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The literary legacy of the Ardalans | Farangis Ghaderi[‡]

Abstract

Classical Gorani literature is believed to be the oldest Kurdish literary tradition which under the patronage of the Ardalans developed into a “literary koinè” in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. However, despite its antiquity and significance in the history of Kurdish literature, it has remained largely under-studied. It is against this backdrop that I offer an overview of Gorani literature, its history of development, and main literary characteristics in this article. Through extensive text analysis I examine the classical Gorani poetry for its major genres and forms and predominant themes and images. I study Gorani oral and written literature and their interactions, and the role it played in Kurdish poetic modernisation in the twentieth century.

Keywords: Ardalan; Gorani; classical Kurdish poetry; Ahl-e Haqq; Kurdish epic; Gorani lyric.

Abstract in Kurmanji

Mîrasa edebî ya Erdelaniyan

Edebiyata goranî ya sunetî wek kevntirîn kelepora edebî ya kurdî tê hesabandin, ku bi patronaja xanedana Erdelaniyan di sedsalên hevdeh û hejdehan de şiklê “koinêyeke edebî” wergirt. Lê belê, li gel qedimî û girîngiya xwe bo dîroka edebiyata kurdî, heta niha kêm xeber li ser wê hatine kirin. Li ser vê paşxaneyê di vê gotarê de ez dixwazim giştîyê li ser edebiyata goranî, li ser dîroka geşedana wê, û xasîyetên wê yên edebî yên serekî pêşkêş bikim. Bi rêya tehlilên berfireh ên metnan ez dê cure û qalibên serekî û mezmûnên serdest ên edebiyata klasîk a goranî binirxînim. Herwiha behs dê bikeve ser edebiyata goranî ya devkî û ya nivîskî û têkiliya wan, li gel rola ku wê edebiyatê di nûjenkirina helbesta kurdî ya sedsala bîstan de gêraye.

Abstract in Sorani

Keleporî Edebiy Erdellaneke

Edebiyatî klasîkî goranî be kontirîn edebî kurdî dadenrêt ke le sedekani hevde w hejde be pallpîştî Erdellaneke wekû zimani edebî hawbeş geşey kird. Bellam be pêçewaney kewnî w girîngiyê le mêtûy edebî kurdî da, lêkollînewey zor kemî le ser kirawe. Lem wutare be leberçawgirtinî em paşxane, edebî goranî, mêtûy geşesendinî w layene edebîye berçawekani bas dekem. Le rêgey şikarî deqî şîrî klasîkî goranî, janr û form û herweha têma w wêna serekîyekan şirove dekem. Em wutare herweha edebî zerekî w nûsrawey goranî w pêwendîyan û rollî le nûkirdinewey şîrî kurdî le sedey bîstem tawtwê dekat.

Introduction

Classical Kurdish literature is written in the Kurdish dialects of Gorani, Kurmanji, and Sorani.¹ The literature of each dialect was developed in different

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¹ The Zazakî (Kirmanckî) dialect has no written literary tradition. “Its cultivation as a literary dialect began in the diaspora in the 1970s thanks to the efforts of Zazaki intellectuals like Malmîsanîj. The earliest classical texts in Zazaki, as Malmîsanîj (2004: 41-43) notes, are two



geo-political contexts and historical periods. Gorani literature emerged and developed from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century in the Ardalán principality of the Persian Empire. Classical Gorani literature is believed to be the oldest literary tradition as it incorporates the Ahl-e Haqq/Yarsan religious literature (Xeznedar, 2002: 12). Kurmanji literature flourished from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century in the Kurdish principalities of the Ottoman Empire such as Botan (ibid.: 143–44). Sorani literature was the last to emerge in the nineteenth century under the patronage of the Baban principality in the Ottoman Empire.² Despite its late development, Sorani enjoyed an uninterrupted continuity in the twentieth century (Xeznedar, 2003: 15–17; Hassanpour, 1990: 67). While Kurmanji and Sorani continued to develop in the twentieth century, though mainly in the diaspora in the case of Kurmanji,³ Gorani declined from the mid-nineteenth century and was never restored. Today Gorani is spoken in a small area of Hawraman (in western Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan) and its use as a written language is limited to a few sporadic attempts. In 2008 Gorani was recognised as an endangered language by UNESCO.⁴ The development of classical Gorani literature, its genres, literary features, and main literary figures are elaborated in this article.

Gorani literature with a rich oral and written literary tradition constitutes a significant part of Kurdish literary heritage. Gorani is the sacred language of the Ahl-e Haqq people and the language they adopted for their religious texts. With the patronage of the Ardalans, Gorani developed into a “literary koine” in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Hassanpour, 1990: 68; Blau, 1996: 21; Minorsky, 1943: 76) and was used as a medium of poetic expression by non-Gorani speakers, not only in the Ardalán principality but also in neighbouring areas (Hassanpour, 1990: 68). But who were the Ardalans who played such a significant role in the development of Gorani literature?

The Ardalans established a semi-autonomous Kurdish emirate in the north-west of Iran in the fourteenth century. In *Sharafnameh*⁵ the Ardalans are mentioned among “the great rulers of Kurdistan who although did not claim royalty and independence but at times [“ba ‘zi owqat”] had coins minted and

mawluds which were published in 1899 and 1933 (by Mele Ehmedê Xasî and Usman Efendiye Babi) and no other literary texts were published until the 1970s.” (Ghaderi, 2015).

² The relation of these literary endeavours and how much influence they had on each other are questions yet to be answered, but the picture of classical Kurdish literature as a whole is fragmented, disjointed, and episodic.

³ The newly established Turkish Republic banned the use of Kurmanji in Turkey in 1924. The Kurdish language was legalised in 1991, but the Turkish government implemented new laws to control its use (Gunter, 2009: xxxi). To read more on the circumstances of the Kurdish language in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq see Sheyholislami (2012), Zeydanlioğlu (2012), and Kreyenbroek (1992).

⁴ UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger is accessible at <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php>

⁵ *Sharafnameh* is an important historic text about the Kurds written by Sharaf Khan Bidlisi in Persian in 1597.

the Friday sermon pronounced in their name.” (Bidlisi, 1964: 11)⁶ According to *Sharafnameh*, Baba Ardalan, the earliest leader of the Ardalans, was a descendent of Ahmad bin Marwan from Diyarbakr who resided for some time among the Gorans and towards the end of the Chengizid rule in Persia took over the Shahrazur (Bidlisi, 1964: 117–118). The Ardalans moved to Sine (Sanandaj), most likely in the fourteenth century (Oberling, 1988), and made it the capital of their emirate. The Ardalans were loyal to the Persian kings and as McDowall notes, only broke their loyalty under duress (McDowall, 2007: 33). As well as being a key factor in the battles against the Ottomans, they played a significant role in suppressing the other Kurdish tribes (ibid.: 32) and thus kept the border under the control of Iran. Some of the Ardalan princes were raised and educated in the court of Persian kings and were married to Persian princesses. The highly celebrated Khan Ahmad Khan of Ardalan was raised in Shah Abbas Safavid court (Oberling, 1988) and was married to his sister (McDowall, 2007: 32). The long rule of the Ardalans and their semi-autonomous emirate was brought to an end in 1867–68 by Naser-al-Din Shah who removed Aman-Allah Khan, the last *wali* of Ardalan, from power and appointed his uncle, Farhad Mirza Mo‘tamad-al-Dawla, as the governor (Oberling, 1988).

