

**YEZIDI RELIGIOUS ORAL POETIC  
LITERATURE: STATUS,  
FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS,  
AND GENRE ANALYSIS**

**WITH SOME EXAMPLES  
OF YEZIDI RELIGIOUS TEXTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

The present work surveys the religious textual heritage of the Yezidis, adherents of the monotheistic, non-proselytizing pre-Islamic Kurdish religion. In this investigation, we explore the publication of Yezidi religious texts and their status, formal characteristics, and language, as well as the different categories of Yezidi poetic literature. At the end of the paper the Yezidi Declaration of the Faith (*Şehdetiya Dîn*) and another example of a religious poetic text, *Beyta Heyî Malê*, both with English translations, are given as illustrations of Yezidi religious poetic literature.

This investigation is based on more than thirty sources, including publications in Kurdish and in Arabic, and on unpublished audio and video archives, including some transcribed materials gathered during my field research among Yezidis in Armenia and Iraqi Kurdistan and interviews conducted in Germany. This study is the first scientific presentation of these results.

The world population of Yezidis is approximately 700,000, that is, about 2.3% of the Kurdish population. They live mainly in Iraqi Kurdistan, in the mountainous region of Shingal and Sheykhani and in the area known as Bashiq and Behzan. They also live in Turkey and in Syria, but the overwhelming majority of this population has moved to Europe, especially to Germany. Yezidis live in several post-Soviet states, mostly in Armenia and Georgia. As a result of the very large emigration from Armenia and Georgia during the post-Soviet period, primarily because of economic hardship, they were forced to move to Russia and Ukraine.

The only centre of the religion and its ceremonial rituals is called Lalish, which is the sacred valley located in the Sheykhani region of Iraqi Kurdistan. In the Yezidi religion, alongside the mostly Kurdish religion of Ahl-e Haqq, one can observe ancient cults, the roots of which are embedded deeply in past millennia. The basis of Yezidism is a combination of the most ancient Indo-Iranian concepts, similar to Indo-Aryan traditions. In the process of investigating Yezidism, it is necessary to pay attention to the presence of several genetically various strata.

Yezidis believe in the existence of a Supreme Power and Truth in the Universe, which is God. The Yezidi myth of Creation begins with a description of the emptiness and the absence of order in the Universe, which was then brought forth by God. Prior to the Time of Creation of the World, God created a Pearl, not in material form, but created from the pure Light of God, and He alone dwelt within it. Then the Pearl exploded, forming the light and the variegated world we know. Before the creation of this world, God created seven angels, whose appointed Leader was Tawusî Melek. After that, the world was left to the care of these seven angels who, in the religious hymns, are called *Heft Surr* (Seven Mysteries).

In Yezidism, an esoteric or non-material world was created first and later the differentiation of various phenomena took place. After the manifestation of these phenomena, they came down to earth. The Creation in Yezidi cosmogony ends with the myth of the creation of the first man, who in Yezidism is also called Adam. The end of Creation is closely connected with the leaving (moving away) of the Creator from the Universe's affairs, His creation of mankind, and the transition from mythological time to historical time.<sup>1</sup>

Yezidis always had a great fear of writing down their religious texts and hence avoided the practice. Yezidis, like other insulated religious communities based on oral traditions, arguably preserved their beliefs better than those that were based on written traditions.

Some accounts of the existence of a Yezidi Scripture are mentioned in the notes of travelers to the region. Beginning in the 1880s, copies of two Yezidi sacred texts, which were written in Arabic, began to appear. After that, in 1911 the Carmelite Father Anastase Marie published his discovery of the so-called original Kurdish versions of the Sacred Books

(1) Kh. OMARKHALI, Names of God and Forms of Address to God in Yezidism. With the Religious Hymn of the Lord, *Manuscripta Orientalia. International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research* 15.2 (2009) 13–24.

of the Yezidis, which were written in an unknown alphabet. A few years later, M. Bittner<sup>2</sup> published a translation of these texts into German. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when two supposed Yezidi sacred books, *Jilvê* and *Meshefa Resh*, were published, there has been great scholarly interest in Yezidi religious texts. Now practically all academics dealing with Yezidology agree that these two books could not be ancient authentic Yezidi books both because of the southern dialect of Kurdish in these texts and also because of their content.

Yezidism is an oral tradition and its religious truth is transmitted orally, at various levels. Yezidi sacred hymns were memorised by the representatives of Yezidi priesthood, usually knowledgeable people, as well as by a special group of performers in Iraq — *Qewals* (Arab. *qawwāl*), who were trained in recitation, religious music, and a few of them in exegesis. The sacred knowledge, including the sacred hymns, was thus traditionally memorised and handed down orally.

## 1. PUBLICATION, STATUS, AND FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YEZIDI RELIGIOUS ORAL LITERATURE

### 1.1. Publication of the Yezidi Oral Religious Texts

Because of their fear of writing down religious texts, Yezidis always avoided doing so. Even if Yezidis from Armenia wrote religious hymns down (or allowed me to do so during my field research), they did so only using red or black ink but never using blue ink, which is believed to be a prohibited colour. Some Yezidis believe that if a person looks at a sacred text, he may become blind. These statements are related to the fact that Yezidis attribute a special, mysterious nature to religious texts in written form.

From the late 1970s and over the last decades, many religious texts were gathered among Yezidis from Armenia and were published by the brothers Ordikhane Jelil and Jelile Jelil; in Iraq such texts were published mostly by Khalil Jindy Rashow, Bedelê Feqîr Hejî, and Khidir Pîr Silêman. The biggest collections of Yezidi religious texts have been published in the following books: Zargotina Kurda 1978 M.,<sup>3</sup> Zargot-

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(2) M. BITTNER, Die heiligen Bücher der Jeziden oder Taufelsanbeter (Kurdisch und Arabisch), *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Phil.-Hist. Klasse* 55 (1913).

(3) Yezidi religious texts, in: O. CELÎL, C. CELÎL (eds.), *Zargotina kurda* (Moskva, 1978) 5–53.

ina Kurda 1978 Y.,<sup>4</sup> Silêman, Jindî 1979<sup>5</sup> (reprinted in Roman script in 1995),<sup>6</sup> Ayîn û Qirarê Dînê Êzdîtiyê 2001,<sup>7</sup> B. F. Hejî 2002,<sup>8</sup> Rashow I–II. 2004,<sup>9</sup> Kreyenbroek, Rashow 2005,<sup>10</sup> and Laliş A. 1993–2011.<sup>11</sup>

Some separate poetic and prose texts have been published in such sources as Êzdaname 1999,<sup>12</sup> Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabîyêt êzidya ji pola 1–6 qunaxa seretayî 1996<sup>13</sup> and 2004,<sup>14</sup> Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabiyên êzdiyan. Navincî 2005,<sup>15</sup> Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabiyên êzdiyan. Amadeyî 2005,<sup>16</sup> Roj 1996–2002,<sup>17</sup> Wana ola Ezidîyan 2001,<sup>18</sup> Aloian 2008,<sup>19</sup>

(4) Yezidi religious texts, in: O. CELÎL, C. CELÎL (eds.), *Zargotina kurda* (Yerevan, 1978) 302–464.

(5) X. SILÊMAN, X. CINDÎ, *Êzidiyatî: li ber roşnaya hindêk têkstêd ayînê Êzidiyan* [Yezidism: in the Light of some Religious Texts of the Yezidis] (Baghdad, 1979); X. SILÊMAN, *Gundiyaî* [Village Lore] (Baghdad, 1985).

(6) SILÊMAN, CINDÎ, *Êzidiyatî...*, in Roman script: Mehmûd Îdo (1995).

(7) Religious texts recited by Sheikh Khelifa, son of Sheikh ‘Elî, in: *Ayîn û Qirarê Dînê Êzdîtiyê* (Tilbîs, 2001). Prepared by K. Anqosi.

(8) B. F. HECÎ, *Bawerî û mîtolojiya êzdiyan* [Belief and Mythology of Yezidis] (Dihok, 2002).

(9) Kh. J. RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan* [A Part of the Yezidi Religious Literature], vol. I–II (Duhok, 2004).

(10) Ph. G. KREYENBROEK, and Kh. J. RASHOW, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect* (Wiesbaden, 2005).

(11) Xidir Pîr SILÊMAN, Îdo Babe ŞÊX, Zêdo BA‘EDRÎ, and others (eds.), *Lalish*. N 1–31 (Hewlêr, Dihok, 1993–2011).

(12) *Êzdaname I*. Weşanên Laliş 2 (Bielefeld, 1999).

(13) *Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabîyêt êzidya ji pola 1–6 qunaxa seretayî*. Danana Xidir Pîr Silêman. Çapa yekê (Dihok, 1996).

(14) Xidir Pîr SILÊMAN, *Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabiyên êzdiyan. Seretayî*. N 1–6 (Baghdad, 2004).

(15) Rêsan Hesên CINDÎ, Xêrî Liyas ELÎ, and others, *Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabiyên êzdiyan. Navincî*. N 1–6 (Hewlêr, 2005).

(16) Şemo Qasim KELO, Xêrî Liyas ELÎ, Rêsan Hesên CINDÎ, and others, *Êzidiyatî. Wane bo qutabiyên êzdiyan. Amadeyî*. N 5–6 (Hewlêr, 2005).

(17) Memo OTHMAN, Khelil JINDÎ, Amer CHELÎK, and others, *Roj. A cultural periodical journal concerning Ezidian affairs*. N 1–10 (Hannover, 1996–2002).

(18) Zeynal YUSUN, *Wana ola Ezidîyan* (Giessen, 2001).

(19) Z. B. ALOIAN, *Religious and Philosophical ideas of Shaikh ‘Adi b. Musafir. The history of the Yezidi Kurds in the Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries* (Sweden, 2008).

Omarkhali (in collaboration with Khanki) 2009,<sup>20</sup> Bedirkhan 1933,<sup>21</sup> Jalile 2002,<sup>22</sup> Hadank 1938,<sup>23</sup> Hewar 1942,<sup>24</sup> Kh. Jindy 1998,<sup>25</sup> Makas 1900,<sup>26</sup> Yegiazarov 1891,<sup>27</sup> and in some other sources.

Translations of the nineteen Yezidi religious texts are given in the second chapter of Kreyenbroek 1995.<sup>28</sup> His next book, co-authored with Rashow, was funded by DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and published in 2005. It covers about fifty religious texts, both poetry and prose, translated into English; some of the translations were reprinted from previous editions. The biggest published collections of Yezidi religious texts to date are the two volumes by Rashow 2004, noted above, in the Kurdish alphabet using Arabic-Persian script.

There was a period around 2004 when some Yezidis began to publish religious hymns on Yezidi websites. This prompted a negative reaction from a conservative Yezidi group, which argued that the texts were sacred and that to show them to everyone was insulting and a desecration of the sacred texts. One of the arguments was that there was usually no named source for the texts.

(20) Kh. OMARKHALI, in collaboration with K. KHANKI, *Mêtoodeke Analîza Qewlên Êzdiyan. Li ser mesela Qewlê Omer Xala û Hesin Çinêrî* [A method of the Analysis of Yezidi religious hymns. On the example of the religious hymn of Omer Khala and Hesin Chinêri] (Istanbul, 2009). Religious hymns: 107–167.

(21) Celadet BEDIRXAN, Nivêjên êzdiyan, in: *Hawar* (Damask, 1933).

(22) Jalile JALIL, Kurds kaya versiya sufiyskoy legendi ob Ibrakhim Adkhame, *St. Petersburg Journal of Oriental Studies* 10 (2002) 271–291.

(23) Karl HADANK, *Untersuchungen zum Westkurdischen: Bôti und Êzâdi* (Berlin, 1938).

(24) *Hewar. Periodical magazine*. N 49 (Şam, 1942).

(25) Jindy KHALIL, *Naħw ma'rifa ħaqîqa ad-diyâna al-yazîdiyya* [An approach to the essence of Yezidian religion] (Uppsala, 1998).

(26) Hugo MAKAS, Gebete der Jeziden, in: *Kurdische Texte und Studien* (Neudruck 1979 der Ausgaben St-Petersburg/Leningrad 1897–1926 und Heidelberg 1900). 2 Bände in 1 Band. Printed in the Netherlands. (1. Eine Probe des Dialektes von Diarbekir. 2. Ein Gedicht aou Gāwar. 3. Gebete der Jeziden.), 28–54.

(27) С. А. ЕГИАЗАРОВ, Краткий этнографическо-юридический очерк езидов Эриванской губернии [A short ethnographic-juridical sketch of Yezidis of Yerevan province], in: *Записки Кавказского отдела Императорского Русского географического общества* 13/2 (Tiflis, 1891) 171–234.

(28) Ph. G. KREYENBROEK, *Yezidism — Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (Lewiston, 1995).

At present, Yezidis possess at least two known Yezidi sacred books (*Jilvê* and *Meshefa Resh* in Kurdish), the authenticity of which is doubtful, eight manuscripts (*Mishûrs* written in Arabic in the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries), and, according to my account, more than three hundred oral religious texts. Including the different variants, the total number of Yezidi oral texts which I managed to find in the published sources recorded during my field research is about nine hundred texts. There are surely more, but this is the number of texts that I managed to gather and which are now available; for sure that there are other religious texts waiting to be found, collected, and investigated.

One can hardly imagine Yezidi liturgies and other kinds of religious ceremonies without religious hymns. Yezidi religious hymns, however, reflect not only their religious ideas, but also their world-view and their perception of world events. The central subjects of the religious texts are cosmogonical storylines, the early history of the community, divine miracles, the lives of Holy Men in Yezidism, and other subjects.

## 1.2. Status, Formal Characteristics, and the Language of the Yezidi Religious Oral Literature

### 1.2.1. Terms for genres

The use of different terms for the various categories of the Yezidi religious texts is strict and important because of the functions of these texts: they are recited on many different occasions in different ways. Sometimes the terms can be interchanged, for instance, *Qewl* (religious hymn) and *Beyt* (poem), but this happens rarely.

Yezidi religious literature is composed of poetic and prosaic texts. The poetic literature includes such genres as *Qewl* (religious hymn); *Beyt* (poem); *Du'a* (prayer); *Diroz(g)e* (a kind of prayer); *Şehdetiya Dîn* (the Declaration of the Faith); *Terqîn* (prayer after a sacrifice); *Pişt Perde* ('under the veil', a separate genre); *Qesîde* (*Qasida*); *Sema'* (Arab. *samâ'* 'listening'); *Lavij*; *Xerîbo*; *Xizêmok*; *Payîzok*; and *Robarîn*. The prose literature includes such genres as *Mishabet* with quotations from religious poetic texts; *Çîrok* and *Çîvanok* (legends and myths); and *Dastan* and *M'ena / Pirs* (interpretations of religious hymns).

However, no strict formal criteria are known to explain the distinctions between different groups of texts. Sometimes the same text can belong to different genres of the religious texts among Yezidis from Iraq or from Armenia. Moreover, one can find different names of *Qewls* and *Beyts* among Yezidis in these two areas.

