

Article history: Received 20 July 2016; Accepted 19 September 2016

Yezidi Spirits? On the question of Yezidi beliefs: A review article

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Abstract

While the Yezidi tradition undoubtedly has certain core characteristics, a more or less “logically” coherent system of beliefs is rarely described as one of these. The book under review deals with beliefs about a wide range of Yezidi “Holy Beings” and seeks to describe the “essentials” of Yezidism in this respect. This calls into question both the nature of Yezidi beliefs, and the methodological approach used here to analyse these. For the record, the authors’ views on some individual Beings will be discussed.

Keywords: Yezidi Studies; Yezidi Holy Beings; method.

Abstract in Kurmanji

“Ruh”ên êzdi? Gotareke rexneyî li ser pirsra baweriyên êzdiyan

Herçend hindek taybetiyên navendî yên nerîta êzdi hebin jî, sistemeke hevaheng a baweriyên ya kêm-zêde “mentiq” wek yek ji wan taybetiyên xuya nabe. Kitêba li vir tê nixandî berê xwe dide hejmareke zêde ya “şexsên piroz” ên êzdi û di vê çarçoveyê de hewl dide “bingeh”ên êzdiyatîyê destnîşan bike. Li vir hem tebîetê baweriyên êzdiyatîyê û hem jî rêbaza tehlîla wan cihê pirsê ye. Herwiha, hindek fikrên nivîskarên li ser çend şexsên diyar dê bêne nixandî.

Abstract in Sorani

رۆحی نێزدی؟ له باره‌ی پرسباری بیروباوه‌ری نێزدییه‌وه: وتاری هه‌ناسه‌نگاندکاری

له کاتێکدا به‌ دلنایایی کولتوری نێزدییاتی خاوه‌نی کارکاتهری تایبه‌ت خۆیاتی، به‌لام سیسته‌میکی بیروباوه‌ری به‌ لۆجیکی هاوخوینی و په‌کگرتو به‌ ده‌گمان و ه‌کو بیکه‌ک له‌وانه‌ له‌ قه‌لمه‌م ده‌درنیت. نه‌م کتێبه‌ی که‌ لیره‌دا هه‌له‌ده‌سه‌نگینریت گرنگی به‌ رۆحی نێزدییاتی دهدات به‌ شێوه‌یه‌کی فراوان و هه‌ولده‌دات جه‌مه‌ری نێزدییاتی و سه‌فیکات. نه‌مه‌ پرسبار دوروست ده‌کات هه‌م له‌ سه‌ر سه‌روشنی بیروباوه‌ری نێزدییاتی و هه‌رواش له‌ سه‌ر روانگه‌ی مینتۆلۆژیکی که‌ بو‌ لیکدانوه‌ی ناسانه‌ به‌ کار ده‌هینریت.

Introduction

The Religion of the Peacock Angel. The Yezidis and Their Spirit World (Durham: Routledge/Acumen 2014)¹ by Garnik S. Asatrian and Viktoria Arakelova raises some fundamental questions, both on methodology and on the question of Yezidi religious beliefs, that are relevant for Yezidi Studies generally. Since the work has been positively reviewed so far, it seems appropriate to discuss

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¹ Garnik S. Asatrian and Viktoria Arakelova (2014). *The Religion of the Peacock Angel. The Yezidis and Their Spirit World*. Durham: Routledge/Acumen, 157 pp. (Series: Gnostica Texts and Interpretations.) ISBN: 978-1-84465-761-2.



these questions and some of the author's conclusions regarding individual Holy Beings at some length here.