Under their long reign the Ardalan princes provided patronage to Kurdish poets and litterateurs and supported the cultivation of Gorani literature, in all probability, because they spoke the language (Minorsky, 1943: 76; Soane, 1921: 57). Gorani enjoyed centuries of prominence and prestige; anthologies compiled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the *Divans* of prominent Gorani poets testify to the lively literary life under the Ardalans. Gorani was for some time even adopted as the court language in the neighbouring rival principality of the Babans.⁷ The Babans later cultivated Sorani inside the royal court, which resulted in the emergence of a prominent Sorani literary tradition. However, with the fall of the Ardalans Gorani literature lost its status and declined dramatically, gradually being supplanted by the newly cultivated Sorani.

The decline of Gorani and its subsequent replacement with Sorani in the twentieth century, has not yet been the subject of significant scholarly study; however, one can propose a preliminary explanation of the phenomenon. Gorani was not widely spoken, but up to the nineteenth century was adopted as a literary language by Sorani speakers in the Persian and Ottoman empires. Once the language lost its princely support, the Sorani speakers who found Sorani gradually gaining prestige and status under the Babans’ patronage, took it up as their written language, along with Persian, Arabic and Turkish. After all, as Soane (1921: 57) suggests, Gorani was “only officially kept alive in Sina by its recognition as the official language” in the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, while Sorani had the opportunity to be recognised as an official

⁶ All translations in this article are mine unless stated otherwise.

⁷ The Babans were the Ardalans’ biggest rival with whom they were constantly fighting for territorial control.

language in post-1918 Iraq, in modern Iran there was no state support for native languages like Gorani (Hassanpour, 1990: 68).

That Gorani literature dramatically faded following the fall of the Ardalans in the second half of the nineteenth century testifies to the significance of the princely patronage for its cultivation. Nevertheless, other factors have also been suggested for its eminent status. Xeznedar (2002: 12) and Muhemmed (1990: 38) have proposed that Gorani's prominence stems from its use as the sacred language of the Ahl-e Haqq/Yarsan people and the language of a significant part of their religious literature. Hassanpour (1990: 68) has refuted this and argues that because of the secrecy associated with Ahl-e Haqq, as a minority religion, it could not enhance the status of the language. Whilst it is true that Ahl-e Haqq religious literature had limited circulation and was not shared with the non-Ahl-e Haqq, the adoption of Gorani as the vehicle for transmitting their belief system had refined the language and influenced Gorani oral literature, which then became the basis of written Gorani literature. Ahl-e Haqq religious literature shares certain elements in form and language with classical Gorani literature. Hekim Mela Salih (2008: 71) has also suggested that a considerable number of Gorani poets were the followers of Neqşbendî sheikhs of Hawraman who were Gorani speakers, so they adopted Gorani to express their feelings and passion, even though they themselves were not Gorani speakers. Mewlewî, the iconic Gorani poet, is a case in point. Among the Sorani speakers who wrote in Gorani, as well as Sorani, Mela Salih (*ibid.*) mentions Salimî Sine (1848–1911), Mela Salih Herîq (1856–1909) and Şêx Muhemmed Saleh Fexrol 'Olema (1830–1885). Before examining Gorani literature a short comment on the nomenclature of the language and the controversies of its origin is helpful.

Gorani or Hawrami? Kurdish or Persian?

The designation of the dialect is a matter of dispute with Western scholars generally referring to it as “Gorani” or “Gurani” [other spellings are “Gūrānî,” “Gurānî,” and “Gorānî”] (Soane, 1921; Minorsky, 1943; MacKenzie, 1965; Kreyenbroek, 1992) and Kurdish scholars referring to it as “Hewrami” or “Hewramanî” (Hassanpour, 1990; Hewramanî, 2004). While Gorani is an established designation in Western literature, in the Kurdish region it is unheard of. Leezenberg (1993), commenting on the confusion of the nomenclature of the group of dialects known as Gorani, noted that none of his informants “save those familiar with European writings on the subject” ever referred to the language as “Gorani” and instead used “Hawrami” or “Hawramanî”. MacKenzie (2002) argued for the use of the term Gorani as a generic label for a collection of north-west Iranian dialects including the dialect of the Hawraman area on the Iran-Iraq border, Kandula, north-west of Kermanshah, and “Bājalānî” around Zohab and Qasre Shirin in Iran extending to the Shabak and the Bajalans in Iraq. Whether or not Gorani is an appropriate designation

needs to be examined by scholars of linguistics,⁸ but in this article Gorani is used as a generic term to refer to the group of dialects mentioned by MacKenzie.

The origin of Gorani is also an ongoing dispute and current scholarship is dominated by two major discourses, with one considering it as a Kurdish dialect and the other a dialect of the Persian language. Hassanpour (1998: 36–7) traces the claim of the non-Kurdish origin of Gorani (or as he calls it Hewrami) to Charles Rieu and a short grammatical survey of the dialect in his *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (1881). Rieu noted that C. J. Rich, the buyer of one of the Gorani manuscripts he catalogued, had identified the work as Kurdish, “[T]wo poems in the Gorani dialect of the Courdish Language; purchased at Sine, August 1820.” (cited in *ibid.*: 37) Nevertheless, trying to decode the language and comparing it to Persian he concluded that:

Although spoken in Kurdistan, the dialect is essentially Persian. In its vocabulary and grammatical structure, it agrees in the main with the language of Iran, from which it differs, however, by certain phonetical changes, by its verbal inflexions, its prepositions, and some other peculiar words. (cited in *ibid.*: 36–7)

Hassanpour (1998: 42) rightly problematises the use of Persian grammar as a benchmark and criticises relying on comparative philology and genetic classification of language as the main, or the only, method of determining the Kurdish or non-Kurdish origin of Gorani. In his review of Soane’s (1921), Minorsky’s (1943) and MacKenzie’s (1965) accounts of Gorani, Hassanpour (*ibid.*: 37) notes that “the construction of Hewrami genealogy by Western linguists was no more than a reiteration of Rieu”.⁹

In Gorani literature “Kurdish” rather than “Gorani” or “Hewrami” is used to refer to the language. A famous example is Xanay Qubadî, a prominent Gorani poet of the eighteenth century, who in the introduction to his famous epic *Xosrow û Şîrîn*, explains why he wrote the poem in the “Kurdish language” (*bi lefzê Kurdî*) (1969: 20–21), when referring to Gorani. Likewise, Rencûrî (1750–1809), another renowned Gorani poet, has a eulogy for Kurdish poets (*so‘erayê Kurdistan*) in which he names fifty-five poets, most of whom are known as Gorani poets.¹⁰ Even Minorsky, who argued Gorani was an Iranian, non-

⁸ Two more recent linguistic studies of the dialects spoken in south of Hawraman in the villages of Gawraju and Zarda refer to the dialects as “Gorani”: Mahmoudveysi et al. *The Gorani language of Gawraju (Gawrajuyi), a village of West Iran* (2012) and Mahmoudveysi and Bailey. *The Gorani language of Zarda, a village of West Iran. Texts, grammar, and lexicon* (2013).

