

ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ  
ԱՐԵՎԵԼԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՖԱԿՈՒԼՏԵՏ

ԱՐԵՎԵԼԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՐՑԵՐ

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**Հրատարակվում է Երևանի պետական համալսարանի  
արևելագիտության ֆակուլտետի  
գիտական խորհրդի որոշմամբ**

**Խմբագրական խորհուրդ՝**

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Հովհաննիսյան Դավիթ բ.գ.թ., պրոֆեսոր

Սաֆարյան Ալեքսանդր պ.գ.թ., պրոֆեսոր

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Րեպենկովա Մարիա բ.գ.դ., պրոֆեսոր (Ռուսաստան)

Կուզնեցով Վասիլի պ.գ.թ., դոցենտ (Ռուսաստան)

Էքմեքչյան Լեոնա PhD (ԱՄՆ)

Իլյա Յակուբովիչ բ.գ.դ., պրոֆեսոր (Գերմանիա)

Ահմադջան Ղուրոնբեկով բ.գ.դ., պրոֆեսոր (Ուզբեկստան)

## CONTENT

*Davit Hovhannisyan*

THE RESULTS OF WWI AND THE LOGIC OF CURRENT  
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST ..... 8-13

*Sarah Irving*

EXCAVATING THE SUBALTERN: STUDYING THE LIVES  
OF PALESTINIAN PEASANT WOMEN PRE-WWI ..... 14-26

*Mariam Elmasyan*

IBN AL-MUQAFĀ‘A’S SYSTEM OF ETHICS ON THE BASIS  
OF AL-ADĀB AL-SAGHIR AND AL-ADĀB AL-KABIR ..... 27-34

*Hayk Kocharyan*

ISLAMIC PROTECTION CONTRACTS SYSTEM AND  
THE ARMENIANS IN EARLY UMMĀH ..... 35-42

*Alice Eloyan*

THE STRUCTURAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE KHABARS  
OF “ANSĀB AL-ASHRĀB” ..... 43-50

*Sona Tonikyan*

ON THE PROBLEM OF ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION  
IN ISLAM ACCORDING TO YUSUF AL-QARADAWĪ’S  
FATWAS ..... 51-56

*Shushan Kyureghyan*

“THE DEVIL’S DECEPTIONS IN THE RELEVANCE OF  
READING THE QURAN ACCORDING TO ‘IBN AL-JAWZĪ’S  
“TALBĪS IBLĪS” ..... 57-63

*Svante Lundgren*

THE ASSYRIAN LOBBYING AT THE PARIS PEACE  
CONFERENCE – MYTHS AND REALITY ..... 64-69

*Lilit Safrastyan*  
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS:  
THE READING OF THE EXILE EXPERIENCE OF  
IRANIAN WRITER GOLI TARAGHI .....70-80

*Noonik Darbinian*  
IRANIAN POST-MODERNISM: THE SAQQA-KHANEH  
ART MOVEMENT ..... 81-89

*Gohar Iskandaryan*  
THE UNITED STATES-IRAN POLICY DYNAMICS  
IN 1993-2016.....90-111

*Tereza Amryan*  
THE IDEA OF SECRET MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE  
IN YEZIDI RELIGIOUS HYMNS.....112-121

*Nshan Thomas Kesecker*  
THE HISTORICAL GILGAMESH AND KINGSHIP  
IN THIRD-MILLENNIUM MESOPOTAMIA.....122-129

*Gevorg Sahakyan*  
“VICTORY HAS A THOUSAND FATHERS, BUT DEFEAT IS AN  
ORPHAN”: WHO IS TO BE BLAMED FOR TURKS’  
DISINTEGRATION IN GERMANY?.....130-140

## **BOOK REVIEW**

*Alexander Safaryan, Naira Poghosyan*  
Safrastyan R., Melkonyan R., Ter-Matevosyan V., Dumanyan A.,  
Chakryan H., Geghamyan V., Hovhannisyan A., History of the  
Republic of Turkey, Yerevan, 2018, 364 p. ....141-144

## ԲՈՎԱՆԴԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

### *Դավիթ Հովհաննիսյան*

ԱՌԱՋԻՆ ԱՇԽԱՐՀԱՄԱՐՏԻ ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔՆԵՐՆ ՈՒ  
ՄԻՋԻՆ ԱՐԵՎԵԼՔԻ ՆԵՐԿԱ ՉԱՐԳԱՑՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ  
ՏՐԱՄԱԲԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ.....8-13

### *Սամա Իրվինգ*

ՀԵՏԱՉՈՏԵԼՈՎ «SUBLATERN». ԱՌԱՋԻՆ  
ՀԱՄԱՇԽԱՐՀԱՅԻՆ ՊԱՏԵՐԱՉՄԻ ՆԱԽՕՐԵԻՆ  
ՊԱՂԵՍՏԻՆՑԻ ԳՅՈՒՂԱԲՆԱԿ ԿԱՆԱՆՑ ԴՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒՄԸ.....14-26

### *Մարիամ Էրնայան*

ԱԲԴԱԼԼԱՀ ԻԲՆ ԱԼ-ՄՈՒԿԱՖՖԱՅԻ ԷԹԻԿԱՅԻ  
ՀԱՄԱԿԱՐԳԻ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ «ԱԼ-ԱԴԱԲ  
ԱԼ- ՍԱԴԻՐ» ԵՎ «ԱԼ- ԱԴԱԲ ԱԼ-ՔԱԲԻՐ»  
ՍՏԵՂԾԱԳՈՐԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՀԻՄԱՆ ՎՐԱ.....27-34

### *Հայկ Քոչարյան*

ՀՈՎԱՆԱՎՈՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՊԱՅՄԱՆԱԳՐԵՐԻ ԻՍԼԱՄԱԿԱՆ  
ՀԱՄԱԿԱՐԳԸ ԵՎ ՀԱՅԵՐԸ ՎԱՂ ՈՒՄՄԱՅՈՒՄ.....35-42

### *Ալիս Էրոյան*

«ԱՆՍԱԲ ԱԼ-ԱՇՐԱՖ»-Ի ԽԱԲԱՐՆԵՐԻ ԲՈՎԱՆԴԱԿԱՅԻՆ  
ՈՒ ԿԱՌՈՒՑՎԱԾՔԱՅԻՆ ԴԱՍԱԿԱՐԳՈՒՄԸ.....43-50

### *Սոնա Տոնիկյան*

ՕՐԳԱՆՆԵՐԻ ՏՐԱՆՍՊԼԱՆՏԱՅԻԱՅԻ ՀԻՄՆԱԽՆԴԻՐՆ  
ԻՍԼԱՄՈՒՄ ԸՍՏ ՅՈՒՍՈՒՖ ԱԼ-ԿԱՐԱԴԱՈՒԻԻ  
ՖԵԹՎԱՆԵՐԻ.....51-56

### *Շուշան Կյուրեղյան*

ՍԱՏԱՆԱՅԻ ԽԱԲԵՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ՂՈՒՐԱՆԻ ԸՆԹԵՐՑՄԱՆ  
ՀԱՐՑՈՒՄ ԸՍՏ ԻԲՆ ԱԼ-ՉԱՌԻՉԻԻ «ԹԱԼԲԻՍ ԻԲԼԻՍ»  
ԱՇԽԱՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ.....57-63

*Սիվանտե Լունդգրեն*

ԱՍՈՐԱԿԱՆ ԼՈՔԲԻՆ ՓԱՐԻՉԻ ՎԵՀԱԺՈՂՈՎՈՒՄ.