Various developments and events affecting different Yezidi communities over the past decades have brought about a new interest among Yezidis in questions relating to their own religion; as is shown by other articles in this special issue, the Yezidi community as a whole may be on the brink of momentous new developments. At the same time, the non-Yezidi public in many parts of the world is now seeking more information about this group and its religion. For many years academic information on this tradition was scarce, but the past three decades have seen a significant increase in publications by Yezidis and outsiders, so that we are now relatively well informed about important aspects of the religious life of the group. At this stage, the focus of many students of Yezidism is on the differences between local traditions (see Spät in this volume), and on the fact that structures and social norms long regarded as unchangeable are now capable of being renegotiated (see Spät and Kizilhan in this volume).

This new interest in variety and dynamism coincides with a general trend among students of religion to be wary of "essentialism", i.e. of a view of "religion" as an eternal constant that underlies and inspires all actual manifestations of a religion. In the case of a religion that is based on oral transmission rather than written learned works ("theology"), an essentialist approach is perhaps particularly hazardous. Nevertheless, Yezidism is not a blank screen. The Yezidi community has its own distinctive social structures, religious observances, norms and obligations. Furthermore, there is a rich store of myths and religious narratives. These can be expressed in various ways, in the sacred Hymns (such as *Qewls*, which are traditionally performed by professional reciters), in edifying sermons (*mishabet*), and in prose stories (*çîrok*), of which popular and more elevated versions may exist.

There is broad consensus that the Yezidi tradition lays greater emphasis on proper behaviour (orthopraxy) than on questions of true belief (orthodoxy). It is doubtful whether a more or less abstract, "logically coherent" system of religious teachings, tenets and beliefs can be said to form part of the Yezidi religious tradition. No such system appears to be reflected either in the religious discourse of modern Yezidis or in the sacred and religious texts. One finds references to God and (in the *Qewls* at least) to the "Seven Mysteries" (*Heft Sir*), both open and covert allusions to Tawûsî Melek, and mentions of a number of other Beings (*xas*, see further below), and the religious world-view is clearly informed by myths and other religious narratives. However, on many topics one finds various accounts which, from a logical point of view, show contradictions. For instance, a belief in reincarnation exists among Yezidis, but the concepts of heaven and hell also are very much present in Yezidi religious discourse. Although there are cultural parameters that limit the range of beliefs that would be acceptable to most Yezidis, it is probably true to say that a range of different religious beliefs coexist in Yezidi culture, while few

attempts have been made to reconcile conflicting beliefs, systematise religious tenets into an abstract system (e.g. by defining the mutual relations between individual Holy Beings), or to establish an “orthodoxy” based upon the “essential” teachings of Yezidism.

It is important in this context to point to the nature of the transmission of such beliefs among the Yezidis. Ideally, the transmission of religious knowledge is in the hands of the individual’s Sheikh and Pîr, whilst the *Qewaks* contribute to it with their “sermons”; naturally the parents and social environment also play a role. Religious instruction was traditionally given by word of mouth, and often on a one-to-one basis. Until recently, writing played at most a very minor role in the Yezidi tradition. Given the manner of their transmission, it would be strange if the contents of such oral teachings were highly abstract and wholly consistent, or remained unaltered over the centuries.

The Religion of the Peacock Angel bucks the current trend in Yezidi Studies which concentrates on dynamism and variety, and is instead explicitly concerned with an abstract, “essential” form of Yezidi beliefs. It aims to provide a systematic study of the Holy Beings who are referred to in Yezidi narratives. These range from major figures such as the “Peacock Angel” (Tawûsî Melek or Melek Tawûs), to the less prominent Beings. The latter group is known among Yezidis as *xas* (“special ones”) and many (though not all) of its members appear to be chiefly associated with a lineage of Sheikhs or Pîrs, or with holy places. If the lineage or place is thought to have particular powers (such as healing), these may be associated with the Being in question. Otherwise, whether in modern Yezidi discourse or in the Hymns, few *xas* appear to have a strong individuality.

