



ULUSLARARASI
SİİRT SEMPOZYUMU
BİLDİRİLERİ

*INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF SIIRT
PAPERS*

Tarih/Date: 19-20-21 EYLÜL/ SEPTEMBER 2006

Yer/Place: Siirt Kültür Merkezi

BİRLEŞİK MATBAA / İZMİR / AĞUSTOS 2007

Uluslararası Siirt Sempozyumu



ULUSLARARASI
SİİRT SEMPOZYUMU
BİLDİRİLERİ

*INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF SIIRT
PAPERS*

Tarih/Date: 19-20-21 EYLÜL/ SEPTEMBER 2006

Yer/Place: Siirt Kültür Merkezi

Vayına Hazırlayanlar/Publishing Committee

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Mehmet Bilen

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Ahmet Erkol

Dr. Abdurrahman Adak

Veysel Gürhan

Diyaeddin Temiz

BİRLEŞİK MATBAA / İZMİR / AĞUSTOS 2007

THE YAZIDIS: ORIGIN AND CREED

Prof. Dr. George Grigore

THE YAZIDIS: ORIGIN AND CREED

Prof. Dr. George Grigore*

The Yazidis or Yezidis are adherents of a small religious cult with ancient origins, organized in small villages spread out in Eastern Turkey (especially here in Siirt and other places too), Iraq, Syria, Iran, Georgia and Armenia and are estimated to number in total approximately half million individuals (Tawa, 2005: 10).

The religion of the Yazidis is a highly syncretistic one: elements from Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam can be found. Also, Islamic mystic influence and imagery can be seen in their religious vocabulary, especially in the terminology of their esoteric literature, but much of the mythology is non-Islamic, and their cosmogonies apparently have many points in common with those of ancient Iranian religions. Early writers attempted to describe Yazidi origins, broadly speaking, in terms of Islam, or old Iranian religions, or sometimes even pagan religions; however, publications in the last fifteen years have shown such an approach to be very simplistic.

The Yazidis belong to the minor of the three branches of Yazdanism. The other two more populous branches are Alevism and Yarsanism, which differ from Yazidism by recognizing Islamic *taqiyya* "dissimulation". The three branches are geographically split and mutual contacts are rare. They are primarily ethnic Kurds and by trade, they either grow plants or breed animals, moving their flocks and herds to and from the Alpine pastures.

Origins

The origins of Yazidism are ultimately shrouded in Middle Eastern prehistory. Although the Yazidis speak Kurdish, their religion shows a strong influence from archaic Levantine and Islamic religions. Their principal holy site is near Mosul, Iraq. The Yazidis own name for themselves is Êzîdî or Êzîdî. Some scholars have derived the name Yazidi from Old Iranian *yazata* "god", while others say it is a derivation from Umayyad Caliph Yazid I (Yazid bin Muawiyah), revered by the Yazidis as an incarnation of the divine figure Sultan Ezi (this is no longer widely accepted). Yazidis, themselves, believe that their name is derived from the word *Yezdan* or *Êzîd* meaning God. The Yazidis cultural practices are observably Kurdish, and most of them speak Kurmanjî (Northern Kurdish), with the exception of some villages – like Bayqa and Bahazane in Northern Iraq – where Mesopotamian Arabic is spoken. Kurmanjî is the language of almost all the orally transmitted religious traditions of the Yazidis.

During the fourteenth century, important Kurdish tribes whose sphere of influence stretched well into what is now Turkey (including, for a period, the rulers of the principality of Jazira) are cited in historical sources as Yazidi.

Yazidi Creed

In spite of many an obvious peculiarities, Yazidis do assert their faith in a sole, unique God, *Khoda* by name, a God Who is imbued with an infinity of kindness, and yet Who is so far away. This very God delegates the stewardship of this world to seven angels (Kurdish

* University of Bucharest/ROMANYA

ezad/ezidiyan “angel/angels”) who assist Him. Each and every one of these seven angels take turns becoming periodically incarnate and ruling mankind for a while. This provides a relevant illustration of the manner in which illustrious personalities, be they historical or legendary, are being identified as the very embodiment or incarnation of some angels: from Moses to Jesus, to Mansur al-Hallaj and so on. This also provides a relevant explanation for the existence of so many angels that inhabit the Yazidi Pantheon.

