for solitaries,⁸⁸⁷ because their faces are set for that which is before them... and anything that they spoil, all (belongs) to themselves, and they receive their profit abundantly.... And anyone who fears this part of the contest, let him retreat... Anyone who loves possession, let him retreat from the army, lest when the battle becomes hard for him, he will remember his possessions and retreat. And anyone who retreats from the struggle, - shame belongs to him... every one who chooses for himself and puts on the armor, if he retreats from the struggle, laughter belongs to him.⁸⁸⁸

As regards the dualistic movements of Late Antiquity, it hardly needs to be said that confronting the (material) world is the constant, underlying motif of these systems. Their very cosmology and anthropology is based on the notion of a non-ceasing war between the powers of light and darkness. Man's ultimate duty, once he is awakened, is to fight relentlessly against the world of matter to free his soul from it. Mentions of the struggle and war against the world and its elements of Darkness are abundant in texts of dualistic origin:

⁸⁸⁶ According to Vööbus, during a period of early monasticism “baptism became the prerogative of the ascetic elite only... the sign of those who had courage to make the radical decision to turn their backs decisively upon the world.” Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, vol. 1, 90. In other words this liturgy is addressed at those who are about to embark on an ascetic life.

⁸⁸⁷ That is ascetics, who have pledged to live a life of celibacy.

⁸⁸⁸ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 93-94.

Fight the great fight as long as the fight lasts, while all the powers are staring after you - not only the holy ones, but also all the powers of the Adversary... if you fight the fight and are victorious over the powers which fight against you, you will bring great joy to every holy one, and yet great grief to your enemies.⁸⁸⁹

Only those who have faced this fight against the world bravely can hope to reach (return to) heaven, the world of light: "Fight, o sons of Light, yet a little while and you will be victorious. He that shirks his burden will forfeit his bride chamber."⁸⁹⁰

The reference to the war, which all who are awake are going to, explains the title of the *Beyta Cindî*: "The Song of the Soldier." "Soldier" (of God) would express the message implicit in the song much better than the more neutral "commoner." It is a wake up call addressed to those willing to awaken and face the world and the enemies of faith, whether physical or abstract, as good soldiers or athletes. As has been mentioned in the introduction to the *Beyta Cindî*, *cindî* as a general rule appears in texts where there is a reference to the need to fight for the faith, and especially to the final, eschatological battle between the powers of good and evil. For example, it appears in the eschatological *Hymn of Sherfedin* which centers on the topic of the Final War to be fought by the Mehdi and the faithful. It can also be found in the *Hymn of Sheikh Obekr*, where it talks about the *khirge* and the keys (to the divine mystery, gnosis) being bestowed on the *feqirs*, who "renounced the desolate, transitory evil,"⁸⁹¹ and goes on to talk about the *cindî*, who will also receive the keys of mystery, in connection with the Last Day and God as the leader of a vast army.⁸⁹² Such usage of the image of the

⁸⁸⁹ *Teaching of Silvanus* 114.1-6, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 357.

⁸⁹⁰ Psalms to Jesus CCXLIX, in Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 58.24-26.

⁸⁹¹ *Hymn of Sheikh Obekr* 9, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 209.

⁸⁹² "Those keys, They will bring to the hands of those commoners (*cindî*). All five obligatory acts of Truth will bear witness for them on the Last Day. My King, ever since he was the Prince, Was the leader of a vast army. With the Seven Mysteries (i. e., the Seven Angels) of Sultan Êzîd, he

soldier, as a soldier of God and faith, was wide-spread in Late Antiquity, both among those following a dualistic ideology, and in the so-called orthodox Christian circles.

Those engaged in this fight are soldiers, or at least "combatants." As has been said above, in a Syriac-speaking environment, "athlete" or "combatant" was commonly used to refer either to monks or anybody in general fighting for his faith. This usage was then carried over into Manichaeism, where the soul was the central protagonist in the cosmological struggle between Light and Darkness.⁸⁹³ In its turn, Yezidi usage of *cindî*, whose definition was given as "a godfearing Yezidi, with a connotation of poverty, discipline and simplicity," sounds very similar to the definition of an "athlete of Christ," that is an ascetic.

Promise of salvation or heavenly reward

As a counterpoint to the "moral instruction" or rather the demand for future actions befitting a believer and threats aimed at those who prove to be slack in their duty, stands the third element, the promise of salvation. Of course, talking of a heavenly reward may be more correct than using the term "salvation" when dealing with Yezidis concepts. But if we remember that the notion of salvation is often expressed by the idea of return to heaven or light in late antique texts, it cannot be doubted that we meet with the same element in the *Beyta Cindî*. The text clearly promises those ready to heed the wake up call that they will attain the gardens of Eternal Paradise, the Realm of Sultan Êzîd (God):

Oh commoner, do not eat in the daytime,
And do not sleep at night.
Lift your head, look at the properties and gardens (above):

was the knowing one. *Hymn of Sheikh Obeker* 10-11, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 209-11.

⁸⁹³ The Manichaean Psalm to Jesus 31 quoted above on the soul arming itself in the commandment of God and going out into the world refers to man (or the soul) as "champion": "As I was saying these things in tears the Saviour called me: come, o busy champion, and give the garland of Light to me."

Eternal Paradise is the realm of Sultan Êzîd, peace be upon him.

The fact that reaching heaven, the realm of light, is promised as a reward to the soldiers who wake up and take up the struggle for faith, is made even more apparent by the last part of the song, once its obscure references are interpreted. In fact this second,⁸⁹⁴ seemingly independent part of the *beyt*, the *Hymn of the Headdress*, (following on the wake up call and the Sufi description of divine intoxication) is nothing else but a literary expression of the third element of the Call of Awakening, the promise of redemption or heavenly reward.

THE HEADDRESS: THE REWARD OF AWAKENING – THE CROWN (AND THE ROBE)

The *Hymn of the Headdress* is said to constitute a semi-independent part of the *Beyta Cindî*. (It is also included in the *Hymn of Sheikh Heseni Sultan*, on which more will be said below.) This part is almost exclusively devoted to the headdress or crown (*keşf*) of Pîrê Libnan, a headdress that is “pristine,” “commemorated in the world,” “precious,” and most relevantly, “luminous.” What is more, “saints,”⁸⁹⁵ “mirîds,” “believers,” and “discerning ones” have gathered around this headdress, and “good men have taken their share of it.”

I must confess that I am at a loss to explain the role of Pîrê Libnan, the owner of this headdress. He is not much mentioned in everyday discourse on religion among Yezidis today.⁸⁹⁶ According to Kreyenbroek’s list of Yezidi holy figures,⁸⁹⁷ Pîrê Libnan (Pîr of the Bricks) is believed to have built many of the shrines in Lalish. He is a *kebas* of marriage and domesticity, he brings about mar-

⁸⁹⁴ Or third, if we consider the stanzas on wine and divine intoxication as a separate unit.

⁸⁹⁵ *welî* – Arabic for saints or holy men.

⁸⁹⁶ That is, I have never heard him mentioned, though I have to confess that I never remembered to ask directly after his person.

⁸⁹⁷ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 112-3.

riages. He also has strong links with Khidr-Ilyas. One of his epithets is "whose prayers are heard." According to Feqir Haji, he was the leader of the legendary "Forty Men," the companions of Sheikh Adi.⁸⁹⁸ In Khanke, a Yezidi collective village near the bank of the Tiger, he is prayed to by unmarried maidens and young men, who ask for his help to find a spouse.⁸⁹⁹ None of these provides a clue for interpreting Pîrê Libnan's role in the hymn. Possibly, there is some aspect of Pîrê Libnan that eludes me, and subsequent research will perhaps bring to light details concerning the role of Pîrê Libnan that will explain his association with the luminous headdress. It is equally possible that the information shedding light on Pîrê Libnan's role has long dropped out from the memory of Yezidi oral tradition, and has been lost for good. All I can ascertain for the time being, based on the text of the *Hymn of the Headdress*, is that Pîrê Libnan and his headdress are associated with the *sur*, the mystery, divine essence of the Great Angels. The *sur* of Sheikh Mend, Sheikh Adi, Sultan Êzid, Melek Sheikh Hesên (Sheikh Sin), Sheikh Obekr, Shems el-Dîn, and Fekhr el-Dîn⁹⁰⁰ are all mentioned in sequence as to what (or whom) Pîrê Libnan, or his headdress, serves as an ornament. The Kurdish text is rather difficult to interpret at this point, but it may not be too far-fetched to assume that

⁸⁹⁸ Other traditions mention Hesên Meman, or Dawude Derman, or Mehmed Reshan as the leader of the Forty. Some traditions connect the forty *pîr* families with the *Chil Mêr* of Forty Men. The Forty Saints are a well known concept in both Sufism and "popular" Islam, though the exact connection with the Yezidi Forty Men is as yet not clear.

⁸⁹⁹ Oral information from Pîr Jafo, the guardian or *mijenir* of the sanctuary of Mem Shîvan in Khanke. It is possible that Pîrê Libnan fulfills the same function in other villages as well, but it does not necessarily have to be so, given the great variability of beliefs concerning Yezidi holy beings. In Khanke those praying to Pîrê Libnan try to balance three round stone balls on top of each other at a spot dedicated to him, near the sanctuary of Sheikh Adi. If the stone balls stay put, their wishes will be fulfilled. Such a custom of balancing stones on each other seems to be widespread throughout the region. For example, I have heard of similar practice in south-east (Kurdish) Turkey.

⁹⁰⁰ On these figures, appearing both sometimes as Angels, sometimes as *khas* or holy beings on earth, see Kreyenbroek's "Survey of Prominent Yezidi Holy Beings," Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 91-107.

it is the headdress which is the ornament of the mystery of these divine figures (that is, the headdress is worn by the Angels possessing the divine essence, mystery), rather than the ornament being Pîrê Libnan himself.

If we set aside poor Pîrê Libnan and concentrate on this mysterious headdress instead, we may fare better with trying to solve the riddle posed by the hymn. The headdress (*kef* or *tac/tanc*), also referred to as “the luminous black crown,”⁹⁰¹ has already been mentioned in the chapter on the *kebirqe* as a garment of faith. It was created by God along with the *kebirqe*, baptized and worn by him, and then later worn by his Angels and the *kebas*, the Yezidi holy men or incarnate divine beings. It appeared in some versions of the myth of Adam as a part of Adam’s angelic apparel, while he was still in Paradise, with the *sur* or mystery of Sheikh Sin dwelling in his forehead. And finally there was Sheikh Adi’s headdress or crown, still guarded in Lalish, from which light is said to have shone while he was wearing it, just as from his *kebirqe*. On the earth, along with the *kebirqe*, it represents religious gnosis, divine enlightenment.⁹⁰² If the *kebirqe* accrues to those who follow the true faith, after their death or on the Last Day as the eschatological hymns analyzed in the previous chapter imply, it is reasonable to assume that the headdress will also be given as a reward to the faithful, when they ascends to heaven. This is, as I believe, the message of the *Hymn of the Headdress*. Just as the promise of heavenly reward is in keeping with the late antique tradition of the Call of Awakening, the promise of a headdress (or crown) constituting a part of this reward is probably another late antique inheritance.

⁹⁰¹ For example, *Hymn of the Faith* 19 “My Sultan Ezi(d) put on the *kebirqe*, He placed a luminous black crown of power on his head.” (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 85-6.) See also *Beyt of Mir Mih* 6-8.

⁹⁰² The *seqirs* today also wear a kind of black turban along with the black *kebirqe*, symbolizing this divine headdress or crown.

The Crown of Light in Late Antique Calls of Awakening

It was seen in the previous chapter how in many texts a crown was also promised along with (or occasionally in the place of) the robe of glory to those pious who strove to live the true, sinless life of the faithful. In Jewish and Christian tradition the crown (worn by the angels and also lost by Adam) accompanied the robe as the reward of the righteous in a great number of texts. There is no need to quote again the relevant texts, but it may be worthwhile to call attention to the fact that, just like in *Beyta Cindi*, the crown or crowning is often mentioned in connection with the “war” or “contest” that had to be fought on account of faith. For example, Syriac literature on the life of the martyrs also speaks of martyrdom as “crowning,” being killed for the sake of faith is being “crowned with the crown of victory.”⁹⁰³ The crown appears as a sort of reward, symbolizing the promise of salvation, for those who fight valiantly: “An everlasting crown is Truth; blessed are they who set it on their head. It is a precious stone, for the wars were on account of the crown.”⁹⁰⁴ The Syriac *Acts of Thomas*,⁹⁰⁵ which seem to have preserved ancient liturgical formulations, say: “Blessed are the spirits of the holy ones (chaste ones) who have taken the crown and gone up from the contest.”⁹⁰⁶ One of the hymns of Ephrem in his

⁹⁰³ See, for example, Walker, *Syriac Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 68 and *passim*.

⁹⁰⁴ Odes of Solomon 9. 8-9, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2, 743.

⁹⁰⁵ This third-century New Testament apocryph has survived in Syriac and Greek manuscripts. The Greek version contains some Gnostic undertones, which have been purged from the Syriac version. Consequently, the Greek version is considered older, though the *Acts* were probably composed in Syriac in Northern Mesopotamia.

⁹⁰⁶ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, vol. 1, 91. Vööbus claims that the crown refers to baptism, pointing to the fact that newly baptized persons were dressed in white robes and crowns were placed on their heads, and that liturgical hymns refer to baptism as crown. It has been seen, however, that starting with Jewish texts and the Book of Revelation the crown may have other, including eschatological, meanings. As the *Acts of Thomas* talks about “going up from the contest” it is likely that the text wants to confer

Epiphany Hymn Cycle not only mentions the crown (and garment) that will be set on the head of the redeemed when he recovers the glory lost by Adam, returns to Eden and becomes again like the angels, but they also echo a number of themes in the *Beyta Cindî* analyzed above, including repeated references made to the war that has to be fought before victory is achieved and the crown conferred:

Your garments glisten, my brethren, as snow; and fair is your shining in the likeness of Angels!
 In the likeness of Angels, you have come up, beloved, from Jordan's river, in the armour of the Holy Ghost.
 The bridal chamber that fails not, my brethren, you have received: and the glory of Adam's house today you have put on.
 The judgment that came of the fruit, was Adam's condemnation: but for you victory, has arisen this day.
 Your vesture is shining, and goodly your crowns: which the Firstborn has bound for you, by the priest's hand this day.
 Woe in Paradise, did Adam receive: but you have received glory this day.
 The armour of victory, you put on my beloved: in the hour when the priest, invoked the Holy Ghost...
 The day when he dawned, the Heavenly King opens for you His door and bids you enter Eden.
 Crowns that fade not away are set on your heads: hymns of praise hourly, let your mouths sing...
 The Evil One made war, and subdued Adam's house: through your baptism, my brethren, lo, he is subdued this day.
 Great is the victory but today you have won: if so be ye neglect not, you shall not perish, my brethren.⁹⁰⁷

an eschatological meaning, which would be a bit premature at the moment of baptism.

⁹⁰⁷ *Hymn for the Feast of the Epiphany 13 (Hymn for the Baptized)*, 1-7, 10, 11, 19-20. trans. E. Johnston, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 13, ed. P. Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1898.)

The warning not to neglect one's duties is added to the theme of fight in another hymn of Ephrem, which promises receiving the crown as the final reward. In this hymn Ephrem calls on the faithful to live up to the promise of baptism, and not become slack in their duties, or in his language, not become a heathen again, but to remember their baptism, the commandments of God, and fight against evil. Then they shall receive atonement and the crown.⁹⁰⁸

In Gnostic texts one also finds the image of the soul returning to the realm of light being crowned, alongside the metaphor of being invested with a garment of light.⁹⁰⁹ Thus, for example, the work *Zostrianos* describes the mystical ascent of the soul toward acquaintance or Gnosis, and at the end of this spiritual journey concludes: “I united with them all⁹¹⁰... I became all perfect and received power. I was written in glory and sealed. I received there a perfect crown.”⁹¹¹ The theme of contest reappears in the *Teachings of Silvanus*, where those who contend well (are good athletes, combatants) will be crowned by Christ:

And the Life of Heaven wishes to renew all, that he may cast out that which is weak, and every black form, that everyone may shine forth with great brilliance in heavenly garments in order to make manifest the command of the Father, and that he may crown those wishing to contend well. Christ, being judge of the contest, is he who crowned every one, teaching

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3704.htm>, last accessed 11 October 2009.

⁹⁰⁸ “But our Shepherd has baptized His sheep... The People passed through the water and were baptized; the People came up on dry land and became *as* heathen. The Commandment was savourless in their ears; the manna corrupted in their vessels. Eat the living Body,—the medicine of life that gives life to all!... You have gone down to the victorious waters: come up and triumph in the fight! receive from the water atonement, and from the fight the crowning!” *Hymn for the Feast of the Epiphany* 7.5-8, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3704.htm>.

⁹⁰⁹ John D. Turner, “Ritual in Gnosticism,” *SBLSP* 33 (1994): 136-181, <http://jdt.unl.edu/ritual.htm#fnB33>, last accessed 11 October 2009.

⁹¹⁰ I.e., with the powers of Light.

⁹¹¹ *Zostrianos*, 129,12-16 (cf. 57,13-24), ed. B. Layton, trans. J. H. Sieber, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, NHS 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 221

every one to contend. This one who contended first received the crown, gained dominion, and appeared, giving light to everyone.⁹¹²

The *Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex* also makes frequent mention of the ray-emitting crowns⁹¹³ of the holy beings of light, which those closed in the body strive to attain:

This is the crown which gives power to every power. And this is the crown for which all the immortal ones pray... those who have received bodies pray, wishing to leave their bodies behind, and to receive the crown which is laid up for them in the imperishable aeon.⁹¹⁴... And the all-visible one came forth wearing the crown, and gave (crowns) to those who have believed.⁹¹⁵

Manichaean tradition is of special relevance, for hymns which can be defined as literary Calls of Awakening often include the promise of a crown as a reward for those who awaken, symbolizing the promise of salvation inherent in the Gnostic Call. (The crown of light may also appear instead as a diadem or a wreath – these three, crown, diadem and wreath seem to be three different ways of expressing the glorious headdress that accompanies the garment and the different texts may mention all three, just two, or only one of them at the same time.)⁹¹⁶ Already some versions of the Call (of the Living Spirit) and the Answer (of the awakened Primal Man) contain allusions to the crown of light, like this Turfan fragment:

[Call:] Shake off the drunkenness in which thou hast slumbered,

⁹¹² *Teachings of Silvanus* 112,10-27, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 353.

⁹¹³ *Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex* ch. 11.

⁹¹⁴ *Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex* ch. 9.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.* ch. 12.

⁹¹⁶ It is revealing, for example, that in the Coptic *Kephalaia*, the diadem, wreath and crown are held by the same angel, while another holds the garment, and the third one the “prize.” One (angel) holds the prize in his hand. The second bears the light garment. The third is the one who possesses the diadem and the wreath and the crown of light.” *Kephalaia* 36.12-21, Gardner, *Kephalaia*, 40.

Awake and behold me!
Good tidings to thee from the world of joy
From which I am sent for thy sake.

[Answer:] I am I, the son of the mild ones.
Mingled am I and lamentation I see.
Lead me out of the embracement of death.

[Call:] Power and prosperity of the Living unto thee from thy
home!
Follow me, son of mildness,
Set upon thy head the crown of light.⁹¹⁷

Modeled on the fate of the Primal Man, the same crown (and of course the robe of light) awaits those souls (particles of the imprisoned light armor, sons of the Primal Man) who manage to emulate their forefather, wake up and break free of the matter:

Deep is the drunken stupor in which you sleep, awake and
look at me. From the World of Peace, from which I have been
sent for your sake: Hail... Follow me, son of mildness, and set
the wreath of Light upon your head.⁹¹⁸

O Soul... thou sleeping,
They that sleep (lacuna...) they that slumber
Awake. Lo, the morning has come, lo, the sun rises on [thee].
The morning is the Truth, the Truth is the command-
ments...⁹¹⁹

O Noble one despised. Thy king searches for thee. Where are
thy angelic garments, thy robes that grow not old?
Where are thy gay garlands, the crowns that fall not?⁹²⁰

The second psalm just quoted has many parallels, concerning its content, with the Yezidi *Song of the Commoner*. The whole Call of

⁹¹⁷ Turfan fragment M 7, quoted in Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 83.

⁹¹⁸ *Zarabustra-fragment* (Parthian), Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 47-8. Zarathustra (Zoroaster) was considered one of the prophets preceding him by Mani, whose message aimed at freeing the Living Soul from the matter.

⁹¹⁹ Psalmoi Sarakotôn, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 146.14-20.

⁹²⁰ Psalmoi Sarakotôn, *ibid.*, 146.38-44.

Awakening is embedded in a naturalistic scene of the morning coming and the sun rising, just as in its Yezidi counterpart. The Call to awaken is then followed by a reminder of Truth and the commandments, that is, faith and the religious precepts, which a Manichaean has to follow, if he wishes to serve his Lord. The moral instruction is then followed by the promise of salvation, symbolized by the garment of light, the garland and the crown, which await the true believer. Other hymns put the emphasis on the cry or the voice calling from the beyond (like the voice of the cockerel calling from the Throne of God) and add the prospect of returning to heaven to the promise of the robe and crown:

When I heard the cry of my saviour, a power clothed all my
limbs, their bitter walls I destroyed, their doors I broke down,
I ran to my Judge. The garland of glory he set upon my head,
the prize of victory he set in my hand, he clothed me in the
robe of light.⁹²¹

Finally, just like Manichaean hymns, Mandaean hymns of the Call of Life also hold out the promise of a wreath to be set on the head of those, who rise from their sleep:

Early I arose from my sleep: I stood,
Into radiance that was great I looked,
I gazed into radiance that was great,
Into the Light which is boundless.

When clothed in robes of radiance
And light was thrown on my shoulders
A wreath of ether He set on my head

⁹²¹ Psalm to Jesus CCXLIII, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 50.21. See also: "And while I thus wept and shed tears upon the ground, I heard the voice of the Beneficent King... I shall save you from every... Of the rebellious Powers who have frightened [you] with fear... I shall take (you) eagerly and soar up upon wings, High over all the (Dark) Powers and rebellious Princes, I shall lead (you) into the primeval calm of that land [i.e. the New Paradise]... You shall put on a radiant garment, and gird on Light; And I shall set on your head the diadem of sovereignty." Parthian Hymn-Cycles, *Huvidagman*, Canto VI, Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature* 85-86.

And set it on the head of all His race
 He hymned, and the ‘uthras with Him hymn
 And the Light-rays answer his Voice.
 And it rouseth sleepers and maketh them rise up
 From their sleep.⁹²²

The Headdress and the Promise of Heaven in the *Beyta Cindî*

Admittedly, the Yezidi text, in its present form, does not openly state that such a “luminous headdress” will accrue to those who harken to the voice of the cockerel. However, it is possible to conclude that as much is implied by the text. The song’s claim that saints, believers, *mirîds*⁹²³ and discerning ones have gathered around the headdress, suggests that believers (will) have access to this precious item of divine clothing. This interpretation is reinforced by the sentence, “Your headdress is in order, the good men have taken their share of it.” The next few verses further illuminate the circumstances of taking share in the crown:

Your headdress is precious,
 It flew, it went away, it was in Heaven,
 It circled around the Throne...

I went towards that light.
 One cries out in deep emotion...

I went towards heaven.
 That sight pleases me,

⁹²² Drower, *Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaean*. The Rus’hma, chapter 114. The hymn continues with the moral instruction to “worship and praise the Great Life and praise His Counterpart,” already quoted above. The Gnostic Society Library (online), <http://www.gnosis.org/library/ginzarba.htm>, accessed 03. 07. 2008.

⁹²³ I.e., Yezidi commoners. In this context they are probably to be understood as believers of the true faith, just like Manichaean *auditors*, who do not possess a special status, but are ready to follow their religious leaders who possess knowledge of the true religion.

The Commoner has become a Prince dressed in Black.

The headdress or crown seems to lead the way to heaven, to the throne of God, or in any case is to be found there. And this is where the faithful soldier himself will follow, whose reward of the fight will be to reach heaven and the divine light, just like in the late antique texts quoted above.⁹²⁴ This interpretation is reinforced by the last line, on the commoner (soldier) being dressed in Black. This Black symbolizes the clothing of the *feqirs*, who wear the sacred black shirt with a black turban, believed to be fashioned after the luminous black *khirqe* and crown worn by God and Angels of the Yezidi hymns. A commoner becoming dressed in black refers to his winning these sacred items of clothing. In other words, the soldier who has heeded the Call of Awakening and fought the fight for his Master, will as his reward reach heaven, become like a *feqir*, that is a true man of religion, and put on the sacred clothing, *khirqe* and crown.⁹²⁵

The expression “the commoner became a Prince”, which can be found only in the version of the *Hymn of the Headdress* contained by the *Beyta Cindî*, is somewhat of a challenge to interpret. *Feqirs* are never referred to as “prince” (*mîr*), a term which as a rule refers to God in Yezidi sacred hymns. Thus, the statement that the soldier of faith becomes a prince upon reaching Heaven would seem to imply a sort of apotheosis of the soldier, probably in the sense that the soul of the true believer would eventually unite, become one with the Divine. Such an interpretation could also be born out by the idea that in heaven the true believer would wear the *khirqe* and crown. This may, of course, merely imply that the believer becomes like a *feqir*, a truly pious ascetic, but it is equally possible that the

⁹²⁴ Note that in the Calls of Awakening above light (receiving light, being illuminated by light, or ascending back to the world of light) was often associated with awakening.

⁹²⁵ The same line is repeated in the hymn of the headdress contained in the *Hymn of Sheikh Heseni Siltan* 19: “I went to the realm of heaven, That sight pleases me, The commoner had been dressed in black” (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 360.) In his footnote Kreyenbroek explains: “in heaven the pious commoner was recognised as the equal of a Feqir.” (Kreyenbroek, *Sheikh Adî*, 360, note 111.)

black garments here refer not to the dress of the *feqirs*, but its heavenly archetypes, the luminous black *kebirge* and crown of God and his Angels. Adam, while living in Paradise as an angelic being, with the *sur* or divine essence in his forehead, also wore these black garments as the symbols of his angelic status.⁹²⁶ The (Yezidi) soldier of faith heeding the Call to awaken would then be dressed in the same angelic clothing as that lost by Adam (of which the garments of the *feqirs* are mere earthly reminders.) At the same time he would also regain the divine status lost by Adam (become a Prince), since being an angel (possessor of the *sur*, or divine essence, power) amounts to being a divine being in Yezidi religious thought, that is, being ultimately one with the prince (*mîr*), or the godhead. If this interpretation is correct, this single sentence would contain not only a promise of heavenly reward, but also the missing reminder of the soul's origin, one of the doctrinal elements of the Gnostic Call. As has been seen, the idea that human soul is of divine origin, and will eventually (upon its redemption) unite again with the Divine, is one of the cornerstones of Gnostic and related systems. If the interpretation of this cryptic sentence on the soldier becoming a Prince dressed in Black is correct, this would be a most interesting thought as far as Yezidi anthropology, its origins and development are concerned. Unfortunately, the texts published so far do not yield enough information to let us decide if there was indeed such a thought of the unification of the soul with the Divine present in Yezidi religion once, or if this is a mere corruption of the text, and “prince” has merely been switched for *feqir*. The question, therefore, must for the time being, remain open.

Any remaining doubt that these stanzas refer to the soldier of faith ascending to heaven and reaping his reward, symbolized by receiving his share of the sacred clothing, can be removed by a comparison with the version of the headdress hymn found in the *Hymn of Sheikh Heseni Siltan*. Though very similar to the one contained in the *Beyta Cindî*, there are some interesting differences:

⁹²⁶ Though he lost this *sur*, along with the garments at the time of his expulsion, the Yezidi “race” was then created from this lost *sur*, as shall be seen in the next chapter, thus providing Yezidis (or their souls) with a divine origin.

Your head-dress is big
Falcons called to it overhead...

I went to the realm of that head-dress
I sought to reach the shores of the ocean
Oh beloved Pire Libnan
Their cup stood on holy wood⁹²⁷
Oh Pir, let me be your slave.

I went to the realm of heaven
That sight pleases me
The commoner had been dressed in black
Oh Pir, let me be your slave⁹²⁸

The text makes it clear that the realm of heaven and the realm of the head-dress, where the believer aims to arrive, are ultimately the same. And if heaven is no other than the realm of head-dress, it is probably not too far-fetched to conclude that reaching heaven will mean attaining the headdress, or "taking a share of it" as the hymn says.

The *Song of the Commoner* then ends with a brief enumeration of the sacred spots in Lalish, the holy valley: the Cave, the *Silargeh*,⁹²⁹ and the Spires of the Sanctuary. Keeping in mind that Lalish is nothing else but the earthly reflection of heavenly Lalish, the Throne of God,⁹³⁰ it would not be too daring a supposition to as-

⁹²⁷ *Gezir*, the special sacred wood used for cooking in Lalish.

⁹²⁸ *Hymn of Sheikh Heseni Siltan* 16-19, Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 359-60.

⁹²⁹ The "place of greeting," the stone marking the place on the path leading to Lalish, from where the valley is first sighted. Pilgrims used to fire their rifles at his spot and kiss the stone.

⁹³⁰ Yezidi oral tradition relates how the earth at the time of creation settled only when Lalish, the Throne of God, "came down" on it. According to Dr. Khalil Jindi Rashow, the relationship between earthly and heavenly Lalish should be compared to that between God and the human soul. Talking of the connection between earthly and heavenly Lalish, he mentioned the mysterious tree, Ghew(ar) referred to in the *Prayer of Belief* 6 (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 104) as a tree which had "Its head below, its roots above, The angels took the light from the uppermost height." In his interpretation this was the Tree of Knowledge connecting

sume that the text refers to heavenly Lalish (representing the *batini* or spiritual, esoteric world), and not the earthly Lalish, its *ẓabiri* (material, exoteric) counterpart. The mention of the "eternal place, at the eternal foundation" supports his assumption. Earthly Lalish could hardly be called "eternal foundation" unlike heavenly Lalish, the Throne of God. It is heavenly Lalish where the soldier eventually arrives, following the flight of the headdress. Thus, the third element of the classical Call of Awakening, the promise of heaven, is fulfilled in the hymn of the headdress, where the faithful soldier is rewarded with access to heaven and investiture with the headdress, and possibly the black *ķhirqe* as well, so that the commoner will become "black," (dressed as in the luminous black *ķhirqe* and *ķoſ*) in heaven, becoming once again like Adam was before his expulsion.

* * *

Summing up, there can be little doubt that the *Beyta Cindî* is a Yezidi version of the late antique literary genre of the Call of Awakening (also referred to as the Gnostic Call). It calls on the faithful to wake up, designating sleep as something dark, unlawful and leading to punishment. In other words, sleep is a metaphor for the state of spiritual ignorance, where the individual inevitably transgresses the divine precepts and commandments due to his lack of religious awareness. Awakening, on the other hand, is spiritual conversion, a turning toward religion and accepting its demands. The classical image of awakening is here complemented by the Sufi image of wine, divine intoxication, which leads to a mystical state of gnosis, also a form of awakening and enlightenment. The Call itself, a voice calling for awakening in the middle of the night, comes from the word of the beyond, from heaven or the Throne of God, in keeping with the late antique tradition of the Call being the voice of the transmundane penetrating this world. Beside the exhortation to awaken and spurn sleep, the song also contains at least two of the three doctrinal elements of the Gnostic

earthly and heavenly Lalish. With its roots it absorbed divine gnosis in heavenly Lalish to distribute it through its branches down on earth.

Call. It contains a moral instruction, instructing the awakened believer of his duties toward God and the righteous conduct expected of him. It also calls on the believer, consistently referred to throughout the song as soldier, to fight the war for his faith, yet another common late antique motif. Punishment meted out to those who prove to be slack in their service constitutes a part of this moral instruction. As a counterpart to the moral instruction we find the promise of salvation or, in a Yezidi context, the promise of a heavenly reward: ascension to heaven, to the eternal Paradise and the Throne of God (fleetingly mentioned in the first, and elaborated in the last part of the hymn), and being invested with the luminous black headdress (crown,) and perhaps with the black *kehrqe* as well.⁹³¹ The promise of the headdress and the *kehrqe*⁹³² as a reward for those who heed the Call of Awakening and take their part in the fight for faith connects the *Beyta Cindî* to the same tradition as the eschatological *Hymn of Sherfedin* and the *Hymn of Faith*. Both of these hymns promise the *kehrqe* as a reward to those who are willing to join the fight on the side of the true religion at the battle at the end of the world.

The story of the Yezidi *kehrqe* and the crown (*kof, tac*) has come full circle. They were the clothing of God at the very beginning of the creation, and the light emanating from them played its role in the creation. They were later inherited by the Angels, symbolizing their share in the divine power. Then they were worn by the angels incarnated on earth as Yezidi leaders, finally becoming instruments of distributing faith and divine wisdom among men. They play a role in the myth of Adam's (i.e. man's) creation as well. The sacred clothing is then worn by Adam while he lives in Paradise and possesses the *sur*, divine essence of Angel Sheikh Sin.

⁹³¹ Possibly, the third element, reminder of the soul's divine origin, is also present. If so, the *Song* promises not only investiture with the luminous black garments and ascension to heaven, but also a return to the soul's original state, that is becoming one with the Divine again, the key message of the Gnostic Call.

⁹³² Though the promise of the *kehrqe* is not explicit in the text, it may be inferred from the line stating that the soldier will become black, that is, in heaven he will be dressed in the black *kehrqe* and headdress of the *feqirs*.

Upon his loss of the *sur*, that is the loss of his angelic status, Adam is expelled from Paradise and divested of his angelic clothing. These lost garments are finally recaptured as a heavenly reward by the "soldier" of faith, who awakens to the true religion, and takes up the struggle for it. It may even be inferred, even if the Yezidi texts published so far and the extant oral traditions do not state it openly, that the Yezidi who manages to shed the manacles of sleep (spiritual unconsciousness) and follows the true religion, regains the original divine state of Adam, that is he becomes like Adam when he was in Paradise and possessed the divine soul of Melek Sheikh Sin and wore the *kbirge* and the *kof*.

It is hard to miss the parallel between the *kbirge* and *kof* and the garments of light of Late Antiquity, and especially the light garments of Adam, lost at the time of his Fall and eventually regained as a symbol of salvation by those who become victorious in the spiritual fight, regaining man's elevated position lost at the time of the Fall.⁹³³ The appearance of the *kof* and the *kbirge*, the latter designated with a Sufi word but carrying ideas inherited from Late Antiquity, in a hymn continuing the late antique tradition of the Call of Awakening is further proof of the long-lasting influence the late antique religious thought exercised even on the periphery of the Mediterranean world well into the Middle Ages, when Yezidi tradition developed.

⁹³³ Christian and dualistic systems emphasize different elements of the myth, and their understanding of the human soul's original position also differs (angelic or part of the divine, consubstantial with the Light), but both concur on the notion of the soul's return to its original elevated position, often expressed by the investiture with the garment and crown of light.

9 THE ORIGIN MYTH OF THE YEZIDIS – THE MYTH OF SHEHID BIN JER

THE CREATION MYTH OF SHEHID BIN JER

Creation from the *Sur* in Adam's Forehead

In this chapter I propose to return to the creation myth of Adam as told by Feqir Haji. The first part of this myth has already been analyzed in details in a previous chapter. The second part tells of the creation of the Yezidi race (or rather their forefather, Shehid) from the divine essence, the *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin lost by Adam along with his angelic clothing at the time of his expulsion from Paradise. I shall first recount again the myth as told by Feqir Haji, but now focusing on the events that followed the fall of Adam and his loss of the *sur*. The myth as told by Feqir Haji, to the best of my knowledge, has never been published in full in Western literature before.⁹³⁴

Sheikh Sin is from goodness. He was modeled after the Pearl. He existed before men and women. Sheikh Sin was created from Goodness, and his Light was staying in the Divine Light. In heaven he was the king of true religion. On earth he gave power to the prophet of the Ummah. The prophet of the Ummah was no other than Adam. The divine light and mysterious power (*sur*) of Melek Sheikh Sin came from heaven into the forehead of Adam.

⁹³⁴ For the original text of the myth, as recounted by Feqir Haji and others, see the transcriptions and translations in the *Appendix*.

God created Adam's body between Saturday and Friday. After seven hundred years, a soul entered this body. This soul was an angel that came from heaven. The soul did not want to enter the body. The seven Angels stood around the body and they said to this angel, you have to enter into this body so that the world (mankind) may be established." This soul was the soul of Melek Sheik Sin.

For seven hundred years the soul (Sheikh Sin) did not go into Adam, but then God and the Peacock Angel commanded that he must go into it. Before the soul [or light, *sur*] of Melek Sheikh Sin entered Adam, it made conditions for entering the body and said to God and the Peacock Angel, "take me to Paradise then." They consented. He said, "put the *kehrqe* on me." They consented. He said, "and let the Peacock Angel be my imam and show my way around Paradise." They consented.

So, finally, Melek Sheik Sin consented. Then he brought his divine power and light, that is, his *sur*, and put it into Adam's forehead and stayed in Adam's forehead. And they put the *kehrqe* on Adam. The *kehrqe* became Adam's cloth. And the Peacock Angel took Adam to Paradise and became his imam.

Then follows the story of the Peacock Angel tricking Adam into tasting the forbidden grain:

Then the Peacock Angel took away the *kehrqe* of Adam, and he took away the *sur* in Adam's forehead. As long as Adam was in Paradise, he was like a great angel, for the divine light, or *sur* of Sheikh Melek Sin inside him was great. But after the Peacock Angel took away the *sur* from his forehead, and his *kehrqe*, he became like the empty shell of a snail. He became a human.

The Peacock Angel then created Eve from the rib of Adam, and Adam married Eve. They had seventy-two sons and seventy-two daughters, who later married each other. This was the beginning of mankind.⁹³⁵

⁹³⁵ Yezidis, no doubt under Judeo-Christian-Islamic influence, seem to share the view that there are seventy-two nations (not counting the Yezidis) on earth. Interestingly, many Yezidis I met claimed that Yezidis

When the Peacock Angel tricked Adam, and he had to leave Paradise, Adam swore at the Peacock Angel, pronouncing the forbidden word,⁹³⁶ a habit that the descendants of his children follow up to this day. So the Peacock Angel wanted to create a people for himself, who would revere him, so his name wouldn't be lost. To this end, he took the *sur*, which he had taken away out of Adam's forehead and put it in a jar, for the form of a jar resembles that of a womb. After nine months a boy was born from that jar who came to be called Shehid bin Jer, or Witness of the Jar. God then sent a *houiri* from Paradise, called Leyla, for him to marry. From their union were born Hashim and Quresh.⁹³⁷ The Yezidis are their descendants. They were brought forth from the *sur* of Shehid. They are the nation of that *sur*. Yezidis are not the descendants of Adam and Eve's twice seventy-two children, like the rest of mankind, with whom they cannot marry. After Shehid they have no prophet, because they are the nation of his *sur*, the nation of God, and the nation of the Peacock Angel. They are the nation of God, and that is why they are called "Ezidis," for Shehid said, "God gave (made) me."⁹³⁸

had weathered seventy-two *fermans* (persecution in this context), a number which probably reflects the traditional number of nations, and implies that they are a people who have been persecuted by all other nations.

⁹³⁶ That is, he called the Peacock Angel "Sheitan," a word Yezidis are forbidden to pronounce.

⁹³⁷ Quresh was the tribe of Mohamad, Hashim his sub-tribe. The appearance of these names in a Yezidi myth as the legendary forefathers of the Yezidis, born from the divinely conceived Shehid, reflects the strong influence Islam must have exercised on the ancestors of Yezidis at one point.

⁹³⁸ This is connected with the word play Yezidis (or as they prefer to say these days: Ezidi/Ezdi) use to explain their name. In the phrase *Xweda ez dam*, *Xweda* is the etymological explanation of the Kurdish for God (*Xwedê*), understood as *xwe da*, that is "self-created" ("he who gave/made himself), while (*Xweda*) *ez dam* means "(by the Self-created/God) I was made/given." Thus Yezidis claim their name, "Ezidi," or "Ezdi" comes from *ez dam*, "I was created by God."

A less coherent account of the same event can be found in one of the interviews made by Jasim Murad with Yezidis living in Germany:

Then, Angel Dirdail entered the body of Adam and clapped both of his hands saying: "Wake up Adam and put on your body the attire of angels."... Then Dirdail taught Adam the science of God and brought him to paradise and said unto him: "Now you are an angel, do not leave Paradise for if you do so, you shall become a man."⁹³⁹

This is followed by the story of the Peacock Angel tricking Adam into eating from the plant of grain, his ousting from Paradise, and the stripping of his angelic clothing:

"Now you have become a human being and you have lost your angelic nature."... Then, Ta'us Malak stripped Adam of the angelic clothes and left him only with the pearl⁹⁴⁰ on his forehead, and then threw him away from the gates of Paradise.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁹ Version of Feqir Ali, in Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 290.

⁹⁴⁰ There was no previous mention of a "pearl" in the text, but it evidently refers to the drop of light or *sur* representing the power of the angel in Adam's forehead, known from other versions of the myth. Jasim Murad mentions later, when referring to the myth, that according to Feqir Ali, the pearl was given to Adam by the Peacock Angel, when he was placed in Paradise ("Sacred Poems," 310). It is somewhat surprising that the Peacock Angel does not take away the "pearl" right away together with Adam's angelic clothing, only later on, but this is probably due to the fact that the narrator of the myth did not associate the "pearl" with the angelic nature of Adam, that is, the presence of divine power in him (which is referred to in this version only in an ambiguous way). This is a good example of how oral myths are continually being changed and rewritten, when some of the motifs can no longer be interpreted by those retelling them. Another example is furnished by Empson (*Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 47), when he mentions jars filled with blood from the forehead, which again must be the result of his source (sadly unspecified), perhaps not quite understanding the myth, substituting human essence, "blood," for divine essence, "*sur*," in Adam's forehead.

