



JELWA, KETĀB AL-

JELWA, KETĀB AL- (Kurd. *Kitēba jilwe*, “the Book of splendor”), title of a notional sacred text in Yazidism. Written copies of the text were first discovered in the late 1880s, together with *Meşhefa reş* (*Meşhefa reş*, “black book,”), another short text purporting to be a sacred book. The oldest copies of these texts were written in Arabic (rather than in Kormānji Kurdish, the language of the Yazidi community). They usually formed part of collections of short works on Yazidism, where they did not appear to have pride of place. Shortly before this, in a published interview with the French scholar Anastase N. Siouffi (1880), Bābā Shaikh, the religious leader of the Yazidis, had declared that the group possessed two “sacred books,” written in Arabic and named *Kitēba jilwe* and *Meşhefa reş*. The latter was said to be a commentary upon the former. While the title *Meşhefa reş* originally appears to have been no more than a generic name for a sacred book, the other title may be connected with an older work, *Ketāb al-jelwa le-arbāb al-ḳalwa*, which the Hanbalite theologian and jurisconsult Ebn Taymiya (d. 1328), ascribed to Ḥasan b. ‘Adi (k. 1246; Ebn Taymiya, I, pp. 262-317). Ḥasan was an early leader of the proto-Yazidi community, whose world-view and beliefs were presumably formed by Sufism. In its present form, the *Ketāb al-jelwa* purports to reveal the words of the Peacock Angel (Ṭāwusi Malek; Guest, 1993, pp. 208-10), which makes it unlikely to have originated from Ḥasan b. ‘Adi’s work.

In the early 20th century, at least half a dozen manuscripts containing the Yazidi sacred books had found their way to the West. Their provenance was shrouded in mystery, but it seems clear that Jeremiah Shamir, a former



Christian monk who made a living as a dealer in books and manuscripts, played a key role in their sudden appearance (Kreyenbroek, p. 11).

An anonymous publication (known to be by A. N. Andrus) in 1891 contained the first verbatim translations of passages from the *Ketāb al-jelwa* and the *Meşhefa reş*. The first full translation, by Edward G. Browne (q.v. [not in bibliography]), appeared in 1895. In 1909, Isya Joseph published the Arabic text of both *Ketāb al-jelwa* and *Meşhefa reş*, with an English translation. Two years later, in 1911, the Carmelite Père Anastase-Marie de Saint-Elie announced his discovery of what he believed to be the original Kurdish version of the texts. This was written in an otherwise unknown alphabet that bore no obvious resemblance to any other Middle Eastern script, but strangely had separate characters representing Arabic emphatic consonants which do not normally occur in Kurdish. Father Anastase showed his find to the Austrian orientalist Maximilian Bittner, who published the texts in 1913 with a German translation. Bittner had access to Oskar Mann's work on the Mokri dialect of Kurdish, but was evidently unfamiliar with other forms of the language. On the basis of this limited knowledge, he declared the Kurdish of these texts to be ancient and obviously regarded Father Anastase's texts as authentic.

A few years later this view was challenged by Alphonse Mingana, who gave a number of cogent arguments to suggest that these finds did not represent an ancient manuscript tradition. Mingana claimed that the texts were forgeries made by Jeremiah Shamir. At a later stage, Cecil John Edmonds (p. 88) pointed out that the Kurdish of the "sacred books" was not Kormānji, but the Sōrāni of the Arbil region, that is, the dialect of Kurdish spoken by Shamir. To these arguments one might add the very words of *Ketāb al-jelwa*, where Ṭāwusi Malek asserts: "I teach without a scripture" (cf. Guest, 1993, p. 209).

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