Amongst all the other angels, Malak-Tawus, the Peacock angel, stands out and distinguishes himself as the only steadfast, firm angel. He is the strongest, the very one who leads all the other angels. While in the beginning driven away by God Himself, inasmuch as he did not want to worship His deity, Malak-Tawus, the Peacock angel is eventually reinstated, but only after having wept 7,000 years of bitter tears. Actually, Malak-Tawus, the Peacock angel is the one who governs the world. An outside approach to this religion would lead to Malak-Tawus being identified with the Devil. He is the spring of evil, the source of all misfortunes and sorrows. That is why the mere utterance of his name is to be avoided, so as not to trigger off his fury (Tawa, 2005: 11).

Worshipping Malak-Tawus is different from worshipping God. While the peacock angel is worshipped with fear and imploration and humiliation, God enjoys an act of worship with plenty of gratitude and content. Despite that, the frightful fear that the Yazidis were harbouring was so overwhelming that they abandoned, step by step, God’s worship. Nowadays Yazidis only mention, now and then, God’s name, and only with a symbolical nuance, while they have entirely dedicated themselves to worshipping Peacock angel. The explanation they attach to this attitude is simple: God, in His kindness and love for His creatures, would not harm them in any way, whereas the Peacock angel’s only reason to exist is entirely for the sake of evil. Therefore, whoever wants to become acquainted with happiness should leave aside God and give up worshipping Him – i.e. the absolute good – and worship the Peacock Angel instead, so as to beg for compassion and forgiveness, with a view to keeping at a distance that evil He has created.

Yazidism and other religions

Meanwhile, the Yazidism has always been apt to absorb other religions, entirely or in part, that have come into contact with it. To do so, new branches of the Cult have been formed by incorporating into their dynamic cosmogonies system of continuing avatars the highest personages of these external religions. Several old, and now extinct, movements and religions also appear to have begun their existence as branches of the Cult of Angels, under circumstances similar to those that gave rise to Yazidism. Among these, with due caution and reservation, one may place the Gnostic religions of Mithraism and Zorvânism, and the socio-economically motivated messianic movements of the Mazdakites, Khurramiyya, and the Qarmatites. The Cult also has fundamentally influenced another Gnostic religion, Manichacism, as well as Ismâ’ili (Sevener) Shi’ism, Druzism, and Bâbism, and to a lesser extent, Zoroastrianism, Imâmi Shi’ism, and Bahâ’ism.

Similarity with the Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism and the Cult of Angels share many features, among which are the belief in seven good angels and seven “bad” ones in charge of the world, and a hereditary priestly class. These common features are natural results of the long and eventful contact between the two religions. Other common features may be the result of the religious imprint of the Aryan settlers of this area, whose original religion must have been the same as that

which the Prophet Zoroaster later reformed and reconstituted into the religion of Zoroastrianism. The fire symbol figures prominently in Yazidi rituals and of course it is a central feature of Parsi iconography. In fact, speculation centres on the etymology of *Yazidi* deriving from the Avestan *Yazata* which is meaning “deity”. The creation myths of the two cultures share many common features (for instance, both involve two stages of creation) and there is also a heptad (*amesha spentas*) that is similar to the Yazidi *haftan*. There are also correlate festivals between the two as well as the custom of wearing a sacred shirt (Kreyenbroek 1995: 57-60).

While the symbols and habits may compare on a certain level, it is more probable that the Parsi features in the Yazidi paradigm are artefacts from the movement and dissemination of a variant of Zoroastrian thought over distances and time. There are differences between the two, as well; For example, where the Yazidi (and Ahl-i Haqq) believe in reincarnation, there is no parallel belief in Zoroastrianism; nor is there a parallel to the soul-transmigration concept found in the Yezidist tradition.

Similarity with the Cult of Angels

Cyril Glasse in “The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam” said that the Ahl-i Haqq “People of the Absolute, the Real, God” is one of several sects called collectively ‘Ali ilahis “the deifiers of ‘Ali”. The Ahl-i Haqq are a minor, dualist cult found among some Persians, Kurds, and Turkmen of Iraq and Iran. In Iran, they are concentrated in the west of the country, especially around Tabriz, but small groups can be found everywhere. They are closely related to the Yazidis, and more distantly with the other dualist sects in the Middle East. Their doctrine teaches that there were seven Divine Manifestations beginning with a figure called Khawandagar; they believe that the Prophet’s cousin ‘Ali bin Abi Talib was one of these manifestations, and that the series culminated in the direct “founder” of the cult, a figure called Sultan Sohak (Ishaq), who lived in the 9th / 15th century. The cult practices the sacrifice of cocks, a bird which represents the liminal moment of daybreak. Thus the cock appears as a popular symbol in religions with light/darkness polarizations. The Ahl-i Haqq have a ceremony called *sabz namudar* “making green” which may harken back to the beliefs of the Manicheans that the Divine light is hidden in the world in the greatest concentration in plants (which is why the Manicheans were vegetarians). The beliefs of the Ahl-i Haqq, which vary from group to group, incorporate elements typical of the Gnostic or Manichean deviations found on the fringes of Islam, as indeed, around all religions. Like the Ahl-i Haqq, the Yazidis believe in soul-transmigration and even in reincarnation which can be of four kinds (see Al-Hasani: 1980: 81):