The work is divided into two main parts. Part I: “The one god”, contains chapters entitled (1) “Malak-Tāwûs: the leader of the triad”; (2) “Sheikh ‘Adî”; (3): “Sultan Ezid”. Part II: “The Yezidis’ pantheon and the syncretic features of their religion”, containing the chapters (4) “The Yezidi minor deities, saints and holy men”; (5) “Aspects of nature and celestial bodies in the Yezidi tradition”; (6) “Yezidi religious syncretism” It is said to be “mainly based on Yezidi texts and materials collected by the authors during their fieldwork in the Yezidi communities of Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Turkey over the last fourteen years” (p. x). No details are given as to the nature and methodological approach of this fieldwork.

Although the ostensible aim of the work suggests a largely descriptive approach, in fact many of its comments – and indeed its very structure – reflect the authors’ assumption of the existence of an underlying, complex belief-system which it seems, is neither known to modern believers nor attested in the corpus of Yezidi sacred texts (see below), but whose contents they deduce, and regard as representing an essential form of the religion:

This book is entirely dedicated to the essentials of Yezidi identity – the Yezidi religion, or more precisely the so-called Yezidi folk-pantheon in its

varied dimensions. The idea of one god and his incarnations, Yezidi deities, saints, holy patrons and their deified personalities are the prolonged focus of this book (pp. ix–x).

In the concluding part of the book the authors write:

There have been numerous publications on Yezidi history and religion, but we can dare to conclude that this has been first attempt [sic] to probe the core aspects of the Yezidi religious outlook and to do so in a systematic way. We have presented all the characters we can detect that are and have been worshipped by the Yezidis, and through them, especially the major spirit beings, we are now able to approach the quintessence of their cosmic vision (p. 133).

The key problem with these pronouncements is the implication that phrases like “essentials of Yezidi identity”, and “the quintessence of their cosmic vision” denote realities that have an objective existence at some level in the Yezidi tradition. In other words, they construct an abstract system of beliefs, which is held to underlie the actual expressions of religious belief in the sources. In our opinion, this is problematic because the process of constructing abstracts can hardly be fully objective. It is likely to be informed by the authors’ views on the way the data should be interpreted. The authors define the questions to be addressed and the criteria to be applied; they take decisions as to the relative validity of information collected from a range of heterogeneous sources; and the abstract language they use has no connection with the actual utterances of Yezidis, and may be misleading.²

In fact, the underlying belief-system the authors have deduced, shape the very structure of the book. The list of Chapters of Part I (see above) reflects their thesis that “the one god” is in fact a “triad” headed by Tawûsî Melek (hereafter TM). The Being who is known to Yezidis as “God” (*Xwedê*), however, is at the same time said to have been “sidelined” by TM, who is one of his manifestations:

Malak-Tawûs, being as noted a manifestation of *xwedê*, claims, quite legitimately, the role of the demiurge, even if, in so being sidelined by a later triad, *xwedê* could not leave the cosmogonic void (p. 13).

A hypothetical Yezidi divine “triad” plays a prominent role in the authors’ understanding of Yezidi teaching. Its members are said to be TM, Sheikh ‘Adi, and Sultan Êzîd. There are admittedly some references in the Yezidi tradition stating that God has three names or “three letters”, but references to these terms remain obscure. The Yezidi scholar Khalil Jindy (1998: 74), suggests that “perhaps” the names may be those of TM, Sheikh Shems (not Sheikh

² Such abstractions can legitimately be used, e.g. when describing ancient religions, where such a process is the only option, and where these interpretations are less likely to affect living people.

‘Adi), and Sultan Êzîd. This hardly suggests that the “three names of God” are at all central to Yezidi belief.³

Many variants of the text known as the Yezidi Declaration of Faith begin with the words: “My declaration of faith is that there is one God” (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 226–227), and in everyday discourse many modern Yezidis say the same thing. In the *Qewls*, some passages suggest a clear distinction between God and TM (“Pronounce the names of God and Tawûsî Melek over me”, *Qewlê Seremergê* v. 52; Keyenbroek, 1998: 319). One of Kreyenbroek’s informants claimed that Sheikh Shems is “really God”, while another said that “Sheikh Shems goes to see God three times a day,” implying that they are two distinct Beings (Kreyenbroek, 1998: 98). The question is complicated further by the fact that several names, such as “the King”, “the Prince”, “the Lord”, can demonstrably be used for both *Xwedê* and several other beings (Kreyenbroek, 1998: 93–94).

