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MALAK-TĀWŪS:
THE PEACOCK ANGEL OF THE YEZIDIS

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General

Although the relevant literature will often classify the Yezidis as followers of polytheism, worshipping an array of gods having differing degrees of significance, a closer scrutiny will show this view to be in need of a radical review.

Using this type of approach, elements of polytheism can be identified in the unambiguously monotheistic religions as well. Thus, Muslims, for instance, see the concept of the Christian Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as a manifestation of polytheism in Christianity. Meanwhile, in Islam itself, where monotheism is an indisputable basis, the alpha and omega of the entire theology, some heterodox sects (the extreme Shi‘as, for example) deifying the fourth caliph, ‘Ali ibn Abi-Talib, and other characters, like Fatima, also come in for criticism by orthodox Islamic theologians for their departure from the monolithic God, from the very idea of *tauḥīd*, monotheism.

The poly-variation, or rather, the dismembered representation of the Divine Entity, 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, whose essential nature does not change even in the presence of a manifestly principal divinity in the system of gods. This principal divinity, while endowed with a greater power (greater attributes, functions, and so on) compared to others, is, however, not the Absolute, which is the main characteristic of the One God. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly differentiate between the dismembered representations of the Divine (by different spheres of manifestation and even under differing names) reduced to the single initiation, and polytheism characterised by a dispersed representation of the Divine.

In monotheism the Divine Essence in its manifestations does not in any way lose even partially the role, functions or power of God, the sole source of divine emanation and of the Divine in its entirety, but rather manifests its qualities within different hyposta-

ses. From this viewpoint, even Zoroastrianism, often characterised as a dualistic religion, can be regarded as such, albeit with great reservations. Indeed, despite quite an impressive pantheon of gods as a whole, Ahura Mazdā is featured generally as the supreme god, with the functions of the demiurge.¹

In the Old Iranian religion god is designated by the term *bága- (cf. Old Pers. *baga* “god”, Avestan *baga-* “lot, good fortune”, Sogd. *bay*)—One (Single) God (rather, supreme god), unlike the Yazats (Avestan *yazata*, Middle Pers. *yazat*, New Pers. *īzad*, literally meaning “one worthy of worship or of sacrifice”). As for *bága-, this concept means “dispenser (of good fortune)”, cf. Skt. *bhága-*. Another denotation of the supreme god in Old Iran was *dātār-, that is, “creator” (New Persian *dādār*). At the present time the general designation of god in New Persian and in most New Iranian dialects is *xudāy*, from Old Iran. **xwa-tāwan-*, lit. *αυτοκρατής*, “autocrat”; the same term, *Xwadē*, also designates One God among the Yezidis.

As for Angra Mainyu or Ahriman in the Zoroastrian religion he is only a manifestation of evil, a force of destruction, and to some degree is a parallel of Satan, although possessing more significant attributes than the devil in Christianity (for example, he is the author of part of creation and is hostile to Ahura Mazdā and his creation).

Thus, the Old Iranian religion, while never having been unambiguously monotheistic, tends in its various manifestations towards monotheism, with one god, Ahura Mazdā, dominating over a whole array of divinities. The situation does not change radically when the priority of Ahura Mazdā is challenged by Zurvān or Mithra.

In consequence, a true dualism, with equally significant god and demon locked in unending combat with an unpredictable outcome, has never been known in Iran.²

¹ Cf. in Old Persian inscriptions: *baga vazarka Auramazdā haya imām būmim adā haya avam asmānam adā haya martiyam adā haya šiyātim adā martiyahyā*, etc.—“A great god is Ahura Mazdā, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man” (DNa, 16; see R.G. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar*, New Haven, Connecticut, 1953: 137-138). Also: *Auramazdā baga vazarka haya mašišta bagānām*—“Ahura Mazdā, great god, who [is] the greatest of gods” (AsH, 5-7; Kent, *op. cit.*: 116).

² Cf. “The Iranian religion has never been as aggressively monotheistic as are, for instance, Judaism and Islam. But it does represent, in some of its sources, an attempt at monotheism, with one god, Ahura Mazdā (later Ohrmazd) dominating a series of abstract entities. In other sources, other gods exist also, whose relationship with the main god is not always clearly defined. They can be equivalents of the saints in Roman Catholicism or in Islam; or they can, as in the case of Mithra or Zurvān, tend to rob Ahura Mazdā of his supremacy; or

In the meantime, even the Old Greek religion, whose designation as “polytheism” is unambiguously substantiated, had monotheistic tendencies with ancient roots: “Der monotheistische Gedanke war alt in Griechenland”, as noted by one well-known expert of the Old Greek religion.³ That, however, leaves no doubt as to its polytheistic nature as a whole, since we are here dealing with the dominance of religious mentality, rather than at the various ideas allowed to co-exist within a common system.

Anyway, when characterising a specific religion, particularly a syncretic one, which is Yezidism, it is necessary to consider the entire complex of its structure without leaning mainly upon the external manifestation of the transcendental in the system of the religious dogmas.

Analysis of the Yezidi Holy Triad also shows its component deities to be unambiguous manifestations of one god worshipped by the Yezidis. The absence of canonised dogmatic literature leaves us no choice but to lean upon the oral religious code of the Yezidis. However, the folkloric religious texts, particularly within the context of a wider analysis, present a material quite sufficient for research. The monotheism of the Yezidis is seen, for example, in the following prayer adopted as the Symbol of Faith (Šahdā dīnī):

Šahdā dīnē min ēk Allāh,...
 Silt’ān Šēxadī pādšē mina,...
 Silt’ān Ēzdī pādšē mina,...
 Tāwūsī malak šahdā ū imānēd mina...
 Haqa, xwadē kir, [am] ēzdīna,
 Sar nāvē Silt’ān Ēzdīna.
 Al-h’amd lillāh, am ži ōl ū tariqēd xō di-řāzīnā.

“The Testimony of my faith is One God,
 Sultan Sheikh ‘Adi is my king,
 Sultan Yezid is my king,
 Malak-Tawus is the Symbol [of Faith] and my faith.
 Indeed, by God’s will [we] are Yezidis,
 We are called by the name of Sultan Yezid.
 God be praised, we are content with our religion and our

else they are simply, besides Ahura Mazdā, *the other gods*” (J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “The Religion of Ancient Iran”, *Historia Religionum*, ed. Bluher-Widengren, Leiden, 1969: 323, see also 324).

³ M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*, München, 1961: 569, et sq.

Community".⁴

As for the minor deities of the Yezidi pantheon, the spirits, demons, and so on, their existence provides no reason to talk of polytheism, for similar characters (including the exact counterparts of those of the Yezidis) have been retained by many Iranian (and non-Iranian) Islamic nations at the level of the so-called popular or folk Islam. Therefore, in this work "pantheon" is used as a provisional term denoting the variety of divine incarnations, divinities, spirits, demons and so on, in other words all that is sacral (considering the ambivalence of the sacral in a wider sense, wherein this term exists in the modern religious knowledge for the designation of all that is non-profane, everything that goes beyond the boundaries of the profane world), or, in other words, all hierophanies attested in the Yezidi beliefs.

The One God

The Yezidi Holy Triad comprises the following: Malak-Tāwūs, the Peacock-Angel (in the Yezidi imagination it is featured as a bird, a peacock or a cock, and sometimes even a dove); Sheikh 'Adi (Šeyx 'Ādī = Sheikh 'Adi bin Musafir, a historical personality, the founder of the proto-Yezidi community, as an old man); Sultan Yezid (Silt'ān Ēzīd, as a youth). All three characters are manifestations of God—Xwadē (or Xwadī, Xudā, the term, deriving from New Pers. xudāy). There are also other variations to designate God: xudāvand, rab(b)ī, as well as allāh (mostly in the Arabic formulas); occurring in some religious songs is the term ēzdān (from New Pers. yazdān—"god").

The Yezidi ideas on Xwadē are quite hazy and blurred, and can be subjected to systemic processing only with great difficulty.

The Yezidi Xwadē resembles neither Zeus, the humanised father of the gods of Ellas, nor Yahweh, the almighty and ruthless god of the Jews. Xwadē is little reminiscent of the absolute Allah in Islam or the all-forgiving and merciful God of the Christians. The main thing that makes him equivalent to the One God of the dogmatic religions, and what actually is essential, is his transcendentality and his function of demiurge, as the Creator. However, according to the Yezidi tradition, despite being creator of the Uni-

⁴ Ph. G. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism—Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*, New York, 1995: 226.

verse, Xwadē is completely indifferent to its fate; he is not concerned with worldly affairs or human fortune.

It is not an accident that in the Yezidi liturgy, as well as in the oral tradition, direct address to Xwadē is a very rare occasion, and nor does he want any offerings. There is, however, at least one specimen of religious text dedicated to God, Xwadē, directly, which can be described rather as a glorification than an address in prayer. It is actually called “Madh’ē Xwadē”, that is, “Glorification of God”, or “Praise to God”.⁵ See the text of this prayer, emended occasionally:

Yā, řabīō, tu dāymī,
 Tu k’arīmī,
 Tu řah’īmī,
 Tu qadīmī,
 Tu xudāye har xudāyī,
 Xudāye milk-ē k’arīmī,
 Tu xudāne a’ršē a’zīmī (*rather, a’zmānī*),
 A’nzaldā dānī qadīmī,
 Har xudāyē har xudāyī.
 Hin mak’āyī (*that is, mak’ānī*), hin ma j’āyī (ma j’ālī),...
 Tu xudāyē jin ū isī [insī],
 Xudāyē a’rš ū k’ursī.
 Tu xudāyē ‘ālam ū quśī (*rather, ‘ālamī qudsī*),
 Har xudāyē har xudāyī.
 Hin mak’āyī, hin ma j’āyī,
 Kas nizāna tu čawāyī,
 Har xudāne har xudāyī...
 Ta na māla, ta na p’arda,
 Ta na lawma (*rather, lawna*), ta na ranga,
 Ta na āwāza, ta na danga,
 Kas nizāna tu čawānī,
 Har xudāyē har xudāyī.
 Walīyē farz ū nimēžanī...
 Řuh’ā didī, ruh’ā diparēžī.
 H’ākimē řāh ū gadānī,
 H’ākimē jimh’ī ‘ālamī.
 Ta dīhār kir Īsā ū Maryam,
 Ta am kirin tažbatī (*perhaps, ži batnī, cf. Arab. baṭn*) Ādam.