⁹ In his comments on Rieu’s work, Minorsky says “[W]ith no outside assistance Rieu succeeded in deciphering the meaning of the text and in preparing a clear resume of the Gurani grammar” (Minorsky, 1943: 89–90). Minorsky’s use of the word “deciphering” for Rieu’s work and emphasising the lack of “outside assistance” implies that Rieu was not familiar with Gorani and Kurdish. If Rieu managed “to decipher” the language using his Persian language knowledge, it is hardly surprising that he concluded Gorani to be a Persian dialect.

¹⁰ See the poem in Xeznedar (2002: 119–121).

Kurdish language, acknowledged that Hajj Ni'mat-allah (1871–1920), author of the *Firqan al-Akhhbar*, wrote *Risala-yi Tabqiq* in “Kurdish” and by Kurdish he actually meant Gorani: “because elsewhere he writes that Kurdish was the language of Sultan Sahak, whom we know to have spoken Gurani” (1943: 75–89). He further acknowledges that the Kurdish quotations in the *Firqan* also proved to be in Gorani (ibid.: 89). Modern Kurdish poets like Goran (1904–1962) and Pîremêrd (1867–1950), who were influenced by classical Gorani poetry in their writing, did not hesitate to call the literature Kurdish. In fact, as Hassanpour notes, until the 1960s, few Kurds knew about the European constructions of the genealogy of Gorani, but the Kurdish scholars’ response has been “generally, resentment and resistance” (1998: 35).

Among the scholars who have defied Western views on Gorani, one should mention Hewramanî (1981), Muhemmed (1990), as well as Hassanpour (1998). In more recent studies of Gorani, scholars are more cautious when drawing conclusions on the ethnic affiliation of the Gorani speakers and acknowledge that Gorani speakers think of themselves as Kurds (Kreyenbroek, 1992: 55; Leezenberg 1993). Further linguistic research is required to ascertain where Gorani stands and determine whether it is a dialect or language. For the purpose of this study suffice it to say that Gorani speakers presently regard themselves as Kurds despite, as Leezenberg (1993) notes, being aware that their dialect is not mutually comprehensible for Kurmanji or Sorani speakers.

Prior to a discussion of Gorani literature and its forms, I take a brief overview of Ahl-e Haqq, or Yarsan, religious literature. This literature was important in shaping Gorani poetry and there are shared elements which cannot be ignored. Indeed, an overview of Ahl-e Haqq literature is essential for fully understanding and appreciating Gorani poetry, oral and written.

Ahl-e Haqq/Yarsan Literature

Ahl-e Haqq, or Yarsan, known in the West as the People of Truth, is a sect found in western Iran and some regions of northeastern Iraq (Halm, 1982; Minorsky, 2012).¹¹ In Iran communities of Ahl-e Haqq live in the provinces of Kordestan, Kermanshah, and Western Azerbaijan, and in Tehran and some other cities (Kreyenbroek, 2010: 72).¹² The origins of the religion are under speculation, but there is a general consensus on its emergence (or its revival) dating back to the fifteenth century and to Sultan Sahak as its founder or the person who shaped its final form (Kreyenbroek, 2010: 73; Halm, 1982; Hamzeh’ee, 1990).¹³ Ahl-e Haqq has its own unique myth of creation which

¹¹ In Iraq the Ahl-e Haqq followers are known as “Kakayi”.

¹² Two main sanctuaries of the sect, the tomb of Baba Yadgar in Zohab and Soltan Sahak in Perdivar, are located in “Gürânî territory” (Halm, 1982).

¹³ Sefizade (1990) and Xeznedar (2001) date the history of the religion back to the seventh and eighth centuries, but argue that it declined in the Middle Ages until Sultan Sahak restored and revived it in the fifteenth century. However, Hamzeh’ee who contemplates the early history of Ahl-e Haqq against the lack of record and based solely on information provided by the

begins in pre-eternity when the Divine essence was located in a pearl. The Divine essence then manifested himself as *Khavankar* upon the request of The Seven Bodies (the seven angels who appear shortly before the Divine manifestation) (Hamzeh'ee, 1990: 70–72). The seven successive manifestations of the Divinity are at the heart of the Ahl-e Haqq religion. Hamzeh'ee (1990: 90–91), who has published an extensive study on the religion, explains that the first three incarnations after Khavankar are 'Ali,¹⁴ Shah Khoshin and Sultan Sahak, but there are different opinions on the other successors. The Ahl-e Haqq divides world history into three epochs, in each of them the Divinity is accompanied by seven angels (ibid.: 98–107). Kreyenbroek (2010: 73), commenting on religious affiliation of the Ahl-e Haqq, says that most (though not all) of them consider themselves as Shiites. This is probably incorrect as Ahl-e Haqq were under duress to cover their religious beliefs. In Iran Ahl-e Haqq is not a recognised religion and its followers are deprived of their rights and cannot even attend universities or get state employment, therefore to avoid discrimination they have made themselves known as Shiites. In recent years the duress they have been under has been brought more to the attention of the Iranian public.¹⁵

Although Persian, Kurdish, Lori, and Turkish speaker communities have contributed to the Ahl-e Haqq tradition, as Kreyenbroek (2010: 72) rightly notes, their religious literature is mainly in Gorani. The tradition is predominantly oral and Ahl-e Haqq lacks a canonical scripture and their religious songs, known as *Kalam*, have been compiled into several collections (Halm, 1982; Minorsky, 2012). Some of these collections have been published in the twentieth century (Suri, 1965; Sefizade, 2006). It seems that the oral literature started to be written down at the later stages of the development of the religion, but the exact date of this transmission is disputed. While Kreyenbroek (2010: 86) refuses the possibility that any of the manuscripts can be dated back before the nineteenth century, some Kurdish critics and writers claim the works to be much older (Sefizade, 2006; Xeznedar, 2001: 233–305). What is important, however, is that the religion has largely been transmitted through oral performance of the *Kalams* in the gatherings (known as *jam*) and has not relied on written manuscripts for its transmission. The *Kalams* are traditionally memorised, studied, and performed by trained transmitters who are called “Kalamkhan” (Kreyenbroek, 2010: 84). The recitation of the *Kalams*

community itself, warns that any information on the periods prior to the fifteenth century should be dealt with cautiously (Hamzeh'ee, 1990: 41).

¹⁴ Ahl-e Haqq have been referred to as “‘Alī-Allāhī” because they consider ‘Ali to be the Divine’s incarnation. Nevertheless, as Halm (1982) rightly notes, this is misleading as ‘Ali plays only a minor role in their belief system.