### 1.2.2. Status of the Religious Literature in Yezidi Society

There are different notions regarding each genre of the Yezidi religious texts relating both to their origin and to their value. Moreover, there are different means of transmission for each kind of text. The status of the texts also differs; there is a special hierarchy in the position of the Yezidi religious texts. The category to which a poem belongs implies both its function and its status.

The famous Yezidi reciter of religious hymns in Iraqi Kurdistan, Feqîr Hejî,<sup>29</sup> characterised Yezidi religious knowledge in this way:

<i>Kurdish Original</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
<i>Feqîr Hecî: 'Ulmê me — 'ulmê mehfûsê ye, yê ezmana.</i>	<i>Feqîr Hejî: Our [religious] knowledge is the knowledge kept in one's memory, it is heavenly.</i>
<i>Padişa dibêje: Fexro, ez diçime ezmana, Dê bo we dişînim Qewl û xerqene Dê sunetxane pê dibit bawerî û îmane.</i>	<i>The Lord [i.e., God] says: Oh, Fekhir<sup>30</sup> I am going to the Heavens, I will send for you Qewls [religious hymns] and the Kherqe [hair-shirt] The Tradition [i.e., Yezidis] will believe in it.</i>
<i>Ulm û Xerqe ligel hatin ji ezmana. Sura Sunetê wextê hatî, pê dibêjit:</i>	
<i>Melkê Fexredîn... (Melkê Fexir — Tawûsî Melek e.)</i>	<i>The knowledge and Kherqe came from the heavens together. When the Sur [Mystery] of the Tradition came, it is said:</i>
<i>Melek Fexredîn xoş delîl e Rawest bû li qendîla Ji berî Adem û çendî bedîle Ewî hêvênê da Noh û Adem û Bîrahîm Xelîle.</i>	<i>Melkê Fekhredîn... [Melkê Fekhir is Tawûsî Melek] Melek Fekhredîn is a good leader He stood in the Source of Light<sup>31</sup></i>

(29) From the interview with Feqîr Hecî, which I conducted on 14.04.2008 in Beedrê, Iraqi Kurdistan.

(30) Fexro is in the Vocative (Oh, Fekhir); it means Angel Fekhredîn.

(31) *Qendîl* is sometimes translated literally as 'lamp'. The meaning of this word in the religious context is "the source of the Light", as in the explanation of this term by the Yezidi Pîr Rizayê Kakê: "Qendîl is a place, where the rennet of the first Yezidi man was kept, it was in the Pearl, the innermost place, from which the Light originated, which was the first primary source of the Light (*Nûr / Nûra Xwedê* 'The Light of God') from which everything was created."

Before Adam and some periods  
 He gave the rennet to [the prophet]  
 Noah, Adam, and Ibrahim Khelil.

According to Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov,<sup>32</sup> the church songs, which were composed by the Church Fathers, contain the full course of the dogmatic and moral theology. The same could be said about Yezidi religious hymns — they present rich material for the understanding of the basic core of the Yezidi religion.

### 1.2.3. Structure

One can see the special structure of the Yezidi religious poetic texts, but it is not as strict as in Arabic, Persian, or Kurdish literature, which is why it is not easy to describe. However, some special features can be named.

Practically all *Qewls*, *Beyts*, *Qesîdes*, and some *Du'as* (prayers) consist of a number of stanzas, called *sebeq* or, in some regions, *sebeqe*, which usually have three lines. Each line in a stanza is called *mal*. Some religious texts have the usual three lines, but some might have two, four, five, or seven, and sometimes even nine or twelve lines in a stanza.

The first and last stanzas in the texts usually differ from the structure of the rest of the text. The majority of the religious hymns finish with the ending phrase “*Em kê m in, Xwedê yî temam e*” (We are imperfect, God is perfect) or with the less-used phrase “*Ez kê m in, Tu yî temam*” (I am imperfect, You are perfect).

### 1.2.4. Metre and Rhyme

In Yezidi religious poetic literature, the metre is variable even within the same piece, and rhyme may or may not be used. Let us examine these elements individually.

#### 1.2.4.1. Metre

Yezidis use the word *wazin* for metre.<sup>33</sup> The Yezidi poetic compositions do not have the strict metre that is used in Arabo-Persian or

(32) Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807–1867) is a saint in the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1831 he took monastic vows and received the monastic name of Ignatius.

(33) In Kurdish *wezin* ‘metre’, from Arabic *wazin*.



Kurdish literature.<sup>34</sup> They also use meters not known to us from Arabic, Persian, or Kurdish classical literature. Nevertheless, Yezidis say that their religious texts have metre. Indeed, in some stanzas one can see the special metre, but it is not strict and does not appear throughout the entire text. In the *arûz* and *qafî* of Arabo-Persian and Kurdish literature, written — not oral — texts were used, so one could follow strict rules; this is not the case for Yezidi oral religious literature.

#### 1.2.4.2. *Rhyme*

Yezidis use the word *qāfi* for rhyme.<sup>35</sup> Normally, the lines of the stanza have end-rhyme, i.e., the last accented syllables rhyme:

<i>Ji ewil beyza li berê</i>	At first there is white
<i>Zeriyê bê eħmerê</i>	Yellow without red
<i>Bêje min kî ji berê?</i> <sup>36</sup>	Tell me, which is first?

End-rhyme, however, is not necessarily typical for all stanzas of all texts. Some *Berane Qewls* (*Argali Qewls*, see below), for example, do not use it. Usually the lines of a stanza have end-rhyme, even if it is against the grammatical rules of the Kurdish language.

In a great many Yezidi religious texts, the vowels of the last accented syllables rhyme, but the consonants do not. There can sometimes be rhymes formed by such consonants as *ş / j*; *l / r*; *d / z*, etc., which is not possible according to the strict rules of rhyming.

Some of the lines rhyme with each other and could be perceived as *beyt*:

<i>Day mirîd e, dot dê ye</i>	The mother is a <i>mirîd</i> (pupil),
<i>Bêjine min, kî ji berê kê ye?</i> <sup>37</sup>	the daughter is the mother
	Tell me, who is before whom?

Or in the following stanza:

<i>Mêr di rûniştîne bi heq rêya Şîxadî</i>	The Holy Men sit and ask Sheikh
<i>jêk dikin pirse:</i>	Adî:

(34) On the literary analysis of the Yezidi religious hymns, see OMARKHALI, *Mêtodeke Analîza Qewlên Êzdiyan*.

(35) In Kurdish *qafî* 'rhyme', from Arabic *qāfiyê* 'rhyme'.

(36) From *Qewlê Bê Elîf* (The Hymn of A and B), *sebeq* 12, in: RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. I, 236.

(37) From *Qewlê Bê Elîf* (The Hymn of A and B), *sebeq* 11, in: RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. I, 236.

"Omer Xale bab e û Hesin Çinêrî pis e" ?<sup>38</sup> Is Omer Khale the father and is Hesin Chineri the son?

Some four-line stanzas have two *beyts* that rhyme with each other, so they could be described as *masnavî*. For example:

Êzdanê me bi rehmanî	Our God, with His mercy
Hisn û cemal ji me ra anî	Brought for us beauty and loveliness
Destûr da qelemê qudretê	He gave a command to the Pen of
Em avêtin nav Sura mubetê. <sup>39</sup>	Power
	We were thrown into the Mystery of
	Love.

Some three-line stanzas rhyme only in two lines, for instance, in the first and the last lines, but not in the second one:

Êzdanê me sefîne çêkir	Our God made a ship
Însan heywan teyr û tû	Men, animals, and birds
Cot bi cot li sefîne siyar kir. <sup>40</sup>	In pairs He placed in the ship.

In some stanzas (marked with numbers), the rhyme scheme can be as follows:

N	Stanza	Type of rhyme
5	Malê Baba maleke bi dewlet e	A
	Jê diçon keramete	A
	Pîrê Omer Xale kirne merebiyêt xelîfete	A
3	Omer Xale û Hesin Çinêrî	A
	Mêrêt xudan kemal in	B
	Bo feqîra avakir mezel û malin	B
18	Şîxadî ji Şamê dihate	A
	Li mergehê diêwirî dikir xebate	A
	Li qubehê, li cînehê, şandî alîmehê <sup>41</sup>	B

(38) From *Qewlê Omer Xala û Hesin Çinêrî* (The Hymn of Omar Khala and Hesin Chineri), *sebeq* 27 in: OMARKHALI, *Mêtodeke Analîza Qewlên Êzdiyan*, 133.

(39) From *Qewlê Afirîna Dinyayê* (The Hymn of the Creation of the World) in: SILÊMAN, CINDÎ, *Êzdiyatî...*, 41. This *Qewl* was first published by Qenatê Kurdo in 1973 in the magazine *Korê Zanyarî Kurd*.

(40) From *Qewlê Afirîna Dinyayê* (The Hymn of the Creation of the World) in: SILÊMAN, CINDÎ, *Êzdiyatî...*, 41.

(41) From *Qewlê Omer Xala û Hesin Çinêrî*, in: OMARKHALI, *Mêtodeke Analîza Qewlên Êzdiyan*, 72.

4	<i>Ewin mêrêt xudan çav in</i>	A
	<i>Şîxadî lê di kirin silave</i>	B
	<i>Got xoş Malet Baba maleke bi dewlet in</i>	A

As the Yezidi religious literature is still oral, the patterns of rhyme do not follow strict rules. Obviously, music plays a very important role in the rhyme of Yezidi literature.

### 1.2.5. Refrain

Practically all Yezidi religious poems are published without a refrain. However, I would not omit recording and publishing refrains in all parts of the religious texts, because a refrain is extremely important for an oral poetic text. A refrain is not used after each stanza and it shows the division of the text, which is why it is significant to show it in published versions. Moreover, division of the text by a refrain sometimes signals the changing of its melody (*kubrî*) as it is recited. In the majority of publications, however, the refrains are simply omitted and ignored.

For instance, the complex text of the long prayer *Dirozga Şêşims*, which is recited among Armenian Yezidis and is a combination of different texts, has three different refrains, recited after each stanza. In the variant I recorded in Armenia, the refrains are as follows:

1. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> stanzas:

<i>Şemsê êzdiyano, Melkê Mêrano!</i>	Oh Shems of Yezidis, oh the King of the [Holy] Men!
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2. From the 21<sup>st</sup> to 43<sup>rd</sup> stanzas the refrain changes and a different one is used:

<i>'Ezîzê min, navê te Mîr e</i>	My dear one, your name is Prince,
<i>Şêxşimsê min, navê te Mîr e!</i>	My Sheikh Shems, your name is Prince!

3. From the 50<sup>th</sup> to 85<sup>th</sup> stanzas yet another refrain used:

<i>Xatira Mêra û Meleka kî!</i>	For the sake of Holy Men and An- gels!
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Refrains are usually repeated after each stanza, except the opening and closing stanzas. The changing of a refrain might indicate different things, for example, it could show the changing of the religious texts or changing of the melodies (*kubrî*).

There are interesting differences in the performance of Yezidi religious and non-religious poetry. Non-religious songs usually have a

responsorial character, a procedure whereby each verse is repeated a few times by the first singer and then resumed by the second one, the last verse being sung as a refrain. This is impossible in Yezidi religious poetry, where each verse follows a strict order, one after another.

In some poetic texts, however, the last line of the stanza is repeated as the first line of the next stanza. In my view, this procedure has the special function of “fixing” the text, providing the text with a firm structure and an unchangeable order. The function of such “fixing” seems obviously to facilitate memorization and for later reproduction of the text orally.

## 1.2.6. Length and Number of Texts

### 1.2.6.1. *Qewl*

*Qewls* and *Beyts* are much longer than other kinds of poems. The usual length of a *Qewl* varies from approximately 25 to 45 stanzas. There is a reference to the *Qewlê Qiyametê* (The Hymn of the End of Time), which has 160 stanzas (478 lines). The text, which I have not seen and which is still unpublished, is given with two *Khezels* of the Kurdish poet Feqiyê Teyran<sup>42</sup> in the manuscript of the famous novel *Mem and Zîn*.<sup>43</sup> Another *Qewl*, *Qewlê Seremergê* (The Hymn of the Moment of Death), in a variant published by Pîr Khidir Silêman recorded by Koçek Silêman on 14.02.1980, contains about 137 stanzas.<sup>44</sup> The *Qewlê Mezin* (The Great Hymn), with 117 stanzas, is also among the longest in this genre.<sup>45</sup>

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(42) Feqiyê Teyran (1590–1660) is considered as one of the great classical Kurdish poets and writers. The writer, whose real name was Mir Mihemed, was born in a village in the Hakkari region of the Ottoman Empire. In his youth, he went to the Jizre Botan region to study under the supervision of the well-known Kurdish poet Malaye Jaziri.

(43) The religious hymn was written by Ehmed Mîrazî on 08.07.1935. The manuscript is stored under the number ROS-717 in the Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, see K. ANQOSÎ (prep.), “*Qewlê Qiyametê*” ya Êzdiyan (*bi zimanê k’urdî*) (Tbilisi, 2010) 18.

(44) *Laliş* N 5 (1995) 37–56.

(45) RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. I, 333–349. This text was sent to Rashow by Kheri Liyas Purto in 1994.

### 1.2.6.2. *Beyt*

There are no *Beyts* that are as long as the longest *Qewls*. The length of *Beyts* differs, but in general they are about the same length as *Qewls*, that is, from 25 to 45 stanzas in a text.

### 1.2.6.3. *Du'a*

*Du'as*, prayers, are usually much shorter and they are often not divided into stanzas. These are prayers that are more understandable to the members of the community; they are not usually intended to be recited by those who conduct the religious services.

### 1.2.6.4. *Diroz(ge)*

The genre of *Diroze* has a special textual form. Stanzas can range from three to twelve lines, which may or may not rhyme. This is a rather long text and, in my view, the most informative historical one, because the names of the most prominent figures in the history of the Yezidi community are mentioned in it.

### 1.2.6.5. *Qesîde*

*Qesîdes* traditionally are also not very long, roughly the length of prayers.

The number of *Qewls* is approximately four times greater than the number of *Beyts*. There are more *Du'as* (prayers) than *Beyts*, but fewer than *Qewls*. The number of *Qesîdes* is approximately the same as the number of *Beyts*.

## 1.2.7. Performance and Music

In the Yezidi religious texts, one should pay attention to the narration of the text and to whom it is addressed.

The repetition of some words or sentences in the oral Yezidi religious texts is very important. It gives the listener a special feeling of the power of the word and consequently such repetitions reinforce the power of the text.

For instance, in the majority of the stanzas of *Dirozga Şêşims*, the first line is repeated twice and after the second repetition the next line is introduced. Sometimes in other religious texts the first line of a stanza repeats the last line of the previous stanza. This could be explained by the oral nature of the text, which brings us back to the way in which these oral texts are transmitted. The repetition of the last line at the beginning of the next stanza helps to fix the order of the whole text.