ՄԻՖԵՐ ԵՎ ԻՐԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ.....64-69

*Լիլիթ Սաֆրասայան*

ԵՐԿՈՒՄ ԱՇԽԱՐՀՆԵՐԻ ՄԻՋԵՎ

ԸՆԹԵՐՑԵԼՈՎ ՊԱՐՄԻԿ ԳՐՈՂ ԳՈԼԻ ԹԱՐԱՂԻԻ

ՎՏԱՐԱՆԴԻՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՓՈՐՁԱՌՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ.....70-80

*Նունիկ Դարբինյան*

ԻՐԱՆԱԿԱՆ ՊՈՍՏ-ՍՈՂԵՌՆԻՉՄ՝ ՍԱՂԱԽԱՆԵՀ

ԱՐՎԵՍՏԻ ՇԱՐԺՈՒՄ.....81-89

*Գոհար Իսկանդարյան*

ՄԻԱՑՅԱԼ ՆԱՀԱՆԳՆԵՐ-ԻԻՀ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ

ԴԻՆԱՄԻԿԱՆ 1993-2016ԹԹ.....90-111

*Թերեզա Անդրյան*

ԳԱՂՏՆԻ, ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՊԱՇՏԱԿԱՆ ԳԻՏԵԼԻՔԻ ԳԱՂԱՓԱՐԸ

ԵԶԴԻԱԿԱՆ ԿՐՈՆԱԿԱՆ ՀԻՄՆԵՐՈՒՄ.....112-121

*Նշան Զեսկեր*

ՊԱՏՄԱԿԱՆ ԳԻԼԳԱՄԵՇԸ ԵՎ ԱՐՔԱՅԱԿԱՆ

ԻՇԽԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ Ք. Ա. ԵՐՐՈՐԴ ՀԱԶԱՐԱՄՅԱԿԻ

ՄԻՋԱԳԵՏՔՈՒՄ.....122-129

*Գևորգ Սահակյան*

«ՀԱՂԹԱՆԱԿՆ ՈՒՆԻ ՀԱԶԱՐ ՀԱՅՐ, ԲԱՅՑ ՊԱՐՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ

ՈՐԲ Է». Ո՛Վ Է ՄԵՂԱՎՈՐ ԳԵՐՄԱՆԻԱՅՈՒՄ

ԹՈՒՐՔԵՐԻ ԱՊԱԻՆՏԵԳՐՄԱՆ ՀԱՐՑՈՒՄ.....130-140

**ԳՐԱՆՈՍՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ**

*Ալեքսանդր Սաֆարյան, Նաիրա Պողոսյան*

Սաֆրասայան Ռ., Մելքոնյան Ռ., Տեր-Սարգսյան Վ.,

Դումանյան Ա., Չաքրյան Հ., Գեղամյան Վ.,

Հովհաննիսյան Ա., Թուրքիայի Հանրապետության

պատմություն, Երևան, 2018, էջ 364.....141-144



Tereza Amryan<sup>1</sup>

## THE IDEA OF SECRET MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN YEZIDI RELIGIOUS HYMNS

**Keywords:** *Yezidism, mysticism, religion, knowledge, interpretation, meaning*

The Yezidi community was formed between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries in the canyon called Lalish in present-day Northern Iraq. The religion of the Yezidis has preserved a significant number of Sufi elements since it was formed on the ideology of the Adawia Sufi brotherhood founded by Sheikh Adi bin-Musafir. Those Sufi elements represent not only certain rites and ceremonies, but also some religious terms. Many terms are related to certain phenomena associated with the idea of secret, mystical knowledge. Those terms are mainly found in Yezidi religious hymns. Yezidi hymns are lyrical verses which are considered sacred and are recited by Yezidi priests during religious ceremonies. The terms designating the idea of mystical knowledge have a special place in Yezidism and have interesting interpretations in the framework of the Yezidi religious world-view. The Sufi meaning of the terms related to mystical knowledge is present in contemporary Yezidism. While those terms are used in their original Sufi meaning, in the texts of Yezidi religious hymns, they are not interpreted in this way in the world-outlook of contemporary Yezidis.

The Yezidi community was formed in Lalish (situated in present-day Northern Iraq) in the XI-XIV centuries, on the basis of the Adawia Sufi brotherhood. The founder and leader of that Sufi order was Sheikh Adi bin Musafir.<sup>2</sup> The religious doctrine of this Sufi brotherhood became the basis of Yezidi religion. The main temple of Lalish, where Sheikh Adi was buried after his death, became a religious center and pilgrimage site for

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<sup>2</sup> Kreyenbroek, Ph. *Yezidism: Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995: 3-6; Arakelova, V. "Ethno-Religious Communities: To the Problem of Identity Markers." *Iran and the Caucasus*, no. 14 (2010): 6-7, 16.

