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Canonization and sacred text in the Yārsān religion

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Abstract

This paper explains the nature of sacred text and the process of canonization in the Yārsān religion. To this end, we first show how three formative ideas—i.e., the history of divine manifestation, the angelology of scribing, and the scripture of Qabālah—played a major role in the emergence of canonization and sacred text in the Yārsān religion. We then turn to the parallel, heterogeneous processes of canonization in the Yārsān community, showing that factors such as the community's rhizomatic structure, idea of infinite divine manifestation, continuous process of producing holy texts, and the heterogeneous nature of its oral tradition hindered the emergence of an ultimate canon in the Yārsān community. Additionally, the sacred Yārsān texts, as the outputs of canonization procedures, are divided into three categories: narrative, testimony, and ritual. Finally, following scrutiny of the linguistic nature of Gorāni koine, the paper attempts to clarify the relationship between different types of religious texts and the formative idea of Qabālah as the archetypal sacred text in the Yārsān religion.

Keywords: Yārsān tradition; canonization; sacred text; *kalām*; Qabālah; Kurdish language

Although Yārsānism, as a historically secretive religion, has been reluctant to publish its core beliefs, even holding a complete contempt for the idea of writing, its religious texts have gradually been copied, printed, and distributed since the twentieth century, despite the reluctance of the community's conservative leaders.¹ These texts found their way into the public realm, either as officially printed or copied manuscripts shared among individuals.² The

¹ In the Yārsān religion, divine knowledge is metaphorically represented as reading a white book, devoid of black letters. This metaphor underscores the acquisition of divine knowledge in the absence of physical books. Conversely, the knowledge derived from books is depicted as *reading black letters*, a phrase carrying negative connotation. Some manuscripts portray the Yārsān religion's gnostic knowledge as fundamentally disconnected from books:

daftar-ə yāri dur na kəṭāwan// shāgərdə ʔostād səfid khāna-nān// na syāh khāni hich nazāna-nān.

The sacred manuscript (*daftar*) of the Yārsān is far removed from being a mere book// I am a disciple of a spiritual master who reads from a white book// I am oblivious to the concept of reading black letters.

bəgīr-a na war rāga-y haqiqat// buwān-a kalām pirə səfid khat.

Embrace the path of truth// read the divine speech of a spiritual leader with white letters.

See Sheykh ʔAmir, *Daftar-e Kalām-e Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʔAmir*, 18, 59.

² Ivanow, *Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*; Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*; Dāneshvar, *Zabur Haqiqat, Diwān-a Gawra*; ʔAfzali, *Daftar-e Romuz-e Yārsān: Ganjine-ye Soltān Sahāk*; Niknezhād, *Ganjine-ye Yāri*; Unknown, *ʔAsrār-e mazhabi-ye Ferq-e-ye ʔAhl-e Haq*; Jeyhun-ʔAbādi, *Haqq al-Haqāyeq (Shāh Nāme-ye Haqiqat)*; Tabriziyān, *Majmaʔ al-Kalām-e Saranjām*

disclosure and distribution of these secret texts revealed something important: despite significant convergences in content and style, there were in fact considerable differences. Particularly, a *kalām* (a sacred speech in Yārsān, whether oral or written) often existed in multiple versions, leading to variation in both the quantity and quality of verses included. Additionally, the titles of the holy texts were also radically different. For example, titles such as *Diwān-a Gawra* (The Great Diwan), *Zabur-e Ḥaḡiqat* (The Psalms of Truth), *Nāma-y Saranjām* (The Ultimate Letter), *Daftar-i Khazānah* (The Book of Treasure), *Daftar-i Pərđiwarī* (The Book of Pərđiwar), or simply *Daftar* (a sacred manuscript) were used for the same texts containing the sacred Yārsān *kalāms*.