One of the remarkable things I noticed during the performance of Yezidi religious hymns is that, on a few occasions, when one reciter, for example, suddenly began to cough, the other *Qewlbêj* (reciter of religious hymns), who had been silent, quickly continued reciting the hymn; thus, the performance of the *Qewl* was not disturbed at all.<sup>46</sup>

Half of the religious texts are performed with special music, accompanied by sacred instruments, namely, the tambourine (*def*) and flute (*şibab*). During the performance of the religious texts these instruments play a very important role.

The majority of Yezidi poetic compositions have their own distinctive melody, which is called *kubrî*. *Kubrî* have no separate names; it is said that there is a *kubrî* of this *Qewl*, or *kubrî* of that *Beyt*, and so forth. It is interesting to note that, during my field research and talk to different religious specialists, I noticed that the majority of the *Berane Qewls* are recited without any *kubrî*, that is, they have no special melody.

Yezidi religious literature has a significant corollary: the sung/recited religious poetry of Yezidis still remains alive. As such, it plays, or rather until recently has played, a social, cultural, and spiritual role.

## 1.2.8. The Language of Yezidis and their Religious Texts

### 1.2.8.1. The Language of Yezidis

All Yezidis speak the northern dialect of the Kurdish language, that is, Kurmanji. Some Yezidis in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, who live (or used to live) in the distant villages, know only the Kurmanji dialect. Yezidis living in Bashik and Bahzan villages all speak Arabic fluently, and some know Kurdish. It is the only region where not all Yezidis know Kurdish. However, the majority of Yezidis know at least two languages, namely Kurdish and the language of the country they live in. Yezidis from Armenia know three languages: Kurdish, Armenian, and Russian; those in Georgia know Kurdish, Georgian, and Russian. In Iraq, Yezidis usually know the Kurdish Kurmanji dialect and some know Sorani. The majority of Yezidis there know Arabic.

### 1.2.8.2. The Language of Yezidi Religious Texts

Practically all Yezidi oral religious texts are composed in the archaic Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language. Nevertheless, some texts, mostly *Qesîdes* and few *Du'as*, are composed in Arabic with some

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(46) Compare with the performance of the Avestan texts during religious services.

Kurdish insertions. One *Qesîde*, namely *Qesîde Be'rî*, is composed in Kurmanji with some inserted Turkish expressions and sentences. With some exceptions, all *Qewls* or *Beyts* are composed in the Kurmanji dialect. The language of the religious texts differs from that of spoken Kurdish and from the language of the non-religious literature.

Religious hymns are composed in poetic forms, while the legends are prose narrations. The meanings of the religious hymns are more implicit and allusive, whereas the legends are explicit. The language of the religious hymns, in comparison with the legends, is much more complicated and full of rich terminology, while the legends are narrated in a more straightforward common oral form. Hymns are recited only by men and with the distinctive melody called *kubrî*.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Qewl</i> — a religious hymn	<i>Me'na</i> — a legend
<i>Style of narrative</i>	Poetry	Prose
<i>Meaning</i>	Allusive; implicit	Direct; explicit
<i>Terminology</i>	More terms are used	Fewer terms are used
<i>Language</i>	Ancient and complex terms are used	Spoken language
<i>Variants</i>	Not many variants; the form is very important	Many variants; the content is very important
<i>Reciters</i>	Only by men, often <i>Qewl-bêj</i> (reciters) and <i>Feqirs</i> , <sup>47</sup> in Armenia, priests	By both men and women
<i>Melody</i>	Recited with its own distinctive melody called <i>kubrî</i>	Prosaic narratives

To what extent an ordinary Yezidi understands a religious text depends on the genre of the text and the way it is performed by the reciter.

In the religious hymns there are often grammatical “mistakes” that are made deliberately because of the rhyme and metre of the hymn. Below I will give some examples of “incorrect” Kurmanji, which are often related to word order, in the religious hymn of Omar Khala and Hesin Chinêrî:

(47) Especially *Feqirs* from Shingal (i.e., Sinjar).

<i>Number of Stanza</i>	<i>Incorrect lines according to the grammatical rules:</i>	<i>The correct text should be:</i>
3	Bo feqîra avakir mezel û malin.	Bo feqîra mezel û mal avakirin.
4	Şixadî lê dikirin silave.	Şixadî silav lê dikirin.
12	Min vexwar ji wê qedehê.	Min ji wê qedehê vexwar.
20	Mêra meyzekir pê ve.	Mêra(n) pê ve meyzekir. <sup>48</sup>

The typical characteristic of the language of the myths, as well as of the religious hymns, is the past tense and using the verb *bûn* ('to be') usually in the past tense.

A characteristic of the language of the religious hymns is their vocabulary, the group of words that could be considered "archaic" by modern Kurmanji-speaking people. There is a special value in the large number of place-names and the names of the historical figures appearing in the religious hymns.

### 1.2.9. Interpretation of Religious Hymns

For an ordinary Yezidi, the most difficult genre of the religious literature to understand is the *Qewl*. One of the fundamental characteristics of the *Qewl* is its language, which can be perceived as a special system of code, giving a listener (and, in contemporary times, a reader as well) complete information about Yezidi beliefs and dogma, but only if it is correctly understood, while the majority of its words allow different levels of understanding. This is how Yezidis preserved the whole rich tradition in a short and efficient manner: as abbreviations or codes that transmit deeper information.

Yezidi religious hymns are rich with special terminology that should be perceived as a separate subject in Yezidology. Some variants of the storylines (legends) could be given in *Qewls* in just one word or in a sentence. A researcher should thus have not only perfect knowledge of the old Kurdish language, Arabic, and classical Persian, but must also be very familiar with the whole Yezidi religious literature as well as with their traditions. For example, in the Yezidi religious texts, some epithets are used not only for a single Holy Man, but could be used for

(48) OMARKHALI, *Métodeke Analîza Qewlên Êzdiyan*, 86.



several different Holy Men, which can result in a misinterpretation of the text.

In spite of the century-long isolation of the different Yezidi communities and their religious texts in general are very similar. In the variants of the religious texts of the Transcaucasian Yezidis, some truncations appeared which were caused by the course of time and a greater distance from an understanding of their full meaning. The main reason for this was language, or, more accurately, differences among sub-dialects. This is why the main grammatical endings typical for southern Kurmanji were removed and changed into the northern Kurmanji sub-dialect. Some words were changed to be more understandable for Yezidis in Armenia. As a whole, though, these changes are relatively minor.

The question of the language as a marker of the age of the text is a point at issue. Kreyenbroek and Rashow think that because of the mainly oral character of the Yezidi tradition, the language cannot be used as a yardstick by which to determine the age of a composition. They also believe that contents cannot automatically be accepted as clues to a poem's date of origin, since additions or changes may have been made during the period of transmission.<sup>49</sup> Bedelê Feqîr Hecî, however, disagrees, and believes that the language and the specific usage of the terms and symbols can clarify the date of origin and, moreover, the authenticity of the composition.<sup>50</sup> I believe that the language of the Yezidi religious hymns could be used as a special tool for determining the history of the composition of religious hymns and probably for the development of their ideas: which historical reason caused the appearance of particular elements in the Yezidi religious texts.

The main point is that no stanza could be changed in the strict ordering of the text, no lines could be removed, and so no word could be removed or changed to another one. This is what helped Yezidis to preserve their religious texts. A simple example is the prayer *Terqîn*, which is mostly in the Arabic language and is still recited among Yezidis in the Caucasus, who do not know Arabic at all.

(49) KREYENBROEK, RASHOW, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, 50.

(50) B. F. HECÎ, Çawetiya naskirina têkstên rast û duristên diyaneta Êzdiyan, in: *Şêx Fexrê Adiyân. Filozof û xasê ola Êzdiyatîyê* (Oldenburg, 2009) 124–153.

## 2. DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF YEZIDI POETIC LITERATURE

Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, travellers, specialists in Kurdish studies, and other Orientalists concentrated almost exclusively on Yezidi folklore<sup>51</sup> and on their written sacred texts, considering them as the only objects of interest. In the late 1970s it was the Yezidis themselves who started to pay attention to the collecting and publishing of their religious oral poetic texts.

### 2.1. *Qewl*

#### 2.1.1. General Characteristics

The most specific to the oral Yezidi heritage is the genre of religious hymns called *Qewl*, which likely had a dual function: religious and social.

*Authorship of Qewls.* The names of some of the authors of the Yezidi religious oral texts remained in the texts. According Yezidi tradition, authors of the hymns include Sheikh Fekhrê Adiyân, Pir Reshê Heyran, Derwêsh Qatan, Babekrê Omera, Hesedê el-Tewrî, Dawidî bin Derman, Sheikh Obekir, Dewrêsh Hebîb, Koçek Jem, Derwêsh Qotik, Sheikh Havind, Derwêsh Tajdin, Abu Bekrê Jeziri, Pir Khidir, Gavanê Zerza, Lawikê Pir, Ereb begî, and some others,<sup>52</sup> the majority of whom lived in the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is no *Qewl* known that was composed by Sheikh 'Adî himself.

*Formal characteristics.* The *Qewls* are sometimes laid out as a dialogue between, for instance, the Earth and Heaven, between the Months, and so forth. All *Qewls* are divided into stanzas, the lines of which can range from three to seven or to nine lines. The majority of *Qewls* have end-rhyme in the lines of the stanza, but not all of them have this feature. Half of the religious hymns have their own distinctive melody (*kubrî*) and half do not.

*Number.* There is no known fixed number of *Qewls* and even very knowledgeable Yezidi cannot tell for certain how many *Qewls* exist. Yezidis believe that there were about 12,000 *Qewls* during Sheikh Fekhir's period (12<sup>th</sup> century), but after that their number decreased.

(51) F. C. ALLISON, *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan* (London, 2001).

(52) OMARKHALI, *Métodeke Analîza Qewlên Êzdiyan*, 22.

After field research and collecting all possible published and unpublished religious hymns, I found more than 130 *Qewls* that now exist in the Yezidi literature. Among them approximately eleven or twelve *Qewls* were composed at a later date and are not authentic Yezidi texts (see below).

*Status.* Although we know that there were real historical figures who are considered to be the authors of a number of the Yezidi religious hymns, there are different views on the origin of *Qewls*, all of which narrate the divine origin, and which are called collectively by the Yezidis ‘the knowledge of God’ (*ulmê Xwedê*) or, as a symbol of esoteric knowledge, ‘the ocean’ (*behr*) or ‘the heavy ocean’ (*behrê giran*). The other genres of religious poetry and prose are respected, but they are not considered as divine.

The majority of Yezidis believe that *Qewls* are concerned with religious themes, whereas *Beyts* typically deal with social, moral, and life questions, which is partly correct.

Below I give one part of my interview with a Yezidi reciter<sup>53</sup> of religious hymns from Iraqi Kurdistan about the status of the religious hymns in Yezidi society.

*Kurdish Original*

*Xanna Omerxalî:* Dibêjin ku Qewl “gotinên” Xwedê ne, ew ji Xwedê hatin. Rast e?

*Merwanê Xelîl:* Erê, erê. Mesele, noho misilmanan dibêjin Quran gotinên Xudê ne. Em dibêjin, “gotinên Xasa”. Ewana çi gotin, Xudê his kir. *Keremata* wan hebû,

*batîna* wan hebû, ewana zanî çi baş e, çi ne baş e. Ewan jî, ji gorê wê, ew fikra dane ber miletî.

*English Translation*

*Khanna Omarkhali:* It is said that *Qewls* are the “words” of God, they came from God. Is that true?

*Merwanê Khelîl:* Yes. For example, now Muslims say that the Quran is the words of God. We say [about Yezidi religious texts], “sayings of *Holy Men*”. What they said God

wanted. They had *the mysterious divine power (Keremat)*, they possessed the concealed knowledge, and they knew what is good and what is not good. They were the ones who gave these ideas to the people.

(53) From the interview with Merwanê Khelîl, which I conducted on 02.03.2008, Nienhagen, Germany.

Sebeqe me Qewlê ji Hindav da çûme Banî dibêjît:

*Gelî bira, hûn guh bidêrin  
‘Ilmê Xudê hemû nesîhet û xêr in  
Xet û berata Siltan Êzî zêr in.*

Belê, eferim bo wî kesî ê wextê  
Lê guhder ket bi xo hindekî hilg-  
irit û bi xo hindekî veşêrit.

Gotinêd Xasa hemû ji rastiye ne, ji  
başiyê ne. Ev jî tiştê Xudê hijê kiri-  
ye. Em divêt li van gotinan biçin.

There is a stanza from the *Qewlê Ji Hindav da çûme Banî* (The Hymn of From above<sup>54</sup> I went to roof), which says:

Oh Brothers, listen  
The knowledge of God is all ad-  
vice and good things  
The lines and *Berats* of Siltan Êzîd  
are golden.

Yes, well done to the person who  
during listening will take [i.e.,  
learn] something for himself and  
will hide [i.e., remember] some-  
thing for himself.

The sayings of Holy Men are all  
from the Truth, from good. This is  
also what God liked [wanted]. We  
should follow these words.

*Performance.* There is a general view among Western scholars that *Qewls* are recited only by a special group of *Qewals*, sometimes with the accompaniment of the sacred Yezidi instruments, *def* (tambourine) and *şibab* (flute). In fact, *Qewls* are recited not only by *Qewals*, but also by knowledgeable representatives of the priestly castes of Yezidis, that is, Pîrs and Sheikhs, as well as sometimes by erudite laymen.

The solemn performance of *Qewls* gives a listener the feeling of the sanctity and connection with the higher sacred world.

*Qewls* are recited with music in Lalish during all big festivals, such as the Feast of the Assembly (*‘Eyda Cimayê*), the Feast of ‘Erefat, and the Forty Days of Summer (*Çilê Havînê*), and so forth. They are also recited in the Caucasus, and now in the Diaspora, during general gatherings, but mostly during religious feasts and funeral ceremonies. *Qewals* recite religious hymns during the bringing of the image of Tawûsî Melek to the Yezidi villages, i.e., during the *Tawûs Gêran* ceremony. During the annual festivals known as *Tiwafs*, *Qewls* are often recited, and they are recited during funerals on the grave of a deceased Yezidi.

(54) *Ji hinav de* has two meanings; the first is ‘from above’ (*gor de* or *ji serî ve*), and the second is ‘from inside’ (*ji hundir de*) or ‘from people’ (*ji nava meriv de*).

*Classification and Predominant themes of this genre.* Some groups of *Qewls* can be classified, although this is a loose system of classification and it is not one commonly used by the Yezidis. However, this kind of categorisation can be made on the basis of the religious literature. An examination of the meaning of the *Qewls* suggests that they can be divided into some general groups, such as the *Qewls* telling about the Creation; *Qewls* telling about the life of a Holy Man; *Qewls* with Advice, etc.

### 2.1.2. *Berane Qewl*

Is there any particular order in the religious texts? What will be the order of the future Yezidi canon? These are surely some of the first questions that will arise during the canonisation of Yezidi texts after they have been collected and probably the standard variant from each text chosen.