⁵ O. Celil, C. Celil, *Zargotina k’urda*, Yerevan, 1978: 323-324.

Har xudāyē har xudāyī...

“O, my Lord, you are eternal,
 You are merciful,
 You are graceful,
 You are ancient,
 You are God of all gods,
 The God possessing kindness.
 You are God of the firmament of heaven,
 Initially ancient,
 [You] are God of all gods.
 [You] are both refuge and might,
 [You] are God of spirits and people,
 God of the firmament and throne.
 You are God of the realm of sanctity,
 You are God of all gods.
 [You] are both refuge and might,
 No one knows what you are,
 [You] are God of all gods.
 You have no home, no shelter,
 You have no colouration, no colour,
 You have no voice, nor sound,
 No one knows what you are,
 [You] are God of all gods.
 [You] are the master of prescriptions and prayers.
 You give souls [to people] and [yourself] break the souls,
 [You] are the ruler over both kings and plebeians,
 [You] are the ruler of the entire world,
 You have created Jesus and Mary,
 You have created us [the Yezidis] from the loins of Adam.⁶
 [You] are god of all gods, etc...”

The quoted eulogy is a typical specimen of the *maddāhī* genre (praise of God or rulers) common in the Oriental and Persian poetry.

There is also another prayerful address to God, which is commonly read in the morning:

⁶ An allusion to the origin of the Yezidis from the seed of Adam (cf. G.S. Asatrian, “Foremother of the Yezidis”, *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages*, Copenhagen (forthcoming); see also in detail Eszter Spät, “Shahid bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis and the Gnostic Seed of Seth”, *Iran and the Caucasus*, vol. 6, 1-2, 2002: 27-56).

Yā, xwadē, wara hawārā
 Hafū du milatē,
 Girtīyā havsā,
 Nafsē tangīyā,
 K'asīvā-k'ūsīvā;
 Pāšē wara hawārā
 Milatē ma, ēzdīyā.

“O God, come to the rescue of
 Seventy-two nations,
 Prisoners,
 [People] in straits,
 To paupers and the downcast;
 And then only come to the rescue of
 Our people, the Yezidis”.⁷

Nor are there too many references to Xwadē in the Yezidi religious knowledge and perceptions in general. Everything is done by the hand of his manifestations—the Holy Triad. Xwadē himself for the Yezidis is some transcendental entity: his features are vague, being perceived only through the activity of the Triad, particularly of Malak-Tawus, its main representative, often posing as the creator as well.

Actually, the members of the Holy Triad as the hypostases of Xwadē are not always distinctly explicated; it is rather an implication. Neither the oral tradition nor the so-called holy scriptures of the Yezidis make a note of the Triad as a derivation from Xwadē.

To all appearances, the emergence of the Triad in the Yezidi doctrine in a way moved Xwadē aside, providing him with an implicit character. In other words, the Triad, having developed in Yezidism, was superimposed upon the already available tradition of monotheism initially included in the Yezidi religion, along with the dogmas of the proto-Yezidi formations—bearers of the Mystic Islam.

Thus, the Yezidi Xwadē is a typical example of *deus otiosus*, an impartial god, whose image in sacred history will naturally lose his distinct outlines against the background of more trivial phenomena of creation, the aggrandisement of supernatural creatures, minor divinities, cultural heroes and ancestors directly related to human life. The initial stage of creation and the role of demiurge thus end

⁷ Recorded from Sheikh Hasane Mamud, Armavir region, Armenia.

up, in a way, falling into oblivion. In other words, as noted by F. B. J. Kuiper, referring to M. Eliade, the consecutive chain of events forming sacred history is endlessly recollected and praised, while the preceding stage and everything that had existed prior to that sacred history (in other words, the origin of the Universe), and primarily the majestic and solitary presence of God the Creator, goes dark or dim, becoming faint or obscure. If Great God is still remembered, they know that he had created man and the Universe, and that is it. The Supreme God like this may seem to have played his role having finished the cause of creation.⁸

Malak-Tawus—the Leader of the Holy Triad

Malak-Tawus (Malak tāwūs, Malakē tāwūs, or Tāwūsē/ī malak, Arab. Malak ṭāwūs, that is, Peacock Angel) is the most important character of the Yezidi Holy Triad. He dominates all major and minor divinities of the pantheon.

Malak-Tawus is, in fact, the essence, the *raison d'être*, of the religion of the Yezidis. In a variant of the Yezidi Symbol of Faith he is featured directly after Xwadē.

Min ša'datīya īmānā xwa
Bi nāvē xwadē ū Tāwūsī malak dāya.

“I attest that my faith is given
In the names of God and Malak-Tawus”.⁹

In another version of the same text given above already, Malak-Tawus and Xwadē are both featured as Symbols of Faith, Malak-Tawus himself being characterised as Faith itself:

Šahda dīnē min ēk Allāh,...
Tāwūsī malak šahdā ū īmānēd mina...

“The Testimony of my faith is One God, ...
Malak-Tawus is the Symbol [of Faith] and my faith...”

Malak-Tawus is at the same time the main distinguishing feature of Yezidism, lending a unique character to this syncretic re-

⁸ Ф.Б.Я. Кейпер, *Труды по ведийской мифологии*, Москва, 1986: 112 et sq.

⁹ Celawa Šex Dewrēs, *Du'a ū dirozgê êzdīya*, Rewan (Yerevan), 1993: 11.

ligion: not one religious trend in the region has a comparable cult, including some dogmatically related extreme Shi'a sects, wherein the said image has mainly a nominal representation (see below).¹⁰

Malak-Tawus is at the same time an eponym for the Yezidis: they are called *milatē Malak tawūs*—the nation (or tribe) of Malak-Tawus. In “The Black Scripture” (Mash’afē řaş, NN 2, 14) Malak-Tawus is identified with Azrail, the messenger of death, one of the four archangels nearest to God. “Malēkī xalq kird nāvēna ‘Azra’īl; awīř Malak tawūsa kī gawra hamūyāna”—“... [God] created an angel and gave him the name Azrail; that was Malak-Tawus, who [is] the leader of all”; “Li siř Ādam... milatī li sar arz paydā dibī, li pāřtir milatī ‘Azra’īl, ya‘nī Malak Tawūs kī yazīdiya paydā dibī”—“From the essence of Adam... the people will emerge on earth from which later the people of Azrail, that is, Malak-Tawus, will be born, which is the Yezidi folk”.¹¹

Many peoples of the region indeed consider Malak-Tawus the embodiment of the lord of darkness. That fact has led travellers entering the Yezidi environment at different times to describe them as worshippers of Satan. The epithet “devil worshippers” has been attached to the Yezidis particularly among the followers of orthodox religions, primarily among Muslims. That was the reason, no doubt formal, for the unending persecutions suffered by the tribe of Malak-Tawus. The Yezidis were very often and with particular brutality persecuted by the Kurds, sharing with them, by the way, the same language, the Kurmanji dialect.

An interesting description of the Yezidis and Malak-Tawus, their symbol, was given in the report by Mahmud Bayazidi, a Kurdish Mullah, written under the instructions of the Russian

¹⁰ Interestingly, in the early twentieth century a certain Syrian established a secret society in England entitled the “Order of the Peacock Angel”. Multiple circles embraced fully respectable folks infatuated by peculiar Eastern exotics, worshipping two powers: the “Augmentation” and the “Construction”, known under the code names “Peacock” and “Serpent”. The members of the order regarded one another as brothers, took part in common rituals, facilitating, in their opinion, an establishment of close association among the cult followers. Similar societies must have been established on the American continent as well (for detail, see Аркон Дарол, *Тайные общества* (пер. с французского), Москва, 1998: 165-184.

The concept of the Peacock Angel cult of this order was, of course, borrowed from the Yezidis. This attempt at an artificial recreation of the esoteric knowledge in an alien environment among the people of an alternate mentality is evidence of nothing more than a general interest of the Europeans in diverse systems of clandestine knowledge, so typical for the Europe of the early twentieth century.

¹¹ M. Bittner, *Die heilige Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter* (kurdisch und arabisch), Vienna, 1913: 24, 28; Գ.Ս. Ասատրյան, Ա.Պ. Փոլադյան, “Եզդիների դավանանքը (Հիմնական աստվածոթյունները եւ սուրբ գրքերը)”, *Պատմա-բանասիրական Հանդես* 4 (1989): 144-145.

Consul in Erzerum. “And there is a tribe of the Yezidis, which do not belong to the Muslims, being the Yezidis. And all their customs, and mores, and laws are different [from those of the Muslims]. That tribe (*tāyfa*) worship Iblis (the devil), and the one they call Malak-Tawus is Satan (*šayṭān*). Their language, however, is also Kurdish”.¹²

Because of the shadowy character of the image of Xwadē as well as by virtue of the members of the Triad being his manifestations, Malak-Tawus appears at times as the demiurge or as his assistant (see below, “The Book of Revelation”).

Unfortunately, in the oral religious tradition (in the so-called *Qawl-ū-bayt*¹) there is only one song directly concerned with Malak-Tawus—“*Qawlē Malakē tāwūs*”; references to him are also very few. That may be explained by a partial taboo upon his name (see below). To call out his name in vain, particularly among the members of religious castes, is forbidden (cf. “Never mention my name or my features, lest you should commit a sin”; see below, “The Book of Revelation”, Part 4, No. 8).