An analysis of the texts from the commentators and scribes of the Yārsān religion (before the 19th century) reveals that none of the previously mentioned titles were employed by the early scribes and commentators to denote the sacred book or the unified canon of the Yārsān religion. Such scribes and commentators exclusively used the terms *kalām* (sacred speech) or *daftar* (sacred manuscript) to refer to the Yārsān religious tradition. In the sixteenth century, for instance, Qoshchi Ughli employed the terms *kalām-e Gorāni* (Gorāni sacred speech) and *daftar* when referring to this tradition. Although he frequently referred to the four famous religious books (the Quran, Torah, Bible, and Zabur), he made no reference to an inclusive Yārsān religious canon with a specific title.³ Similarly, in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, Khān ʿAlmās, Sheykh ʿAmir, Seyyed Farzi, Shāh Hayās, and Zonnur-e Qalandar also primarily used the designations *kalām* and *daftar* when referencing the Yārsān religious tradition.⁴ Thus, in the ancient texts, *kalām* and *daftar* are the expressions most frequently utilized to denote the Yārsān religious tradition. Suri argues that *kalām* refers to a sacred discourse (hymn or narrative), but *daftar* is used exclusively for the written form.⁵ In fact, these sources indicate that *kalāms* were mainly oral, but some (described as *daftar*) may have been randomly scribed and written. However, what is evident is that an idea of an inclusive canon with a particular title did not exist in the works of the scribes and commentators mentioned above. It seems that the *kalāms* were scattered and independent until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not organized in a *specific order* between the front and back cover of the same canon.

Although some scholars have recently started using the term *Nāma-y Saranjām* (The Ultimate Letter) to refer to the comprehensive sacred text of the Yārsān religion, this term does not appear in the writings of earlier commentators and poets. Furthermore, within the religious texts of the Yārsān tradition, the word *saranjām* is not used specifically to denote a holy book, but instead to signify either the final phase of divine history or the ultimate manifestation of God.⁶ In his seventeenth to eighteenth-century apocalyptic prophecies, Khān ʿAlmās employed this word to refer to the end of time.⁷ This may explain why more recent Yārsān writers choose this title for the comprehensive sacred, perhaps due to the relation of these divine speeches (*kalāms*) with the ultimate phase of divine history and the ultimate manifestation of God in Pərđiwar. However, the existing manuscripts do not necessarily confirm this title's authenticity. Similarly, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that in past eras of the Yārsān religion, the title *Diwān-a Gawra* was used to designate a

² *Ahl-e Haq; Šafi-Zādeh, Nāma-ye Saranjām; Hoseyni, Diwān-a Gawra; Tāheri, Saranjām (Majmuʿe-ye kalām-hā-ye Yārsān); Qobādi, Zabur-e Ḥaḡiqat (Saranjām).*

³ Qoshchi Ughli, *Daftar-e Kalāmāt-e Torki*, 44, 74–5, 173, 178, 295–6.

⁴ Khān ʿAlmās, *Diwān-e Khān ʿAlmās*, 52, 155, 178, 191; Sheykh ʿAmir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Ḥaḡiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʿAmir*, 26, 27, 30, 36, 40, 47, 84, 106; Seyyed Farzi, *Kalām-e Hazrat-e Seyyed Farzi wa Yārānash*, 14, 15, 37; Shāh Hayās, *Saranjām-e Shāh Hayās*, 4, 11, 15, 22, 26; Zonnur Qalandar, *Daftar-e Zonnur*, 373 (3), (385) 15.

⁵ Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dīni-ye Yārsān*, 19.

⁶ See Tāheri, *Saranjām (Majmuʿe-ye kalām-hā-ye Yārsān)*, 47 (ʿākhər saranjām kārə-sh bi tamām: finally, his work was done), 257, 820 (shā-y saranjām-ān: the king of ultimate eras), 754 (khwājā-y saranjām: the master of the ultimate epoch), 261 (wareza rā-y saranjām-an: wake up, it is the final path), 680 (ʿāmā wa hozur jam-e saranjām: he came to the ultimate jam), 689, 261 (rā-y saranjām: the ultimate path).