The obvious solution, we would argue, is to regard all such statements as being, or having once been valid within the framework of the Yezidi tradition. Asatrian and Arakelova’s attempts to explain the divergence between such statements by looking for one original “truth” from which they all derive, by constructing a hypothetical system of beliefs based on Aristotelian logic, seems to us an attempt to systematise and intellectualise a world-view that does not lend itself to such a process.

About Tawûsî Melek, we find several further “theologising” statements, including:

[Malak-Tâwûs] ... dominates all major and minor divinities of the pantheon. Malak-Tâwûs is, in fact, the essence or *raison d’être* of the religion of the Yezidis (p. 9).

Nevertheless, Malak-Tâwûs, even while he might seem to have a mere latent presence within the [sic] Yezidi dogmatics and beliefs, is an unambiguously key figure in the Yezidi religious domain (p. 19).

The authors admit that, given the scarcity of references to Tawûsî Melek in the Yezidi textual tradition, an adequate description of this figure is problematic. However, they offer the reader a full translation of *Kitêba Cilwe*, which they say is “devoted entirely to Malak-Tâwûs” (p. 19). The problem is that the text in question is not an authentic Yezidi text. The authors admit

³ The notion of a Yezidi “Triad” may also be connected with the expression “the Three Letters (of God)” (*sê berf*), which occasionally occur in the Yezidi tradition, but with a variety of different meanings. In Armenia, the term *sê berf* is used to refer to three major sins or offences (see Omarkhali, 2005: 127–128, 148–149). In Iraq it is sometimes understood to refer to the three letters used in Arabic script to write the word *Xuda/Xwedê* “God”. In this sense the expression *sê berf* also occurs in the *Qewls*, e.g. *Qewlê Behra* 17 (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 204–205), in a context which suggests that it is a mystery, not an obvious and prominent element of the Yezidi faith: “His name consists of three Letters / One is in Mecca and one is in Medina/ I wish I knew where they are on earth.”

this, but describe this work as “still definitely reflecting the genuine religious and folk tradition” (p. viii). Elsewhere we find a similar circular argument, citing a doubtful source as evidence because it confirms one’s preconceived notion:

... Eliseev mentions in his notes, which we can hardly vouch for as authentic, but which we nonetheless consider it expedient to quote here in full, since it is very substantially indicative of the constitutive essence of Malak-Tāwūs (p. 21).

The tensions between Yezidi realities and intellectual definitions cause some problems when it comes to categorising Yezidi beliefs as monotheistic, polytheistic or pantheist. The authors write:

The poly-variation in the Yezidis’ religious thought, or rather, their dismembered representation of the divine entity or of god, is none other than the personification of the functional division of the divine, which has nothing to do with polytheism in its pure form, the essential nature of which does not change even in the presence of a manifestly principal divinity within the system of gods.... It is therefore necessary to differentiate clearly between the Yezidis’ dismembered representations of the divine ... reduced to the single initiation, and polytheism characterized by a dispersed representation of the divine (p. 1).

However, the authors admit a degree of pantheism:

The syncretism and eclectic character of Yezidism is supposed to include a deep, thick layer of primitive religious elements, yet distinctions between canon, dogmatics (if we suppose their existence) and primitive beliefs (or “superstitions”) remain very hazy. Still, to complete the religious picture of the Yezidis, it is necessary to consider their pantheistic views, all of them turning out to be reflections of early forms of religion (p. 109).