⁹⁴¹ Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 291.

This is followed by the creation of Eve, the separation of Adam and Eve,⁹⁴² and the sending of a *houri* from Paradise to Adam, who made Eve very jealous. Then the text abruptly returns to Adam's forehead:

Ta'us Malak then asked Adam to give up the pearl and Adam did so... Now, the pearl which Adam gave to Ta'us Malak transformed at the order of God into a handsome boy, and Ta'us Malak made the boy and the Houri marry each other and the Yazidis came from their offspring.⁹⁴³

The myth of Shehid's creation ends with an account of how Eve tried to induce her children to murder the boy, but the Peacock Angel confused the tongue of the would-be murderers, who could no longer understand each other and so the plan failed.⁹⁴⁴

Summing up, Sheikh Sin, one of the Seven Great Angels who were the emanations of the Godhead, "moved" into the body of Adam in order to bring him to life, that is, to give him a soul or spirit. His divine essence or light, the *sur*, was manifested in the forehead of Adam, something that can be imagined, perhaps, as a drop of light shining forth from Adam's forehead, or even as a pearl.⁹⁴⁵ At the time of his expulsion from Paradise, Adam lost the

⁹⁴² Many versions of the Yezidi myth of Adam recount that the couple lost each other, or were separated, by the Peacock Angel, and spent forty years looking for each other. The motif of separation was already known in Late Antiquity, for example, it can be read in the *Vita Adae*, and it was known in Islamic tradition as well.

⁹⁴³ Jasim Murad, "Sacred Poems," 292.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.: "But before the young boy married the Houri, Eve advised her children to kill the boy born out of the pearl so that one of them could marry the Houri. But Ta'us Malak came on that night and struck the mouths of Adam and Eve's children with his cane, and thus, they spoke different languages and could not understand each other, and the plot of murdering the young boy was aborted." As Adam and Eve had twice seventy-two children, corresponding to the traditional number of nations on earth, it is clear that this part of the myth is related to the myth of the Tower of Babel and God confusing the tongue of the nations.

⁹⁴⁵ On the *sur* shining as a drop of light on the forehead of a Yezidi divine being, and in non-Yezidi tradition of the region, see above, in Chapter 6 on the creation myth of Adam.

sur in his forehead, along with his angelic clothing and angelic (divine) status. However, the *sur* was not lost for good as far as the history of humans was concerned. It was taken by the Peacock Angel, who ensured that a special being was born from this *sur*, divine essence or light, who then became the forefather of the Yezidi race. As Arab Khidir of Beshiqe said:⁹⁴⁶ “Adam had *sur* in his forehead, this reached Shit (Shehid), this light reached his (Shehid’s) children.”⁹⁴⁷ In other words, Shehid (and his descendants) took the exalted position as a special people of God (in possession of the divine essence, *sur*) initially given to Adam, and which Adam eventually lost (though in the Yezidi version through no sin of his own, but rather to fulfill the inscrutable plans of God).

The Creation of Shehid from Adam’s Seed

There is another variant of this myth current among the Yezidis. This variant also attributes a special birth to Shehid, forefather of the Yezidi race. However, there are some notable differences. The *sur* of a divine being does not play a role.⁹⁴⁸ Instead the myth centers around the seed of Adam. This other version has been published repeatedly in Western scholarship, with minor variations.⁹⁴⁹

⁹⁴⁶ After having first claimed that Shehid was in fact Adam, and Yezidis were the children of Adam and Eve.

⁹⁴⁷ *Adam, sur hebû li eniya wî, ew gebîste Şit, ew nûr gebîste piçukêd wî.*

⁹⁴⁸ As has already been mentioned, the myth of enclosing Angel Sheikh Sin in Adam’s body to function as his soul is not reported in the *Black Book* or in any other Western publications, except for Siouffi (writing before the publication of the *Black Book*,) who makes a passing reference to it. Some brief mentions of it were also made in the interviews in the unpublished doctoral thesis of Jasim Murad. These, however, failed to attract any attention.

⁹⁴⁹ The *Black Book* in Joseph’s publication (“Yezidi Texts,” 223); Chabot, “Notice sur les Yézidis,” 118; Drower *Peacock Angel*, 91; Empson *Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 45-7, 147-48; A. Guérinot, “Les Yézidis,” *RMM* 5.8 (1908): 586-7; Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 36-7.; Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yezîdis*, 59; F. Nau, “Recueil de textes et de documents sur les Yézidis,” 245; Siouffi, “La Secte des Yézidis,” 259-60.

According to the *Black Book* (in the manuscript version translated by Joseph), Shehid's creation took place in this way:

Now Gabriel was away from Adam for a hundred years. And Adam was sad and weeping. Then God commanded Gabriel to create Eve from under the left shoulder of Adam. Now it came to pass, after the creation of Eve and of all the animals, that Adam and Eve quarreled over the question whether the human race should be descended from him or from her, for each wished to be the sole begetter of the race. This quarrel originated in their observation of the fact that among animals both the male and the female were factors in the production of their respective species. After a long discussion Adam and Eve agreed on this: each should cast his seed into a jar, close it, and seal it with his own seal, and wait for nine months. When they opened the jars at the completion of this period, they found in Adam's jar two children, male and female. Now from these two our sect, the Yezidis are descended. In Eve's jar they found naught but rotten worms emitting a foul odor. And God caused nipples to grow for Adam that he might suckle the children that proceeded from his jar. This is the reason why man has nipples. After this Adam knew Eve, and she bore two children, male and female; and from these the Jews, the Christians, the Moslems, and other nations and sects are descended. But our first fathers are Seth, Noah, and Enosh, the righteous ones, who were descended from Adam only.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁵⁰ Joseph, "Yezidi Texts," 223. It is worth noting that while the myth of the creation of Adam presented at this point by the *Black Book* clearly talks about the creation of Shehid from Adam's seed, and makes no reference to the *sur*, the same manuscript mentions the creation of Shehid and the Yezidis from the essence of Adam a page earlier: "O Angels, I will create Adam and Eve; and from the essence of Adam shall proceed Sehar bn Jebr, and of him a separate community shall appear upon the earth, that of Azazil, i.e., that of Melek Ta'us, which is the sect of the Yezidis." Joseph, "Yezidi Texts," 222. The manuscript in the possession of Père Anastase Marie (published in French in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), 1-39) also contains this reference to the essence of Adam, see F. Nau, "Recueil de textes et de documents sur les Yézidis," 165. On the other hand, Frayha's manu-

Other versions recorded by researchers and travelers on the creation of Shehid from the seed of Adam (and Adam alone) add a few more interesting details. According to one version, Eve was so angry or jealous at the results of Adam's creative action that she tried to destroy the jar, but – prevented by Adam – she succeeded only in paralyzing one of Shehid's legs.⁹⁵¹ Siouffi also adds that Adam was a possessor of the true religion, which then he transmitted Shehid (and not his other sons), who “est né d'Adam seul, sans le concours de la femme et sans aucun mélange avec la sange corruptible du sexe féminin.”⁹⁵² As regards Shehid's marriage, some versions also state that he married a *bouri* (or *hurryah*, *hûri*) from Paradise,⁹⁵³ and not a twin sister, and from their union originated the race of Yezidis.

Among Yezidis today both variants can be found, one putting the emphasis on Adam's seed, and viewing Yezidis as the children of Adam but not of Eve, and the other emphasizing that Shehid was created from Adam's (that is, Sheikh Sin's) *sur*. However, I had the impression that most Yezidis would lay claim to knowing only one or the other version. In any case, all variants, whether written

script of the *Black Book* simply says, “Of the seed of Adam there shall be born ShHD bin SFR.” (Frayha, “New Yezidi Texts,” 25.) Dāmlūjī, an Arabic author on Yezidis, also writes that “Shehid alone came by *sur*,” and he didn't look like the other children of Adam. Then he recounts the story of Adam and Eve quarreling and putting their seed in a jar. (Dāmlūjī, S., *Al-Yazidiyya* (Mosul, 1949), 4-5. Oral translation by Dr Khalil Rashow.) Possibly Dāmlūjī was using the *Black Book* as his source.

⁹⁵¹ Siouffi, “La Secte des Yézidis,” 260; Guérinot “Les Yézidis,” 586. Eve's wish to destroy the newborn was already mentioned above in connection with the other variant of the myth, told by Feqir Ali to Jasim Murad.

⁹⁵² Siouffi, “Notice sur la secte des Yézidis,” 260.

⁹⁵³ *Ibid.*; Guérinot, “Les Yézidis” 586; Nau, “Recueil de texts,” 245. Ahmet (Yazidis, 203) writes that “Adam and Eve then begot Seth and Hurryah, the ‘blessed ones’ were born.” As he repeatedly mentions that Shehid was created miraculously and from Adam alone, this is probably a slip of the pen. On the same page, he recounts another version of the myth mentioning a twin-sister. Others, like Drower (*Peacock Angel*, 91), Empson, (*Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 47, 148), Chabot (, “Notice sur les Yézidis,” 118) speak of a twin sister.

or oral, agree that the Yezidis spring from this Shehid of miraculous birth, while the rest of mankind is the offspring of the carnally-conceived children of Adam and Eve.⁹⁵⁴ Therefore the Yezidis, the race of Shehid, are the inheritors of true religion, the tribe of true believers, and superior to the rest of mankind.⁹⁵⁵

Though the second variant of the myth has been, as was shown above, widely published and quoted in Western literature dealing with the Yezidis, practically no effort was made at attempting to interpret this myth, other than qualifying it as yet another childish Yezidi myth, constructed from a misunderstood Biblical legend. The sole exception was Lescot,⁹⁵⁶ who wished to compare the Yezidi myth to the Zoroastrian tradition of the first human

⁹⁵⁴ The only surprising exception was Qewwal Qewwal of Behzani, who said that Shehid was created from the *sur* of Adam, but claimed that Adam had no children (except for Cain and Abel, who both died childless), and *all* mankind originated from Shehid. His remark occasioned some discussion among those present, but as it was in Arabic, I could not follow it.

⁹⁵⁵ The hymns so far published do not contain anything on the birth of Shehid. In fact, they do not even mention his name. One of my informants in Shariye, who was interested in collecting Yezidi sacred texts, claimed that there was in fact a *qewl* of Shehid bin Jer. (He quoted one stanza from this hymn: *havinîye me batîne, ji behra spî ye, ji milyaketa*. That is, "our rennet (i.e. seed) is from the other world (*batîni*, hidden esoteric), it is from the white sea, it is from the angels." *This* was denied by others. (Though, as no one can be familiar with the whole corpus of existing texts, such denial does not necessarily imply more than that any such hymn, if it really existed, was not among the most important, often recited ones.) On the other hand, one version of the *Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 49-50 talks about Eve as a *houri* coming from heaven to marry Adam, and Hashim and Quresh are her sons (and not those of the *houri* Leyla and Shehid): "The saintly Adam drank from the Cup, The mystical power of that Cup came to him, So (God) sent him the Houri Eve. What a beautiful Houri she is! By the mystical power of that Cup. Both the Hashemites and the Quraysh⁹⁵⁵ came from her." (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 64.) In my opinion, this is a good example of how myths get shortened, simplified with time, with complicated extra details discarded. Furthermore, the text translated by Kreyenbroek contains *çawa* (how), instead of *Hawa* (Eve), which is probably a distortion in the transmission.

⁹⁵⁶ Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yezîdis*, 59, note 1.

couple having been born from a plant that grew out of the semen of Gayomard, hidden in the earth. He also called attention to a Greek myth according to which the god Agdistis was born out of a drop of blood that Zeus let fall on the sun in his sleep. The similarities between these myths, however, are rather superficial, and Lescot offers no substantial argument that would establish any essential link between them. Instead, I propose to trace the roots of the myth back to a late antique, and specifically Gnostic/Manichaean background, and to prove that at the time of its adoption into Yezidi (or proto-Yezidi) mythology, this myth was hardly childish and obscure. Rather it carried an important message easily decipherable in the given cultural context.

The chapter on Adam's creation has already demonstrated how the Gnostic speculation on the divine origin of Adam's (man's) spirit (*pneuma*) from the Realm of Light may have been the original idea behind the thought that the Yezidi Adam's soul was the *sur*, or divine essence, of Angel Sheikh Sin, one of the Great Seven Angels (emanations of the Godhead). It was this divine *sur* which brought Adam's lifeless body to life.

But what of the idea that this lost *sur* of Adam, representing the divine essence, mystery, and light of a divine being (Sheikh Sin, and ultimately of the Godhead) was then used to create another man, who, in his turn, was to become the forefather of a special race, a race which was clearly distinguished from and superior to all others, both in its origin and in being the possessor of true faith? And why is the place of this *sur* taken by Adam's seed in the alternative variant of the myth, a variant which – while acknowledging the parenthood of Adam – still ascribes a miraculous conception to Shehid, and the status of the chosen race to his descendant?

Here I would like to suggest that the Yezidi myth goes back to the legends that developed around the figure of the Biblical Seth in Late Antiquity, especially in Gnostic circles, and continued to enjoy some popularity even in the Middle Ages as the forefather of the pious, and ancestor of the chosen race. The Gnostic myth of Seth, which tells of his birth from a miraculous seed, claiming true believers, shows a very close affinity to the myth of Shehid. The similarities between the two myths (both of which have many versions) are so numerous and deeply-rooted as to make it a likely proposi-

tion that the later myth is yet one more version of the ancient myth of Seth, this time fitted to the language of Yezidi religion.

THE GNOSTIC MYTH OF SETH

The Roots of the Speculations Concerning Seth

Speculations on the figure of Seth were first elaborated in Jewish literature, based on Adam's genealogy in Gen. 5.3, which curiously only mentions Seth by name among his sons, and on the enigmatic sentence of Gen. 4.25, "God has raised up to me *another seed*," pronounced by Adam upon the birth of Seth after the death of Abel.⁹⁵⁷

Jewish tradition, trying to solve the riddle of the genealogy, arrived at the conclusion that Cain was not the son of Adam, but was born from a licentious relationship between Eve and the Devil, or Sammael, thus making Seth the only surviving son of Adam. The generation (or descendants) of Seth, as opposed to the generation of Cain, was also a matter that received some attention. According to most Jewish texts, the generation of Seth, the pure ones, lived separately from the Cainites, the wicked ones, until the Flood, when the latter were all destroyed, thus, making all mankind the descendants of Seth. There was another school, though, which taught that all righteous men, regardless of their race or tribe, are the descendants of Seth, while all the wicked ones come from Cain. We encounter this idea in Philo's *De Posteritate Caini*, the *Pirke of Rabbi Eliezer*, and the *Zohar*.⁹⁵⁸ In the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* a mystical battle between white, black and red bulls seems to suggest that Seth was the forefather of the people of God and the Messiah. There are also some scholars who suggest that the Samaritans, who talked about a chain of purity, considered themselves the generation of Seth, though these arguments are not accepted by all. In

⁹⁵⁷ For an exhaustive treatment of the speculations that developed around the Biblical figure of Seth, see A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

⁹⁵⁸ Of course, the latter two are medieval works, but reflecting earlier traditions.

some Jewish writings, Seth also appears as the transmitter of special knowledge received from Adam (such as the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve*).⁹⁵⁹

However, it is in Gnosticism that speculations concerning the conception of Seth and his offspring came really to life, taking a centrepiece in Gnostic anthropogony.

The core of the Gnostic myth that sprang up around the figure of Seth was the σπέρμα ἕτερον (*sperma heteron*) or “another seed” of Gen. 4.25. This is the notion that Gnostics adopted and developed into a key myth of their anthropogony. In the centre of this mythical anthropogony stood the idea of the “other seed,” that is, Seth, and his seed or generation, the “unshakeable,” “other” race, the race of Seth.⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁹ See Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, chapters “Seth in Jewish Literature,” and “Seth in Samaritan Literature,” (pp. 1-33).

⁹⁶⁰ Until recently there has persisted the conviction, based on the anti-heretical catalogues of the Church Fathers, of the existence of a “Sethian sect” par excellence. Early Christian heresiologists, and in their footsteps modern philologists, talked of “Sethianism,” and the “Sethian sect.” Hans-Martin Schenke has even attempted to create an actual Sethian system of doctrine in his influential works. (H.-M. Schenke, “Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften,” in *Studia Coptica*, ed. P. Nagel, Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten 45 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974), 165-73; and idem, “The Phenomenon and Significance of Sethian Gnosticism,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*. Vol. 2. Sethian Gnosticism. Studies in the History of Religions 41 (Supplements to Numen) (hereafter *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*), ed. B. Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 588-616.) Recent findings and developments, however, make it a likely conclusion that a concrete sect of Sethians, with a single and rigid system of thought and clearly defined boundaries, never existed (outside the writings of the Church Fathers, that is). A most typical case is the Nag Hammadi texts, our most important source on Gnosticism, which were for a time labeled a “Sethian library.” These agree with each other in many details, but still differ from each other to a considerable extent, demonstrating that we cannot talk about “a Sethian myth.” Rather these features – the special importance they attributed to the figure of Seth and his offspring, and a number of other mythological motifs – were shared by various Gnostic sects, though in varying degrees and different forms. For example, “some of the themes considered to be typically

Gnostics believed that in the fight against Darkness and for freeing one's spirit or light soul from the fetters of matter, not all men fared equally well. The cornerstone of Gnostic anthropology was the idea that men were divided into several categories. Gnostics, those who possessed true 'knowledge' (Gnosis), constituted a special, spiritual race destined for salvation, clearly divided from the rest of mankind wallowing ignorantly in the material world. This is where Seth and his seed enter the scene: he is the forefather of this Chosen Race. Many Gnostics based their claim to represent a special race, superior to the rest of men, on the notion that unlike the rest of mankind they originated from Seth, who himself was born from "another seed" that is from a seed, a spark of Gnosis, coming from the spiritual world, not this created, material one. In fact, Seth is repeatedly referred to in various writings as *Allogenes* (ἀλλογενής), literally meaning "another generation" or "of another birth"), evidently a wordplay on "another seed."⁹⁶¹ In its turn, the notion of the "Seed of Seth," (or "Race of Seth"), meaning the Gnostics, or the offspring of Seth, developed from this idea. Gnostics thus often referred to themselves as the "Seed of the Great Seth," "Race of Seth," "Children of Seth," or "the Other Race," and claimed that the "Seed of Seth" had inherited Seth's spiritual nature, as well as his teachings on the true religion.⁹⁶²

'Sethian' also occur in Valentinian texts." See Stroumsa (*Another Seed*, 9). In other words, the core of the "Sethian myth" was part of a common mythological stock that these Gnostic movements drew from and further developed according to their own religious and philosophical concepts. On the problem of the existence of "Sethians," see J. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, Bibliothèque Copte De Nag Hammadi 6 (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 2001) 3-5, and chapter "The Sethians," 57-59; Wisse, "Those Elusive Sethians," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 563-76; Klijn, *Seth*, 81-117 and passim; and Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 1-14.

⁹⁶¹ The Nag Hammadi Gnostic library even contains a piece of writing entitled *Allogenes*.

⁹⁶² As Stroumsa put it: for those who talk about a Sethianism "the main characteristics... of the Sethian-Gnostic system is the self understanding of the Gnostics that they were the pneumatic seed of Seth." *Another Seed*, 7.

The Birth of Seth from “Another Seed”

Gnostics interpreted the “other seed” raised up by God to mean that Seth’s real father was not Adam, but a divine being of the Light World, and his celestial paternity implied that he was a bearer of the divine principle.⁹⁶³ Thus, Seth was intrinsically connected, through his conception and birth, with the divine spiritual world that the Gnostics opposed to the material world, created by the evil powers.

Regarding the conception of Seth in Gnostic mythology, we have a bewildering variety of stories, as is typical of Gnostics, who loved to dress the same message in different mythological clothes, the more complicated the better. However, all of them seem to agree on the point emphasized above that some kind of a divine will or providence was involved in one way or another in the conception of Seth, investing him with spiritual power - the divine spark or glory that had been lost by Adam previously⁹⁶⁴ - and mak-

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁶⁴ The loss of this spiritual power, the source of Gnosis, is usually associated with the loss of the luminous state (covering) or glory (described in the chapter on the Yezidi Creation Myth of Adam) and with man’s incarceration into matter and oblivion, due to the machinations of the enraged powers of darkness: “Now, when the rulers saw that Adam had entered into an alien state of acquaintance... they became troubled... ‘behold Adam. He has come to be like one of us, so that he knows the difference between light and darkness... Come, let us expel him from paradise down to the land from which he was taken, so that henceforth he might not be able to recognize anything better than we can.’” *On the Origin of the World* 110-11, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, vol. 2, 75-77. “[The evil powers of Matter]...recognized that he (Adam) was luminous, and that he could think better than they, and that he was free from wickedness, they took him and threw him into the lowest region of all matter... This is the tomb of the newly-formed body with which the robbers had clothed the man, the bond of forgetfulness; and he became a mortal man.” *Apocryphon of John* II.20.6-9 and 21.10-13, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 117, 123. However, Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereres* 1.30.8.) reports a tradition where it was the Mother (Sophia) herself who took away the “secretion of light” after Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise and enclosed in matter, in order to prevent it from being sullied by the powers of matter: “For he

ing him the bearer of the divine principle and Gnosis in the material world. In most cases, this divine plan is realized through the intervention of Sophia (or Mother Wisdom), the divine creative power active in the material world. In other stories the conception of Seth is attributed to the interference of a power called the Heavenly Seth. Heavenly Seth is the son of Adamas, the "incorruptible first human being," a being of light, after whom Adam is modelled. Heavenly Seth himself is the divine prototype of earthly Seth, and is called the "seed of the righteous ones," the "righteous ones" being the heavenly prototype of the Gnostic race.

Irenaeus speaks of some Gnostics, whom he called "others" (*alii*), and who were identified with the Sethians by later heresiologists who drew upon Irenaeus. According to his account, following the murder of Abel by Cain, Seth was conceived through the providence of Prunicius, or vulgar Wisdom (that is, Sophia): "They say that after these Seth was generated through the providence of the vulgar Wisdom."⁹⁶⁵

The first Patristic account to mention the Sethians explicitly was Pseudo-Tertullianus' catalogue of heresies, probably based on Hippolytus' lost *Syntagma*.⁹⁶⁶ In his view, Sethians taught that Cain and Abel were born from some powers or angels, and following the death of Abel "that power which is above all other powers,

[the Evil Ruler] wished to beget sons to Eve, but he was not able to, because his Mother opposed him in every way. And in secret the Mother emptied Adam and Eve of seeds of Light, so that the spirit [that is, the Light] which was from the Greatest Power would not become cursed and be brought into opprobrium." Irénée, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 1, tome 2, 374.

⁹⁶⁵ *Adv. Haer.* I.30.9: *Post quos secundum providentiam Prunici dicunt generatum Seth.* Irénée, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 1, tome 2, 376. Many of the details in this chapter are corroborated by such Nag Hammadi tractates as the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and other works, suggesting that Irenaeus's chapter "must be based on early traditions underlying these tractates." See F. Wisse, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists," *Vigiliae Christianae* 25 (1971): 218.

⁹⁶⁶ B. Pearson, "Seth in Gnostic Literature," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 473; F. Wisse, "Those Elusive Sethians," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 568.

who is called the Mother [Wisdom], wanted Seth to be conceived and born in the place of Abel.”⁹⁶⁷

Epiphanius’ account is believed to have been based either on Pseudo-Tertullianus or Hippolytus, though in his work he claims to have met some Sethians personally.⁹⁶⁸ Epiphanius writes that “the Sethians proudly derive their ancestry from Seth.”⁹⁶⁹ And speaking of the conception of Seth he adds:

Mother Wisdom... took thought and caused Seth to be born... and *deposited her power* within him, establishing in him a posterity of the father from above and the *spark that had been sent from above* for the first establishment of posterity and the alliance... So, it is for this reason that the people of Seth have been set apart and are descended from that origin, as being the elect who are differentiated from other people.⁹⁷⁰

Epiphanius then passes on to the group of the so-called Archontics, whose teachings are generally identified with those of the so-called Sethians by modern scholars,⁹⁷¹ and whom he believed to have infected Greater Armenia as well. He claims that according to the Archontics, Seth was born from Adam and Eve,⁹⁷² but was in a

⁹⁶⁷ Pseudo-Tertullianus, *Liber de Praescriptionibus* 47. PL 2.81.B: *illam virtutem quae super omnes virtutes esset, quam matrem pronuntiant... voluisse concipi et nasci hunc Seth loco Abelis.*

⁹⁶⁸ Pearson, “Seth in Gnostic Literature,” 473; Wisse, “Those Elusive Sethians,” 568.

⁹⁶⁹ Epiphanius *Panarion* 39.1.3. in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 187.

⁹⁷⁰ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.2.4. in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 188. Note the words “deposited *her power*” and “the *spark* that had been sent from above,” which recall the *sur* of the Yezidi myth. This divine spark or power here represents the heavenly Gnosis. Being of the “Heavenly Seed” or “Seed of Seth” means, for the Gnostics, possessing the divine Gnosis from above, and the spark or power (Gnosis) that Sophia deposited in Seth is inherited by and resides in Seth’s offspring – the posterity and alliance the text refers to.

⁹⁷¹ B. Pearson, “Seth in Gnostic Literature,” *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*. 474.

⁹⁷² Archontics, according to Epiphanius, also taught that Cain and Abel were the children of the Evil Ruler.

way snatched up and adopted by the supreme power,⁹⁷³ where he “experienced a corporeal transformation... He ultimately returned to earth, but in a non-physical form that was immune to the blandishments of the demiurgic archons,”⁹⁷⁴ in order to bring revelation for mankind. Consequently, says Epiphanius, Seth was also called Stranger, or *Allogenes*, a term that refers to the “other seed” of Genesis, and is recurrent in many “Sethian” texts.

Cloaked in the obscure wording of Gnostic mythology, a language heavily laden with symbolism (and made even harder to decipher by frequent lacunae) the texts termed “Sethian” from the Coptic Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library seem to convey the same idea.

In the *Apocryphon of John*, Cain and Abel are the results of the seduction of Eve by the chief Evil Ruler. Then the account passes on to the birth of Seth:

And when Adam recognized the likeness of his own foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις), he begot the likeness of the Son of Man. He called him Seth, according to the way of the race in the aeons.⁹⁷⁵

Though it is Adam who is said to have done the begetting, the conception of Seth is not without divine interference. The words concerning Adam getting to know “likeness of his own foreknowledge” refers to the lost Gnosis of Adam, more precisely to the

⁹⁷³ “the higher power descended... and caught up Seth himself, whom they also call ‘the foreigner’; carried him somewhere above and cared for him for a while, lest he be slain; and after a long time brought him back down into this world, having rendered him spiritual and (only) <apparently> physical.” Epiphanius 40.7.2 in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 197-98. See also Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 114-15.

⁹⁷⁴ Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 115.

⁹⁷⁵ *Apocryphon of John* II. 24.35-25.2, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 141-43. Layton translates, “Now, after Adam had known the image of his own prior acquaintance, he begot the image of the child of the human being, and called him Seth, after the race in the eternal realm,” in *Gnostic Scriptures*, 47.

Heavenly Adamas, the Perfect Human Being,⁹⁷⁶ Adam's heavenly counterpart, in whom Adam recognizes his own luminous former self, the one who still possessed the glory and Gnosis.⁹⁷⁷ The expression "according to the way of the race in the aeons" (that is, in the eternal realm) refers to the "race" or "seed" of Heavenly Seth,⁹⁷⁸ after whom the product of Adam's begetting (earthly Seth) is named – clearly postulating some kind of intrinsic relationship between Heavenly and Earthly Seth. Similarly the "Son of Man" in whose image Seth is created, should probably be understood as Heavenly Seth, son of Adamas, the Perfect Human Being. The presence of a divine agency, after whom the newborn is modeled, and who imparts its divine spirit in him, is made even clearer by the

⁹⁷⁶ Or as Reeves sums it up, "while Adam may indeed be responsible for the body of Seth, the 'image' associated with Seth (and originally Adam) derives from the heavenly realm. Like his putative progenitor, Seth combines within his person two disparate qualities: he is a corporeal being who bears the 'image' of God. This status reinstates the hybrid position that Adam occupies prior to his own disobedience and subsequent forfeiture of the 'image.'" *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 119-20.

⁹⁷⁷ Getting to know his "foreknowledge ($\pi\rho$ γνωσις)" would mean, in Gnostic parlance, remembering his former self, which possessed an understanding or Gnosis of the true spiritual world, before it (i.e., the soul) was imprisoned in matter and forgetfulness. The image of this former Adam armed with Gnosis would be Adamas, his heavenly prototype.

⁹⁷⁸ According to the *Apocryphon of John*,² Heavenly Seth is the son of Adamas, the Incorruptible first Human Being of the Light world, and he is the Father of the Incorruptible and Immovable Race that dwells in the Luminaries. He is simultaneously "a Platonic heavenly prototype of the Earthly Seth, undoubtedly originating in Gnostic Speculation as a projection of the latter onto the transmundane, precosmic plane" (Pearson, "Seth in Gnostic Literature," 483). Thus, in Gnostic myth, the Heavenly Adam and his son, Heavenly Seth, can be said to have their counterparts in the material world in Adam, and Earthly Seth. Just as the Great Seth is the Father of the Incorruptible Race, so Seth becomes the parent of the Gnostic race, the earthly counterpart of the former. (On the offspring of Seth, see below, "The Seed of Seth"). Thus it becomes clear why Heavenly Seth is assumed to play a part in the conception of earthly Seth, the forefather of the Incorruptible Race on earth.

next sentence, which deals with the conception of Seth's sister,⁹⁷⁹ which is said to be like that of Seth, with the Mother acting in the place of Heavenly Seth: "Likewise the Mother also sent down her spirit which is her likeness and a copy of the one who is in the pleroma [fullness, the World of Light]."⁹⁸⁰

The *Apocalypse of Adam*, where Adam invests Seth with a testamentary revelation, relates how Adam and Eve lost the glory and the Gnosis through the machinations of the Evil Ruler. Then this glory and Gnosis passed to the "other seed," that is Seth and his descendants:

And the glory in our heart(s) left us, me and your mother Eve, along with the first knowledge (γνῶσις) that breathed within us. And it (glory) fled from us... But it (knowledge) entered into the seed (σπορά) of great aeons. For this reason I myself have called you by the name of that man [Seth] who is the seed (σπορά) of the great generation or from whom (it comes.)⁹⁸¹

This is again a play on the interpretation of "another seed." The glory and Gnosis lost by Adam and Eve entered into seed of great Aeons, that is, the earthly seed of Heavenly Seth. The close connection between Heavenly and earthly Seth and their generation is made evident by Adam's choice of a name for his son.

⁹⁷⁹ For a comprehensive treatment on the sister-wife of Seth, see B. A. Pearson, "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature," in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism*, ed. Geo Windengren (Stockholm: Royal Academy, 1977), 143-52. Also see below.

⁹⁸⁰ *Apocryphon of John*, II.25.3-6, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 143-145.

⁹⁸¹ *Apocalypse of Adam* 64.24-65.9, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V*, 2-5, 155-57.

The *Gospel of the Egyptians*⁹⁸² gives a detailed (if somewhat complicated) account of how Adamas, the “great incorruptible human being” that “produced” the Great Heavenly Seth, who is to become the parent of “the immovable and incorruptible race.”⁹⁸³ Later, Adam is created and the text recounts the generation, “a defiled and corrupt sowing” of “his” son (Cain) by the Evil Ruler. Then, as a counter measure, Seth is created so that his race can serve for the sowing of the holy spirit as a vessel.⁹⁸⁴ To achieve this, Heavenly Seth sows his seed in Seth and his offspring. This is to become the “source of the seed of eternal life,” that is the seed of the incorruptible race on earth, the Gnostics, who become incorruptible by their awareness of their true origins.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁸² Also titled: *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*. Translated into Coptic from the original Greek, this work, which belongs to the same tradition as the Apocryphon of John, was probably composed in the second or third century, though some of the pieces of the tradition it preserves may be considerably older. See *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 2 and IV, 2: The Gospel of the Egyptians* ed., trans. and commentary A. Böhlh and F. Wisse (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 24-38.

⁹⁸³ “[Next] Adamas the [great (?)] incorruptible human being made a request for a child (to be produced) for it from out of itself – that for its part, it (the child) might become parent of the immovable and incorruptible race; that, for the sake of this race, silence and speech might be shown forth; and that, at its instigation, the realm that is dead might arise and dissolve. And so the great [...] power of the great light emanated from above. The effulgence engendered four luminaries... together with the great incorruptible Seth the son of Adamas [the great] incorruptible human being.” *Gospel of the Egyptians* 62.30-63.16, in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 110.

⁹⁸⁴ According to Layton, this refers to Jesus. “The begetting of Seth establishes a line of descent... leading ultimately to Jesus and his adoption by the great Seth.” *Gnostic Scriptures*, 115, note IV 71 f.

⁹⁸⁵ “And after the sowing by the ruler of this realm and those [that derive from] that ruler – a defiled and corrupt sowing of the demon-begetting god – and after the sowing by Adam, a sowing that resembles the sun and the great Seth, next the great angel Hormos emanated in order to prepare for the great Seth’s sowing through the holy spirit in a holy, reason-born vessel ... Next the great Seth came, bringing his seed, and he sowed it in the earth-born aeons... This is the race that appeared through the agency of Edökla. For by means of reason, it (Edökla) engendered

In contrast to the strongly symbolical language of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* puts forward the heavenly origin of (the spirit of) Seth and his descendants in a very clear language, though it is Norea, Seth's sister and wife, whose origin is actually addressed here. However, the contemporary reader would have been aware that any account of the origins of Norea and her descendants would inevitably apply to Seth, her male counterpart:

And Adam knew his female counterpart Eve, and she became pregnant, and bore Seth to Adam. And she said, "I have borne another man through God, in place of Abel." Again Eve became pregnant, and she bore Norea. And she said, "He has begotten on me a virgin as an assistance for many generations of mankind." She is the virgin whom the forces did not defile...⁹⁸⁶ The <great> angel came down from the heavens and said to her [Norea]... "I have been sent to speak with you and save you from the grasp of the lawless. And I shall teach you about your root"⁹⁸⁷.... And these authorities cannot defile you and that generation;⁹⁸⁸ for your abode is in incorruptibility, where the virgin spirit dwells, who is superior to the authorities of chaos and to their universe⁹⁸⁹.... You, together with your offspring, are from the primeval father; from above, out of the imperishable light, their souls are come. Thus the authorities cannot approach them, because of the spirit of truth present within them; and all who have become acquainted with this way exist deathless in the midst of dying mankind."⁹⁹⁰

truth and right (?), i.e. the source of the seed of eternal life and of all those who are going to endure because of acquaintance with their emanation. This is the great incorruptible race." *Gospel of the Egyptians* 71.6-72.9, in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 114-15.

⁹⁸⁶ *Hypostasis of the Archons* 91.30-92, in *Nag Hammadi Codex* II,2-7, vol. 1, 247.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid. 93.2-12, in *Nag Hammadi Codex* II,2-7, 251.

⁹⁸⁸ That is, the race descending from Norea and Seth.

⁹⁸⁹ *Hypostasis of the Archons* 93.28-31, in *Nag Hammadi Codex* II,2-7, 251.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid. 96.19-26, in *Nag Hammadi Codex* II,2-7, 257.

Thus, while we have a number of different accounts concerning the birth of Seth, all the sources seem to agree on the point that he was created by or in the image of a divine being, the origin of his spirit (*pneuma*) is from the divine Realm of Light, and he became the bearer of Gnosis or divine self-acquaintance.

This Seth, conceived in a miraculous way through the intervention of the beings of the Light World, was also often depicted as transmitter of divine revelation, just as Shehid transmitted the true religion to the Yezidis. In some writings, like *the Apocalypse of Adam*, he appears as the conveyor of the divine message revealed to him by Adam on his deathbed.⁹⁹¹ This is clearly modeled on writings like the Jewish *Life of Adam and Eve*.⁹⁹² This idea was then further developed. In numerous Gnostic writings, it is Seth himself who is the first revealer of salvatory knowledge. The Church Fathers mention a number of books written under the name of Seth. The veracity of their reports is born out by the findings of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library that contains a number of texts purported to bear the revelation of Seth, even including two writings under the name of Seth: the *Three Steles of Seth*, and the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*.

The Seed of Seth – the Race of Seth

One of the cornerstones of Yezidi identity is the idea of their descent from the miraculously conceived Shehid,⁹⁹³ coupled with the notion that as his children, they, and they alone, have inherited the

⁹⁹¹ The closing words of the *Apocalypse of Adam* are, “These are the revelations which Adam made known to Seth, his son. And his son taught them to his seed.” *Apocalypse of Adam* 85.19-22, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI*, 195.

⁹⁹² The *Life of Adam and Eve* was the most influential and perhaps first exposition of this thought and widely read throughout the East. See G. Nickelsburg, “Some Related Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, *The Books of Adam and Eve*, and *1 Enoch*,” in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 515-40; and M. Stone, “Report on Seth Traditions in the Armenian Adam Books,” in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 459-72.

⁹⁹³ This idea is often quoted to explain the strict ban on exogamy.

teachings of true religion from him. This is again a notion which can be linked to Gnostic mythical notions concerning Seth, or the “generation of Seth” to be more exact.⁹⁹⁴

As has been mentioned above, for some Gnostic groups their fascination with Seth was not limited to his birth through divine providence. As Pearson puts it: “Probably the most important feature of Gnostic speculation on Seth is the idea that the Gnostics constitute a ‘special race’ of Seth. Indeed this should be seen as ‘the fixed point of what may be called Sethian Gnosticism.’”⁹⁹⁵ The Gnostics considered themselves to be fundamentally different from the rest of mankind, to represent a special, spiritual race (or generation - γενεά) that originated from a different seed belonging to the eternal world - the σπέρμα ἕτερον or “other seed.” Seth, born of this “other seed,” was seen as the progenitor of the spiritual race, or Gnostic people. The Gnostics, also referred to as “the seed of Seth,” inherited Seth’s spiritual nature and his teachings of the true religion as well.

Modeled after the Heavenly Seth and his seed, the Incorruptible Race, Seth was, to use the opening words of the *Three Steles of Seth*, the “father of the living and unshakable race.”⁹⁹⁶ Various other epithets are attributed to this seed or race: “seed of the Great Seth,” “race of Seth,” “children of Seth,” “the other race,” “immovable race,” “incorruptible race,” “living race,” “unshakeable race,” “imperishable seed,” “the living elect,” and so on. The “seed of Seth” or the corresponding titles are mentioned repeatedly in a number of Gnostic texts, many of which do not actually recount the myth itself. It is simply hinted at or implied, demonstrating that the “seed of Seth” was a sufficiently basic idea for the writers and intended readers of these texts to make retelling the myth unnecessary.

⁹⁹⁴ For a detailed account of the Gnostics as a “race of Seth,” see Stroumsa, “The Gnostic Race,” in *Another Seed*, 73-134.

⁹⁹⁵ Pearson, “Seth in Gnostic Literature,” 489.

⁹⁹⁶ *The Three Steles of Seth*, 118.12-13, trans. and ed. J. M. Robinson and J. E. Goehring, in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, NHS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 387. Layon translates “unmovable race” in *Gnostic Scriptures*, 152.

There is no space here to enumerate the various instances when the “seed of Seth,” referring to the Gnostic race, is mentioned in Gnostic texts or in accounts of them. For the present purpose, it should suffice to mention only some of the most eloquent and expressive examples.

Some of the Church Fathers explicitly speak of a “Sethian group” that taught descent from Seth. So, for example, Epiphanius writes that “these Sethians proudly derive their ancestry from Seth.”⁹⁹⁷ Speaking of the conception of Seth and his receiving the power of the mother and her spark, he states that:

she deposited her power within him, establishing in him a posterity of the father from above and the spark that had been sent from above for the first establishment of posterity and the alliance... So, it is for this reason that the people of Seth have been set apart and are descended from that origin, as being the elect who are differentiated from other people.⁹⁹⁸

The Nag Hammadi writing, *Zostrianos*, clearly equates the seed of Seth with the Gnostics: “O living people! O holy seed of Seth! Understand!”⁹⁹⁹ The *Gospel of the Egyptians* speaks of spiritual mankind¹⁰⁰⁰ as the seed of Seth, that is, the seed engendered on earth by the Heavenly or Great Seth, the parent of the Immovable and Incorruptible race (who dwell in the spiritual word).¹⁰⁰¹ The *Gospel of the Egyptians* recounts how Seth had brought and sowed his seed, and so his race appeared on earth:

Next the great Seth came, bringing his seed, and he sowed in the earth-born aeons... This is the race that appeared... For it engendered truth and right, i.e. the source of the seed of the

⁹⁹⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.1.3, in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 187.

⁹⁹⁸ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.2.4-6. in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 188.

⁹⁹⁹ *Zostrianos*, 130.16-17 in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 139. In Gnostic parlance the expression “living” refers either to the beings of the Eternal Realm of Light, or to the Gnostics, their representatives on earth.

¹⁰⁰⁰ That is, the *pneumatics* or Gnostics.

