



YAZIDIS I. GENERAL

The Yazidis have long been the object of fascination among orientalists, largely due to their erroneous description by outsiders as ‘devil-worshippers’ (see below). The literature devoted to their religion is disproportionately large, considering how few they are in number by comparison with the large majority of Kurdish Muslims. Their name for themselves is usually, Êzdi, Êzidi, or, in some areas, Dāsini (the last, strictly speaking a tribal name). Some scholars have derived the name Yazidi from Old Iranian *yazata* (divine being), though the current consensus among Western academics is a derivation from Yazid b. Mo‘āwiya, revered by the Yazidis as an incarnation of the divine figure Sultan Êzi. (Kreyenbroek, 1995, p. 3.

Origins. The Yazidis’ cultural practices are observably Kurdish, and almost all speak Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish), with the exception of the villages of Ba‘şıqa and Baḥzānē in northern Iraq, where Arabic is spoken. Kurmanji is the language of almost all the orally transmitted religious traditions of the Yazidis. Religious origins are somewhat complex. The religion of the Yazidis is a highly syncretistic one: Sufi 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 ‘Iranian,’ or sometimes even ‘pagan’ religions; however, publications since the 1990s have shown such an approach to be over-simplistic. The origin of the Yazidi religion is now usually seen by scholars as a complex process of



syncretism, whereby the belief-system and practices of a local faith had a profound influence on the religiosity of adherents of the 'Adawiyya sufi order living in the Kurdish mountains, and caused it to deviate from Islamic norms relatively soon after the death of its founder, Shaikh 'Adi b. Mosāfer.

History and Development. 'Adi b. Mosāfer, who was of Omayyad descent, was born c. 1075 CE in the Bekáa valley. After studying in Baghdad under Abu'l-Ḳayr Ḥammād al-Dabbās and alongside 'Abd-al-Qādir al-Jilāni, he settled in the valley of Lāleš (some thirty-six miles north-east of Mosul) in the early 12th century. Groups who venerated Yazid b. Mo'āwiya and the Omayyads—already known as Yazidis—had existed for some time in the area; beliefs and practices which were apparently part of an ancient Iranian religion were also retained by some of the local tribes. Shaikh 'Adi himself, a figure of undoubted orthodoxy, enjoyed widespread influence; he died in 1162 and his tomb at Lāleš is a focal point of Yazidi pilgrimage. His name, pronounced Ādi or even Hādi, passed into Yazidi oral tradition, though full knowledge of his identity was lost within the community. Yazidism grew during the period of Atabeg and Mongol rule. Only two generations later, led by Ḥasan b. 'Adi, the community had grown large and powerful enough to come into open conflict with the Atabeg of Mosul, who killed Ḥasan in 1246. At about the same point, it seems, the community began to incur the opprobrium of more orthodox Muslims for its excessive veneration of both Shaikh 'Adi and Yazid b. Mo'āwiya. 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 (Guest, p. 45). Muslim leaders clearly perceived Yazidis as a threat; a significant battle took place in 1414, during which Shaikh 'Adi's tomb was razed. After the battle of Čālderān (1514), Yazidi influence at first remained considerable; a Yazidi was appointed 'emir of the Kurds' by the Ottomans, and, in the 1530s, Yazidi emirs ruled the province of Sorān for a time. The current family of Yazidi *mirs* (emirs), claiming Omayyad origins, replaced the descendants of Shaikh Ḥasan in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. However, as time passed, conversions to Islam became increasingly common and Yazidi power declined. By the end of the Ottoman Empire many important tribes and confederations still had sizeable Yazidi sections, and the dynasty of Yazidi *mirs* remained dominant within a limited geographical area, but Yazidis had suffered enormously from religious persecution. Until 1849, when provision for their protection was made under Ottoman law, they had not had the status of 'People of the Book' (Guest, pp. 103-107; Edmonds, pp. 59-60). In



the 19th century complex social and political changes, many related to the Tanzimat reforms, produced an environment of increasing religious intolerance culminating in large-scale massacres of the Christian minorities. The Yazidis, also targets of militant Sunnism, suffered at the hands of Kurdish tribal leaders such as Moḥammed Beg of Rowanduz (1832) and Bedir Khan Beg (1840s), as well as Ottoman officials, such as ‘Omar Wahbi Pasha (1893; Guest, pp. 96-97, 134-9; Edmonds, p. 60). There was some co-operation between the minorities; Yazidis of Mount Senjār sheltered Armenians during the massacres of 1915-16. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century many Yazidis fled to Georgia and Armenia. In the second half of the twentieth century, most of Turkey’s Yazidis, who still lived in fear of religious persecution, emigrated to Germany, and in the 1990s many of Iraq’s Yazidi intelligentsia arrived there, where they play an active role in diaspora affairs, maintaining contact with co-religionists in Iraq and the Caucasus (Guest, pp. 193-203, Ackermann, forthcoming).