¹⁵ Self-immolation of a number of Ahl-e Haqq followers in June and July 2013 in Iran in protest against their humiliating treatment and discrimination is one of the incidents that brought their struggles to the attention of the public.

is traditionally accompanied by music and the playing of the tanbur (a long-necked string instrument).¹⁶

A thorough study of Ahl-e Haqq literature is yet to be produced, but there have been attempts by Kurdish literary critics and scholars to classify and study aspects of the literature. Mohammad Mokri has made significant contributions to the study of Ahl-e Haqq texts; among his works are *Le chasseur de Dieu et le mythe du Roi-Aigle (Dawra-y Damyari)* (1967) and *La Grande Assemblée des Fidèles de Vérité au tribunal sur le mont Zagros en Iran (Dawra-y Dîwāna Gawra)* (1977). Xeznedar starts his extensive literary historiography, *Méjûy Edebî Kurdî* (the History of Kurdish Literature), with Ahl-e Haqq literature and classifies it into three stages (2001: 232–34). However, in the light of the scarcity of information on the genesis and the development of Ahl-e Haqq literature, proposing a plausible classification is a difficult task. The majority of the *Kalams* have remained unpublished and a detailed study of the *Kalams* is needed to provide a comprehensive picture of the literary tradition. Although some of the *Kalams* contain prose (for instance in *Saranjam*), poetry is the dominant literary form.

The *Kalams*, as the main channel of transmitting the religion, reflect Ahl-e Haqq religious beliefs and principles, therefore understanding them requires not only linguistic knowledge (of Gorani), but also of the religion itself. The following lines, which are attributed to Baba Serhengê Dewdanî, illustrate this point:

Heftem ser xêlen, Heftem ser xêlen
Ci asman da, Heftem ser xêlen
Her yek we rengê, ne geşt û gêlen
Her yek pey karê aware w wêlen (cited in Xeznedar, 2001: 236).

The Seven are the leaders; The Seven are the leaders.

The Seven in the sky are the leaders.

They are at work and endeavour,

Each in haste, pursuing a mission.

The seven bodies (*baftan*) are the seven angels of each epoch accompanying the Divine, according to Ahl-e Haqq. The *Kalams* are interpreted and explained by *Kalamkêhans*.

The above poem reflects a number of formal features of Ahl-e Haqq poetry. The poem is in a ten-syllabic metre, which is the most common metre of Ahl-e Haqq poetry.¹⁷ Each hemistich is divided by a caesura (5+5). The repetition

¹⁶ For an extensive study of the importance of music in Ahl-e Haqq see, P. Hooshmandrad (2004). *Performing the belief: Sacred musical practice of the Kurdish Ahl-i Haqq of Goran*.

¹⁷ Although ten-syllabic metre is the most common metre, 7, 8, 9, and up to 17 and 18 syllabic metre are also observed in the *Kalams*. Mohamadi and Tabibzadeh, in their analysis of metre in four *Kalams*, illustrate that ten-syllabic metre has the biggest proportion compared with other metres. They argue that older *Kalams* have more variety of metres (like *Kalam-e Pardinvar*), but the variety gradually faded and the ten-syllabic metre became the main metre in use. They explain

of the first half line is another common feature of Ahl-e Haqq poetry. The above quatrain is mono-rhymed, which along with abab and abbb are the most common rhyme schemes.

In the *Kalams* we get to know the prominent figures of the religion. The following lines have been ascribed to Shah Khoshin, who is believed to have been born of a virgin (Hamzeh'ee, 1990: 90). He mentions "Celale" as his mother, but does not speak about his father. The lines also make a reference to incarnation (*Donadon*), which is at the heart of the Ahl-e Haqq belief system:

Mamam Celale, Kakam Rengîne
Don wa don amam, çîne we çîne
Ha îsa yûrt û namim Xoşîne
Her kes bişnaso, pakîş mew kîne (cited in Xeznedar, 2001: 242).

My mother is Celale, Benyamin is my leader.
 I am here with incarnation, as is the custom.
 Now, my name is Shah Khoshin,
 Those who come to know me, would reach certainty.

In the *Kalams* there are many references to Iranian mythology and the characters of the Persian *Shahnameh* (composed in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries by Ferdowsi), as well as the *Kurdish Shahnameh* (*Şanamey Kurdî*), as noted by Mokri (1966-1971), Bahrami (2004: 30-33), and Chamanara (2013: 169). The ancient Iranian and Kurdish heroes are depicted as the re-incarnation of the great religious leaders of the Yarsan, as the following lines illustrate:

Rûsem bî Binyam, pîr şifaban
Ham Gîw bî Dawûd, çerxçî cihan
Gûderz pîr Musa, nîketaî tîr nîşan
Rûsemi yekdes, Mustefay Dewdan (cited in Bahrami, 2004: 26).

Rostam was Benyamin reincarnated, the healing master.
 Giv was Pir Dawud reincarnated, in charge of the world's affairs.
 Goodarz was Pir Moosa reincarnated.
 The one-handed Rostam was Mustafay Dawdan reincarnated.

Rostam, Giv, and Goodarz are the heroes of *Shahnameh*, while one-handed Rostam is a mythical hero of *Kurdish Shahnameh*. The stories of the *Kalams* also reflect the ancient Iranian history and myth. In the following lines which are ascribed to Baba Yadgar, he says that he was Barbad, the minstrel-poet of the court of the Sasanian king Khosrow II Parvez (591-628 AD):¹⁸

Yaga ke Xosren, Behram da şikest
We rebkê û ferman, xwacekey Elest
Barbed ama, Berbetî ne dest

this as the influence of 'arûzî poetry and a sign that the oral tradition began to be written down (2005: 5-9).

¹⁸ On *Barbad* see Tafazzoli (1988). Barbad. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

Sê away Kurdî, pey dildaran best
Ez Barbed bîm, new bezmgay Elest (cited in Xeznedar, 2001: 282).

Where Khosrow defeated Bahram
 With the will of the Lord of Alast [the Eternal Power],
 Barbad came and with barbat (lute)¹⁹ in hand,
 Recited three Kurdish songs,
 I was Barbad in that eternal feast.

The poem exhibits a mixture of pre-Islamic and Islamic allusions. There is an allusion to the battle of Khosrow Parvez and the usurper of his throne, Bahram Chobin in 591. Baba Yadgar is said to be the incarnation of Barbad, the legendary musician of Khosrow Parvez's court. Yet, in the poem the Creator is referred to as "the Lord of Alast" (*Xajeye Alast*), which is an allusion to the famous Quranic verse *alastu bi-rabbikum* (Am I not your Lord?) and a well-known theme in Islamic Sufism and Sufi poetry. In verse 172 of Al-A 'raf Sura, God asked the yet uncreated souls of Adam's offspring, "Am I not your Lord?" which was met with the response "yes, we have testified" (Sura VII: 172). Thus, a pledge was sealed between God and man in pre-Eternity ('*abd-i Alast*). This pre-Eternity covenant is a recurrent theme in Sufi poetry.²⁰

The Ahl-e Haqq *Monajat* (prayer poems) reflect the influence of Islamic Sufism and Sufi literature. The following lines attributed to Shah Ibrahim illustrate the symbolic language of this genre:

Şahenşay şaban, Şahenşay şaban
Bê me'awa w mekan, şahenşay şaban
Agay her dû ser, rehnmay rahan
Mutî'olarim, ji emr w xaban
Seda ce wêtan, ême rebabin (cited in Xeznedar, 2001: 274).

The King of kings, The King of kings
 The King of kings, the Ever-present
 With knowledge of both worlds, The Guide of all paths
 We are humbly obedient to your orders and wishes.
 You are the music, we are the Robab [lute].

