

All in all, the book offers a great gain in knowledge for communication scientists, but also for scholars interested in the close relationship between politics and journalism not only in Kurdistan.

## References

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Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Yiannis Kanakis, **"God First and Last": Religious Traditions and Music of the Yaresan of Guran. Volume I: Religious Traditions**, by Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020. XIV+188 pp., (ISBN 9783447114240)*.

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This slim volume was apparently written to accompany a presumably more substantial and fieldwork-based study of the ritual and musical practices of the Yaresan (also known as Ahl-e Haqq) of Guran by the ethnomusicologist Yiannis Kanakis that is still forthcoming. Kreyenbroek, a specialist of Iranian religions, has written on the Iranian background of the Ahl-e Haqq religion and Yezidism before and returns here to some of his favourite themes. His studies of Yezidism, written in collaboration with knowledgeable Yezidi intellectuals, have established themselves as authoritative overviews of the state of the art and works of reference (Kreyenbroek, 1995; Kreyenbroek and Rashow, 2005). A work of similar scope and ambition on the Ahl-e Haqq religion would certainly be welcome. In the thirty years that have passed since the last book-length attempt to present a synthetic overview (Hamzeh'ee, 1990), much new information has become available. Many primary sources, which had long been kept hidden from outsiders, have become more widely available through printed editions of *kalam*, the sacred texts in which the tenets of this religion are expressed. A modest number of anthropological studies (by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Navid Fozi and Martin van Bruinessen) investigate how myth and ritual interact with social relations among the Guran Ahl-e Haqq. The most important recent contribution, based on extensive fieldwork among the Guran and reflecting access to the inner world of the Ahl-e Haqq, is the PhD research by the ethnomusicologist Partow Hooshmandrad (2004), which remains as yet unpublished apart from a brief article (2014).

These and many other works are listed in the bibliography and some are summarily referred to in the text, but nowhere does Kreyenbroek engage critically with them. He does not attempt a synthetic overview but instead offers a more modest collection of materials for the study of the Ahl-e Haqq religion (Yaresanism or Yāri, as he often calls it). The book is a rather quaint miscellany of bits and pieces of information on Yāri, some parts very interesting but, in spite of the book title, not all of them concerning the Guran. The author's own relevant fieldwork consisted of a visit to the Kaka'i village of Hawar in Iraqi Kurdistan, which represents another, and in his view older, tradition of Yāri than the Guran tradition. For his understanding of the

Guran Yaresan, he leans heavily on a single knowledgeable informant in the diaspora, Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini, and on a written systematic exposition of the Yaresan belief system by the latter's father, Sayyed Wali, who was a knowledgeable *kalāmkbwān* though not a widely recognized authority on doctrine. Extracts from Sayyed Wali Hosseini's "exegesis" are translated in an appendix.

Kreyenbroek devotes a considerable part of the book to a search for origins of the Yaresan religion (which he argues have to be sought in a non-Zoroastrian variety of Western Iranian religion) and the comparison of isolated elements of Yaresan cosmology with older Iranian ideas. In fact, he appears more interested in Yaresan texts and traditions for the light they may shine on older Iranian religion than for their own sake. Thus he proceeds to "construct a hypothetical Indo-Iranian myth of creation which is similar in many ways to that found in the Yāri tradition" (p. 11) – note the "hypothetical": the argument is highly speculative and moreover hardly relevant to the Yaresan belief system. Central to this myth is the primordial sacrifice of a bull, which Kreyenbroek keeps referring to throughout the book (pp. 11, 17, 27, 81) although it has no place in Yaresan *kalām* or oral tradition. Bull sacrifice was most strikingly present in the Roman cult of Mithras, which had followers among the soldiers on Rome's Iranian frontier (encompassing part of present Kurdistan) two thousand years ago and in which Kreyenbroek shows a strong interest (p. 16-17). There is, however, no indication that Mithraism left any traces in the later Yaresan religion – unless we take as such Kreyenbroek's speculation that the concept of Satan as the Peacock Angel in Yaresanism and Yezidism may "[go] back to that of Mithra, who [...] is said to be 'both wicked and very good to men'" (p. 27).

The direct origin of the Peacock Angel concept as well as the idea that Satan is a tragic rather than evil figure and never lost God's favour, however, is more likely to be found in Muslim cosmologies and Sufi texts of the classical period, where both are well attested (Awn, 1983). It is of course possible that these ideas ultimately have Iranian origins, but Muslim and Christian thought in the medieval period reflects many other influences. This is also true of the Yezidi belief system, as Eszter Spät (2010) and Artur Rodziewicz (2014) have shown, in pointing out remarkable parallels with classical Greek and especially Hellenistic ideas. An exclusive focus on Iranian religions as the template for Yaresanism may obscure as much as it illuminates. For understanding the emergence and early history of the Yaresan community I would suggest that much is yet to be learnt from a stronger focus on Muslim thought and Sufi practices of the period of upheaval during and following the Mongol conquests, roughly 1250-1500 CE.