This situation, of course, in no way facilitates the proper coverage of the image and the role of Malak-Tawus in the cult. However, the so-called “The Book of Revelation” (*Kitēbā jalwa*), a brief treatise reflecting the Yezidi religious tradition, is devoted entirely to Malak-Tawus. Analysing this writing is what enables findings, albeit incomplete ones, to be made about that divinity of the Yezidi pantheon. With regard to the significance of this “Book” as an important source, and its unique character, it is expedient to cite the complete text here in translation, based upon the Kurdish-Arabic edition by M. Bittner and our Armenian translation.¹³ “The Book of Revelation” is composed of six parts, including the Introduction, and consists of 44 statements.

INTRODUCTION

0. The one who had existed before all creatures, Malak-Tawus.

1. It is he who has sent Abtavus to this world (lit. “slave of Tawus”, that is, “slave of Malak-Tawus”), so that [he may] identify his chosen people (that is, the Yezidis), endow [them] with knowledge and relieve [them] from fear and delusion.

¹² Mēla Mehmūd Bayazidī, *Rusūmat' nameyē ek' radiye* (Russian edition by M. B. Rudenko), М.М. Баязиди, *Нравы и обычаи курдов*, Москва, 1963: 74 (Kurdish text), 64 (Russian translation).

¹³ See Bittner, *op. cit.*: 24-39; Ասատրյան, Փղարյան, *op. cit.*: 140-144.

2. The emergence of this matter (that is, the Scripture) [has been done] by word of mouth, face to face, and then through this Book called Jalwa (that is, "Revelation").

PART I

1. I have been and I am now, and I shall be forever. I rule over all creatures and arrange their matters.

2. I am ready. I am kind to those who believe in me and address me in need.

3. I am omnipresent. I participate in all events considered evil by the infidels for the reason that they do not match their wishes.

4. Each Time has its arranger, which is done by my advice. Each Time sends a certain ruler, and each of those rulers does his work at his time.

5. The creatures created are allowed by me to do [what they want].

6. Those who counter me are defeated.

7. Other deities do not interfere with my cause: whatever I wish, they never go against me.

8. The books held in the hands of infidels (that is, the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an), are untrue, have not been written by the prophets, they are distorted and deformed. They all reiterate and negate one another.

9. The truth and error are defined by experience.

10. I rage against those who speak in my name. My discord is shown by the wise arrangers dispatched by me for a few days. Generally, I forbid [all that I hold to be wrong].

11. I show the way and instruct those following my disciples (in text: "those whom I taught"). Those people shall be happy when they become my companions.

PART II

1. I award kindness to people as I hold to be true.

2. I rule all creatures above and underneath the earth.

3. I do not wish that people clash with one another.

4. In any case I do not begrudge good to those who belong to me and who obey me.

5. I engage in activities those whom I have tested and who move at my wish.

6. I appear in some image to those people who have faith in me and who consult me.

7. Time and again I test people with trials (sufferings), [and] no one can forbid me to do so.

8. And no one can interfere.

9. The sufferings and afflictions that I bring are for those who resist me.

10. The one who walks in my steps (lit. "is headed towards me") will not die like other people.

11. I will have none to live in this world beyond the time that has been set for him.

12. If I will, by rebirth, I will send someone to this or some other world once or twice.

PART III

1. With no book do I show the way to those who please me. I rule them invisibly; what I teach you [is achieved] easily.

2. Time and again I inflict injury upon those who are in another world (that is, perhaps those, who do not observe the laws of Yezidism) and shun my religion.

3. Those sons of Adam ignore the course [of laws] of [the true] religion and, therefore, often stray off course.

4. The beast of the land, the dove of the skies and the fish of the sea are in my hands all and under my eye.

5. I know of the subterranean treasures and I gradually cede them to people.

6. I show my miracles to those only who want [to see] them.

7. Those aliens who commit evil following not my words and those of my followers in their actions will see harm, for they ignore the fact that both greatness and wealth are in my hands, and I give them to the best of the sons of Adam.

8. The creation of the world, succession of days and arranger of all arrangers at the very beginning are from me.

PART IV

1. I will never cede my right to any one of the gods (divinities).

2. The four elements, the four seasons and the four bases were presented by me so that creation would take place.

3. The books of infidels can be accepted if [they] match my law. The [book] that does not match my law has been distorted by them.

4. My enemies count three in number, and my wrath is on three things.

5. Those who do not divulge my secret will prosper.

6. Those who suffer for me will receive kindness from me in some world.

7. When fighting against aliens I will stand at the side of those who join me.

8. O, people, who perceive my truth with your ears, keep away from those things that come not from me! Never mention my name or my features, lest you should commit a sin. You ignore what those people do who have lost their way.

PART V

1. Keep my essence and my image in your thoughts, for [it] will help you remember the part of my knowledge that you have forgotten.

2. Be guided by the speeches uttered by my servants, hear the divine science that [they] communicate to you in my name.

END OF "THE BOOK OF REVELATION"

In the text quoted herein, Malak-Tawus is at first sight featured as the demiurge, creator, ruling the creatures in heaven, above the earth and underneath, adjusting their lives, awarding goodness to "his people" and severely punishing those who err. A deeper analysis, however, shows that while Malak-Tawus "existed before all creatures", he is not in actual fact the creator. We look here at the phenomenon when there is a complete transference of the features and functions of creator from One God to his chief representative. Malak-Tawus, being as noted, a manifestation of Xwadē, claims, quite legitimately, the role of the demiurge. Sidelined by a later Triad, Xwadē could not leave the cosmogonic void. Creation, amended by the prophetic mission of the characters of the Triad, has explicitly become the merit of Malak-Tawus (implicitly remaining, of course, something done by One God-Demiurge). It is the prophetic mission of Malak-Tawus that indicates to us what stays the same—the manifestation of the demiurge, rather than the demiurge himself. Quite another matter is Malak-Tawus in the person of a preaching prophet. This is unambiguously his domain; he is more interested in the purity of religion and orthopraxy, the aspirations of the followers and the endurance of faith than in the cosmogonic categories. He tries to controvert the sanctity of aliens' writings, although he allows acceptance of them if they "match my law" (part IV, No. 3).

There are individual shadowy spots. For example, it is not clear what is meant in part IV, No. 4 by "three enemies" (perhaps the three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam?) or by the

wrath on the “three things” (the holy scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims), and who Abtavus is (Introduction, No. 2). However, in all, despite this ambiguity, “The Book of Revelation” is an ultimately clear text, with a manifestly apologetic character, aggrandising Malak-Tawus as a symbol of the Yezidi religion. In another sacred Yezidi text, the so-called “Black Scripture”, compiled, to all appearances, prior to the “Book of Revelation”, Malak-Tawus poses in more genuine outlines, with more authentic attributes. “The Black Scripture” is a classical example of the Sufi treatises, with a mixture of various traditions, myths and cosmogonic details, with invented, possibly *ad hoc*, fabulous characters associated with the Near Eastern and the Biblical traditions. In it, Malak-Tawus is one of the attendant angels of God (beside those known in the Muslim tradition: Jabrail, Israfil, and so on), having taken part in creation, particularly in arranging the affairs of the Forefather Adam. The following *loci* from the text of “The Black Scripture” given below mention Malak-Tawus.

1. In the beginning God created the white pearl from his kind essence and a dove, calling him Anfar, and put that pearl on him that stayed there forty thousand years.

2. Sunday, day one of Creation. [God] has created an angel calling him Azrail; that was Malak-Tawus, who is the leader of all.

3. On Sunday [God] created the angel Dardail, who is Sheikh Hasan (relative and follower of Sheikh ‘Adi bin Musafir).

4. On Tuesday he created the angel Israfil, who is Sheikh Shams (identified with the Sun).

5. On Wednesday he created the angel Mikail, who is Sheikh Abu Bakr (Shekhobakr).

6. On Thursday he created the angel Jabrail, who is Sidjaddin.

7. On Friday he created the angel Shamnail, who is Nasraddin.

8. On Saturday he created the angel Turail (in the Arabic version, Nurail).

9. And he set Malak-Tawus as the head of all...

*Further on (10-13) there is a description of the act of the creation of the world: creation of the earth, plants, celestial bodies, natural phenomena, and so on; all creation originates from the pearl.*¹⁴

¹⁴ In the oral version of the Yezidi cosmogony, *Qawlē āfrīnā dinyāyē* (Kreyenbroek, *op. cit.*: 182-192.), there is also a pearl present (dīr, Arab. durr) as the basis of the Universe; however, it does not mention Malak-Tawus, which meets the standards of religious practice, i.e., because of the taboo on his name.

14. Great God said to the angels: “I have created Adam and Eve, and I shall make them into people. The essence of Adam will cause Shahd bin Safar, who will start a nation on earth that will later produce the nation of Azrail—in other words Malak-Tawus—that is, the Yezidi people.¹⁵

15. Later [he] sent Sheikh ‘Adi (the second character of the Triad) from the country of Sham (Syria) to Lalesh.

16. Later God came down to the Black Mountain (probably Mount Judi in Mesopotamia) and shouted, thus creating a throng of thirty thousand angels who worshipped him for forty years. Then [God] delivered [those angels] to Malak-Tawus and ascended to heaven along with them.

17. Then God came down to the holy land [and] commanded Jabrail to bring earth from all four corners of the world, [and] He created earth, and wind, and fire and water, and by virtue of His might planted soul [into earth and created Adam], and commanded Jabrail to carry him over to paradise, [and to allow] tasting [of the fruit] of all plants, except wheat.

18. A hundred years later Malak-Tawus said to God: “In what way should the progeny (*nasl*) of Adam grow?” God said: “I passed to you the arrangement [of this matter]”. [And Malak-Tawus] came to Adam and asked: “Have you eaten wheat?” [Adam] said: “No, for God forbade it to me”. [Malak Tawus] said: “Eat, it is good for you”. After eating wheat Adam’s belly was swollen.