¹⁰⁰¹ *Gospel of the Egyptians* I.IV.63, in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 110.

eternal life and of all those who are going to endure because of acquaintance with their emanation [origin])”¹⁰⁰²

The Birth of Seth and the Enmity of Eve in the Manichaean Myth

Though neither Feqir Haji’s myth, nor the *Black Book* make any mention of Eve’s reaction to Shehid, other accounts do, describing it as one of murderous jealousy. In Feqir Ali’s myth recounting Shehid’s creation from a heavenly pearl (in lieu of the *sur*), Eve in her hurt jealousy tries to induce her own children to kill the boy born from the pearl.¹⁰⁰³ Other accounts, narrating Shehid’s birth from the seed of Adam, claim that in her rage Eve tried to destroy the jar, but – prevented by Adam – she succeeded only in paralyzing one of Shehid’s legs.¹⁰⁰⁴

These details seem to have little relation to the known versions of the Gnostic myth of Seth, in which Eve either does not play a role, or her role is seen as rather positive. However, if one looks at the Manichaean myth of Seth (or Sethel in its Manichaean form), which builds on traditions associated with the Gnostic Seth, there one finds a strikingly familiar detail, namely, the enmity of Eve toward the new-born, whom, at the prompting of the Evil Ruler, she does not accept as her own, and wishes to destroy.

Seth continued to be a central figure in Manichaean mythology, one of the most important figures in the Manichaean cycle of prophets, though some changes can be observed regarding both the myth of his birth and his role in cosmogony (or, rather, anthro-

¹⁰⁰² *Gospel of the Egyptians* II.IV.71-72, in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures* 115. Though Earthly Seth (of the Genesis) is not mentioned here, the reader was probably assumed to be familiar with the exact content of the myth, and so it was enough to refer to the miraculous appearance of the divine seed on earth.

¹⁰⁰³ Jasim Murad, “The Sacred Poems,” 292.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Siouffi, “La Secte des Yézidis,” 260; Guérinot “Les Yézidis,” 586.

pogony).¹⁰⁰⁵ Our main source for the Manichaean myth surrounding Seth's birth comes from the Arabic historian, an-Nadim. In his *Fihrist*, he writes that Eve conceived Cain from the Evil Ruler, and then in turn conceived Abel from Cain.¹⁰⁰⁶ Then, with the help of the magic taught her by the ruler, she managed to seduce Adam and conceived from him.¹⁰⁰⁷

She gave birth to a male child who was beautiful and of a comely countenance. When al-Sindid [the Evil Ruler] learned about this, it upset him, so that he became ill and said to Eve, "This child who has been born is not one of us, but a stranger."¹⁰⁰⁸ She therefore desired his death, but, taking hold

¹⁰⁰⁵ For a summary on the figure of Seth in Manichaean religion and its connection with Gnostic Seth, see Reeves, "The Apocalypse of Sethel," in *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 111-40; Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 145-52; and B. Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Manichaean Literature," in *Manichaean Studies. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Manichaeism*, ed. P. Bryder (Lund: Plus Ultra, 1988), 147-55.

¹⁰⁰⁶ This seems to go back to a Gnostic background. Gnostics seem to have inherited the idea from Jewish tradition that Cain was the son of the Evil Ruler (the Devil) conceived when the latter raped Eve. Unlike Jews, however, they tended to see Abel as the offspring of the same union, or rape, as well. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 44-46.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Although Seth(el) is the biological son of Adam in this tradition, his description implies a connection with the world of Light (see also next note). Furthermore, the name Sethel simultaneously connotes a heavenly entity in Manichaean literature, to whom prayers and hymns are addressed. Occasionally he appears as the Light-*Nous* or the heavenly Apostle of Light, the revealer of saving Gnosis, repeatedly manifesting himself on earth in different forms, just like his literary "prototype," the Gnostic heavenly Seth. See Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 37, 112-13.

¹⁰⁰⁸ According to Pearson "the recognition of the child born to Eve as a "stranger" reflects Gnostic lore concerning Seth as *Allogenes*, of "another seed." Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Manichaean Literature," 149. The chosen race or "seed of Seth" is also referred to as "strangers" or "aliens" (that is, strangers to the creator of the material world), see for example *Apocalypse of Adam* 69.18. It may also refer to Seth's role as a bringer of the true revelation, as the word "alien" or "stranger" usually applied to the "messenger of the world of Light," that is, the bringer of the saving knowledge in Gnostic parlance. See Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 50.

of him, Adam said to Eve, "I am going to nourish him with cow's milk and the fruit of trees!"¹⁰⁰⁹

However, al-Sindid destroyed all the trees and cows, thus leaving Adam without the means to nourish the child. Then Adam performed a magical ritual, drawing three rings around the child, which made the evil powers flee.

Then there appeared to Adam a tree called the Lotus, from which came forth milk with which he nourished the boy. He (at first) called him by its name, but later he called him Shatil.¹⁰¹⁰

Later, Adam had intercourse with Eve again but was rebuked by his son, Shatil and brought to the wisdom of God. (In other words, the Manichaean Seth was also a bringer of true Gnosis - in this case to his own father in the first place.)

Al Nadim doesn't explain by what method Eve desired to destroy Seth, but the reference to Adam's plan to nourish the child with cow's milk implies that Eve refused to suckle the child. This is supported by a Manichaean Sogdian fragment from the Central Asian Turfan basin. According to this fragment: "he [Adam] appeared before Šaqḷon [the Evil Ruler], and addressed him thusly: "Command that she give him milk immediately."¹⁰¹¹

The widespread popularity of this Manichaean myth on the birth of Seth, and Eve's enmity, is attested by a series of Manichaean cosmogonic fragments in Middle Persian also from Turfan,¹⁰¹² as well as by a magic bowl from lower Mesopotamia. This ceramic bowl inscribed with Aramaic magical incantations from Nippur is dated to around 600 A.D. Though it is labeled "rabbinic," the name of its client (for whose protection it was produced) is Persian. Part of the inscription in the bowl refers to the

¹⁰⁰⁹ An-Nadim, *Fihrist* vol.2, 785.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., 786.

¹⁰¹¹ Trans. W. B. Henning, *Selected Papers*, Acta Iranica 14-15 (Leiden: Brill, 1977): 462, quoted in J. Reeves, "Manichaica Aramaica," 435.

¹⁰¹² M 4500, M 5566, M4501 in W. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte der Manichäer* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 70-77, quoted in Reeves, "Manichaica Aramaica," 436.

Manichaean episode of the magical deliverance of Seth by Adam.¹⁰¹³

Manichaean Eve's wish to destroy the beautiful child, whom she sees as an intruding stranger, has its parallel in the Yezidi myth of Shehid. What is more, even her method of trying to bring about the newborn's demise, that is, her refusal to suckle the newborn, and Adam's attempt to provide milk in his reluctant wife's place, can all find their echoes in the Yezidi myth. The *Black Book*, as well as some other accounts,¹⁰¹⁴ claim that Adam had to suckle the baby himself, and that this is the reason men have nipples just like women: yet another Yezidi motif that seems to reflect the events of the Manichaean myth.

There is one more Yezidi motif - though one of a somewhat dubious credibility - concerning the feeding of the newborn spurned by Eve which may be worth mentioning in connection with the Manichaean myth. Chol Beg, the "pretender" Yezidi prince, asserts that "Seth was the son of the tree and for this reason... he is called Melik Sajadin (the tree's name)."¹⁰¹⁵ We have seen above how, according to the *Fibris*, Adam named his son after the lotus tree which nourished him. On the other hand, late midrashic word-plays derive the name Seth (or Sethel) from the Hebrew root "to plant" (*štl*), interpreting the Biblical passage to mean, "God has planted (for) me another seed."¹⁰¹⁶ The variant

¹⁰¹³ Reeves, "Manichaica Aramaica," 437-38.

¹⁰¹⁴ Beside the *Black Book*, see also: Chabot "Notice sur les Yézidis," 118, and Empson *Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 47.

¹⁰¹⁵ Quoted in Ahmet (*Yazidis*, 203). Chol Beg, from the princely family (who vainly aspired to the role of Prince) was the first Yezidi to put down (or rather dictate) the tenets of the Yezidis in writing for the benefit of Western researchers (*The Yazidis Past and Present*, American University of Berlin, 1934). We must keep in mind, however, that he was not a man of religion, and, as is the case with most Yezidi "laymen," was not very likely to have received a formal religious education, while he seems to have been a man of active imagination. Consequently the information he offers must be treated cautiously. In the opinion of Prof. Kreyenbroek, the part concerning the tree is likely to be a pseudo-etymology.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews* vol. 5, 148-49; Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Manichaean Literature," 150-52. Stroumsa is of the opinion that

used by Manichaeans (and Mandeans as well): Shatil (Shetel, Shitil), meaning “the planted,” might have referred to or played on the same concept.¹⁰¹⁷ It is not possible to say if the Yezidi “son of the tree” is simply an echo of the old Hebrew (pseudo-) etymology, or is in some way more directly connected to the Manichaean myth of the tree nourishing the child.

The Twin-Wife of Seth

While Feqir Haji’s myth, as well as some other accounts, talk of Seth marrying a *bouri* from heaven,¹⁰¹⁸ other sources maintain that there were two children in the jar, a boy and also a girl, and it was this girl, his twin sister, that Shehid bin Jer married.¹⁰¹⁹

Just like Shehid, Gnostic Seth also had a miraculously-conceived sister, whom he later married. The idea that Seth married his sister (or his twin sister) can be found in many Jewish sources¹⁰²⁰ (given the circumstances this seems to be an unavoidable conclusion). Otherwise, Seth’s wife does not seem to play a role of any importance in Jewish literature. The Gnostics, however, present a different picture. Here, the sister-wife of Seth, usually mentioned as Norea, Horaia, or Orea becomes a key figure herself in the Gnostic salvation myth, appearing as a genuine (or even the)

the motif of having the child named after the lotus tree reflects this etymology (*Another Seed*, 74). Reeves, however, does not accept this view, and argues that naming the child after the lotus tree is unconnected with the Hebrew etymological word-play (*Heralds of that Good Realm*, 113).

¹⁰¹⁷ Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 75. Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 113.

¹⁰¹⁸ This may reflect the influence of a Muslim tradition, which counted Seth among the progenitors of Mohamed and claimed he married a *bouri*. On this, see more below.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Black Book*, in Joseph, “Yezidi Texts,” 223. The twin version is also mentioned by Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 91; Empson, *The Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 47; Chabot, “Notice sur les Yézidis,” 118; Ahmed, *Yazīdis*. 203.

¹⁰²⁰ Klijn, *Seth*, 37-9.

Savior figure.¹⁰²¹ In fact, she is the protagonist of a number of Gnostic works, and the Nag Hammadi library even contains a book written under the name of Norea, the *Thought of Norea*. Just like that of Seth, the birth of Norea is a miraculous one, linking her with the realm of Light. Irenaeus writes that like Seth, Norea was also begotten through the providence of the Vulgar Wisdom, making her his sister.¹⁰²² Epiphanius, on the other hand, writes that some sects honor a certain power called Horaia, whom the Sethians recognize as the wife of Seth.

They [the Sethians] say that a certain woman named Hōraia was the wife of Seth... there are other schools of thought that say there is a power whom they name Hōraia. So, these (Sethians) say that the power, whom others esteem and call Hōraia, was the wife of Seth.¹⁰²³

The conception of Seth's sister in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* has already been quoted above, in the paragraph on Seth's miraculous birth.¹⁰²⁴ The *Apocryphon of John* recounts how, following the divine conception of Seth, in the image of Heavenly Seth, his sister was created by Mother Wisdom, and endowed with her spirit:

Likewise the Mother also sent down her spirit (πνεῦμα) which is her likeness and a copy of the one who is in the pleroma [fullness, the World of Light], for she will prepare a dwelling place for the aeons which will come down... thus the seed (σπέρμα) remained for a while assisting him.¹⁰²⁵

The female being, created by Mother Wisdom after the begetting of Seth and endowed with her spirit, is Norea, Seth's sister and

¹⁰²¹ For a comprehensive treatment on the sister-wife of Seth and the variations of her name, see B. A. Pearson, "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature," 143-52.

¹⁰²² Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30.9, *Post quos secundum providentiam Prunici dicunt generatum Seth et Norean*. Irénée, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 1, tome 2, 376.

¹⁰²³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.5.2-3 in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 189-90.

¹⁰²⁴ *Hypostasis of the Archons* 96.19-26

¹⁰²⁵ *Apocryphon of John*, II.25.3-25.10, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 143-145.

wife, who plays a crucial role (as a wife and mother) in establishing posterity, or race of Seth.¹⁰²⁶ This is demonstrated in the text stating that this female being was brought to life with the aim of preparing a dwelling place for the “aeons coming down here.” That this is a reference to the “Great Race of the Heavenly Seth,” or rather its earthly counterpart, the Gnostic race or “seed of Seth,” is made clear by the words, “thus the seed remained for a while.” The use of the term σπέρμα (seed) reflects the Gnostic interpretation of the key term “another seed” of Gen. 4:25.¹⁰²⁷ Thus, along with Seth, his similarly miraculously-conceived sister also represents the progenitor of the spiritual race.

The name of Shehid’s wife in one of the accounts also points towards a possible late antique influence. Ahmet, recounting the Yezidi myth, mentions that in one version Shehid’s wife is called Nama.¹⁰²⁸ He also adds in the footnote that Chol Beg, the pretender Yezidi prince, “makes Nama the wife of Malik Miran.”¹⁰²⁹ There are two different traditions regarding the identity of Malik Miran (or Melekê Miran). According to one, he is the ancestor of the Yezidis,¹⁰³⁰ presumably Shehid himself or his son.¹⁰³¹ The other tradition identifies Malik Miran with Noah, and other sources actually mention his wife as Na’mi or Na’umi.¹⁰³² In other words, in Yezidi mythology there appears a certain Nama (or other variants of the same name) who is sometimes known as the wife of Shehid, but may also surface as the wife of Noah.

¹⁰²⁶ Cf. *Reality of Rulers* 91.34-35; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.1.9.

¹⁰²⁷ Pearson “Seth in Gnostic Literature,” 481.

¹⁰²⁸ Ahmet, *Yazîdis*, 209.

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid., 245, note 13.

¹⁰³⁰ G. Furlani, “I Santi dei Yezidi,” *Orientalia* 5 (1936): 76.

¹⁰³¹ Edmonds (*A Pilgrimage to Lalish*, 79) says that he was born of a virgin mother, Hürriya (sic) during the time of Shehid. Presumably, Malik Miran is the son of Shehid and his *bouri* wife, though his birth from a virgin mother may imply that the asexual conception of Shehid himself is behind the story.

¹⁰³² Joseph (*Devil Worship*, 91-92) claims that Na’umi is another name of Malik Miran, whom he identifies with one of the sons of Noah. Guérinot (“Les Yézidis,” 587) actually identifies Na’mi with “le Noé biblique.”

As Pearson has pointed out in his article on the Gnostic figure of Norea or Horaia, this name is the distorted Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Na'ama* meaning “pleasing, lovely.”¹⁰³³ This Na’ama was well known in Jewish literature. In some Jewish writings Na’ama appears as the wife of Noah, while in other sources she is the twin wife of Seth.¹⁰³⁴ The appearance of the name “Na’ama” in the Yezidi myth of origins can be explained in two ways. It is possible that she reached the Yezidis directly from Jewish circles. But it is equally possible that the source of the name (and the myth) is to be found among Syriac-speaking Gnostics, who used the name in its original form (Na’ama,) and not its Greek translation, which their Egyptian co-religionists used in the extant Gnostic texts.¹⁰³⁵

SETH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The figure of Seth, both as a being intimately connected with the divine, and as the forefather or head of a chosen race, custodians of the true religion, was widespread throughout the Middle East in Late Antiquity as well as the Middle Ages.

As was seen above, many Gnostics based their claim to be the “other,” “the spiritual race,” on the conviction that they were the “pneumatic (spiritual) seed of Seth.”

¹⁰³³ Pearson, “The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature,” 147-50. The original translation would have been Horaia. This was later distorted to Norea.

¹⁰³⁴ Similarly Noreia, the translation of Na’amah, sometimes appears as the wife of Noah in some Gnostic legends, rather than the wife of Seth. See, for example, Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.1.4; cf. *Hypostases of the Rulers* 91-93. In Jewish sources Na’ama was originally the idolatrous daughter of Lamech, and sister of the Cainite Tubal Cain, and her name usually evoked negative connotations.

¹⁰³⁵ Unfortunately, no Gnostic texts have survived from Syriac-speaking territories, and the extant Greek and Coptic primary sources cannot help us on this subject.

Among the Manichaeans Seth, as a heavenly figure and ultimate revealer of Gnosis,¹⁰³⁶ was associated with the most exalted class of the believers, that of the *Electi*,¹⁰³⁷ possessors of the true religion and destined to escape the bonds of matter and return to the realm of Light. A Manichaean psalm lists the prayers as addressed by the different categories of believers to different “deities:”

The cry of a Virgin to Sethel, Amen.

The cry of a Continent One to Adam, Amen.

The cry of a Married One to Eve, Amen.¹⁰³⁸

Apparently for the Manichaeans, who placed a high value on purity, Seth is connected with the most elevated class, that of the “Virgins,” that is, the *Electi*,¹⁰³⁹ while his parents, Adam and Eve lag behind.¹⁰⁴⁰

Seth continued to exercise a mysterious allure over people’s imagination in the Middle East, even after the coming of Islam. According to Theodore bar Khoni, the eighth-century Audians of Northern Mesopotamia had a book called the *Apocalypse of the Strangers*. Reeves argues that the “strangers” in the title can be connected with the self-designated “Allogenes,” (Ἀλλογενής, Ἀλλογενεῖς) those who saw themselves as the descendants of Seth, the ultimate “stranger” to this world. This claim is supported by the content of the book (dealing with the seduction of Eve by

¹⁰³⁶ Manichaean literary works even included a “Prayer of Sethel” and an *Apocalypse of Sethel*. See Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 37, and chapter “Apocalypse of Sethel,” 111-29.

¹⁰³⁷ The highest class in the Manichaean hierarchy, who were obeyed, served and provided for by the class of the *Auditors*, or Hearers.

¹⁰³⁸ Psalmoi Sarakotōn, Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book* II, 179:20-23.

¹⁰³⁹ For the association between the Virgin and the *Electi*, see Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 147.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Seth, as the forefather of the “chosen race,” or the idea of Manichaeans, or the *Electi* constituting a special seed of Seth, does not seem to appear openly in Manichaean lore, which is understandable, as unlike the Gnostics, “the Manichaean religion... does not place such emphasis on spiritual genealogy.” (Pearson, “The Figure of Seth in Manichaean Literature,” 151.)

the evil powers) as described by bar Khoni, which bears a close resemblance to earlier "Sethian" works, just as their *Apocalypse of John*, on the creation of the world, shows many parallels to the *Apocryphon of John* (another "Sethian" work).¹⁰⁴¹

He played a role of some prominence even in Muslim tradition, where he is often mentioned as a prophet, one of the forefathers of Muhammad, and the inheritor of Adam's *wassiya*, or universal religious heritage.¹⁰⁴² Traditions about the designation of Seth as Adam's inheritor, for instance, were widely current in Shi'a literature,¹⁰⁴³ displaying an influence of the apocryphal Adam books of Late Antiquity in their turn. In fact, the idea that Shehid married a *houri* may not be unconnected with Islamic tradition, which claimed Seth married a *houri* (*hawra*) from Paradise.¹⁰⁴⁴ This is due to the great importance attributed to Muhammad's pure genealogical origin,¹⁰⁴⁵ that is, an unbroken line of Islamic matrimony.¹⁰⁴⁶ As a result, the view, also known to Islam, that Adam's children married their siblings, posed a serious difficulty. This difficulty was

¹⁰⁴¹ Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 115-117. The text given by bar Khoni as the *Apocalypse of John* has enough parallels with the *Apocryphon of John* to suggest that it was a possible source, though Wisse also points out that there are notable differences; see *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 194. See also Steve Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughira b. Sa'id's Islamic Gnosis and the Myth of its Rejection," *History of Religions* 25.1 (1985): 10.

¹⁰⁴² Rubin "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition," 42-9.

¹⁰⁴³ Rubin "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition," 49.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Thereby indirectly supplying another proof that the Yezidi Shehid is in fact a later-day avatar of the Biblical Seth.

¹⁰⁴⁵ So, for example, Ibn Sa'd (I/1 31) ascribes these words to the Prophet: "I emerged from (pure) matrimony and not from fornication. No fornication of the *Jabiliyya* has ever touched me since Adam. I came out of purity." Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 73. The *Jabiliyya*, or "state of ignorance" (of pre-Islamic, pagan Arabia) was said to have practiced father-daughter marriage.

¹⁰⁴⁶ "I was never born from *Jabiliyya* fornication; what gave birth to me was not other than Islamic matrimony." Suyuti, I, 96; Zurqani, I, 66, quoted in Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 73.

solved and the chain of pure matrimony secured by the claim that Seth was born without a twin sister, and he married in due course a woman descended from Paradise, a *hourî*.¹⁰⁴⁷

Heterodox groups of the medieval Middle East carried on the tradition of considering themselves, as a group, the “people of Seth,” thereby becoming a chosen race, jealously guarding the mystery revealed to them, and to them alone, by Seth. ‘Abd al-Jabbâr, an eleventh-century theologian and heresiologist, writes of such a group:

There is among them, in addition to the people of Harran, another group. They claim to follow Seth’s religion. They say that he was sent to them, and they possess his book, which God had descended upon him.¹⁰⁴⁸

Al-Biruni, around 1000 AD, talking about the Sabaeans¹⁰⁴⁹ even made mention of claims of a genealogical lineage traced to Seth saying that they “pretend to be the offspring of Enoch, the son of Seth.”¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibid., 74. Rubin puts forward no speculation as to the possible origins of this idea (other than the necessity of pure matrimony). Notwithstanding, it is possible that Islamic writers here relied on earlier traditions. This is reinforced by the fact that Cain was said to have married a demon. This may be an echo of the notion that Eve begot Cain with the devil or a demonic figure.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Mughni*, V, 152-153 (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1965), translated by G. Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iranniennes, Abd al Jabbar et ses devanciers*, Etudes musulmanes 16 (Paris: Vrin; Cairo- Beirut: Institut dominican d’études orientales, 1974), 126, quoted in Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 116. According to Stroumsa (note 7) the group mentioned “were a branch of Harranian Sabaeans (and not later-day Gnostics) since they upheld the doctrine of the eternity of the world.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Today Sabaeans are identified with the people of Harran, but were originally a distinct group. Al-Biruni also distinguishes them from the Harranians, and claims that they were originally Jews who “adopted a system mixed up of Magism and Judaism like that of the Samaritans of Syria” Al-Biruni, *Chronology* 8, ed. and trans. E. Sachau (London: William H. Allen and Co., 1879), 188.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Al-Biruni, *Chronology* 8, 188.

Seth was an important figure among the Nusayrîs as well. A passage in a Nusayrî catechism explaining the seven historical cycles of the *ma'nā's* incarnation¹⁰⁵¹ identifies Seth as the name (*ism*) through which the deity manifests itself in its second circle of incarnation.

Q. 5 How many times did our master veil himself and appear in human form?

A: He veiled himself seven times. In the first he veiled himself in Adam, in his cycle he was named Abel; in the second [time] – in Noah, and was named Seth; in the third ... in the seventh and last – in Muhammad, and was named 'Alī.¹⁰⁵²

Q. 49 What are the exclusive names of our master, the commander of the faithful, the use of which is not permitted to anyone but him, and [through which] the interior meaning of the prayer is to be directed to him alone?

A. They are the *ma'nā*, the eternal, the unique, the primordial.... My lord and master, Abel, Seth... 'Alī.¹⁰⁵³

Furthermore, Nusayrîs attribute hidden, esoteric texts to Seth, along with other prophets like Idris (Enoch,) Noah and Abraham.¹⁰⁵⁴

¹⁰⁵¹ The principle of the cyclical manifestation of the *ma'nā* (divine essence) in human figures is a fundamental Nusayri creed. "According to this concept the *ma'nā* revealed himself in each cycle in the lesser person of a pair. This concept evolved to explain the supremacy of 'Alī in Nusayrî theology despite his inferior position in Muslim tradition. In this passage the author describes the principle of the manifestation of the *ma'nā* through the *ism* [name] in each cycle by the *ma'nā's* historical companion, e.g. the *ma'nā* in the seventh cycle is manifested in 'Alī and perceived through the manifestation of Muhammad." see Bar-Asher - Kofsky, *Nusayrî-'Alawî Religion*, 171, note 34.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid., 171.

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid., 186.

Among the contemporary groups of the Middle East Seth still has a prominent position in Mandaean mythology today. Possibly, there were Mandaean groups in the past, which ascribed even greater importance to Seth. At least around the year 1200, the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi said that the Sabaeans of the 'Tib, the Mandaean scribal center for centuries, consider themselves the descendants of Seth, son of Adam.¹⁰⁵⁵ Finally, but most importantly, Ahl-i Haqq tradition recounts a myth about Seth that clearly supports the identification between Seth and Shehid and indicates that the myth of Shehid/Seth's miraculous birth is not confined to the Yezidis. According to this, Sheyth (whom they identify with the Biblical-Quranic Seth) was created from the seed of Adam put in a jar, while the content of Eve's jar turned into worms. Though the Ahl-i Haqq do not consider Sheyth their legendary forefather, they talk about his two lines of descendants, some of whom became prophets, while others became worldly leaders.¹⁰⁵⁶

THE MYTH OF SHEHID AND ITS TWO VARIANTS

This chapter has demonstrated that the Yezidi myth of Shehid can ultimately be traced back to the Gnostic figure of Seth, whose myth permeated the whole region in one form or another. His myth was, once upon a time, known to many people, and could be used to provide a prestigious origin to the Yezidis in the eyes of a wider audience.

Let us now briefly sum up the motifs that are relevant to drawing a parallel between the Gnostic Seth and the Yezidi Shehid.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid., 185. The idea that these Biblical figures have left esoteric texts, revealing divine mysteries for the initiated was current in Late Antiquity, especially among the Gnostics.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Buckley, *The Mandaeans*, 5.

¹⁰⁵⁶ The myth of Seth is retold in the *Firqān al-Akbār* of H.N. Jey-hūnābādī. This book was published in 1902, but is based on earlier oral tradition. I owe this information to Dr. Mojane Membrado, who was working on the edition of this work at EPHE, Paris, when I met her at a conference on Discourses of Memory in Iranian Studies.

The most important feature of Gnostic speculation on Seth is the idea that the Gnostics, who descend from Seth, constitute a race apart from the rest of mankind.¹⁰⁵⁷ Seth, in his turn, was conceived in an extraordinary way, either through Wisdom or/and through and in the image of Heavenly Seth, “seed of the righteous ones.” The miraculous mode of his conception endowed him with a “spark of power,” the *pneuma* from the World of Light. This “spark of power” meant that (along with his twin sister) he was the “inheritor” of the glory and Gnosis lost by Adam, thus making him “a type of *Adam redivivus*, a regenerated Adam.”¹⁰⁵⁸ Seth is the earthly counterpart of the Heavenly Seth, a being of Light, in whose image he was conceived, and he transmits his spirit and Gnosis to his race, which is the earthly counterpart of the “Great Seed of Seth.”

Thus, we have all the key elements of the Yezidi myth, as told by Feqir Haji. Yezidis, springing from Shehid, are a race apart from the rest of mankind, created by the Peacock Angel, eager for a people he could call his own.¹⁰⁵⁹ Shehid himself could boast of a miraculous birth, being conceived not in a carnal way – unlike the other children of Adam (and Eve) – but through divine intervention. As a sort of replacement of angelic Adam, he was created from the *sur*, that is, the divine essence, light, which used to belong to Adam while he had still been one with Angel Sheikh Sin in Paradise. This notion of *sur* calls to mind Epiphanius’ account of how the Mother deposited “her power” and the “spark sent from above” in Seth, in order to establish a posterity (race) in alliance

¹⁰⁵⁷ It is not clear whether we should understand the descent of the Gnostic race from Seth in a physical or merely spiritual sense. As Gnostic texts concentrated on the description of the World of Light, the events leading to the creation and its nature, and the way of achieving salvation, they do not provide us with a clear answer on this point. While the second possibility seems more likely, in my opinion, the first one cannot be ruled out either. According to Stroumsa (*Another Seed*, 101), “the term *yēve* [race] is not simply metaphorical, but refers directly to the biological origin of the Gnostics.”

¹⁰⁵⁸ Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm*, 125.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Note that being “the people of the Peacock Angel” is ultimately the same as being “the people of God,” as is made clear by the account of Feqir Haji (see Appendix.)

with the Realm of Light.¹⁰⁶⁰ Just like Seth is the possessor of the “lost glory,” “the spark of power,” and is intrinsically connected with the “race of the eternal realm” and the “seed of the great race” (that is, Heavenly Seth and his seed), so Shehid is connected with the world of the divine Angels through the *sur* of Sheikh Sin.¹⁰⁶¹ Seth’s descendants, the Gnostics, were the race of Heavenly Seth on earth due to the spark of divine power, while Shehid’s descendants, the Yezidis, became the race of the Peacock Angel through the *sur*, the very essence of divinity, which they inherited. Both Shehid and Seth transmitted the true religion (or divine revelation) to their own people, who constitute a race apart from the rest of mankind born from a simple carnal union.¹⁰⁶²

What about the “alternative” variant, recounted by earlier published sources (including the *Black Book*) and some Yezidis today? Though Shehid is conceived in a miraculous and non-sexual way in this variant as well, it seems to know nothing of the *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin. Instead the myth centers around the seed¹⁰⁶³ of Adam, from which Shehid is then born, without a need for Eve. This version seems to reflect the importance attributed to the Biblical σπέρμα ἕτερον, the “other seed,” on which the Gnostics originally based their mythical speculation concerning the origins of their special “race.” Yezidis, not given to the metaphysical speculations of the Gnostics, understandably gave a literal meaning to the notion of the “other seed:” Shehid is literally born from another

¹⁰⁶⁰ See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.2.4.

¹⁰⁶¹ It has already been mentioned in the chapter on “Yezidi Religion” that there were two shrines dedicated to two Shehids in the village of Kheter. One of the two Shehids, the “original one,” was simply described to me as “Sheikh Hesén” (that is, Sheikh Sin), demonstrating the close connection traditional Yezidis perceive on account of Shehid being created from Sheikh Sin’s *sur*.

¹⁰⁶² No wonder that – according to the Yezidis – all prophets, with the notable exception of Mohamed, were Yezidis. After all they are the descendants of the *sur*. (The exclusion of Mohamed from the Yezidi race, in fact, seems to be a relatively late development, as he is repeatedly mentioned in the Yezidi hymns among with other prophets of Yezidi history.)

¹⁰⁶³ Some variants mention sweat (Jasim Murad, “Sacred Poems,” 294, 296), probably a euphemism for seed.

(pure) seed - as compared to the other offspring of Adam, who are born from a mixed seed produced by the sexual union of Adam and Eve.

The question of the relation of the two variants to each other inevitably arises. Did the latter (the variant of the seed), develop out of the former (the variant of the *sur*), or does it represent an independent tradition, which evolved from the same basic myth, or perhaps another different - although related - myth,¹⁰⁶⁴ simultaneously?

At first glimpse, the more simplistic form of the second myth seems to indicate that the second variant is a simplified version of the first. The motif of the *sur*, representing the divinity invested on Adam by Angel Sheikh Sin (that is, the divine principle and Gnosis eventually lost by Adam in Gnostic writing), which is so hard to interpret even for many Yezidis,¹⁰⁶⁵ is omitted from this version, and the plot is definitely easier to follow.¹⁰⁶⁶

However, on further reflection one has to conclude that the importance that this variant attributes to the “seed” of Adam may indicate that we deal here with an alternative variant, which evolved independently, putting the emphasis on different motifs than the “myth of *sur*.” As we have seen, the notion of “another seed” was at the origin of the myth of Seth and continued to play an important role throughout its development, with frequent references to it in

¹⁰⁶⁴ The Seth myth produced a number of different versions already during Late Antiquity, so it is quite feasible that there was more than one variant current in the region.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Interpreting the notion of *sur* must have posed an intellectual puzzle for some time. Thus Empson (*Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 41, 148) talks of jars filled with blood from the forehead, Feqir Ali mentions a pearl given to Adam by the Peacock Angel when first taken to heaven, while the young, university-educated Yezidi, who helped me with translation during my first interview, repeatedly translated the removal of the *sur* from Adam’s forehead, which Feqir Haji mimicked by wiping his forehead, as the Peacock Angel taking the “sweat” of Adam, a mistranslation which caused quite a bit of confusion at the time (see Appendix.)

¹⁰⁶⁶ Presumably, this is the reason why Western literature published previously was so consistent in mentioning only the second, “seed” version.

Gnostic literature This is the tradition which the variant of the “seed” seems to preserve and continue, while it has let the idea of the seed being connected to the divine world slip into oblivion. On the other hand the first variant, that of Feqir Haji, concentrates on the *sur*, the essence or light emanating from God, which establishes a connection between Shehid (and his descendant) and the Angels, and has discarded the motif of the seed as a superfluous detail.¹⁰⁶⁷

Though these two variants of the myth seem to have developed along different lines, independently of each other, they contain many elements which are interchangeable, and can be found in the versions of both variants, in a manner truly typical of oral tradition.¹⁰⁶⁸ It is also typical of oral tradition that the Gnos-

¹⁰⁶⁷ One must keep in mind that oral tradition, which lacks the support of written text, often tends to simplify and shorten, especially if information which makes a motif relevant is no longer retained in memory.

¹⁰⁶⁸ This is true, for example, for the negative role of Eve, or for Shehid's sister-wife, which can both also be traced back to Manichaean and Gnostic speculations concerning Seth: Shehid's wife is a *bouri* in Feqir Haji's version, a twins-sister in the *Black Book*, but some accounts following the “seed” variant also reported in the *Black Book* speak of a *bouri*. Eve's attempt on Shehid's life is mentioned by versions of the “seed of Adam” as well as by Feqir Ali's version of the creation of Shehid from the “pearl” (a substitute for *sur*) in Adam's forehead. The most interesting interpretation is Empson's account (source unknown), which mixes core elements of the two variants. It tells of a quarrel between Adam and Eve (on account of a *bouri*, who is sent because Eve is barren): Eve, during a quarrel with Adam, declared that she alone had the power of reproduction, adding that Adam had nothing to do with it. The angel Jabrâ'il thereupon placed blood from the forehead of Eve and Adam into four jars... Eve's jars were barren, but Adam's contained a boy called Shahid Jayar – son of jar, and a girl, who were suckled by Adam and from whom sprang the race of the Yezidis. (Empson, *Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 47.) The account of a quarrel concerning the reproductive powers of man and woman belongs to the version recounted by the *Black Book*, the variant of the “seed.” (It is the quarrel which induces Adam and Eve to put their seed in jars.) Meanwhile the role of Jibrail (who is often substituted for the Peacock Angel), and the mention of blood (the essence connected with soul) from the forehead (the place of the *sur*) belongs to the variant of Feqir Haji, the “myth of the *sur*.” Finally, in this version both the *bouri* and

tic/Manichaean myth of Seth is enriched with motifs taken from other traditions. Thus, for example, Feqir Haji's variant incorporates Muslim speculations on the "light of Muhammad," when it places the *sur*, from which Seth is eventually created, in Adam's forehead. It may also be under Muslim influence that Shehid marries a *houri* sent from heaven, rather than his own twin-sister.

While it seems fairly certain that the Yezidis' Shehid is a "descendant" of the Gnostic/Manichaean Seth, colored with motifs from other traditions, and rewritten and restructured again and again according to the needs of the narrator and/or the audience, it would be completely impossible to pinpoint its exact source. It is impossible to tell even if the two variants developed from a common Yezidi myth, or if they reached Yezidis already as two distinct mythical traditions. What we can be sure about is that the myths surrounding Seth were widely popular, well into the Islamic period, and Yezidis (or proto-Yezidis) had plenty of material at their disposal to make use of when forming their own myth(s), a myth that underlined their claim to be the special race of God in a way that was easily understandable outside their own community.

twin-sister make their appearance, as if its teller wanted to fuse all the different elements heard at different occasions into one concise myth.

10 THE BIRTH OF PROPHET ISMAIL IN THE YEZIDI “TALE OF IBRAHIM”¹⁰⁶⁹

THE TALE OF IBRAHIM

The story of the prophet Ibrahim’s birth and life is a good example of the syncretism that characterizes Yezidi tradition, where different elements from diverse backgrounds are woven into a new and complex whole. The “Tale of Ibrahim”¹⁰⁷⁰ presents a vivid mix of the various traditions of the wider region. It contains a great number of motifs known from Greek mythology, the Bible, Jewish Haggadic literature, the Quran and other Islamic tradition.

The “Tale of Ibrahim” starts with a description of king Nemrud’s birth¹⁰⁷¹ who was so ugly that his father, the ruler of Canaan, put him into a basket, and threw him into the sea, from where he was rescued by a fisherman. Once grown up, Nemrud returned as King of Egypt, leading an army against Canaan, unwittingly killed his father and married his own mother, who later recognized him by a mark on his back. Clearly, here we are facing a version of the Greek Oedipus myth. It may have been transmitted through medieval Islamic literature. This version of Nemrud’s Oedipic beginnings is preserved in the work of al-Kisāi, the author of a fa-

¹⁰⁶⁹ This chapter has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Kurdish Studies*.

¹⁰⁷⁰ The myth, or rather the “tale of Ibrahim the Friend” (Çîroka Bi-rahîm Xelîl) was translated by P. Kreyenbroek, in *God and Sheikh Adi*, 239-56.

¹⁰⁷¹ The figure of Nemrud (or Nimrod) came to embody the archetype of the pagan idolator – an antithesis of the “monotheist” Abraham – in Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition alike.

mous Arabic work, *The Lives of Prophets*, composed around 1200 A.D. It recounts the legends of the prophets prior to Muhammad, and was a vivid expression of “popular” religion and narrative tradition in medieval Islam. The legend is also given at greater length in the introduction to the famous romance of Antār, a model of the Arabic romance of chivalry, based on “popular” literature.¹⁰⁷² Embittered by his bad fortune Nemrud becomes the enemy of God.

Then follows an account of Ibrahim’s birth and his deeds, most details of which can be found, if not in the Bible, then in Jewish literature and the Quran. Ibrahim’s birth is foretold by the priests, who warn Nemrud that a man will be born who will take the power away from him. To prevent this, Nemrud orders the bellies of all pregnant women be ripped open, in an episode reminiscent of the Slaughter of the Innocents.¹⁰⁷³ Only Ibrahim, the son of Azir, Nemrud’s uncle and an idol maker, survived by a miracle, for his mother’s pregnant belly disappeared every time she appeared in public.¹⁰⁷⁴ When her time came she fled to a rock above the town to give birth to the baby, whom, out of fear, she left there for the wild animals to eat. The baby Ibrahim was fed by the milk

¹⁰⁷² B. Heller, “Nemrud,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 952-53.

¹⁰⁷³ According to some Jewish legends it was Nemrud himself, an accomplished astrologer, who read his fate in the stars, which then led him to have seventy thousand male children slaughtered. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 186-87. In another version it is the astrologers who draw his attention to the danger. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews* vol. 1, 207-8. One version of the Islamic legend relates that Nemrud saw a rising star in his dream that outshone the sun, which was then interpreted by his dream-readers. See Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, 72.

¹⁰⁷⁴ In Jewish legends it is from her husband, a prince – in other versions an idol maker and obedient follower of Nimrod, that Abraham’s mother has to hide her pregnancy, so he will not betray their child. “When he passed his hand over her body, there happened a miracle. The child rose until it lay beneath her breasts, and Terah could feel nothing with his hands. He said to his wife, ‘Thou didst speak truly,’ and naught became visible until the day of her delivery.” Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews* vol. 1, 188; see also Knappert *Islamic Legends*, 73.

of a gazelle sent by God, and he grew up in six months.¹⁰⁷⁵ As he became conscious of the external world, Ibrahim first worshipped the stars, then the moon, then the sun, but when he saw how all the heavenly bodies disappeared at the horizon at dusk and dawn he understood the futility of his beliefs and recognized God, the maker of all these things.¹⁰⁷⁶ Then he returned home, where he started his missionary campaign for the One God, against worshipping idols and Nemrud.¹⁰⁷⁷ Informed by the boy's father and enraged, Nemrud decided to burn him in a fire caused by a ballista.¹⁰⁷⁸ Preparing for this proved no easy task and took years, for Ibrahim was God's chosen, and the draft animals used for gathering the wood could not carry their loads, the ropes used for fastening the wood broke, and then the wood would not catch fire.¹⁰⁷⁹ Thus, Nemrud had "to do something that is not according to the law of the world" to counteract these difficulties. So he had donkeys mate with mares to produce mules, reeds sown to produce ropes, and forty young maidens and boys made drunk on *araq* and incited to an orgy. When this last outrage against God's laws happened, the angels removed themselves and finally the wood caught fire and Ibrahim was thrown into it. Ibrahim prayed to God to save

¹⁰⁷⁵ In Jewish legends Abraham's mother took refuge in a cave in the desert. God then sent Gabriel to feed the child left in a cave, and he suckled the baby from his little finger. His mother, distraught at what she had done, returned after twenty days and found Abraham fully grown. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews* vol. 1, 1947, 188-91. The cave motif is also retained by Islamic legends, according to which Ibrahim suckled his own fingers on his right hand, Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, 73.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews* vol. 1, 189; Quran 6,76-79, 37.88-89;

¹⁰⁷⁷ Quran 2.258

¹⁰⁷⁸ The ballista is an ancient military engine like a catapult used for throwing stones. Here it was used for throwing burning material. Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 244, note 10. In Jewish and Islamic tradition Abraham/Ibrahim meets this fate after having destroyed the idols. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, 213-16; Quran 37.91-95; 21.51-67.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Nimrod had all the men and women of his kingdom bring wood for the fire. But whoever tried to throw Abraham into the fire, he was consumed by it himself instead, so finally, at the instigation of Satan, they threw him into the fire with the help of a catapult. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, 198-201, 216-17; Quran 37.97-8.

him, promising to sacrifice what was special to his heart. God then sent the Angel Jibrail, who “took Ibrahim the Friend to Paradise, to the pastures and meadows... when the fire was over when it was extinguished, Ibrahim the Friend was at Ayn Arus (‘The Bride’s Spring’)”¹⁰⁸⁰ together with his wife Sarah. From there Ibrahim continued his journey to Egypt, where the Biblical incident of the pharaoh trying to wed his wife, passed off as his sister, befell him. The pharaoh, finally realizing the terrible danger he was in, released Ibrahim and his wife, even giving him a slave girl, Hagar. Sarah, who had no children proposed that Ibrahim marry Hagar and beget a child with her. By the grace of God both Sarah and Hagar became pregnant at the same time. However, as the months passed, the child in Hagar’s womb, the Prophet Ismail, made Sarah stand up to show respect for Hagar, even when she had her arms and legs covered in sand. Sarah resented this and made Ibrahim get rid of her co-wife. Ibrahim had his servant take Hagar into the desert and abandon her there.¹⁰⁸¹ This was where Hagar gave birth to Ismail. As she paced up and down she brought forth water first under her left, then under her right foot. She named the spring that

¹⁰⁸⁰ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 245-46. “The logs burst into buds, and all the different kinds of wood put forth fruit, each tree bearing its own kind. The furnace was transformed into a royal pleasance, and the angels sat therein with Abraham.” Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, 201; Quran 21, 48-9; 29.24; “God commanded the branches and logs around Abraham to sprout, grow twigs, leaves, flowers and fruit so that Abraham was soon sitting in a shaded cover where colourful flowers spread cool fragrance and sweet fruits offered themselves to the thirsty prisoner. Many years later, when he was an old man, Abraham used to say: ‘These seven days in the midst of the fire were the finest of my life.’” Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, 75. In Urfa, where this took place according to the Muslim tradition, the sacred lake that is said to have formed when God turned the fire into a lake surrounded by a garden is still an important place of pilgrimage, and the fish, descendants of the wood of the stake turned into fish, are believed to be sacred and are fed by the pilgrims.