The most important group among the *Qewls* are called *Berane Qewl* (Kurd. *Argali Qewl*). Although even knowledgeable Yezidis could not name all of these *Qewls* very easily, the general interpretation was the same: *Berane Qewls* are higher in status than other *Qewls* and they contain the most important information about Yezidi religion and philosophy.

A Yezidi reciter of religious hymns is not allowed to study a *Berane Qewl* if he does not already know a number of other *Qewls*, if he is not good in his interpretation of *Qewls*, and if he does not possess expert knowledge of Yezidi religious texts. If he possesses some basic information, he goes to a Yezidi religious preceptor and asks to study a *Berane Qewl*, which is permitted only after an examination. If he is accepted by his preceptor as a knowledgeable Yezidi, the teacher allows him to learn a *Berane Qewl*. He studies it by heart, but first without any explanation. Only after a certain time he is allowed to study its interpretation and its implicit knowledge.

The portion of my interview with a Yezidi from Iraqi Kurdistan, given below, perfectly demonstrates the meaning and status of the highest religious hymns — *Berane Qewls*.

#### *Kurdish Original*

#### *English Translation*

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Berane Qewl  
çi ne û kîjan in?

*Khanna Omarkhali*: What are *Berane Qewls*  
and which ones are they?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Hindek Qewl  
wêd heyên, gelek me'niyêd

*Merwanê Khelîl*: There are some *Qewls*,  
which have a very deep [huge] mean-

kûr diden. Bi rastî heta niho, gelek ji me negihîştine vê me'niyê... ew sebeqe têne gotin em nizanîn me'niyêd wan çi ne. Wekî *Qewlê Qere Firqan*, wekî *Qewlê Gay û Masî*, ew êkî ji wan *Qewla ye, Berane Qewl* e. Wekî *Qewlê 'Erd û 'Esman*, ew êkî ji wan *Qewla ye, ew jî Berane Qewl* e.

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Mirov çawa fehm bike, ku ew *Berane Qewl* e? Ew ji ku hatiye?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Ew digotin. Te dît, însanek 'ulmdar wextê, mesele, em diçûn 'ulm ji ba hostayê xo dipirsî, ewan dê gotibana: "Hindek *Qewl* wêd heyn, *Berane Qewl* in." Me digot: "Çawa *Berane Qewl* in?" Digo: "Ev *Qewl*ne, mesele, *Qewlê Qere Firqan*, û heta tu çend *Qewlî* nepirsî, tu nikarî vî *Qewlî* bipirsî."

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Çima?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Çengû ew *Qewl* gelekî bi me'ne ye. Heke te çend *Qewl* pirsî, tu di *Qewla* da zane bî, hinekî dê zanebûna te hebit di *Qewla* da, wextê piştî çend *Qewlî* te pirsî, belkî ji me'niyêd wan fehm bikey. Û ew *Qewla* me'niyêd wan çi ne, ji bo çi hatine gotin."

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Ji destpêkê da tu tenê *Qewlan* hîn dibî û şirovekirina wan hîn nabî, ne wisa?

ing. To say the truth, until now a lot of us [i.e., reciters of Yezidi religious texts, or experts in Yezidi religious knowledge] did not understand this meaning... there are recited some stanzas and we don't understand their meanings. Like *Qewlê Qere Firqan* (The Hymn of the Black Book), like *Qewlê Gay û Masî* (The Hymn of the Bull and the Fish), it is one of those *Qewls*, it is *Berane Qewl*. Like *Qewlê 'Erd û 'Ezman* (The Hymn of Earth and Sky), it is one of those *Qewls* that is also *Berane Qewl*.

*Khanna Omarkhali*: How can one understand that it is a *Berane Qewl*? Where has it come from?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: It was said so. You know, a knowledgeable [in religious questions] person, for instance, when we used to go to our [spiritual] preceptors, they used to say: "There are some *Qewls*, they are [called] *Berane Qewls*." We used to ask: "How is it *Berane Qewl*?" They answered: "These *Qewls*, like *Qewlê Qere Firqan* (The Hymn of the Black Book), and until you ask [i.e., study] some *Qewls*, you cannot ask for [study] this *Qewl*."

*Khanna Omarkhali*: Why?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Because that *Qewl* is very meaningful. If you asked [i.e., learned] some *Qewls* and you are knowledgeable in *Qewls*, if you have some knowledge on *Qewls*, then if some *Qewls* are asked from you, then maybe you understand something from their meanings. As well as [you will understand] what are the meanings of those *Qewls*, with which [purpose] they were said.

*Khanna Omarkhali*: At first, you study the *Qewls* and you do not study their interpretation, don't you?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Na. Dest-pêkê da mirov hîn nabit şirovekirina Qewla. Gelek sebeqe wêd heyn, mirov nizanit ew sebeqe ser çi têtê gotin yan me'niyêd wan çi ne. Heta mirov nebite Qewl-bêjekî baş, baş Qewla fehmi neket, û gelek Qewla nizanit, mirov mikarî şirovekirina wan bike. Çengo gelek sebeqe wêd heyn, mesele, wekî me *Qewlê Berane Qewl*, gelek sebeqe wêd têtê da ne, meniye'd wan kûr in. Mirov jê fehmi nekit. Mesele, me *Qewlê Gay û Masî*. *Qewlê Gay û Masî* di bîr û baweriya êzîdiya da... hincî ga ye — ax e, hincî masî jîk — av e. Ew Qewl têtê gotin, 52 sebeqe ye û gelek tişt di wî Qewlî da ye, ez bi xo heta niho jê fehmi nakim. Yan, mesele, *Qewlê Afirandina Kinyatê*, *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr*, tiştê gelekî bi me'na wêd têtê de ye. Ser xelîqetê diaxivî, ser afirandina kinyatê diaxivî.

*Xanna Omerxalî*: *Berane Qewl* çend heb in?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Ez nikarim bêjime te ew çend heb in. Yenî, nizanîm bi rastî... Gelek Qewl hebûn, mesele gelek dirêj bû, û me'niyêd wî kûr bûn. Yenî gotinek hebû, gelek me'nî jê diçûn. Digotîne wan, *Berane Qewl* in. *Qewlê Lawîkê Pîra* 77 sebeqe ye û sebeqêd wî ne wekî sebeqêd *Qewlê* di ne. Mesele, gelek *Qewlê* me wêd heyn, sebeqe sê rêz in.

*Merwanê Xelîl*: That's true. At first, a person doesn't study the interpretation of the *Qewls*. There are a lot of stanzas; a person doesn't know when these stanzas are used and what their meanings are. Until a person becomes a good reciter of the religious hymns [i.e., *Qewlbêj*], until he understands *Qewls* well, and until he knows a lot of *Qewls*, a person cannot interpret them. Because there are a lot of stanzas, for instance, the [stanzas] of a *Berane Qewl*, it consists a lot of stanzas with very deep meanings. A person does not understand them. For example, *Qewlê Gay û Masî* (The Hymn of the Bull and the Fish). *Qewlê Gay û Masî* according to the belief of Yezidis, the Bull should be understood as earth, the Fish as water. This *Qewl* includes 52 stanzas and there are many things in this *Qewl* that I personally even now do not understand. Or, for example, *Qewlê Afirandina Kinyatê* (The Hymn of the Creation of the Universe), *Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr* (The Hymn of the Weak Broken One). There is something very meaningful in it. It tells about Creation, about the Creation of the Universe.

*Khanna Omarkhali*: How many *Berane Qewls* exist?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: I cannot tell you how many of them there are. I just do not know... There were a lot of *Qewls*, for example, they were very long and the meaning of them was very deep. That is, there was a word; it had a lot of meanings. They were named *Berane Qewl*. *Qewlê Lawîkê Pîra*(no) includes 77 stanzas and its stanzas are not like [the stanzas] of another *Qewl*. For example, we have a lot of *Qewls*, the stanzas of which contain three lines. For example, *Qewlê Silavêd*

Mesele, *Qewlê Silavêd Melkê Kerîm*, the stanza of it consists of three lines. For instance, the first stanza tells:

*Silavêt Melkê Kerîm*  
*Ez im aşiqê Surra berîm*  
*Bi mal û serî ew Surr dipirsîm.*

Eva sebeqe ye, bû sê rêz. It is a stanza, it became three lines. The end of all of three lines should be similar. The Dawiya wan her sêka gereke. That is, it becomes a metre, the metre and wek êk bit. Yenî dibite wezin, the rhyme. But *Qewlê Lawikê Pîra* is not wezin û qafî. Bes *Qewlê Lawikê Pîra* ne yî wisa ye. *Qewlê Lawikê Pîra* neqşê wî hûr e. so. The structure<sup>55</sup> of *Qewlê Lawikê Pîra* is more complicated.<sup>56</sup> For example, it says: Mesele, dibêjit:

*Hey Lawikê Pîrano*  
*Heya meka denga me bê*  
*Te me'nî heyne ceng bi nîşan.*

*Hey Lawikê Pîrano*  
*Yarî hene heyra dîkin*  
*Denga dibên te pêwanî rikêba*  
*Destê wan yî li celewa*  
*Çavê wan mi'eleq li stêrra li hewa dimînî.*

Ewa nabite wezin, nabite sê rêz. It doesn't become a metre, doesn't Hindek sebeqe wa tê da ne, dibine become three lines. There are some heft rêz. Dawiya wan jîk ne şert e stanzas in it, they reach seven lines. And their ends should not necessarily be similar. Ew *Qewlêd* wisa dibêjine ewne *Berane Qewl* in. Those are *Qewls* which are called *Berane Qewl*.

*Qewlê Sera Mergê, Berane Qewl* bû, û *Qewlê Sera Mergê* was *Berane Qewl*, felsefeka gelekî kûr di tê da ye. Ev and there is a very deep philosophy in it. Such important *Qewls* were *Qewlêd* hosa êd muhîm, digotîne called *Berane Qewl*. wan *Berane Qewl*.

Ez di wî baweriyê da me, bes çî I believe that which *Qewls* talk *Qewlî* ser tiştê wisa axivîba, mesele, about, for example, the Creation or about philosophy, were called ser xelîqetê axivîba, yan ser felsefê

(55) He used the word *neqş*, which means 'embroidery', 'needle work'.

(56) The word *hûr* is used in the text, which means 'small', 'tiny'.



axivîba, digotinê *Berane Qewl*. Bes *Qewlê Şîreta* nedigotine *Berane Qewl*. *Berane Qewl*. But the *Qewls* of perception were not called *Berane Qewl*.

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Yenî *Berane Qewl Qewl* in ku felsefeya dînê êzdiyatiyê ya herî girîng tê de ye? *Khanna Omarkhali*: That means that *Berane Qewls* are religious hymns (*Qewls*) which contain the most important philosophical information of the Yezidi religion?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: A, dibêjine wan *Berane Qewl*. *Merwanê Khelîl*: Yes, they are, which are called *Berane Qewl*.

The length is not the most important criterion for naming the religious hymn *Berane Qewl*. The main criterion is its content and the knowledge of the Yezidi people, who either consider this *Qewl* as *Berane Qewl* (Kurd. *Argali Qewl*) or do not. None of the *Qewls* of Advice (*Qewlên Nesîhetê / Şîretêd Dinyayî*) are considered as *Berane Qewls*.

Below I name some *Berane Qewls* that are considered so by all knowledgeable Yezidis:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Qewlê Afirîna Dinyayê (IKinyatê)</i> | — The Hymn of the Creation of the World (or Universe) |
| <i>Qewlê 'Erd û 'Ezman</i>              | — The Hymn of Earth and Sky                           |
| <i>Qewlê Gay û Masî</i>                 | — The Hymn of the Bull and the Fish                   |
| <i>Qewlê Mezin</i>                      | — The Great Hymn                                      |
| <i>Qewlê Qere Firqan</i>                | — The Hymn of the Black Book                          |
| <i>Qewlê Şêşîms</i>                     | — The Hymn of Sheikh Shems                            |
| <i>Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e</i>       | — The Hymn of Sheikh Hesen is the Sultan              |
| <i>Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr</i>              | — The Hymn of the Weak Broken One                     |

There is a reference to *Berane Qewls* in Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005), who write: "... those *Qewls* which form part of a *sema'* (the *Qewlêd beran* or '*Qewls* as strong as a ram'), are higher in status than others."<sup>57</sup> However, as we have seen, it is not only the *Qewls* which form part of a *Sema'* that are considered to be *Berane Qewls*.

There are different groups among *Qewls* which can be classified, for instance, *Qewlên Civatê* — Social *Qewls* or *Qewlên Nesîhetê (Şîretên Dinyayî)* — *Qewls* of Advice.

(57) KREYENBROEK, RASHOW, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, 23.

*Kurdish Original**English Translation*

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Ji kerema xwe, tu dikarî ji min ra bêjî, *Qewlên Nesîhetê* kîjan in?

*Khanna Omarkhali*: Can you tell me, please, which are *Qewls* of Advice?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Mesele, *Qewlê Miştaqê Sê bor*, ew şîretên dinyayî ne tê de. Mesele, ser çî diaxivît? Ser hevaliyê diaxivît, ser însanê xêrxwaz diaxivît, ser qîmetê cînariyê diaxivît, ser edeb û heyatê diaxivît. Ewa *Qewlên Nesîhetê*, digotin, *şîretên dinyayî*.

*Merwanê Khelîl*: For example, in the *Qewlê Miştaqê Sê bor*, there is the world's advice. For instance, what do they talk about? They talk about friendship, about a good-hearted person, about the value of the neighbourhood; it talks about good manners and life. They are *Qewls* of Advice; they are called the World's Advice (*şîretên dinyayî*).

There is another group of *Qewls* dedicated to Sheikh Adî and his mysterious divine power (*Keramet*). They are, for example:

- Qewlê Şêxadî û Mêra* — The Hymn of Sheikh Adî and Men  
*Qewlê Şêxadî* — The Hymn of Sheikh Adî  
*Qewlê Bi Şêxadî xalis im* — The Hymn I am pure with Sheikh Adî

Thus, there are various groups of Yezidi *Qewls*, and among the most important religious hymns are *Berane Qewls*; there are also Social *Qewls* (*Qewlên Civatê*) and *Qewls* of Advice (*Qewlên Nesîhetê*).

### 2.1.3. Newly Composed *Qewls*

Recently some new Yezidi religious hymns have appeared and were published in different sources. Here I discuss the problem of the newly composed religious texts that deserve to be named and listed.

As Bedelê Fakir Heçî writes in his article, presented during the conference dedicated to Sheikh Fekhrê Adiya, recognizing that the book of Kh. J. Rashow, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzîdîyan*, is one of the best books with the published Yezidi religious texts nowadays, there are some mistaken and not authentic Yezidi texts that were included in it.<sup>58</sup>

Some of these texts were provided and published earlier by Ahmad Mela Khelîl (Ehmed mela Xelîl), who also used the names Ebu Dasin and B. Ş. Dilkovan in his publications. He sent some religious texts to Kh. J. Rashow on 19.5.2001 and 10.6.2001. These texts were the *Qewls* and one *Qesîde*, which his father, the Muslim Imam Mela Khelîl, heard

(58) HEÇÎ, Çawetîya naskirina têkstên rast..., 124–153.

and learned by heart from a Yezidi religious leader named Babê Çawîş (also called Pîr Çerût) in 1928–1929. Such facts are unknown in the Yezidi tradition.