The pearl is a polyvalent symbol noted in the gnostic teachings and in a number of Near Eastern syncretic doctrines (those of the Ahl-i Haqq, and so on). But that is primarily the symbol of the Universe. The fact itself that the pearl is located in a shell, as stated by M. Eliade (*Очерки сравнительного религиоведения*, Москва, 1999: 398-405), can become the cause of its being transformed into a “cosmological centre”. The Yezidi cosmogony regards the pearl in the same hypostasis: the essence of the Universe, existing with the divinity in pre-eternity, prior to anything else.

¹⁵ This verse is interesting because it features the concept of the Yezidis having originated from Adam directly, rather than from his union with Eve, as is the case with all the rest of mankind. That tradition, based perhaps upon the apocryphal Gnostic legend, narrates the dispute between Adam and Eve as to the main role in the reproduction of children. To prove the irrelevance of the woman’s claim to this role, Adam suggests placing his seed and Eve’s seed in two separate jars as to see what fruit they will bear. The result was that Eve’s jar contained worms, scorpions and different vermin, while the jar with Adam’s seed contained a moon-faced boy who was named Šahid bin Jarr (Arab. “Witness, son of the Jar”) (see in more detail Spät, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*). Both the Kurdish and the Arabic versions of the “Scripture” give Šahr bin Safar, to be regarded as the distorted Šahid bin Safar (i.e. *Re* instead of *Dāl*). The patronymic Safar (lit. Arab. “yellow”), may be an allusion to *jarr* “jar, jug”, since a clay jar is mostly yellow.

Later the marriage of the Adam’s son and a *hourî* produced the tribe of Yezidis. Adam, being a true Yezidi, delivers his religion to Shahid, the latter passing it to his successors (see N. Sioufi “Notice sur la seete des yézidis”, *JA*, ser. 7, tome 19: 259-260; R. Lescot, *Enquête sur les yézidis de Syrie et du Djebel Sinjar*, Beirut, 1938:59).

Malak-Tawus expelled him from Paradise, left him then and there and ascended to heaven.

19. Adam started to worry, since he did not have any back passage in his body. God sent a dove (in oral legends a raven) who made an opening with his beak [in the back part of his body, and] he became calm.

20. Jabrail was distant [from Adam] for a hundred years. For one hundred years he was sad.

21. God sent Jabrail [who] came and created Eve out of Adam's left rib.

22. Then Malak-Tawus descended to earth for the sake of our people...¹⁶

The cited fragments of “The Black Scripture”, at first glance a mixture of Biblical, Muslim and local traditions, with sometimes controversial and awkward formulations along with a distinct explication of the role of Tawus in the Universe and of his place within the divine hierarchy, also contain a clear allusion that the same character has features of the fallen angel expelled from heaven for violating the divine command and misleading Adam. However, to all appearances, the details of the “fall” are left out of the “Scripture”, or, perhaps, removed from the text at a later time. In any case, it is easy to perceive a parallel with the Biblical serpent the tempter. Essentially, Malak-Tawus, using God's trust, by fraud made the ignorant Adam trespass the ban, after which he himself expelled him from Paradise, and abandoned him in this improper situation.

A very archaic motif is attested in verse 16, telling the story of God creating a thirty thousand throng of angels by shouting. That is possibly a manifestation of the ritual or, so to say, a “creative” shout, having an unconditional connection with ritual laughter.¹⁷

As has already been mentioned, the oral religious tradition of the Yezidis devotes only one praising hymn (wrongly named the main Yezidi prayer) to Malak-Tawus, where again his name is not mentioned, although the text is addressed to him. There exist several versions of this hymn. The first three versions were recorded and published by S. Egiazarov, an Armenian ethnographer, as far

¹⁶ Bittner, *op. cit.*: 2-28; Ասատրյան, Փղարդյան, *op. cit.*: 144-146.

¹⁷ See, e.g., G. S. Asatrian, “Risus Ritualis: An Old Reminiscence (Iranian Miscellanea)”, *Iran and the Caucasus*, vols. 3-4 (1999-2000): 203-208.

back as 1891,¹⁸ and later published unchanged in 1900 by the Hungarian Orientalist Hugo Makas.¹⁹ However, the most complete version was published by Kh. Sileman and Kh. Jindy in 1979,²⁰ and later, in 1995 re-published by Ph. Kreyenbroek.²¹ It is to be noted that this hymn is not used in religious practice; that may be a form of prayer having no institutional use, like a number of other pieces of religious folklore, although most *qawls* of religious content, comprising the Yezidi liturgic corpus, are performed in the course of the cult administration.

The hymn is compiled in rhyme and is named “Qawlē Tāwūsī malak”, that is, “Song (or Hymn) to Malak-Tawus”. This is a praise for the image, a description of Malak-Tawus’ many virtues: strength, kindness, limitless power, fame, and so on, making the Peacock Angel the stronghold of true faith. See this extract from the “Hymn to Malak-Tawus”:

- (2) Yā, řabbī, tu malakē malikē jīhānī,
 Yā, řabbī, tu malakē malikē k’arīmī,
 Tu malakē a’rřē a’zmīnī,
 Yā, řabbī, ři a’nzalda har tuyī qadīmī.

“O my Lord, you are angel-ruler of the world,
 O my Lord, you are the generous angel-ruler,
 You are the angel of the heavenly firmament,
 O my Lord, you are forever primordial (ancient)”.

- (3) Tu tām ū k’ām ū ř āyī,
 Yā, řabbī, har tu xudāyī;
 Har tu hāyī,
 Ū har tuyī lāyīqī madh’ ū sanāyī.

“You are taste, and happiness, and prudence,
 O my Lord, you are eternal God;
 You are always awake,
 And you are forever worthy of honour and laudation”.

¹⁸ See С. Егизаров, "Краткий этнографический очерк курдов Эриванской губернии", *Записки Кавказского отдела Императорского русского географического общества*, Тифлис, 1891.,: 221-227.

¹⁹ Hugo Makas, *Kurdische Studien*, Heidelberg, 1900: 37-48.

²⁰ See Kh. Silēman, Kh. Jindy, *Ēzdīyatī: Li ber rořnaya hindek tēkstēd a’īnē ēzdīyan*, Baghdad, 1979.

²¹ Kreyenbroek, *op. cit.*: 244-249.

- (4) Yā, řabbī, tu malakē ins ū řinsī,
 Yā, řabbī, tu malakē a'řš ū kursī,
 Yā, řabbī, tu malakē gāy ū māsi,
 Yā, řabbī, tu malakē ālam ū qudsī.

“O my Lord, you are the angel of people and genies,
 O my Lord, you are the angel of heaven and Throne,
 O my Lord, you are the angel of bull and fish,²²
 O my Lord, you are the angel of the world and sanctity.²³”

- (6) Yā, řabbī, tu xudāwandē sap'ahrī,
 Yā, řabbī, tu xudānē mah ū mahri (*should be nārī*)

“O my Lord, you are the master of firmament,
 O my Lord, you are the Lord of the moon and the sun (light)”.

- (16) Yā, řabbī, tu řah'imī, k'aramī, amīnī,
 Yā, řabbī, tuyī al-samadī, am čū nīnin.

“O my Lord, you merciful, beneficent, faithful,
 O my Lord, you are the eternal one, we are nothing”.

- (21) Yā, řabbī, tu xāliqī, am maxlūqin,
 Tu mirāzī, am dā xwāzīn.

“O my Lord, you are the creator, we the creatures,
 You are the desired, we are the desire”.

It is proper to also cite here fragments from Egiazarov's publication of the “Hymn to Malak-Tawus” (with scholarly transcription and some emendations with regard to his Russian translation), which in places give very precise formulations.²⁴

Yā, řabbī, tu k'arīmī,

²² It is an allusion to a known cosmogonic myth, wherein the earth rests on the back of the primeval bull, standing in turn on the fish.

²³ Rather, “world of sanctity”, since the relevant place in the original was, probably, *ālamī qudsī*, that is, an *izāfe* construction”.

²⁴ See Егизаров, *op. cit.*: 221-224.

Yā, řabbī, tu řāh`īmī, tu xudāyī;
 Malak`ē mulk` ū ĵiyāyī,
 Malak`ē řawq ū safāyī,
 Malak`ē mulk`ē k`arīmī,
 Ži azaldā tu qadīmī.
 Tu ābādē k`ām ū řawāyī,
 Samadē lut`f ū nawāyī;
 Tu malakē ĵinn va isnī (*that is, insī*),
 Malak`ē ālamē qudsī,
 Samadē hāyīl ū maĵīdī,
 Ābādē farz ū h`amdī,
 Lāyiqē madh ū sanāyī.
 Yā, řabbī, xudāwandē sap`arī,
 Xudānē mah ū tārī,
 Xudānē řams ū nārī,
 Xudāne a`rřē a`zīmī (*should be a`zmīnī*),
 Xudāwandē at`āyī.
 Yā, řabbī, kas nizāna tu čawāyī:
 Ta na husna, ta na bilinda,
 Ta na čūyīna, ta na čanda.
 Yā, řabbī, h`ākimē řāh ū gadānī,
 H`ākimē ĵimā`at ū ālamī;
 Tu dāhir dikir t`ōbayē Ādam.
 Yā, řabbī, ta na māla, ta na p`ařa (*rather, p`arda*),
 Ta na hāsika, ta na čanga,
 Ta na āwāza, ta na ranga.
 Kas nizāna tu čawānī,
 Ma dikirī k`ām ū safāya,
 Ta dikirī Īsā ū Maryama.
 Yā, řabbī, tu k`arīmī,
 Řāh`īmī, amīnī;
 Tu samadī, az t`u tiřtim.
 Az t`āwīma, k`atīma,
 K`atīma, ři ta bīrim;
 Ma dikirī ři tārī k`ifřa.
 Yā, řabbī, gunah ū sūĵē min
 Bigira ū baxřa!
 Wūlla, wūlla, wūlla, Āmīn!