- fashkh – reincarnation of the soul into a mineral;
- rashkh – reincarnation of the soul into a plant;
- mashkh – reincarnation of the soul into an animal;
- nashkh – reincarnation of the soul into a human being.

The Yazidis, like the other branches of Cult of Angels, do not believe in a physical hell or heaven, filled with devils or angels to come at the end of time, but in a figurative hell or heaven. The horrors of hell and pleasures of paradise take place in this world as people reincarnate after death into a life of bounty and health or conversely into one of misery and destitution, depending on the nature of the life they lived within their previous body, the lower

level being into a mineral and the higher into human being. At the end of time, however, only the righteous and complete “humans” who succeed in crossing the tricky bridge (compare also with the Qur’anic *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* “The Straight Path”) of final judgment will join the eternity of the Universal Spirit. They believe so much in metempsychosis, and this belief is so deep-rooted with the Yazidis, that the rich who have disobedient prodigal sons, for fear that their own sons might squander their wealth, would bury it in the ground and cover it with earth, leaving a certain trace – to be known by them only - at that very place. It is worth mentioning that they have faith in the fact that their spirit shall come back and they shall thus be able to dig the treasures up and live a plentiful life. (Al-Qass Ishaq, 1900: 19). The failed souls will be annihilated along with the material world forever.

“None shall live in this world longer than the time set by me; and if I so desire, I send a person a second or a third time into this world or into some other by the transmigration of souls” (Book of Revelation; Chapter II).

Similarity with the Christianity

The Yazidis have religious practices which are to be found only in the Christian Church. I mean the rites of baptism and the Eucharist. It is true that the use of water as a rite is practised by other non-Christian sects, such as the Mandeans; but it is argued that this ordinance as observed by the Yazidis is so similar to that of the Christians that its origin is to be traced back to Christianity, rather than to any other system. Like their neighbours, the Yazidis must if possible baptize their children at the earliest age. In performing the rite, the sheykh, like the Christian priest, uses the holy water. For the Yazidis the holy water is taken from Zamzam, a little spring located in Lalish Valley in Northern Iraq. The cup used in this rite is named the cup of Jesus. They also use a special sort of earth (called *baratta*), taken from the grave of the shaykh ‘Adi, which is similar to the Eucharist of the Christians, and is given either to the ones who are dying or to the ones who are critically ill. Thus, they consider this very earth to be a cure-all: “Whoever swallows a bit of *baratta* throughout an entire year shall be happy both in his soul and in his body” (see Grigore, 1994: 47-48). Finally, the Yazidis entertain great reverence for Christianity and the Christian saints. They respect the churches and tombs of the Christians, and kiss the doors and walls when they enter them. In the Black Book a statement is made that on her way to the house of her bridegroom, a bride should visit the temple of every idol she passes by, even if it be a Christian Church. They have also professed reverence to ‘Isa (Jesus) who was considered, in certain periods, to be the embodiment of one of the seven angels.

Similarity with the Ophites

As Habib Tawa (2005: 17) remarked, a possible approach should be made between the Yazidis and the Ophites (cf. Greek *óphis*, “serpent”, “snake”) spread out in entire Middle East in a period between approximately 100 A. D. until 400 A. D. when they were annihilated by the Constantinian Christianity. The common trait of these numerous gnostic cults (i.e. Naasseners Hebrew – *na’asch* “snake”; Mandaean, Sethians, Perates, Borborites etc.), which were continuing the old oriental cults dedicated to snake, was the great importance given to the serpent of the biblical tale of Adam and Eve, as the bestower of knowledge, connecting the Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil) to gnosis. In contrast to Christian interpretations of the Serpent as Satan, Ophites were considering the opener of the way to the human being towards the knowledge as being the lord of this world. As the Bible doesn’t actually identify the serpent more than being a serpent, the Ophites felt perfectly justified in their position, pointing to the serpent’s trying to cause Adam and Eve to gain

knowledge, and the forbidding of this knowledge by the figure which Christianity and Judaism identify as God (Francis Legge, 1914). One of the conspicuous, although tacit, symbols of Yazidism is the serpent, which is practically never mentioned explicitly in any Yazidi religious text – oral or written. The only manifestation of this symbol is in the two-meter image of the black serpent at the entrance to the shrine of Shaykh ‘Adi in Lalish (Asatrian & Arakelova 2003: 7-8).