In a chapter on "mythical" and "factual" history, Kreyenbroek attempts to reconstruct the history of the community from its sacred texts and oral tradition. He sees Soltan Sahak and his companions, who appear in myths as manifestations of God and his angels, as historical persons who established the first Yaresan community in Perdiwar (near Hawraman) and Baba Yadegar as one of two rival successors to leadership. He believes that it was Baba Yadegar who led most of the community south towards Dalahu, the present home of the Guran Yaresan. The other would-be successor, Shah Ebrahim, is associated with Baghdad but his descendants constitute one of the holy families (*kbāndān*) present in many Yaresan communities, notably in Iraq as well as Iran. (Many of the other *kbāndān* are affiliated with Baba Yadegar.) The small community in Hawar that Kreyenbroek briefly visited claims

descent from a group that migrated west from Perdiwar. Its traditions differ significantly from those of the Guran, and he assumes that they represent the original Perdiwari belief system.

Among the sacred texts, Kreyenbroek distinguishes between Perdiwari and later *kalām*. He pays most attention to the former group, and only lists the titles of some of the later ones, although among the Guran these are better known than the Perdiwari *kalām* and quoted more often to explain a point of belief. For the teachings contained in the later *kalām*, he depends on the very general observations by Sayyed Fereidoun and the “exegesis” by Sayyed Wali Hosseini. Sayyed Wali was one of the men that I have elsewhere called “systematizers” of the tradition, who organized the disparate and often mutually incompatible narratives of the *kalām* into a coherent and meaningful whole. His synthesis appears to correspond closely with that of Ka Karim, the most knowledgeable *kalām*khwān in the household of Sayyed Nasreddin, the *pir* (highest religious authority) of the Guran (Bruinessen, 2014).

Given the author’s interest in *kalām* as the most authentic embodiment of Yaresan religious ideas, his dismissal of the most substantial body of relevant scholarship, the work of Mohammad Mokri, comes as something of a surprise. Mokri edited, translated and annotated a large number of Gurani *kalām*, Perdiwari as well as later ones, in a series of books and journal articles (in the *Journal Asiatique*). This includes the one often considered as the earliest exposition of Ahl-e Haqq cosmology and sacred history (Mokri, 1977). Kreyenbroek refers to another version of this text (51, 55) but largely ignores Mokri, citing only some of his other work. In the introduction he briefly mentions the existence of Mokri’s editions of *kalām* and remarks that the nature of Mokri’s comments “suggests that his approach to religion was strongly informed by sociology” (4), which apparently was sufficient reason not to engage with them. I also find it hard to judge the quality of Mokri’s translations and interpretations, but he was in close contact with Yaresan over a long period of time, and his work is the only systematic presentation of *kalām* in a western language. Any serious study of Ahl-e Haqq *kalām* will, in my opinion, have to start with a reappraisal of Mokri’s monumental oeuvre, whatever the final verdict will be on his interpretations.

The book under review is neither “strongly informed by sociology” nor very systematic, and its value consists mainly in the odd bits and pieces of information it contains. These include the author’s notes on Hawar, notes on the treatment of the community in Iran by the authorities of Islamic Republic, and several self-representations by prominent Yaresan, notably Sayyed Wali Hosseini and his son, as well as the translation of a document prepared by the late musician and religious authority from Sahne, Sayyed Khalil Alinezhad, in response to an inquisitive interrogation by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards on Ahl-e Haqq doctrine and ritual obligations.

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Seyedeh Behnaz Hosseini, **The Yārsān of Iran, Socio-Political changes and Migration**, *Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 229 pp., (ISBN 978-981-15-2634-3)*.

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This book consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, “Research Overview”, Hosseini elaborates on the theoretical framework of her research, literature review, methodology, data analysis as well as challenges which she experienced while working on the topic. The main purpose of this research is “to understand how beliefs and ethnic identity between Yārsāni are expressed through diaspora” (p. 3). She seeks to find out what happened to the ethnic-religious identity of the Yāresān<sup>1</sup> once they departed Iran, their homeland, and settled to Sweden. Qualitative interviews with more than 120 participants in Iran, Iraq, and Sweden provide the data for her research.

The second chapter revolves around 'Identity and Diaspora.' Applying the concept of “transnationalism”, Hosseini asserts that the Yāresān in Sweden define their identity such that they feel no border between themselves and non-Yāresān Kurdish people from Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Also, based on this definition, they can accept ethnically diverse Yāri believers, like Turk and Persian Yāresān, as their own. The political and social freedom in Sweden encourages some Yāresān to be involved in political activism. As an example, she mentions “The Yārsān Democratic Organization” whose task is to pursue “political and social rights for Iranian and Iraqi Yārsāni” (p. 73).

The predominant theme in chapters three, 'Yārsāni Religious Practice and Identity', and four, 'Yārsāni Religious Innovation and Transformation' is the Yāri religion and its transformation under the influence of external factors. In these chapters, Hosseini seeks to elucidate the historical context in which the Yāresān community and Yāri religion have survived and redefined their identity despite the external forces in Iran and Sweden. Moreover, she explains how they have overcome tensions and have come up with new definitions for their religious identity.

In the last chapter, 'Yārsāni Community and the Internet', the author points to a fascinating topic: how Yāresān have implemented social media (in this case, Facebook) to rebuild and

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<sup>1</sup> The author uses Yārsān, and Yārsāni as its adjective form; however, based on the local pronunciation of this word, I preferred to use Yāresān for the community and, as the *Kalāms* suggest, Yāri for the religion. In the text, wherever I have quoted directly from the author, her opted form has been kept.