Geographical distribution and identity. The Yazidi heartland is in Northern Iraq. A substantial community known for its conservatism lives on Mount Senjār some 80km west of Mosul on the border with Syria. A collection of farming villages and small towns lies in the Šaiḳān area, in the foothills north-east of Mosul; this area is adjacent to the shrine of Lāleš and contains the home of the mir and the settlements of Ba‘šiqa and Baḥzānē, home of the *qawwāls*, reciters of sacred texts. In the 20th century both Šaiḳāni and Senjāri communities struggled for religious dominance. In Syria there are also two main groupings, in the Jazira and the Kurd Dāḡ areas (the latter including the Sem‘ān and ‘Afrin communities). However, these are much smaller, probably totaling only about 15,000. In Turkey some Yazidis still live in the villages of the Ṭur ‘Abdin, southeast of Diyarbakir, remnants of a much more widespread community. The Transcaucasian communities, which once numbered some 60,000, have also declined due to economic and political factors, though accurate statistics remain unavailable. During the 1990s the population in Georgia decreased from some 30,000 to under 5,000, though numbers in Armenia have apparently remained more constant. Diaspora communities have increased correspondingly; most importantly, some 40,000 Yazidis now live in Germany, mainly in the Western provinces of Niedersachsen and Nordrhein-Westfalen. Most are from Turkey, with arrivals during the 1990s from Iraq including some influential figures. This profile may change as the situation in Iraq evolves following the fall of the Saddam regime. A much smaller community exists in the Netherlands. Other groups of Yazidis, in



Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and in the United States, Canada, and Australia, are extremely small, and probably total well under 5,000.

Many attempts to define the Yazidis' ethnic identity (notably the policies of the Ba'athist government in Iraq, which designated them as Arabs) have been politically motivated. Apart from a few Arabic-speaking clans, Yazidi communities speak Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) as their first language, and their cultural practices are Kurdish. Most Yazidis claim Kurdish identity; in Iraq, this view has had the support of the government in the Kurdish Autonomous Region since 1991. In the Caucasus however, particularly in Armenia, to be 'Kurdish' is often popularly associated with an Islamic (and thus pro-Azeri) identity. Many Caucasian Yazidis, therefore, claim to belong to a separate *ethnie*, though the politicization of the Kurdish question in Turkey and the influence of the PKK have reportedly caused a number in Armenia to redefine themselves as Kurds. In the diaspora, the Yazidis' status as Kurds is not debated so much as their religious origin. In nationalist discourse, the Yazidi religion is seen as the 'original' Kurdish faith, a view that distinguishes the Kurds from Arabs and Turks. It is sometimes inaccurately presented as a form of Zoroastrianism or, spuriously, as a 'Cult of Angels.' In the Caucasus, a hypothesis of Babylonian origins is favored. Such different interpretations of the Yazidis' origins are closely interlinked with expressions of identity, and tend to be explicable in terms of the prevailing political climate.

Religious belief and practice. Contemporary Yazidism is a religion of orthopraxy. Practice, in terms of careful adherence to rules governing all aspects of life, is more important than the role of scriptural text, dogma and professions of personal belief. Two key and interrelated features of Yazidism are: a) a preoccupation with religious purity and b) a belief in metempsychosis. The first of these is expressed in the system of caste, the food laws, the traditional preferences for living in Yazidi communities, and the variety of taboos governing many aspects of life. The second is crucial; Yazidis traditionally believe that the Seven Holy Beings (see below) are periodically reincarnated in human form, called a *kāṣṣá*. Not only does this reinforce the caste system, as the members of the dominant religious castes are the descendants of the most recent manifestations of the Holy Beings in Shaikh 'Adi and his companions, but it also provides a mechanism for syncretism, as figures from other traditions can be said to be earlier manifestations of the *kāṣṣá*. A belief in the reincarnation of lesser Yazidi souls also exists; like the



Ahl-e Ḥaqq, the Yazidis use the metaphor of a change of garment to describe the process, which they call *kirās gehorin*, ‘changing the shirt.’ Alongside this, Yazidi mythology also includes descriptions of heaven and hell, and other traditions attempting to reconcile these ideas with the belief-system of reincarnation.