Yazidi Pantheon

Besides the Holy Triad – the Holy Triad includes Malak-Tawus, Sultan Yezid, and Shaykh ‘Adi bin Musafir, a historical figure, the founder of the ‘Adawiyya Sufi order, which was later to become the main basis for the formation of the Yazidi community (cf Asatrian, Arakelova 2003: 4-9) – constituting the so-called dogmatic base of the Yazidi religion and standing distinctly out in the cult and in the beliefs, the pantheon of the Yazidis includes a multiplicity of deities and spirit guardians, which are not too easy to determine, by many reasons other than scarcity or sparseness of the available material. Knowing the identity of Yazidi divine beings is obstructed by the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the revered historical personalities – Shaykh ‘Adi’s kinsmen and ambience, locally significant saints, having restricted spheres of influence, the Sufi saints (Mansur al-Hallaj, the one who uttered the famous sentence: *Ana al-haqq* “I am the truth”, Rabi‘a ‘Adawwiya, the one who used to walk carrying a burning ember in her hand, willing to set Heaven on fire, and a wooden pail full of water, willing to extinguish Hell, being thus able to love God under no constraints at all), Biblical and Qur’anic characters, like Ibrahim “Abraham”, Musa “Moise”, ‘Isa “Jesus”, ‘Ali, etc.), as well as simply *shaykhs* and *pirs* possessing a certain halo of saintliness. At the same time, many mythical and semimythical figures, saints, often even historical characters, having retained their cults in various Near Eastern religious traditions, e. g. in Islam and, in particular, in its so-called heretical environment, gained popularity with the Yazidis who worship them along with their genuine deities. A specific regional figure from this category of characters can be included in the paradigm of the Yazidi divine beings in case it has been deeply implanted in the popular mind and adapted to the religious tradition (e. g. Ibrahim-khalil, Hidir-nabi).

For the figures of the folk pantheon it is impossible to identify the unambiguous attributes of sanctity for a given figure even in the religions having an official institute of canonisation (as in Christianity). Even more so it is related to the doctrines wherein the deification or canonisation is done informally, in the way of a popular tradition. In Yazidism, these informal criteria can be satisfied by the character being by all represented in the oral religious tradition, as well as in most cases, by having been rested in a legendary burial place in Lalish. Canonisation (deification) can be also substantiated by a genealogy going back to the relatives and subordinates of Shaykh ‘Adi (Shaykh Hasan, Fakhruddin, and Shaykh Shams).

The figures identified here as deities are those who patronise diverse spheres of human activities or personify the natural phenomena. This list does not include the seven avatars of Malak-Tawus: ‘Azrail, Dardail, Israfil, Mikail, Jabrail, Shamnail, and Turail (of which ‘Azrail, the alleged head of the Seven, is usually identified with Malak-Tawus, the Seven all in all still being the emanations of the latter), as well as most of their counterparts within the system of saints – historical personalities of the ‘Adawiyya order, *viz.* Shaykh Abu Bakr (Kurdish: Sexobakr), Sajaduddin (or Sijadin, responsible for escorting the souls of the dead to the underworld), Nasruddin (identified with the angel of death; he used to be the executor

under Shaykh 'Adi, killing everyone who countered him). The exceptions are Shaykh Shams, symbolising the sun, and Fakhruddin identified with the moon.

The Yazidi shaykhy tradition says that, unlike all other peoples who originated from Adam and Eve, the Yazidis had only a primeval father, Adam: Eve played no role in their genesis.

Once, the Yazidi legend tells us. Eve claimed that children were produced by her alone and that Adam had no part in creating them. In order to test her claim they put their seeds in separate jars and closed them. When, nine months later, they opened Eve's jar, they found serpents, scorpions and poisonous insects, while in Adam's jar there was a beautiful moon-faced child. They called the boy *Shahid bin jarr* (in Arabic "Shahid, the son of the pot"); he later married a *huri* and became Forefather of the Yazidis (Spat 2002: 27- 56). This account of the origin of the Yazidis is also confirmed in one of the Yazidis' Holy Books, the "Black Book": "The Great God said to the angels: I create Adam and Eve, and make them human beings. From Adam's essence *Shahid bin jarr* will appear, and from him will originate on Earth a people who will later give birth to the people of 'Azrayil, i. e. Malak-Tawus, who are the Yazidis" (Al-Hasani, 1980: 37). Another version of the same legend mentions two children in Adam's jar (Al-Hasani, 1980: 50).