Yezidis. The Yezidi religion was also influenced by Islam, Christianity, local beliefs, as well as some gnostic sects. It thus became a syncretic religion.

There are many Sufi elements preserved in Yezidism. The idea of mystical secret knowledge inherited from Sufism is best expressed in Yezidi religious hymns.<sup>3</sup> The terms designating the secret mystical knowledge are interpreted in a very unique way within the framework of the contemporary Yezidi religious world outlook.

In Sufism *sir* (Arab. "secret") symbolizes mystical knowledge, divine secret,<sup>4</sup> which is revealed to the hermit after passing through certain hardships, difficulties and overcoming some degrees on the path of self-perfection.<sup>5</sup>

In Yezidi religious hymns it is mentioned:

Ya Xwedê, rêya te rastîye,  
 Ê karê te bi heqîye,  
 Sura te here mixfiye. (Qewlê Padşayî)<sup>6</sup>  
 O God, your way is straight  
 And your work is true,  
 Your *secret* is hidden.

Melik Fexredîn ji padşê xo diket pisyare:  
 "Belê ezîzê min navê te ê şîrin extîyare,  
 Te çar kitêb nazil kirine xware,

<sup>3</sup> Yezidi religious hymns are lyrical verses which are considered to be sacred. The hymns are devoted to Yezidi saints, prophets, cosmogony, eschatology, etc. Religious hymns are recited by Yezidi priests (sheykhs and pirs) during religious ceremonies (Amryan, T'. *Yezînerî kronakan ashxarhayacq'*. Yerevan: Yerevani petakan hamalsarani hratarakçut'yun, 2016: 21, 169-176).

<sup>4</sup> Amryan, T'. "Sufiakan siro yev arbecumi gaghap'ar' yezdiakan kronakan himnerum." *Arevelagitut'yan harcer*, № 12, Yerevan, 2016: 282; Sajādî, S. J. *Farhangê êstîlâhât û ta'birâtê êrfânî*. Têhrân: Êntêşarâtê Tahûrî, 1393: 460.

<sup>5</sup> Schimmel, A. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975: 174, 192, 312.

<sup>6</sup> Hecî, Bedelê Feqîr. *Bawerî û Mîtologiya Êzdîyan, Çendeha Têkist û vekolîn*. Dihok: Hawar, 2002: 206.

Te qet *soreke* heqîyê me ra nekir dehare?" (Qewlê Axretê)<sup>7</sup>

Malak Fakhradin<sup>8</sup> said to his Lord:

"Your sweet name is holy,

You have brought down four [holy] books [from above],

Have not you revealed any *secret* to us?"

Hûn bidene xatirê çerxan û feleka,

Horîyan û meleka,

*Sura* Tawûsî Melek û çardeh tebeqe,

Ya Şêşims, tu pirsiyareke xêrê li mala xo û me jî bike. (Duaya

Hêvarî)<sup>9</sup>

For the sake of destiny/fortune,

[For the sake of] angels,

[For the sake of] the *secret* of Tausi Malak<sup>10</sup> and fourteen layers<sup>11</sup>,

Sheykh Shams,<sup>12</sup> tell us and your family a nice thing.

Hûn bidina xatira behîştê û darê,

Kafê û mexarê,

*Sura* Êzî û Beyt el-Farê,

Ya Şêşims tu pirsiyareke xêrê li mala xo û me jî bike vê care. (Duaya

Hêvarî)<sup>13</sup>

For the sake of paradise and the tree,

[For the sake of the] the cave<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 121-122.

<sup>8</sup> In Yezidism, Malak Farkhadin (sometimes called Fakhradin) is considered to be the author of religious hymns, as well as the lord of the disc of the Moon (Amryan, 2016: 100, 170-171).