“O Lord, you are gracious,
 O Lord, you are merciful, you are God,
 Angel of estates and countries (places),
 Angel of joy and pleasure,
 Angel of the realm of mercy;
 Forever you are eternal.
 You are the essence of happiness and existence,
 Vessel of grace and wealth;
 You are the angel of spirits (genies) and people,
 Angel of the realm of sanctity,
 Vessel of fear (?) and greatness,
 Essence of fame and praise,
 [You are] worthy of praise and glorification.
 O Lord, you are the master of the Universe (firmament),
 Lord of the moon and darkness,
 Lord of the sun and light,
 Lord of the Throne of heaven,
 Lord of grace.
 O Lord, no one knows what you are:
 Neither your beauty, nor your height,
 Or your walk, or your quantity.
 O Lord, you are the judge of kings and servants,
 Judge of assemblies and all people;
 You have exposed [arranged] the atonement of Adam.
 O Lord, you have neither home, nor curtain,
 You have neither wings, nor claws,
 You have neither voice, nor colour.
 No one knows what you are,
 You have created [for us] happiness and pleasure,
 You have created Jesus and Mary.
 O Lord, you are gracious,
 Merciful, faithful;
 You need nothing, I am nothing,
 I am lean [and] prostrate,
 I am fallen, [but] you remember me;
 You have withdrawn [revealed] us from darkness.
 O Lord, my sin and my guilt,
 Take them and forgive!
 O God, God, God, amen!”

It is easy to see that the “Hymn to Malak-Tawus” has a striking resemblance with the “Praise to God”—Madh’ē Xwadē—cited above. Both in composition and in language texture (similar formulations, phrasings, formulas of address, and so on), these are nearly the same texts, all the more so in that neither one nor the other names the object of worship (Xwadē and Malak-Tawus). That is, however, not too important: the crucial thing is the conventional status of the text, the way, it is perceived by the carriers of the religious tradition. As for them, both God and his incarnations, whether Malak-Tawus, Sheikh ‘Adi, or Sultan Yezid, despite their obvious distinctions, in the cultic sense, these characters are the same in their entirety.

Nevertheless, Malak-Tawus, despite his mere latent presence within the Yezidi dogmatics and beliefs, is an unambiguously key figure in the Yezidi religious domain. The religious tradition even describes Malak-Tawus as *bēšīrīk-bēhavāl*—“having no companion or friend”,²⁵ in other words “the Only One”, which is undoubtedly the attribute of God, transferred to this image.

According to the religious tradition of the Yezidis, Malak-Tawus is accompanied and assisted by seven of his avatars: the angels Azrail, Dardail, Israfil, Mikail, Jabrail, Shamnail and Turail, the attendant angels of God. He spearheads the Triad, although Sheikh ‘Adi is often regarded as a character of the same rank, while all three figures, along with Sultan Yezid, are at times identified with one another in many cultic contexts. By tradition, Malak-Tawus with his company of seven each year determine the course and the fate of the subsequent year during the celebrations of Jamā‘at, Festival of the Assembly, on September 23-30, when an offering is made of a bull at the shrine of Sheikh ‘Adi in Lalesh.²⁶

It should be noted that the concept of the supreme deity’s seven avatars is an element coming from the Biblical and Muslim traditions. It is encountered nearly in the same form and with the same functional significance in the religious beliefs of the extreme Shi‘a sects.²⁷ The concept of seven angels also existed in the Ancient Iranian religion, as reflected in Zoroastrianism.

²⁵ See Ամինե Ավրալ, *Եզդիների կրոնական հավատալիքները, Երևան*, 1960 (Typewritten text), folio 81.

²⁶ See C. J. Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish*, London, 1967: 4.

²⁷ See В.Ф. Минорский, *Материалы для изучения персидской секты “Люди истины” или Али-илахи*, ч. 1, Москва, 1911: 62, 64, 81; Nûr ‘Alī-shāh Elāhī, *L’ésotérisme kurde: Aperçus sur le secret gnostique des Fidèles de Vérité*, Traduction, introduction, commentaires et notes par M. Mokri, Paris, 1966: 22-26; M. Mokri, *Cycle des fidèles compagnons a*

The Genesis of the Image

Malak-Tawus is with no exaggeration one of the most exotic figures in the Near Eastern religious continuum. His non-ordinary character is manifested in everything: in the very image of a bird from overseas and a controversial nature; what is more interesting is that among the neighbouring communities, despite admitting his ambivalent character, he is definitely regarded as an incarnation of evil or even as Satan himself,²⁸ although the Yezidis see the Peacock in another light.

The origin of this enigmatic figure has captivated many people; however, until now there have been no unambiguous answers to a lot of questions, including his emergence in the pantheon of a small ethnic group. As noted before, no similar cult has been seen in any other religion, either in our region or outside, although the peacock comes up in certain Near Eastern doctrines in some other hypostases (see below).

It is because of this mysterious image that the Yezidis have acquired the attributes of devil worshippers, were considered a mystic tribe originating from the devil's saliva, and so on. This intriguing characteristic, this mystic halo around the Yezidis and their "satanic" religion, inspired not only scientists but also poets, writers, lovers of all kinds of exotic things and simply adventurers.

In his travel notes, the Russian officer A. V. Eliseev wrote about the nocturnal mysteries of the Yezidis, with torch lit processions, dedicated to the spirit of evil that he allegedly secretly observed in Afrin (Syria).²⁹ In actual fact, however, the Yezidis have no such-like mysteries. As for the torch lit processions described by the author, those are rather reminiscent of a nighttime turmoil in the midst of a festival, which the author took for an element of festive action. No mysteries of this kind have been noted, as far as we know, by any traveller or pundit of the Yezidi realities.

Beside the nocturnal mysteries, A. V. Eliseev mentions in his notes a legend on Malak-Tawus, which we can hardly vouch to be

l'époque de Buhlül: Études d'hérésiologie islamique et de thèmes mitho-religieux iraniens, Paris, 1974: 29-30.

²⁸ Cf. the Kurdish curse formula *Bi tawûsê ha'ra*—"Go to hell" (lit. "Go to Satan (peacock)").

²⁹ А.В. Елисеев, "Среди поклонников дьявола (Очерки верования езидов)", *Северный вестник*, N 2, ст. 1, СПб, 1888: 59-74.

authentic,³⁰ but which we nonetheless consider it expedient to quote here in full, since it is very substantially indicative of the constitutive essence of Malak-Tawus, his character of a fallen angel, also alluded to by “The Black Scripture” (see above), the details in this case being immaterial.

“A little star fell from heaven, said an ancient Yezidi legend, and hid in the depth of the then still dark earth. In that little star a bright beam of the nocturnal sun illuminating Paradise fell on earth, and the earth became light, clear and warm; a particle of endless light illuminated it, inflamed life in it, gave it strength, reason and breath. That beam, that particle of endless light, was the great and glorious Melak-Tauz (sic!); through love for the dark earth he exchanged the realm of endless light—the blue sky flooded with the sunbeams and thirty three thousand stars; along with endless light Melak-Tauz lost the grace of the great radiant God ruling in heaven but loathing the earth, which was always distant from him. The Creator Most High became angry at Melak-Tauz and cast him down from the height of the Throne whereupon he had ruled the stars, the sun and the moon. The great and the incomparable, it took him (Melak-Tauz) a long time to fly down, with no place to stay and rest; there was not a star, or moon or sun to lend him support. Loyal to the will of the Most High, they drove away the fallen spirit, being afraid to anger the one who cast Melak-Tauz down. Only earth did not deny shelter to the exile, accepting him with open arms. Having fallen on the green earth covered with sweet-smelling flowers, the incomparable Melak-Tauz lay motionless: battered, sick, dejected, he was alone in the world, for all disdained him... Even people whom he loved so much, to whom he brought the bright hope and blazing fire, were so mean that they did not want to alleviate the heavy sufferings of the exile. Passing by and seeing him helpless, they jeered at him, beat him with sticks, spat in his face and cursed the one to whom they owed their life and their senses. All those insults were patiently born by Melak-Tauz in silence; he believed and hoped that a spark of the better light that had been brought by him would not be extinguished even among cruel and corrupt people, and the bright hope did not deceive Melak-Tauz.

There came about kind people, pure in heart, who had preserved the unextinguished spark of endless light falling on earth as

³⁰ It could in some way remind the reader of “The Demon” by Mikhail Lermontov, rather than an original story taken directly from the Yezidi milieu.

a bright star of heaven; they recognised and welcomed Melak-Tauz, fearing not what other people would say or in what way Allah would view their kind deed. Gathering around the fallen angel, they washed his body with the water of pure springs, sprinkled him with the incense of the colourful mountain flowers covered him with the best garments woven by the hands of their beautiful daughters. Melak-Tauz then revived and woke up for the new life on earth; he raised his hands to heaven, as if to bid farewell to him, and the Everlasting rolled thrice in the roaring storm.

The Creator of the world, the source of grace and limitless love, condemned not the kind people for what they did for the miserable Melak-Tauz, and showed his blessing with the sign of the rainbow. And the poor people of the mountains received that sky-sign as the command of the Most High never to abandon the downcast and rejected Melak-Taus in distress or affliction.

Those people were the Yezidis; until now they go after Melak-Tauz, hated and cursed by the whole world...³¹

The two main components making up the image of Malak-Tawus are to be explicated: 1) his depiction as a peacock, and 2) his identification with the devil, the angel of darkness.

1. It is to be noted that the homeland of the peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) is India, whence the bird found its way to the West not earlier than the sixth century BC.³² Several elements of the cult of this bird have featured in the beliefs and relics of the spiritual and material culture of the peoples of Near East for a very long time. The peacock was a solar symbol in Ancient India and Egypt: it symbolised immortality and rebirth, as marked on many ancient images of that bird with the tree of life or at the source of life.³³

The major designations of the peacock in the languages of the Near Eastern region, including the Iranian, go back to Arabic

³¹ А.В. Елисеев, *op. cit.*: N 1, стр. 1, СПб, 1888: 67-68.