As regards the deities controlling the natural phenomena, most are believed to heal the diseases caused by the corresponding spheres under their command. It is to be noted that the healing function is commonly ascribed to the sanctuaries, shrines, and certain Shaykhy clans, as one of the important elements of working miracles (see Arakelova 2001a).

The names of deities, spirit guardians and saints are commonly featured with the caste-related titles. In the top of hierarchy are the *Shaykh* (in Kurdish *şex*, cf. Arab *šayḥ* "old man") and the *pir* (cf. Kurdish *pir* "old man", synonymous with the Arab *šayḥ*), as well as *dervish*. More often than not, used as epithets with the names of saints, spirits, and deities are the terms *malak* (cf. Arab *malak* "angel"), *xas* (cf. Arab *khass* "special"), "chosen", "noble", *xudan* "master", "protector", "patron", *mer* (cf. Kurdish *mer* "man") "holy man", *aziz* (cf. Arab 'aziz "powerful", "respected") "holy", *wali* (cf. Arab *wali* "friend") "beloved", "close [to god] "holy", *qanj* (cf. Kurdish "good", "handsome") "holy", "saint" (in the expression *qanje Xwade* "God's saint"), etc. The gods, goddesses, patron deities, and guardian spirits of the Yazidis seem to exist mostly in ritual, being usually invoked in particular cultic events related to their domains of competence (Asatrian; Arakelova, 2004: 233).

Thus, to be counted among the gods and deities of the Yazidi pantheon, in addition to the Holy Triad, are the following figures: the Thunder-god (with a number of equivalent figures); the Lord of the wind and the air; the Foremother of the Yazidis and the Patroness of the women in labour; the Mistress of the pregnant women and of the infants; the deity of the phallus; the dual deities of cattle; the Lord of the earth (underworld); the Patron of wayfarers; the Spirit of the furrow, the Spirit of the household; the Spirit of the bedding; the Lord of the graves; the Universal deity (Khidir-nabi); the Friend of God (Ibrahim-khalil); the Ruler of the genies; the Builder-spirit; the deities of the sun and the moon, and that of the garment (*kiras*).

Here are a few of these Yazidi deities:

Birus (also named Malak-Birus "The Angel Birus") is a name related to *birusk* "lightning" (with the shift of the final consonant). That, however, is not the last line in the inventory of the Yazidi celestials controlling the thunder and the related phenomena. Ba-raş—

“Spirit of the hurricane” (lit. “Black wind”) are the names of the same deity, his differing characteristics: “pouring hail”, “darting (lightnings)”, “flashing lightning” (or “cloud-lightning”), and “hurricane”, “whirlwind” (Asatrian; Arakelova, 2004: 234).

The epithet *Raş(o)* (cf. Kurd, *raş*) means “black”, the colour often used to define the names of supernatural beings. The designation of the Yazidi spirit of the wind, *Ba-raş*, also has the formant *raş*, “black”, as an attribute to *ba* “wind”, meaning “Black wind” (Asatrian; Arakelova, 2004: 235).

Sex Musê-sor “Red Shaykh Moses” an atmospheric deity controlling the winds and the air. He is addressed, therefore, during the works on the threshing-floor for winnowing when what is needed is wind in fair weather to screen and clean the grain from hay.

Then we shall prepare for you baked red loaves (Kreyenbroek 1995: 106). Sex Musê-sor is usually glorified by the title *Sorê-soran*, i. e. “the Red of the Reds”. The attribute *sor* “red” may be here intended to underscore sanctity, red colour being directly opposite to blue, which is considered by the Yazidis the colour of apostasy. Sultan Yazid is quite properly indicated using this attribute as well Siltan Ezidê Sor “Sultan Yazid the Red” (Asatrian; Arakelova, 2004: 242)..

According to different legends, the control over the “white” wind belongs also to Sexisin “Shaykh Hasan”, who is allegedly the Lord of the Tablet and the Pen as well; therefore, only his posterity amidst the Yazidis have the right to know the literacy. Although, in actual fact, it was Sex Musê-sor (*Sorê Soran* – “The Red of the Reds”) who had to be the Lord of the Tablet and the Pen, which is just the case with his counterpart among the Ahl-i Haqq, the Archangel Pir Musi, the motif is clearly reminiscent of the Biblical story of Moses having received the Tablets with Testaments from God. The displacement of functions from Sexmus to Shaykh Hasan has been done through the contamination of images, causing also the entanglement of power controlling the wind and the air. Shaykh Hasan, having a historical archetype, is a marginal figure among the Yazidi saints (Asatrian; Arakelova, 2004: 243).