"King," "Ever-present," and "Guide" are the names of God in Quran and Islamic Sufism. The last line reflects determinism, which is a recurrent theme in both Ahl-e Haqq *Kalams*, Quran, and Sufi literature.

¹⁹ Barbat is a short-necked lute characterised by its flat, pear-shaped sound box. See During (1988). Barbat. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

²⁰ On this theme in Persian poetry see L. Anvar (2010: 123–143). The radiance of Epiphany: the Vision of Beauty and Love in Hâfiz's Poem of Pre-Eternity. In Lewisohn (ed.). *Hâfiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*.

Gorani Poetry

Epic and lyric are the main literary genres in Gorani literature (Minorsky, 1943: 89–103).²¹ Both genres manifest unique characteristics which set them apart from the classical Kurdish poetry of Kurmanji and Sorani. Despite embodying a rich array of literature of hundreds of years old, it is significantly under-researched within the field of Kurdish studies and is largely obscure within the broader contexts of Iranian and Middle Eastern studies. In what follows the main thematic and formal features of Gorani poetry, the prominent literary figures, and the major literary works are examined. Due to its cultural significance epic is considered first.

Gorani epic

Perhaps the best example of Gorani epic poetry is the *Kurdish Shahnameh*, which, despite its name, is not merely the translation of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Chamanara (2013: 164) describes the *Kurdish Shahnameh* as an important part of Kurdish oral culture and a tradition with roots in the tribal and rural cultures of the Zagros regions. *Shahnameh-kebani*, the oral performance of *Shahnameh*, has been traditionally accompanied by music along with a display of paintings (ibid.: 166–67). The oral tradition, however, lent itself to manuscript tradition throughout the ages (ibid.). While the *Kurdish Shahnameh* shares some stories with the Persian *Shahnameh*, there are a number of distinctively different stories in the *Kurdish Shahnameh* which do not exist in the Persian *Shahnameh*, like “*Rostam o Saghlāb Dēw* and *Rostam o Zanūn*” (ibid.: 175).²² The oral performance of *Kurdish Shahnameh* is still alive in parts of Kurdistan, however, the tradition is fast disappearing.

The manuscript tradition of *Kurdish Shahnameh*, similar to that of Ahl-e Haqq literature, has not produced one single book, but a collection of booklets with each recording one story (ibid.: 167). The majority of the manuscripts are yet to be published, but among those published one should mention Mohammad Mokri's *La Légende de Bižan-u Manjā* (the Legend of Bijan and Manijeh, 1966) and Mustefa Goran's *Shahname-ye Kurdi: Javahirpush* (Kurdish Shahnameh: Javahirpush, 2004). *Javahirpush* narrates the story of the Iranian and Turanian wars, and the title, Javahirpush, is the name of one of the heroes in the story, who is a descendant of Rostam, the legendary Iranian hero in the Persian *Shahnameh*. The story is 5061 distich (*beyt*) long and was told by Mustefa Goran, probably in the eighteenth century (Bahrami, 2004: 38–43). Bahrami notes that not only the kings and the heroes are Kurdish, but also none of the events correspond with Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (2004: 42). Furthermore, within the battles demons and wizards play significant roles (ibid.: 38).

²¹ Minorsky classifies Gorani literature into three classes of epic, lyric and religious poetry (1943: 89–103).

²² Chamanara notes that some of the stories in the Persian *Shahnameh*, particularly historical ones, do not exist in the *Kurdish Shahnameh*.

Among other well-known epics one can mention *Heft Leşker* (Seven Troops), *Nadir û Topal* or *Nadirname* (The Book of Nader) and *Şemal û Zelan* (Shamal and Zalan), which are ascribed to Elmas Xan Kendûleyî (1702–1776) (Xeznedar, 2002: 60–61). While some of the epics are distinctively Kurdish, the stories in some others are shared by other Iranian people. A famous example is the story of Sheikh San‘an, the Sufi master who fell in love with a Christian woman and lost his faith, reputation and fame. The author of the Gorani version of *Sheikh San‘an* is unknown.²³ The opening lines of the story are:

Bivaço te ‘rîf Sen‘anî gumr’a
Ci gumrahî wêş çon berçî ci ra
Çil sal bê Sen‘an ci qapî herem
‘Îbadet mekerd bê ziyad û kem
Çenê çwarsed mûrîdî sermest
Laqeyd û bê bak, ragey heqperest
Royê nîştebê, neser secadet
Wateş kê kerdên çon min ‘îbadet
Ce meXRûrî wêş fexreş kerdewe
Şîşey bednamîş da we berdewe (cited in Hewramanî, 2004: 9).

Let me tell you the tale of San‘an, the lost one,
 How out of ignorance he lost his way.
 For forty years, San‘an on the sacred altar,
 Prayed without failing,
 With four hundred disciples intoxicated with the faith,
 Completely devoted and dedicated to the ultimate Truth.
 One day, sitting on his prayer mat,
 He said to himself, who has prayed like me?
 He felt proud and this ignorant pride,
 Shattered his fame.

One of the manuscripts of this epic indicates the date of its composition as follows:

Eger biprsan ci tarîx û wext
Qecer nîştebê ne şad ne ruy text
hezâr û dwîst bîst û sê sal bê
Feth ‘Elî şa, bolend îqbalê bê (ibid.: 34).

If asked about the date and time,
 [tell] Qajars were gracefully on the throne,
 The date is 1223 [1808],
 May Fath ‘Ali Shah enjoy a grand destiny.

²³ The story of Sheikh San‘an is written by ‘Attar, the twelfth century Persian poet and mystic in his famous *Manteq al-tayr* (The conference of birds, 1177).

The Gorani epics, like the Ahl-e Haqq *Kalams*, are written in ten-syllabic metre with a caesura in the middle (5+5). They follow mathnavi rhyme schemes (aa, bb, cc, ...) which suits the purpose of long narratives. Not all epics, however, are written in syllabic metre. Xanay Qubadî (1700–1759), inspired by Nezami Ganjavi's (1141–1209) *Khosrow o Shîrîn*, wrote an epic romance of the same name, *Xosrow û Şîrîn in hazaj*, the exact 'arûzi metre²⁴ employed by Nezami. *Xosrow û Şîrîn* was completed in 1153/1741 and with 5526 lines, is one of the longest Kurdish epics to have survived.

The flowing and musical style of the poem indicates the poet's skill in employing 'arûz and his mastery of the Kurdish language. The language is embellished and sophisticated, illustrating the poet's erudition. The poem follows the conventional structure of *mathnavî*²⁵ with prologue and *monajat* (praying). In the prologue Qubadî invokes God, asking for the imagination and skill of Nezami, to whom he pays tribute on many occasions throughout the poem. An excerpt of the prologue illustrates his language and form:

Wêney Nîzamî seyqel der zeynim
 Bi surmey danîş roşen ker 'eynim
 Take maceray Şîrîn û Xosrew
 Sengtaştî Ferhad sergûzeşt ew
 Baweron be nezm xastir ci gewber
 Bi reşh xamey şox bo 'enber
 Ce lay 'aqlan sabeb 'eqî û dîn
 Dana bozorgan kurdsitan zemîn
 Rasten mewaçan Farsî şekerern
 Kurdî ce Farsî bel şîrînterîn
 Pey çêş ne denran ey dinyay bedkêş
 Mehzunen her kes be zûbanê weş
 Me'lûmen her kes be her zûbanê
 Bîwaço nezmê ce her mekanê
 Wêney 'erûsan zîbay moşkê çîn
 Bîkeros ce husnî 'îbaret şîrîn
 Xaric ce me'nî nebo meznûnes
 Gûya bo çon şîr Camî mewzûnes
 Ce lay xêredmend dil pesend mebo
 Şîrîntir ce şehd şîrey qend mebo
 Ce 'ersey dinyay dîn bedfercam
 Be destûrê nezm Nîzamî tamam
 Bi lefzê Kurdî Kurdistan tamam

²⁴ Hazaj (*Mafâ'ilun Mafâ'ilun* (مفاعيلن مفاعيلن)) is one of the most common metres in the 'arûz metrical system.