³² See K. E. Müller, *Kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudo-islamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien*, Wiesbaden, 1967: 368.

³³ On the peacock cult see in detail J. J. Meyer, *Trilogie altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation: Bali*, Zurich-Leipzig, 1937: 33; Müller, *op. cit.*: 388 et sq.; B. Brentjes, "The Mittanians and the Peacock", *Ethnic Problems of the History of Central Asia in the Early Period*, Moscow, 1981: 145-151; Ж.П. Майе, "Павлин и кубок в орнаментации древнеармянских рукописей", *IV международный симпозиум по армянскому искусству, Тезисы докладов*, Ереван, 1985: 190-191; R. Amirbekian, "Contribution a la question des symbols zoomorphes dans l'art de l'Orient (le serpent et le paon)", *Iran and the Caucasus*, vol. 1 (1997): 147-158.

ṭāwūs (Armenian is clearly an exception). The Middle Iranian name of the peacock fraš(ē)murv, attested in the Middle Persian, points to Old Iran. *fraša-mrğa-, that is, “miraculous” (or, according to H. Junker, “überherrlich, herrlich, glänzend”³⁴) bird”, which would be in keeping with the hypothetical Armenian forms *hrašamarg, *hrašahaw, or *hrašatřcun. Incidentally, a common designation of this bird in Armenian—siramarg—is also an Iranian (rather, Parthian) loan-word, going back, probably, to *sēr(a)marg, which has its attested parallel, sēnmurv, in Middle Persian (New Pers. sīmury)—both from Old Iranian *saina-(or saira)-mrğa-, that is, perhaps, “colourful bird”. On this subject, it is this very word, sīmir (Kurd.), that acts as a substitute of the tabooed name of Malak-Tawus as used by the Yezidis in requests and appeals: “bīdī xātīrē tayrē sīmir”, that is, “do it for the sake of the bird sīmury (= Malak-Tawus)”. The Arab. ṭāwūs must be, by the way, a borrowing from Greek, cf. τᾰῶς.³⁵

In Ancient Iran the peacock symbolised the vault of heaven, the heavenly light.³⁶ The peacock is featured in many Muslim sects.³⁷ In the Sufi Mystic symbolism the peacock is equivalent to passion or lust (šahwat). Deified by the extreme Shi‘a circles, the fourth righteous Caliph, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, brother-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, in one of his messages, *Khuṭba*, included in the “Nahj ul-balāya” (“The Way of Eloquence”), attributed to him, dedicated an entire encomium to the peacock, to this, in his words, “most wonderful (bird)—*min a‘jabihā xalqan*—in creation”.³⁸ In this text ‘Ali describes all the beauties of the peacock, also ascribing to him some mythical qualities. Thus, for example, he says that the mating of peacocks occurs when the female gets pregnant by sucking in a teardrop shed by the male. The most interesting speculations, however, are dedicated to the peacock’s legs, attested also in a later tradition, both written and oral. Talking about the divine beauty of the peacock, its magnificence and colouration, and also on this bird’s self-admiration and conceit, ‘Ali notes that the peacock is greatly upset because of his ugly legs, and that causes him a lot of suffering. “And when his

³⁴ H. Junker, “Mittelpers. *Frašēmurv* ‘Pfau’”, *Wörter und Sachen. Kulturhistorische Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Sachforschung*, Bd XII (1929): 158.

³⁵ Cf. τᾰῶς “samt lat. pāvō, pāvus aus unbekannter orientalischer Quelle (vgl. tamil *toghai?*)” (H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bd. II, Heidelberg, 1973: 862).

³⁶ See Junker, *op. cit.*: 136.

³⁷ See B. Nikitine, *Les Kurds*, Paris, 1956: 227.

³⁸ *Nahj ul-balāya*, Tehran, 1372/1994: 169-172, N 265.

(peacock's) gaze goes down to his legs, he utters a yell, as if weeping, it seems as if he is calling for help. That yell is the sign of his true anguish, for his legs are (indeed) lean and black".³⁹

Farid ad-din 'Attar, a medieval Persian Sufi poet, writes, as if echoing 'Ali:

Tāwūs rā be rang-o-negārī ke hast
Hame tahsīn konand, va ū
Xeʃel az pāye zešt-e xīš.

"Everybody praises Tawus (peacock) for his beauty, but he is ashamed of his ugly legs".

Thus, the ambivalence of this image is even showing in his exterior, combining magnificence and deformity, as well as in the antagonism between this exterior magnificence and the interior vices of pride and vanity.

For his links with the powers of evil the peacock is considered an ominous creature. In the Old Iranian beliefs highlighted by Eznik, an Armenian theologian of the fifth century, the peacock is presented as a creation of Ahriman, or the devil: "Orpēs ew zmiws ews asen, t'e Ahrmnn asac': Oč' et'e č'karim aṛnel bari inč, ayl č'kamim". Ew aṛ hastatun zbann aṛneloy, arar siramarg".—"For again they assert that Ahriman said: 'It is not that I cannot do good, but I will not.' And as substantiation of his words, he created the peacock".⁴⁰ That is another example of a dubious interpretation of his nature: the peacock is a creation of the devil, but possibly a good (or the only good?) creation of his for all that.

From time immemorial in the East and even in the beliefs of the European nations, the permanently open "eye" on the peacock's plumage had been associated with the evil eye gazing from the bottomless pit, and hence with the extreme manifestations of bad luck. Moreover, according to the Muslim apocryphal tradition, it was the peacock that had facilitated the penetration of Iblis (perhaps, from Greek διάβολος), the devil, to Paradise. According to this story, once upon a time, Iblis, presenting himself to the peacock as an angel, praised his beauty and asked him for help to

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Եզնիկի Կողբացի, Ճառք ընդհան աղանդոց, Հրատ. Մ. Մխիթարյան, Փնիւ,* 1992: 56; cf. also Junker, *op. cit.*: 135; P.P. Штакельберг, "Об иранском влиянии на религиозные верования древних армян", *Древности восточные*, II/2, Москва, 1990: 9-10; R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, New York, 1972: 120, 438.

get into Paradise and to see God; in return he promised to teach the peacock three magic formulas pronounced to retain eternal youth, to never fall sick and to stay in Paradise forever. The peacock sent Iblis to the serpent, which helped him to get to Paradise and to deceive Adam, escorting him to the prohibited wheat. For this act they were all expelled from Paradise.⁴¹ Interestingly, the angel of death, Jabrail (Gabriel), is named Ṭāwūs al-malā'ika, "The Peacock of Angels", while Mahdi (the Messiah), the twelfth Imam of the Shi'as, who is located in a secret place and whose advent is expected, is called Ṭāwūs ahli-l'janna—"Peacock, the Dweller of Paradise".

Farid ad-din 'Attar quotes another version of the myth on the expulsion of the peacock, whereby Iblis and serpent are featured in a single character of a seven-headed serpent (mār-e haft-sar).⁴² Curiously, painted on the wall in front of Sheikh 'Adi's tomb in Lalesh is a huge black serpent.

What is actually very interesting here is the appearance of the peacock with the serpent, a chthonic entity, nearly always having ambiguous properties. In different traditions the serpent had an eschatological meaning symbolising the omens of destiny, posing as the symbol of the Universe, identified with both life and death, with both night and day, embodying the World Mind and coming out as the Forefather of all life on earth.⁴³

On the one hand it is the embodiment of evil, death and destruction, as in the Ancient Iranian tradition,⁴⁴ and on the other hand it is a mystic animal possessing the wisdom of primordial nature as a typical representative of the otherworldly fauna, having direct links with the supernatural, the mysterious, in a word, with the non-profane. Hence, the positive aspects in his image provide here also the reason for a wary attitude toward him. Actually, the most visible characteristic of the chthonic nature is the merging of life-creating and destructive functions within a single image.⁴⁵

With regard to the aforementioned, the two images, both the serpent and the peacock, have inevitably been subject to being

⁴¹ M.-J. Yāhaqqī, *Farhang-e asātir va ešārāt-e dāstāni dar adabiyāt-e fārsi*, Tehran, 1369/1991: 292-293.

⁴² Šeyx Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nišābūrī, *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*, Tehran, 1975: 41.

⁴³ Cf. M.M. Маковский, *Сравнительный словарь мифологической символики в индоевропейских языках*, Москва, 1996: 175-176.

⁴⁴ Cf. К.И. Инostrанцев, *Сасанидские этюды*, СПб, 1909: 97-98.

⁴⁵ Cf. G. S. Asatrian, "The Lord of Cattle in Gilan", *Iran and the Caucasus*, vol. 6, 1-2 (2002): 82.

drawn into the orbit of Gnosticism, which is actually what has taken place.

The cult of the peacock in the Yezidi culture contains clear traces of cock worship noted in Old Iran⁴⁶ and having a wide following to date inside the region and outside.⁴⁷ In many Baluchi tribes the cock even now is considered a sacred bird, its meat being unusable for food.⁴⁸ Particularly worshipped is the white cock, which is considered to be a good angel exorcising the evil spirits.⁴⁹ According to the Islamic beliefs, the Prophet Muhammad liked white cocks and even kept one at his home.