The image of Moses in the Yazidi tradition must have had a double penetration, perhaps a parallel one: one as Sexmus, as a god, and one as a folkloric character, Musa P'exambar, i. e. the Prophet Moses; there is even a hymn dedicated to the latter “Qawle Musa Pexambar” (Celil, Celil 1978: 366-368, 438-439).

In the religious concepts of the Iranian agrarian communities, the Prophet Moses is a popular figure who has replaced many local characters of primitive worship. The Ahl-i Haqq regard Pir Musi as an incarnation of Angel Israfil (Raphael), etc. (see Mokri 1966: 24, 28).

Pira-Fat is the patroness of women-in-labour, as well as of newborn babies: she protects them from the evil demoness (Asatrian 2001). A parturient woman asks for Pira-Fat's help: *Yā Pîrâ-Fât, âlî min bika!* “Oh Pira-Fat, help me”! Those present traditionally express their hope for the deity's assistance: *Çârâ Pîrâ-Fât bê hawara ta!* – “May the seed of Pira-Fat help you!” (Celil, Celil, 1978: 434). The word *çar* in this formula means “seed”, which developed from its original meaning – “means, possibility”, via the interim meaning “liquid, medicine” (cf. New Persian *çara* “medicine”, “solution”). This phrase specifically expresses the wish that the woman will give birth to a pure Yazidi, from the original seed of the Yazidi people-since Pira-Fat is traditional preserver of this seed. Similarly, they invoke this seed when embarking on a journey: *Yā Pîrâ-Fât çâra ta sar ma* “Oh Pira-Fat, let your assistance (seed) be with us”. Pira-Fat is actually the Foremother of the Yazidis, since she has saved

from annihilation the seed from which this people originated. The name of the deity, Pira-Fat, literally means "old woman Fat", and apparently, goes back to the name of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. This character absorbed many of the features of pre-Islamic patron deities of fertility and family, and she is worshipped all over the Muslim world, especially among the Shi'as (Asatrian; Arakelova, 2004: 245). The Virgin Mary (Maryam) has almost the same function in Islam, and women in labour appeal, as a rule, to both these saints (Donaldson 1938: 31). Fat is shown to be a variant of Fatima by the fact that in certain contexts both forms of the name are used for the Prophet's daughter. The hymn dedicated to 'Ali, the Lion of God (*Bayta Ali Şerê Xwade*), offers clear evidence of this (Celil, Celil 1978: 403).

The shortening of the name Fatima, or, to be more precise, the omission of the end syllables, obviously results from the Kurdish interpretation of the name: Fatima (or Fatima) was understood as *izafa* construction *Fatima* "Fat-i-ma", i. e. "our Fat". "The palm of Fatima", the symbol of the five main characters in Shi'ism, the prophet Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn, is an essential element of the talismans and amulets that offer protection from evil spirits and demons (Budge, 1961: 467-472). A metal representation of "The palm of Fatima" is a significant accessory of any god-fearing Shi'a house, alongside a portrait of 'Ali, whose image has also accumulated certain characteristics of Old Iranian mythical personages – from Verethragna to Rustam.

The Holy Angel, as could be expected, is also traced in the wedding rites. The Yazidis used to adorn one of the trees in front of the groom's house, and put a phallic-shaped wooden stick in between its boughs. Before entering the house, a new-married couple stayed for a while under the tree, and the groom's friends shook it uttering: "May the groom and bride be fertile (fruitful) like this tree".

The name of this character, Xudane-male, can be translated as "Master of the house". He embodies the welfare of home and the family, supports the family morals, facilitates the cattle breed and crop yield. Xudane-male dwells in the fire-place,*' but sometimes, assuming the form of a serpent, he crawls out of the house. Therefore, killing the domestic snakes is a great sin that can turn off fortune, cause trouble and adversity (see, e. g. Christensen, 1941: 83-84; Seferbekov, 2001: 140-141).

The reverence for Khidir "the green man", is a well-accepted practice among the Muslim Kurds. Khidir's shrines are found all over Kurdistan beside natural springs. The Muslims have connected the lore of Khidir to that of the Prophet Eliyyah, who like Khidir, having drank from the Fountain of Life, is also ever-living. An earth and water spirit, the immortal Khidir lives within the deep waters of the lakes and ponds. Assuming various guises, Khidir appears among the people who call upon him to grant them their wishes.