⁷ Khān ʿAlmās, *Diwān-e Khān ʿAlmās*, 196 (ya notq-e kalām ru-y saranjāma... wātan jang mayo: this is the speech about the ultimate day, they said there would be a war).

particular sacred scripture. This title might be adopted by some writers due to its general sense. In fact, any book with rhythmic verses is typically referred to as a *diwān* and *gawra* is a term of respect for religious books. However, *Diwān-a Gawra* cannot be regarded as a particular title specific to Yārsān's *kalāms*. Such titles primarily emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (thirteenth and fourteenth hijri), coinciding with a growing inclination to gather, publish, and disseminate religious manuscripts within the Yārsān community. In this time, due to the Yārsān community's tendency to write its religious tradition and various Yārsān spiritual households' efforts to canonize the oral traditions, many texts were distributed in printed or manuscript form.

In fact, the emergence of comprehensive texts with divergent titles in recent centuries was the result of parallel and various processes of canonization in the Yārsān community, the purpose of which was to fabricate a final and ultimate canon (*nāma-y saranjām*); a goal ultimately unrealized. Despite the failure of these processes, they still could have brought about many important changes in the Yārsān religious community, but no research has been done on this. Although there is extensive literature on the historical, sociological, and cosmological dimensions of this religion, no research has been done on the processes of canonization and the nature of sacred text in the Yārsān religion.⁸ There are a few studies that briefly and descriptively discuss the different types of Yārsān sacred texts, but do not delve into the aforementioned issues in detail.⁹ An exception of note is Membrado's investigation into the Yārsān canonization process, which provides comprehensive analysis of the subject matter.¹⁰ However, her research centers predominantly on specific figures (such as Ne'mat 'Allāh Jeyhun-'Abādi and Nur-Ali Elahi in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), thereby neglecting the preceding historical context and other important figures associated with the phenomenon.

This article, thus, aims to explain the processes of canonization in the Yārsān community in its broader historical context. We first discuss the formative ideas influencing the canonization processes and, accordingly in section two, then turn to analyzing the idea of divine history as a formative idea with significant impact on the Yārsān canonization and organization of sacred texts.¹¹ Then, in sections three and four, we explain angelological ideas and the *Qabālah* formative idea as influential factors inspiring and guiding the Yārsān community's canonization and scribing procedure. Finally, in section five, we conduct an analytical-historical study of the process of canonization within the Yārsān community and elucidate the primary factors hindering these processes from achieving their objectives. In section six, we give our final conclusions.

The formative idea of divine history and the sacred *kalāms*

The first researchers and travel writers who encountered the secretive religion of Yārsān primarily highlighted its three heterodox principles: the divine history of manifestation, the incarnation of the sacred in humans, and the transmigration of souls.¹² These

⁸ For literature on the historical, sociological, and cosmological dimensions, see Minorski, "Studies on the Ahle Haq"; Minorski, "Ahle Haq"; Ivanow, *Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*; Bruinessen, "Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mīna Sahib and Various Avatars of a Running Wall"; Bruinessen, "When Haji Bektash Still Bore the Name of Sultan Sahak: Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran district"; Bruinessen, "Between Dersim and Dālahū: Reflections on Kurdish Alevism and the Ahl-i Haqq religion"; Kreyenbroek, "The Yezidi and Yarsan Traditions"; Kreyenbroek, "Mithra and Ahreman, Benyamin and Malak Tawus, Topics of a Myth in the Cosmogonies of Two Modern Sects"; Kreyenbroek, *God First and Last: Religious Traditions and Music of the Yaresan of Guran*.

⁹ See Minorski, "Ahle Haq"; Mokri, *Divane Gawra. French-Gawrani: La grande assemblée des fidèles de vérité au tribunal sur le mont Zagros en Iran (Dawra - y - Diwana - Gawra)*; Kreyenbroek, *God First and Last*.

¹⁰ Membrado, "Enteqāl-e Shafāhi va Motun-e Moqaddas: Motun-e 'Ahl-e Haq dar Dowrān-e Jadid."

¹¹ A formative idea can be defined as a regulative principle in a symbolic order that gives a sense of coherence to that symbolic order. Although it may provide authenticity and justification for a discourse or identity, it may lack historical reality, because it is a regulative idea not an ontological element.