In Ancient Iran the cock was considered the bird of Sraosha.⁵⁰ In Avesta (Vd. 18. 14-19) it is named *parō-dərəs-*, that is, “he who foresees (the coming dawn)”.⁵¹ In early Christendom the cock was in some sense an embodiment of Christ.⁵² In Muslim tradition, the voice of the cock is pleasing to God, while in Paradise, a little below the Throne of Allah, lives a huge cock-angel whose voice is actually reiterated in the mornings by the cocks of the whole world inviting the faithful to prayer.⁵³

In the Sufi dogmatics, the cock is at the same time a symbol of passion and lust and the peacock conceit, just as the duck is of greed and the raven tenacity.⁵⁴

The elements of the cock worship overlaying the image of Malak-Tawus can be traced primarily in the iconographic presentation of the deity by the Yezidis, featuring a cock effigy made of copper or brass, mounted on a pole with a broad-based pedestal like a large candlestick. That is an important object of the cult, called *sanjak*, to be carried by a special group of the Yezidi priests (*Qawwāl*) travelling through the Yezidi settlements and gathering

⁴⁶ W. Geiger, *Ostiranische Kultur im Altertum*, Erlangen, 1882: 365-368.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., С. Фрэзер, *Золотая ветвь*, Москва, 1983: 921-923.

⁴⁸ I. Afšār Sīstānī, *Balūčestān va tamaddon-e dīrīne-ye ān*, Tehran, 1993: 378.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., S. Hedayat, *Neyrangestān*, Farhang-e ‘āmyāne-ye mardom-e Irān, Tehran 1379/2001: 109; F. Meier, “Nizāmī und die Mythologie des Hahns”, *Poeta Persiano Nizāmī e la Leggenda Iranica di Alessandro Magno*, Roma, 1977: 55-115; Th. Bois, *The Kurds*, Beirut, 1966: 100; ‘A. ‘Abdolī, *Tālešthā kīstand?* Tehran, 1991: 202; Yāhaqqī, *op. cit.*: 179-180.

⁵⁰ H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religiöner des alten Iran*, Leipzig, 1938: 66-67.

⁵¹ *The Zend-Avesta, Part 1. The Vendīdād*, Translated by J. Darmesteter, Oxford, 1887:193; cf. also “der zuvor erblickt (näml. die Ankunft des Tages)” (Chr. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Strassburg, 1904: 859).

⁵² Müller, *op. cit.*: 372.

⁵³ M. Asin Palacios, *La Escatología musulmana en la ‘Divina Commedia’*, Madrid, 1919: 50 et sq.

⁵⁴ See *Dāstānhā-ye Mathnavī*, vol. 3, tadvīn-e N. M. Eštehardī, Tehran 1370/1992:110-111.

religious tribute. A brief and, perhaps, the best-matching description of this object was given in the mid-nineteenth century by A. H. Layard. “I was aware that on the occasion of these journeys the priests carry with them the celebrated Melek Taous (= Malak-Tawus), or brazen peacock, as a warrant for their mission. As this was a favourable opportunity, I asked and obtained a sight of this mysterious figure. A stand of bright copper, or brass, in shape like the candlesticks generally used in Mosul and Baghdad, was surmounted by the rude image of a bird in the same metal, and more like an Indian or Mexican idol than cock or peacock. Its peculiar workmanship indicated some antiquity, but I could see no traces of inscription upon it. Before it stood a copper bowl to receive contributions, and a bag to contain the bird and stand, which takes to pieces when carried from place to place. There are four such images, one for each district visited by the Cawwals (= Qawwāls). The Yezidis declare that, notwithstanding the frequent wars and massacres to which the sect has been exposed, and the plunder and murder of the priests during their journeys, no Melek Taous has ever fallen into the hands of Mussulmans”.⁵⁵

Importantly, furthermore, in the Yezidi religious views, as reflected in “The Black Scripture” (24, f), Malak-Tawus is considered to resemble a cock, and therefore the members of the clerical castes are banned from tasting the meat of that bird: “And the Sheikh and his disciples shall by no means eat of the cock’s meat [for] Tawus is one of the mentioned seven deities (?), who look like a cock”.⁵⁶

In a word, individual elements of the cock cult, in indirect references rather than directly, have found their way into the image of Malak-Tawus, although it should be remembered that the peacock, as noted before, has always had an autonomous cultic significance. Incidentally, there are some legends wherein Malak-Tawus is depicted as a dove.⁵⁷

Thus it is no wonder that it was none other than the peacock, symbolising on the one hand grandeur and magnificence, and on the other pride and passion, attracting with the beauty of its luxurious plumage and simultaneously repelling with its ever-open and gazing eye, its ugly legs, its unpleasant voice so incompatible with

⁵⁵ A. H. Layard, *Discoveries among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon: With Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and Desert: Being the Result of a Second Expedition undertaken for the Trustees of the British Museum*, New York (Abridged), 1853: 46.

⁵⁶ Ասատրյան, Փղաղյան, *op. cit.*: 146.

⁵⁷ See Ամինե Ավզալ, *op. cit.*, folio 74.

its appearance, its voracity and both divine and infernal attributes, that could embody both god and demon at the same time.

2. As for the second aspect of the nature of Malak-Tawus, the incorporated image of the fallen angel expelled from Paradise for disobedience to the will of God, this mythological concept can be most probably traced to the Sufi views on Satan and the essence of evil in general; the apologia of Satan is one of the characteristic features of early Sufism.

According to the Qur'anic tradition and the *Hadith*, the reason for alienating Satan (Azazel) from the throng of angels was that in contrast to all other angels he disobeyed God's command to worship Adam (man); meanwhile, according to the same sources, Satan, like genies (*jinn*s), was created out of fire, the other angels from light.

The same line is traced with the extreme Shi'as. "Satan was the head of the angels", wrote Nur-'Ali-Shah Elahi, a notable religious figure of the Ahl-i Haqq, "God created man (Adam) out of rotten earth (*gel-e gandīde*) and commanded the angels to worship him. Satan disobeyed the command, saying 'How can a higher creature (*xelqat-e 'ālī*) bow his head to man who has been created out of rotten earth; how can fire (*nār*) bow to rotten earth?' And for this reason God expelled Satan from Paradise: *rānde šodī*—'you are expelled,' he said".⁵⁸

In this connection, a curious explanation is given to the word *dev* "demon, devil" in one of the medieval Armenian lexicons. That is, *hrestak, kam apstambac* — "angel or rebel".⁵⁹ Actually, a piece of Armenian popular wisdom thinks that demons and devils are angels headed by Sadael, who have been expelled from Heaven for their conceit. They are characterised as *Astco eresic' t'ap'vac, Astco irisanc' inkac*, that is, "Dropped from the face of God".

The same view exists in the Yezidi popular tradition, whereby Satan is the head of all angels temporarily overthrown as a punishment, but in time a recipient of mercy.⁶⁰

The Biblical story on the celestial origin of Satan and his subsequent expulsion from the divine presence has received an etiological explication in the mystic doctrines eventually exonerating him

⁵⁸ N. 'A. Š. Ēlahī, *Āθār ol-haqq*, Tehran, 1995: 456-457.

⁵⁹ Ն. Ամայան, *Բառազիրք Հայոց, Երևան*, 1975: 77.

⁶⁰ See E. B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*, London, 1926:100.

or not regarding his deed as sin in any way. Indeed, God himself desired that Azazel should disobey him and become Iblis (and the fall of Adam was essentially desired by God as well). Thus, Azazel becomes the executor of God's Providence within the context of predestination—as only the executor of his role, he should therefore be pardoned. An interesting version about Satan was told to Edward Soane, a British intelligence officer, by the Yezidis in Tiflis, whereby Satan “has, after weeping sufficient tears in seven vessels to quench the seven hells of his seven thousand years' exile, now been reinstated in Heaven”.⁶¹

According to the Islamic Mystics (such as 'Ayn al-Quzzat Hamadani), God and Satan are in the relation of *coincidentia oppositorum*: Satan is presented as a black lock of hair emphasising the whiteness of the face of the beloved (God). The explanation by Satan of his refusal to worship man is that he bows to no one but God in order to underscore the greatness of the Creator: “For Adam is nothing before you”.⁶² Satan is perceived by Mansur al-Hallaj, the great Sufi, as “a greater monotheist than God Himself”,⁶³ for God at the very beginning was part of the Truth that except His purest substance there is nothing worthy of worship, and Satan, in contrast to the rest of the angels, made this out and adopted it as his stand. As a result, Hallaj recognises only two real *muwahhids* (monotheists): the Prophet Muhammad and Satan, their only difference being that the former is a treasury of divine grace, while the latter shows the wrath of the Creator. “My disobedience is only for aggrandising your substance!” cries Satan in desperation, which enables another outstanding Sufi, Ahmad al-Gazzali (died in 1126), to state: “One who will not learn to worship One God (*tauḥīd*) from Satan is a heretic and infidel”.⁶⁴

In his “Mantiq at-ṭayr” Farid ad-din 'Attar dedicated an entire section to the story of Satan's downfall—“Creation of Adam and Satan's refusal to worship him”. 'Attar, too, considers Satan to be a *muwahhid*, as well as a self-renouncing lover of the Way of Truth, carrying God's curse joyfully, as a mantle of honour.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, f.n. 2.

⁶² Mansour al-Hallaj, *Kitab at-Tawasin*, in: L. Massignon, *La passion d' al-Hosayn Ibn Mansour al-Hallaj, Martyr mystique de l'Islam*, tome 2, Paris, 1922: 869.

⁶³ Apud: H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: God, Welt and Mensch in den Geschichten Fariduddin 'Attars*, Leiden, 1955: 538.

⁶⁴ M. Swartz, *Ibn al-Jawzi's Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa'l-mudhakkirin*, Beirut, 1971: 211.

Moreover, God appointed Iblis guard of his gate, saying: “My beloved, because of the jealousy and love that you entertain for me, you do not allow aliens to approach me”.⁶⁵

It was this Sufi concept, whereby Satan is an adherent absolutely devoted to the Creator, moreover, ready for self-sacrifice and doomed to exile, the one who is tragically in love, without whom, however, there can be no recognition of the object of love, has produced a powerful effect upon the concept of the fallen angel in Yezidism. This perception of Satan is so original and ambiguous that the word “Satan” (Arab. *šayṭān*) is a taboo among the Yezidis, and what is even more interesting, this taboo has also covered a number of similar-sounding words (for example, the words *šaṭṭ* “estuary”, *qayṭān* “rope” and so on), which are substituted by synonyms.