In the Yazidi worldview, God created the world, which is now in the care of a Heptad of seven Holy Beings, often known as ‘Angels’ or *haft serr* (the Seven Mysteries.) Pre-eminent among these is *Ṭā’us-ē Malak* or *Malak Ṭā’us*, the Peacock Angel, who is equated with Satan by outsiders. Most Yazidis find this identification highly offensive; however, it is clear that Malak Ṭā’us is an ambiguous figure. The *Ketēbā Jelwa* ‘Book of Illumination’ which claims to be the words of Malak Ṭā’us, and which presumably represents Yazidi belief (see below), states that he allocates responsibilities, blessings and misfortunes as he sees fit and that it is not for the race of Adam to question him. The Yazidi taboo against the word *Šaiṭān*, and on words containing *š* and *t/ṭ* that might (to their ears) recall it, may indicate some perceived connection between this figure and Malak Ṭā’us. The reasons for the connection remain unclear. Although some Sufi traditions have presented Satan as a redeemed or holy figure, Shaikh ‘Adi b. Mosāfer was apparently orthodox on the matter. However, pre-Islamic Zoroastrian tradition indicates some link between Ahriman and the peacock, and this ambiguity may predate Islam. Yazidi accounts of creation, which have much in common with those of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq state that the world created by God was at first ‘a pearl’. It remained in this very small and enclosed state for some time (often a magic number such as forty or forty thousand years) before being remade in its current state; during this period the Heptad were called into existence, God made a covenant with them and entrusted the world to them. It has been suggested, on the evidence of pre-Zoroastrian Iranian cosmogony and its similarity to Yazidi cosmogonies, that if the Yazidis’ ancestors venerated a benign demiurge who set the world (in its current state) in motion, the role of this figure may have become ambiguous when they came into contact with Zoroastrians, whose cosmogony was essentially similar, but whose demiurge was Ahriman, who polluted the world. Thus Yazidism would be, not a form of Zoroastrianism, but a religion possessing an Iranian belief-system akin to it.

Besides Malak Ṭā’us, members of the Heptad (the Seven), who were called into existence by God at the beginning of all things, include Shaikh ‘Adi, his companion Shaikh Ḥasan, and a group known as the ‘four Mysteries’,



Šamsadin, Faḳradin, Sajādin and Nāšerdin. These latter, according to oral tradition, were the sons of an Ēzdinā Mir, whom Shaikh Ādi met at Lāleš. All these figures are eponyms of clans of Ādāni shaikhs (see below); in Yazidi accounts of the cosmogony they tend to have other names, and they are also identified in other incarnations, such as Ḥasan al-Bāšri as an incarnation of Shaikh Ḥasan. Not all listings of the Seven are identical; sometimes, for instance, Shaikh Ādi himself is identified with Malak Ṭā'us, and Shaikh Obakr is added.

The *kāšš* and other holy beings are the focus of frequent veneration. The Heptad, under the names of the families of Shaikh Ādi and his companions, are objects of devotion, but so also are numerous lesser figures, also usually eponyms of clans of shaikhs or *pirs* (see below), who are requested for help on practical matters. Shaikh Mand, for instance, is believed to cure snakebites, and his descendants may handle snakes safely; the family of Pir Jarwān has power over scorpions. A female figure, Kātuna Faḳra, is associated with help in childbirth. Help from such beings may be sought by consultation with their descendants, or by veneration of a sacred site associated with them—occasionally a tomb, but more often a shrine consisting of a room with a spire, a small votive altar, a sacred tree, or a pool or cave. Many people who know little of the higher-status sacred texts make offerings at such places. Some of these cults appear to be very localized, but others are respected by members of other religions, and Yazidis also solicit help from local saints associated with other religions, especially Christianity (Kreyenbroek, 1995, pp. 91-123, 145-68; Drower, pp. 24-29, 51-60).