Khidir (in Kurdish Xidir-nabi "the Prophet Khidir"), having obviously the Muslim roots (a hint at him, perhaps without mentioning his name, is in Qur'an: XVIII, 59-81. In the Yazidi tradition, he is one of the sons of Shaykh Shams; first of all, he is a celestial warrior, a rider on a white horse (*haspe siyare boz*) (Al-Hasani, 1980: 73).

On the day of the festivities the main beams of the house were painted with flour, the pictures showing figures of cattle, celestial bodies, people, etc. There was a teeter mounted in the house, and the members of the family were given a few swings each saying to shake out the sin. According to L. Sternberg, the ritual swinging was "an imitative sexual act with regard to the deity of fertility" (Sternberg, 1936: 466).

In the name of this deity we certainly see the Biblical Prophet Abraham, who is, like Moses very popular in folk beliefs not only of Muslims but the Christians as well (see Russel 1987).

Including Ibrahim-Xalil (cf, Arab *khalil* “close friend”) into the Yazidi pantheon is, of course, quite provisional, for he has neither definitive spheres of influence, nor specific functions in the cultic practice. That is perhaps a deified saint, to be addressed during a meal, a ritual meal in particular.

Organisation

Yazidi society is hierarchical. The secular leader is a hereditary *emir* or prince, whereas a chief *shaykh* heads the religious hierarchy. The Yazidi are strictly endogamous. This tradition of endogamy has allowed the Yazidi and other non-Islamic minorities to survive within *Dar al-Islam*. In addition, members of the three Yazidi castes, the *murids*, *shaykhs* and *pirs*, marry only within their group.

Religious practices

Prayers

Yazidis have two daily prayers (Arab *du'at*): *Nivêja rojhilatinê* “Sunrise Prayer” and *Nivêja rojavabûnê* “Sunset Prayer”. The worshipers should turn their face toward the sun, and for the certain prayers, they should face toward *Laliş*. Such prayer should be accompanied by certain gestures, including kissing the rounded neck (*gerîvan*) of the sacred shirt (*kiras*). The daily prayer services must not be performed in the presence of outsiders (Al-Hasani, 1980: 76).

Pilgrimage

The most important ritual is the annual six-day pilgrimage to the tomb of Shaykh ‘Adi in the Valley of Lalish, north of Mosul, Iraq. A sacred microcosm of the world, as it were, it contains not only many shrines dedicated to the saints, but a number of other landmarks corresponding to other sites or symbols of significance in other faiths, including *Pirra selat* “Sirat Bridge” and a mountain called Mount Arafat. The two sacred springs are called *Zamzam* and *Kaniya sipî* “The White Spring”. If possible, Yazidis make at least one pilgrimage to Lalish during their lifetime, and those living in the region try to attend at least once a year for the autumn *Feast of the Assembly* which is celebrated in September. During the celebration, Yazidi bathe in the river, wash figures of Malak-Tawus and light hundreds of lamps in the tombs of Shaykh ‘Adi and other saints. They also sacrifice an ox, which is one reason they have been connected to Mithraism, in addition to the presence of the dog and serpent in their iconography. The sacrifice of the ox is meant to declare the arrival of Fall and to ask for precipitation during winter in order to bring back life to the Earth in the next Spring (Al-Hasani, 1980: 80).

Festivals

The Yazidi New Year falls in Spring, in the first Wednesday after the 14th of April. There is some lamentation by women in the cemeteries, to the accompaniment of the music of the *Qawals*, but the festival is generally characterized by joyous events: the music of *dehol* “drum” and *zorna* “shawm”, communal dancing and meals, the decorating of eggs. This feast lasts as long as seven days, that is a day is dedicated to each of the seven angels. Another

important festival is the *Tawus-geran* “circulation of the peacock” where Qawals and other religious dignitaries visit Yazidi villages, bringing the *senjaq*, sacred images representing the peacock and associated with Malak-Tawus. These are venerated, taxes are collected from the pious, sermons are preached, and holy water – from the Zamzam spring of Valley of Lalish – distributed. The greatest festival of the year for ordinary Yazidis is the *Cejna Cemaiya* “Feast of the Assembly” at Lalish, a seven-day occasion. A focus of widespread pilgrimage, this is an important time for social contact and affirmation of identity. The religious center of the event is the belief in an annual gathering of the *Heptad* in the holy place at this time. Rituals practiced include the sacrifice of a bull at the shrine of Shaikh Shams and the practice of *sema* (the whirling dance like the adepts of the Mevlavi order, founded by Mevlana Jallaluddin Rumi). Wednesday is the holy day, but Saturday is the day of rest. They keep two fasts per year, for the duration of three days each of them, i.e. the Sun feast, on the 1st of December, and Khidir Elyas feast, on the 18th of February. These fasts are similar with the Islamic fast, that is abstinence, starting just a little bit before sunrise and till after sunset. Sultan Ezi feast comes after the first fast. According to mazdeean writing *Skand Gumanik Vicar* dated back to the IXth century, it is the Wednesday the day of rest (Tawa, 3-4).