It is important to underscore that the devil here is not the principle of evil, in contrast to, say, the Satanists in the Christian tradition, who see Satan as the Antichrist; the Sufis, as well as the Yezidis, accept him as one of the necessary principles of energy, unjustifiably condemned by the Orthodoxies, without which it is impossible to comprehend the source of energy *per se*.⁶⁶

Incidentally, the idea of the duality of God and Satan, the pre-determination of the downfall and the complete subordination to the divine will, is reflected in the Christian theology, although in a slightly modified version; we find its reflection in “Refutation of Heresies” by Eznik, who wrote: “Ayl mek‘ asemk‘, t‘e mtaneloy i mard č‘uni išxanut‘iun (devn) ařanc‘ Astuacoy t‘ulac‘uc‘aneloy; ew aynr pēs pēs patčark‘, orpēs ink‘n miayn gite” — “But we say that the devil cannot enter a man without permission from God. And there are many reasons for that, which only he knows”.⁶⁷ For arguments the author makes references to the Gospel stories (Matt. 8, 30-33, Mark 5, 11-13, Luke 8, 32-33); in particular, he explains Judas’ treachery by Satan’s interference, however, with God’s permission.⁶⁸

Evidently, the varieties of the image of Satan (the devil, Ahri-man) and the ambiguous interpretation of his nature are rooted in the Old Iranian religious tradition. The same dual appearance of Ahura Mazdā and Ahriman in Zoroastrianism and Zurvanism

⁶⁵ P.L. Wilson, “Iblis, the Black Light”, *Gnosis*, N14 (1989-1990): 45.

⁶⁶ V. Arakelova, “Healing Practices among the Yezidi Sheikhs of Armenia”, *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. LX-2, Nagoya, 2001: 321-322.

⁶⁷ *Եզնիկի Կողբացի*, *op. cit.*: 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

indicates some predetermined presence of the “dark” hypostases of the Supreme God. Meanwhile, the early stages of the positive perception of Satan can be perceived at least in the story of the creation of the peacock cited by Eznik (see above). One more similar story (about the demon Mahmi) has been attested both by Eznik and by one Manichaean Middle Persian fragment: “Na, ew t’e dewk’ bnut’eamb č’ark ēin, čer hnar Mahmeayn hangamanac’ lusoyñ ařneloy gušak linel, orum c’ayžm paštawneauk’ aynr k’eši eric’s yami zohs matuc’anen”—“And if the demons were evil in nature, it would have been impossible for (the demon) Mahmi to reveal the means of creating the light, to which until now the servants of this sect offer sacrifices many times a year”.⁶⁹ In the Manichaean text (M28 IRI, 5) there is “gwynd ’br ’whrmyzd kwš m’hmydyw hmwxt šhr rwšn kyrdn”—“They say about Ohrmazd that the demon Mahmi has taught him (how) to illuminate the world”.⁷⁰

In any case, the mythological concept of the expelled deity, the fallen angel, having deep roots in the Near Eastern traditions, and particularly brightly manifested in Islamic Mysticism, the latter being a crucial component of the religious outlook in the Yezidism-forming environment, has been intricately contaminated with the controversial image of the peacock through the aforementioned reasons: the infernal features of this bird, the functional resemblance to the angel rejected by God, and so on.

After an intuitive discovery of a congenital symbol, the peacock, the synthesis of the fallen angel and an ambivalent creature, or, rather, the need to reflect the double nature of the character, whose glorification had become a crucial concept of the new religious ideology, resulted in the appearance of the character of Malak-Tawus as the supreme deity of the Holy Triad in the Yezidi religion. The material herein exposed and analysed will hopefully enable the emergence of that image to be traced with sufficient clarity.

Who is Sharfadin?

The Yezidi Sheikhs of Armenia usually answer the question of their ethnic and religious affiliation in this way: “Milatē ma—Ēzīd, dīnē ma—Šarfadīn”—“Our nation—the Yezidis, our religion—

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: 56.

⁷⁰ W. B. Henning, “A Sogdian God”, *BSOAS*, 28/2 (1965): 50; J. Russell, “Mahmi Reconsidered”, *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay*, 1987: 74-80.

Sharfadin". One version of the Yezidi Symbol of Faith reads as follows:

Ātqātā min Silt'ān Ēzīd,
Dīnē min Šarfadīn

"My faith is Sultan Yezid,
My religion is Sharfadin".

Or:

Šarfadīna—dīnē mina.
"Sharfadin is my religion". (From a religious hymn.)

However, the identification of the religion using the name of Sharfadin is unmotivated, either historically or mythologically: Shafadin has never been canonised, even informally; he is left outside the seven avatars of Malak-Tawus, unlike his uncles, Sheikh Shams (Šams ad-dīn) and Farxadīn (Faxr ad-dīn), and has no cultic significance whatsoever.

This enigma, that is, in what way a name of an insignificant figure from the 'Adawi dynasty, or associates of Sheikh 'Adi, has become the title of the religion, with the character himself possessing not a single quality or attribute fit for a deity, or even for a saint, can perhaps be explained as follows.

Sharfadin as the title of the Yezidi religion, we think, should be regarded as an allegory substituting the tabooed name of Malak-Tawus, the supreme deity of the Yezidis. The Arabic name Sharaf ad-dīn (Šaraf ad-dīn), that is, Sharfadin, means literally "the honour of religion", which had been more likely than not one of the main epithets of the principal deity, Malak-Tawus, the core, as it were, of the Yezidi religious ideology. Quite naturally, as time went on, this epithet, having replaced the tabooed name, came to be used to denote the religion. Thus, Sharfadin as the name of the Yezidi religion is in no way a correlation with the name of a specific historical person, although it is not excluded that later, by way of a secondary reference, it became associated in the folk tradition with the respective member of the 'Adawi family.

The Peacock Angel in Other Traditions

As noted before, Malak-Tawus is a unique image in the treatment that it is given in the Yezidi religion. However, the Peacock Angel, as a marginal image and in other interpretations, is present in certain Near Eastern cults.

The Ahl-i Haqq also regard Malak-Tawus as some embodiment of Satan,⁷¹ but that is another Satan, with an alternate set of attributes, not identified with evil and having the features of the angel rejected by God.⁷² However, also noted in that doctrine are the elements of Satan's apologia, and there is even a taboo for the word "Satan" as well. Moreover, he is sometimes identified with Pir Dawud,⁷³ the second most important among the *Hafttan*, the Seven Saints in the Ahl-i Haqq religion.⁷⁴

For the extreme Shi'as, Satan is merely Azazel, the angel waved aside by God, whose name was changed to Iblis ("devil") after the downfall. He is feeble and infirm, limited in his movements, rather than the concentration of evil as presented in dogmatic doctrines. The Ahl-i Haqq think that except man there is no evil in nature; evil (devil) is just the way whereby the dominant Self is manifested in us.⁷⁵ As shown by a detailed analysis above, this concept is largely rooted in the Islamic apocryphal tradition; this conclusion, however, cannot be viewed unambiguously. The peacock had been a symbol of immortality in the multiple manifestations of early Christendom, since it was widely held that the peacock's meat is not subject to decay. Even more attractive in this aspect is the fact that among the Mandaeans, one of the most significant syncretic sects living, incidentally, in Iraq neighbouring on the Yezidis, the peacock is featured as the messenger of God or of the Original Spirit.⁷⁶ That adjacency, however, is not quite demonstrative in the way of mutual influence. The two groups have become absolutely closed in the course of centuries, while the esoteric knowledge was disseminated only within the community, and with regard to certain gradation.

So much more interesting against this background is the Mandaean Tawūs Melka. In the Mandaean legend narrating the creation of man, the following story, *inter alia*, is recounted: "The Jews were of the children of Ruha and Adam. Their great men were the children of Ruha... They travelled and travelled until they came

⁷¹ See N. Čahārdehī, *Asrār-e feraq-e xāksār*, Tehran, 1369/1991: 179.

⁷² Cf. M. Sūrī, *Sorūdhā-ye dīnī-ye yāresān*, Tehran, 1344/1966: 174-175.

⁷³ Kreyenbroek, *op. cit.*: 52.

⁷⁴ Nūr 'Alī-Šāh Elāhī, *L'ésotérisme kurde*: passim.

⁷⁵ Wilson, *op. cit.*: 42.

⁷⁶ R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, Bonn, 1921: 227.

to ‘Ur shalam (Jerusalem)... They wanted books, and Melka d Anhura (King of Light, the Supreme Being) said, ‘A book must be written that does not make trouble for the Mandai,’ and they sent one of the *melki*—Tāwūs Melka to write the Torat’.⁷⁷

Malkia (Melki) are semi-divinities among the Mandaeans, executing the will of Great Life. They obey the Creator, being at the same time his initial incarnations. As seen, the Mandaeans interpret *malka* in the combination Tāwūs Melka as “king”, rather than “angel”. Although the functions of *malkia*, as noted by Lady Drawer, are akin to the functions of messengers, angels (Heb. malāk, Arab. malak), the Mandaeans, however, used the word *malax* (equivalent of the aforementioned Heb. and Arab. forms) also to designate the evil spirit. The entities that are completely beneficial are referred to by the Mandaeans as ‘uθria (sing. ‘uθra). In the colloquial Iraqi dialect an evil spirit or a jinn is also sometimes named using a related word, *melek*.⁷⁸

As for the peacock (Tāwūs), it is the name given in the Mandaean tradition to the very *malka*, who was distressed about his having rebelled against the Great Life and allowed his pride to push him into rebellion. Thus, we are looking again at an ambivalent figure of the fallen angel, the term contained in his name being of a dubious interpretation integrating both the good and the evil origins.

⁷⁷ E. S. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, Leiden, 1962: 257-258.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 73-94.