This brings us to another problem with this book, namely its idiosyncratic use of language. In the above passages is not clear what is meant by “initiation”. The images conjured up by the phrase “dismembered representation of the divine entity or of god” may not be what the authors intended. The words “a deep, thick layer of primitive religious elements” is surely out of place in an academic work on religion. The term “pantheon” is used throughout the work. It is said to be a “provisional term” (p. x), but given the objective meaning of the word (*viz.* a collective group of gods) it is misleading and inappropriate for representing Yezidi beliefs. Similarly the term “gods” is used throughout for major and minor Holy Beings. Collectively these are referred to in the subtitle as the Yezidis’ “spirit world”, a term most often used in English in connection with Spiritualism. The word “incarnations” occurs regularly. Members of the Heptad are called “avatars of Malak Tāwūs” (p. 53).

For the record, some of the book's conclusions about individual Holy Beings must be discussed here. The hypothesis (pp. 29–30) that Şerfedîn (Şaraf al-Dîn, Honour of the Religion), is in fact an epithet of, or an oblique way of referring to TM, is ingenious. It is contradicted, however, by the textual evidence which strongly suggests that Şerfedîn is a saviour figure, who is currently absent from the known world but will return at the end of time.⁴

A doubtful use of sources informs the authors' claims regarding the existence of what amounts to Yezidi cults of the onion and the black dog. On p. 113 we find:

... the most esteemed plant bearing evident cultic significance is the onion (...) or *pîwâz*. The earliest evidence for onion worship among the Yezidis can be found in the same passage by Çelebi that discusses the worship of black dogs.

The key passage from Evliya Çelebi's *Siyâbetnâme* on which this claim is based reads as follows:

... If anybody smashes or squashes onion, his head will be smashed and he will be killed by them [Yezidis]. And the most important thing is that if a rich person dies, he is washed with onion juice and onion is planted on his grave. I asked the captives [Yezidis] several times about it, but never got a straight answer... (p. 113).

Çelebi's readiness to emphasise or invent strange things about Yezidis is further illustrated by another passage, which is quoted as evidence of a cult of black dogs (pp. 111–112). The authors quote the *Siyâbetnâme* as saying that the Yezidis "first give to their children milk of a black dog", and hold "great feasts" when a black dog is born; when such an animal dies they offer the other dogs roast mutton "for the soul of the dead dog"; and they bury their dogs in a special cemetery after washing the body with the sap of onions. The passage's final sentence, "It is strange that the mount [sic] Sinjar, known as a blessed land, sheltered such infidels", strengthens the impression that Çelebi was not an unbiased reporter on Yezidi affairs. Also the expense and inherent impracticality of such lavish canine *rites de passage* in a society where "every Yezidi holds ten to five dogs in front of the doors" should perhaps make one wary of Çelebi's claims. Furthermore, not a trace of a special religious preoccupation with black dogs or onions can be found in the Yezidis' sacred texts or modern practice.

The cult of a "Deity of the Phallus" (pp. 82–86) must join those of the onion and the black dog as an unlikely phenomenon. It represents the authors' interpretation of what seems to be a relatively minor, beneficent Being called *Mihyaketê Qenc* (Good Angel). The authors admit that this is "the

⁴ See Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005: 427). On the historical figure see Kreyenbroek (1995: 34–35).

only example of the *Deus Phalli* in all New Iranian folk pantheons” (p. 12), and that most of their female informants “tried to avoid this subject altogether, denying the very existence of a phallic deity in Yezidi beliefs” (p. 83). Nevertheless, they insist on this curious identification,⁵ saying: “still, the information gleaned from our research thus far allows us to reconstruct at least the general idea of this deity, once probably a popular image among the Yezidis” (p. 83). On the next page the authors cite an 80-year old female informant who described a fertility rite.⁶ No such rite appears to be known in most Yezidi communities. However, given that such a ceremony is said to exist among other Armenian groups (p. 84), the informant’s community may have borrowed a rite of non-Yezidi origin, invoking the help of the Yezidi “Good Angel”, who is thought to be helpful in all things. Furthermore, Khanna Omarkhali heard the formula *Ya Mihyaketê Qenc, were bewara min* (“O Good Angel, come to my aid”), used by male Yezidis in Armenia. Unless these men publicly implored *Mihyaketê Qenc* to restore their virility, this suggests that the Being is not felt to have any particular connection with the phallus. Elsewhere in the same passage, the authors quote prayers asking *Mihyaketê Qenc* for help, and discuss folk observances thought to further prosperity and pregnancy, but offer no convincing evidence to show that *Mihyaketê Qenc* is particularly concerned with fertility rather than with helping believers generally. A mistranslation in this context is found on p. 83, where, in a prayer to *Mihyaketê Qenc*, the words *ber min rûnî* “sit (i.e. appear) before me”, are said to mean “impregnate me [lit. ‘sit upon me’]”.

Further problematic translations are found in connection with the Being the authors call *Pîrâ-Fât* (pp. 72–76). About this Being, they say (p. 76): “Although this is not explicitly stated in the extant materials, it was most probably *Pîrâ-Fât* who produced the first Yezidi from the primordial seed.” The reference to “primordial seed” is based on a mistranslation of two formulae directly connected with the Being, while another mistranslation and an arbitrary interpretation of *Qewl* passages are adduced as further evidence supporting this theory.⁷ On this basis, the authors describe her as “the foremother of the Yezidis” (p.72)

⁵ The hypothesis apparently originates with Amine Avdal (see p. 83). Two of Avdal’s works (1957, 1960) were published, and their contents are well-known among Yezidi intellectuals in or from Armenia. Avdal’s views were strongly informed by anti-religious Soviet ideology. Although his work offers a great deal of information, it contains too many inaccuracies to be acceptable as a basis for a claim of this magnitude and inherent implausibility.

⁶ The informant apparently recited the formula *Yâ Mihyaketê Qenc, mi awis kee*, which is here translated as: “O *Mihyaketê Qenc* make me pregnant” (p. 84). As an Armenian-born Yezidi, Khanna Omarkhali strongly questions the authenticity of this formula, on the grounds that in all known forms of Armenian Kurdish the term *awis* ‘pregnant (of animals)’ would be improper to use for a human being.

⁷ On p. 73, the formula *Çara Pîra Fat bê bewara te*, “May the remedy of *Pîra Fat* be of assistance to you”, is rendered as: “May the seed of *Pîrâ Fât* help you!” The authors further assert (*ibid.*): “Similarly, they invoke this seed when embarking on a journey: *Yâ Pîra-Fât, çarâ ta sar ma*, ‘Oh *Pîra-Fât*, let your assistance (seed) be with us.’” Few women might wish to get pregnant during

This Being is said to be “a female deity, and she is the daughter of Farxadin” (p. 72). Many of the functions associated here with Pîra Fat are attributed by most Yezidi communities to Xatûna Ferxa (or Fexra), whose name indicates she is the daughter of Fexredîn.⁸ The authors admit that Xatûna Ferxa is the eponym of a Sheikhly lineage and has a well-known sanctuary at Lalish. This clearly implies that she has considerable prominence. Nevertheless, the authors call her a “frail duplicate of Pîrâ-Fât with a reduced scope of activities”, and “a secondary figure, budding from the image of Pîrâ-Fât” (p. 77). Unlike Xatûna Ferxa/Fexra, Pîra Fat is hardly a central figure in Yezidi belief. This is shown, for example, by the fact that very different views exist on his/her gender and associations. Jindy (1998: 26) refers to a masculine “Pîr Afat”, whom he connects with storm and flooding. A connection with flooding can also be found in an Armenian Yezidi tradition to the effect that Pîra Fat has rescued all Yezidis in her tent during the Flood (Omarkhali, 2005: 142–144).