²⁵ *Mathnavî* in Persian poetry has been rightly regarded by critics as fulfilling the role of the drama in classical Persian literature (Morrison, 1981: 10), which is also true for Kurdish literature. The rhyming couplet in *mathnavî* gives the poet the freedom to write as many lines as needed for the purpose of narrating the story.

Pêş bwan mebzûz baqî weselam (1969: 20–21).

[Pray] make my mind sharp like Nezami's
 With the kohl of knowledge, brighten my eyes.
 [so that] the story of Shirin and Khosrow,
 [and] Farhad, who carved his way through the rock, and his fate,
 I compose in verse, finer than pearls,
 With the ambergris-scented perspiration of my pen.
 To the lords of wisdom and faith [and]
 The knowledgeable elders of Kurdistan,
 Although it is said that "Farsi is sugar,"
 Kurdish is much sweeter than Farsi.
 For some reason in this cruel world
 Everyone is attached to their [own] language.
 Of course anyone composing in any language,
 And writing from any corner [of this world],
 Will beautify [their verse] like musk-scented fair brides,
 With the adornments of pleasing rhetoric.
 To be articulate and meaningful
 And as eloquent as Jami's²⁶ rhyme,
 So that it is accepted by the wise,
 And becomes sweeter than Molasses.
 [thus, I present this work] in this ghoulish world
 Following the verses of Nezami, complete
 In the Kurdish tongue, to be enjoyed [by the wise of Kurdistan].

It is unfortunate that this masterpiece has not yet attracted the attention of literary scholars. Qubadi's remarks on the Kurdish language remind one of Ehmedê Xani's opening comments in *Mem û Zîn* (1692), but while *Mem û Zîn* has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention, *Xosrow û Şîrîn* is yet to be fully discovered. In Kurdish literary studies, as I have previously discussed, Gorani literature is marginalised and overlooked, and indeed the obscurity of *Xosrow û Şîrîn* testifies to this (Ghaderi, 2015: 3-25).

The scope of this article does not allow further examination of the Gorani epic, but suffice to say it opens a new unexplored world, the study of which will shed new light on Kurdish classical literature.

Gorani lyric

Ghazal is the predominant Gorani poetic form; nevertheless, Gorani *ghazal* is distinctively different from Persian *ghazal* in form. Gorani *ghazal*, also called *xezeli xomatî* (local *ghazal*) (Gerdi, 1999: 270; Xeznedar, 2001 & 2002), is varied in length and can be between five to twelve or more lines. The metre, unlike Persian *ghazal*, is syllabic, with decasyllabic lines and a caesura in the middle

²⁶ Jami is the Persian poet, scholar, and Sufi of the 15th century.

(5+5) as the most common form. Other syllabic metres practiced in Gorani *ghazal* are eight (4+4) and seven (4+3). As for rhyme, Gorani *ghazal* is written predominantly in rhyming couplet, *mathnavî* rhyme (Muhemmed, 1990: 107; Gerdî, 1999: 271). In his extensive study of Kurdish rhyme schemes, ‘Ezîz Gerdî (1999) illustrates that although couplet rhyme (*mathnavî* rhyme) is the dominant rhyme scheme, there is no strict rhyme pattern in Gorani *ghazal* and poets manifest great liberty in employing rhyme. He shows that sometimes a particular rhyme is repeated in more than two lines, for instance in Mewlewî (1806–1882) and Bêsarani (1643–1701) and sometimes mono rhyme is practiced, for instance in Rencûrî (1750–1809) and Seydî Hewramî (1784–1848) (ibid.: 275). Gerdî (ibid.: 273–74) also illustrates that the first and the second distiches in Gorani *ghazal* are usually rhymed. The first line of Gorani *ghazal* is usually a half line, of five syllables. Sometimes, the half line is repeated to make the line a decasyllabic line. The following lines by Mehzûnî (1643–1701)²⁷ illustrate the above points:

Taf dêwane,
Tafî seyday eşq, wêl dêwane
Be soz seday razan te'ane
Meşano koko mirwarî dane
Coşîş çon zerîf mehbûb dilber
Bexende mewzî mirwarî we ber
Şew û roj nexmey soz û saz pêşen
Daxo yend senda, ce eşq kêşen!
Herkes aşiqen, pêse cesteş bo
Pêse coyay west awat westeş bo (cited in Soltani, 1998: 278).

The mad waterfall,
 The wanton, maddened, lovesick waterfall
 Sighing its song of desire,
 scatters mountains of its pearls.
 Its effervescence is like that of my beautiful sweetheart
 Who, when she laughs, brings forward the pearls (of her teeth).
 It sings the theme of burning and longing
 All day long, all through the night.
 Who knows, for whose love, he bears such anguish?
 All true lovers share this condition
 And in so doing, ever seek their ideal (Translated by Soltani, 1998: 22).

The poet draws on the image of a waterfall to depict the madness, passion, and the pain of love. Drawing on nature, and in particular Kurdish nature, to express ideas, feelings, and emotions, is one of the features of Gorani poetry

²⁷ In Kurdish literary history Mehzûnî and Bêsarani are discussed as two poets, but Soltani and a number of other critics have argued that they are the same. See Soltani (1997). Bêsarani yan Mehzûnî? In *Destnûsê Kurdî û Farsî Sebarete be Kurd le Kitêbxanekani Beritanyaya*.

which attracted the attention of modernist Kurdish poets such as Pîremêrd and Goran in the twentieth century.

Although *ghazal* is almost synonymous with love poetry, the Gorani *ghazal* is also used for elegies, nature, and epistolary poems. The best known love poems are the *ghazals* of Mehzûnî (1643–1701), Mewlewî (1806–1882) and Welî Dêwane (1754–1798) which have been popular due to the accessibility of their language, their flowing music, and delicate images. While Persianate images are an integral part of Gorani lyric, the frequency of images which draw on Kurdish cultural and folkloric elements makes knowledge of Kurdish culture imperative for fully understanding and appreciating the poems. The following poem by Mewlewî, the prominent Gorani poet of the nineteenth century, illustrates this point:

Sîneftim dâr ba leyl zûkameşin
Dîşwarî balay newnemeşin
Henarekey dil pîr ce daney êş
Pîşyay kûrey narî 'eşqî wêş
Be mewday mujgan suraxîş kero
We germî nîşan demaxîş dero (Mewlewî, 2003: 403–404).