<sup>9</sup> Kreyenbroek, Ph. *Yezidism: Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995: 220.

<sup>10</sup> Tausi Malak (Arab. "peacock angel") is one of the main saints in Yezidism. The Yezidis depict Tausi Malak as peacock and consider him the embodiment of divine essence (Amryan, 2016: 33-35).

<sup>11</sup> According to the Yezidi world-view, the world consists of fourteen layers or fourteen stages (seven layers of heaven and seven layers of land) (Amryan, 2016: 34, 92).

<sup>12</sup> Sheykh Shams (Arab. Şams, "Sun") is one of the main saints in the Yezidi religion and is associated with the Sun (Amryan, 2016: 94, 100).

<sup>13</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 220.

[For the sake] of the secret of Yezid<sup>15</sup> and Bayt al-Far,<sup>16</sup>

O Sheykh Shams, ask us and your family a nice thing.

The concept of secret mystical knowledge called *sir* has its unique place in Yezidi cosmogonic myths and legends. It is mentioned in a religious hymn:

Şembû dane esase,

Înîyê kir xilase,

Bedî heft sed sal, heft *sur* hatine dura kase. (Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr)<sup>17</sup>

[The Creator] began the creation of the world on Saturday (lit: the creator put the fundament of the creation of the world on Saturday),

[He] finished it on [Friday],

Seven hundred years later seven *secrets* came towards the pearl<sup>18</sup> of the cup.<sup>19</sup>

According to one Yezidi cosmogonic legend, after creation, the body of Adam was not alive for seven hundred years. He came to life only after drinking a cup of mystical secret knowledge.

Bedî bi heft sed sal heft *sur* hatine hendave,

Qalib mabûy bê gave,

Gote: "Ruhê tu bo çi naçiye nave?". (Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr)<sup>20</sup>

Seven hundred years later, seven secrets came to [Adam's body]

The body was stunned,

It was heard: "Soul, why do you not enter [into the body]?"

<sup>14</sup> There is a cave under the temple of the central sanctuary of the Yezidis in Lalish.

According to Yezidi religious tradition, Sheykh Adi used to fast, pray, and contemplate in that cave (Amryan, 2016: 108):

<sup>15</sup> Yezid or Sultan Yezid is one of the main saints in Yezidism. He is also considered to be the forefather of the Yezidi people (Amryan, 2016: 34-35).

<sup>16</sup> Bayt Far (or Beyt Far) is a village not far from present-day Baalbek, Lebanon. Bayt Far is the birthplace of Sheykh Adi (Guest, J. *The Yezidis: A Study in Survival*. New York: KPI Limited, 1987: 15).

<sup>17</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 176.

<sup>18</sup> In some Yezidi religious legends, the Pearl is the symbol of cosmogony. According to one of the Yezidi cosmogonic legends, the world was created as a result of the explosion of the Pearl (Amryan, 2016: 62-63).

<sup>19</sup> It refers to the cup of mystical knowledge (Amryan, 2016: 286-291).

<sup>20</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 176.

Adem pêxember ji wê *kasê* vedixwar û vedijya,  
Mest bû hejya,  
Goşt lê hurya, xûn tê gerya. (Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr)<sup>21</sup>  
Prophet<sup>22</sup> Adam drank that cup and came to life,  
[He] got drunk and moved,  
[The body] was covered with flesh, the blood flowed [through his  
body].

Adem pêxember ji wê *kasê* vedixware,  
Keremeta wê *kasê* hate diyare,  
Lew Adem pêxember pêngijî, pê bû şiyare. (Qewlê Zebûnî Meksûr)<sup>23</sup>  
Adam the Prophet drank from that cup,  
The miracle of the cup revealed itself (The miracle of the cup was  
revealed),

Adam the Prophet sneezed and his senses awoke.

The concept of *u'lm* (Arab. 'ilm, "knowledge") has a special place in Sufism. Many Sufi philosophers distinguish *ēlmē bātēn* (lit: "secret knowledge") from *ēlmē zāhēr* (lit: "apparent knowledge").<sup>24</sup> The expression, "*ilm ladunnī*", mentioned in the Qur'an, symbolizes the knowledge transferred directly from God.<sup>25</sup> In Yezidism, *u'lm* is interpreted as the knowledge of the Yezidi religion.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that Yezidis also call religious texts, *u'lm*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid: 176.