The authors admit that they could find no evidence for the existence of Xeta Cot (lit. “the Line of the Plough”, here called “The Spirit of the Furrow”) as a revered Being (p. 91). Still, they state: “Nonetheless, a genuine imaging of her exists, having its own niche in the religious concepts of the Yezidis,” also remarking that “Xatâ-Ĵõt is almost certainly a female character” (*ibid*). In fact the term refers to the line that is drawn over the cakes baked for the New Year (known among the Yezidis of the Caucasus as *keçoça Serê Salê*), to divide these into two halves, which is not in any way revered as a Being (Omarkhali, 2005: 70).

The same goes for Şêx Kiras, “the Sheikh of the Shirt”, here called “the spirit of the garment”. This Being is not known to be revered by any Yezidi community.⁹ The authors admit that Şêx Kiras is “an almost forgotten personage now” (p. 77). Still, this Being is said to have been “responsible for the process of death, transmigration of a soul, maybe even reincarnation” (*ibid*).

Amine Avdal (see above, fn. 6) seems to have been responsible for introducing Aba Birûsk (Uncle Thunder), who is here discussed under the

a journey, and an interpretation of the words as a simple prayer for help, not particularly connected with semen, seems preferable. On the same page the words of a *Qewl*: *jî durrê fêrî kirîna çare; baya, ave axe û nare*, are translated: “[He] created a liquid from a pearl, It is a wind [air], water, earth and fire”. The correct translation is: ‘He extracted four (elements) from the Pearl: Wind, Water, Earth and Fire’. In the same *Qewl*, the words *feqîreke şandiye teveka herberê, avek aniye*, which simply mean: ‘He sent a Feqîr to the eternal sphere; he brought water’, are rendered by the authors as: “[He] sent once a *faqîr* [probably Şêxöbakır] to the seventh sphere of heavens; [he] brought a liquid [lit. ‘water’]”. The “liquid” is said to be connected to the Pîr’s “seed-keeping”.

⁸ The word *Ferxa* is here (p. 76) connected with Arabic *farx*, “chicken” and the name Xatûna Ferxa is said to mean “The Dame of Children”.

⁹ He is mentioned only by Furlani (1936: 64–83, esp. 76), whose information was uncritically accepted in an earlier publication by Kreyenbroek (1995: 11).

heading “The Thunder-God: the Deity of Lightning and Wind”. The authors write (p. 54f.): “At the turn of the last century the Armenian Yezidis featured another image named Ābā-birūsk, as Amine Avdal reports, which is now completely forgotten (or at any rate no one of the queried pundits of Yezidi folklore amid the spiritual castes in Armenia is able to recollect this name).” To posit the existence of a “Thunder-God” on this basis seems unwarranted.

Cinteyar (or Cin Teyar), is mainly known to Yezidis in Armenia. He is said to have been a *jinn* who married a human, and so became the ancestor of the Cinteyar lineage, which only exists in Armenia and Georgia. The authors, however, call him a “deity” who “is believed to be the ruler of the jinns (genies, spirits),” although they admit that: “Jin-tayār is a fuzzy image, lacking precise explication within the cult” (p. 98). Furthermore, they postulate a link between Cin Teyar and Memê Reşan, who is somewhat arbitrarily discussed under the heading “The Thunder-God...” (pp. 54–61, see above under Aba Birūsk), and whose name, which surely means “Mem/Mehmed son of Reş”, is translated here as “pouring, darting Mahmad (Muhammad)”.

In most of the cases discussed above the authors show a readiness to let speculation prevail over the information that is found in either textual sources or the living tradition. This approach clearly originates in their consistent quest for underlying, “deeper” truths than those that emerge from an objective analysis of the evidence. As has been shown here, the search for the “essentials” of Yezidism shapes many aspects of this work. As a result, that religion is depicted and interpreted here in a way that many of its followers and students might fail to recognise.

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