God forbid, I have heard Layl (the beloved) has a cold and is suffering;
 I am sending the pomegranate of my heart, with its seeds of pain,
 and heated up with the fire of love,
 Tell her to pierce it with her eyelashes,
 and drink up warm (for cure).

The heated pomegranate is an allusion to a belief in Kurdish traditional medicine that drinking the juice of a heated pomegranate cures a cold. As well as folkloric elements, Gorani poetry is replete with images of Kurdish nature and landscape and references to the names of Kurdish rivers, mountains, flowers, wild plants and birds. Nature poetry, poems devoted to the celebration of nature, constitutes a significant part of Gorani lyrics. Spring is the favourite season, but there are poems depicting the Kurdish Summer, Winter and Autumn. The following lines provide a description of Summer in a *ghazal* by Mewlewî:

Hamin, Ha, min war, germîş, coş awerd
Fezay nezîm, bezîm, new webaran berd (Mewlewî, 2003: 632).

Summer, Summer-like, overheated the warmth,
 [and] has driven away the joyful scenery of the Spring.

In this poem Mewlewî skilfully uses short syllables to depict the excessive heat of the Summer. The word *hamin* (summer) consists of two syllables (ha+min) and the poet breaks the word into its syllables in the first line (*Hamin, Ha, min war*) when mentioning the hot weather, thus conveying breathlessness

because of the excessive heat. The poet employs the same technique in the next three lines, separating the words into their syllables and making four pauses in each line. Such clever use of syllabic metre to convey feelings and emotions inspired the modernist poets who were in search of an alternative to ‘*arûz*. Classical Kurmanji and Sorani poetry are predominantly in ‘*arûzî* metre,²⁸ but abandoning ‘*arûz* and adopting syllabic metre became one of the distinguishing markers of modern Kurdish poetry in the twentieth century. Discarding ‘*arûz* started under the influence of modern Turkish poetry, but the discovery of classical Gorani poetry and its skilful use of syllabic metre was a revelation for modern Kurdish poets and opened their eyes to the capacities of *hija* (syllabic metre).²⁹ Syllabic metre is close to the nature of the Kurdish language and was the metre used in Kurdish folklore (Gerdî, 1999: 70).

Gorani *ghazal* has been also adopted for elegies. Despite sharing stock Persianate images and motives with Kurmanji and Sorani elegies, Gorani elegies are informal, passionate mourning of a beloved, close relative, patron or mentor. Minorsky (1943: 100–103) quotes and translates Komasi’s famous elegy for his wife “*gilkoy tazey Leyl*” (the fresh mound of Leyla) as an example of Gorani elegy. Among other renowned examples of Gorani elegy are Mewlewî’s elegies for his wife, ‘Enber Xatûn, Mestûre Erdelan’s elegies for her husband, Khosrow Khan, and Rencûrî’s elegy for Welî Dêwane, a prominent Gorani poet of the eighteenth century.

Mah Şeref Xanim Mestûre Erdelan (1805–1848) is most famous for her *Tarikhe Ardalan* (the history of the Ardalans), but also wrote poetry in Persian and Kurdish.³⁰ Mestûre’s elegies are simple, yet strong expression of pain. The opening lines of one of her elegies illustrate the informality and the personal tone of her writing:

Xesrewim webar, Xesrewim webar
Yaşa neyowe îmsal newwebar
Berneyan weber gulân ne gulzar
Nekero dirext şikofe îzbar
Ne sebnî çemen newano bulbûl
Henî nenîšo jale ne rûy gul
Nîlûfer ta beşr berneyo ce aw
Ne rûy gul surx nekêşo gûlan
Wenewşe w sunbul, nesrîn û şewbo
Ta qam qiyamet berneyan ce ko

²⁸ Syllabic metre was practiced by some Kurmanji poets such as ‘Elî Herîrî (1009/10–1077/78) and Feqiyê Teyran (1590–1632), but less frequently than ‘*arûz*.

²⁹ I present a detailed account of the construction of modern Kurdish poetry and the influence of Modern Turkish poetry in my doctoral dissertation (Ghaderi, 2016).

³⁰ Mestûre was the second wife of Khosrow Khan of Ardalan, who was already married to Hosne Jahan Xanom, Fath ‘Ali Shah of Qajar’s daughter. Mestûre also wrote *Şarîyat*, a book for instructing religious orthodoxy, in Persian. It was first published as ‘*Aqayed* by ‘Ebdula Merdûx in 1998, and re-published with Kurdish translation in 2005.

*Sosen û lale w re`na w gûlezêrd
Henî sewz neban çenî soz û derd
Sîpay gûlalan xwar û nigûn ban
Şeqayeq reng zêrd ciger pîr hûn ban* (2005: 318–319).

My dear Khosrow, Spring is here,
How I wish it would not have come this year,
How I wish no flowers were grown in the garden
No trees coming into blossom,
No nightingale in the meadow,
No dew on flowers.
I wish water lilies did not come up until Doomsday
And no rosewater be produced.
[how I wish] violets, wallflowers, and hyacinths
would never grow again.
[how I wish] tulips, lilies, yellow flowers, and basil
would not grow to remind me of my pain.
How I wish the troop of flowers were destroyed
And poppies would grow yellow with aching heart.

It is interesting that while Mestûre adopted syllabic metre for her Kurdish poems, she used ‘*arûz*’ for her Persian verses. Her Persian poetry is the prototype of Persian writing of the nineteenth century, nevertheless in her Kurdish writing she is a follower of Gorani tradition. In comparison with her Persian verse, her Kurdish poems are simple which has led some to conclude that her Kurdish writing is “shallow”,³¹ a judgement derived from a lack of understanding of Gorani literary tradition.

Different styles of writing in Kurdish and Persian was common practice amongst all Gorani poets. Whilst they all wrote poetry in Persian, as well as Arabic, their Kurdish poetry followed Gorani tradition and not Persian. This is at a time when classical Kurmanji poetry, which developed in the Ottoman Empire during roughly the same period, closely followed the classical Persian poetry style and is in fact unintelligible without a good grasp of Persian language and classical Persian poetry. In-depth studies are required to explain why this was the case, but one possibility could be that Gorani poetry was built on a strong literary tradition. This does not mean that Persian literature had little impact on the development of Gorani poetry, but the nature of the Persian influence requires more detailed study. Exhaustive research is needed to take us beyond generalised observations on the presence of Persianate images and terminology in Gorani poetry. In fact, it takes little effort to highlight the consciousness of the Gorani poets of Persian literature and their familiarity with

³¹ “The Kurdish poems of Mestûre, if they proved to be hers, are shallow and weak, in comparison with her Persian poems. They do not merit an aesthetic evaluation.” (Mohammadpour, 2006: 164)

the works of Persian masters. The following excerpt from a letter by Welî Dêwane (1754–1798) to Rencûrî (1750–1809) illustrates this point:

Mewlay laṭ şînas, mewlay laṭ şînas
Mewlay ewlewî, danay laṭ şînas
Heyas dîrînas est û neseb xas
Nejad pakan nizamî qîyas
Firdowsî tusî, Camî mulk cam
Xaqanî xeyal, Enwerî eyam
Se'dî succendan behr me'anî
Hafezê Şîraz Sa'ebê sanî
Bêtay bê hemtay qeyûm bê çûn
Hemtay to kemin ne rûy dewr dîn (cited in Muhemmed, 2004: 31).³²

Pearl-expert lord, Pearl-expert lord,
 My lord, my master of pearls,
 My master of noble origin
 Of pure roots, Nezami-like
 [my] Ferdowsi of Tus, Jami of Jam
 [bearer of] Khaqani's imagination, Anwari of our time,
 Sa'di, master mariner of eloquence,
 Hafez of Shiraz, Sa'eb the second
 Unique master of no equal match,
 Your likeness is rare in this ghoulish world.