<sup>22</sup> The Yezidis call not only Biblical, that is Judaic and Christian prophets (*Mūsā pēxambar* - Prophet Moses), *pēxambar* (Pers. payyāambar, messenger), but also Muhammad (*Mahmad pēxambar* - Prophet Muhammad). In Yezidism, Jesus is also called prophet *Isā pēxambar*. Some Biblical characters, who are not considered to be prophets in the Christian, Muslim and Jewish religions, are also called *p'ēxambar* by Yezidis. For example, *Ādam p'ēxambar* - prophet Adam, *Ayūb pēxambar* - prophet Job, *Aqūb pēxambar* - prophet Jacob.

<sup>23</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 176

<sup>24</sup> Sajādī, S. J. *Farhangē ēstēlāhāt ō ta 'bīrātē ērḡānī*. Tēhrān: Ēntēšārātē Tahūrī, 1393: 589.

<sup>25</sup> Schimmel, 1975: 18.

<sup>26</sup> Arakelova, V. "Sufi Saints in the Yezidi Tradition." *Iran and the Caucasus*, no. 5 (2001): 90.

<sup>27</sup> The integrity of Yezidi religious hymns is called *qawlūbayt* (qawl, Arab "word", bayt, Arab. "verses"). Some religious hymns are called *qawl*, some, *bayt*, and the remaining ones, *u'lm* (Amryan, 2016: 169-170).

Paḏşayê min li nav textê xo yî bi *sure*,  
 Paḏşayê min xudanê *ilmê* pire. (Qewlê Texta)<sup>28</sup>  
 My King is near the table full of secrets,  
 My Lord is the master of big knowledge.

Ew kasa te mira anî  
 Wekî min zanî, wekî min vedixarî,  
 Te dame ser *ulmekî* Qatanî. (Qewlê Îmanê)<sup>29</sup>  
 You fetched that cup for me,  
 So I know and drink that.  
 You put me on the path of the knowledge of the Qatanî<sup>30</sup> [sheykhs].  
 A hymn, dedicated to Sufi martyr, Huseyn Hallaj, mentions:  
 Destê Husêynda heye *ulmê* dîwanê. (Qewlê Husêyînî Helac)<sup>31</sup>  
 Huseyn has the knowledge of *dîwan*<sup>32</sup> in his hand.

In Sufism, *ma'rîfat* (lit: "wisdom," "knowledge") is one of the stops on the Sufi path to self-perfection. At this stop, the hermit, who is deprived of physical desires, is able to contemplate God and can become a teacher for beginners. In Sufism, *ma'rîfat* is also the ability of the hermit to comprehend his integration with divine nature.<sup>33</sup> Sufi *ma'rîfat* is comparable to the Hellenistic concept of "gnosis," i.e. the divine knowledge and wisdom based on revelation.<sup>34</sup> Some authors have differentiated divine knowledge (*ma'rîfat*) from knowledge gained through intellectual activity

<sup>28</sup> Hecî, 2002: 337.

<sup>29</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 194.

<sup>30</sup> The caste of sheykhs is divided into three clans: Qatani, Shamsani, and Adani (Amryan, 2016: 72): The expression, *ulmê Qatanî* (lit: "the knowledge of Qatani") used in religious hymns symbolizes the knowledge of the Yezidi religion and hymns (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 199, fn. 7).

<sup>31</sup> Celîl O., and Celîl C. *Zargotina Kurda*. Vol. II, Moscow: Nauka, 1978: 38

<sup>32</sup> In Yezidi religious vocabulary, *dîwân* (Arab. "office", "bureau") indicates the hierarchy of forty saints (*çil mêrê dîwana Şixadî*, lit: "The 40 saints of the *diwan* of Sheikh Adi") (Amryan, 2016: 38).