¹⁰⁸¹ In Jewish legends Abraham merely sends Hagar and Ismail away, but in Quranic commentaries he actually accompanies them to the desert, as far as where Mecca was later built, before abandoning them. The place of Ibrahim here seems to be taken by his servant. R. Paret, “Ismail,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 184-85.

thus sprang up in the desert “Zemzemi.”¹⁰⁸² Mecca was built next to this spring, and Ismail grew up there. When Ismail was already a grown-up, Ibrahim came looking for him. When he arrived at Ismail’s home, his son was not there, and his wife failed to invite the stranger to dismount and have something to eat and drink. Ibrahim then left a message for his son, telling him “your house is a good one but its door is not good, ... change it and put in a better door.” Ismail, upon his return, understood that his father had come to seek him and his wife had not shown him courtesy, so he divorced her.¹⁰⁸³ He married again, but when Ibrahim came looking for him the whole incident was repeated. When Ibrahim came the third time, however, he was respectfully invited in by Ismail’s third wife and he gave her and the marriage his blessing.¹⁰⁸⁴ Then Ismail and Ibrahim were reunited, but Jibrail came and reminded Ibrahim of his vow to sacrifice what was dearest to him. Ibrahim balked at this demand, but his son, a true prophet, convinced him to heed the divine command.¹⁰⁸⁵ As Ibrahim prepared to sacrifice his son, first his sharp knife refused to cut Ismail’s neck, than a fattened ram kept by the houris in Paradise for seven years descended and took Ismail’s place as a sacrifice

¹⁰⁸² In Jewish tradition, God, in response to Ismail’s prayers, bade Miriam’s well spring up, Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, 265. In Islamic tradition, while Hagar ran in despair back and forth between the hills al-Safā and al-Marwa, Ismail scratched the sand and thus helped the water of Zemzem break through. Paret, “Ismail,” 184-85.

¹⁰⁸³ In Jewish legends Ismail’s wife even refuses Abraham’s request for water and bread, saying they have none, all the while cursing her children and husband. Abraham recommends that her husband replace the tent-pin. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, 266.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Both Jewish and Islamic traditions are familiar with this story, though they mention only two wives. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, 266-68; Paret, “Ismail,” 185.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Quran 37.101-103; although the Quran does not mention the name of the son to be sacrificed, most Muslim traditions maintain that it was Ismail rather than Isaac.

The Birth of Ismail

Rich in adventures, most of the details of this tale of Ibrahim's life and tribulations can also be found in Jewish and Islamic legends, which – no doubt – were a part of the oral culture throughout the Middle East. One element, however, surprises the reader or listener, and is very hard to place or to interpret. This motif appears in the description of the birth of Ismail, son of Ibrahim.¹⁰⁸⁶ As in Muslim tradition, Ismail was born from Hagar in the desert, and the spring Zemzem sprang up at his birth place, but then follows a most intriguing incident. The text transcribed and translated by Kreyenbroek runs like this:

¹⁰⁸⁶ During my field research, Yezidis knowledgeable on religious tradition disagreed on whether the account of Ismail's birth was a "tale" or a *qewl*, that is, a "hymn." The difference is that "hymns" are considered sacred, as they have a heavenly origin, and they were revealed specifically to the Yezidis, while "tales" are thought of more as accounts of historical events, also shared by other nations. Some informants claimed that the birth of Ismail was to be considered a *çîrok*, and as such was not a Yezidi myth, as it was shared by other people as well (as proof the Bible was quoted) although it was a true story. (*Çîrokekî bash e, na piroz e, na qasure jî. Bas Qewl nîne, qewle Ismail na ye me ye.* "It is a good story, it is neither sacred, nor a mistake/faulty. But there is no *qewl*, the hymn of Ismail is not ours.") Others, like Feqir Haji, one of the best known experts on Yezidi religion and texts, called it a *qewl*, *Qewle Nebî Ismailê*, marking it as a genuine Yezidi myth, despite the fact that in his performance most of the text was in prose form. The version published by Kreyenbroek does in fact contain a hymn about Ismail, which briefly refers to this episode: "It was through the power of the Great One, That Ismail the Prophet appeared in that desert, The water of the Zemzem welled up under his feet... The merchants passed that place, The great ones, like mountains, By God's grace, no one knows how much wealth there is. People who were around the merchant, Went to greet them, (saying:), We would like to know your names. Oh Intelligent child, Are you God or the Prince? Are you a saint or a Feqir?" (Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 251.) Such a relationship between myth and hymns is characteristic of Yezidi oral tradition, where many obscure references in the hymns can only be interpreted if one knows the corresponding myth, or "tale."

...around that time Rajab, Sha'ban and Ramadan¹⁰⁸⁷ appeared there. All three were Kurdish merchants, their real names were Rejo, Shebo and Remo, but the Arabs called them Rajab, Sha'ban and Ramadan. They traded in Egypt and India, they came and saw that water flowed there. They said to each other, 'We have traded in these parts for several years but we have never seen water flowing here.' They settled by the water, they brought their wares and said to Rejo (Rajab), 'Squeeze your rump, get on your horse, go to the water and see where it comes from.' They said that Rajab got off his bottom, mounted his horse and traveled on and on until he came to the source of the water; there he saw an old man with a white beard and white clothes, and a white-haired woman. He greeted them and said, 'What people are you, who are you, how long have you been here?' They said, 'Take your water and have a good journey; don't ask questions!' Rejo came back to his friends and told them what he had seen, explaining how things were.

The second time they sent Shebo (Sha'ban), he went to the source of the water and saw a young man of sixteen and a young woman. Again he greeted them and asked, 'May I ask you some questions? What people are you, where do you come from, where are you from?' They said, 'Sir, take your water and have a good journey, there is no need for these questions.' Shebo came back to his friends and explained the situation to them and told them what he had seen with his own eyes.

The third time they sent Remo (Ramadan) like his comrades, he too got off his bottom and rode his horse until he came to the Spring; he saw a baby of three days, sucking on his mother's nipple. He greeted him and said, 'Who are you people, since when have you been here?' The woman said, 'We have been here as long as the little one has been born.' He in turn returned to his friends and told them what he had seen. One said, 'I saw an old man.' One said, 'I saw a young man.' One said, 'I saw a baby.' Remo's words were true. They said,

¹⁰⁸⁷ The names of three months of the Muslim calendar, see Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 248, note 18.

‘He is a prophet.’ They went to India to fetch their belongings and built Mecca (i.e., *makgeh*, ‘the mother’s place.’)¹⁰⁸⁸

The message of this portion of the *chirok* is that when the three merchants realized that the old man, young man and baby they had seen separately were in fact the same person, or rather baby, they immediately identified him as a prophet. It must be noted here that during my field research I found that this motif and its interpretation is still a part of living tradition. Yezidis who were familiar with the details of the story saw the three-form appearance as a proof of Ismail’s *keramet*, or divine power, and of the fact that he was indeed a “supernatural being,” a possessor of the *sur*, that is, he was a divine figure (*khas*.) His appearance in three different forms (ages) in a short period of time proved that he was a real prophet¹⁰⁸⁹ and led to the conversion not only of the three merchants, but of all their people.

Appearing simultaneously as a baby, young man and old man is a striking and unusual way to describe or symbolize the status of a prophet. One is tempted to point a finger and declare that this must be an original Yezidi motif, so hard to interpret for an outsider, exactly because it is rooted in Yezidi religious symbolism. Before we get carried away, however, we must take note that Yezidis are not the only group in the region to possess such a myth of the three-form appearance of a divine being or prophet.

Appearance of Ali as a Child, Young Man and Old Man in Nusayrî Mythology

A similar account is found among the Nusayrîs (or Alawites) of Syria. The Nusayrî renegade, Sulaimân Efendî al-Adhanî, recounts

¹⁰⁸⁸ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 248-49. In Islamic tradition, after the spring of Zemzem breaks out, Hagar gives permission to the Arab tribe of Djurhum to settle in the neighborhood. Later Ismail takes a wife from there. Paret, “Ismail,” 185.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Some Yezidis are reluctant to use the word “prophet” about their *khas*. Those who use it, however, understand it in the sense that Yezidi prophets were invested with the divine *sur*.

this myth in his work *Kitāb al-bakūra al-sulaymānīyya fī kashf asrār al-dīyāna al-nusayrīyya*, written in 1834-35. He gives an account of the original Fall of the Nusayrī souls. According to Nusayrī belief, the souls of gnostics¹⁰⁹⁰ originated in the divine world of light that existed before the creation of the material world. These souls, which were originally luminous spiritual entities emanating from divine light, existed in a pure spiritual form, in complete purity, and in this state they beheld Ali. They fell, however, when they rebelled against the divine will or succumbed to pride. Both faults are said to derive from an imperfect knowledge of God (Ali, that is).¹⁰⁹¹ In al-Adhanī's manuscript, this came about when they committed the sin of pride stating that "As for creation, there has not been created anything nobler than we," so that Ali withdrew from them. Then, much later, Ali appeared before them, and again they sinned by imagining that Ali was a human like them. (One of the cornerstones of the Nusayrī's debate with "heretics," that is, other Shiīte sects, on Ali's nature, is their docetic conviction that Ali, in his cyclical incarnations, merely seemed to take on human form, and that it was only those ignorant of true gnosis, who thought to see him according to a material and human form.)¹⁰⁹² The third time, he appeared to them in three forms, as a child, young man and old man, and once being deceived by their eyes and outward appearances they failed to understand his true essence, so they were cast down into the material world:

All groups of the Nusairīs believe that in the beginning, before the existence of the world they were shining lights and luminous stars and they used to distinguish between submission and rebellion, neither eating, nor drinking, not excreting, but beholding 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib in the yellow aspect. They remained in this condition 7,007 years and 7 hours. Then they

¹⁰⁹⁰ Gnostics here refer to those "knowers" or true believers who have penetrated the secrets of religion, not to be confused with the dualistic Gnostics of Late Antiquity.

¹⁰⁹¹ Bar-Asher - Kofsky, *Nusayrī*, 53. On the Fall, see also pages 45-48 and 75-77.

¹⁰⁹² *Ibid.*, passim, especially the chapter "Nusayrī Trinitarian Theology," 7-41.

thought among themselves, “as for creation, there has not been created anything nobler than we.” This was the first transgression that the Nusairîs committed. And he (‘Alî) created for them a veil (hijāb), keeping them under restraint for 7,000 years. Thereupon, ‘Alî ibn Abi Tâlib appeared to them saying, “Am I not your Lord?” and they replied, “Indeed.” After that he had made visible to them his Omnipotence. But they imagined they could apprehend him in his fullness on their supposition that he was one of themselves. By that they committed a second transgression... after 7,077 years Ali appears to them again: Thereupon, he appeared to them in the form of an aged man with a white head and beard... then they imagined him to be such as that shape through which he appeared to them. And he said to them, “Who am I?” and they replied “We do not know.” Then he appeared in the form of a young man with a twisted moustache, riding on a furious-looking lion, then again he appeared to them in the form of a small child. Again he called them and said “Am I not your Lord?” And he repeated the question to them on each manifestation, in his company being his Name (ism) and his Gate (bāb)... and they (the Nusairî) imagined he was one like unto themselves, and they became confused and did not know what to answer; and so he created them, out of their backwardness, doubt and confusion. And he called them, saying “I have created for you a lower abode and I intend to cast you down into it. And I shall create for you fleshly temples and I shall appear to you in a veil as one of your kind; and he who acknowledges me amongst you, and acknowledges my Gate and my Veil, him will I bring back hither.”¹⁰⁹³

Here the three-form appearance serves to underline the important Nusayrî notion that the deity is eternal and unchanging; it is only the ignorant who see his manifestations in the created as according to human or material form, the true gnostic, however, is the one who is not misled by such outward appearances.

¹⁰⁹³ Olsson, “The Gnosis of Mountaineers,” 177-78.

Al-Adhani's work was compiled in the nineteenth century, but evidently this motif is much older, for it can be found in another, much earlier, Nusayrî work, the *Kîtab al-usûs*. The date when this work was composed is not known, but internal evidence shows it to have been composed before the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁹⁴ Speaking of the mystery of divinity and the way God manifests himself to His creatures the *Kîtab al-usûs* explains that before the creation only God's essence existed, "He was by Himself and did not describe Himself to His creatures, for they did not yet exist." Moreover, in that state God neither needed contact with anyone nor did He have to describe Himself to Himself or to converse with Himself. After the creation of human beings, however, such a need on the part of the deity became imperative and various categories of divine attributes were introduced in order to express the forms of relationship existing between God and His creatures. Since it is impossible for any change to take place in the divine essence, God created an intermediary entity of an external human form through which He communicated with his creatures.¹⁰⁹⁵ The *Kîtab al-usûs* further elaborates the idea of intermediary forms; in one place it speaks of twelve human-like forms, which, according to the modern commentary, may be an allusion to the spiritual archetypes of the twelve Imams through which God reveals Himself to His believers.¹⁰⁹⁶ Elsewhere, however, "the forms through which God reveals Himself are described as angelic persons appearing in various forms... There follows a description of three of these appearances... God first appeared in the form of an old man, with hoary head and beard, possessed of the qualities of dignity, mercy and reverence. In His second appearance God revealed Himself to them in the shape of a young man with a curled moustache, riding upon a lion having the quality of wrath. Then follows the third appearance, when God reveals Himself in the form of a child."¹⁰⁹⁷

The parallels or similarities between the two myths are too pronounced to be the results of mere coincidence. Clearly, the two

¹⁰⁹⁴ Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nusayrî*, 43.

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

tales are related, but what is their significance? At first glance, such a presentation of prophethood in the Yezidi tradition and divinity in Nusayrî tradition is confusing and hard to interpret. Obviously, if Yezidis and Nusayrîs, share such a peculiar motif, there must be a common source which should be sought in order to understand this motif. While the Yezidi myth, embedded in its oral environment, offers few clues as to the origins of the motif, the Nusayrî myth is more "helpful." It is the Nusayrî myth, with its message that God Himself is eternal and unchanging, opposed to the changing forms of the unstable (moving) created world, which provides the clue to the origins of this curious motif.

THE TRIMORPHIC DIVINITY IN LATE ANTIQUE LITERATURE

Trimorphic Christ

The very same idea, conveyed through the very same description, that of God appearing as a boy, man and old man, representing the cycle of human life time, is found in several Apocryphal Acts and the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John*. The apocryphal Acts are non-canonized writings of uncertain origin or authorship from the first few centuries of the Christian era, talking about the life and deeds of the Apostles mentioned in the canonized Biblical texts. During Late Antiquity and even the early Middle Ages these Apocryphal Acts enjoyed great popularity. It is in these Acts that one finds the concept of a divine figure, in this instance Christ, appearing in three different forms: as a boy, young man and old man.

One of the apocryphal works where the three-form, or trimorphic, representation of Jesus appears is the *Acts of John*. The description of Christ appearing in three forms unfolds from the story of Drusiana, one of John's followers, who was resurrected by John after her death through the mercy of the Lord. When John and his friends went to her grave (more likely a catacomb or crypt) on the third day after Drusiana's death to break bread, as was the custom, they were met by a beautiful smiling youth who told John to raise Drusiana. Later, Drusiana told the other brethren that the Lord appeared to her in the tomb in the likeness of John, and of a youth. When her brethren doubted her words, John told them that

there was nothing to be perplexed or dubious about, but to make them understand he would tell them about his own experiences, so “that you may see the glory which surrounds him, which was and is both now and evermore.”

For when he [Jesus] had chosen Peter and Andrew, who were brothers, he [Jesus] came to me and my brother James, saying ‘I need you; come to me!’ And my brother <when he heard> this said: ‘John, what does he want, this child (παιδίον) on the shore who called us?’ And I said, ‘Which child?’ And he answered me: ‘The one, who is beckoning to us.’ And I replied: ‘Because of the long watch we have kept at sea, you are not seeing well, brother James. Do you not see the man standing there who is handsome, fair and cheerful looking (ἄνδρα εὖμορφρον καλόν)?’ But he said to me. ‘I do not see that man, brother; but let us go, and we shall see what this means.’ And when we had brought the boat *to land* we saw how he also helped us to beach the boat. And as we left the place, wishing to follow him, he appeared to me again as rather bald <headed> (ὑπόψιλον ἔχων <τὴν κεφαλὴν>) but with a thick and flowing beard (τὸ δὲ γένειον δασὺν καταγόμενον), but to James as a young man whose beard was just beginning (ἀρχιγένειος νεανίσκος). So we were both puzzled about the meaning of what we had seen...¹⁰⁹⁸

There follows a description of other sightings of the Lord when he appeared in different, ever-changing forms (making one wonder if the author of the tract was a follower of docetism), with eyes that never closed, as a small and ugly man, sometimes with a smooth and soft breast, which was at other times rock hard, then stripped of his clothes and not like a man at all, with feet whiter than snow and a head stretching up to heaven, and then again as a small man. At other times he had a material, solid body, yet again

¹⁰⁹⁸ Acts of John 88-89, trans. K. Schäferdiek, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2: *Writings Relating to the Apostles, Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, English trans. and ed. R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: James Clark, 1992), 180. Cf. *Acta Ioannis in Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 2, 1, ed. M. Bonnet (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1898), 194.

he was immaterial and incorporeal, "as if it did not exist at all," and his feet left no print in the snow. Still, there was "unity within the many faces,"¹⁰⁹⁹ for behind all these apparently changing material forms the divine essence/power was always, and unchangingly, the same.

The *Acts of Peter* relate a story about some blind old widows who called out to Peter, begging him to give them back their sight through the mercy of Christ. Peter then significantly answers:

If there is in you the faith which is in Christ, then see with your mind what you do not see with your eyes... These eyes shall again be closed, that see nothing but men and cattle and dumb animals and stones and sticks; but only the inner eyes see Jesus Christ. And when prayer was made, the room in which they were shone as if with lightning, such as shines in the clouds. Yet it was not such light as (is seen) by day, (but) ineffable, invisible, such as no man could describe... Then Peter said to them 'Tell us what you saw.' And they said, 'We saw an old man (πρεσβύτερος), who had such a presence as we cannot describe to you;' but others said, 'We saw a growing lad' (νεανίσκος ἀγένειος); and others said 'We saw a little boy (παιδάριον μικρόν) who gently touched our eyes, and so our eyes were opened.' So Peter praised the Lord, saying '.... God is greater than our thoughts, as we have learnt from the aged widows how they have seen the Lord in a variety of forms.'"¹¹⁰⁰

The divinity appearing successively as child, young man and old man can also be found in non-Christian, or to be more exact, in Gnostic literature. The second-century Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* contains a revelation to the narrator, a certain John, by a divine being, called the Forethought, the creative power of the transcendent Father. John describes this revelation in the following way:

¹⁰⁹⁹ Acts of John 89-93, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, 180-81.

¹¹⁰⁰ Acts of Peter 21, trans. W. Schneemelcher, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, 308. Cf. *Acta Petri* in *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 1, ed. R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1891), 69.

Straightaway [while I was contemplating these things] behold, the [heavens opened, and] the [whole] creation (κτίσις) [which] below heaven shone, and [the world (κόσμος)] was shaken. 2. [I was afraid, and behold, I] saw in the [light] a child who stood] by me. While I looked [at it, it became] like an old man. And he [changed his] likeness (again), becoming like a servant.¹¹⁰¹ There [was not a plurality] before me, but there was a [likeness] with multiple forms (μορφῇ) in the [light] and [the semblances] appeared through each other [and] the [likeness] had three forms (μορφῇ).¹¹⁰²

The Trimorphic Deity and the Hellenic God of Eternal Time, Aion

These enigmatic descriptions of a polyphormic, or rather trimorphic, deity in late antique texts have for some time aroused the interest of researchers of late antique religiosity and religious philosophy. Erik Peterson, the first to devote attention to the topic, sought the explanation of this remarkable Christology, with Christ appearing as child, youth, and old man, in the theology of Tatian, an Encratite Assyrian Christian from second-century Mesopotamia.¹¹⁰³ He looked at the famous passage in Tatian's *Address to the*

¹¹⁰¹ Layton translates this as "young person" (*Gnostic Scriptures*, 28).

¹¹⁰² *Apocryphon of John* II, 1.30-2.9, in *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices*, 15-17; Layton (*Gnostic Scriptures*, 28-29) translates, "At that moment ... the heavens opened and all the creation shone with light... I... saw within the light a child standing before me. When I saw... like and elderly person. And it changed [its] manner of appearance to be like a young person... in my presence. And within the light there was a multiform image. And the [manners of appearance] were appearing through one another. [And] the [manner of appearance] had three forms... It said to me ... [Now I have come] to teach you what exists, and what [has come to be], and what must come to be, so that you might [know about] the invisible realm [and the] visible realm."

¹¹⁰³ E. Peterson, "Einige Bemerkungen zum Hamburger Papyrus-Fragment der Acta Pauli," *Vigiliae Christianae* 3 (1949): 142-62. See also G.

Greeks, where the *aion*, or time, appears to man as past, present, and future, while he himself remains ever the same. As Tatian asked his opponents:

Why do you divide time, saying that one part is past, and another present, and another future? For how can the future be passing when the present exists? As those who are sailing imagine in their ignorance, as the ship is borne along, that the hills are in motion, so you do not know that it is you who are passing along, but that time (ὁ αἰών) remains present as long as the Creator wills it to exist.¹¹⁰⁴

Henri-Charles Puech, who had new texts at his disposal (such as the translation of the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John*), further elaborated this train of thought, claiming that the trimorphic Christ in the Apocryphal Acts is no other than *Aion*, the abstract Hellenic god of Infinite Time, or Eternity. The same *Aion*, who is described by the dedication on the pedestal of his statute from Eleusis (probably made in A.D. 73/74)¹¹⁰⁵ as: "He who by his divine nature remains ever the same in the same things. He who is and was and shall be, without beginning, middle or end, free from change, universal craftsman of the eternal divine nature."¹¹⁰⁶

According to Puech, the trimorphic god, whether Christian or Gnostic is "conçu sur le type de l'Αἰών en qui coexistent passé, présent, avenir, qui englobe et réunit en soi les trois dimensions du temps, les trois stades successifs d'une durée totale, correspondant, pour ce qui est de l'homme, aux trois âges de la vie: enfance ou jeunesse, maturité, vieillesse.... Jésus doit être, en l'occurrence, une figure, une personification de l'Αἰών; les trois aspects d'enfant ou

Quispel, "The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 2-3.

¹¹⁰⁴ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 26, trans. J. E. Ryland, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. C. Coxe, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 76.

¹¹⁰⁵ A. D. Nock, "A Vision of Aion Mandulis," *The Harvard Theological Review* 27.1 (1934): 83.

¹¹⁰⁶ R. Pettazzoni, "Aion – (Kronos) Chronos in Egypt," in *Essays in the History of Religions* (Supplements to *Numen* I), trans. H. J. Rose (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 175.

d'adolescent, d'adulte, de vieillard, sous lesquels il se manifeste signifient l'éternité, la perpétuité de son être et répondent, du même coup, à autant de modes du vision ou de connaissance proportionnés à l'homme et conformes aux trois principales étapes de l'existence humaine."¹¹⁰⁷

This Aion, the deified abstraction of Eternity or Eternal Time, was a typical product of the Hellenistic culture. In *Timaeus* Plato defined Aion as the conception of ideal eternity, contrasted with Chronos, empirical time.¹¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, an epigram attributed to Plato claims "Aion brings everything; the long Time knows how to change name and shape and nature as fate well."¹¹⁰⁹ This Platonic Aion then went through a long and gradual evolution, from being first conceived of merely as period of time renewing itself, to acquiring the attributes of a cosmic principle, and was seen at last as the supreme and eternal principle of the universe. The last stage of this development of the Hellenistic Aion is represented by the *Chaldean Oracles*, a second-century collection of somewhat fragmentary commentaries on a mystery poem. The *Oracles* are a product of Hellenistic (and more precisely Alexandrian) syncretism, displaying a combination of neo-Platonic elements with others that were Egyptian, Persian or Babylonian in origin. The concept of Aion in the *Chaldean Oracles*, as summed up by Hans Lewy, is reminiscent of the concept of Logos as regards his relationship to the ultimate Supreme Beings and to creation.¹¹¹⁰ The Aion of the Chaldeans, the

¹¹⁰⁷ C. Puech, "Histoire de L'Ancienne Église et Patristique," *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études* (1966/67): 130.

¹¹⁰⁸ D. Levi, "Aion," *Hesperia* 13.4 (1944): 274.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Cf. Plato, "Time the Conqueror," *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*, ch 9.epig. xviii, ed. and trans. John William Mackail (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 135.

¹¹¹⁰ "Aion is a noetic (subtle) monad with a dual aspect; on the one hand, he, alone is sustained by the Vital Force ('Strength') of the Supreme Being, Whose Intellect he, by virtue of his noetic quality, is able to cognize. On the other hand, his function is to transmit the supreme light to the 'Sources and Principles' who are... the general and particular ideas, and to keep these in perpetual circular motion... The Great Father has created the Aion out of himself, and manifests Himself in him to man... Aion may accordingly be regarded as identical with the 'Light' through

offspring of the (Platonic) Primal Being ("begotten of the Father"), also "forms the primal measure of all temporality, in that he 'mixes' the ages (aeons) of the universe (Aeons)," while he himself is in constant motion.¹¹¹¹

It would not have been impossible to draw a parallel between the Hellenistic Aion, that the Great Father created out of himself in order to manifest Himself to man, and the Christ of the Christians.¹¹¹² After all, as Hippolytus says, it was "Christ, who stood, stands, and will stand, (that is, was, is, and is to come),"¹¹¹³ therefore using the eloquent image of the Aion or Eternal Time, to depict Christ in apocryphal writings may have been appealing.

Though no trimorphic representation of the Aion appears in the *Chaldean Oracles*, a bimorphic representation can be traced. In the *Oracles* the god Aion is identical with god Chronos, and Chronos is called "old and young" (πρεβύτερον καὶ νεώτερον).¹¹¹⁴ There is, however, a most interesting representation of Time, both eternal and finite, which is worth a mention at this point. A mosaic dated to the mid-third century after Christ, excavated in Antiochia,¹¹¹⁵ shows four male figures sitting at a table,

which...the Father moves... The Light of Aion is the motion of the Supreme God... For the Chaldaean Theurgists the absolutely transcendent Father manifests himself in him." H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 100-1.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid., 402-3. For Hans Lewy, the Aion of the *Oracles* represents the Iranian Zurvan and the peculiar position Chaldaeans assign to the god Aion offers proof of the penetration of Zurvanism, a later development of Mazdaism influenced by Babylonian astral religion, into the Hellenistic world. In this Iranian system, Zervan Akarana, or Infinite Time, limitless, eternal and uncreated was the cause and source of all things, a doctrine which "formed the foundation of the cult of Aion practiced by the worshippers of Mithra." Ibid., 408.

¹¹¹² According to Istvan Perczel (personal communication), Dionysios Aeropagitos and Synesios of Cyrene, representing the Christian Platonic tradition, identified the Aion of the Chaldean *Oracles* with Christ.

¹¹¹³ ὁ ἑστὼς στὰς στησόμενος Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* VI.1.17, trans. A. Siouville, *Réfutation de Toutes le Hérésies*, vol. 2 (Milan: Archè, 1988), 15.

¹¹¹⁴ Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles*, 102, note 151.

¹¹¹⁵ D. Levi, "Aion," *Hesperia* 13.4 (1944): 269-314.

three in a group on the right, and one on the left. According to the inscriptions underneath, the lonely figure is Aion, while the group of men is designated as *Chronoi*. The words, Παρω(ι)χημένος, Ἐνεστώς, Μέλλων meaning Past, Present, and Future can be read under the *Chronoi* figures. According to Doro Levi, in this context the *Chronoi* stand for relative time, that is, "time in relation to something, especially human life," as opposed to absolute time, eternity, Aion. In the group of the *Chronoi*, the man on the right corner is an adult, bearded, "the second figure is a young man, with energetic features, whose black hair is adorned with a rich wreath of sprigs." The third figure is a robust adolescent, showing his upper body in almost full nudity, whose black hair falls in waving curls on the nape of his neck. Aion, on the left, is a figure of advanced age, with a grayish moustache and flowing beard. In his hand he probably holds a wheel, the symbol of Aion, eternal time.¹¹¹⁶

A completely different line of argument is followed by Gedaliahu Stroumsa, who takes exception to the idea that the trimorphic God of these texts should be related to the Hellenistic god of Eternity, Aion.¹¹¹⁷ He finds the notion that "a mythologeme may originate in an abstract reflection on the nature of time and eternity" anachronistic.¹¹¹⁸ Stroumsa is of the opinion that the trimorphic appearance of the divinity in these writings should rather be traced to the bimorphy attested in rabbinical texts. He distinguishes not one but two kinds of bimorphy in these texts: young man/old man, and form of God/form of Servant. The latter kind of bimorphy, he claims, can be detected in the *Apocryphon of John*, where the Coptic

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid., 271-74. According to Doro Levi the Aion-Chronoi mosaic was not a testimony of the philosophical movement in the learned and religious metropolis, rather a testimony of "conceptions which were passing from mouth to mouth, of words which were much in the air, which were used more or less by everybody, *excerpta* of philosophical speculation which together with religious and mystic ideas had passed over, as would often happen in popular philosophy." Levi, "Aion," 312.

¹¹¹⁷ G. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie Divine et Transformations d'un Mythologème: L'Apocryphon de Jean' et ses Sources," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981): 412-34.

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid., 413.

word *bal* should be translated, in his opinion, as servant rather than child. Furthermore, the Greek *παῖς* may also be understood both as a “child” and a “servant.”¹¹¹⁹ Hence, these two types of bimorphy were fused into one, giving birth to the threefold, child-young man-old man manifestation of the deity.

Both interpretations of trimorphy have their own merits, and it is also quite feasible that the two different traditions, Biblical bimorphy and ideas concerning the Eternal Time, may have reinforced each other. One must argue with Stroumsa’s claim, however, that it would be anachronistic to look for the origins of a mythologeme in an abstract philosophical reflection on the nature of time and eternity. There are eloquent instances of exactly such philosophical notions making their appearance in seemingly “naive” apocryphal works.¹¹²⁰

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid. 419.

¹¹²⁰ A good example is furnished by the 2nd-c. apocryphal *Protoevangelium Iacobi*. Joseph’s vision at the time of the Nativity, where he sees the world and time stop, carries a philosophical-theological meaning concerning the relationship between the Eternal (divine) and the created, expressed through the concept of movement and time. The scene of Mary’s receiving the Annunciation in the same work is also redolent with Neoplatonic symbols. In other words, this apparently simple apocryphal work puts forward a complex theology clothed in symbols taken from the contemporary philosophical language, ultimately based on Plato, and probably well known and easily interpretable for any educated man of the time. Gy. Geréby, “A világ és az idő megállása Jakab Prótevangéliumában,” (The Suspension of Time and the World in the Protevangelium Iacobi) *Vallástudományi Szemle* 2.1 (2006): 93-126. F. Bovon, “The Suspension of Time in Chapter 18 of the Protevangelium Iacobi,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester*, ed. B. A. Pearson, A. T. Kraabel, G. W. E. Nickelsburg, and N. R. Petersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 393-405. György Geréby, “Egy ortodox apokrif műhelyében: A Jakab-ősevangélium (*Protevangelium Iacobi*) filozófiai szimbolikája” (In the shop of an Orthodox apocryphe: The philosophical symbolism of the Protevangelium Iacobi), *Ókor* 6.3 (2007): 50-61

Further Applications of Trimorphy in Early Christian Writings

Whatever the origin of the trimorphic manifestation of the deity, it became a common motif of late antique religious language, for it fitted well with the image of the Savior - who chooses to appear to each man as he can best grasp Him, and the Savior who took on himself all the lowly humiliations of the human condition, the incarnate divine Word. The true nature of this Savior is well expressed by these changing forms. As Puech says: "par l'entremise des formes qu'il revêt, ou en quoi il se transfigure, celui-ci s'accommode à la faiblesse des créatures, s'adapte aux diverses capacités qu'ont les spectateurs, les voyants ou les croyants, de l'apercevoir, de le saisir, de le concevoir."¹¹²¹ These are exactly the sentiments Peter expresses just before the episode of the blind widows, perhaps proffering an explanation for the trimorphic appearance that is to follow: "For each of us as he was able, as he could see, so he saw (him)."¹¹²²

The trimorphic manifestation occasionally appears in Christian works in a negative context, associated with heretics or enemies or the faith, probably because it was not only "orthodox" Christians, but also Gnostics who employed the image of trimorphy to express the eternal, unmovable nature of the Divine as contrasted to the changing created world.¹¹²³ For example, exactly such a feat is attributed to Simon Magus, in the *Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*. Simon Magus, who made his first appearance in the Bible as the rival of the apostles, later came to be widely considered the founding father of the Gnostic movement.¹¹²⁴ Simon

¹¹²¹ Puech, "Histoire," 129.

¹¹²² "Unusquisque enim nostrum sicut capiebat videre, prout poterat videbat," Acta Petri 20, *Acta Apostolorum* I. 67

¹¹²³ The trimorphic appearance in the *Apocryphon of John* quoted above is such an example of Gnostics utilizing this motif, although Quispel is of the opinion that the introduction containing this motif was not part of the original work. Quispel, "The Demiurge," 5-6.

¹¹²⁴ Simon was considered the "father of all heresies," (*pater omnium haereticorum*). The first to call him so was Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III Pref., perhaps following Justin Martyr. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* II.Pref.1) also

Magus' duel with the Apostle Peter, rich in magical and miraculous details, is a much-liked topic of many Apocryphal Acts. In the *Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*, we find a description of Simon's magical tricks that sounds familiar. According to this apocryphe, the dispute between the Apostle Peter and Simon, the magician came to the ear of Emperor Nero, who ordered Simon brought before him:

And he, coming in, stood before him, and began suddenly to assume different forms, so that on a sudden he became a child, and after a little an old man, and at other times a young man; for he changed himself both in face and stature in different forms, and was in a frenzy, having the devil as his servant. And Nero beholding this, supposed him to be truly the son of God.¹¹²⁵

It is not difficult to understand why such a three-form appearance was associated with Simon, if one reads the Church fathers' account of Simon's teachings. Simon claimed to be the Great Power of God,¹¹²⁶ that is, the incarnation of God the Father, descended on earth in a human form. And this Father, or the principle of All, the root of all that exists, the infinite, uncreated, immovable Power containing everything, was defined by Simon, with words that evoke the description of the Aion, one that "stands,

asserts that "all heretics drew their impious doctrines from Simon," (*omnes a Simone haeretici initia sumentes impia et irreligiosa dogmata induxerunt*.) Irénée, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 2, tome 2, 24. And *Adv. Haer.* 1.27.4 "all those who in any way corrupt the truth and hurt the glory of the Church, are the disciples and successors of Simon Magus" (*omnes qui quoquo modo adulterant veritatem et praeconium Ecclesiae laedunt Simonis Samaritani magi discipuli et successores sunt*) Irénée, *Contre les Hérésies* livre 1, tome 2, 352. Irenaeus often repeated this sentiment in his work. Other writers followed suit, and it soon became a commonplace that just as all sins stemmed from Satan, all heresies were born out of the teachings of Simon.

¹¹²⁵ "Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul" 14, trans. A. Walker, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, ed. C. Coxe, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans: 1950), 480.

¹¹²⁶ *Acts of the Apostles* 8.11: δ ναμὶς το θεο καλοῦμ νη μεγ λη; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.23.1; Hippolytus *Philosophumena* VI.19.4; Pseudo-Tertullianus, *Adversus. Omnes. Haereses* 1; Pseudo-Clemens, *Recognitiones* III.47.1; Pseudo-Clemens, *Homilies* II.2.

stood, and will stand” (ὁ ἑστὼς, στὰς, στησόμενος).¹¹²⁷ That is, existing eternally, immovable (“standing”), unlike the changing world. This infinite power that has stood, stands, and will stand is ultimately identical with Simon, who descended to save mankind.¹¹²⁸ Researchers believe to recognize the Aion or Infinite Time of late Hellenism - that was, is and will be - in this description of the Endless Power. As Simon, in his role as the “father of all heretics,” was said to have claimed for himself the same role as Christ, that is, the role of the incarnated Divine Power, it is clear why the three-form appearance, the trademark of the Aion as a manifestation of the Supreme Being in the created, moving world, came to be associated with his figure. “This seems to reveal an awareness of the fact that this view is not limited to Christianity. Such a transformation should be considered as the expression of an extraordinary power and an adaptation to the different levels of spiritual capacity in the spectators”¹¹²⁹ in Late Antiquity.

Photius, ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople, also attributes the description of divine trimorphy to the Gnostics in his *Bibliotheca*, which is treated by Photius as merely another example of those “old wife’s tales” (*anicularum fabulae*)¹¹³⁰ that Church Fathers had always claimed heretics liked to tell so much. Photius attributes the apocryphal work, *Travels of the Apostles* (τῶν ἀποστόλων περίοδοι), including the Acts of Peter, John, Andrew, Thomas and Paul, to a certain Leucius Charinus, whom he accuses of having Gnostic or at least dualistic sentiments. (“He says, in fact,

¹¹²⁷ According to Simon, therefore, this blessed and incorruptible being resides in everything – it is hidden, it is there in power, but not in act. It is He who stands, has stood, and will stand. He that stands above in the unbegotten Power; he, who has stood below, having been begotten through the image (which is reflected) in the streams of the waters; he, who will stand above by the blessed infinite Power, when one will be just like the other, Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* VI.1.17 (Siouville, *Réputation* vol. 2, 25-26.). See also VI.1.9; VI.1.13; VI.1.19.

¹¹²⁸ Ibid. X.2 “Simon”; VI.1.18; VI.1.19

¹¹²⁹ Gilles Quispel, “The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John,” in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, NHS 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 5.

¹¹³⁰ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.8.1.

that there exists a God, that of the Jews, who is malicious... and another one, Christ, whom he declares good.”)¹¹³¹ One of the accusations he levels against the work is the doctrine of docetism, which is attested by the polymorphic appearance of God:

It pretends that Christ was not incarnated in reality, he only appeared to have done so, and he showed himself under different aspects at different times to his disciples: young man (νέον), old man (πρεσβύτερον), infant (παιδα), then again old man and again infant, and big and small, then again very big to the point that he was touching the sky with his head.¹¹³²

THE MOTIF OF DIVINE TRIMORPHY IN MEDIEVAL TEXTS

The image of the three-form deity did not disappear with the decline of Hellenistic culture of Late Antiquity, but was transmitted both to the literary and “popular” culture of the Middle Ages, Christian and non-Christian alike. Very likely it was the above-mentioned Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles that served as the vehicle of transmission. These Apocryphal Acts, with their descriptions of the wondrous travels, adventures and miraculous deeds of the apostles were the literary inheritors of the antique novel.¹¹³³ Despite the condemnations of religious figureheads, like Photius above, they were enjoyed far and wide by all layers of society, but especially by the less-educated classes, whose moral education and amusement they simultaneously aimed at. They were both read aloud and passed on orally. These acts, that one may also consider

¹¹³¹ Photius, *Bibliotheca* cod. 114, tr. and ed. René Henry (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), vol. 2, 85

¹¹³² Ibid.