Welî Dêwane praises Rencûrî as a gifted poet by equating him to the masters of Persian poetry: Jami (1414–1492), Anwari (1126–1189), Sa'di (1210–1291 or 1292), Khaqani (1127–1186 or 1187), and Sa'eb (1592–1676). Highlighting specific qualities of these poets, for instance, the eloquence of Sa'di and the imagination of Khaqani, indicates Dêwane's intimate knowledge of their works. The first metaphor of the poem, "pearl-expert," is however, drawn on the Ahle Haqq belief that the world came into being from a pearl which embodied the Divine essence. Pearl could also be a metaphor for words and literature. Therefore, Rencûrî is praised as the master of the pearls of poesy and a mystic who knows the mysteries of the Pearl.

The above poem is an example of epistolary poetry (*namey şî'rî*), in which poets write letters in verse to their mentors (*pir*), friends and local princes. Mewlewî with eighty-eight *namey şî'rî*, produced the highest number of this literary form among the Gorani poets (Muhemmed, 1990: 187).

Another manifestation of the influence of Persian literature in Gorani poetry is *molamma'at*, or macaronic verses. The best examples of Gorani macaronic verses are perhaps Seydî Hewramî's alternating Persian and Gorani distiches and hemistiches. He also has examples of alternating Gorani, Persian

³² The poem was written in response to Rencûrî's letter. To read both poems see Muhemmed's (2004: 30–33).

and Arabic lines. Such a mixture has rendered Seydî's poetry a complexity which makes him rather difficult to read. While he adopts 'arûž for his *molamma'at*, he writes predominantly in syllabic metre.

Other poetic forms such as *fard/mofrad* (which is only one beyt), *dubeyti* or quatrain, *qasida* and *tarji'-band* are also practiced in Gorani, but less frequently than *ghazal*. Examples of *qasida* are Seydî's famous narrating the tale of Qeys and Leyla (legendary lovers in Arabic literature) and Rencûrî's *Monajat Name* (Book of Prayers) or *Elabî Name* (The Divine Book). Religious poems such as Rencûrî's *qasidas* make up an important body of Gorani poetry, besides the religious poems of the Ahl-e Haqq. Mela Perêşan's (late 14th or early 15th century) religious poems are among the oldest example of this genre in Gorani. His works including a *Divan*, also known as *Perêşan Name*, and *Saqî Name* (Book of the Cupbearer),³³ reflect Shiite orthodoxy (Xeznedar, 2002: 13–26). He has poems in praise of 'Ali and the twelve Imams of Shia.

One of the most celebrated religious poems is Xanay Qûbadî's (1700–1759) *Selwat Name* (Book of Prayers), also known as *Monajat*, *Elabîyat* and *Haft Band* (Xeznedar, 2002: 77). The opening lines of the poem illustrate its highly symbolic language:

Qedîmê mutleq,
Ya qâim be zât, Qedîmê mutleq
Heyê bê zewal, qeyûmê be heq
Nîgarendey neqş no taqê erzêq
Labût bê şerîk bînaq bê manend
Yektay bê nezîr bê mîsl û peywend (cited in Xeznedar, 2002: 77).

Oh the ultimate everlasting,
 Oh the independent, everlasting,
 The infinite living, the just subsisting,
 The creator of the nine canopies of the universe
 The one with no co-equal, the unique seer,
 The unique One of no peer or like.

A less known religious poem of a significant length is Mîrza Ebdulqadir Paweyî's (1835–1907) *Rawzatol Safa* (The Garden of Purity) with nearly 4,600 lines. This work was first published by Hewramanî in 2004 in an anthology of Gorani poetry. The poem begins with the story of creation and continues with the story of prophet Mohammad, his journey and life. It is comprised of different sections and in each section the poet deals with one subject or story. Each section has a heading in prose, in the Persian language, indicating the subject or the theme. For instance, the first two sections are titled, "fasl dar bayan-e owsaf-e ebteday-e awal ziruh ke xelqat ast" (chapter on the beginning

³³ *Saqî Name* (*Saqî-nama* in Persian) is a poetic genre in which the speaker seeking relief from his hardships and losses summons the *saqî* (cupbearer) to bring him wine and was first practiced by Nezami (Losensky, 2009).

of the creation), and “*fasl dar bayan-e owsaf-e behesht wa duzakh wa chegunegi ra guyad*” (chapter describing paradise and hell).

On Christian doctrine there is only one known work in Gorani: *Kitab-i Nizami* (mizgani) (Book of Good Tidings), written by Seïd Khan Kurdistani, a convert from Sanandaj (Minorsky, 1943: 95; Soltani, 1998: 28–29). The work has remained unpublished. Seïd Khan says he chose to write in Gorani, “the language of Sultan and Pir and the style of later *daftars*,” as he found it suitable for conveying his message (cited in Minorsky, 1943: 95).

Conclusion

From a highly cultivated language with a rich literary tradition, Gorani has fallen to a state where its existence is under severe threat and it is on the verge of extinction. The dramatic fall of Gorani literature following the demise of the Ardalans highlights the significance of patronage and state support in the development of languages. Gorani was gradually replaced by Sorani in the nineteenth century, but the process of this shift is yet to be thoroughly examined. Gorani literature, although constituting a significant part of the Kurdish literary heritage, has not received the attention it merits. A significant part of its literature has remained unpublished and a sizable number of literary works are deemed to be lost.

In Gorani literature there is a strong link between oral and written literary traditions. *Ahl-e Haqq Kalams* and Gorani epics, as discussed in this article, developed orally, but gradually lent themselves to a written tradition. The oral tradition, however, lived in parallel with the written literature. It is for this reason that elements of orality, for instance the use of syllabic metre, specific rhyme schemes, and literary forms, persisted in the written literature. It is interesting that although Gorani poets were familiar with *‘aruz* and used it in their Persian works, and occasionally in Kurdish, syllabic metre remained the dominant metre in Gorani poetry. Alongside unique formal features, the strong presence of Kurdish folklore in Gorani poetry makes it distinctively different from classical Kurmanji and Sorani poetry.³⁴ It was these unique peculiarities that attracted the attention of modernist Sorani poets in the 1930s and 1940s and made Gorani poetry a great source of inspiration for poetic modernisation. This aspect of poetic modernisation, however, has yet to be studied. Indeed, Gorani literature offers a world of unexplored materials and this article was an attempt to draw that to the attention of literary scholars.

³⁴ This conclusion is based on my extensive research on classical Kurdish texts, illustrated in this article and my doctoral dissertation (Ghaderi, 2016).

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