Mela Khelîl was known as a good poet and he also wrote the book *Pêngavek li gel Êzidîyan*, which was removed from bookstores and destroyed by followers of the regime of that time. His eight *Qewls* and one *Qesîde* are as follows:

<i>Qewlê Mersûma</i> <sup>59</sup> <i>Barî</i> <sup>60</sup>	— The Hymn of the Decree of the Creator
<i>Qewlê Şêxê Sirrê</i>	— The Hymn of Sheikh of the Mystery
<i>Qewlê Birhîm pêxember</i>	— The Hymn of the prophet Ibrahim
<i>Qewlê Nuh pêxember</i>	— The Hymn of the prophet Noah
<i>Qewlê Melik Salim</i>	— The Hymn of the Angel Salim
<i>Qewlê Mûsa pêxember û Xidirê zînde</i>	— The Hymn of the prophet Moses and living Khidir
<i>Qewlê Pîr Hemedê boz</i>	— The Hymn of Pîr Hemed the grey <sup>61</sup>
<i>Qewlê Mîr Mihemedê Kurdî</i>	— The Hymn of Mîr Mihe-med the Kurd
<i>Qesîda Şêx Cêncer.</i>	— The Hymn of Sheikh Jenjer.

These texts are unknown to Yezidis in Armenia and Georgia, and, moreover, they are not known even to the pupils of Pîr Cherût, one of whom was well-known Feqîr Hecî. Feqîr Hecî's son, Bedelê Feqîr Hecî, not only has doubts about their authenticity, but is quite sure that they are not authentic.

Kh. J. Rashow published the above-mentioned texts in his book, where he wrote: “Bi rastî navê van Qewil û Qesîda hatibû ji bîrkirin, heke hoşê hêja Mişextî jiber nekirbane, bêguman ne nav û ne têkist niha liber destê me dibûn” (Actually, the names of these *Qewls* and

(59) Arabic *marsûm*, meaning ‘decree’, ‘edict’, ‘ukase’.

(60) In Farsi one of the rare meanings of *bârî* is ‘Creator’, ‘God’.

(61) Usually *boz* means the color of a horse.

*Qesîdes* became a thing of the past, and if the respectful Mishekhti didn't learn them by heart, no name and no text would now be in our possession, this is certain).<sup>62</sup> A few pages later, Kh. J. Rashow writes<sup>63</sup> that the author of this *Qewl* is Pîr Reshê Heyran (Pîr Reşê Heyran), because his name appears in the last stanza, but he expresses doubts about this attribution. He thinks that Pîr Çerutê Baba Çawîş, who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the author of several texts, especially those texts which are considered as texts of Pîr Reshê Heyran, who lived in 12<sup>th</sup> century. Bedelê Feqîr Hecî disagrees with Kh. J. Rashow, because Pîr Reshê Heyran was one of the prolific authors of Yezidi religious texts.

In 1994, Bedel Feqîr Hecî went to visit Mela Khelîl, when he returned from Iran to Iraq, and during their talk, Mela Khelîl did not mention even once the texts he studied from Pîr Cherût. It seems very possible that the above-named texts are not real Yezidi *Qewls* or a *Qesîde*.

To the *Qewls* and the *Qesîde* of questionable authenticity published by Rashow in 2004, I can add other *Qewls* that were published in journals:

<i>Qewlê Afrîna Dinyayê</i> variant 1 <sup>64</sup>	— The Hymn of the Creation of the World
<i>Qewlê Zerdeşt</i>	— The Hymn of Zoroaster
<i>Qewlê Pîrê Siba</i> <sup>65</sup>	— The Hymn of Pîr of Morning
<i>Paş duwa</i>	— The After Prayer
<i>Qewlê Newrozê</i>	— The Hymn of Newroz (New Year)

How can one recognise whether a religious hymn is authentic or newly composed?

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Mirov çawa dikare fehm bike *Qewl* enzeli ye yan emeli ye?

*Khanna Omarkhali*: How could a person understand if the *Qewl* is an authentic or a made [i.e., recently composed] one?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Ez bêjime te. Vê dawiyê çend *Qewl* diyar bûn. Hindek

*Merwanê Khelîl*: I'll tell you. Recently a number of *Qewls* appeared. Some

(62) RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. I, 595.

(63) Ibid., 598.

(64) By Prof. Qenatê Kurdo.

(65) Website [www.lalish.de](http://www.lalish.de).

Qewl vê teliyê derkeftin. Min bi xo îmana bi wan Qewla nîne!  
Ev tishte... hema mirov wextê berê xo didete Qewlî, wextê mirov Qewlî dixûnit, mirov zanit, yan ew Qewl yê enzelî ye, yan ew Qewl hatiye çêkirin.

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Mirov çawa bizane?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Ji gotina, ji zimanî, ji kevinîyê, ji gelek tişta! Mirov dizanit: ew Qewlê emelî ye, yan ew Qewlê enzelî ye.

*Qewls* not long ago appeared. I personally do not believe those *Qewls*! These things... when a person looks at this *Qewl*, when a person reads the *Qewl*, the person knows if this *Qewl* is real or if this *Qewl* was made.

*Khanna Omarkhali*: How can a person understand that?

*Merwanê Khelîl*: From the words [i.e., terminology/vocabulary], from the language, from the antiquity, from a lot of things! The person knows if this *Qewl* is the made one or this *Qewl* is the real one.

In spite of the fact that there are different groups of *Qewls*, the most important of which is the group called *Berane Qewl*, the genre of *Qewl* in general occupies the highest position within Yezidi religious literature. There is at present no method that could help to determine the authenticity of a text.

## 2.2. Beyt

*Status*. Yezidis strictly divide compositions into the categories of *Qewls* or *Beyts*. Only in some cases are these distinctions changed. While the *Qewls* in general are considered as holy poems and occupy a special higher status in Yezidi literature, the *Beyts* are respected by all Yezidis, although they are not considered of divine origin. Below I will reproduce a part of the conversation I had with a reciter of religious hymns about the difference between *Qewls* and *Beyts*.

### *Kurdish Original*

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Ez dizanim, ku *Qewlê Baza* carina bi navê *Beyta Baza* yan *Pîr Şeref* tê nasîn. Em çawa bizanibin, ew *Qewl* e yan *Beyt* e?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Tu dizanî, ew bi xo *Qewl* e. *Qewlê Pîr Şerefê Mêra*, *Qewl* e. Bes, te dît, wextê me bi deng digotin, gelek carî me digotine: “Bi

### *English Translation*

*Khanna Omarkhali*: I know that *Qewlê Baza* sometimes is known under the name *Beyta Baza* or *Pîr Sheref*. How should we know if it is *Qewl* or *Beyt*?

*Merwanê Khelîl*: You know, it is the *Qewl*. *Qewlê Pîr Şerefê Mêra* is a *Qewl*. But, you see, when we used to perform them with the melody,

Beyta bêjî, bi kubrî bêjî." Me digote kubriya "beyt". Bes heke tu bêyî rastiya wê, *Beyt* û kubrî cuda ye, *Beyt Beyt* e. Meselen, me wêd heyên, *Beyta Sibê*, *Beyta Cindî*, ... eva *Beyt* in. Me wa hey *Betya Bilbilî*, *Beyta Nesîheta*, me wa hey *Beyta Dinê*. Bes *Qewlê Pîr Şeref Qewl* e, ne *Beyt* e. Bes wextê bi beng tête gotin, dê gotibana: "Beyt bêjin", yenî bi deng bêjin.

*Xanna Omerxalî*: *Beyt* zêde derheqa çi da ne?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Ez karim bêjime te, *Beyt* jîk wekî *Qewla* ne. Çengû *Beyta Nesîhetê*, ew jîk 'eyn wekî çawa tu *Qewlekî* di dîwanê bêjî, şîreta xelkê bikey, *Beyta Nesîhetê* jîk ew şîret û nesîhet wa tê da ne. *Beyta Dinê* jîk her wisa ye.

Bes ferqa wê ya dibêjin eva *Qewl* e, eva *Beyt* e, ez di wê baweriyê da me, *Beyt* gelek ji wan nabine wezin û qafî. Wezin û qafîya wan ne şert e êlla êk bit. *Qewl* êlla hemû bite wezin û qafî.

*Number*. *Beyts* are fewer in number than *Qewls*. I collected approximately thirty-five *Beyts*.

*Authorship*. While we know about the authorship of a number of *Qewls*, we do not know specifically about the authorship of *Beyts*. There are some *Beyts* that were accepted from Kurdish literature, such as *Beyta Nesîhetê* (The *Beyt* of Advice), which is believed to be based on the poem of the Kurdish poet Ehmed Melê Batê.<sup>66</sup>

very often we used to say: "Perform it with *Beyt*, with *kubrî*." We used to name *kubrî* 'beyt' [i.e., as synonyms]. But if you come to the truth, *Beyt* and *kubrî* are different things: *Beyt* is *Beyt*. For instance, we have *Beyta Sibê*, *Beyta Cindî*, ... they are *Beyts*. We have *Betya Bilbilî*, *Beyta Nesîheta*, we have *Beyta Dinê*. But *Qewlê Pîr Şeref* is a *Qewl*, it is not a *Beyt*. But when they are performed with the melody, it would be said: "Perform a *Beyt*", that is, perform it with the melody.

*Khanna Omarkhali*: What are *Beyts* about, in more detail?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: I can tell you that *Beyts* are also like *Qewls*. Because *Beyta Nesîhetê*, it is also similar as if you perform a *Qewl* in the gathering, will give advice to people. In the *Beyta Nesîhetê* there is also advice. *Beyta Dinê* is the same as well.

But the difference between when people say that it is *Qewl* or *Beyt*, to my point of view, the majority of *Beyts* don't have the metre and rhyme. Their metre and rhyme — it is not necessary to be similar. *Qewl* has the metre and rhyme.

(66) KREYENBROEK, RASHOW, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, 51.

*Formal characteristics.* *Beyts* as well as *Qewls* are also divided into stanzas, and many of them have special metre and rhyme.

*Functions.* The function of the *Beyt* differs according to its classification. *Beyts* are performed every day in the morning and evening during the *Tawûs Gêran* ceremony. For example, the *Beyt* of the Commoner (*Beyta Cindî*) is recited before morning, during the *Tawûs Gêran* procession, during 'Eyd-'Erefat in Lalish, while the last one is obligatory.

After the *Beyt* of the Commoner (*Beyta Cindî*) comes the time of the *Beyt* of Sheikh Shems (*Beyta Şêşims*). It is recited after sunrise. Yezidis in Iraq recite it at approximately 10 o'clock. During the evening, just before sunset, the *Beyt* of Evening (*Beyta Êvarê*) is performed. The majority of *Beyts*, however, are performed during the usual Yezidi gatherings.

*Performance.* While half of the *Qewls* are performed with melodies and half without, all *Beyts* are performed with melodies (*kubrî*), which usually differ from each other.

*Classification.* There are no *Berane Beyts* in the category of *Beyts*, so there is no absolutely clear hierarchy within this classification. However, we can classify *Beyts* as those that are used more often in religious practice and those that are used less often. For example, there is a group of *Beyts* that are sung every day. For instance, *Beyta Cindî* (*Beyt* of the Commoner) and *Beyta Êvarê / Hêvarî* (*Beyt* of the Evening) are performed every morning and every evening.

*Predominant theme of this genre.* The *Beyts'* themes differ from that of the majority of *Qewls*; they are mostly dedicated to the life stories of Holy Men in Yezidism, and different mythological motives are also described.

## 2.3. Prayers

### 2.3.1. Du'a

*Status.* *Du'as* are prayers, which occupy a special status in Yezidi literature. They contain important symbols and religious knowledge connected with the Holy Men, God, and daily situations.

*Number.* I managed to gather more than fifty published and unpublished prayers (not including different variants).

*Authorship.* We do not possess any information about the authorship of the prayers.

*Formal characteristics.* The prayers are mostly private and as a rule they are not performed in public. A Yezidi usually prays privately, or the prayers are recited by one person during a gathering.

*Performance.* The prayers do not have melodies, i.e., they are performed without *kubrî*. Nevertheless, I heard a few performances of the prayers with special tones, which could not be called a *kubrî*, but they were undoubtedly performed with a special slow tone, sometimes with a prolonging of the end of a last line.

*Classification.* The prayers could be classified according to their content and the occasion to which they are dedicated. We find the following groups of prayers:

- prayers connected with Yezidi symbols and religion
- prayers dedicated to God and Holy Beings
- prayers of Yezidi castes
- prayers for specific occasions
- *rites de passage* prayers
- prayers connected with health problems
- daily prayers
- prayers connected with the Moon, Stars, and nature.

Let us examine some of the prayers in these groups.

### 2.3.1.1. Prayers dedicated to God and Holy Beings

<i>Du'a bona Xwedê</i>	Prayer for God
<i>Du'aya Tawûsî Melek</i>	Prayer of Tawûsî Melek
<i>Du'aya Temametiya Şîxadî</i>	Prayer of the Perfection of Sheikh 'Adî
<i>Du'a Xudanê Malê</i>	Prayer of Khudanê Malê
<i>Methê Xwedê</i>	The Praising of God

### 2.3.1.2. Prayers connected with Yezidi symbols and religion

<i>Du'a Tokê</i>	Prayer of <i>Tok</i> <sup>67</sup>
<i>Du'a Xerqe</i>	Prayer of <i>Xerqe</i>
<i>Du'a Îmanê</i>	Prayer of Belief
<i>Du'a Êzdiyatiyê</i>	Prayer of Yezidism

(67) That is, *Toka Êzîd* — the Yezidi white undershirt, as a symbol of belonging to Yezidis.



### 2.3.1.3. Prayers of Yezidi Castes

<i>Du'a Pîraniyê</i> <sup>68</sup>	Prayer of Pîrs
<i>Du'a Şêxîtiyê</i>	Prayer of Sheikhs
<i>Du'a Mirîdiyê</i>	Prayer of Mirîds

### 2.3.1.4. Prayers for Specific Occasions

<i>Du'aya Oxirê</i>	Prayer of Fortunate Going
<i>Duwa Razanê</i>	Prayer of Sleep
<i>Du'a Sebrê</i>	Prayer of Patience
<i>Du'aya Sifrê</i>	Prayer of the Meal
<i>Du'a Tifaqê</i>	Prayer of Unity
<i>Duayê Xêrê</i>	Prayer of Favour (alms)
<i>Du'a Ziyaretbûnê</i>	Prayer of Pilgrimage

### 2.3.1.5. Rites de passage Prayers

<i>Dua me'r birînê</i> <sup>69</sup>	Prayer of the act of marriage
<i>Du'aya Biskê</i>	Prayer of the Lock <sup>70</sup>
<i>Du'ayê Dewrêşê 'Erd</i> <sup>71</sup>	Prayer of the Dewrêsh of the Earth
<i>Du'aya li ser giyanê mirî</i>	Prayer on the soul of a deceased person

### 2.3.1.6. Prayers connected with health problems

<i>Du'aya Dûpişkê (û mar)</i>	Prayer (against the poison) of the scorpion and the snake <sup>72</sup>
<i>Du'aya Êşa Mekanî jinê</i>	Prayer (against) the pain of the woman's uterus

(68) In Yezidism there are collective names for all the representatives of the Pîr caste, *Pîranî*; for the Sheikh caste, *Şêxanî*; for Mirîds, *Mirîdî*; and for all Yezidis, *Êzdîxana*. See Kh. OMARKHALI, On the Structure of the Yezidi Clan and Tribal System and its Terminology among the Yezidis of the Caucasus, *Journal of Kurdish Studies* 6 (2008) 104–119.

(69) There can be another name for this prayer, namely *Diroze Zewacê* (The prayer of Marriage).

(70) *Bisk birîn* is an initiation ceremony, during which the Sheikh, called Sheikh of the Lock (*Şêxê Biskê*), is invited to the house and conducts this ceremony by cutting a small lock of hair from a boy who has never had his hair cut before.

(71) This prayer is also called *Du'a Tesmîlî 'Erdê*.

(72) This prayer is used when a person is bitten by a snake or a scorpion.

<i>Du'aya Nezerê</i>	Prayer (against) the evil eye
<i>Du'aya Serêşê</i>	Prayer (against) a headache

### 2.3.1.7. Daily Prayers

<i>Du'aya Pişt girêdanê</i>	Prayer of the fasten the back (i.e., fastening the belt)
<i>Du'aya Fecrê</i>	Prayer of the Dawn
<i>Du'ya Sibeykê</i>	Prayer of Morning
<i>Du'aya Nîvoro</i>	Prayer of Noon
<i>Du'aya Hêvarî</i>	Prayer of Evening

### 2.3.1.8. Prayers connected with the Moon and Stars and nature

<i>Du'aya Heyvê</i>	Prayer of the Moon
<i>Du'a Kêma Heyvê</i>	Prayer of the Moon waning
<i>Du'aya Stêra Demilqapî</i>	Prayer of the Morning Star

## 2.3.2. Dirozge

*Status.* *Dirozge* (lit., Request of alms) is one of the most important Yezidi prayers. In Kurdistan, Yezidis call this prayer *Diroze*, in Armenia, it is often called *Dirozge*. *Diroze* occupies a rather high status among the religious genres. While this genre is often connected with the prayers and it is used in the expression '*Du'a — Dirozge*', I prefer to perceive it as a separate genre or at least as a separate sub-category of the group of Yezidi prayers.

*Number.* Only one *Diroze* is known in the Yezidi literature, with two different variants, namely, among Yezidis in Armenia and among those in Iraq. I managed to gather eight published and unpublished variants of *Diroze*.

*Authorship.* The authorship of *Diroze* is not known.

*Formal characteristics.* *Diroze* is divided into stanzas, but in contrast to the *Qewls* and *Beyts*, its stanzas are not strict and sometimes are very long. The manner of reciting this prayer recalls the code system, which tells about Yezidism, full of special symbols and terms in a very brief and compressed style.

*Functions.* *Diroze* is recited during big Yezidi festivals. In contrast to the prayers, *Diroze* is usually performed in public, although it can be recited in private as well.

*Performance.* *Diroze* is performed with a special melody. The variant of *Dirozge* that is recited among Yezidis in Armenia is much longer than the Iraqi variant, and it is more complicated for interpretation, also because there are some loanwords and names that have been distorted and changed over time. *Dirozge* is recited during the ceremony of *Tawûs Gêran*, when *Qewals* used to bring *Tawûs* (*Senjeq*) to the Yezidi villages, and one can also recite *Diroze* during the *Berê Şibakê* rite and during a religious feast.

*Predominant theme of this genre.* I perceive *Dirozge* as one of the most important prayers because it is the only prayer in which one can find a large number of the names of Yezidi Holy Men, Angels, Protectors, Pîrs, Sheikhs, Dervishes, and others. Moreover, the text includes the names of many things and places that are sacred to Yezidis. It is a kind of recital of the history of the Yezidis and an encyclopaedia of the historical figures in Yezidism.

### 2.3.3. *Terqîn*

*Status.* This genre of religious text belongs to the prayers and is considered as one of the types of *Du`as*. The *Du`as* are regarded as very sacred texts and, unlike other prayers, it is not allowed for women to recite them, or to recite the *Terqîn*. Only men are allowed to study and recite them.

Yezidis from Armenia and Georgia call this prayer *Terqîn*, while Yezidis from Iraq, Turkey, and Syria sometimes call it *Telqîn*. The name of this prayer comes from the Arabic word *talqîn* (تلقين), that is, 'instructions'.

A person who does not know the Arabic language (e.g., Yezidis from the Caucasus), can hardly understand the meaning of this prayer, so that is why *Terqîn* achieved a higher status among Yezidis from Transcaucasia. They did not understand the meaning of the prayer as a whole, and so attributed a transcendental meaning to its words, a meaning not available to ordinary people.

*Number.* One *Terqîn* prayer exists in the Yezidi literature, but there are different local variants, with the variants from Armenia and Iraq showing the greatest difference.

*Authorship.* The authorship of this text is not known.

*Formal characteristics.* *Terqîn* is composed in the Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language, with a great number of words and long expressions in Arabic.

*Functions.* This prayer is recited during funeral ceremonies as well as during the sacrifice of an animal during the big religious festivals. *Terqîn* is recited during funeral ceremonies, because it tells about the life hereafter.

*Performance.* It is recited by a Yezidi from the priesthood caste and it is absolutely forbidden for women to recite it.

*Terqîn* is performed without melody (*kubrî*).

### 2.3.4. Declaration of the Faith (*Şehdetiya Dîn*)

*Status.* The Declaration of the Faith in Yezidism belongs to the genre of prayers. It is one of the most important and often recited prayers. The Declaration of the Faith gives the most important knowledge of the religion, presented mostly in a very short way in order to preserve it.

The variant of the Declaration of the Faith of Yezidis in Armenia and Georgia differs from the variant in Iraq. It has an extra beginning, which tells about two hangmen who will come to a person at the moment of death: "*Ser mira sekinîn du celat*" (Two hangmen stay overhead of me). According to Yezidi tradition, the two hangmen are Sijadîn and Nasirdîn, who come to a person during his/her death: one of them, Sijadîn, is a messenger of death, and Nasirdîn is a hangman, who takes the soul away. They will ask the soul to recite the Declaration of his/her Faith:

<i>Go: „Miskîno, Tacdîno, beniyo,</i>	[One of them] said: "Oh Miskîn, oh Tajdîn, oh human being,
<i>De te were, Şe`detiya dînê xwe bîne,</i>	Recite the Declaration of your Faith,
<i>Ezê serê te hilînim".</i>	I shall carry away your head".

This means that the angel asks the human being to recite their declaration of the faith before he takes their soul. This passage, which precedes the Declaration of the Faith itself, is not found in the version of the Declaration in Iraq. Only after the angel's address does the person begin to recite the Declaration of the Faith, which begins with the words of the unity of God: "I answered: The Declaration of my faith is one God". The Declaration of the Faith mentions the names of many Holy Men, including Sheikh 'Adî, Sheikh Hesên, Melek Ferkhedîn, Êzîd, Sherfedîn, Nasridîn, and others.

*Number.* There is only one Declaration of the Faith in Yezidism, although some local variants are known. The two primary variants are those from Armenia and Georgia and the variant known among the Iraqi Yezidis. During my field research, I gathered more than twenty variants of the Declaration of the Faith among Yezidis in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Armenia, and Georgia.

*Authorship.* The author of Declaration of the Faith is unknown.

*Performance.* This is the religious text that should be known by all Yezidi men, women, and children. It is performed every evening before bed without a melody (*kubrî*). It is recited every day because it contains the most important information about Yezidi beliefs. Some claim that it should be recited twice a day: in the morning and before sleeping. But all Yezidis, from Armenia as well as from Iraq, agree that it should be recited every night before sleeping. In some regions in Armenia it is even called *Şehdetiya ber/ser be'lgî* (The Declaration [of the Faith] before/at the pillow). This is probably due to the first line of this prayer, which among Yezidis in Armenia begins with the following words: "Serê min be'lgî" (My head is on the pillow).

There are different groups of prayers in the *Du'a* genre of religious literature. They are connected with Yezidi symbols and religion, dedicated to God and Divine Beings, and representatives of different Yezidi castes. They are recited during most daily occasions, in the case of health problems, at rituals and *rites de passage*, at the changing of nature, and for the moon and the stars. The *Dirozge*, *Terqîn*, and the Declaration of the Faith (*Şehdetiya Dîn*, see the text below) occupy special positions among the prayers.

#### 2.4. *Pişt Perde*

*Status.* The *Pişt Perde* (lit., Under the Veil) is another genre of the Yezidi religious poetic texts. This category is not widely known and has not been mentioned in the literature. This genre, unlike the *Qewls*, is not of a very high status. They are sometimes considered as *Beyts*, although this is a separate and unrelated genre. Nevertheless, their status is near to the status of *Beyts*.

*Number.* The number of *Pişt Perdes* is not fixed, but it is believed that now there are about seven of them, although previously there were more than twenty.

*Formal characteristics.* *Pişt Perdes* are also divided into stanzas.

This genre is not known to Yezidis from the Caucasus. However, in general they are well known and widespread among Yezidis all over the world. For instance, during my interview with a Yezidi Pîr from the village of Berroj (Dûzkend) in Armenia,<sup>73</sup> he told me that he heard how this practice was well known among Yezidis in the Ottoman Empire.

*Xanna Omerxalî*: Pişt Perde kengê tên gotin?      *Khanna Omarkhali*: When are *Pişt Perdes* recited?

*Merwanê Xelîl*: Civata da gelek carî me bi deng di-gotin.      *Merwane Khelil*: We used to recite them with the melodies in the community [i.e., during the gatherings, in public].

Gelek sebeqêt wî êd heyn û gelekî xoş in.      There are many stanzas [of the *Pişt Perde*] and they are very nice.

*Functions*. They are usually recited in public and during big gatherings.

*Performance*. They all are performed with special melodies (*kubrî*); each *Pişt Perde* has its own *kubrî*.

Although *Pişt Perdes* are recited during gatherings, they are also used after reciting a *Qewl*.<sup>74</sup> Yezidis in Armenia and Georgia also recite a small *Terqîn* (different from the *Terqîn* described above) after reciting a *Qewl*, which has the function of a kind of confirmation of the religious hymn.<sup>75</sup>

*Predominant theme of this genre*. *Pişt Perdes* belong to the special genre of the dialogue between two or more knowledgeable Yezidi figures, or Holy Men.

When I recited the *Beyt of Heyî Malê* recorded from a Yezidi in the Caucasus to a Yezidi reciter of religious texts from Iraq, he told me:

*Kurdish Original*

*English Translation*

Eva me digote *Pişt Perde!* Eva *Pişt Perde* ne! Ev ne *Beyt e. Pişt Perde* wekî *Xizêmok e, Lavijok e*.<sup>76</sup>      We called it *Pişt Perde!* These are *Pişt Perde!* This is not the *Beyt*. *Pişt Perde* is like *Khizemok, Lavijok*.

(73) From the interview with Pîr Tosinê Qero (born in 1929), conducted on 16.10.2007, Berroj (Dûzkend), Armenia.

(74) Merwanê Xelîl, conducted on 22.07.2009, Nienburg, Germany.

(75) From the interview with Pîr Qanatê Kakê, conducted on 02.08.2008, Moscow, Russia.

(76) Merwanê Xelîl, Nienburg, 22.07.2009.

After that he recited with the *kubrî* the same *Pişt Perde* with some differences, but generally similar to the text I had given. After he finished, he added:

Eвне Pişt Perde bûn, digotînê. Eva me'ne bûn, pirsyar bûn. Pirsyar wextê Xasa di havêtine ser hev û du. Mesele, tu di dînê êzdiyatîyê da jî zana bûyî, ez, mesele, di diyaneta êzdiyatîyê da bi xo zana dîm, dê min pirsyar havêtibana ser te, te ciwaba min daba. Tê dihavêtiba ser min, dê min ciwaba te daba.

These were called *Pişt Perde* [i.e., Under the Veil]. These were “meanings”, “questions”. When the Holy Men used to put questions to each other. For instance, you were knowledgeable in the Yezidi religion, and I, for example, considered myself a knowledgeable person in the Yezidi religion, so I would ask you some questions and you would answer me. You would ask me questions and I would answer you.<sup>77</sup>

## 2.5. *Qesîde*

*Status.* There are some *Qesîdes*, which are obviously of recent composition and not the old Yezidi texts. There is one *Qesîde*, namely the *Qesîde* of Sherfedîn, in which one can find the name of Kurdistan:

*Ciwabê bidene Kurdistanê*  
*Bila qayim ken îmanê*  
*Şerfedîn mîr e wê li dîwanê.*<sup>78</sup>

Give the news to Kurdistan  
Let them strengthen the belief  
Sherfedîn is the Prince of the  
Assembly.

*Number.* I gathered about thirty-six *Qesîdes* during my research. There are about fifteen *Qesîdes* of Pîrs, sixteen *Qesîdes* of Sheikhs, and several general *Qesîdes*, which mostly form the *Sema'* collections (see below).

*Formal characteristics.* Some *Qesîdes*, but not all, are composed in Arabic, and others are in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish. The rhyme structure of the Kurdish *Qesîdes* does not correspond to that of the Arabic *Qesîdes*. It is believed that *Qesîdes* were composed by the followers of Sheikh 'Adî at a later time.<sup>79</sup>

*Functions.* The majority of *Qesîdes* are part of the *Sema'* collections.

(77) It is like a dialogic poem.

(78) From the interview with B. Cuma Îdo, which I conducted on 21.04.2008, Bashîk and Bahzan, Iraqi Kurdistan.

(79) KREYENBROEK, RASHOW, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, 51.

*Performance.* All *Qesîdes* are recited with music and special melodies. Their status is not as high as the *Qewls* and *Beys*.

*Classification.* Some *Qesîdes* are known to be of Sheikh Adî's authorship.

Some *Qesîdes* dedicated to Pîrs are known, as follows:

<i>Qesîda Alûbekir</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Alûbekir
<i>Qesîda Pîrê Cerwa</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Pîr Jerwa
<i>Qesîda Êk Siwar</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of One Horseman
<i>Qesîda Hecî 'Elî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Heji 'Elî
<i>Qesîda Hacyalî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Hajiyalî
<i>Qesîda Hesin Meman</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Hesin Meman
<i>Qesîda Hesnaleka</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Hesnaleka
<i>Qesîda Îsibiya</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Îsibiya
<i>Qesîda Mehmed Reşan</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Mehmed Reshan
<i>Qesîda Mehmedî Reben</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Mehmedî Reben <sup>80</sup>
<i>Qesîda Memê Şivan</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Memê Shivan
<i>Qesîda Pîrî Kemal</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Pîr Kemal
<i>Qesîda Pîr Mehemed — Pîr Afat — Xetî Pîsî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Pîr Mehemed, Pîr Afat, Khetî Pîsî
<i>Qesîda Qedibilban</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Qedi bi-'l-Ban
<i>Qesîda Sinî Behrî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sinî Behrî, and some others.