Pilgrimage. The holiest Yazidi site is the valley of Lāleš, site of the tomb of Shaikh Ādi. A sacred microcosm of the world, as it were, it contains not only many shrines dedicated to the *kāšš*, but a number of other landmarks corresponding to other sites or symbols of significance in other faiths, including *pirrā selāt* (Šerāṭ Bridge) and a mountain called Mt. 'Arafāt. The two sacred springs are called *Zamzam* and *Kāniyā spi* 'The White Spring'. The former rises in a cave below the sanctuary of Shaikh Ādi, the heart of the holy place. Water from the springs is mixed with earth from the holy valley to make *barāt*, little molded balls that are taken away and treated with reverence; they play a part in some rites of passage such as marriage and funerary rites. If possible, Yazidis make at least one pilgrimage to Lāleš during their lifetime, and those living in the region try to attend at least once a year for the autumn "Feast of the Assembly" (see below). As for Lāleš, pilgrimages



to lesser sites may also be undertaken, to seek intercession, in gratitude for prayers answered, or as a vow.

Prayer. Formalized prayer is largely a matter of personal preference and is not obligatory. The practice of praying facing the rising, noonday, and setting sun which is described by travelers seems not to have been universal and is now seen as an ideal rather than a norm. Such prayer should be accompanied by certain gestures, including kissing the rounded neck (*gerivān*) of the sacred shirt (*kerās*). Those who wear the girdle—the black *resta* for certain dignitaries, the white *šutik* for other Yazidis—say a prayer when putting it on. Prayers have almost exclusively been transmitted orally; their texts have themes in common but vary in details.

Festivals: (see [FESTIVALS IV. YAZIDI AND AHL-E ḤAQQ](#)) Apart from individual rites of passage, such as marriage, baptism, circumcision, and death, Yazidis observe a number of communal festivals, some more widespread than others. The Yazidi New Year falls in Spring (somewhat later than Nowruz). There is some lamentation by women in the cemeteries, to the accompaniment of the music of the *qawwāls* (see below), but the festival is generally characterized by joyous events: the music of *dahol* (drum) and *zornā* (shawm), communal dancing and meals, the decorating of eggs. Similarly the village *ṭewaf* (Ar. *ṭawāf*), a festival held in the spring in honor of the patron of the local shrine, has secular music, dance and meals in addition to the performance of sacred music. Another important festival is the *ṭāwusgerrān* (circulation of the peacock) where *qawwāls* and other religious dignitaries visit Yazidi villages, bringing the *senjāq*, sacred images representing the peacock and associated with Malak Ṭā'us. These are venerated, taxes are collected from the pious, sermons are preached, and holy water distributed. The greatest festival of the year for ordinary Yazidis is the *Ježnā Jamā'īya* (Feast of the Assembly) at Lāleš, 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 Šams, the washing of the 'bier of Shaikh Ādi,' the practice of *samā'* (see below). Other festivals are more likely to be kept by the few than the many. Religious leaders observe forty-day fasts in summer and winter; a three-day winter fast culminating in the celebration of the birth of the *kāšš* Ēzid is kept more widely. The Čēlkān, a tribe originating in the border areas of Turkey and Syria, keep a winter festival called *Bātizmiya*. For some Yazidis at least, the *kāšš* have



their feast-days. Counterparts to certain Islamic feasts, including *Id al-adḥā*, *Id al-feṭr*, and *Laylat al-barā'a* are also observed by some.

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, such as those on exogamy or on insulting or offending men of religion, are widely respected. Others, such as the prohibition of eating lettuce or wearing the color blue, are often ignored when men of religion are not present. Others still are less widely known and may be localized. The purity of the four elements, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, is protected by a number of taboos—against spitting on earth, water, or fire, for instance. These may reflect ancient Iranian preoccupations, as apparently do the taboos concerning bodily refuse, hair, and menstrual blood. Too much contact with non-Yazidis is also polluting; in the past Yazidis avoided military service which would have led them to live among Muslims, and were forbidden to share such items as cups or razors with outsiders. The mixing with others brought about by formal education may be a major reason behind the well-known Yazidi taboo on learning to read and write. In the past, only Shaikhs of the Ādāni lineage group had the right to do so. Certain words are the subject of taboos, such as those dealing with cursing or stoning, or those which are felt to sound like the name *Šaiṭān*, whose utterance is an unforgivable insult to Malak Ṭā'us, obliging any Yazidi who heard it (in the past at any rate) to slay the speaker. Auditory resemblance may lie behind the taboo against eating lettuce, whose name *kās* resembles Kurdish pronunciations of *kāšš*. The taboo against eating pork appears to be a custom which follows Islam rather than a specifically Yazidi edict. Prohibitions are also attested, in certain areas at least, against fish, cockerel, gazelle, and various vegetables including okra, cauliflower, and pumpkin.