<sup>33</sup> Khalidov, A. "Arabskij yazik." *V Oчерки istorii arabskoy kul'turi (V-XV vv.)*. redaktor Bol'shakov O. G., Moskva: Nauka, 1982: 30.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A. *The Mystics of Islam*. London: Forgotten Books, 1914: 71.

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(‘ilm), since *ma’rîfat* is associated with divine love (Arab. mahabbat, "love").<sup>35</sup>

Some Yezidi religious hymns mention:

Şêxşims xudanê *merîfet* û erkan û nasîne. (Qewlê Sibeykê)<sup>36</sup>

Sheykh Shams is the master of knowledge, commandments, and wisdom.

Ji stûnê heta bi stûnê,

Çend mifte heyê li hindiru xizînê,

Ya Şêşims, te dane destî me *merîfet* û nasînê. (Qewlê Şêşimsê Tewrêjî)<sup>37</sup>

From commandment to commandment (lit: from pillar to pillar)<sup>38</sup>

There are so many keys in the treasury,

O Sheykh Shams, you gave wisdom and knowledge to us.

Birme dîwanê û hedretê,

Ew cîyê edebê û *merîfetê*,

Siltân Êzî bi xō wê li wê suhbatê. (Silav silavêt cebêre)<sup>39</sup>

I was taken to *diwan*,

It is a place of knowledge and wisdom,

Sultan Yezid is speaking [there].

Ji Şamê birme Şerqê,

Nefsa bê *merîfetê*,

Ne li rê şevêt giran dewê dikey li xedrê. (Qewlê Axretê)<sup>40</sup>

I was taken from the West to the East (lit: I was taken from Sham<sup>41</sup> to the East),

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<sup>35</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A. *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923: 9.

<sup>36</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 216.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid: 258.

<sup>38</sup> In Yezidism, the religious commandments and duties are called *pillars* (Amryan, 2016: 161-162):

<sup>39</sup> Hecî, 2002: 61.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 116.

The senseless lust,  
Which is not on the path, reveals traitorous demands.

Sedqa me xoş sikane,  
Rêya me xoş erkane,  
*Merîfeta* me xoş nîşane. (Qewlê Aşê Muhbetê)<sup>42</sup>  
Our purity is a good station,<sup>43</sup>  
Our way is a commandment,  
Our wisdom is a good sign.

Although the term *ma'rîfat* is used in its Sufi meaning in Yezidi religious hymns, in contemporary society it has lost its original meaning and is interpreted as "wisdom," "goodness," or "politeness." Sometimes it is interpreted as "zeal" and is devoid of Sufi religious mystical nuances.

The term *ma'rîfat* is a part of the name of the holy place in Lalish. *Sûkâ Marîfatê* or *Suq al-Ma'rîfa* (lit: "the market of wisdom") is the name of a square which is not far from the main Yezidi sanctuary. The square is edged with a construction resembling arches. This area does not have a definite function today. During pilgrimages and holidays, it is used for ceremonies related to fire and is full of pilgrims.<sup>44</sup> One historical source points out that there used to be a market that occupied the western part of the square.<sup>45</sup>

The religious hymns mention:  
Hûn bidine xatirê *Sûka merîfetê*,  
Mêrê li ber bedîlê diket xilmetê,

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<sup>41</sup> The word Sham in Arabic was used to denote Syria. Since it is west of the historical homeland of Yezidis - Lalish, it is sometimes used to mean West in the Yezidi language (Amryan, T'. "Sufiakan inqnakatarelagorc'man ç'anaparhi gaghap'arn artahaytoğh vorosh yezzer yezdiakan kronakan himnerum.", *Banber Matenadarani*, № 24, Yerevan, 2017: 38):

<sup>42</sup> Hecî, 2002: 265.

<sup>43</sup> The stops on the Sufi path to self-perfection (Amryan, 2017: 35-46):

<sup>44</sup> Açıkyıldız, B. *The Yezidis. The History of a Community, Culture and Religion*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2010: 136; Kreyenbroek, 1995: 80-81.

<sup>45</sup> Empson, R.H.W. *The Cult of the Peacock Angel*. London: Harry Forbes Witherby, 1928: 124.