¹¹³³ E.g., R. I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight, The Literary Genre of the Acts of Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); T. Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); J. N. Bremmer, “The Novel and the Apocryphal Acts: Place, Time and Readership,” in *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*, vol. 9, ed. H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 157-180.

adventurous biographies, eventually gave birth to another genre, hagiography, that is, the miraculous accounts of the lives of saints. This latter fact explains why we may find, for example, an almost verbatim copy of the incident of the blind widows contained in the *Apocryphal Acts of Peter* in the *Life of Saint Abercius*, composed by a tenth-century Byzantine writer. Here it is Abercius, instead of Peter, who is visited by three old widows, who ask him to give them back their sight, for they also believe in Jesus. Abercius tells them “If your faith in the true God is true, as you say, you shall see him with the eyes of your heart. Then he prayed to Christ to give back their sight, both physical and intellectual, to the widows. Then “a great light from above spread over that place where they were standing... nor was it light like that of the sun or of lightning, but something not seen before, unusual and amazing.” All those in the room fell down, and the widows regained their sight. Abercius then asked them, what it was that they first saw. “One of them answered ‘I saw an old man, whose form was so beautiful it cannot be expressed by words.’ The other said ‘I saw a young man.’ And the third said ‘a boy touched my eyes.’”¹¹³⁴

It is obvious that the episode here was absorbed almost entirely from the apocryphal model, including not only the situation itself, but even such details as the reference to the inner eyes, the description of miraculous light filling the room, down to the form of old man, young man and boy seen by the various widows. The only novelty is in ascribing the story to a rather obscure second-century saint, rather than to Peter Apostle. However, we can meet with more creative and innovative use of the trimorphic motif in other literary works, which testify to the popularity of this motif.

¹¹³⁴ Vita Abercii XI. PG 115 (Paris: Migne, 1899) 1226. B-C ‘Ο δέ, Εἰ ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν πρὸς τὸν ἀληθῆ θῶν ἀληθὴς ἐστίν, ὥς φατε, τοῖς νοητοῖς αὐτὸν τῆς καρδίας ὀψεσθι ὀφθαλμοῖς...καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸν τόπον ἐνθα δὴ καὶ εἰσῆλθεσαν, φῶς ἄνωθεν περιήστραπτε μέγα... τὸ δὲ φῶς οὐχ ὅτιον ἐξ ἡλίου καὶ ἀστραπῆς ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ καινὸν ἄλλως καὶ φρικτὸν καὶ ἀσύνθετος... Τί ἄρα τὸ φανέν ὑμῖν, ἤρετο, καὶ τί πρῶτον διαβλέψασαι ἐδετε; Ἡ μὲν οὖν, Πρεσβύτην, ἔφη, τὸ εἶδος, ἄρρητον τὴν ὥραν, φαιδρόν· ἡ δὲ, Νεανίσκος ὡφτη μοι· ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα, Παιδάριον κομιδῇ, φησὶν, ἥφατό μου τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν.

The Abgar Legend

The motif makes a fascinating appearance in the Abgar legend.¹¹³⁵ This famous legend tells of the arrival of Christianity to Edessa (today Urfa in south-east Turkey) and the conversion of its king, Abgar. Our earliest source, the fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History* (I.13) of Eusebius of Caesarea, recounts how the king of Edessa, king Abgar, sent an envoy to Christ, stating his willingness to accept his teachings and inviting him. In response, Christ sent the king a letter, blessing him and the city. The slightly later Syriac *Doctrine of Addai*, which probably goes back to the same common source as Eusebius' account, talks about a verbal message sent by Jesus (proving the importance of orality in early Syriac Christian culture), but adds that Jesus also sent a portrait of himself. This image, known to later generations as the "Image of Edessa,"¹¹³⁶ was to become an important part of the legend and to play a crucial role in the development of image veneration in the early Church. While in the *Doctrine of Addai* it is painted by one of the envoys of King Abgar, the painter Hannan, in later tradition it emerged as one of the "non-hand-made" or ἀχειροποίητοι icons. Evagrius, writing around 600, talks of the portrait as of miraculous origin (θεότευκτος). More than a century later, John of Damascus gives the full story of its origin. According to him, "when Augarus was king over the city of the Edessenenes, he sent a portrait painter to paint a likeness of the Lord, and when the painter could not paint because of the brightness that shone from His countenance, the Lord Himself put a garment over His own divine and life-giving face and impressed on it an image of Himself and sent this to Augarus, to satisfy thus his desire."¹¹³⁷

¹¹³⁵ On the Abgar Legend see H. J. W. Drijvers, "Abgar Legend," in *New Testament Apocrypha* vol. 1, 492-99.

¹¹³⁶ See S. Runciman, "Some Remarks of the Image of Edessa," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 3.3 (1931): 238-53; E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images before the Age of Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oak Papers* 8 (1954): 83-150.

¹¹³⁷ John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV. 16, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ser. 2, vol. 9,

The story of the *Mandylion* or miraculously created portrait of Christ soon came to enjoy a great popularity and was mentioned in a number of theological works. It is agreed by researchers that the legend, which originally served to support the veneration of images in a Christian Church that was suspicious of such practices, became of even greater importance during the Iconoclast period when it asserted that the prototype of icons was created by Jesus himself. Certainly, both the letter and the image were accredited with attaining feats of miraculous cures and repelling enemy attacks against the Edessa, and their legend enjoyed a wide circulation in medieval Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Slavonic, Persian, Coptic and Armenian languages.

What concerns us here is the curious version conserved by two Armenian writers concerning the incident that took place when the painter attempted to put Jesus' countenance to canvas. One is Grigor Anavazetsi, Catholicos of Cilician Armenia (1293-1307), whose work on the Abgar Legend, *The Feast of the Assumption of the All-blessed Mother of God, and in the Same Day [that of the] Holy and Noble Portrait of Christ, Our God, which [was sent] to Abgar* can be regarded as a pure apology of images, in support of image veneration in the Armenian Church. His account preserved a number of curious details not paralleled anywhere else in the extant Abgar literature.¹¹³⁸

The text begins with Abgar sending his messenger, "Anane, his trusted person, and together with him Hovhannes, the painter and goldsmith" to Jesus with a letter, asking him to visit Edessa. In case he would refuse, they are to bring Christ's portrait to Abgar. The story continues in the same vein as all the other Armenian accounts, with the messengers' arrival in Jerusalem on the day of

ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1955.) <http://www.balamand.edu.lb/theology/WritingsSJD.htm#Writings>. (Last accessed 04 April 2008). See also Runciman, "Image of Edessa," 240 and 246.

¹¹³⁸ Irma Karaulashvili, "Armenian Versions of the Abgar Legend," (MA Thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 1996), 49-50. I would like to thank Irma Karaulashvili for drawing my attention to the existence of this version.

Christ's entrance, their presentation to Christ, meeting him in the house of the Jewish high priest, and the answer of Christ, written by Thomas Apostle. The attempt of the painter to represent the likeness of Jesus contains novel elements:

When the painter saw that Christ did not promise to go with them, he started to paint His face, in order to bring to Abgar according to the command, [the portrait] of the young man, as the Saviour was. And [the painter] looked up to Him again, and saw a powerful aged man. And he threw away the first sketch and started to paint with fear the portrait of the old man. And he looked up again and saw a beautiful youth. Then he realized that he was unable to imprint the likeness of His face.

Christ then wiped his face on a towel, and his image appeared on it immediately, "*without any dye of human art.*"¹¹³⁹ This Holy Towel later performed many miracles.

The account of the famous fifteenth-century religious poet, Gregor Khaletsi, seems to preserve a similar tradition in his *The Feast of the Ascension of the Mother of God and the Memory of the Image, which is on the Towel*. Khaletsi relates that when the messengers understood that Christ

did not oblige himself to go to Abgar, the painter started to paint the face of Jesus according to the command received from Abgar to paint His face, if He would not go. When [the painter] started to represent [Jesus'] young age, as He was, and looked at Him again, he saw him to be a boy of tender age. At that time he was frightened and abandoned the painting. Jesus who knew their desire, praised their faith. He took a flax towel of fitting measure... put it onto His divine Face, and immediately the Supreme Face was imprinted on it.¹¹⁴⁰

Though this second account contains mention only of the young man Jesus, and of a boy, while it omits the old man, there

¹¹³⁹ G. Bayan, ed. and trans. *La Synaxaire Arménien de Ter Israel* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), 391, quoted by Karaulashvili, "Abgar Legend," 48.

¹¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Karaulashvili, "Abgar Legend," 51, no source is given.

can be no question that it relies on the same tradition as the account of Grigor Anavarzetsi. It is equally clear that for these authors the changing appearance of Jesus no longer carried any reference to the principle of Eternal Time, nor even to the idea of God appearing to every man in a form he was best fit to see and understand. What is stressed here is the notion that icons came into being in a miraculous way – despite the Old Testament injunction against images. The trimorphic appearance has become hardly more than a mere literary tool here, signifying that while it is impossible for humans to grasp the form of the divine, their icons are still divinely inspired.

The Three Magi of the Orient

Another branch of the development of this motif was connected with the legends surrounding the Three Magi or Wise Men from the Orient. Attention to the existence of such a story was first paid to in connection with “popular” oral tradition in Persia, transmitted to us through Marco Polo.¹¹⁴¹

Marco Polo, traveling through Persia in the second half of the thirteenth century, reports that at a distance of a three-day-journey from the town of Saba,¹¹⁴² from where the Three Magi of the Orient had sat forth to visit the new-born Jesus, there existed a town, *Kala Ataperistan*,¹¹⁴³ populated by what he called “fire-worshippers.” These people retained in their memory a version of the legend of the Three Magi, or Three Kings as they called them. Marco Polo

¹¹⁴¹ Puech, “Histoire,” 131-136.

¹¹⁴² Identified as Savah, about fifty miles southwest of Teheran, see A. V. Williams Jackson, “The Magi in Marco Polo and the Cities in Persia from Which They came to Worship the Infant Christ,” *JAOS* 26 (1905): 80.

¹¹⁴³ It is not certain where this castle was, although Jackson identifies it with Kashan, about three days travel from Savah in the province of Isfahan, on the way toward the province of Yazd. The Italian friar, Odoric of Pordenone, who traveled the same way about 1320, calls Kashan, or *Cassan*, “the city of the Three Kings,” and says the worshippers set out from there. Jackson, “The Magi,” 82.

tells that these Persian fire-worshippers remembered that once in the distant past three kings of the region set off on a journey to find and worship a prophet born just then in the country of the Jews. They took three kinds of gifts, gold, incense and myrrh to see which the child would choose. For the first symbolizes an earthly king, the second God, the third a man of medicine. When they reached the place where the child was born:

first the youngest of the kings went in to see him, and found the child similar to himself both in his age and looks... Then the second, middle-aged king entered, and just like the one before him, he saw the child as a man of his own age... Finally the oldest king entered, who was of an advanced age, and after the same had happened to him as to the other two, he retreated in wonder. When all three of them were together again, they told each other what they had seen, and were even more amazed. They agreed to enter together, all three of them, and when they did so, they could finally see Christ as he really was, that is a thirteen-day-old child. Then they worshiped him and gave him the gold, incense and myrrh. The child reached for the three presents at the same time.¹¹⁴⁴

This curious account of Marco Polo for a long time didn't draw much interest, apart from passing critical remarks to its "puerile" nature, while some editions and translations even omitted it for being alien to the Christian faith. The first to pay attention to this episode was Leonardo Olschki, who saw Zoroastrian influences in this story. Olschki associated the trimorphic appearance of Jesus, followed by his appearing the way he really was, with the ancient Iranian, or rather Zurvanite theory of Infinite Time, *Zurvan Akarana*, the four-faced god represented by the four

¹¹⁴⁴ *Marco Polo utazásai* (The travels of Marco Polo), chaps. 31-32, Hungarian tr. Endre Vajda (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 69-70. See also *The Travels of Marco Polo*, vol. 1, ch. 13, trans. Henry Yule. Online Gutenberg Project, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/10636> (last accessed 21 November 2008), p. 280.

figures, Ashôqar, who makes virile, Frashôqar, who makes excellent, and Zarôqar, who makes old, Zurvan appearing as himself.¹¹⁴⁵

It was Puech, who pointed out that (apart from such trimorphic representations of Christ in the Apocryphal Acts) we can clearly trace the story of the Three Magi and the polyphormic baby Jesus in earlier Christian works, both literary and visual. In the Armenian Gospel of Infancy, ch. XI, 17-21 Jesus appears to the Three Magi under three different forms. To Balthasar as the "son of an earthly king," to Gaspar as a child in the manger, and to Melkon as "Christ sitting on a throne, God become flesh."¹¹⁴⁶ We also possess some pictorial representations of the scene. The fresco of a Cappadocian Church, *Eğri Taş Kilisesi* (Church with the Crooked Stone, Ihlara Valley) dated between the seventh and the ninth century, probably represents the Three Magi seeing Christ in three different forms.¹¹⁴⁷ We have a more evident example in an eleventh-century Gospel manuscript (Paris, Bibl. Nat., ms. Gr. 74, fol. 167), where above the successive words *παλαιὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν* (the well known Old Man or Ancient of Days, of Daniel 7.9), *Χριστὸς Ἑμμανουήλ* we can see three medallions. The one in the centre shows Jesus as an old man, the medallion on the left as a grown up, and the one on the right as a youth.¹¹⁴⁸

The most interesting example yet is furnished by another eleventh-century manuscript (MS n° 14, fol. 106 from the Library of the Patriarch of Jerusalem). A miniature at the bottom of fol. 106 shows the Three Magi, representing the three ages, in the presence of the Virgin, "le plus proche se courbant sur Jésus figuré sous la forme d'un enfant nimbé, les deux autres debout et portant chacun dans ses bras un petit personnage dont le tête est de même,

¹¹⁴⁵ Leonardo Olschki, "The Wise Men of the East in Oriental Traditions," *Semitic and Oriental Studies, University of California Publications in Semitic Philology* 11 (1951): 375-395. Quoted in Puech, "Histoire," 132-33. Olschki may have been right, in as much as Aion, with whom the trimorphic appearance was associated, may ultimately have gone back to the theology of the Iranian Zurvan, as noted above.

¹¹⁴⁶ Puech, "Histoire," 134.

¹¹⁴⁷ Puech, "Histoire," 134.

¹¹⁴⁸ Puech, "Histoire de l'Ancienne Église et Patristique," *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, cinquième section* (1967/68): 160.

ceinte d'un nimbe, et le menton orné d'une barbe (noire, en un cas, blanche, dans l'autre), autrement dit: Le Christ vu et saisi sous l'apparence, ici d'un vieillard et là d'un adulte."¹¹⁴⁹ The accompanying Greek text explains that the Three Magi, after having adored him as was his due, returned to their lodgings and there they discussed the way the infant appeared to each of them. One said, "I saw him as a small child (νήπιον)," the second said, "I saw him as a rather young man of thirty years" (νεώτερον τριακονταετή) and the third saw him as a white-haired old man (γέροντα πεπαλαιωμένον).¹¹⁵⁰ This eleventh-century manuscript in its turn is based on an earlier homily on the Nativity, delivered in 744 AD and attributed by the manuscript tradition to a certain John of Euboea, or else to John of Damascus.¹¹⁵¹

The authors of the Christian manuscripts, especially if their source was indeed John of Damascus, may have employed the motif of divine trimorphie with its multilayered philosophical resonance in mind. The Armenian Infancy Gospel and the Cappadocian church paintings are much more likely to derive from "popular" culture, where the three-form appearance was probably no more than just another miracle performed by the new-born Christ. As for the story of the Three Wise Kings, as collected by Marco Polo somewhere in Persia, among people he termed fire-worshippers, it is a very clear indication that - just as may have happened to many other motifs of philosophical origin - divine trimorphie became incorporated into the oral tradition of non-literary classes even far away.

Thus, the story of the Three Magi and the baby Jesus is of special importance from our point of view, for two reasons. First, it is here that we can pinpoint the appearance of the trimorphic motif in "popular" culture, both in paintings and oral tradition.¹¹⁵² Sec-

¹¹⁴⁹ Puech, "Histoire," 135.

¹¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid., 136.

¹¹⁵² This is not to say that the motif of Jesus' trimorphic appearance, fashioned after the examples cited earlier, may not have been part of "popular" culture in the Middle Ages, especially considering the impact the apocryphal works had. However, as it is usually only the writings of

ond, we have every reason to assume that it was this legend that served as the final (presently traceable) source of the Yezidi myth on the birth of the Prophet Ismail. The three merchants or travelers, who come, one by one, to see a new-born prophet, who shows himself in different form (and age) to each of them, is clearly an echo of the Three Magi come to worship the new-born Jesus. As the story is present not only in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Armenia, but reached lands as far as the distant province of Isfahan in Persia, there is no reason to doubt that on its way eastward it may have traversed Northern Mesopotamia bordered by the mountainous region of Kurdistan. Furthermore, just as in Persia, if we are to trust Marco Polo, it was incorporated into the legends of the “fire-worshippers;” so in Muslim lands it may have been taken up by the Muslim population, and become “Islamicized.” For it is clear that the story must have reached the Yezidis through an Islamic or at least superficially Islamicized channel, since the baby Jesus’ place is taken by the baby prophet Ismail. As Yezidis have mostly had good relations with their Christian neighbours, another religious minority, and had no adverse feelings towards Christianity,¹¹⁵³ they probably would not have had any incentive to change the figure of Christ into that of Ismail, had the legend reached them directly through Christians.

We have followed the motif of a divine power appearing successively or simultaneously as a child, youth and old man full circle, from its Hellenistic beginnings through its late antique and medieval career to medieval and modern Nusayrî religious literature, and contemporary Yezidi oral tradition. The story of divine trimorphy

the most educated classes that have reached us, such evidence is hard to come by.

¹¹⁵³ Christ is even mentioned in the sacred *qewl* or hymn performed on the occasion of the *Sema Evarî* (“Evening Dance”), the ritual dance performed by the religious leaders of the community after nightfall, a fact to which Yezidis (laymen) have repeatedly and proudly drawn my attention.

serves to demonstrate how late antique motifs, possibly originating in the syncretistic milieu of Hellenistic philosophy, and once widely employed but long since forgotten in Christian literature, can to this day be traced in the mythology of heterodox, and isolated, religious communities, where it is still part of a living tradition.

The ways the motif of the divine appearing in the three different aspects of the human life-cycle “survived” and became incorporated into new traditions are varied, depending on the nature of the respective religion. Ali appearing as child, young man and old man in Nusayrî literature is probably a case of “literary inheritance” by a non-Christian group (albeit one that was clearly very much influenced by heterodox Christianity). Nusayrîs, who possess a rich religious literary tradition, preserve a version that clearly reflects the philosophical speculations connected with the trimorphic appearance, where - as the Acts of Peter say - everybody sees the divinity according to his own capacity. In the Nusayrî myth the ignorant are unable to see behind the material disguise of Ali, appearing as child, young man, old man, while the true gnostics, or enlightened ones, understand his divine nature, no matter what his apparent form. The philosophical aspect of the myth is so pronounced, that it seems likely that the source of the Nusayrî myth was a written text of a theological or philosophical nature.

The case of the new-born Ismael in Yezidi mythology represents the very other end of the scale – the popularization of a philosophical-theological motif in oral religious culture. Such a popularization was not rare, and this is not the only motif of philosophical origin that has found its way into “popular” culture, nor the only curious Yezidi motif that originates in late antique religious tradition. What makes this case special is the possibility of being able to trace the development and history of the motif at least in broad details.

11 CONCLUSION

In the five previous chapters I have shown that these “quaint” Yezidi myths and religious motifs, which were either seen as non-sensical vagaries (the creation and fall of Adam; the creation of Shehid, forefather of the Yezidi race; the three-fold manifestation of the deity in Ismail’s story), or simply failed to arouse interest because they seemed too vague and confused (the *kebirge* imagery; the Call of Awakening) can be traced back to the religious language of Late Antiquity. Placed in context, these elements no longer seem senseless or vague and confusing, but make up a coherent, valid system, making it obvious that Yezidi religion, just like any other, has its own inner logic which controls the content and its expression.

It has also become clear that it would be difficult to pinpoint a single source for these late antique motifs. Some elements, such as the divine origin of the human (Adam’s) soul, the tasting of the forbidden fruit as a part of a positive divine plan, the connection between the forbidden fruit and the digestive functions of Adam’s body, and Shehid’s creation from the lost divine *sur* of Adam as the father of a chosen people, display very strong resemblances to crucial mythological concepts in Gnosticism and Manichaeism. The various ideas concerning the “black *kebirge* of light” as the garment of God, of His angels, of Adam before the Fall, and finally of those who are redeemed or reach enlightenment may equally have been rooted in Jewish, Christian, Gnostic or Manichaean “garment imagery,” reflecting the fact that these movements shared a common cultural background and often used the same language to express ultimately different ideas. The same could be said of the trimorphic appearance of the deity, a motif which appears both in Gnostic and Christian works. The Call of Awakening is generally understood as the Gnostic Call, and is widely utilized in dualistic works, though it

can occasionally be found in Christian and even Hermetic literature.

How these legends were transmitted from the people of Late Antiquity to the Yezidis, who did not appear on the historical scene before the twelfth or thirteenth centuries would be hard to answer given the present level of knowledge of the religious history of the region. It is widely accepted that there existed countless connections between Jewish, Syriac Christian, Gnostic and Manichaeans legends and religious motifs, while we know very little of the way these elements were transmitted. Similarly, one can see the connection between Late Antiquity and the Yezidi belief system of today, but is at a loss when it comes to the chain of transmission. It is quite possible that already in Late Antiquity (and earlier) such legends were transmitted not only by books, but orally as well. These elements, though today not very familiar to a Western-educated audience, once must have formed part of "popular" mythical and religious lore deriving from the literary culture of Late Antiquity. The key may lie not with the Yezidis, but with the various, often orally transmitted, traditions of the Middle East in general.

The presence of similar elements among other people of the region indicates, as I contend at the beginning of this work, that such legends are not the exclusive inheritance of the Yezidi people, but are part of a common cultural substratum of the wider region (or at least were a part of it during the formative period of Yezidism.) The popularity of some of these elements well into the Middle Ages is shown by written documents. Other elements, while perhaps not documented in writing, can be found in the oral lore of other groups living in the Middle East today, thus indicating that they must have once enjoyed a wider currency.

- The idea that the digestive function of human stomach and intestines was a result of eating the forbidden fruit (thus, Adam had to leave Paradise in order not to dirty it) can be found not only among the Yezidis, but also among Muslims in the region. Examples have been given from Iraqi Kurdistan, Diyarbakir and Mardin in Turkey.
- Teaching that Adam, the first man, received his soul from a divine angel (an emanation of the Godhead) when this angel, or his divine essence, entered Adam's lifeless body, can also be found among the Ahl-i Haqq.
- Muslim authors like Abd al-Jabbâr and al-Biruni, as well as

Nusayrî religious tracts attest to the continuing popularity of the figure of Seth in the Middle Ages. An *Ahl-i Haqq* myth tells how Sheyth (whom they identify with the Biblical-Quranic Seth), forefather of prophets and leaders, was created from the seminal fluid of Adam collected in a jar.

- The Call of Awakening, or Call of Life as the Mandaeans refer to it, with its condemnation of sleep as sinful, and its call for a spiritual awakening and promise of heavenly reward, is still an important literary motif in contemporary Mandaean religion.
- The three-fold or trimorphic appearance of a divine figure is well documented throughout the Middle Ages. It can be found in the hagiography of Abercius, in medieval Greek and Armenian manuscripts, in some Armenian versions of the Abgar legend, and finally even in Persian oral lore in the time of Marco Polo. It can also be found in the mythology of the Nusayrîs.
- The garment of Light, which was probably the archetype for the Yezidi *khirqe*, can be found both in Nusayrî and Mandaean religious literature. For Mandeans it is both a baptismal and eschatological garment put on when the soul returns to the spiritual realm, while for Nusayrîs it is the garment the soul wore before its fall, and will put on again upon its ascension back to the light world. The garment of Light also played an important part in Syriac “garment theology,” and it often appeared in the literary works of ecclesiastic authors of long lasting influence such as Ephrem and others. Thus, it may be safely assumed that Syriac-speaking Christianity was familiar with at least some of this garment imagery even when the days of a vibrant cultural life were long gone and, where the garment of Light is concerned, it may have played a significant role in the transmission of ideas.¹¹⁵⁴

¹¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately, I have no idea how well known the different motifs of the garment theology were to medieval and modern Nestorians, Jacobites and Catholic Chaldaeans of Kurdistan. The sad fact is that while scholarly works on late antique and early medieval Syriac literature abound, contemporary Syriac-speaking Christianity (or that of the past few centuries) does not seem to attract the attention of Syriac scholars.

If we consider how very little is known about the mythology of most heterodox groups, and about the “popular” legends and beliefs of Christians and Muslims in the region, it must be concluded that even these few examples of shared late antique motifs (not taken directly from the Bible or the Quran) are very significant. They allow us to speculate on a common cultural substratum which retained many oral elements that have disappeared from written religious culture. It is not unreasonable to conclude that were the volume of knowledge on these groups less meager, it would be possible to pinpoint many more motifs of late antique origin, linking these groups together as the inheritors of an earlier oral tradition which was greatly influenced by the religious literature of Late Antiquity.

While I was working on this study, many have asked why these elements in particular came to be incorporated into Yezidi religion. The question of “why” can never really be answered. However the formulation of some careful hypotheses may be attempted. Certainly, there must have been a number of different motivations at play:

Some motifs, like Adam’s transgression of God’s will which serves to fulfill a divine plan, simply fits into the religious ethos of the Yezidis, one that does not accept the existence of an evil being (devil, Satan), but sees everything as originating from one principle, God. The “original” interpretation of this event would not have been easily compatible with the extremely strong monotheistic views of the Yezidis, which denies the existence of an evil power acting in opposition to God. The Gnostic version may simply have just made more sense to the Yezidis (or proto-Yezidis) than the orthodox Muslim one.

Some nineteenth-century travelers mention that they found the Nestorians rather uneducated, while the Chaldaean clergy displayed a better knowledge of the Syriac (Aramaic) language and literature. However, this is of little help. As researching these Aramaic-speaking communities, their religious language and religion in general is not the field of the author of this thesis, the unfortunate lack of such academic works makes it impossible to ascertain how common the use of images taken from a garment theology, once so popular in the region, is in contemporary Christian communities of the Kurdish region.

In the case of other motifs it is probably not Yezidi religion itself one has to keep in mind, rather the religious ideas professed by the population of the region in general. Thus, the popularity of Seth helps explain why and how this myth was incorporated into Yezidi mythology. The adoption of the myth of Seth, probably widely known in different variants throughout the region, as a Yezidi origin myth, can be said to have several important purposes, though of course these cannot easily be detached from each other. First, we have the origin myth per se, explaining the origins of the Yezidis, and attributing them a separate origin from the rest of mankind, which makes them the “chosen people” of God (or rather of the Peacock Angel). This would satisfy the internal needs of the group to feel “different,” “special.”¹¹⁵⁵ Second, such an origin myth would also serve to explain and reinforce the practice of endogamy, an essential feature of Yezidi religion (which itself is a protective measure against assimilation, at least today).¹¹⁵⁶

Finally, from the external point of view, we may assume – at least at the time of the myth’s adoption by the group – that this myth was meant to ensure group prestige through association with this important figure in the eyes of the environment. Descent plays, and has always played, an important role in the Middle East, defining personal status and standing in the community.¹¹⁵⁷ Let us think of the Sufi *silsilas*, the chain of tradition, where the validity of the whole path and its teachings depended on the – often semi-mythical – founding figure, or the more recent examples of Christians claiming to be Assyrians, or Kurds insisting on their direct descent from the Medes. It is in such an environment that the importance of this myth has to be evaluated. It may be assumed that when it came to be adopted by the ancestors of the Yezidis, the

¹¹⁵⁵ As Jasim Murad, himself a Yezidi, writes of this myth, “This unique birth gives the Yazidis the feeling of self assurance and contentment that they receive the utmost attention of the divine forces.” “Sacred Poems,” 307.

¹¹⁵⁶ Of course, given the lack of evidence, it is impossible to tell when Yezidis started to practice endogamy. Presumably this practice could not have arisen before the rupture with Islam became clear and widely felt.

¹¹⁵⁷ Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, 36, 41.

myth of Seth and his race was still, more or less, known in some form(s) to many people in the region. Thus, claiming descent from Seth, or rather a later avatar of his legend, was a bid at prestigious origins that could be easily interpreted by the other groups as well.

The need to acquire prestige, not directly, but in the sense that it provided Yezidis (or proto-Yezidis) with today's equivalent of "modern scientific religion" may account for the incorporation of many of the other elements. It was seen in the chapter concerning the changes in oral tradition that Yezidis today try to adapt their religion and religious language to what they see as the demands of the modern world, lest they be looked down upon as a backward religion of simple, rural people. This leads not only to efforts to form a canon of sacred texts and forge a coherent theology, but also to the adoption of motifs taken from contemporary natural and social sciences (that is, history writing). Thus, Yezidis with some school education will insist that the sacred texts contain references to the ice age, atoms, heliocentric world view, black hole and so on. At the same time, Assyrians, Sumerians, Zoroastrians, etc., that is, nations who "made history" are being incorporated into the retelling of Yezidi myth ("oral historiography"), not only in order to gain direct prestige, but also so that they find the place of Yezidis in history as presented by "mainstream" history writing.

Sometimes the simple motivation of "doing as the other does" may be enough. I have just recently heard of a *qemmal* singing Quranic songs at the one year commemoration of a death by the grave of the deceased.¹¹⁵⁸ Despite the strong aversion of Yezidis to Muslims and Islam, he felt tempted to learn and repeat the words of the other (more popular, literate and powerful) religion.

This striving to "measure up to contemporary standards" and to incorporate anything that may seem of value among neighboring communities makes it easier to understand why Yezidis adopted some other motifs which do not seem to carry such important messages as Adam's Fall, or Shehid's miraculous creation. As has been seen these motifs were deeply imbedded within the religious

¹¹⁵⁸ After a three day *tazî* or mourning period, Yezidis will hold another *tazî* after forty days and one year. This custom is also known among Muslims.

culture, trickling down from literary culture into oral circles. *Mutatis mutandis*, they belonged to the “scientific language” or at least the “educated language” of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, which people tried to emulate, or at least build into their own system.

This study does not pretend to be the last word on late antique motifs, Gnostic or otherwise, in Yezidism. Rather it hopes to be the first of its kind, opening the way to further research. Clearly, there is a lot more to be done in this field, especially as regards the possible influence of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. During the course of my research, a number of motifs I suspected as being of possible late antique origin had to be put aside due to a lack of sufficient corroborating data.¹¹⁵⁹ As scholarly research (one hopes) gathers more information on the various religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East and their oral traditions, new details may appear that would make finding further connections and refining the ones treated by this work possible.

¹¹⁵⁹ The most intriguing of such motifs, which was not analyzed in this study, is the repeated incarnation of the *sur* in the persons of the Yezidi *kbas*. The cyclical incarnation of divine beings (from the World of Light) as prophets, or rather as “emissaries of light” was an important concept both to the Gnostics and the Manichaeans. This idea of the successive manifestation of the deity in human form is also present among the Ahl-i Haqq, the Nusayrîs, the Alevis, as well as in medieval Ismaili theology, where researchers often suggest a strong Gnostic influence. It would indeed be tempting to call this a Gnostic/Manichaean motif, however, it cannot be ruled out that it may have been an independent development. Unlike concrete myths and literary motifs, such a “theological” concept could have arisen autonomously, leading to religious features that resemble Gnostic ideas. The fact that the idea of the “manifestation of divine essence” is widespread among religious movements with an Iranian background implies that this may be an autochthonous feature, which drew its inspiration, at least partially, from old Iranian beliefs. Equally, the two different traditions may have merged and reinforced each other in producing new religious forms. Certainly, this is a topic which would need a lot more research than has so far been allocated to it.

EPILOGUE: LATE ANTIQUE MOTIFS AND MODERN YEZIDISM

The fast-paced changes taking place in Yezidi religious tradition under the influence of a new-found literacy and growing contacts with the outside world have not failed to affect the position of late antique motifs. Just as once they were adopted because they served some purpose, so today they are being discarded or rewritten and reinterpreted for having become spurious or even embarrassing. The way they are treated by a new generation of Yezidis speaks volumes about Yezidi religion and the way it is changing.

Myths of a presumably Gnostic/Manichaean origin are a primary target of the “modernizers,” destined to be weeded out. The religious views reflected in such myths are incompatible with the teachings of the majority religions, be it Islam or Christianity, as well as with what is perceived as “modern” thinking.

Such is the fate of the myth on the origin of Adam’s soul, which relates how Angel Sheikh Sin (or his *sur*) was enclosed in the lifeless body of Adam. As has been mentioned, this myth is amazingly evocative of the Gnostic teaching which claims that the human soul is a particle of the Divine Light imprisoned in the body, but it is hardly compatible with either Christian or Islamic teachings. It is hardly surprising therefore that many Yezidis display an ambivalent attitude toward this myth. Arab Khidir, for example, roundly denied this version or even being familiar with it. He quoted the “story of Adam’s soul” as known from the hymns,¹¹⁶⁰ how it refused to enter Adam’s body until the sacred musical instruments, the *def* and *shibab* came down from the sky to accom-

¹¹⁶⁰ He shared the view that only material in the *qewls* or hymns can be considered genuine Yezidi teaching.

pany him, and claimed that the human soul, created by God, was clearly different from the souls of the angels (which are divine) “The soul came into the body. The soul is from the power of God, [but] it is not an angel, it is not *sur*. It is human.” It is feasible, of course, that the version of the *sur* giving life to Adam, related only in the myth, but not in the hymns, was unknown to him, but later - talking of another topic - he referred to the *sur* of Adam in passing.

Sheikh Deshti also declared that Adam was a human, and the father of humans, and his soul was a human soul. Human souls and angelic souls are different. Later on, however, when he recounted the myth of Shehid bin Jer, he said, “Adam had *sur* in his forehead, like some divine power, I mean after the fashion of angels, I mean, he wasn’t a human,”¹¹⁶¹ though he did not elaborate how the angelic *sur* got there.

The myth of Shehid bin Jer as the forefather of the Yezidis, created in a supernatural way, proved even more sensitive. This myth presumably posed some difficulties even before the advent of modern education. While the variant of seed of Adam was simple enough to be understood by people, the variant of the *sur*, the divine essence, must have caused plenty of bewilderment among those less well versed in Yezidi religious lore (the majority, that is) as the concept of *sur* would not have been easy to grasp without some familiarity with religious symbolism.

No wonder that in a number of versions the elusive *sur* is replaced by other “props.” One of Jasim Murad’s informants spoke about a pearl in Adam’s forehead, without explaining what it was.¹¹⁶² Two other informants claimed it was the sweat from the forehead of Adam and Eve which was put in jar.¹¹⁶³ Empson¹¹⁶⁴ also mentions jars filled by Angel Gabriel with blood from the forehead of Adam and Eve.

Today, it is no longer the concept of the *sur* that creates confusion in the minds, but rather the concept that Yezidis have an “unnatural” descent, different from the rest of mankind. When I

¹¹⁶¹ See “Transcript of Interviews” in the Appendix.

¹¹⁶² Jasim Murad, “Sacred Poems,” 290.

¹¹⁶³ Ibid., 294, 296.

¹¹⁶⁴ Empson, *Cult of the Peacock Angel*, 47.

wanted to hear the myth of Shehid bin Jer, many informants hastened to assure me that they believed that all mankind had the same origin, that is, they all came from Adam and Eve,¹¹⁶⁵ and though – at my insistence – they finally repeated the Yezidi myth, they stressed that this was just “some old-fashioned tale” and “now we know better.” Arab Khidir was even more adamant in denying the validity of this myth. When asked, he claimed that Shehid was no other than Adam, who was made from water, earth, air and fire according to Yezidi mythology. As Arab Khidir said, water and earth yield clay, which then is put out to dry in the air, and is finally fired. The result is a jar. Thus the epithet, “Witness of the Jar” simply referred to Adam being created from the same four elements as a jar. However, during a later session my informant referred to the unique origin of the Yezidis in passing: “Adam had *sur* in his forehead, this reached Shit [i.e. Shehid], this light reached his (Shehid’s) children.” And then he added “Shehid married a *hour*i, the Yezidi nation was born from them.” Clearly then, Arab Khidir was familiar with the myth of the *sur* functioning as the soul of Adam, and of Shehid bin Jer and ultimately the Yezidi nation being created from this *sur*. However, he did not seem to think that such a myth fit into the framework of religion that was based on scientific facts as he tended, or wished to see, in Yezidism. His explanation of the jar was probably nothing more than a piece of modern exegesis which tried to resolve this “embarrassing” myth in a “rational” manner.

As I have said, one of the motivations for incorporating the myth of Seth, born of another seed and the forefather of a special race, was to give Yezidis a prestigious origin, one that could be understood and appreciated by the people of a given cultural milieu. This is no longer the case. For many Yezidis today, any myth about children springing out of jars, born either of Adam’s seed or some divine essence, far from conferring prestige, is more likely to be a source of embarrassment, a “childish tale” as has been put forward by some researchers. They feel such stories make Yezidis seem to be professing outlandish, unscientific ideas.

¹¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, I have never so far heard the myth of Shehid’s creation repudiated in favor of Darwinism, though this may simply be a question of time.

However, Yezidi religion is still essentially an oral one, governed by the same mechanism (for the moment) as in the past. The content may change, but the motivations are often similar. Yezidis still wish for origins that would confer prestige on them as a group. Consequently, the place of the myth of Shehid, or Seth, if one prefers, is “usurped” by new “origin myths” more in keeping with the spirit of the times. Today, when asked about their origins, few of the younger Yezidis would mention Shehid (unless specifically asked). Instead they refer to Zoroastrian, Sumerian or Assyrian origins. To support such theories, stories are told about Assyrian pictograms hidden under the plaster on the walls of Lalish, or about the Assyrian rock carvings in the hillside above Duhok representing the seven Angels. Others claim that the Sumerian cuneiform texts mention the word “ezid,” meaning “pure souls,” “who go on the right path,” referring to the Yezidis as the fountainhead of Sumerian religion. These stories, amusing as they may sometimes sound to an outsider, are in fact new origin myths that are meant to play the same function as the myth of Seth centuries ago: confer a prestigious origin on Yezidis using a language and symbolism that can also be interpreted and appreciated by outsiders.

Other motifs, such as the symbolism of the *kbirqe*, the Call of Awakening, or the three-fold appearance are harder to evaluate when it comes to the question of change in Yezidi tradition. Unlike the myth of Adam and Shehid, which are (or were) cardinal points of Yezidi religious consciousness, serving as a basis for communal identity and helping them orient themselves in the (sacred) past, these other motifs were of little interest for most Yezidis. The trimorphic appearance of Ismail may have been told during “sermons,” but is not too likely to have exercised people’s imagination any more than miracles in folktales. The *Song of the Commoner* is sung exclusively by men of religion and is of little concern to anybody else.¹¹⁶⁶ The *kbirqe*, as the shirt of the *feqirs* is still

¹¹⁶⁶ I am not even sure if it is actually sung every morning, or just on special occasions. Of course, ideally it should be sung every morning, and heard and heeded by the whole community, but no traveler has reported such a wake up call during his/her travels. When I heard it in Lalish I was the only one in the sleeping quarters of the princely family to get up to

much respected (as is the *ķhirqe* of Sheikh Adi kept in Lalish), but its symbolism, hidden in the disjointed stanzas of numerous hymns and the myth of Adam, is far too complicated and nuanced to be familiar to most people. Consequently they attract little attention on the part of people who would like mold Yezidism into a religion of the book, and little can be said about how the changes are affecting these elements of traditional Yezidis religion.

Of all these elements the *ķhirqe* alone seems to have found at least a small niche for itself in this emerging religion of the book. As the clothing of God mentioned in the hymns, it is said to represent the darkness of cosmos before creation. This may be seen as a part of the effort attempting to give Yezidism a modern scientific aspect and shape it according to the criteria of scientific thinking. Furthermore, for many Yezidis emphasizing the deep moral aspect of Yezidi religion¹¹⁶⁷ is almost as important as talking about the scientific side. Consequently, the *ķhirqe*, in its role as the symbol of moral living, of “walking the road of God,” may still prove to be an important motif in future Yezidi religion.

More than this cannot be said at the moment. Yezidi publications on Yezidi religion are more concerned with their putative roots and the ancient nature of their faith, topics where the *ķhirqe* does not at present figure much. (This would change of course, if the *ķhirqe* were proven to link Yezidis to some famous people in the past.) Most people who read such publications, or hear about their contents, would know (or care) little more about the *ķhirqe* other than the fact that it is worn by the *feqirs* and possibly that it was once the clothing of God.

Researchers should not be discouraged, however. The canonization of Yezidism is only just beginning. It is likely that once the

listen to it, and the attendants of the Sanctuary seemed to have serious difficulties in shaking awake people sleeping in the courtyard before the door of the Sanctuary.

¹¹⁶⁷ I recall a long conversation that I had with a young Yezidi man from the Sheikhan region. He was dressed in traditional garbs and was said to be very religious and an expert in matters of religion. His conversation focused mainly on the moral aspects of Yezidism, much to the detriment of the mythological detail.

collection and publishing of the texts is finished, and Yezidi intellectuals manage to draw up the outlines of a fixed doctrinal system, we will learn the fate of these elements, whether they will be relegated to oblivion as quaint and useless motifs, or will be filled with novel meaning and given a place within this new form of Yezidism.

PLATES



Fig. 1. Pilgrim kissing the Peacock Standard at the Autumn Assembly in Lalish.

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Fig. 2. Feqir Haji, wearing the black turban of the *feqirs*, with the *khirqe* peeping out under his coat sleeve.



Fig. 3. The Yezidi shrine of Mehmedê Jindal (lord of the jinns), with its guardian, Sheikh Deshti in front. The conical spire is a distinctive feature of Yezidi shrines in the region.