A widespread myth about the Yazidis' origin which gives them a distinctive ancestry expresses their feelings of difference from other races. Adam and Eve quarreled about which of them provided the creative element in the begetting of children. Each stored their seed in a jar which was then sealed. When Eve's was opened it was full of insects and other unpleasant creatures, but inside Adam's jar was a beautiful boy-child. This lovely child, known as *Šahed b. Jarr* (Šahed, son of Jar) grew up to marry a houri and became the ancestor of the Yazidis.

Social and religious groups. The Yazidis divide themselves into three



endogamous major castes, with religious orders also playing an important role. Most Yazidis belong to the *morid* (layman; literally ‘disciple’)) group, which is endogamous, but, within the group, marriage is not restricted. Every morid must have a shaikhand a pir; the lineage of these is determined by the morid’s own heredity. The Shaikhs are divided into three endogamous lineage groups, the Šamsāni, Ādāni and Qātāni, the latter of which also shares its ancestry with the family of the mir. The pirs are divided into four main groups, and forty clans, most of whom may intermarry. Both groups receive alms from their morids. Tithes paid to the Shaikh are more substantial; however, the difference between the two groups lies not in the nature of their religious tasks, but rather in ancestry (the shaikhs apparently associated with non-Kurdish companions or relations of Shaikh Ādi, and the pirs with his Kurdish companions). At puberty, each morid should also choose a ‘brother’ or ‘sister of the Hereafter’, *berāyē* or *kweškā akeratē*, normally a Shaikh, who performs certain important rituals at transitional points such as marriage and death.

The *Qawwāls* or reciters constitute a different class, and come from two clans, the Kurmanji-speaking Dimli and the Arabic-speaking Tazhi, settled in the villages of Ba’šiqā and Beḥzānē, in the Šaiḡan area. They specialize in the playing of religious music on sacred instruments, the *daf* (frame-drum) and *šebāb* (flute), and in the recital of the sacred hymns or *qawls*. They also carry out the *ṭawusgerrān*; these were severely curtailed in the twentieth century when crossing international frontiers became more difficult; the Transcaucasian communities in particular were effectively cut off from the Yazidi religious centers.

There are also religious ‘orders’ whose members may come from different castes. The *Faqirs* become members of their order by an initiation which was once open to all, but as time has passed have become in effect a hereditary group, with initiation undergone almost exclusively by members of faqir families. They are expected to lead a life of piety and abstinence, by fasting, refraining from drinking and smoking, avoiding any violent behavior. Their clothes, especially their black woolen *kerqa* or tunic that recalls that of Shaikh Ādi, are considered to be sacred, and their persons must not be harmed. Some are very learned in religious lore. The *Kočaks* are a small non-hereditary group charged with outdoor labor for Shaikh Ādi, such as cutting wood and drawing water for the shrine. Some in the past have been clairvoyants, miracle workers and interpreters of dreams; a few have acquired political



influence in this way, such as the nineteenth-century Kočak Mirzā of Mount Senjār, who predicted the fall of Islam.

There are a number of important offices in the Yazidi hierarchy. The Mir (prince) is both temporal and spiritual head of the community; his person is sacred, and in theory all Yazidis owe him spiritual allegiance. In practice the temporal influence of the family, based in Bā'drē in Šaiḳān, has declined since the late 18th century, though it remains a substantial landowner, and is active in Kurdish politics. Members of this family are linked to the Qātāni Shaikhs. The Prince, along with other dignitaries, is a member of the Yazidi *Majlesi Roḥāni* 'Religious Council'. The *Bābā Shaikh* (Father Shaikh), is the leader of the Shaikhs and must come from the Šamsāni branch. He must lead a pious life; regarded by many as the spiritual leader of the Yazidis, he supervises the Kočaks and many of the ceremonies at Lāleš cannot take place without his presence. The functions of the *Piš-imām* (Foremost Imam) are less clear; a representative of the Ādāni Shaikhs, he leads certain rituals. The *Bābā Čāwuš*, (Father Guardian), guardian of the shrine at Lāleš, leads a life of piety and celibacy. He lives there permanently and has authority over what happens there; he is assisted by the *feqrāyyāt*, (celibate 'nuns') who are unmarried or widowed and also care for the sanctuaries. These are very few in number. Successive families of faqirs living there on a temporary basis also look after the fabric of the shrine and take care of guests.