Dewrêşê<sup>46</sup> şev û roj diket ibadetê,  
Her pênc ferzêd heqîqetê,  
Şêx û pîr, hosta û merebî, yar û birayêd axretê,  
Ya Şêşims, to meferiyakê mala xo û me jî bikey vê carê. (Duayê Hêvarî)<sup>47</sup>

For the sake of *Suka Marifat*,  
[For the sake of] the saint who is serving,  
[For the sake of] the saint who is exalting day and night,  
[For the sake of] of the five priests,  
[For the sake of] *sheykh, pir, hosta, marhabi* and the brother of the hereafter,  
Oh Sheykh Shams, this time become a shelter for us and your family.

Xoza çoboma *Sûka merîfatê*,  
Ya tijî ji xêrê ji nazê ji nemetê,  
Ewe jîyê sitî lê dîkin dawetê. (Qewlê Miskîn Tajdîn)<sup>48</sup>  
I wish I went to *Suka Marifat*,  
Which is full of miracles and blessings,  
The *stis*<sup>49</sup> are enjoying the wedding there.

Studying Yezidi religious terms related to secret mystical knowledge allows us to reconstruct the development and transformation of some Sufi realities in Yezidi beliefs. The religious terms of Sufi origin, which express the idea of mystical knowledge, have lost their original meaning in Yezidism.

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<sup>46</sup> In the medieval Islamic world, the term *dewrêş* was used to describe the hermits and members of Sufi brotherhoods. The term *dewrêş* in Yezidi religious hymns is used not only to characterize the hermits, but also for describing the saints (Amryan, 2016: 47):

<sup>47</sup> Kreyenbroek, 1995: 222

<sup>48</sup> Hecî, 2002: 316

<sup>49</sup> The Yezidis use the word *stî* (Arab. sayyida, "mistress") to refer to female members respectfully, as well as representatives of sheykh or pir families. In religious hymns, *stî* is also used for female saints (Amryan, 2016: 50).

**ԳԱՂՏՆԻ, ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՊԱՇՏԱԿԱՆ ԳԻՏԵԼԻՔԻ ԳԱՂԱՓԱՐԸ  
ԵԶԴԻԱԿԱՆ ԿՐՈՆԱԿԱՆ ՀԻՄՆԵՐՈՒՄ**

**Թերեզա Ամրյան  
(Ամփոփում)**

Եզդիական համայնքը ձևավորվել է 11-14-րդ դարերում ներկայիս Իրաքի հյուսիսում գտնվող Լալիշ կոչվող կիրճում: Եզդիների կրոնում շատ սուֆիական տարրեր են պահպանվել, քանի որ այն ձևավորվել է Շեյխ Ադի բին Մուսաֆիրի հիմնած աղավիհ եղբայրակցության դավանաբանության հիմքի վրա: Այդ սուֆիական տարրերը խորհրդանշում են ոչ միայն որոշակի ծեսեր, այլև կրոնական եզրեր: Գաղտնի խորհրդապաշտական գիտելիքի գաղափարի հետ կապված մի շարք եզրեր հիշատակվում են եզդիական կրոնական հիմներում: Եզդիական կրոնական հիմները չափածո տեքստեր են, որոնք արտասանվում են հոգևորականների կողմից որոշակի կրոնական արարողությունների ժամանակ: Խորհրդապաշտական գիտելիքի գաղափարի հետ կապված եզրերը հատուկ տեղ ունեն եզդիականության մեջ և հետաքրքիր մեկնաբանություն են ստանում եզդիների կրոնական աշխարհընկալման շրջանակներում: Խորհրդապաշտական գիտելիքի հետ կապված եզրերի սուֆիական իմաստը եզդիականության մեջ այլևս կենդանի չէ: Չնայած եզդիական կրոնական հիմների տեքստերում այդ եզրերը կիրառված են սուֆիական նշանակությամբ, բայց դրանք սուֆիական մեկնաբանություն չունեն ժամանակակից եզդիների կրոնական աշխարհընկալման մեջ: