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YEZIDI MUSIC AND THE EPIC OF DERWEŞE EVDİ

Abstract

The most common forms prevail in the field as means of Yezidi oral tradition are as follows: folk songs (strana folklori), various forms of narrative prose (çirok), and women's laments (şin). Unfortunately, many forms existing in Yezidi oral tradition could only be studied within these three categories since forms in Kurmanji have not been thoroughly analyzed and documented. Yezidis use stran, which is considered the most popular and important form of oral tradition, in their conversations related to oral tradition. The Kurdish term stran means song. Its scope is broad. Celil Brothers' book entitled Zargotina Kurda, the most comprehensive and competent compilation that aims at documenting Kurmanji oral traditions by drawing on Yezidi sources, classifies stran as historical stran (tarixi), love stran (bengiti) dance stran (govend), and lament stran (şin). Even though they contain many different subjects, Yezidi strans mostly narrate heroism, villainy, and events that are believed to be historical.

The most important Yezidi strans are as follows: Feriq Pasha, Dawude Dawud and Derweşe Evdi. Among these has Derweşe Evdi the richest musicality.

Keywords: *The Yezidis, The Yezidi Music, The Yezidi Oral Tradition, Derweşe Ewdi.*

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1. WHO ARE YEZIDİS

Yezidi people call themselves Ezidiyan and Ezidi. They began using the term Yezidi after

1930s. The word Yezidi is assumed to be come from Kurdish “ezdam (the one who creates me)” (Tori, Kürt p.168). There are various views put forward on the origins of Yezidi belief system. A few of them propose that it is a sect that deviated from Islamic principles whereas others suggest that it is a continuation of Zoroastrianism as the religion of Kurds before they converted to Islam. It is also thought to have originated in Central Asia as a Turkic belief system. Some interprets it as a belief system that combines various religious practices (Ç.Ceyhan Süvari p.54).

Yezidism is known as “ethnic religion” since those who were born as Yezidi are only accepted as Yezidi (Süvari p.96). Yezidis speak Kurdish and they form a religious community without national identity. Yezidism is recognized as a combined belief system rather than a national identity mostly because Yezidis maintain Assyrians` belief, the cult of sun, and Şeyh Adi was an Arab monk and his first followers were Arabs, and Yezidi Sheikh Muaviye bin İsmail claimed that his ancestors were Assyrians, and the mother language of the great proportion of Yezidis was Kurdish (Erol Sever, p.95-96). In Yezidi belief system, we can see many traces of numerous religions and believes. It takes practices of Paganism such as the worship of sun and moon, and dualism of Zoroastrianism, and baptism, blessing, and wine of Christianity, and circumcision, fasting and sacrifice of Islam. There are also similarities between Yezidis and Sabians such as three-time prayer in a day (Müslüm Yücel p.209-210).

Sheikh Adiy bin Misafir, who is known of his Arab origin, is recognized as the founder of Yezidism (Ahmet Taşgın p.15). However, the connection between Sheikh Adiy, who is known as a Muslim cleric, and Yezidism is unidentified. Sheikh Adiy was born in Damascus and received religious education in theological schools in Baghdad. In 1116, he settled in Saint Adday, an old Nestorian monastery located in Valley of Laleş, which is in 57 km north of Mosul, and he lived there until he died in 1162. He was buried there and later on the valley of Laleş became the most sacred place and the center of pilgrimage of Yezidis. Community members, who wash their hands and faces with the water called “zemzem” there, were considered baptized and blessed. Yezidis celebrate “*Ceyna Cemaiye (the Festival of Congregation)*,” which is the most important commemoration of their four religious festivals, during the first week of October in Laleş. The visit to the temple during this festival was compulsory (Sabiha Banu Yalkut, p.54).

The decisions concerning Yezidi community were made in Laleş. *Meclis-i Ruhani*, the highest spiritual body of Yezidis, assemble several times in a year to discuss religious and material issues of Yezidis. Decisions taken here obligate all Yezidis. *Meclis-i Ruhani* may remove bans or release new orders. Yezidism, to a large extent, is based on orally transmitted information (Sabiha Banu Yalkut, p.31).) It is claimed that the temple located within the Monastery of Deyrulzafaran in Mardin is one of an important pilgrimage centers of Yezidis, and they visit here in particular

times of the year (Erol Sever, p.31). According to another view, Yezidism is a belief that is peculiar to Kurds. In this respect, Zoroastrianism, which is the previous religion of Kurds, is defined as Yezidism bounded by new principles and rules.

Yezidis worship a god called Xude, who they believe the creator of the entire universe. They believe that Xude left his/her power that he/she has on the earth to angels that assist him/her. The foremost angel among these is the “*Melek Tavus (angel of badness)*.” This angel is equal to the Devil whose name is never uttered. *Melek Tavus*, according to Yezidi belief, was first expelled because of his/her revolt against god then was forgiven because of his/her remorse. Yezidis are afraid of Melek Tavus, whom they recognize as the head of angels, since he/she is the angel of badness (Tori, Yezidilik p.51). This is why Yezidis are blamed for worshiping the Devil. Uttering the name of the Devil is considered equal to blaspheming against god, and it might be the cause of the dismissal from the community. Yezidis, for that matter, do not use words similar to Devil such as *kaytan* (, şad (happy), *melun* (devilish), *lanet* (curse). According to Yezidi belief both goodness and badness are in human’s power and therefore both heaven and hell are on earth (Tori, Yezidilik, p.53). Yezidis turn to west three times a day (sunrise, noon, and sunset) standing, and practice their 20-word prayer. Written texts are not much effective in religious practice.

2. YEZIDI MUSIC AND THE EPIC OF DERWEŞE EVDİ

The most common forms prevail in the field as means of Yezidi oral tradition are as follows: folk songs (*strana folklori*), various forms of narrative prose (*çirok*), and women’s laments (*şin*). Unfortunately, many forms existing in Yezidi oral tradition could only be studied within these three categories since forms in Kurmanji have not been thoroughly analyzed and documented. Yezidis use *stran*, which is considered the most popular and important form of oral tradition, in their conversations related to oral tradition. The Kurdish term *stran* means song. Its scope is broad. Celil Brothers’ book entitled *Zargotina Kurda*, the most comprehensive and competent compilation that aims at documenting Kurmanji oral traditions by drawing on Yezidi sources, classifies *stran* as historical *stran (tarixi)*, love *stran (bengiti)* dance *stran (govend)*, and lament *stran (şin)*. Even though they contain many different subjects, Yezidi *strans* mostly narrate heroism, villainy, and events that are believed to be historical (Allison, p.120-121).

Yezidi oral tradition should be studied within Kurdish oral tradition. *Dengbej* practice of Kurdish oral tradition also form the basis for Yezidi oral tradition. Narration is divided into poetic and melodious sections as in *Dengbej* tradition. As in Kurdish *kilams* (songs) and *strans* (ballads), words such as ‘le daye’ (oh mom) or ‘le le’ (alas) are frequently used in Yezidi *kilams* (songs) and

strans (ballads). The only difference was the word 'Ezdi o' (hey, Yezidi) used by Yezidis. These words enhance the emotional intensity of strans.

The most important Yezidi *strans* are as follows: Feriq Pasha, Dawude Dawud and Derweşe Evdi. Among these has Derweşe Evdi the richest musicality.

The atrocity of Feriq Paşa in 1892 is considered the most terrifying disaster in the collective memory of Yezidis at the moment. The stran of Feriq Paşa narrating this atrocity, in this respect, is considered a stran of war and betrayal. The stran of Dawude Dawud, on the other hand, is a stran of uprising and heroism. Derweşe Evdi that contains love, warfare, and heroism, in addition, is one of the greatest strans of Yezidi oral tradition in terms of its musical expression. Derweş was a brave hero who was in love with Edüle, the daughter of Zor Temel Paşa, who was one of the most important tribal leaders at the time. Derweş was a Yezidi but his beloved was a Muslim. Their love that tragically ended takes an important part in many traditional narratives in northern Iraq. Yezidis regard Derweş, Edüle ve Zor Temel Paşa as historical figures. As for story, Gesans, one of Arab tribes, send a message to Zor Temel Paşa that they will attack his tribes. The tribe, terrified by the message, look for a way out. Edüle propose to ask for help from Derweş. Derweş is sent a message that tells the situation. According to message, Zor Temel Paşa will give his daughter Edule to the one who fights. Derweş mentions the message to his father Evdi and his brother Sedun, and asks his father for his brother Sedun, and Eli and Bozan to fight with him. Evdi cries and tries to convince him about the dishonesty of Zor Temel Paşa. Derweş does not believe him and goes to the house of Zor Temel Paşa. He drinks a coffee made by Edule and asks her father for her and leaves. Derweş and his entourage mount their horses. Derweş's father, Eli and Bozan's mother beg Edule for her conciliation. Edule goes after Derweş and begs him but he rejects her beggings. They kiss each other and Derweş leaves with his comrades. Derweş and his friends fight against Gesans and die. After Zor Temel Paşa received the message that mentions their death, Edule is informed about the incident and lyrically laments for Derweş and stabs herself.

3. CONCLUSION

Yezidism, in which traces of many religions and beliefs could be found, influenced ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, and played an important role in the development of many culture, and was influenced by various cultures. We can see religious music, music for entertainment, and 'stran' as a form of narrative tradition. Yezidis use kaval (end-blown flute) and tef (frame drum) to accompany their prayers when they visit graves. Similarly, they use these instruments in their

religious center Laleş. They use dahol (double-headed cylindrical drum) and zirne (a double reed woodwind instrument) in their wedding celebrations and festivals. They orally narrate events that are related to their culture. Sometimes they use baglama (long-necked lute) for these narratives. Generally oral transmission is expressed only with vocal music. Vocal music has contributed to passing down of Yezidi culture to this day. In spite of their displacement from their lands, Yezidis, who have not forgotten their oral culture and traditions, was one of the most important communities of Mesopotamia.

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