The institution of *karāfat*, whereby a relationship of sponsorship is created with a man on whose knees a boy is circumcised, exists among Yazidis as for other groups. This often creates close relationships with other communities; since the family of the child may not intermarry with that of the *kariv* for seven generations, the *kariv* himself is usually not a Yazidi, and the institution serves to make useful alliances with neighbors. Yazidis in Northern Iraq may also have a *mirabbi* (literally 'teacher'), chosen from any caste by rules of heredity.

Textual traditions. Most Yazidi religious texts have been passed on exclusively by oral tradition, and many features characteristic of oral literature can be seen in them. It is now generally accepted that the manuscripts of the Yazidi Sacred Books, the *Mashafā Reš* and *Ketēbā Jelwa*, published in 1911 and 1913, were 'forgeries' in the sense that they were written by non-Yazidis in response to Western travelers' and scholars' interest in the Yazidi religion, amid a general environment of trading in ancient manuscripts. However, the material within these manuscripts is consistent with the contents of the Yazidi oral



traditions, and to that extent they may be considered authentic. Nevertheless, it seems that written texts with the titles *Mashefā Reš* and *Ketēbā Jelwa* were known among the Yazidis long before this date, though they have remained unseen even by the vast majority of the community. The latter title is a shortened form of the title of a work by Ḥasan b. ‘Adi, but it currently seems to denote manuscripts used for divination, which are still kept by certain Ādāni Shaikhs. Other written texts were known; *mešur*, kept by Pirs, giving accounts of lineages and attached morid families, and *kaškul*, which included prayers, religious history and some *Qawls*. These collections may also have included some of the Arabic odes (*qaṣidas*) attributed to Shaikh Ādi which are used in the community. However, there is no evidence that the large corpus of sacred texts once existed in the form of a book.

The core religious texts are the qawls, hymns in Kurmanji which are often dedicated to a *kāṣṣ* and which make frequent allusions to events and persons not explained in the texts. These have, for most of their history, been orally transmitted, though there is some evidence that not all were orally composed. Knowledge and recitation of the qawls has traditionally been the province of the Qawwāl, though their training school no longer exists in their home villages. Few members of the Qawwāl families now learn either sacred texts or sacred instruments and those with the widest knowledge of the Qawls and their interpretation are now from other classes. In 1979 two young Yazidi intellectuals published a number of the qawls, provoking considerable controversy within the community. (A few had been published in the Soviet Union the previous year, but were presented as part of a folklore anthology and largely ignored). By the beginning of the 21st century more had been published in Armenia and a research program in Germany was almost complete. With the assent of the community, this latter aimed to collect and transcribe the many unpublished qawls for use in academic research and the education of Yazidi children, especially in the diaspora. Yazidism is thus being transformed into a scriptural religion.

The qawls, with their allusions and obscurities, are not easy to understand, and a tradition of interpretation has grown up. Each qawl has a *čirōk* or ‘story’ associated with it, which explains its context. Some of these *čirōks* show signs of having been developed long after the qawl. In general the qawls and the knowledge within them are the province of men of religion, but on certain occasions, a *moṣḥābat* is given. This is a sermon usually consisting of narrative interspersed with couplets from a qawl, which explains the sacred text, and is



aimed at a general audience.

Other types of sacred text exist: the *bayt* which is difficult to distinguish from the *qawl* in formal terms, but unlike the secular Kurdish *bayt* is used to accompany religious events such as *ṭāwusgerrān*; the *qaṣida* in Kurdish, often a praise-poem for a holy man which does not formally correspond to the Arabic or Persian *qaṣida*; *du‘ā* and *dirozā*, prayers for private and public use. There are seven forms of Yazidi *samā‘*, consisting of music and the singing of hymns, usually a combination of *qawl* and *qaṣida*; a solemn procession is also often part of these.

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