There is a group of *Qesîdes* dedicated to the Sheikhs, as follows:

<i>Qesîda Adiya Şêxê Mine</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Adî my Sheikh
<i>Qesîda Amadîn</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Amadîn
<i>Qesîda Nasirdîn</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Nasirdîn
<i>Qesîda Sicadîn</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sijadîn
<i>Qesîda Şerfedîn</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sherfedîn
<i>Qesîda Şêşîms û Melik Fexredîn</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh Shems and Melek Fekhredîn
<i>Qesîda Şêşîmsê Tewrêzî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh Shems from Tabriz
<i>Qesîda Şêx 'Adî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh 'Adî
<i>Qesîda Şêx Alê Şemsa</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh Alê Shemsa
<i>Qesîda Şêx Babik</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh Babik
<i>Qesîda Şêx 'Ebdil Qadir</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh 'Ebd al-Qadir

(80) Kurdish *reben* 'poor', 'miserable'.



<i>Qesîda Şêx Mend</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh Mend
<i>Qesîda Şêx Sin</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikh Sin (Hesen)
<i>Qesîda Şêxûbekir</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of Sheikhûbekir
<i>Qesîda Xatûna Fexra</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of Khatûna Fekhra, and some others.

The *Qesîde* of Sheikh Jenjer (*Qesîda Şêx Cencer*) is probably not an authentic Yezidi *Qesîde*.<sup>81</sup>

There is another group of *Qesîdes* that are not dedicated to a Pîr or a Sheikh. This group includes:

<i>Qesîda Çopan</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of the Shepherd <sup>82</sup>
<i>Qesîda Nadîmî</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of my Friend
<i>Qesîda Subhân e ji te Melkê Ekber</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of the Praising is to you, the Great King
<i>Qesîda Tawûsî Melek</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of Tawûsî Melek
<i>Qesîda Kes ne tê</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of Nobody comes

## 2.6. *Sema'*

*Status.* The primary meaning of *Sema'* (Arab. *samā'* 'listening') in Yezidism, is a genre of religious literature, the singing of holy poems with music, which may or may not include a solemn procession of religious dignitaries.

When I talked about this procession with *Qewals* in Bashik and Bahzan villages, near Mosul, I used the word *reqs* (dance). I was stopped by a *Qewal* and corrected. They said that *Sema'* could not be called a dance at all. The meaning of this procession was explained as “Melayêka sucude bo Xudê diken” (Angels bow to God).<sup>83</sup>

*Sema'* is described by Yezidis as a religious ceremony (*merasima dînî*).<sup>84</sup> *Sema'* are known only among Yezidis in Iraq and they are not known in the Caucasus. However, Pîr Tosinê Qero from Armenia men-

(81) See above on texts that are not authentic. This *Qesîde* was published in RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. II, 757.

(82) I translated this word as it is in Farsi, meaning 'shepherd' or 'herdsman', while in Kurdish the word 'shepherd' is translated with the word *şivan*. For the *Qesîda Çopan* see: RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. II, 758–759. This *Qesîde* is in Arabic and in the dialect of Bashiq and Bahzan.

(83) From the interview with *Qewal Simaîl*, conducted on 21.04.2008, Bashik and Bahzan, Iraq.

(84) From the interview with B. Cuma Îdo, 21.04.2008, Iraq.

tioned the term *Sema'* in the meaning of religious dance with the performance of the *Qewlê Şerfedîn*.<sup>85</sup>

*Number.* There are seven *Sema'*s in Yezidism. Their number is significant, because it could help to understand the essence of the *Sema'* performance, that is, its connection with astrology and the seven planets, their movement, the direction of movement, the Time of Creation, and the Creation of Seven Archangels. The *Qewls* in each *Sema'* are not recited in their entirety, just the first seven stanzas.

*Formal characteristics.* The typical feature of the *Sema'* is that it combines texts of different genres, usually *Qewls* and *Qesîdes*.

*Functions.* *Sema'*s are recited during the big religious festivals in Lalish. One *Sema'* is performed exclusively at graves and is called *Sema' Miriya* (*Sema'* of the deceased people). In Iraq only women are present at the graves; men do not go to the graves after the funeral. The *Sema'* noted above is performed by a Yezidi man in the presence of Yezidi women after the funeral.

If somebody from the Adanî clan (one of three clans of Sheikhs, which is also called Sheikh Hesen's clan) dies, people ask a knowledgeable person to perform the *Semaya Şerfedîn û Şêx Hesen* (*Semaya* of Sherfedîn and Sheikh Hesen). If a person from the Shemsanî clan dies, then the *Semaya Şêx Şems* (*Semaya* of Sheikh Shems) is performed.<sup>86</sup>

*Performance.* Each of the seven *Sema'* is performed with special music and melody. Each *Sema'* has its own melody, according to its text.

*Classification.* Each of the seven known *Sema'* is a combination of different religious texts (*Qewls* and *Qesîdes*). Each *Sema'* has its own particular combination.

When I asked Yezidis in Iraq about the *Sema'* and the names of the different religious texts that appear in a specific *Sema'*, they would usually name the texts by the first line or by the opening words of the text. This is also a typical feature of the oral tradition, when the texts are not written and there are sometimes no fixed names of the texts. People learn the text or recognise it by its first line or two, which are all different.

Let us describe the seven *Sema'* texts individually:

(85) From the interview with Pîr Tosinê Qero.

(86) From the interview with B. Cuma Îdo, 21.04.2008, Iraq.

**2.6.1. *Semaya Bilind*.** This *Sema'* includes the following texts:

<i>Qesîda Kamā qalamtu bi-'l-'il(m)</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> As I wrote with the knowledge
<i>Çendî govende</i>	— How many dances ( <i>govends</i> )
<i>Qesîda Şafā waqtî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> Good time
<i>Hālî al-ra'm</i>	— Without tenderness
<i>Cana</i>	— The soul

**2.6.2. *Semaya Maka Êz(îd)*.** This *Sema'* is also called *Sema' Makê*. The following texts are used:

<i>Qewlê Makê</i>	— <i>Qewl</i> of the Mother (i.e., the Mother of Êzîd)
<i>Hey Cana</i>	— Oh Soul

**2.6.3. *Semaya Merkeba (Miriya)*.** This *Sema'* is also called *Sema' Miriya* (*Sema'* of the deceased people); it includes the following texts:

<i>Merkeba Qewiye</i>	— Strong ship
<i>Zênare</i>	— Help
<i>Qesîda Şafā waqtî</i>	— <i>Qesîda</i> Good time
<i>Qesîda Çopan</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of the Shepherd

**2.6.4. *Semaya Qanûnî*.** This *Sema'* is also called *Sema' Şêx Adî*, which includes the following texts:

<i>Qesîda Lawikê Pîra</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> Lawikê Pîra
<i>Qesîda Şafā waqtî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> Good time
<i>Qesîda 'Ana wa'dî</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> About this time
<i>Ismatu</i> <sup>87</sup> <i>ğamā'at al-ħađir</i>	— I listened to the present gathering
<i>Cana</i>	— The soul
<i>Qewlê Maka Êz</i>	— <i>Qewl</i> of the Mother of Êzîd
<i>Şîxadî û ...</i>	— Sheikh Adî and ...

**2.6.5. *Semaya Şerfedîn û Şêx Hesên***

In the *Semaya Şêxê Hesên*, three *Qewls* make up one text. They are: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesên*, *Qewlê Babekrê Omera*, and *Qewlê Pîrê Libina* (or *Qewlê Kofiya*).<sup>88</sup> From each of these three *Qewls* only the seven first stanzas are recited and then the text changes to next *Qewl*. All three *Qewls* are recited with their own melodies (*kubrî*).

(87) Arabic *sama'tu* 'I listened'.

(88) This *Qewl* is also called *Qewlê Dilê minî bi kovan e*, because this line is mentioned there.

<i>Qesîda Kamā qalamtu bi-`l-`il(m)</i>	— <i>Qesîde</i> As I wrote with the knowledge
<i>Hayā mû lelem</i> <sup>89</sup>	— <i>Hayā mû lelem</i>
<i>Çendî govende</i>	— How many dances ( <i>govends</i> )
<i>Hey Adiyê Şêxê mino!</i>	— Oh Adî, oh my Sheikh!
<i>Şêx Şimso navê te mîr e</i>	— Oh Sheikh Shems, your name is Prince
<i>Qesîda Şerfedîn</i> <sup>90</sup>	— <i>Qesîde</i> of Sherfedîn
<i>Ya la, ya lale</i>	— Oh God, oh God
<i>Hay lêm ha leyl</i>	— <i>Hay lêm ha leyl</i>

**2.6.6. Semaya Şêx Şems.** This *Sema`* includes the texts:

<i>Zimzim al-Adî</i>	— (The sacred spring) Zimzim of (Sheikh) Adî
<i>Hâlî al-ra`m</i>	— Without tenderness
<i>Qesîda Şafâ waqtî</i>	— <i>Qesîda</i> Good time
<i>Şadaytu bi-`l-zînâra</i>	— I sang with the (asking for) help
<i>Ismatu ğamâ`at al-ħađîr</i>	— I listened to the present gathering
<i>Birime behişta `enzelî</i>	— I was taken to the ancient paradise

**2.6.7. Semaya Zerza(yî).** This *Sema`* includes the texts:

<i>Qesîda `Ana wa`dî</i> <sup>91</sup>	— <i>Qesîde</i> About this time
<i>Subhân e ji te Melik Kerîm</i> <sup>92</sup>	— The praising is for you, the Merciful Angel

(89) This is the first line of the *Qesîde Çopan* (*Qesîde* of the Shepherd): “*Hayā mû lelem, hāzā mû çopan ra`î li ğenem...*” See RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. II, 758. There is another *Qesîde Çopan*, which begins with the words: “*Wer-in, werin, eve ne çopanê şivanê pezî ye...*” See RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. II, 759. The first one is in the Arabic language in the dialect spoken in the Bashik and Bahzan region, the second one is in the Kurdish Kurmanji dialect.

(90) For the *Qesîda Şerfedîn* see: HECÎ, *Bawerî û mîtolojiya êzdiyan*, 161–162, RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. II, 2004: 674–675. This *Qesîde* was reprinted from the article by Bedelê Feqîr HECÎ, *Laliş* 6 (1996) 54–85, and translated into English in: KREYENBROEK, RASHOW, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, 221–222.

(91) Sometimes it is called *Qesîda `Ana wa`ht*.

(92) For the *Qesîde Subhân e ji te Melik Ekber*, see RASHOW, *Pern ji edebê dînê êzdiyan*, vol. II, 754–756. This *Qeside* was written down by Rashow from the cassette tape recorded by Sheikh Derman on 9.4.1998.

<i>Çendî govende</i>	– How many dances
<i>Qesîda Çopan</i>	– <i>Qesîde</i> of the Shepherd
<i>Cana</i>	– The soul

Every knowledgeable Yezidi knows which *Sema'* includes which kinds of religious texts and in which order they should be performed, and how many stanzas from each text should be recited.

Here I would like to quote the words of B. Cuma Îdo from Bashik and Bahzan, Iraqi Kurdistan, with whom I conducted an interview on 21.04.2008. After the performance of a few *Sema'* without the accompaniment of the sacred instruments, but with the special melody, he told me:

Dengê min ne yêt xosh e. Bi Xudê, heke mûsîk hebe û Qewala bi dengê xoş, eve ecêb e, ecêb e! Xudê, sîmfoniyek jî ne wekû ew e!	My voice is not good. By God, if there is music and <i>Qewals</i> with a nice voice, it is absolutely amaz- ing! Oh God, even a symphony cannot be compared with it!
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After these words, I could not (and even did not try to) stop him from performing different *Sema'* with melodies.

## CONCLUSION

The basis of Yezidi belief is kept in the literature which is represented by different genres of religious poetry and prose, and which was transmitted orally from one generation to another. These categories of poetry and prose have their own names and cannot be compared with the literature in known written traditions.

In this study I described the specific structure and characteristics of Yezidi religious poetic literature. There is also a group of poetic songs in the Yezidi literature which, although it is traditionally religious, does include not only the religious knowledge but also love stories. They are typical not only for Yezidi literature, but they are known in Kurdish non-Yezidi literature as well. Among them are the so-called *Lavij(ok)*, *Xizêmok*, *Robarîn*, and *Payîzok*. There is also a rather large group of religious prose narratives represented by such genres as *Mishabet* (sermon), *Çîrok*, and *Çîvanok*, i.e., legends and myths, and *Dastan* and *M`ena* (or *Pirs*), interpretations of religious hymns.<sup>93</sup>

(93) On the Yezidi legends as interpretations of the Yezidi religious hymns, see Kh. OMARKHALI, "The status and role of the Yezidi legends and myths. To the question of comparative analysis of Yezidism, Yârisân (Ahl-e

It is already possible to speak with confidence that Yezidism is going through a new stage of its development, namely the probable transition to a written tradition. The process of writing down these religious texts has already begun; how this process will be reflected in the Yezidi literature with its oral nature, melodies, and special performance remains a question.

**Excursus:**  
**SOME EXAMPLES OF YEZIDI RELIGIOUS TEXTS**

**The Declaration of the Faith**  
**(Şehdetiya Dîn)**

The Declaration of the Faith in Yezidism belongs to the genre of prayers. It is one of the most important prayers, which should be recited by every Yezidi, man or woman, every day. The text below is a variant<sup>94</sup> of the Declaration of the Faith that is recited among the majority of Transcaucasian Yezidis.

**ŞEHDETIYA DÎN**

*Serê min be'lgî,*

*Be'lgîyê min şivakê,*

**THE DECLARATION OF THE FAITH**

My head is on the pillow,

My pillow is on the window,<sup>95</sup>

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Haqq) and Zoroastrianism: a common substratum?" *Folia Orientalia* 45–46 (2009–2010) 197–219.

(94) This variant of the Declaration of the Faith was recited by Pîr Rizayê Kakê from the Omarkhali clan of Pîrs, who was born in Armenia, and I wrote it down in 03.2007 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

(95) *Şivak* is pronounced "v" among some Yezidis from Armenia and in Iraq pronounced "b" (*şibak*). It is interesting that one can find a very similar stanza (*sebeq*) in the *Qewlê Seremêrgê* (Hymn of the Moment of Death), *sebeq* 8, where it is said:

*Min zor farîqe kiribûn ji makê*

*Û ezna didem şibakê*

*Bi rû da çome zikakê*

*Ez daname ber bedenê makê*

(Original text: Silêman 1985:

113).

I was removed far from my mother,

And invited (to go) to the opening.