PLATES

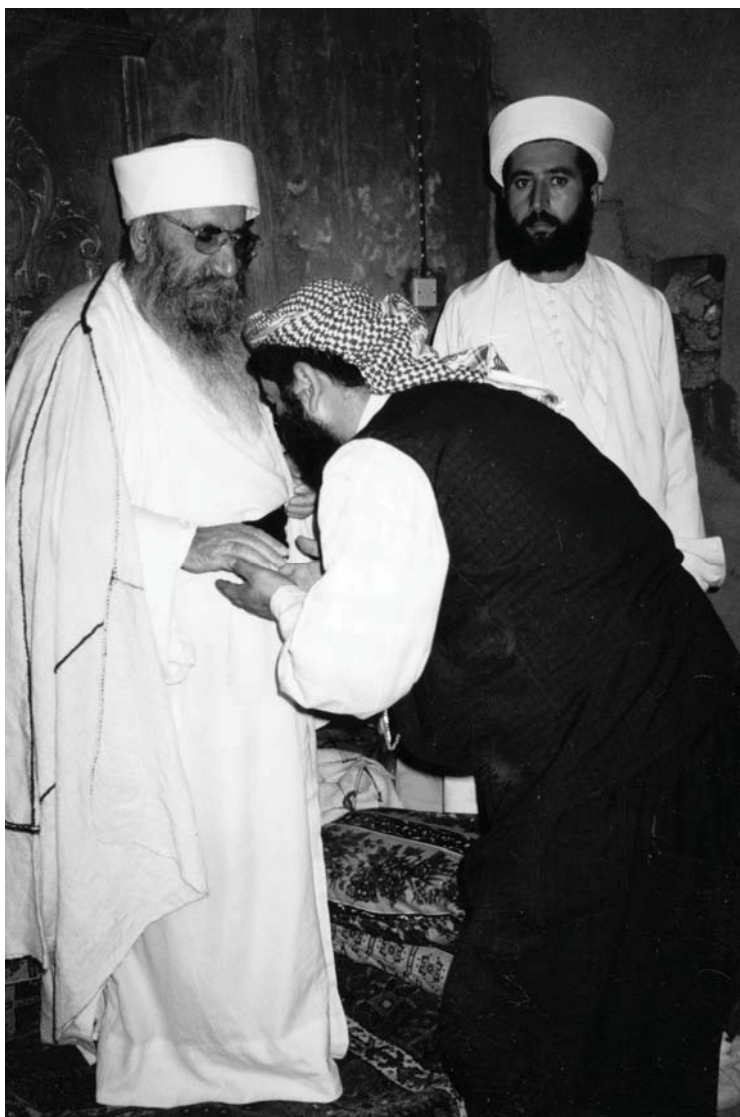


Fig. 4. The Baba Sheikh on his yearly visit to Yazidi villages.

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Fig. 5. *Qenwals*, or singers of religious hymns, resting during the Autumn Assembly in Lalish. Qewwal Suleyman, head of the caste of *qenwals* on the right.



Fig. 6. *Qenwals* performing during the “Parading of the Peacock” in the Sinjar.

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Fig. 7. The performance of the Evening Dance. The head of the *feqirs* leading the dance is said to wear the black *kebirge* and headdress of Sheikh Adi.



Fig. 8 *Qenwals* playing at a graveside on New Year's morning



Fig. 9. The door of the Central Sanctuary in Lalish, with the emblematic black snake painted next to it.

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Fig. 10. Sinjari woman.

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Fig. 11. Old women in the Sheikhan, Shariye.



Fig. 12. The ritual mourning of women on the morning of Yezidi New Year in Beshique.

APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDINGS OF THE MYTH OF ADAM AND THE MYTH OF SHEHID BIN JER¹¹⁶⁸

Below are three versions of the myth of Adam and Shehid bin Jer. Two of the three were recounted by Feqir Haji of Baadra on two different occasions,¹¹⁶⁹ while the third is from Sheikh Deshti of Khanke. Their way of telling the myth exemplifies very well the way myths are recounted in oral tradition. It is clear that each recounting is different, even though the storyline, that is the main message of the myth, remains the same, with many formulas repeated. The manner of recounting seems to presuppose a certain familiarity with the myth. Its “staccato” telling, the lack of linearity, and casual references to events and “protagonists” make it very hard to understand for an outsider listening for the first time. Another feature, peculiar to Yezidi oral tradition, is the mixture of *qewls*, or hymn, with free prose, to the extent, that I was often unable to determine which was which.¹¹⁷⁰

¹¹⁶⁸ The Appendix contains different versions of the Adam and Shehid myth which have not formerly been published in Western scholarship. These myths form the basis of the chapters on Adam’s creation and the origin myth of the Yezidis.

¹¹⁶⁹ He gave me two sort summaries of the myth subsequently, when he was talking of other matters, but as these contained no extra information, I will refrain from giving their transcript and translation here.

¹¹⁷⁰ I would like to express my thanks here to Loqman Turgut, a fellow PhD student at the Georg-August University of Göttingen, for helping me painstakingly translate some of the first interview I made with Feqir Haji in Lalish. Working together with him also helped me appreciate how difficult it is for non-Yezidi Kurds to understand the peculiar lan-

The spelling of the transcriptions posed a serious problem. Standard literary Kurdish is just emerging, and books published in the Latin alphabet show some variations even in Turkey. The dialect spoken in Iraq, Badhini, differs from the dialects spoken, or written, in Turkey. Though mutually understandable, there are some considerable differences not only in vocabulary and grammar, but even in the way the same words are pronounced. Then again, Yezidis in the Sheikhan district speak a Kurdish that is easily distinguishable from its Muslim Badhini counterpart. Some say that it is nearer to the Kurdish spoken in Turkey (many of the Yezidis presently living in Iraq retain orally transmitted memory of having migrated from Turkey in the previous centuries, due to religious persecution.) As Feqir Haji, as well as my other interviewees, spoke local dialects of Yezidi Kurdish,¹¹⁷¹ I finally decided to try and transcribe their Kurdish as I hear it, and not according to the rules and spelling taught in Kurdish grammar books. Transcription by a native speaker from the region, preferably a Yezidi, would probably yield much more faithful results, but unfortunately this was not viable.

Note: Texts in italics are quotations from sacred hymns. The translations of these, unless otherwise stated, are quoted on the basis of Kreyenbrock's translations.

guage of Yezidi sacred texts. Undoubtedly such linguistic difficulties may add to the deep social divide existing between the two communities.

¹¹⁷¹ This dialect was more pronounced in the case of Feqir Haji, who was of an advanced age. Others, who were younger, and probably enjoyed some formal education, tended to approximate the Kurdish spoken in Duhok much more, though far from completely.

Feqir Haji (Lalish, Festival of Sheikh Adi, 2002)

This interview was my first interview with Feqir Haji, one of the best experts of Yezidi oral lore. It was made at the Sheikh Adi Festival, which takes place in every October in the holy valley of Lalish. The festival lasts a whole week, with various rituals taking place during this period. As this is both the most important religious and social event of the year, when the members of widely dispersed community can meet each other,¹¹⁷² thousand of Yezidi pilgrims congregate in the tiny valley of Lalish, crowding every spot. Consequently there was a considerable background noise (people, loudspeakers) which make the recording hard to understand. To this one must add that Feqir Haji is often hard to understand due to his age, the difference in dialect, and his tendency to speak rather fast.

At the time of making this recording, as my Kurdish was still poor, I was helped by Segvan Murad, a young Yezidi who majored in English and was working on Yezidi publications at the Lalish Center in Duhok. As it later turned out, once my Kurdish improved, his translation was occasionally incorrect (he was probably confused by being familiar with a different version of the myth), which¹¹⁷³ led to misunderstandings on my part. I endeavored to clarify the confusing parts with repeated questions on the same motif, hence the occasionally repetitive nature of this interview.

In the transcription and translation of this recording I was helped by Loqman Turgut, then a PhD student at the University of Göttingen, whose help I would like to thank here. Unfortunately

¹¹⁷² This was even more so between 1992 and 2003, when an internal border existed between the Kurdish Autonomy and the rest of Iraq. Those living under Saddam's rule could not legally enter the Kurdish territories, and many of those in the Kurdish Autonomy would have taken great risks to go to Iraq. The Festival of Sheikh Adi was practically the only occasion when families and friends separated by the border could see each other.

¹¹⁷³ Namely substituting "sweat" to "*sur*" or "mystery", "divine essence" mentioned by Feqir Haji.

some parts of the interview proved unintelligible even to Loqman, but despite some resulting lacuna, most of Feqir Haji's account is clear.

Tawusî Melek xweş delîl e
Rawesta bû di Qendîl de,
Ji berê¹¹⁷⁴ Adam û çendi
bedîl e.

Ewî heyvî da Adam û Nuh,
Ibrahim Xelile.

Melek Faxradin delîlekî erife,
Û durra birca sedefe.

Min b xwe li meyzand ki
bêye ki elefe.

Melek Fexredin delîlekî çê ye.
Rêberê çendi rêye û zer
Hasan j hez(i)nê ye.¹¹⁷⁵
Hasan ji hez(i)nê¹¹⁷⁶ ye, ji
fasala durrê

Ji berî nêr û mê ye, Hasan ji
hisnê¹¹⁷⁷ peyda bû.

Tawusi Melek is a dear guide,
He was staying in the Qendîl
Before Adam he switched
places.¹¹⁷⁸

He gave hope to Adam,
Noah, and Ibrahim Khalil.¹¹⁷⁹

Angel Fahradin is a knowing
guide, the Pearl is a mother-
of-pearl fortress.

I looked around who is bet
who is aleph,

Angel Fahradin is a good
guide. The guide of so many
roads, and golden Hasan¹¹⁸⁰
is from the Treasury of
God.¹¹⁸¹ Hasan is from the
Treasury of God, from the
model of the Pearl.

He existed before male and
female, Hasan came into ex-
istence from the Goodness
of God.¹¹⁸²

¹¹⁷⁴ The Badhini English dictionary lists “*jiber*” as “be-cause of” and “*ji berî*” as “before.”

¹¹⁷⁵ Loqman Turgut understood “*hezîrê ye*” (thought).

¹¹⁷⁶ Or “*hezîrê ye*.”

¹¹⁷⁷ Loqman Turgut understood “*ji hisnê ye*”. Hisn is Arabic for goodness. The word appears in Yezidi texts, but *xeznê* or *hezînê*, for treasury (the throne) of God, which I hear, is equally possible.

¹¹⁷⁸ I couldn’t interpret this sentence.

¹¹⁷⁹ That is, Abraham.

¹¹⁸⁰ Sheikh Sin

¹¹⁸¹ Or: from the Thought of God.

¹¹⁸² From the Treasury of God. Perhaps the reference to the *Qendîl* (Lamp of God) in the next sentence makes Treasury of God more likely. *Qendîl* is considered the light and throne of God, as well as the place where the soul of the *kebas*, or incarnated angels stay and

Û nûra wî li Qandilê rawesta
bû.

Hesn muhabetê Hasan şax
(Hesenşay?) bû
Şaybûbê (Şaxbûbê?) muha-
betê¹¹⁸³

Li ezmana kire şexê sunnetê

Erd da, quwet da nebîyê
Ometê.¹¹⁸⁴

Nebîyê Ometê ki? ¹¹⁸⁵ Adam
e, ew sure ji ezmana ya Melek

And his light was staying in
the Qendil,

Hesn was the love a branch
of love from Hasan (?)
A branch of love (?)

In the sky he was made the
sheikh of Tradition.¹¹⁸⁶

He gave the earth, he gave
power to the prophet of the
Ummah.¹¹⁸⁷

Who is the prophet of the
Ummah? Adam. This *sur*, the
sur of Angel Sheikh Sin came

sometimes descend from.
Sheikh Deshti, a *mijenir* in
Khanke, actually called the
Qendîl "the treasury of souls"
(*xazîna ruhêd*) for special souls.

¹¹⁸³ The version of *Zebûnî*
Meksûr 6 transcribed by
Kreyenbroek (*Yezîdism*, 170)
writes "*şaxa mehbete*" meaning
"branch of love," which appears
as an expression of his creative
divine power.

¹¹⁸⁴ The text up to this
point gives the impression of
being quoted from a hymn,
though I couldn't find anything
similar in the published texts.
The quotation was very fast-
paced, and the words were often
hard to understand or to trans-
late. Despite our efforts the
translation given on the other
side may be incorrect in some
places

¹¹⁸⁵ This is where the ex-
planation in prose seems to
start.

¹¹⁸⁶ Sunnet, the Kurdish for
Sunnah, or Tradition. The Mus-
lim expression signifies estab-
lished custom, precedent, con-
duct and cumulative tradition,
typically based on Muhammad's
example.

¹¹⁸⁷ Islamic expression for
the community of believers. The
qenl like recitation seems to end
at this point, to be followed by
prose.

Sheikh Sin hate enîya
Adamêda.
Here, di çi dbêjit, qewlê Ze-
bûnî Meksûr dbêjit:

*Adam Peygamber ji wê kasê
vedixware
Quwet û kerameta wê kasê hate
diyare
Lew Adam pêygember pêngijî pê
dibû şiyare*¹¹⁸⁸

*Adam pêygember ji wê kasê vex-
war û vedijîya
Mestbû, bejîya,
goşt lê huriya, xwên tê gerriya*¹¹⁸⁹

*Adam pêygember ji wê kasê vex-
war, û lê xweş tê
Quwet u kerameta wê kasê hat û
gebeştê
Lewma Adam Peygamber heldidi
û bire behîştê.*¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 36, Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 176.

¹¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 35, Ibid., 176.

¹¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 37, Ibid. For these three stanzas compare also the version of *Zebûnî Meksûr* 44-5, 47 published by Kreyenbroek, God and Sheikh Adî, 63. The three versions closely resemble each other, but there are some slight

from the sky into the fore-
head of Adam. What does
the hymn of the *Zebûnî Mek-
sûr* say:

*The prophet Adam drank from
that cup,
The miraculous power of that cup
manifested itself:
Thus the Prophet Adam sneezed
and through it he became con-
scious.*¹¹⁹¹

*The Prophet Adam drank from
that cup and came to life,
He became intoxicated and trem-
bled,
Flesh grew on him, blood circu-
lated in his veins.*¹¹⁹²

*The Prophet Adam drank from
that cup and liked it.
The miraculous power of that cup
came and reached him:
Thus the Prophet Adam was
taken up and born to heaven
[Paradise].*¹¹⁹³

differences in the wording, and more importantly, the sequence of the individual stanzas differs in all three.

¹¹⁹¹ Tran. Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 177.

¹¹⁹² Ibid.

¹¹⁹³ Ibid. Translating *behîşt* as Paradise would perhaps be more appropriate.

Belê, ew sur... li enîya Adamê de, xerqe ber Adam kir, ew xerqe lipsê Adam bû, ber kir. Boçi? Hingi gote milyaketa şexê sunnetê, gote “hun dê xerqêyê li ber min ken.” Gotin, “emê berken.” “Dê Tawsî Melek bite delîl, dê min bibite beheştê.” Gote, “belê, te bite beheştê, û bite delîlê te li behîştê.” ...

“Erda Xwedê” gote “dayne min.” Gote “deynim”

Hingi ew sur îna, li enîya Adamê kir. Wexte ma, sed sale, ew sure, d enîya Adamê de li behîştê. Êre dibêjit “ya Tawsî Melek, wexte Adam li beheştê digera, u heke mabu ismê te heba... ew çênabit.”

Yes, that *sur*... (was put) in the forehead of Adam, *kehrqe* was put on Adam, this *kehrqe* was the cloth of Adam, he put it on. Why? The sheikh of Tradition said to the angels “You will put the *kehrqe* on me!” They said “We will.” “Tawusi Melek will be (my) guide, will take me to Paradise!” They said “Yes, he will take you to Paradise, and will be your guide in Paradise.”... “The earth of God” he said “give to me.” They said “we will give you.”

Then he brought the *sur*, put it in the forehead of Adam. Then it stayed, a hundred years, this *sur*, in the forehead of Adam in the Paradise. Then he said¹¹⁹⁴ “listen Tawusi Melek, as long as Adam walks about in Paradise, and if he stays there, your name will have... this cannot be.¹¹⁹⁵

¹¹⁹⁴ The subject is probably God.

¹¹⁹⁵ The text here is unintelligible, but probably refers to the idea that if Adam stays in Paradise, there will not be mankind, neither will he Peacock Angel have its own nation to remember his name.

Sed salê wî tamam bû, bi quweta Rabul Alemî gote Tawusi Melek “here, wî j behîştê derêxe!”

Wexte ji behîştê derexist, xîrê ji ber îna derê, u sur ji enîyê îna derê. Pişti sur ji enîyê îna derê.

Hawa ji taništa wî xolokand. He. Hawa ji taništa wî xolokand. Hawa lê mer (mêr) kir, Cibraîl lê mar kir. Ji Adam u Hawa çêbûn Habil û Qabil. Habil Qabil kuşt, Habil mir. Piştê wî ji Hawa û Adam çêbûn heftî û dû kur, û heftî û dû kiç, çêbûn, û lê bo-civandin.

Şehîd ji kederê çêbû? Ew surek cerekî kir, Şehîdî bin Cer, xelk dbêje Şehîdî bin Cer.

His hundred years was over, God in his power said to Tawusi Melek “go, throw him out of Paradise!”

When he (TM) threw him (Adam) out of Paradise, he took away the *kebirge*, and took out the *sur* from his forehead. After that he took out the *sur* from his forehead. He created Eve from his rib. He. Created Eve from his rib. He married Eve to Adam, Jibrail married him.¹¹⁹⁶ From Adam and Eve were born Abel and Cain.¹¹⁹⁷ Abel was killed by Cain, Abel died. After that from Adam and Eve were born seventy-two girls and seventy-two boys, and they came together.¹¹⁹⁸

Where did Shehid come from? He (TM) put the *sur* in a jar. Shehid bin Jer,¹¹⁹⁹ people say Shehid bin Jer.

¹¹⁹⁶ Note how the role of the Peacock Angel merges into that of Jibrail (Gabriel.)

¹¹⁹⁷ Abel and Cain are Habil and Qabil in Islamic tradition.

¹¹⁹⁸ Literally “assembled,” here it probably means “married each other.”

¹¹⁹⁹ Witness of the Jar. Kurdish *cer* (pron. “jer”) is jar in English.

(Segvan: çi cerekî kiri?)
 Sur. Ji enîya Adam îna derê.

Cerekî kir, wexte cerekî kir.

(Segvan: yê Adamê b têne?)

Adamê b têne. Hawa na bû,
 heta, Hawa, heta îna dere,
 paşî j tanistê xolokand. Hawa
 hingî nabû.

Sur cerekî kirin¹²⁰⁰. Ê ew sure
 wî, heta, heta, ew jî gehişte
 me.

Ew surek cerekî kir û jê çêbû
 Şehîd, Şehîd Pêygember.
 Nuhu wî milletê me, wî mil-
 letê çu pêygember nine jî
 Şehîd zêdetir. Em Şehîd dna-
 sin bas. Em her milletê Tawsî
 Melekî, û milletê surê in. Em
 dzanin, na milletekê cahil
 bûn hetaneki pêygember
 bêêt, berê me bidite Xwedê,
 me fehminit. Em berê pêy-
 gember atfahmin, em dzanin.

(Segvan: what did he put in a
 jar?)

The *sur*. He took it out from
 Adam's forehead.

He put it in a jar. Then he
 put it in jar.

(Segvan: Only that of
 Adam?)

Only that of Adam. Eve did
 not exist yet. Eve, first he
 brought it (the *sur*?) out, after
 that he created Eve from the
 rib. Eve did not exist yet.

He put the *sur* in a jar. And
 this *sur* of his, this has even
 reached us.

He put the *sur* in a jar, and
 from it Shehid was created.
 Prophet Shehid. Now we are
 his nation. His nation has no
 prophet other than Shehid.
 We know only Shehid. We
 have always been the nation
 of Tawusi Melek, and the
 nation of the *sur*. We have
 knowledge, we were not a
 nation, which was igno-
 rant¹²⁰¹ before prophets
 came, turned us toward God,
 made us understand. We had
 understanding before the
 prophets, we knew.

¹²⁰⁰ The reason for using
 the Plural of "*kir*" (put) is not
 clear.

¹²⁰¹ *Jabil*, the Muslim word
 used to designate the spiritual
 ignorance Arabs lived in before
 Muhammad and the coming of
 Islam.

Şehîd Pêygember çêbû, Lêyle
bo Şehîd ji cennetê îna. Navê
jinkê Leyle bû, kişka cennetê,
navê kişkê Leyle bû, ji cen-
netê ji bo ra îna,
Şehîd mer kir. Cibraîl, e? Şe-
hîd mer kir, jê çêbûn Haşim
û Qureş.

Jê çêbûn Haşim û Qureş. Vê
dbêjit Qureşiam navê Sultanî
têt bawerî imana.

Em, waxtekî em Qureşî bûn.
Em ji Şehîd û Leyle çêbûn, û
bûne Qureşî. Berê ew sura
sunnetê, wexte berê Qureşî,
sur l enîya...

(loudspeaker cuts Feqir
Haji's voice)... sur gehişte
Şehîd, em hingi sunnet bûn,
sunnetxane bûn, piştihingi
bûne Qureşî, Qureşî...piştî,
zaman, Cihîn, piştihingi

Prophet Shehid was created,
Leyla was brought from
heaven for Shehid. The name
of this woman was Leyla, a
maid from heaven, the name
of this maid was Leyla, from
heaven she was brought for
him. He married her to She-
hid. Jibrail did, eh? He mar-
ried her to Shehid, from
them were born Hashim and
Quresh.¹²⁰² From them were
born Hashim and Quresh.
They say the Qureshi came
to the true faith in the name
of God.

We used to be Qureshi. We
came from Shehid and Leyla,
and became Qureshi. First
this *sur* of the Tradition, be-
fore the Qureshi, the *sur* in
the forehead...

(loudspeaker cuts Feqir
Haji's voice)... the *sur*
reached Shehid, we were the
Tradition, the House of Tra-
dition, then we became
Qureshi, Qureshi... after
that, at one time, Jews,¹²⁰³

¹²⁰² Quraysh was the tribe
of Muhammad, and Hashim
was his clan. Yazidi tradition
seems to appropriate these fa-
mous names for themselves
here.

¹²⁰³ This is surprising, as it
is not very commonplace for

navekî dî girt, er, bûne, er,
em her Ezdaine.

Em wexte berê Qureş her
Ezdai bûn.

Em sunnetxane bûn, paşi
bûne Ezdai, paşi bûne
Qureşî, bûne Adawî, bûne
Daseni, bûne Mithain (??),
bûne Babîlî, bûne Aşûrî, û
bûne... Em Ezidî milletê
Leyle û Şehîd in.

Me çu alaqaya gel Hawa û
Adam nine. Min gel Adam jî
çu alaqe nine. Em Ezidî zur-
retê Leyle û Şehîd in.

after that we took a different
name, er, we were, er, we are
still Ezdai. We were all Ezdai
before the Quresh. We were
the House of Tradition, after
that we were Ezdai, after that
we were Qureshi, we were
Adawî,¹²⁰⁴ we became
Daseni,¹²⁰⁵ became Mit-
tani,¹²⁰⁶ became Babylonians,
became Assyrians, became...
We Yezidis are the nation of
Layla and Shehid.

We have no connection with
Eve and Adam. We have no
connection with Adam. We
Yezidis are the offspring of
Layla and Shehid.

¹²⁰⁴ Followers of the Sufi
order founded by Sheikh Adi.

¹²⁰⁵ The ancient name of
the region around Duhok is
Daseni. This was the name of
the Nestorian Diocese in the
area. The Yezidi tribe living in
his region was also known un-
der the name Daseni. Today
many Yezidis claim that Daseni
was the original name of all
Yezidis.

¹²⁰⁶ If *Mithain* indeed stands
for Mitanni, this demonstrated
that contemporary nationalist
discourse on Kurdish origins
(which identifies the little-
known Mitannis with a Kurdish
tribe) has affected even some-
one as traditional and far from
bookish learning as Feqir Haji.

Yezidis to claim identity with
Jews in the past, unlike with
other peoples and civilizations
of the Middle East.

(Segwan explains the story in English, first saying that Shehid was created from Adam's spirit. Then, at the question why Shehid is called bin Jer, he answers: because he put his – I don't know what is it in English – he put, err, his like water in a jar. His sweat, and from it Shehid is created.”)

(Şehîd) Sur bû, sur bû, ji enîya Adam îna berê, û cerekî kir, û ji cerekî xolokand Şehîd. Piştî neh ma. (Cerekî kaput¹²⁰⁷ kiribû wekî zikê jinê.)

Ew sure, ew sure ji ezmana hat, ew sure ji ezmana hat, keftet d enîya wî de. Na xwêdan bû, na ew bû. Ew ji ezman hat di enîya wî de.

(Segwan: It comes from heaven. Spät: Adam's sweat? Segwan: Yes, according to our mythology.)

Şehîd bin Cer. Yani bav nine, bav zêdetir... hate ji cerekî de bê dey û bê bav. Em

(Segwan explains the story in English, first saying that Shehid was created from Adam's spirit. Then, at the question why Shehid is called bin Jer, he answers: because he put his – I don't know what is it in English – he put, err, his like water in a jar. His sweat, and from it Shehid is created.”)

He (Shehid) was *sur*, *sur*, taken from the forehead of Adam, put in a jar, and from that jar Shehid was created. After nine month. (The jar was closed like the womb of a woman.) This *sur*, this *sur* came from the sky, went into his forehead. It wasn't sweat, no it wasn't. It came from the sky into his forehead.

(Segwan: It comes from heaven. Spät: Adam's sweat? Segwan: Yes, according to our mythology.)

Shehid bin Jer. Of the Jar. Yani, he has no father (?)... he came from a jar, without a

¹²⁰⁷ Kaput or kapat, from Turkish “*kapatmak*” (to close) is used in the Kurdish of the region. Interestingly enough it does not figure in Kurdish-Turkish dictionaries.

Ezidi hemû milletê wê surê
in.

Me tedexullî Nuh nekiriye,
me tedexullî ava Tofanê
nekiriye, ne me tedexullî
Brahim Xalîl jî kiriye.

Hemû cerekê ev milletê me
yê hure. Ava Tofanê wexte
rabûy em Ezidi hemû li
Hindê bûn. Dinya hemû girte
avê, wexte gehîşte hudûdê
Hindê, ew qewmê me, em
hemû li Hindê bûn. Ava To-
fanê jî me negirtiye. Me miş-
areke bi sefine jê nekeriye.

(Feqir Haji then talked about
Habil and Qabil, the other
children of Adam and Eve,
their marriage to each other,
and how the nations coming
from the 144 children of
Adam and Eve swore at
Tawusi Melek, unlike
Yezidis.)

mother and a father. We
Yezidis are all the nation of
this sur.

We did not join Noah, we
did not take part in the
Flood, we did not join Ibra-
him Khalil.¹²⁰⁸

All the time our nation was
independent. When the
Flood rose we Yezidis were
all in India. The whole world
was covered by water, when
it reached India, our nation
were all in India. The Flood
did not cover us.¹²⁰⁹ We
never entered the Ark.

(Feqir Haji then talked about
Abel and Cain, and the other
children of Adam and Eve,
their marriage to each other,
and how the nations coming
from the 144 children of
Adam and Eve swore at
Tawusi Melek, unlike
Yezidis.)

¹²⁰⁸ Rather surprising re-
marks, as Yezidis have a num-
ber of myth concerning the
Flood, Noah and Ibrahim
(Abraham.) What is more, they
claim that Ibrahim was origi-
nally a Yezidi and was only later
appropriated by other groups
and creeds.

¹²⁰⁹ The implication is that
India was spared by the Flood.

Hemû ji Adam û Hawa
 çêbûne, zuretê Adam û
 Hawa xeletit Tawsî Melek...
 (*qewl*)¹²¹⁰ Heft û dû millet ji
 Adam û Hawa çêbûne
 Tawusî Melek kufirin, em na,
 em milletê Tawsî Melek in,
 em milletê wî ne... (*qewl*) Em
 milletê Tawsî Melek in, mil-
 letê wî surrê in, çu alaqata me
 Hawa û Adam gelê nine. Em
 milletê Leyle û Şehîd in,
 Leyla deyka me ye, û Şehîd
 bavê me ye.

(Conversation returns to the
sur)

Sur ji ezmana hat, ji ezmana,
 sur keftet d enîyê da, semave
 (Ar.) hat. Semave hat. Ew
 sure Melek Sheikh Sin hat,
 sura sunnetê. Sura sunnetê
 hat, keftet li enîya wî de.

They all came from Adam
 and Eve, the children of
 Adam and Eve swore at
 Tawusi Melek... (*qewl*). Sev-
 enty-two nations who came
 from Adam and Eve swore
 at Tawusi Melek. We did not,
 we are the nation of Tawusi
 Melek, we are his nation...
 (*qewl*) We are the nation of
 Tawusi Melek, the nation of
 that *sur*, we have no connec-
 tion with Adam and Eve. We
 are the nation of Layla and
 Shehid. Layla is our mother,
 Shehid is our father.

(Conversation returns to the
sur)

The *sur* came from the sky,
 from the sky, the *sur* went
 into his forehead, it was from
 heaven. From heaven. Angel
 Sheikh Sin came, the *sur* of
 Tradition. The *sur* of the
 Tradition came, went into his
 forehead.

¹²¹⁰ Here Feqir Hajî quoted
 a hymn, which I have not yet
 appeared in print and I could
 not transcribe.

(Segvan: Adam diviya tişteki
çêket, ji ber hindi cerekî kir?
Ji ber çi çêbû?)

Na, na Adam cerekî kir. Ci-
braîl. Cibraîl sur ji enîyê îna
derê, cerekî kir, na Adam.
Tawsî Melek îna derê ji enîyê.
Adam na xweş bû, pa bû çi
xeletî.

Tawsî Melek îna derê ji enîyê,
cerekî kir, û Adam derêxist ji
cennetê, kire derê. Adam ma
qaqulukî xali, wekî ... be-
şerekî heye. Nepixî, wexte
dare genimî xwar, nepixî.
Gotê, derkeve, here harice.
Sur, Tawsî Melek ji enîyê îna
derê. Îna derê û Şehîd jê
çêbû, ew surek cerekî kir, û
gotê “haqê te xelas,” da
qewm pê ava bit.
Ma li beheştê zawac heye?
Nine.

(Discussion returns to the
story of the forbidden fruit.
Segvan: Ew tişte Adam
xwarî, ma Tawsî Melek gotê
“bixwe”?)

E. Tawsî Melek gotê. Çend
tamêt cennetî xwarin, wexte
Rabul Alemî emir kir, dê
Adam jê derexit, îna Tawsî

(Segvan: Did Adam have to
do something, was that why
he put it in a jar? What was
the reason?)

No, it wasn't Adam who put
it in a jar. Jibrail brought the
sur out from his forehead,
put it in a jar, not Adam.
Tawusi Melek brought it out
from the forehead. Adam
was unhappy, he swore (?).
Tawusi Melek brought it out
from his forehead, put it in
jar, and threw Adam out of
Paradise, put him outside.
Adam became like an empty
snail-shell, like... a human.
He inflated, when he ate the
grain, inflated. He said to
him, leave, go outside.
Tawusi Melek took out the
sur from his forehead.
Brought it out and Shehid
was born from it, he put this
sur in a jar, and said to him
(Adam) “your time (right) is
up” so that mankind could
be created. For is there mar-
riage in heaven? There is not.

(Discussion returns to the
story of the forbidden fruit.
Segvan: This thing that
Adam ate, did Tawusi Melek
tell him “eat”?)

Yes. Tawusi Melek told him.
He ate all kind of fruits of
Paradise, when the Lord de-
creed that Adam be thrown

Melek, çû ... ber xuliya (?)
genimî gotê “te jî xwariye?”
Gotê “na.” Gotê “bixwel!”
Gotê “kafir key (?)” Gotê
“sêyda min gote min
‘newxe.”

Pa Tawsî Melek her delîlê wî
bû, bas xwe jî ber çavan xey-
irand. Gotê “divêt bixwey.”
Gotê “delîlê min gote min
‘nexwe.” Gotê “ez dibêjime
te bixwey.” Hate ev axawî û
ew axawî, Tawsî Melek avête
devê û xwar. Mecbura xwar,
bêxemt.

Xwar, vê neqlê zikê wî ne-
pixî. Çênabit li behîştê pisti-
yatiya biket. Zikê wî nepixî,
îna, xerqê jî berî îna derê, sur
jî enîyê îna derê...

(Segvan: Çi alaqata heye
navbeyna hindê Şehîd bin
Cer çêbûy û ew jî behîştê
derkeftê Adam.)

out from there, he brought
Tawusi Melek, he went...

to the (?) of grain, and said to
him “Have you eaten of
this?” “no. He said to him
“eat!” Said to him “you are
blaspheming.” Said to him
“my teacher told me “don’t
eat.”” In reality it was Tawusi
Melek, his guide, but he hid
himself from his eyes.¹²¹¹ He
said “you have to eat.” He
said “my guide told me ‘don’t
to eat.”” He said “I am telling
you to eat.” He talked and
the other talked, and then
Tawusi Melek threw (the
grain) in his mouth and he
ate it. He had to eat it, it
wasn’t his choice.

He ate, and at once his stom-
ach inflated. There was no
way he could do his dirty
business in Paradise. His
stomach inflated, his *kehrqe*
was taken away, the *sur* was
taken out of his forehead.

(Segvan: What is the connec-
tion between the creation of
Shahid and the expulsion of
Adam from Paradise?)

¹²¹¹ That is, appeared in a
different form, so Adam
wouldn’t recognize him.

Şehîd bin Cer, sureka ezmani,
semavî bû. Sureka semavî bû,
îna, li enîya Adam kir. Sur bû.
Wê surê, karar ji wan sand
milyaketa. Gotê “hun dê min
bine cennetê.” Gotê “te
dêbine cennetê.” Heft sed
salî qalbê Adam peygemberê
çêkirî bû, na çû berê, got “ez
naçime erd de, naçime ber.”

Heft sed salî ma, qalbê Adam
peygemberê çêkir ji şembê
hate îniyê, tu zani, şembê hat
îniyê çêkir. Piştî heft sed salî
ma, milyaketa wê surê gotê
“tu biçî ber.” Gotê “naçime
berê.”... Rabul Alemî gotê
“biçî ber.” Gotê “dehêka wê
erda Xwedê dene min?”
Gotê “dênime te.” “Dê
Tawsî Melek bo min bite
imam, dê min bite cennetê?”
Gotê “te bibite cennetê.”
“Dê xerqe ber min bikey?”
Gotê “xerqe ber te
dêkem.”... Qana kirin.
Wexte çû berda. Ew surek j
... bir .. j wan milyaketan..
Em, em, ji ber xatira wê
surrê, Adam ji behîştê derex-
ist, sur ji enîyê îna derê, û
Adam pêygember ji behîştê
derexist.

Shehid bin Jer was a *sur* from
heaven. A *sur* from heaven, it
was brought, put in Adam's
forehead. He/it was *sur*. And
this *sur* took a promise from
those angels. He/it said “you
will take me to Paradise.”
They said “we will take you
to Paradise.” For seven hun-
dred years the body of Adam
lay ready, it did not go inside.
He/it said “I will not go on
the earth, I will not go in-
side.”

It was seven hundred years.
The body of Adam was cre-
ated between Saturday and
Friday, you know, between
Saturday and Friday. After
seven hundred years the an-
gels said to this *sur* “you go
inside.” He/it said “I will not
go inside” The Lord said to
him “go inside.” He/it said
“will you give me a tenth of
God's earth?” He said “I will
give you.” “Let Tawusi Me-
lek be my imam, let him take
me to Paradise.” He said “let
him take you to Paradise.”
“Will you put the *kebirqe* on
me?” “I will put the *kebirqe* on
you.” He accepted. He went
inside. This *sur*... was from
those angels. We, we, for the
sake of that *sur*, Adam was
thrown out of Paradise, the
sur was taken out of his fore-
head, and Prophet Adam was
thrown out of Paradise.

Adam pêygember ji cennetê derexist da qewm pê ava bit. Şehîd, sur, cerekî kir da ev qewme jî çêdbit, da sunnetx-ane çêdbit. Ew qewmê yê Tawsî Melek çêdbit, qewmê me, qewmê Tawsî Melek e, em qewmê Tewsî Melek in. Her heftû û dû milletê di Tawsî Melek xeletin. Bo qewmîyeta xwe Tawsî Melek em çêkirin.

Û Şehîd. Şehîd cerekî kir, ew suret cerekî kir. Şehîd jê çêbû, j kerameta Tawsî Melek. Û em milleta da çêbit bo xatira navê wî dana wî hinda nabit. Şehîd bin Cer çêkir da ew, nave wî hinda nabit, da ew milletê hemû qewmê wî bit. Milletê wî ye, heta îvroke jî em qewmê Tawsî Melek in. Em na ji Adam û Hawa çêbûna, na.

(Segvan, why did Tawusi Melek need Adam to create Shehid and his own people?)

Sebepa wî heye. Sur hate xwarî b navê Adamî. Bas ji enîyê îna derê. Em bi wê surê bûne binya Adam. Dibêjine me binya Adam.

Adam was thrown out of Paradise, so that mankind could be created. Shehid, that is the sur, was put in a jar so that this nation be created, the House of Tradition be created, our people, the people of Tawusi Melek. We are the nation of Tawusi Melek. All seventy-two nations swear at Tawusi Melek. We were created so that Tawusi Melek could have his own people.

And Shehid. Shehid was put in a jar, this *sur* was put in a jar. Shehid was born from it, from the miraculous power of Tawusi Melek. And so that our nation could be created, so that his (TM) name could be given to them, lest it be lost. Shehid bin Jer was created so that his name not be lost, so that this nation, all of it, be his people. It is his nation, until today we are the people of Tawusi Melek. We are not from Adam and Eve, no.

(Segvan, why did Tawusi Melek need Adam to create Shehid and his own people?)

He had his reason. The *sur* came down in the name of Adam. But he brought it out from his forehead. Through this *sur* we became the sons of Adam. They call us “sons

Em bi asa wê surê çêbûn.

Heta Adam di cennetêde bû,
ew jî milyaketekî mezin bû.
Sura Melek Şêx Sin ya mezin
bû.

Wextê jê xali kir, sur ji enîyê
îna derê, ew xali ma vêderê.
Em zurretê wê surê in. Em
sunnexane ne. Sunnexanek
nine nav musulman, û nav çu
dere. Ew bo xwe ji me alemi
ne.

of Adam”¹²¹² We were cre-
ated through (?) this *sur*
As long as Adam was in
Paradise, he was like the
great angels. He was the great
sur of Angel Sheikh Sin.

When he was emptied of it,
the *sur* was brought out of
his forehead, he was left
there all empty. We are the
children of that *sur* We are
the House of Tradition.
There is not House of Tradi-
tion among the Muslims, or
anywhere else. They learnt it
from us.

¹²¹² “Binya Adam” is an
Arabic, not Kurdish expression.

Feqir Haji , Baadra (2003)

This interview was made with Feqir Haji in Baadra, in June 2003. Baadra is a sizeable village of the Sheikhan district situated on the former border of Iraq and the Kurdish Safe haven. Unlike the rest of Sheikhan it remained under Kurdish control between 1992 and 2003. Baadra is traditionally the village where the Yezidi prince resides. The present prince, Mir Tehsin Bey, set up his residence in ‘Eyn Sifni and Mosul, on Iraqi territory, during the years of Autonomy, and exchanged Mosul for Duhok since the war, due to the threats of terrorism. In his stead it was Kamiran Kheiry Bey, the Prince’s nephew and son-in-law, who as the “acting head” of the Yezidis in the Kurdish Safe Haven, had (and still has) his residence in Baadra. Due to his hospitality I could pay several visits to Baadra, where I interviewed Feqir Haji, a resident of this village, several times. The following interview was made in June, 2003. Though this time there were no celebrating crowds around, the interview was still often interrupted by visitor coming to visit the guest-room of Kamiran Bey, and a constant background noise was provided by the “mubarida,” and eastern type of airconditioning working with water, and by the tractor working outside in the yard. During the interview the English teacher of the local highschool, Mamoste Sabah was helping me, explaining (but not translating, rather paraphrasing) what Feqir Haji said, and adding his own insights of Yezidi religion and mythology.

Qalbê Adam pêygember,
Şembê dane esase
 Şembê esase qalbê Adam
 pêygember dane, Adam çêkir
Û inîyê kîr xelase

Şembê dane esase
Înîyê kîr xelase
Be'dî heft sed sal Heft Sur hatine
*durran kase*¹²¹³

Pîştê heft sed salî ji nû ruh
 hate qalbê. Ji ber çî? Ew qalb
 cêkir ji şembeyê hate inîyê. Û
 ev ruh ya milyaketekî bû ji
 ezmana. Milyaketa gote wî
 milyaketî, lazim e tu biciye
 ber vî qalbî da qewm pê ava
 bit. Sura Melek Şêx Sin bû, te
 zani? Ruha milyaketekî divêt
 biçît di wê qalbî de da qewm
 pê ava bit

¹²¹³ Text in italics quoted from *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*. Cf. Bedelê Feqîr Hecî, *Baverî Êzîdîyan*, 136; cf. also *Zebûnî Meksûr* 31, Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 176; and *Zebûnî Meksûr* 38, Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 62.

The body of Prophet Adam
On Saturday its foundations were
laid,
 On Saturday the foundations
 of Prophet Adam's body
 were laid. Adam was created.
On Friday it was completed.