Purity and taboos

The Yazidis’ concern with religious purity, and their reluctance to mix elements perceived to be incompatible, is shown not only in their caste system, but also in various taboos affecting everyday life. Some of these, prohibition of eating lettuce and cabbage, of wearing the colour blue (reserved to the evil spirits), of pronunciation of the Satan names, are widely respected until now.

References

- Al-Hasani, Abd ar-Razzaq. 1980. *Al-yazidiyyuna fi hadhirihim wa madhihim*. Baghdad.
- Al-Qass Ishaq. 1900. *Kitab al-yazidiyya*. Roma.
- Arakelova, Victoria. 2001. “Sufi saints in the Yazidi Tradition”, in *Iran & The Caucasus*, Vol. 5: 183-192.
- Arakelova, Victoria. 2002. “Three figures from the Yazidi folk Pantheon”, in *Iran & The Caucasus*, Vol. 6 Issue 1/2: 57-73.
- Arakelova, Victoria. 2004. “Notes on the Yazidi Religious Syncretism”, in *Iran & The Caucasus*, Vol. 8 Issue 1: 19-28.
- Asatrian, Garnik; Arakelova, Victoria. 2003. “Malak-Tawus: The Peacock Angel of the Yazidis”, in *Iran & The Caucasus*, Vol. 7 Issue 1/2: 1-36.
- Asatrian, Garnik; Arakelova, Victoria. 2004. “The Yazidi Pantheon”, in *Iran & The Caucasus*, Vol. 8 Issue 2: 231-279.
- Celil O., Celil G., *Zargotina Kurda*, vol.2, Moscow, 1978.
- Christensen, A, 1941. *Essai sur la démonologie iranienne*. Copenhagen.

Uluslararası Siirt Sempozyumu

Donaldson, B. A. 1938. *The Wild Rue. A Study of Muhammedan Magic and Folklore in Iran*. London.

Drower, E.S. 1941. *Peacock Angel. Being Some Account of Votaries of a Secret Cult and their Sanctuaries*. London: John Murray.

Grigore, George. 1994. *Slujitorii Diavolului; Cartea Neagră; Cartea Dezvăluirii*. Bucharest: Editura Călin.

Joseph, I. 1908-1909. "Yazidi Textes", in *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, XXV, 2: 111-156.

Kreyenbroek, Philip G. 1995. *Yazidism: Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

Leese, Benjamin E. 2005. "Zoroastrian Influence on Syriac. Baptismal Rites", in *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 19 Issue 2: 350-367.

Legge, Francis. 1914. *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity, From 330 B.C. to 330 A.D.*, reprinted in two volumes bound as one, University Books New York, 1964. LC Catalog 64-24125.

Marie, A. 1911. "La découverte récente des deux livres sacrés des Yézîdis", in *Anthropos*, VI, 1: 1-39.

Mokri, M. 1966. (Nur 'Ali-shah Elahi), *L'esoterisme kurde. Aperçus sur le secret gnostique des Fideles de Verite*, Traduction, introduction, commentaries et notes, Paris.

Russel, J. 1987. "Our Father Abraham and the Magi", *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*. Bombay: 56-73.

Seferbekov, R. 2000. "On the Demonology of the Tabasaranians". *Iran and Caucas*, vol. 5: 139-148.

Spät, Eszter. 2002. "Shahid bin Jarr, forefather of the Yazidis and the Gnostic seed of Seth", in *Iran & The Caucasus*, Vol. 6 Issue 1/2: 27-56.

Sternberg, L. Ya. 1936. *Pervobytnaya religiya v svete entografii*. Leningrad.

Tawa, Habib. *Les Yezidis*. www.edph.auf.org/IMG/pdf/Tawa-Yezidis.pdf

Wahbi, T. 1940. "Dîni Caranî Kurd", in *Gelawej Journal/Baghad*, XI-XII: 51-52.