Head first I went into the narrow passage.

I was laid on my mother's body.

(Translation: Kreyenbroek 1995: 310)

One can also find the term *Berê şivakê* / *Berê şibakê*, which means sacred thing in Lalish, attributed to Sheikh 'Adî.

<i>Sêrî çûme zikakê,</i>	First [I] went [through] the narrow street
<i>Bidî xatirê Êzîd makê,</i>	Give [to me] for the sake of Êzîd's mother.
<i>Serê min qulbe,</i>	My head is in the direction of prayer,
<i>Berê min rohilat.</i>	My eyes are [fixed] on the east. <sup>96</sup>
<i>Ser mira sekînî(n) du celat,</i>	Two hangmen <sup>97</sup> stay overhead of me,
<i>Go: „Miskîno, Tacdîno, benîyo,</i>	[One of them] said: “Oh Miskîn, <sup>98</sup> oh Tadjîn, <sup>99</sup> oh human being,
<i>De te were, Şe'detiya dînê xwe bîne,</i>	Recite the Declaration of your Faith,
<i>Ezê serê te hilînim”.</i>	I shall carry away your head”. <sup>100</sup>
<i>Go: “Şe'detiya dînê min yek ella,</i>	[I] answered: “The Declaration of my Faith is one God,
<i>Şêxisin hebûb ella,</i>	Shêkhisin [is] the friend of God,
<i>Mergaê, Meqlûbê selaê.</i>	I greet [the holy place] Mergeh, <sup>101</sup> [the holy mountain] Meqlûb, <sup>102</sup>
<i>Ciyê Şerq, Şam lê diçe taê<sup>103</sup> sucûdayê,</i>	From the East [and] West [i.e., Damascus] He is bowed

(96) Yezidis bury their people with their face towards the east in the grave. The legs should be towards the east, so the face will also be in this direction.

(97) According to Yezidi belief, the two hangmen are Sijadîn and Nasirdîn. They come to the person during death: one of them, Sijadîn, is the messenger of death, and Nasirdîn is the hangman, who takes the soul away.

(98) The word *miskîn* is translated as ‘a miserable and poor person’ and here could be also translated as an adjective.

(99) The meaning could be understood in two ways, namely the name of a derwish, Miskîn Tadjîn, who lived in the time of Sheikh ‘Adî; he was put in prison for some misdeed and after that he came back to Lalish. *Tacdîn* could also be translated as he ‘who has the religion as his crown’.

(100) It means that the angel asks the human being to recite his/her Declaration of the Faith before he takes away their soul.

(101) *Mergeh* refers to the place where the main religious center, Lalish, is located.

(102) *Meqlûb* is a mountain located in Iraqi Kurdistan, near the Lalish valley.

(103) Here probably *tobe* ‘vow’ is meant.

<i>Sicûda me diçe bal Şîxadî,</i>	We bow to Sheikh ‘Adî,
<i>Şîxadî reda yê,</i>	Sheikh ‘Adî is satisfied [with our inclinations].
<i>Şêşims melkê Mêra yê,</i>	Sheikh Shems is at the head of [the assembly of] Holy Men,
<i>Şîxadî ser kursî westayê,</i>	Sheikh ‘Adî sits at the Throne,
<i>Şe‘detiyaa dînê xwe heq navê Êzîd dayê.</i>	Gave the Declaration of your Faith in the name of Êzîd.
<i>Şîxadî nûr e,</i>	Sheikh ‘Adî is the Light,
<i>Melek Ferxedîn xefûr e,</i>	Angel Ferkhedîn is forgiving. <sup>104</sup>
<i>Şe‘detiya dînê xwe heq navê Êzîd qebûl e.</i>	The Declaration of the Faith is accepted in the name of Êzîd.
<i>Sinî me, sinî nevî me,</i>	I am a Yezidi, <sup>105</sup> a grandchild of a Yezidi.
<i>Silavkêşê Kaniya Sipî me,</i>	I greet [the spring] of Kaniya Spî. <sup>106</sup>
<i>Mirîdê Şîxadî me.</i>	I am a Mirîd <sup>107</sup> of Sheikh ‘Adî,
<i>Qelesa Melek Şîxisin nivîsîme,</i>	I was written by the pen of Angel Shîkhsin, <sup>108</sup>
<i>‘Erhemdille, Şêx, Pîr, hoste, merebî,</i>	I am grateful to God, Sheikh, Pîr, Master, Preceptor,
<i>Yar birê axretê</i>	Beloved brother of hereafter,
<i>Her pênc tirêqê xwe razî me.</i>	I am satisfied with all my five <i>tirêq</i> . <sup>109</sup>

(104) Usually the description *xefûr* ‘forgiving’ is used for God.

(105) In the Yezidi religious texts, very often the term *sunî* is used, which means ‘a Yezidi’, and *Sunetxane* ‘Yezidis’.

(106) *Kaniya Spî* is the holy spring in Lalish where all Yezidis should be baptised.

(107) *Mirîd* here means a pupil, a follower of Sheikh ‘Adî.

(108) It is said that there is a book of Sheikh Hesên called *Jilvê*. Yezidis believe that Sheikh Hesên was concealed in a cave for six years until the book was revealed to him. But it is also said that the Angel Şêxisin was the first ‘who had the pen and writing’. He is called *Xudanê Qelemê* ‘The Master of the Pen’.

(109) According to Yezidi religious custom, there are five *tirêq*, i.e., people mostly from the priesthood castes who help a Yezidi in their everyday observances and in their spiritual development. These five people are: *sheikh*, *pîr*, *hosta*, *merhebî*, and brother of hereafter.



<i>Celatê ruhê min Nasirdîn,</i>	Hangman of my soul is Nasirdîn.
<i>Atqata min Siltan Êzîd,</i>	My belief is Sultan Êzîd,
<i>Dînê min Şerfedîn,</i>	My religion is Sherfedîn, <sup>110</sup>
<i>Rehme li ruhê hostaê min,</i>	[Let there be] mercy [of God] on the soul of my Master <sup>111</sup>
<i>Êzdîd yek ella,</i>	Êzdîd is the only God,
<i>Şîxadî hebûb ella”.</i>	Sheikh ‘Adî is beloved of God”.

### *Pîşt Perde*

#### **The *Beyt* of Heyî Malê (*Beyta Heyî Malê*)**

The religious text given below<sup>112</sup> belongs to the *Pîşt Perde* genre. It was written down from a Yezidi in the Caucasus and labeled as the *beyt* Oh Home (*Beyta Heyî Malê*). The name of the genre of *Pîşt Perde* among Yezidis in the Caucasus is unknown.

At the beginning of the *beyt* is the praising of a home: “Heyî mala min, heyî mala min, mala bavê min” (Oh my Home, oh my Home, my Father’s Home). This religious text tells about the origin of this home and about the beginning of the world. It is said that this home is connected with the Time of Creation, where God, the bird Enqer, the Pearl, and the Ocean are mentioned.

The term *Mala Bava* (Father’s Home) has deep meanings in the Yezidi tradition. First, there is a name for the Yezidi Pîr’s sacred family hearth (*odjakh*), namely *Omarkhali*, which is called *Mala Bava*. Yezidis from Iraq recite *Heyî Mala min* (Oh my Home) when they talk about Lalish, which was the home for many of the Holy Men in Yezidism.

Moreover, one can find a very interesting stanza in this text, the third stanza, where the name of one sacred manuscript of a Pîr’s home, *Mishûra Resh-Belek*, is mentioned. Probably the term is much deeper and applies not only to the sacred manuscript. I saw the sacred manuscript *Mishûra Resh-Belek* in the home of a Pîr’s family in Armenia in 2007. As the owner told me, it was written on the skin of a gazelle.

(110) The religion is called *Sherfedîn* by Yezidis of Armenia and Georgia.

(111) That is, the religious preceptor, who gave the knowledge to a person, recites the text. Usually after each religious text this expression is given.

(112) *Ayîn û Qirarê Dînê Êzdîtiyê*, 97–99.

When I was allowed to open it and see, I found that it was on the skin of an animal and it was a large folio with four leaves.

The name of *Resh-Belek* also appears in the Iraqi version of this text, recited for me by Merwanê Khelîl:

<i>Bira derê Reşbeleka veket, Bi xêra navê Xudê û Şêx Adî Bila bêjite ew kî bû Meftûl kire qewata girîvanî.</i>	Open the doors of <i>Resh-Belek</i> , In the name of God and Sheikh Adî Let him tell who it was Who made the lock the power of <i>girîvan</i> .
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It is believed among Yezidis in Iraqi Kurdistan that *Resh-Belek* is a Sacred Book, although none of the people I interviewed knew specifically what kind of book it was.

### Beyta Heyî Malê

Qewl in Kurdish

- 1 *Heyî Mala min, heyî Mala min,  
Mala Bavê min,  
Teyîrekî Enqerî nave,*

*Ser piştê 366 cot silave.*

- 2 *Şêxekî bînin şêx be,  
Pîrekî bînin pîr be,  
Talibî zane, ji Mala Baba be,  
70 govek bavê xa da ulma be.*

- 3 *Bira xêra Xudê ra  
Derê Reşbelekê veke,  
Belgê belgevêzê bixûne.*

### The *Beyt* of Oh Home

Translation into English

- Oh my Home, oh my Home, my  
Father's Home,  
There is a bird Enqer<sup>113</sup> in it,

There are 366<sup>114</sup> pairs of greetings  
on its back.

- Bring a Sheikh, [who] would be  
the [real] Sheikh  
Bring a Pîr, [who] would be the  
[real] Pîr,  
The known follower, [who] would  
be from the Father's Home,  
[Who] would be known in his line-  
age in the 70th generations.

- Let him in the name of God  
Open the doors of [the book] *Resh-  
Belek*,  
Read the leaf of plantain leaves.

(113) The comments to this text say that the bird Enqer (*Teyrê Enqer*) is Tawusî Melek himself.

(114) Numerology among Yezidis is a very interesting subject, because the symbolic numbers in Yezidism (7, 12, 72, 366, etc.) are closely connected with astrology.

- 4 *Bira mi ra bêje:*  
*B'era Emenê çend keşkûl avê nav e,*  
*Orta 'erd-'ezman da çend gav e.* Let him tell me:  
 How many *keshkuls*<sup>115</sup> of water has  
 the Ocean of Emen  
 How many steps are between the  
 earth and the heaven.
- 5 *Heyî Malê, heyî Malê, heyî Mala*  
*Babanê, heyî lê,*  
*heyî malê, heyî malê...*  
*Serê Dura elîf û bî ne,*  
*Serê lala elîf û bî ne.* Oh Home, oh Home, oh the Fa-  
 ther's Home,  
 Oh Home, oh Home...  
 On the Pearls<sup>116</sup> are A and B,<sup>117</sup>  
 On the rubies<sup>118</sup> are A and B.
- 6 *Teyrê Enqer Durre 'erşê 'ezmîne,*  
*Du melek lê xulîqîne,*  
*Yek bû nûra 'ezmîne,*  
*B'erê giran dimeyîne.* The Bird Enqer is the Pearl of the  
 vault of heaven  
 Two angels are created from it,  
 One became the Light of the Earth,  
 [Who] makes the great Ocean co-  
 agulate [coalesce].
- 7 *Yek çira çar qulba ye,*  
*Sitûna çar dîna ye,*  
*Çerxa felekê dorê dizivirîne, ba ye.* [Another] one is a luminary of four  
 directions [of the world],  
 Pillar of four religions,  
 [He] turns the wheel of Fortune,  
 [he] is [like] the wind.<sup>119</sup>
- 8 *Heyî Malê, heyî Malê...*  
*Serê Dura elîf û ba ne,*  
*Serê lala elîf û ba ne.*  
*Extiyarê rûniştine,*  
*Koçekê ser darê piya ber dawastane,* Oh Home, oh Home...  
 On the Pearls are A and B,  
 On the rubies are A and B.  
 Old people are sitting,  
*Kocheks*<sup>120</sup> stand on the trees.<sup>121</sup>

(115) *Keshkûl* is a symbolic begging bag of a derwish, which one can find in the Yezidi religious literature.

(116) It should be in the singular, but here it is used with the short ending -a of the plural ending -an of the Oblique case.

(117) Probably this means that, in the beginning of the Creation of the world, the beginning of everything (A and B, the first letters of the alphabet) were on the Pearl, from which the world was created.

(118) Here *ruby* probably is a general name for the jewels, and it could be just a literary replacement of the word *pearl*.

(119) It is written that he is a wind.

(120) Supernatural ability to foretell the future is attributed to *Kocheks*.

(121) It is a special rite, when *Kocheks* before the New Year, which is in April, bring wood from the forest on their backs and they stack it in the yards of Lalish.

<p><i>Fexrê gulî nûr e li 'ezman e.</i></p> <p>9 <i>Heyî Mala min, heyî Mala min, Serê Dura elîf û bî ne, Serê lala elîf û bî ne. Extiyarê rûniştine, Koçekê ser darê piya ber dawas- tane, Roj me derket ji 'erşê girane, Bû çira boyî her çar qulbane, Sitûn boyî her çar dînane.</i></p>	<p>Fekhr of Gulî<sup>122</sup> is a Light in the Heaven.</p> <p>Oh my Home, oh my Home, On the Pearls are A and B, On the rubies are A and B. Old people are sitting, Kocheks stand on the trees. Our sun came out from the heavy Throne, Became the Luminary of all four sides/directions, A Pillar for all four religions.</p>
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In conclusion, I would like to quote Simon Jargy, who wrote in his article on the sung poetry in the oral tradition of the Gulf Region and the Arabian Peninsula, and which also perfectly reflects the function of the Yezidi oral tradition: "The popular genius is so strongly rooted in the souls of these peoples that the musicopoetical traditions have progressively assumed another function: one of keeping their spirit alive through the link to an old and permanent tradition to avoid losing all the roots threatened by the turmoil of modern technology."<sup>123</sup>

## SUMMARY

The paper is devoted to the investigation of the religious textual heritage of the Yezidis, adherents of the monotheistic, non-proselytizing pre-Islamic Kurdish religion. Yezidis always had a great fear of writing down their religious texts and hence avoided the practice. The basis of Yezidi dogmas is kept mainly in the oral tradition, literature which is represented by different kinds of religious poetry and prose and which has its own set of categories that cannot easily be compared with the genres in known written traditions.

In this investigation, the publication of Yezidi religious texts and their status, formal characteristics, and language, as well as different categories of Yezidi poetic literature are explored. At the end of the study, the Yezidi Declaration of the Faith (*Şehdetiya Dîn*) and another example of a religious poetic text, *Beyta Heyî Malê*, are given with English translation as illustrations of the Yezidi religious poetic literature.

(122) The Angel of the Sun (*Melekê Rojê*) and the Angel of the Moon (*Melekê Hîvê*) are Shems and Fekhr.

(123) Simon JARGY, Sung Poetry in the Oral Tradition of the Gulf Region and the Arabian Peninsula, *Oral Tradition* 4/1–2 (1989) 187.