On Saturday the foundations were
laid,
On Friday it was completed,
After seven hundred years, the
Seven Mysteries came around the
*Cup.*¹²¹⁴

After seven hundred years
 the soul came into the body.
 Why? The body was created
 between Friday and Saturday.
 And this soul belonged to an
 angel from the sky. The an-
 gels told this angel, you have
 to go into this body, so that
 mankind be created. It was
 the *sur*¹²¹⁵ of Angel Sheikh
 Sin, you know? The soul of
 an angel had to go into the
 body, so that the mankind be
 created.

¹²¹⁴ Cf. text in italics with *Hymn of the Weak Broken One* 31, Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 177; and *of the Weak Broken One* 38, Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adî*, 62.

¹²¹⁵ Mystery, essence, light.

*Adam pêygamber ji wê kase
vedxware* (Arrival of guests.)

Heft sed salî ma, ew ruha
Melek Şêx Sin na çû ber
Adamda, ina Tawsî Melek û
Rabul Alemî emir kir lazim e
biçite berda, lazim e biçite
berda

*Adam pêygamber ji wê kasê vex-
war* (kas bû, vexwar)

*Adam pêygamber ji wê kasê vex-
ware*

*Quwet û kerameta wê kasê hate
diyarê*

*Lew Adam pêygamber pêngijî pê
bû şîyarê*¹²¹⁶

*Adam pêygamber ji wê kasê vex-
war û vedijîya*

Mestbû, bijîya,

*goşt lê huriya, xwîn tê gerriya*¹²¹⁷

*Prophet Adam drank from that
cup* (Arrival of guests.)

Seven hundred years passed,
the soul of Angel Sheikh Sin
did not go inside Adam, so
Tawusi Melek and the Lord
of the World gave a com-
mand, he must go inside,
must go inside.

*The Prophet Adam drank from
that cup* (it was a/the cup,
drank from it.)

*The Prophet Adam drank from
the cup,*

*The miraculous power of that cup
manifested itself.*

*Thus the Prophet Adam sneezed
and through it he became con-
scious.*¹²¹⁸

*Prophet Adam drank from that
Cup and came to life,*

*He became intoxicated and trem-
bled,*

*Flesh grew on him, blood circu-
lated in his veins.*¹²¹⁹

¹²¹⁶ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 36,
Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 176.

¹²¹⁷ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 35,
ibid.

¹²¹⁸ *Hymn of the Weak Broken
One* 36, Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*,
177.

¹²¹⁹ *Hymn of the Weak Broken
One* 35, ibid.

*Adam pêygember ji wê kasê vex-
war, û lê xweş tê*

*Quvet u kerameta wê kasê bat û
geheştê*

*Lewma Adam Peygamber belgirt
û bire behîştê.*¹²²⁰

Adam ji çi çêkir? Ji axê, ji avê,
û ba, û erdê. (Mamoste Sabah
cuts in to say, he has already
told me that.)

Adam pêygember. Wexte ev
sura Melek Sêx Sin hate ber
Adam, tête ber, gote Tawsî
Melek û Rabul Alemî, gotê
“hun dê min bîne cennetê.”
Gotê “belê.” Gotê
“xerqeyê ber min (bî)keyn.”
Gotê “ber te (dî)keyn.” Gotê
“Tawsî Melek bo min bite
imam, li cennetê dê min
gerit.” Gotê “belê.” Gotê
“dehêka wê erda Xwedê bid-
ite min.”

¹²²⁰ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 37,
ibid. For these three stanzas
compare also the version of
Zebûnî Meksûr 44-5, 47 pub-
lished by Kreyenbroek, *God and
Sheikh Adî*, 63. The three ver-
sions closely resemble each
other, but there are some slight
differences in the wording, and
more importantly, the sequence
of the individual stanzas differs
in all three.

*The Prophet Adam drank from
that cup and like it.*

*The miraculous power of that cup
came and reached (him).*

*Thus Prophet Adam was taken
up and borne to heaven.*¹²²¹

Adam was created from
what? From earth, water,
wind and soil.¹²²² . (Mamoste
Sabah cuts in to say, he has
already told me that.)

The Prophet Adam. When
this *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin
came inside Adam, comes
inside, it said to Tawusi Me-
lek and the Lord, said to
them “you will take me to
Paradise.” They said to him
“yes.” He said to them “you
will put the *kehirqe* on me.”
They said “we will put in on
you.” He said “let Tawusi
Melek be my *imam*, and take
me around Paradise.” They
said “yes.” He said “give me
a tenth of God’s earth.”

¹²²¹ *Hymn of the Weak Broken
One* 37, ibid.

¹²²² The last should be
“fire,” this is probably just a slip
of the tongue.

(Yani erda Xwedê hemî.)
 Gotê “belê.”
 Dayê, hatenikê qana bû, hat,
 keftet ber Adamda.

*Adam pêygamber ji wê kasê vex-
 war, û lê xweş tê*
Quvet u kerameta wê kasê hat û
geheştê
Lenma Adam Peygamber belgirt
û bire behîstê.¹²²³

Sed sala ma, Tawsî Melek
 imam bû. Adam Pêygamber
 ma sed û ek sala cennetêde.
 Sed û ek sal cennetêde ma.
 Rabule Alemî gote Tawsî
 Melek “here, Adam ji beheştê
 derexe, da qewm pê ava bit.”
 Rabû. Sure yê enîyêde bû,
 sura Melek Sheikh Sin li
 enîyê kirbû, û xerqe ber
 kirbû. Sur enîyêde bû, xerqe
 berda.

¹²²³ Cf. *Zebûnî Meksûr* 37,
 Kreyenbroek, Yezidism, 176.
 For these three stanzas compare
 also the version of *Zebûnî Mek-
 sûr* 44-5, 47 published by
 Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh*
Adî, 63. The three versions
 closely resemble each other, but
 there are some slight differences
 in the wording, and more im-
 portantly, the sequence of the
 individual stanzas differs in all
 three.

(That is, all of God’s earth.)
 They said “yes.”
 It was given to him, so he
 agreed, came, and went in-
 side Adam.

The Prophet Adam drank from
that cup and liked it. The miracu-
lous power of that cup came and
reached (him).
Thus Prophet Adam was taken
up and borne to heaven.¹²²⁴

He stayed a hundred years.
 Tawusi Melek was his *imam*.
 Prophet Adam stayed a hun-
 dred and one years in Para-
 dise. One hundred and one
 year he stayed in Paradise.
 The Lord said to Tawusi Me-
 lek “go, and throw Adam out
 of Paradise, so that mankind
 can be created.” He got up.
 The *sur* was in his¹²²⁵ fore-
 head, the *sur* of Angel Sheikh
 Sin had been put in his fore-
 head, and the *khirqe* had been
 put on him. The *sur* was in
 his forehead, he wore the
khirqe.

¹²²⁴ *Hymn of the Weak Broken*
One 37, *ibid*.

¹²²⁵ i.e. Adam’s forehead.

Wexte Rabul Alemî emir kir,
 gote Tawsî Melek "here,
 Adam ji behîştê derexe,"
 Tawsî Melek sur ji enîyê ina
 der, u xerqe ji berî ina der.
 Sur cerekî kir û xerqe ji berî
 ina der.

(Arabic text: Adam took off
 his clothes and went out
 from Paradise.)

Ji beheştê derexist, wextê
 derexist, Adam xeletî Tawsî
 Melek, Adam pê xeletî. Gal-
 gala (word) xelet got. Hewa
 hingi heta vêga, em nuhu,
 heftû û dû millet ji Adam
 çêbûye, ew wî dixeletîn.

Bas em Êzidi naxeletîn. Em
 Êzidi na.

Wexte (sur) ji enîyê ina dere,
 ew sur cerekî kir. Cerekî kir û
 ma. Jê çêbû Şehîd, ji wî cerrî,
 Şehîd jê çêbû.

When the Lord commanded
 Tawusi Melek "go, throw
 Adam out of Paradise,"
 Tawusi Melek took the *sur*
 out of his forehead, and di-
 vested him of the *kehrqe*. He
 put the *sur* in a jar, and di-
 vested him of the *kehrqe*.

(Arabic text: Adam took off
 his clothes and went out
 from Paradise)

He threw Adam out of Para-
 dise. When Adam was
 thrown out, he swore at
 Tawusi Melek, he swore at
 him. He said a bad word
 about him.¹²²⁶ Since then, till
 now, seventy two nations
 were born from Adam, and
 they swear at Tawusi Melek.
 Only we Yezidis do now
 swear at him. We alone.

When he (T.M.) brought the
sur out of his forehead, he
 put it in a jar. Put it in a jar
 and left it there. From it
 came Shehid, from this jar.
 From it came Shehid.

¹²²⁶ That is, he called
 Tawusi Melek "Sheitan" (Satan.)

Û Adam wexte ji beheştê derexist, Tawsî Melek, Adam ji behiştê derexist, ew (?) kelema her digote Tawsî Melek. Adam wexte derexist, Hawa ji taništa wî çêkir. Hawa ji taništa Adam çêkir. Hawa el (?) Adam markir. Tawsî Melek Hawa el (?) Adam markir. Û ji Adam û Hawa çêbûn Habil û Qabil.

Tawsî Melek ruha Melek Şêx Sin jêstand, û ew sur cerekî kir. Cerekî kir, Şehîd bin Cer jê çêbû. Ji Adam û Hawa çêbûn Habil û Qabil. Habil Qabil kuşt, Habil mîr, piştî-hingî Xwede dane Hawa û Adam heftî û dû kur û heftî û dû kiç, û lêk mar kirin. Heftî û dû kur û heftî û dû kiç lêk mar kirin.

Ma wê derê ki? Ma Şehîd , Leyle ji cennetê îna, navê wê Leyle, ji cennetê îna, ji nik hûriya. Wexte Xwede Şehîd xolokand, Şehîd bo Leyle re îna. Ji Leyle çêbûn û Şehîd Haşim û Qureyş. Haşim û Qureyş çêbûn.

Piştê Şehîd min çî pêygember ninin. Çunku em milletê wê sura Melek Şêx Sin in, em milletê wê surê in, u me çu pêygember ninin.

And when Adam was thrown out from

Paradise, by Tawusi Melek, he kept saying that word to Tawusi Melek. When he (T.M.) threw Adam out, he created Eve from his rib. He created Eve from his rib. He married Eve to Adam. Tawusi Melek married Eve to Adam. From Adam and Eve Abel and Cain were born.

Tawusi Melek took away (out) the soul of Angel Sheikh Sin, and put that *sur* in a jar. In a jar. Shehid bin Jer was born from it. From Adam Abel and Cain were born. Cain killed Abel, Abel died, after that God gave Eve and Adam 72 boys and 72 girls, and they married each other. 72 girls and 72 boys married each other.

Who was left? Shehid was left. Leyle was brought from heaven, her name was Leyle, she was brought from heaven, from among the houri. When God created Shehid, Shehid was brought for Leyle. From Leyle Hashim and Quresh were born.

After Shehid we have no prophet. Because we are the nation of the *sur* of Angel Sheikh Sin. We are the nation of that *sur*; and we don't have any prophets.

Em, hing ji Adamû herwa,
em hemû ji millet jê cûda
bûn. Piçukêt Adam u Hawa,
fala, û cuhu, musulman, û her
milleteki heye. Piçukêt Şehîd
em Êzidi ne, bas em Êzidi
ne. Ser aslê xwe kadim mayn.

Hinci zuretê Adam û Hawa
zuretê kufre ne, ji ek û dû
zewicine, xwişk û bira.
Şehîd na, Şehîd cûda ye. Şe-
hîd hûri ji ezmanê îna, ji cen-
netê îna, hûri lê markir, jê
çêbûn Haşim û Qureş.

Hate vega me çu pêygember
ninin, çunku em milletê
Xwedê in. Navê Xwedê ser
me: wexte Şehîd Xwedê
xelokand î dayî (?), gotê
“Xweda ez dam.” “Ez dam.”
“Xweda ez dam.”¹²²⁷

¹²²⁷ A word-play based on the Yezidi (and Kurdish) etymology of the Kurdish word for God. “Xwede” – interpreted as “Xwe – da” “created (gave) Himself.” While “Êzidi” interpreted as “ez Xweda dam” is “I was created (given) by the one who created (gave) Himself”, shortened to “ez dam” as in “I was created (given).” This etymology is not supported by any

We, ever after Adam, we
were apart from all other
nations. The children of
Adam and Eve (are) Chris-
tians, and Jews, Muslims, and
all kind of nations. The chil-
dren of Shehid are we
Yezidis, we Yezidis alone.
We stayed faithful to our
ancient roots (beginnings.)

Now the children of Adam
and Eve are the children of
sin, they married each other.
Brothers and sister. Not
Shehid. Shehid is apart. She-
hid brought a houri from the
sky, from Paradise, married
the houri, from her were
born Hashim and Qoresh.

Until today we have no
prophets, because we are the
nation of God. We bear the
name of God. When God
created Shehid, Shehid said
“God (he who created him-
self) created me.” “Created
me” (*Ez dam*). “God created
me.”

linguistic speculation on the
origins of the name
Yezidi/Ezidi. (In any case, one
word contains a short, closed
“e” (ez), the other contains a
long open “ê” (Êzidi.))

Em milletê ezdayîn. Ezdayîn.

Hate vê gave...(Arabic) çu pêygember ninin. Em berê Nuh em hebûn, ji Adam û Hawa em cûda in ji milleta hema. Çunku heftî û dû millet kelema xelet dbêjite Tawsî Melek, em nabêjin. Em milletê Tawsî Melek in. Milletê Êzdayîn.

(Spät: Heqe Şêx Adi na pêygember e, çi ye?)
Şêx Adi vali ye. Na pêygember e, na. Şêx Adi sur e, nûr a la nûr e.

(Mamoste Sabah: Şêx Adi is a person, not a prophet, but give(s) us a secret.)
Şêx Adi ji nûra Êzi ye, Êzi ji nûra Tawsî Melek e, Tawsî Melek ji nûra Xwedê ye.

(Spät: Qendil çi ye?)

We are the “Ezdayi” nation. Ezdayi (Yezidis.)¹²²⁸

Until now... (Arabic) we have no prophets. We existed before Noah, we are apart from all nations since Adam and Eve. Because 72 nations say the forbidden work to Tawusi Melek, but we don't say it. We are the nation of Tawusi Melek. The Ezdayi nation.

(Spät: If Sheikh Adi is not a prophet, what is he?)
Sheikh Adi is a saint. He is not a prophet, no. Sheikh Adi is a *sur*, he is light from light.

(Mamoste Sabah: Şêx Adi is a person, not a prophet, but give(s) us a secret.)
Sheikh Adi is from the light of Ezi. Ezi is from the light of Tawusi Melek. Tawusi Melek is from the light of God.

(Spät: What is *Qendil*?)

¹²²⁸ It is worth noting that Joseph (*Devil Worship*, 108) already mentions that some Western Orientalists think the word Yezidi must be “an abbreviated form of *Aex-da-Khuda*, that is, created of God.”

Qendil semavi ye. Qendil hate xwar. (unintelligible Arabic and Kurdish text on divine love follows.) Qendil nûra Xwedê ye. Qendil el arşan e. Tê heyn ruhê xasana. Dû Qendilê heyn. Qendilek li ezmana ruhê çaka dçine têda... Xasa, valiye, pêygember dçine têda.

(Spät: Hindek ruh ji Qendilê dzivirine?)

Belê, hatine xware. Ji Qendilê hatine xware... heyn xasa, heyn çaka, ewli hatine, ruhê ewli hatine. Ruha Wakil ji Qendilê hate xwar. Ruha Şêx Adî, Şêx Şems ji Qendilê îna derê.

Qendil is a heavenly thing. The *Qendil* came down. (unintelligible Arabic and Kurdish text on divine love follows.) *Qendil* is the light of God. *Qendil* is the throne. In it there are the souls of the holy men (*khas*.) There are two *Qendils*. The *Qendil* in the sky, the pure souls go inside it... *Khas* (holy souls,) saints, prophets go inside.

(Spät: Do some souls return from the *Qendil*?)

Yes, they have come below. From the *Qendil* they have come below... there are *khas*, pure ones, they came first. The soul of Wakil¹²²⁹ came down from the *Qendil*. The soul of Sheikh Adî, Sheikh Shems was brought out from the *Qendil*.

¹²²⁹ Al-Wakil, the Trustee, is one of the beautiful names of Allah. This is the only mention I have encountered of it in Yezidi lore, and I am not sure which angel or holy being it refers to.

Interview with Sheikh Deshti (2003)

Sheikh Deshti was the *mijewir* or guardian of the sanctuaries of Bayazid Bastami and Mehmedê Jindal in the collective Yezidi village of Khanke, about 30 kilometers from Duhok, near the bank of the Tiger. It was a loosely joined collection of villages, which were originally in other locations, then were later destroyed, and their population was moved to Khanke. Most of the sanctuaries, with the exception of the sanctuary of Mem Shîvan, a protector of sheep and cattle, were newly rebuilt in their present places.

During the interview I made with him, I was accompanied by a Yezidi student of physics, Suzan Haji Shmo, from the University of Duhok, whose family (originally from Sinjar) resided in the same village. Her comments and translations can be read in brackets, along with my own questions. These comments are of interest not only because she endeavors to sum up the explanations of Sheikh Deshti in a few words, but also because occasionally they show that lay Yezidis themselves can have problems with understanding traditional Yezidi lore just as much as foreigners. (Her attempts to give modern scientific meaning to Yezidi myths of creation are mentioned in some details in the chapter on “Orality and Literacy among Yezidis Today.”)

Hinge, wexte Adam di be-
hiştê de,
gava, yani surek eniyêde bû,
yani wekî keramet, wekî qu-
wetek yani em dbêjin sur
Yani wekî sureka eniyêde bû,
wekî quweteka îlahî, yani
wekî dereca wî, wekî dbêjin
sêydi Misahê Isa, yani goreza
milyaketa, yani na beşer bû

(Suzan: He was like an astral
man, because God made a
force, like “sure”, and He
give him, and Ezdiyans say
that “sure.” Sura Tawsî Me-
lekê and sura Ezdî, like their
force, it is called *sur*)

Wexte wissa li emrê Xwedê,
Tawsî Melekê ew genim
dayê, û hate erdê, û Hawa
çêbû, u zawac navbeyna xwe
û Adam çêbû.

Hawayê gote Adam: heke
jînek nabit, beşerê çênabita..
Yani Hawa, jîna Adam bû,
got, heger ne jînek bit, piçûk
nine.

Adam got, na, heger zalam
nabit, her wissa, piçûk nabit.

Nikaş navbeyna wan çêbû.
Adam gote: ka xwêdan – yani
wekî em dbêjin “nesel” –

When Adam was in Paradise,
I mean, when the *sur* was in
his forehead, like a miracu-
lous power, like a power, that
is, we say *sur* He had *sur* in
his forehead, like some divine
power, like his grade, as they
say of the Lord Messiah Je-
sus, I mean after the fashion
of angels, I mean he wasn't a
human.

(Suzan: He was like an astral
man, because God made a
force, like “sure”, and He
give him, and Ezdiyans say
that “sure.” The *sur* of
Tawusi Melek and of Ezdî,
like their force, it is called
sur.)

Then, at the command of
God, Tawusi Melek gave him
grain, and he came down on
earth, and Eve was created,
and the two married.

Eve said to Adam: if there
were no woman, human
would not exist.

That is, Eve, the wife of
Adam, said, if there were no
woman, there would be no
babies.

Adam said, no, if there were
no man, still there would be
no babies.

There rose a fight between
them. Adam said: where is
(my) sweat – like we say
“sweat.”

Wissa (gesture: he wiped his forehead off with the back of his hand) – biket şerpikêda.

Adam wexte wisa kir (gesture repeated), Tawsî Melek wissa kir, puff kir (Sheikh Deshti blew on his hand) ewî ket şerpikêda.

Adam xwêdan wissa kir, kirit şerpekî.

(Discussion on the compatibility of taperecorder and gestures. Suzan explains in Kurdish and English: Adam put his *sur* in the jar.)

Na, na sur, xwêdan, dbêjin nesil, xoxa wî.

Û Hawa jî kreşer (???) bûyda. Neh heyv tamam bû.

Ê Hawayê, wexte şikandin, kêzik bû, kurum bû, naçêbû.

Ê Adam – Şehîd bin Jer bû.

Bas ew çêbû.

Wexte ew xwê kiri, Tawsî Melek (Sheikh Deshti blew on his hand)

(Renewed discussion about the utility of gestures.)

Adam wissa kir: Yani xwê kir şerpekîde. (Sheikh Deshti wiped off his forehead with his hand.)

şikand, mêş, murik, kêrik, we

Then like this (gesture: he wiped his forehead off with the back of his hand) – so that he could put it in a jar.

When Adam did like this (gesture repeated), Tawusi Melek did like this, he blew (Sheikh Deshti blew on his hand), and it was put in the jar.

Adam did like this with his sweat, and put it in a jar (Discussion on the compatibility of a taperecorder and gestures. Suzan explains in Kurdish and English: Adam put his *sur* in the jar.)

No, not his *sur*, his sweat, they say his perspiration, his sweat

And Eve did likewise (???)

Nine months passed.

In the jar of Eve, when it was broken, there were flies, it was rotten.

In that of Adam - Shehid bin Jer.

He alone was born from it.

When he took his sweat, Tawusi Melek (Sheikh Deshti blew on his hand.)

(Renewed discussion about the utility of gestures.)

Adam did like this. I mean he put his sweat in the jar. (Sheikh Deshti wiped off his forehead with his hand.)

When he put it in the jar,

Wexte kire şerpekîde, neh
heyv tamam bû. Hawayê xwe
tişt têda çêbûn.

Adam, peşi neh heyva, Şehîd
bin Cer çêbû, hindek dbêjin
Şîd, bas Şehîd safitire.

(Spât: Wexte Adam xwêdan jî
sere xwe jêkir, Tawsî Melek
çi kir?)

Tawsî Melek puff kir (ges-
tures: he blows on his hand),
yani sur jêkir, ka... bike têde.

(Suzan: Also Tawsî Melek
put them sur (unintelligible
word) with Adam, in that
jar.)

Ew sur, çû şerpikê.

(Spât: Yani Adam xwêdana
xwe dane jarê. Tawsî Melek
hat, bi dizî, û puff kir û
sureka Adamê jî çû gel
xwêdana wî?)

E, puff kir, û sureka şer-
pikêda. E, kete şerpik. Ew
şerpik, piştê neh heyva, kurek
çêbû. Navê kurê bû Şehîd,
ew Şît, yani di cerde, di şer-
pekî de. Ew Şehîd, zewici
hûriya bi jêr hatiya, zawac
çêbû, Haşim û Qûreş jê
çêbûn.

(Spât: Tê got, sure Adamê.
Yani sur yê di sere wî de

nine months passed. Eve
broke her jar, inside there
were flies, mostquitos, in-
sects and things like that

Adam, after nine months,
Shehid bin Jer was born,
some say Shiit, but Shehid
(Witness) is more authentic.

(Spât: When Adam wiped the
sweat from his head, what
did Tawusi Melek do?)

Tawusi Melek blew on it
(gestures: he blows on his
hand), I mean he took away
the *sur*, so... he can put it in-
side.

(Suzan: Also Tawsî Melek
put them *sur* (unintelligible
word) with Adam, in that
jar.)

This *sur*, it went into the jar.

(Spât: That is, Adam put his
sweat in the jar. Then Tawusi
Melek came, in secret, blew,
and the *sur* of Adam went
into the jar along with the
sweat?)

Yes, blew, and the *sur* was in
the jar. Yes, fell into the jar.
This jar, after nine months, a
boy was born (from it.) His
name was Shehid (Witness),
Shiit, in the jar. This Shehid,
he married a houri who de-
scended on the earth. He
married, Hashim and
Quraysh were born from
them.

(Spât: You said, the *sur* of
Adam. You mean the *sur* that

hebû.)

E, sur.

(Spät: Yani ew sur çi ye?)

Sur xelat e, ew, dbêjin, qudrete. Messelah eme dbêjin: Isa, û beşerî şef ferke, Isa qudret hebû, ma na? Be-ser ew qudret nine, bas, mes-selah, Isa, qudret hebû.

(Spät: yani, ew sure, ew qudrete min nine?)

Nine

(Spät: bas li Adamê hebû?)

Hebû

(Spät: wexte di behîştêde bû, wî jî ew qudrete ji Xwedê hebû?)

Hebû, Rabû. Wexte kete şer-pikêde, Şehîd, Şît, Şehîdi bin Cer, dbêjine, jê çêbû, ji cerê, ji wê surê. Wexte Şehîd bin Cer mezin bû, zewici, Haşim û Qureş jê çêbû. Em Ezidi, em dbêjin, em talîya wan kuran.

(Spät: qudrete Adamê na maye? Çunku çû û bûye yê Şehîdê?)

E, e, Şehîdê.

(Spät: yani yê Adamê na maye?)

Na. Em dbêjin, Adam, em dbêjin, lewme, hînge vega gelek milletê hem kelemekî

was in his head.)

Yes, the *sur*

(Spät: What is this *sur*?)

Sur is a gift, it is, they say, a power. For example, we say: Jesus, who was different from humans, Jesus had this power. Humans don't have this power, but Jesus, for example, had it.

(Spät: That is, I don't have this *sur*, this power?)

No, you don't.

(Spät: But Adam had it?)

He had it.

(Spät: When he was in the Paradise, he also had this power from God?)

He had it. It went. When it fell in the jar, Shehid, Shiit, Shehid bin Jer, they say, was born from it, from the jar, from this *sur*. When Shehid bin Jer grew up, he married. Hashim and Qureish were born from him. We Yezidis, we say, we are the tribe descending from these sons.

(Spät: Adam had no power left? Because it went to Shehid?)

Yes, to Shehid.

(That is Adam had none left?)

No. We say, Adam, we say, because, that is, a lot of nations say a bad word to

nebaş li Tawsî Melek dbêjine.
Em Ezidi, em dbêjine, em ê
Şehîdî bin Cerine, silave u
selamet...¹²³⁰

(Spât: qudret keramet e?)

E, qudret keramet e, ji nûrê
Xwedê.¹²³¹

Tawusi Melek.¹²³² We
Yezidis, we say, we belong to
Shehid bin Jer. Blessings...

(Spât: Is this power divine
power (*keramet*)?)
Yes, this power is *keramet*,
from the light of God.

¹²³⁰ Arabic formula of blessing addressed to Tawusi Melek follows.

¹²³¹ The interview from here veers toward discussion on parapsychology and on the miraculous feasts of the *kocheks*, that is, Yezidi seers.

¹²³² Sheikh Deshti here probably refers to the notion, also told by Feqir Haji, that Adam cursed Tawusi Melek, calling him Satan. Yezidis alone, the descendants of Shehid bin Jer, are free of this transgression, and they are forbidden to pronounce this derogatory word by their religion.

APPENDIX II: YEZIDI HYMNS

TRANSLATED BY P. KREYENBROEK

Appendix II contains the hymns translated by Philip Kreyenbroek and quoted in this study, scanned from his books *Yezidism, Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) and *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2005). Seeing these hymns in full, not only as short quotations may perhaps be of interest to the reader. My thanks to Philip Kreyenbroek for acquiescing to my quoting him in this way, and to Mellen and Harrasowitz publishers for their permission.

The Hymn of the Weak Broken One¹²³³

(1) Oh lowly one of mine, of broken heart,
If permission comes from dear Melek Fekhr el-Dîn,
We shall praise the deep oceans.

(2) Oh lowly one of mine, of little endurance,
If authorisation comes from dear Melek Fekhr el-Dîn,
We shall give descriptions of the deep oceans.

(3) Respectable people are gathered around me;
We shall tell (them) about that ocean,
In it there are pearls, jewels.

(4) Respectable people are gathered around me;
We shall give a full account of that ocean,
It is an ocean, and hell and pitch are (contained) in it.

(5) Give praise to the (One who is) Many.
(First there was) only the Throne; (then) the Prince came into
being.
He is the knowing one and he is the all-seeing one.

(6) My King came from the Pearl,
Some good things developed from it,
The branch of love was in it.

(7) In it was the branch of love.
Sultan Êzîd holds the Pen of Power in his hand.

¹²³³ Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 171-79.

Praise be to God, and thanks, that I have cast my lot with the
Tradition.

(8) The Lovers saw that Prince and came to know him,
Love and the Cup became separate,
He laid a number of cornerstones.

(9) He made cornerstones, and supported (the earth),
The Pearl burst open in its awe,
It could not prevent itself, and moved upward (?).

(10) It did not have the strength to remain patient,
The Pearl became adorned with colours,
It became red and white and yellow.

(11) The Pearl became radiant with colours.
Before, there was neither Earth,
Nor Sky, nor a Throne.
Let someone tell me whom my King loved.

(12) My King is nicely-spoken.
Love (and the Cup) were seated together.
At that stage my King instituted measures and laws.

(13) My King established measures and laws in it,
He separated the *Shari'a* and the Truth from each other,
The Tradition had been hidden; then it was revealed.

(14) The Tradition was hidden, then it was revealed,
My King sent the Truth into (the world).
He said, "My dear, where was the Tradition, where had it es-
tablished itself?"

(15) What commanding lord of mine
Was sent, descending from the sky?
Through the Power, the Mystery of the Tradition hung suspended in the air.

(16) Through the Power the Tradition hung suspended;
It obtained authorisation from its King,
He said, "My dear, (your) intercession (?) is an act of love."

(17) What lord of mine of weighty command
Has established many cornerstones amongst them?
He gave love and the direction of light as signs for them.

(18) The direction of light is a doorway.
Two jewels were created,
One is the eye (*ʿayn*), and the other the eye (*ḥav*).

(19) One is the eye and one is sight;
My King caused the Pearl to become visible.
The King knows the positions of all men.

(20) The lamp came down from above, love came into (the world),
My King seized (?) it, it became an eye.
Tell me what he said to the Pearl. Water came from it.

(21) Water came from the Pearl
A sea came into being and water collected in it
My King saddled a horse and roamed over it.

(22) My King mounted his horse,
The King and all four friends,
Together they travelled the four corners.

They stopped at Lalish, saying, "This is the site of Truth."

(23) It is the site of Truth, and they stopped.
My King threw rennet into the sea and the sea coagulated,
Smoke rose up from it, the seven heavens were built with it.

(24) My King adorned (?) the sky,
Love (came) from the right side,
My King assigned the places, he moved the Throne.

(25) My King had roamed in the sky,
As many as four times he had travelled over every part.
He founded a number of pulpits.

(26) The Lovers have told you of this:
He separated another branch from it,
He established the earth everywhere.

(27) The earth was still unsettled,
A fissure appeared (?).
He said, "My dear, without this Mystery the earth will not become tranquil."

(28) Afterwards, count forty years:
The earth did not become solid,
Until Lalish came down into (the world).

(29) When Lalish came,
Plants grew on earth.
How many things were adorned by them!

(30) As the things were embellished by it,

Four elements became separate:
 Earth and Water and Wind and Fire.
 The body of the Prophet Adam was built from them.

(31) On Saturday He laid the foundations;
 On Friday he had completed (the work).
 After seven hundred years, the Seven Mysteries came into the
 Pearl of the Cup.

(32) Seven hundred years later the Seven Mysteries came over-
 head.
 The body had remained without movement.
 They said, "Oh soul, why do you not enter?"

(33) The soul said in the presence of the Lovers, "you know
 (this):
 As long as *shibab* and *def* do not come to me from above,
 There will be a barrier between soul and body of the Prophet
 Adam."

(34) *Shibab* and *def* came and were present,
 And the light of Love reached his head.
 The soul came and manifested itself in the body of the Prophet
 Adam.

(35) The Prophet Adam drank from that cup and came to life,
 He became intoxicated and trembled,
 Flesh grew on him, blood circulated in his veins.

(36) The Prophet Adam drank from that cup,
 The miraculous power of that cup manifested itself:
 Thus the Prophet Adam sneezed and through it he became
 conscious.

(37) The Prophet Adam drank from that cup and liked it.
 The miraculous power of that cup came and reached (him):
 Thus the Prophet Adam was taken up and borne to heaven.

(38) My King is the Everlasting Lord.
 From Adam (many) groups would spring:
 Seventy-two nations became separate from one another.

(39) There would come the period of the Prophet Noah:
 A people would appear in whose heart there was much impiety
 They would become rebellious against their God.

(40) After that time,
 A people would appear in whose hearts respect for the faith
 did not dwell.
 They would drown in the water of the storms.

(41) After those periods,
 An iniquitous people would appear.
 A 'point' would descend from the Lamp.
 Among (them) Ibrahîm Khelîl would appear.

(42) Ibrahîm Khelîl is from a sincere 'point',
 He would become the one to pronounce the three words,
 Until he recognised his God as Truth.

(43) Until he recognised his God as Truth,
 He would dispute with Azir and Nimrud and the Idols.
 Thus he would free his spirit from impiety.

(44) After them there would be Khelîlu'llah, Jesus and Moses.
 The New Muhammad is perfect.
 Love for him would reach some hearts:

The last of the Princes is the Seyyid who is a Prophet.

(45) Oh Seyyid among the Prophets!
Several periods have come and gone,
Several holy beings have appeared, I have counted them:
It is Sultan Sheykh Adi, the crown from the first until the last.

The Hymn of the Creation of the World¹²³⁴

(1) Oh Lord, in the world there was darkness,
There were neither mice nor snakes.
You brought it to life for the first time
Flowers almost burst from it.

(2) Oh Lord, you are the generous master,
You opened the way and the road from(?) darkness.
You are the master of all things,
You created Paradise, many-coloured.

(3) Earth and sky existed
The world was wide, without foundation;
There were neither men nor animals.

(4) You yourself brought order to it.
In the ocean there was only a pearl
—It did not progress, it did not progress—
You quickly gave it a soul,
You made your own light manifest in it.

(5) Flesh and soul came to it,
The light of the eyes entered it.
Hands and feet you made, the body
In it you created sweet speech.

(6) Our Lord, you are the merciful master!
You opened the road and the gate to the world.
All things you brought into being for us:

¹²³⁴ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 183-91.

Paradise, earth and cultivated land came into being.

(7) Our Lord had a thing in mind.
He established the Pearl of the Cup from it,
From it he created the holy men.
He said, "This is still not enough".

(8) The Pearl burst open in its awe of God,
It could not contain itself, it moved upward (?).
It became adorned with such colours:
Red and white became visible in it.

(9) Our God, in his mercy,
Brought forth goodness and beauty for us.
He gave a command to the Pen of Power:
We were thrown into the Mystery of Love.

(10) He threw rennet into the ocean.
The ocean coagulated because of it,
Smoke appeared from it.
He built heaven and earth, fourteen layers,
Our God brought the Pearl out.

(11) He threw Love into it
From it he brought forth two eyes.
A great deal of water flowed from it.

(12) Water flowed from the Pearl,
It became an ocean without end, without beginning,
Without road and without gate.
Our God circled over the water.

(13) Our God made a ship;

Men, animals and all sorts of birds
He gave a place in the ship, two by two.

(14) Our Lord is at the helm of the ship,
The leader who(?) roams in all four directions.
The ship sprang a leak, water came in,
The snake coiled itself over it.

(15) Our Lord sailed the ship,
He went from shore to shore,
He sailed to Lalish, and said, "It is the site of Truth".

(16) Sultan Êzî is a good guide.
Lalish, which is the cornerstone of mankind,
Now the Yezidis know about it.

(17) Oh Lord, I call upon the Great Sheykh
The well, the spring, water is born from it.
Oh Lord, you made the world, the world (is) good;
In it men live replete.

(18) Black nights, dark nights,
Everywhere flowers appeared from it!
You are God, you are generous and merciful.

(19) He founded earth and sky,
He gave us a soul and a tongue.
Our Lord is the Eternal Lord,
He created six Angels,
He separated Hell and Paradise.

(20) Our Lord created the world, he moved the sky (upward),
It became possible to flatten the earth (?),

It was the appointed time to move (the Sky) upward.
He became a scourge to sinners.

(21) What a long time our Lord roamed in the world!
He made trees and stones subservient to his will.
In it he fashioned foundations, pulpits.

(22) He brought Lالش down from above
Lالش became pleasant everywhere.
On earth, plants began to grow,
With them he adorned the existing things as he brought them
to life.

(23) Our Lord, you are merciful
You brought four elements for us.
With them, you fashioned the beloved of Adam.
Our Lord, you are merciful,
You brought four elements into the world.

(24) One is Water, one is Light,
One is Earth, one is Fire.
Our Lord in (his) mercy
Made visible the *def* and *shibab*.

(25) Between Adam and the Seven Mysteries there is a strong
barrier.
The Seven Mysteries circled around and came overhead.
The shape of Adam had remained without movement.
They said, "Oh soul, why do you not enter it?"

(26) Our Lord is powerful.
He has brought to life so many creatures!
For them he has created Hell and Paradise.

(27) Our Lord has created the earth, he moved Heaven (up-
ward),
It became possible to flatten the earth (?),
It was the appointed time to flatten it (?).
Acts of goodness are demanded from man.

(28) Lalish came (down) from heaven
The earth became green, plants came
How many beings grazed on it!

(29) Our Lord laid the foundation on Friday.
On Saturday he drew up a plan,
On Wednesday he completed it.
Seven hundred years afterwards, the Seven Mysteries came to-
the Pearl and the Cup.

(30) Count seven hundred years before Adam.
The earth was below and did not become settled.
Until Lalish the luminous was sent into (the world).

(31) And the soul was present, on high,
It came and went and passed,
The Light of Love reached the head
It came and became manifest in the body of Adam.

(32) Our Lord, you are merciful.
You brought Adam the cup of the Mystery,
He drank water from the cup, and came to life.
Immediately he became drunk, and trembled.

(33) That soul demanded flesh from him,
Blood circulated in his body,
Ardour entered his head.

(34) Adam drank from that cup,
The Mystery of the cup was agreeable to him,
He reached the blessing of the cup, and became conscious.
The angels seized his shoulders and took him to Paradise.

(35) Adam drank from the cup
The blessing of the Cup became manifest in him
He coughed(?) and woke up.

(36) He said, "How pleasant this earth is.
Green plants are everywhere,
The time is the time of strong men."

(37) Our Lord, you are merciful.
You have performed an act of grace for us,
You have laid down time and directions well.

(38) Oh man, on the face of the earth,
At all times have faith!
The Lord has delivered us from the storm.

(39) Let the mirîd do their work,
The blessing of the Power has come down to us.
Earth and heaven grant good things,
You also should become people of good deeds!
Never forget this!

The Hymn of Sheykh Obekr¹²³⁵

(1) Lovers and loved ones all,
We need a friend to explain this question:
Did the Pearl come from the King or the King from the Pearl?

(2) Lovers are wise,
Our search is for an answer to this:
Whether the Pearl came from the King or the King from the
Pearl.

(3) Wise Lovers who are initiates,
Come and explain to me:
Is the Pearl the Throne, and did the King take his seat there?

(4) My King separated the Pearl from himself.
He gazed on it with concentration,
He made a mental image and brought it into existence.

(5) My King detached the Pearl from himself.
The Pearl is a plentiful light,
The luminous light is (like) a star.

(6) The Pearl comes from the word of the King,
The *kbirge* appeared from it,
Always holy men receive salutations because of it.

(7) Sheykh Obekr said,
“My dear, I have needed this word for a long time;

¹²³⁵ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 209-13.

As much gold and riches as I can think of,
I shall give all of it for the sake of the visible *khirqe*."

(8) "My dear, I have been listening for this word for a long
time.

As much gold and riches as I can think of,
I shall relinquish all of it for the sake of the visible *khirqe*."

(9) The Feqîrs followed it.

Thus, he who has renounced the desolate, transitory evil,
On him they will bestow the keys.

(10) Those keys,

They will bring to the hands of those commoners.

All five obligatory acts of Truth will bear witness for them on
the Last Day.

(11) My King, ever since he was the Prince,

Was the leader of a vast army.

With the Seven Mysteries of Sultan Êzîd, he was the knowing
one.

(12) My King, the King,

Is the planner of several plans.

Sultan Êzîd knows who is in front and who is behind.

(13) My King is in (a state of) oneness,

The friend of my heart was aware of this.

Sincere service is such as befits my King.

(14) My King, ever since he was the Prince,

Was the leader of a vast army.

With the Seven Mysteries of Sultan Êzîd, he was the Knowing
one.

(15) My King is the Mystery in Heaven.
Before, there was neither Tablet nor Pen.
Oh Sultan Êzîd, this moment, this hour is in your hands.

(16) Before, there was neither Pen nor Tablet.
We need a friend to explain this word; where is he?
There was one angel, he became two.

(17) By order of the King,
Our search is for an answer to this.
There were two angels, they became three.

(18) My King is the all-powerful.
From him came the Command.
There were three angels, they became four.

(19) My King is the almighty
There were four angels, they became five.
All five shared one another's character and qualities.

(20) My heart is happy because of this:
There were five angels, they became six.
All six became the angels of the Throne.

(21) My King made (his) speech pleasant
They were seated together in Love.
There were six angels, they became seven.

(22) All seven, when they were created,

Were exactly alike.
In Love, gazing at one another, they passed the time.

(23) My King decided thus:
He sent a Feqîr, (who) brought forth water for always,
He named it the *Kaniya Sipi*.

(24) The Feqîrs told one of this:
From heaven down to earth,
From earth upward,
The water of the *Kaniya Sipi* has qualities to deal with so many
ills.

(25) My King is the all-powerful.
Four came from the Pearl of mystical knowledge:
Earth and Water and Wind and Fire.

(26) All four are precious.
By whom were they brought and by whom were they taken
away?
By what (divine) command were they separated from the
Pearl?

(27) All four are correct.
They neither ate nor slept.
By what (divine) command were they moved away from the
Pearl?

The Hymn of the Oceans¹²³⁶

(1) One day I was pondering night and day,
I seek protection with God.

(2) What a great ocean he is!
He is also an endless light.
Four streams have sprung from it.

(3) What a gigantic ocean he is!
Its foundation consists of four cornerstones,
The four foundations are a cornerstone for the holy men,
The assembly of Sheykh Adi, which must observe the pre-
scribed way of dressing (?).

(4) What an endless ocean he is!
He is the everlasting King of the good men.
I am the supporter of my Sheykh,
I give much praise to my Sheykh.

(5) What a deep ocean he is!
He is the compassionate King of the good men.
I was far away, I came near.

(6) I was far away, I came to the shores
The waves removed me again
I am ready to help my Sheykh,
I give much praise to my Sheykh.

¹²³⁶ Kreyenbroek, *Yezîdism*, 203-05.

(7) I have seen an ocean,
In the middle (of it) there is a wall,
On it has come to dwell one whose steed is a lion.

(8) I have seen a (way to) safety,
A Feqîr was alone,
But he had an idea and a plan.

(9) My King is great:
He is the Lord of the eleven pairs who were ready for battle.
Thus the numbers of that large army departed.

(10) My King fashioned the Throne,
He fashioned a carpet, he laid his plan.
Like a draughtsman he concentrated on it.

(11) Two commoners whirled a spear,
Those commoners whirled their spears
You be witnesses for the love of God.

(12) My King hit it.
It returned twelve thousand salutations.
During the *dhîker* of my Sultan Êzîd, (there came) an opening
to the Pearl.

(13) Only one of them was seated, two others are standing up.
In my heart I can see them thus:
(As) the one wick of four lamps!

(14) Four lamps with one wick!
There are seven doorways for the one Word.
Eleven are a deep ditch:
Seven are dark, four are luminous.

(15) They are the judges and the pulpits,
They are the book and the records:
(From) the one cornerstone they are the four humans.

(16) Four humans from one cornerstone.
Two of them I have seen somewhere:
During the dhikr of my Sultan Êzîd they were lifted up and
thrown into the marketplace.

(17) His name consists of three letters.
One of them is in Mecca, one is in Medina:
I wish I knew where they are on earth.

(18) You people of understanding,
Melek Sheykh Hesen has taken his place on the pulpit.
He intones the hymns, he reads the records.

(19) The Qatani derwishes expounded four words of meaning.
They are not pronounced aloud (?),
In the hereafter they will not be sold.

The Declaration of Faith¹²³⁷

(1) My declaration of Faith is: (there is) One God.
 Melek Sheykh Hesên is Truth, (he is) the Friend of God.
 (God) bless Mount Meqlûb and the Sanctuary.

(2) Salutations to the holy men men, to Lalish and to Meqlûb.
 Our point of orientation on this earth are the Twin Spires.
 The Yezidi nation turns towards Sheykh Adi,
 In the worship of prostration.

(3) Sultan Sheykh Adi is my King,
 Sheikh Obekr is my Lord,
 Sultan Êzîd is my King.

(4) XX is my Pîr,
 XX is my Mirebbî,
 Melek Tawus is (the object of) my declaration and my faith.

(5) The *Kaniya Sîpî* is my (the place of) baptism,
 The Cave, the Cavern and the Zimzim spring are (the goals of)
 my pilgrimage.
 The *qibla* of the full moons is my *qibla*.

(6) Melek Sheykh Hesên is my ancestor,
 XX is my lord,
 Sheykh Shems is my religion,
 The light of my eyes.

¹²³⁷ Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 227.

(7) Praise be to God for the House of Adi,
We have remained separate from the heretics, the Rāfīdites.
We have cast our lot with the people of the Tradition.

(8) We are grateful to the holy men,
We have remained separate from the heretics, from the swine.
We have cast our lot with the Sheykhs and Pīrs.

(9) We are grateful and obliged,
We have remained separate from the heretics, from the Shari'a.
We have cast our lot with the Sheykh of the Tradition.

(10) God willing, we are Yezidis,
Followers of the name of Sultan Êzîd.
Praise be to God, we are content with our religion and *tariqa*.

The Hymn of the Weak Broken One¹²³⁸

After formally asking permission from Melik Fekhredin, the Qewwal states that he is surrounded by good believers, and will now tell how the world was created. The cosmogony contains the ancient theme of the Pearl, which first contained God, and from which he then caused to burst open, after which the Seven Mysteries, water, and the earth came into being. Furthermore, the concept of Love, which is said to have caused the earth to become solid, plays an important role in the Cosmogony. The text ends with a description of the early history of humanity and the Yezidi community.

1. All (of us) lowly ones of broken heart
If permission were to come from Melik Fekhredin, the
dear one
We shall praise the deep oceans.

- 2 All (of us) lowly ones of little endurance
If authorisation were coming from Melik Fekhredin, the
dear one
Of the great oceans we shall give descriptions.

3. Respectable people have gathered around me
We shall tell about the great oceans
In it there are pearls and jewels.

4. Respectable people have gathered around me
We shall give a full account of the great oceans
In the great oceans the Prince is present.

5. Give a great deal of praise

¹²³⁸ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 57-65.

The Prince has come to the Throne
He is knowing, he is all-seeing.

6. When the King came from the Pearl
Some perceptions developed from it
The branch of love came into being.
7. In it the branch of love came into being
On Sultan Ezid's head is the crown of the sovereignty
Praise be that we have cast our lot with the Tradition.
8. The Lovers came to know the Prince
The basket and the cup became distinct
All foundations were laid.
9. Foundations were laid and established
The Pearl burst open in its awe
It no longer had the strength to contain (God).
10. It no longer had the strength to remain patient
It became adorned with many colours
It became red and white and yellow.
11. The Pearl was adorned, it became shining
When there was neither earth nor sky nor Throne
Then whom could my King delight in?
12. My King separated the Pearl from himself
He approved of one Companion
He fashioned a luminous *kebirge*.
13. The luminous *kebirge* of the Gate

He put a pearl and a jewel in it
 One is the eye (*'yn*) and the other the eye (*ʿaw*).

14. One is the eye and one is sight
 My King had caused the Pearl to become visible
 The King knows who is in front and who is ahead.

15. My King spoke pleasantly
 The King and the Cup and Love
 They had created rules and limits
 There love had its place.

16. My King established rules and limits
 He separated *Shari'a* and Truth from each other
 The Tradition had been hidden, he revealed it.

17. The Tradition was hidden, he revealed it
 He sent the Truth to it
 Where had it established itself?

18. When the earth and the sky were not yet stable
 He first created a form of Lalish opposite them
 Love, the luminous, acting as leaven came to dwell in it.

19. No pain remained in my heart
 A form of Lalish was created on high
 Its gate was called the '*Qibla* of the Full Moons'.

20. Lalish lies at the centre
 Its hallmark is the White Spring
 The sign of earth and heaven.

21. My King is perfect, his judgement is weighty
He placed many cornerstones in (the world)
As a sign he gave them Love, the luminous, acting as
heaven.
22. What a powerful Lord
A command descended from the sky
By its power the Tradition was suspended in the air.
23. By its power the Tradition hung suspended in the air
The Tradition made many complaints to my King
I said: 'My dear one, (your) intercession is Love.'
24. The Lamp from above came down
My King had placed his eye in it
What did my King say to the Pearl?
From the Pearl water was coming!
25. Water came from the Pearl
It became the ocean and water collected in it
My King saddled a horse and roamed over it.
26. The King and all four Friends
Mounted horses
On them they travelled the four corners.
They stopped at Lalish saying: 'This is the site of Truth.'
27. It is the site of Truth! They stopped
My King threw rennet into the sea and the sea coagulated
Smoke rose up from it
All the seven heavens were built with it.
28. My King adorned the sky

He laid down the place, and put the Throne on it
Love was in its right hand.

29. My King roamed in the sky
He had travelled (over the world) several times
He established a number of pulpits.
30. The Lovers have told of this:
He fashioned another branch from it
He established all the earths.
31. The earth was still unsettled
A fissure appeared
(He said) 'My dear one, without the Mystery the earth
will not become tranquil.'
32. Afterwards count forty years:
The earth did not become solid
Until Love, the luminous, acting as rennet, was sent into
it.
33. When Lalish came down
The light of love came to the Lamp
The earth rejoiced, it was adorned with many colours.
34. When Lalish came
Plants began to grow on earth
So many phenomena were embellished by them.
35. How many phenomena were embellished by them
Earth, water, wind, and fire were mixed together
The body of the Prophet Adam was made from them.

36. My King is the Lord of Might
In the beginning he created the angels.
In their hands he placed hell and heaven.
37. My King and all the Seven Angels exist in loneliness
They decide that they will definitely create beings.
38. On Saturday the foundations were laid
On Friday all was completed
After seven (hundred) years the Seven Mysteries came
around the Cup.
39. The Seven Mysteries came from above
body of the Prophet Adam had remained without
movement.
They said: Oh soul, why do you not enter?
40. The soul said: Lovers know (this)
Until the *shibab* and *def* come from above
There will be a great barrier between Adam's soul and
body.
41. *Shibab* and *def* came and were present
The light of Love entered his head
The soul came and made its home (in the body).
42. When he fashioned the body of the Prophet Adam
The Holy Beings gathered around him, before Time
began
The Cup of Love (became) visible.
43. He (Adam) drank from the Cup
Because of the Cup he agreed to obey the command

The soul came and reached him.

44. The Prophet Adam drank from that Cup
He came to life, became intoxicated, and trembled
His flesh became animated
Blood circulated inside him.
42. The Prophet Adam drank from that Cup
The miraculous power of that Cup manifested itself
So he sneezed, and thus he became conscious.
46. That Cup is luminous
The Prophet Adam drank from it with the love of a faithful heart
Therefore flesh and blood came to his body.
47. Adam liked the Cup
The mystical power of the Cup reached him
The Cup took Adam up to heaven.
48. The saintly Adam became intoxicated from the Cup
He had neither feet nor hands
So Sultan Ezi endowed him with mystical power.
49. The saintly Adam drank from the Cup
The mystical power of that Cup came to him
So (God) sent him the Hourī Eve.
50. What a beautiful Hourī she is!
By the mystical power of that Cup
Both the Hashemites and the Quraysh came from her.

51. After that period
A people appeared
In whose hearts there was no respect for the faith
They drowned during the year of the flood.
52. Then came the epoch of Noah and the prophets
A people appeared in whose hearts there was much infidelity
Therefore they became rebellious against God.
53. That Cup was given to Noah
By the mystical power of that Cup he became conscious
Therefore he saved many souls from the flood.
54. That Cup was given to Ibrahim
His house was great and powerful
He gave it all up for the Generous One.
55. He sacrificed it all for the sake of the Splendid One
A point came down from the Lamp
They gave Ibrahim the name 'the Friend'.
56. Ibrahim the Friend is from a sincere point
He became the one to encounter three words
Therefore he recognised his God as Truth.
57. He recognised his God as Truth
He disputes with Nemrud, Azir and the Idols
He freed his spirit from infidelity.
58. He detached his soul from infidelity
He threw the heathen into the fire
Brother Gabriel accepted him.

59. After him, (Ibrahim) the Friend, the Guide of God
(There were) Jesus and Moses and Mohammed the Chosen
Love for him would reach some hearts.
60. 124.000 Prophets came and passed away
124.000 Favourites (of God) came and passed away
Sultan Ezi counted every one of them.
61. Sultan Ezi was light, he was adorned with light
Sultan Sheikh Adi was the crown from the first until the last.

May God bestow His mercy on my teacher, on all men and sufferers, and on the house and family where we find ourselves. The mercy of God and Sheikh Adi.

The Hymn of the Thousand and One Names¹²³⁹

The text illustrates how God's different aspects, symbolised by his 1001 Names, express themselves in our world from the time of creation onwards. A distinction is implied between the world as we know it and the deeper, unseen reality which underlies it. Furthermore, the text describes how various great figures of the Yezidi Tradition were made to drink from the Cup, which apparently symbolises a mandate to play a leading role in the world. Like God, Sultan Ezi is described as being omnipresent, and as transcending all apparent contradictions of the exoteric world.

1. My King has a thousand and one names.
In his eyes the world is a matter of an hour, an instant
Sultan Ezi knows how many masses of water there are in the
Ocean
How many stones are scattered over dry river-beds
Sultan Ezi made Eve a bride, Adam a groom.

2. All foundations, all hills
All deserts, all oceans
They are all in the palm of God's hand and that of Sultan
Ezi

3. All hills and all foundations
All oceans and all deserts
They are all in the palm of God's hand and that of Sultan
Ezi

4. My King is the Ancient One
If only I knew
Whether the Bull is greater or the Fish.

¹²³⁹ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 74-82.

5. Our explanation (is based) on this answer:
The Fish is seven time greater than the Bull.
6. By the power of the Greatest One
The Fish has seventy-two fins
One fin forms a girdle for it
On top of that fin stands the Bull.
7. I have been taken to that master
Seven angels stand on the head of that Bull
All seven angels are saints and mystics of the King.
8. My King is the one I long for
The saints know the Prince
Therefore they made him the leader of the seven angels
of Adi.
9. The ocean whose name is Nisebin
All seven angels dwell on earth.
If only I knew what their counsel is
Their proofs, which are based on certainty.
10. A Cup was fetched for me
All seven drink (from it)
Through it they became Kings on earth.
11. All seven drank (from it)
The Pearl developed waves, it became the ocean;
What they had to reveal, they revealed to me.
12. The Bull and the Fish drank from it.
Therefore they accepted (to have) on their back:
Foundations and high places, deserts and oceans.

13. The Lord of the Cup came to Mu'awiya
-Oh wall built on (solid) foundations-
Sultan Ezi is the Lord of the Cup!
14. He gave the Cup to Sheikh Musafir
(Saying:) Oh saint, who are so proud
The Mystery of the King is with you
From the first till the last.
15. That Cup he gave to Sheikh Barakat
He was presented with seven robes of honour.
They said: He fled from the world, he went to heaven.
16. That Cup was given to Sheikh (O)bekir
(With the words:) Sheikh Adi invested you with his
miraculous power.
Therefore he gave you a place beside himself.
17. That Cup was given to Ezdina Mir
He knows about this world and the hereafter
He stands on the shoulders of Shems(edin) and Prince
Fekhr.
18. That Cup was given to Shems, the son of Ezdin(a Mir)
The keys are in his hand
Without Shems, the son of Ezdina, no transactions are
possible (in the world).
19. That Cup was given to Mohammad the Perfect;
A good thing is in his mind
He has visions night and day.
20. That Cup was given to the Sheikh of the Tradition

Grace came to him from the Lord of that Cup
 In the heavens he became the Lord of the Tradition
 On earth he gave power to the prophets of the community.

21. That Cup was given to Ali
 The grace of that Cup (comes) at once
 Therefore Ali was invested with seven robes of honour.
22. By the power of the Powerful One
 Ali was invested with these robes of honour
 One was Fatima, one Dhu 'l-Fiqar, and one Duldul.
23. That Cup was given to Ibn Mansur
 He moved away, he went to the deep oceans.
 Sultan Ezi is near, he is not far.
24. That Cup was given to Sayyid Nasim
 Oh All-powerful One, since the days of old
 Sultan Ezi is a doctor for all ills.
25. That Cup was given to Pir Mend the Gorani
 He fled, he landed near that Ocean,
 So he ruled over the land of unbelievers.
26. That Cup was given to Derwesh Qatani
 He drank (from it), as you know
 So he experienced the beneficence of his King.

27. ...¹²⁴⁰
28. Oh God, you are powerful and omnipresent
Please be very patient with me
This blow has eaten the very flesh of my soul.
29. The Prophet, the martyr, became drunk from this Cup
He had neither feet nor hands
Therefore Sultan Ezi asked that a miracle would happen
to him.
30. That Cup was given to Yunis the Dancer
He stayed forty days in the belly of the Fish
From then on he recognised the King as (the) true (God).
31. From that direction we went forwards
Sultan Ezi had roamed around the world in the guise of a
dervish
This world was entirely in the hands of Sultan Ezi.
32. From that direction we went downwards
With me were a hundred leaders(?)
Sultan Ezi made the hereafter the capital of (good) men
Oh Sultan Ezi, we ask you to grant our wish:
Faith and religion, not possessions!
33. He says: There are three hundred and sixty-six Prophets sent
by God
They have all been graced by that Cup
Because of their awe of Sultan Ezi, they came into action.

¹²⁴⁰ This stanza is not clearly audible on the cassette.

34. By the power of the Powerful One
Sultan Ezi became manifest at that assembly
Tell me: with how many colours did Sultan Ezi appear
And how many colours passed away?

35. My King is all-powerful.
The Pearl showed waves, it became the ocean
Sultan Ezi entrusts this world
To the hands of Sheikh Shems and Fekhr, the good men.

36. He says: I was with some who dug the earth
I was with some who sowed
I was with some who feared (God).

37. I was with some who do not dig
I was with some who do not fear (God)
I was with some who do not sow.

38. I was with some whose clamour reaches the skies (?)
I was with some who...
I was with some who, in spring, were longing for a little
dew.

39. I was with some whose pockets were full of money
I was with some who controlled insurgents
I was with some who were inside fortresses, (while others)
died outside the walls.

40. I was with some who went stealing
I was with some who shouted
I was with some who said: A theft is taking place there.

41. Oh Sultan Ezi, you yourself are the wind

You have placed yourself on high
You tell the thief to come
You tell the householders: There is a thief!

42. Oh Sultan Ezi, you are the wind
You are the wind that precedes so much rain
You are the robe (adorning) on the shoulders of good men.
43. You are the sword in its scabbard
You are the rifle on the marksman's shoulder
Oh Sultan Ezi, we are asking you for our desire
Faith and religion, not possessions!
44. Oh Sultan Ezi, you are on earth and in heaven
You are in the oceans, you are in the foundations (of the earth)
You(r name) is on many tongues.
45. Oh Sultan Ezi, you are on earth and in heaven
You are in the Tables, you are in the Pen
You are there in rejoicing, you are there in sorrow
You are with Jesus son of Mary.
46. You cause the clouds to drift
You cause the rain to fall
You cause the great oceans to coagulate
You set this world in motion
You are religion and faith to us
If only I could have a soul
To which you would give, and from which you would not take!
47. Oh Sultan Ezi, you are in the keys and in the boxes
You are with the great and with the small

With grooms and brides
 With Archbishops and ordinary Christian priests
 You are both with the prisons and with the imprisoned.

48. You are in the markets with the grocers
 You are in the marketplaces with the brokers
 Oh Sultan Ezi, we ask you for our desire
 Religion and faith, not possessions!
49. Oh Sultan Ezi, you are the gracious prince of this world
 You are gracious, full of knowledge
 Oh Sultan Ezi, from beginning to end you are in our
 minds!
50. A fortress and a thousand foundations
 A market and a thousand shops
 A head and a thousand tongues.
51. For that fortress only
 Keys come from the Treasury and from the Unseen
 Some sit, longing for Sultan Ezi, and recite (prayers).
52. That fortress has two roads
 Its doorway is of gold
 A hundred thousand winds come to it.
53. If only I could have such a soul, be a Yezidi
 Say this word: Amen, amen, amen.

May God have mercy on the one whom I asked to teach me
 this Qewl,
 And on the souls of the mothers and fathers of the listeners
 who are present here!

Hymn of the Faith¹²⁴¹

The text contains allusions to many aspects of Yezidi sacred history, from the time when nothing existed except God, via the stage when a principle ('the Path') which is connected with mystical knowledge, came into being and the White Spring was created, to a stage when another being existed as a servant of God ('the Master'), who was granted mystical knowledge. Furthermore, there are references to the End of Time, to Sheikh Adi's role as a visionary and an organiser of the community, to the mystical quest of the Feqirs, and the arcane significance of their *kehrqe*. Then the text describes several of the great figures of Yezidi sacred history as laying the 'foundations' of the faith, and ends by admonishing community members to live pious lives and to follow a knowledgeable man as their spiritual director.

1. The faith, what are its signs?
When there was no earth, no sky
There was no ocean, no foundations
There were no mountains and no bedrock.

2. There was a way, a path,
There were pillars of (mystical) knowledge
On that day Sultan Ezi made the White Spring
The direction of prayer for the good men.

3. That day Sultan Ezi made the White Spring the direction of
prayer of good men
Before earth and sky
Before ocean and foundations
Before mountains and bedrock
Oh Sultan Ezi, all offer you praise and signs (of devotion).

¹²⁴¹ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 83-89.

4. Oh Lord, I offer you all praise,
Before the throne and the heavens
Before Table(s) and the Pen
Before Adam and Eve
Before Jesus and Mary
Oh Lord, for the last ninety-thousand years I have been
with you.
5. Oh Sultan Ezi, for the last ninety-thousand years I was there
I had neither father nor mother
My task was service to the master.
6. I was brought before the wondrous power of that master
I was given in the charge of that teacher
He created joy and happiness for me.
7. He made joy and happiness for us
I was brought to the Order of the Proud Angel
Oh Khidir son of Khidir!
8. Oh Khidir son of Khidir!
You gave me an unsullied Cup
I drank, pronouncing (God's) Name
I was taken to proud knowledge.
9. You brought me that Cup
I drank, as you know
I was taken to the knowledge of the Qatanis.
10. I speak about the Qatanis:
As to religion and the Pillars (of faith), I am the mystical
knowledge of the Path,
I want to offer praise to beloved Melik Fekhredin.

11. Let me offer praise to beloved Sherfedin
When will the good tidings come to us
(That) he will leave his occultation in the tent with the
golden sides.

12. He will leave his occultation in the tent with the golden sides
This world will wage war on him
Even the House of Tradition itself will have doubts.

13. The House of Tradition itself will have doubts
Anyone who is a servant of the Creator
Will seek the protection of Sultan Sheikh Adi.

14. Sultan Sheikh Adi himself is the faith
His ocean is a mighty ocean
Divers have brought forth pearls from it.

15. Divers brought forth pearls from it
Anyone who shares the secrets of his King
Has brought forth a pearl from the oceans.

16. Sultan Ezi brought forth pearls from the oceans
Sheikh Adi put them in the palm of his hand
From them he made: the crown and the mantle, and the
luminous black *khirqe*.
He brought these forth and put them on himself.

17. My King established the pillars on high
He 'baptised' the *khirqe*
The status of the *khirqe* is way up above
My Sultan Ezi(d) the Red put it on.

18. Sheikh Adi will come with the foundations
He put them up on high, brought the *khirqe* and

'baptised' it

The *khirqe* is the garment of my Sultan Ezi(d) the Red.

19. My Sultan Ezi(d) put on the *khirqe*
He placed a luminous black crown of power on his head
The Feqirs set out on a journey to reach him.
20. The Feqirs set out to reach him
Whoever makes his ego-soul a prisoner
Will doubtless come before the sight of the Prince.
21. They descend from that place
The Four Friends stand before it
We shall have a share of the protecting hem of the *khirqe*
of Sheikh Adi.
22. Contentment came from above
It is Sheikh Hesên the Chosen.
Yes, my King Sultan Sheikh Adi
Is useful for all ills.
23. My King, Sultan Sheikh Adi, was useful for all ills
Whoever acts on the word of the King
Has accepted the authority of the angels.
24. We have accepted the authority of the angels
Whoever believes in the religion and the foundations of
the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi
(Belongs to) the House of Adi, to our Order, for ever
and ever.
25. Don't say: What is the House of Adi?
Oh naïve young man

You know nothing of the meaning of the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi
 Why do you say: (It takes) a little *zerguz* and a bit of wool?

26. Oh naive young man
 You don't know what the meaning of Sheikh Adi's *khirqe* is
 They say: The meaning of Sheikh Adi's *khirqe* is a handful
 of *zerguz* and a bit of wool.

27. Oh young man, young man
 The *khirqe* is made of wool, it is baptised with the *zerguz*
 The status of the *khirqe* of Sheikh Adi is way up above
 The *khirqe* is the garment of my Ezi(d) the Red.

28. This is a strong foundation
 It appeared among the Saints
 It is the foundation of my Sheikh, Adi.

29. It is an excellent foundation
 It appeared among the followers (*mirâd*)
 It is the foundation of Sheikh Adi.

30. What a great foundation it is
 It appeared among the believers
 It is the foundation of Melik Sheikh Sin.

31. It is an unsullied foundation
 In the world it became famous and oft-mentioned
 It is the foundation of Sheikh Obekr.

32. It is a luminous foundation
 It appeared among the learned ones
 It is the foundation of Sheikh Shems and Melik Fek-
 hredin.

33. It is an artful foundation
It appeared among the good men
It is the foundation of Sheikh Shems the Tartar.
34. Bring the *khirqe*
Put the foundations on it
Send it to the Feqirs
So that the Feqirs will lift it up it over their heads.
35. The Feqirs have lifted up the *khirqe*
It is a profession of faith in the House of Adi
Our bodies are made of clay
The White Spring is (our) direction of prayer.
36. A wall was built on a strong foundation
A foundation was laid ...
My dear one, in this world no one knows about anyone else.
37. Let them build a wall from it (i.e. from mystical knowledge)
With a foundation laid underneath
Let all people, the simple and those of great intelligence, be born and procreate.
38. If the wall does not rest on the foundation
On top of it there are heavy waves
On the Last Day the owner will shake his head in wretchedness.
39. My unsullied master
Came to be praised and remembered in the world
The origin of the stream of water is the dam.

40. A stream and a flat field
I will tell you about (my) leader
Your safety lies with the House of Sheikh Mend of the
Fekhrudin clan!
41. Ask a father (?) today
The world lasts for an hour, a moment
The House of Adi will always be united.
42. Come to the House of Adi
It has made the hidden secrets appear
Oh you buyers of cloth, come!
43. Come, oh ye buyers of this cloth
Do not follow an ignorant man
Lest your pains and trouble go for nothing on the Last
Day.
44. I will tell you, you who have responsible positions
Do not follow an ignorant man
Lest your pains and trouble go for nothing on the Last
Day.
45. Drive directly to the Doorway (at Lalish)
Take the Lord's path without fail
Serve and perform religious duties!
Oh Sheikh Adi, give (religious) wages and freedom from
sin to the Yezidis of East and West
Those who are present and listen, from the treasury of
power.

We are deficient, God and Sheikh Adi are perfect.

The Hymn of Qere Ferqan¹²⁴²

The words Qere Ferqan, 'Black Furqan', apparently refer to a sacred book or text named Furqan, which is also mentioned in the Hymn of Earth and Sky. After an initial passage describing how knowledge is revealed by God to Sheikh Fekhrudin, the text deals with Pre-eternity, Creation and the early history of the faith.

1. What a dark morning it was
 A mystical state came upon me
 From beginning to end the King appeared to me.

2. What a pleasant morning it is
 They gave me a black line in my hand
 And said: Dervish, come, the King calls you to his throne.

3. What a red morning it is
 They gave me an authoritative line (of writing) in my hand
 And said: Dervish, the King calls you to the heights.

4. What a proud morning it is
 My King sent down knowledge, decrees, lines (of script) and family documents to me
 They said: Dervish, the King has called you to the heights.

5. What a precious morning it is
 My King had sent down for me knowledge, decrees, and lines
 Melik Fekhrudin stands before my King
 And asks him a question.

¹²⁴² Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 94-103.

6. Melik Fekhredin stands before the King and asked him a question:
 Oh God, you are the One, triumphant
 Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens
 Before the (holy) men, before the angels
 Love was at your disposal: what did you create with it?
7. The King tells him: Fekhr, my proud one
 It is a duty and an obligation for me to answer you
 Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens.
 Before the (holy) men, before the angels
 My love worshipped the *khirqe*.
8. Melik Fekhredin stands before his King
 He had put one foot on the other, and one hand over the other one
 He said: Truly my ancestor's answer is correct
 After seven years the love of my ancestor existed, but it remained without (object of) worship.
9. My King calls out loudly:
 The Pearl had waves, it became the Ocean
 There was activity and the number of *khirqes* became four
 For 90,000 years he hid them in the Lamp
 But now he made manifest the four Friends.
10. The four wise Friends were made manifest
 Born of the Origin: Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin
 Nasirdin and Sejadin
 They set the world in motion.
11. They set the world in motion
 The Pearl had waves, it became the Ocean
 The King and the four Companions
 Mounted their steeds

And roamed the four corners of the earth.
At Lalish they halted and said: This is the site of Truth.

12. They halted at the site of Truth
My King threw rennet into the Ocean, the Ocean
coagulated
Smoke rose up from it
The four heavens were created with it.
13. Melik Fekhredin says to him:
Oh King, it is thus
The Throne and the Seat are in your hands
By what means did you make the White Spring the direc-
tion of prayer for (holy) men?
14. Thus spoke the King, the luminous one
Fekhr and Sultan Ezi
Put on the Crown and the Robe
They brought these out of the White Spring
From then on (holy) men gave them their allegiance and
their faith.
15. Melik Fekhredin asks his King a question:
My dear one, you must tell me truly
What did the rennet of the White Spring consist of?
16. The King tells him: Oh Fekhr the profound
Learned in appropriate knowledge
If you ask me about the rennet of the White Spring
The rennet of the White Spring has existed from pre-
eternity.
17. The King tells him: Oh Fekhr, there was darkness and
gloom

The (only) powerful one is Truth
 Sheikh Adi's key opens the White Spring
 It was made the direction of prayer for the (holy) men.

18. Melik Fekhrudin asks his King another question:
 My dear one, you are my Creator for ever and ever
 Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens
 Before the (holy) men, before the angels
 Through the agency of which holy man was the *khirqe*
 made?
19. The King tells him: Fekhr, my proud one
 It is a duty and an obligation for me to answer you
 Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens
 Before the holy men, before the angels
 I made the *khirqe* through the agency of Sultan Ezi.
20. Melik Fekhrudin asked his King another question:
 My dear one, you are my Creator for ever and ever
 Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens
 Before the holy men, before the angels
 Through the agency of which holy man did you invest
 (dignitaries with) the *khirqe*?
21. The King tells him: Fekhr, my proud one
 It is a duty and an obligation for me to answer you
 Before the foundation of the earths, before the heavens
 Before the holy men, before the angels
 I invested (dignitaries with) the *khirqe* with the help of
 Ezi.
22. Sultan Ezi is my Pir of the *khirqe*
 It has a profound meaning
 It is my belief and that of the mirids.

23. Sultan Ezi is my Pir of the *kbirge*
That is my creed and that of all believers
He is the light of both my eyes.
24. Sultan Ezi put his hand to the lamp of power, he brought
out a Pearl
Sultan Sheikh Adi placed it in his hand,
And produced from it the crown, the robe, and the
luminous *kbirges*.
They were given to Sheikh Adi's holy men
As you know, they put them on.
25. They put on that Mystery, that *kbirge*
They declared their faith in Sultan Ezi
By their light things were revealed before dawn.
26. Before dawn things were revealed by their light.
Earth and heaven shuddered
The (holy) men sat down in unity
Together they discussed the true path of Sheikh Adi and
Melik Sheikh Sin.
27. The (holy) men sat down in unity
They spoke together of the true path of Sheikh Adi and Melik
Sheikh Sin
Yes, my dear one, you are the healing of so many pains
By what means did you separate heaven and earth?
28. Indeed, Fekhr, I separated heaven and earth
I made the moon and sun visible in between
And I established the community that is named after
Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin.
29. The King says: Oh Fekhr, I created night and day

I named paradise and hell
 I, Melik Fekhredin, made the moon
 Melik Shemsedin made the sun.

30. Melik Fekhredin asked his King another question:
 You have created this pleasant paradise
 What about this hell which appeared opposite it?
31. The King tells him, Fekhr, my precious one,
 It is a duty and an obligation for me to answer your
 question
 I made this hell for those
 Who sin against the name of Tawusi Melek three times a
 day.
32. Melik Fekhredin asked the King another question:
 You have made this pleasant Paradise
 What about Adam who appeared in it?
33. The King tells him: Oh Fekhr, full of (good) qualities,
 From Adam I brought forth the seventy-two nations
 And the eighty-thousand creatures.
34. Those Words (He spoke) in the beginning
 Those words may be scrutinised
 From them, Hashim and Quraysh were made.
35. From them Hashim and Quraysh were made.
 Dissent arose among them
 Sultan Ezi cut them loose from the Truth with his sword.
36. The Quraysh came to believe in the name of Sheikh Adi and
 adhere to him;

Yes, my dear one, you gave the words to both
 unbelievers and Muslims
 You revealed to them the Torah, the Psalms, the Bible
 and the Qoran.
 What shall the House of the Tradition believe in, what
 shall it adhere to?

37. Thus speaks my King, the Lord of Foundations:
 Indeed, Fekhr, I shall reveal to the earths the *Qewls* and
 the *khirqes*
 So that the Yezidi community may adhere to it, rejoice
 and believe in it.
38. Melik Fekhredin asks his King a question:
 Your sweet name is Noble Elder.
 By what means did you reveal the Qewls and khirqes to
 the earths?
39. Thus speaks my King, the luminous:
 Bees and *zerguz* and sheep
 The rennet of all three is from the White Spring.
40. The King says: Fekhr, from the sheep and the zerguz I shall
 fashion the khirqe
 The Feqirs shall wear it
 The House of the Tradition will believe in it and adhere
 to it.
41. He fashioned the *Qewls* and *khirqes*
 And revealed them on the earths
 He entrusted them to Melik Fekhredin
 Melik Fekhredin entrusted them to the holy men of
 Sheikh Adi
 The holy men of Sheikh Adi adhered to them and had
 faith in them.

42. My King fashioned the *şerguż*
 He revealed it on the earths
 He entrusted it to Melik Fekhrudin
 Melik Fekhrudin entrusted it to the holy men of Sheikh
 Adi.

43. The Holy Men of Sheikh Adi entrusted it to the Feqirs
 The Feqirs dyed their *ķhirqes* black with it
 The Yezidi community had come to adhere to it and be-
 lieve in it.

44. In this way my King distributed his wisdom:
 Among the holy men and the individual souls
 To the Pirs he gave religious taxes
 To the Sheikhs he gave hair-locks and scissors.

45. My King is forgiving in his wisdom
 From his cam the Command
 To the Sheikhs he gave hair-locks and scissors
 To the Pirs he gave *şeket* and the *mishur*.

46. May you be a little mindful of the *ķhirqe*
 Let the quality of the *ķhirqe* be such (as it is now)
 And let nothing (bad) come (to it) from me
 And may all four paths come to you as supplicants.

47. The Prince said to the assembly of Sultan Ezi: The *ķhirqe* is
 the garment of faith
 Whoever has doubts about it and uncertainties
 Let them seize him by the arms and throw him
 Among the groups of Muslims.

48. Their place is hidden in the hereafter:
 It is very narrow and pitch dark

From eternity to eternity, that is ever their place.

49. Those holy men watched it
At the assembly of Sultan Ezi there was glass and a
golden radiance
And a cup of pure wine went round and round among
the holy men
It went from one to the other.

50. The King says to him: Fekhr, one day, belief in the name of
Sultan Ezi will come
I shall deliver these poor ones to the unbelievers
I shall not complete.....

51. The King says to him: One day I shall come to the face of the
earths
I shall heal the hearts full of wounds and pain
Whoever has doubts and uncertainties about this word (Qewl)
Let them seize him by the arms and throw him among
the groups of Muslims.

53. His place is hidden in the hereafter
It is very narrow and pitch dark
From eternity to eternity this will ever be their place.

54. This word is the *Qewl* of Black *Furqan*
The full text of this *Qewl* is with the Angel of Death and
with Gava Zerzan.

We are deficient, Sheikh Adi is perfect.

The Hymn of Sherfedin¹²⁴³

Many myths and legends are told about Sherfedin (d. 1257-8 CE), one of the early leaders of the faith and a member of the family of Sheikh Adi. He is especially popular among the Yezidis of Jebel Sinjar. Here Sherfedin is identified with the Mehdi, a religious leader who is expected to return to the world at the End of Time in order to bring about an ideal state of existence. It can be inferred from the text that Sherfedin is thought to be dwelling in a cave until the time of his return to the world, which will be determined by Sheikh Shems. The text also contains references to a last battle between the armies of the Good (i.e. the Yezidis) and the wicked, and to the final defeat of those who follow the *Shar'ia* (i.e. orthodox Muslims) at the hands of Sherfedin.

1. We need someone who (se knowledge) is complete
Who stands in front of those who wear the woollen cord
(To tell us) when Sherfedin the Mehdi will arise.
2. When the Mehdi arises
Neither lords nor judges will remain
On that day the community of the Tradition will be comfortable.
3. The Tradition will be comfortable
To whom Melik Sherfedin shows his mercy and benevolence
He will invest us with spiritual clothes.
4. We have been invested with spiritual clothes
When Melik Sherfedin appears on the face of the earth
Then (Yezidi) commoners will be happy about it.

¹²⁴³ Kreyenbroek, *God and Sheikh Adi*, 368-75.

5. All those who are happy about it
Stand in the valley of the good men
They will require the lances of hard wood from us.
6. The riders of the valley are prepared
Let them come and open the boxes for you
So as to adorn you like brides.
7. Let them come and adorn you like brides
Let them bring out the red and yellow boxes for you
Let them cause (people) to accept for themselves the true
path of Sheikh Adi and Melik Sheikh Sin.
8. Here are the green and red boxes
In them there are elegant black *khirqes*, consecrated with holy
water
The Feqirs will abolish laments and injustice from this
world.
9. The Feqirs will abolish lamentations from this world
They will don the elegant, ..., black *khirqes*
They will take truth and their rightful share to that place.
10. They will take their rightful shares there
The legion of Sultan Ezi is great
They will collect their provisions and other requirements.
11. With those provisions, with those requirements
They will give into the hands of those leaders, those good
people
Their very lives at that assembly
(They are prepared) for ordeals and bitter experiences.

12. In those properties and those gardens
They will give (everything) into the hands of those good people, those leaders
Applying branding irons to their hearts.
13. One day there will be a conflict!
There will be a dispute and a great war
On that day, the 'old rams' will be discovered among those present.
14. One day there will be a war!
The Feqirs will don armour and shield.
That day is not suitable for a lame man.
15. One day the end will come!
A proud group of men will appear
On that day Melik Sherfedin will ordain what we long for.
16. A lover says:
Oh Sultan Ezi, our hope is in you
Make Melik Sherfedin the Mehdi for us!
17. Oh Sultan Ezi, you have the power to do it and you are not doing it
You can raise Melik Sherfedin from the Cavern
You can make rebellious people obedient to him!
18. Make rebellious people obedient to him.
Of all men who follow the pillars (of the faith), the mystical knowledge, the way,
The five obligations-(if) one (is lacking) it will not be right.

19. All five obligations of truth:
The Sheikh and Pir, Osta and Mirebbi, and the Friend
and Brother of the Hereafter
They are a religious duty for us and all the Tradition
Today in the world, tomorrow at the Last Call.
20. Give the clothes to the Feqirs
They will be decked out in armour and silk
Sultan Ezi, call out to evil: the worldly and ruined ones.
21. Sultan Ezi, call out to us (to encourage us)!
Together we will gather behind you
Do not abandon us into the hands of the Shari'a.
22. Sultan Ezi, first you have freedom from sin
You are the lord of (our) beliefs
You stand at the Silat Bridge.
23. Look upon us with the eye of compassion
With the eye of mercy
Take an interest in us and in all the Tradition.
24. All who come hurrying to the Tradition
Mount swift horses
With those commoners they will go to war.
25. Oh Melik Sherfedin, you will be worshipped by the Tradition
In battle you are not weak
You are not asleep in the saddle.
26. Melik Sherfedin is together (with his people)
The assembly is convened

All pay homage to the fame and memory of Sultan Ezi.

27. The Feqirs will come to us seeking distinction (in battle?)
Our religion is Sherfedin and our belief is (in) Ezi
It is they who will answer our calls (for help).

28. At (our) calls and at (times of) intercession
For the sake of dear ones and (spiritual) leaders
Sultan Ezi, answer our calls!

29. Let all the commoners of Lalish come to answer our calls
Let them gather at the Mosque of the Umayyads(?)
So that Sultan Ezi will answer our calls.

30. All nights, all days
The House of Tradition is free from sin, free from guilt, sincere
This world is in the hands of the Shari'a, for us it has become a hell.

31. All nights, all days
The prayer of the House of Tradition is always:
Melik Sherfedin, come out of the Cave for us!

32. Thus speaks Melik Sherfedin:
If Sheikh Shems will show us favours
(If) he removes the curtain from the Cave,
My mule is always saddled.

33. I would keep my mule saddled all the time
I would convene an assembly of Sheikhs, Pirs, Mirids and Feqirs
I would conquer the world with it.

34. I would conquer this transitory (world)
 At the command of Sultan Ezi they would march
 To (occupy) the Seat of the Ruler
 Look what happened too those unbelievers, what transpired!

35. One day I will go
 I will take the army of Sultan Ezi with me
 I will shatter the transitory world
 What shall I do to those unbelievers?

36. For a long time I have been prepared for this service
 I am indebted to the King of the world and the hereafter
 Oh Sultan Ezi, give me your command for the sake of the Tradition.

37. It will be so at that time:
 We shall declare our allegiance to Sheikh Adi
 Our place of pilgrimage will be the Zemzem, our direction of prayer the White Spring.

38. At that time the Mirids will be there
 Our belief will be (in) Sultan Ezi
 Our place of pilgrimage will be the Zemzem, our direction of prayer the White Spring.

39. At that time (the world) will have faith
 The aim of our pilgrimage will be the Sultan
 Pir Reshe Heyran, the poor one of all time, will be (your) brother!

We are deficient, God and Sheikh Adi are perfect.

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