¹² Rawlinson, "Notes on a March from Zohāb, at the Foot of Zagros, along the Mountains to Khūzistān (Susiana), and from Thence Through the Province of Luristan to Kirmānshāh, in the Year 1836"; Gobineau, *Trois ans en Asie*;

highlighted tenets vividly depict the heterodox core of the Yārsān religion, which is based on a particular conception of history. By abrogating and rejecting the orthodox idea of the finality of prophethood, this religion considers *history* as the locus of manifestations and incarnations of the sacred in successive epochs; each divine epoch is characterized by its own particular theology and religious norms established by divine avatars in that era. This divine history is formed through the successive incarnations of the sacred in holy figures. Human being also participates in this history of manifestation by going through a thousand and one transmigrations (*duns*). The cosmic battle between good and evil in Yārsān (such as the confrontation of the fourteen bad ones against the fourteen good ones or the conflict between the creatures made with yellow soil and those created from black soil) should be seen in the background of this historical scenario.

The historical development of this religion also cannot be separated from the idea of divine history. In fact, in the absence of reliable historical sources, most religious historiographies explain the emergence of the Yārsān according to this religious-historical idea. According to religious sources, the Yārsān religion, as the fourth spiritual form after the *shari'at* era (Ali's period in the seventh century), *tariqat* epoch (the period of Shāh Khoshin in the tenth century), and *ma'rifat* period (before Sultan Sahāk), was founded by Sultan Sahāk in the fourteenth century.¹³ Sultan Sahāk was a descendant of the Barzanji family, representing one of the most important Sufi movements in Kurdistan. This religion is considered as the ultimate manifestation of the sacred in history, described as the religion of truth. In addition, Sultan Sahāk was also regarded as the perfect incarnation of the sacred in different historical periods.

This religion's demographic and geographical dimensions also cannot be explained outside the context of its historical development. In the contemporary era, the primary concentration of Yārsān believers can be found in specific regions within Iranian Kurdistan (including Karand, Gahwārah, Saḥna, Shāh-ʿAbād, Sarpol-e Zāhāb, Qasr-e Shirin, Tushāmi, Jeyhun ʿAbād, Gawrajo, Garabān and Harir) and Iraqi Kurdistan (such as Kirkuk, Dāqoq, and Khānaqin). In the past, however, this religion has gone through many migrations and diasporas. According to religious sources, the religion was first performed in regions such as Lorestan, Hawrāmān, and Hamadan (Zāgros) prior to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; it then evolved due to a certain population of Yārsān followers migrating to Barzanjah in Iraqi Kurdistan (first migration).¹⁴ The advent of Sultan Sahāk and the formation of the first Yārsān community occurred in Barzanjah in the fourteenth century. However, due to increasing conflict between the emerging Yārsān religion and conservative Sufi movements in Barzanjah, a second migration took place: Sultan Sahāk and his followers migrated to Iran's Hawrāmān regions (second migration).¹⁵ Hawrāmān was where the Yārsān religion was established and developed; in religious texts, this migration is referred to as the establishment of the Pārdiwari order (Pārdiwari period). However, a third migration also occurred, with second and third generations of the Yārsān community migrating to the Dālāhu, Sarāne, Zarda, and Gorān areas in Kermanshah (post-Pārdiwari period according to some *kalāms*).¹⁶ This third migration explains the Yārsān's high population density in the province of Kermanshah. These migrations occurred due to religious and political

Foroughi, "Taḥqiq Dar Mazhab wa Tariq-e 'Ali-Allāhi ke be Noseyri, Ghāli wa 'Ahl-e Haq Niz Ma'rufand"; Stead, "The Ali Ilahi Sect in Persia"; Modarresi Chārdahi, *Khāksār wa 'Ahl-e Haq*; Pittman, "The Final Word of the Ahl-i-Haqq"; Khāje-al-Din, *Sarsepordegān: Tarikh wa Sharh-e 'Aqāyed-e Dini-ye 'Ahl-e Haq*.

¹³ Sheykh 'Amir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh 'Amir*; Nawroz, *Daftar-i Nawroz*; Kā Boshir Bōzhui, *Farmāyesh Kā Boshir Bōzhui*; Jeyhun-ʿAbādī, *Haqq al-Haqāyeh (Shāh Nāme-ye Haqiqat)*; Elahi, *Borhan al-Haq*, 28–44; Šafi-Zādeh, *Nāme-ye Saranjām*, 23–4; Tāheri, *Saranjām*; Tāheri, *Tārikh wa Falsafe-ye Saranjām: Sharhi bar Nehlehā-ye Fekri wa E'teqādi dar Kordestān*; Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*.

¹⁴ See Khāl, *Sheykh Ma'ruf Nodhi*, 69–72; Tavakkoli, *Trāikh-e Tasavvof dar Kordestān*, 134–5; Modarres, *Bānamāla-y Zānyārān*, 203; Tudāri, *Nur al-Anwār*, 155–7.

¹⁵ For a full account of these early events, see Tabriziyan, *Diwān-i Rohtāw (Majma' al-Kalām-e Saranjām 'Ahl-e Haq)*.

¹⁶ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 915–923; Qobādī, *Zabur-e Haqiqat (Saranjām)*, 246–259.

conflicts prevalent between groups in these regions during various historical periods. Interestingly, some texts mention the religious wars that took place between Sufi and heterodox groups in these regions.¹⁷

The history of divine manifestations (four periods of manifestation) and the divine geography of the Yārsān community (four main diasporas) join to form the basis of the collective memory of the history and spiritual homeland of the Yārsān religious community. In fact, the periods of *tariqat* and *maʿrifat* (pre-Pārdiwari periods from Shāh Khoshin to Bābā Nāʿus) combine to form the divine era before the first migration; the short Barzanjah period relates to the time of the early religion's establishment in Barzanjah, and the Pārdiwari period is connected to the second migration. The post-Pārdiwari periods are basically related to the final migration, i.e., the third diaspora. This historical-geographical image is so imprinted in the Yārsān collective memory that the religious *kalāms* receive their historical and theological status accordingly. Therefore, the religious Yārsān *kalāms* are not necessarily regarded as organized chapters of an ultimate and finalized canon; instead, as scattered *daftar*s, they receive their status and discursive position according to their relevance to the epochs and phases of divine history and religious diasporas. This historical-geographical idea can be viewed as a formative idea giving structure to the collective memory and identity of the Yārsān people and their religious texts.

Yārsān spiritual history is so intermingled with the nature of the sacred text that *kalāms* acquire their identity and status accordingly. Thus, the word *kalām* in Yārsān texts is always concatenated with the word *epoch* (*dawra*). For instance, the text narrating the life and teachings of Bābā Nāʿus is called *Kalām-i Dawra-y Bābā Nāʿus*.¹⁸ In fact, *kalāms* are recognized and discerned according to their relation with the divine history. It was this formative historical-geographical idea that imposed a particular discursive order on the scattered and divergent *daftar*s (religious manuscripts) and *kalāms* (religious oral speeches). During ceremonies, *kalām* reciters performed numerous and divergent *kalāms* that seemed completely incoherent and chaotic to outsiders; those belonging to the Yārsān community, however, fitted each *kalām* like a puzzle piece into the larger formative picture known as Yārsān divine history. This idea was central to the formation of the sacred text in the multiple Yārsān processes of canonization, in such a way that many of the existing manuscripts, despite significant differences in content, language, and structure, have followed the same formative historical order in organizing the *kalāms*.¹⁹

To explain the origin and identity of *kalāms*, and also to shed light on the hidden logic behind the scattered Yārsān *kalāms*, we must explain the divine history that, as a formative past, organizes *kalāms* in a particular order. The Yārsān's divine history, as a formative idea, is neither a completely real nor absolutely mythological history; it is a mixture of spiritual narratives and historical events. In fact, both religious narratives and historical events have been reconstructed in a new discursive order in this formative construction that serves as the foundation for the Yārsān community's collective memory.

Now, the question arises, what exactly constitutes the content of this formative historical idea? Religious texts depict this spiritual history as a sequence of distinct historical periods. Each period is characterized by a unique manifestation of the sacred, its own angelology, and its specific spiritual teachings.²⁰ In fact, each period establishes a special spiritual order that abrogates and nullifies the previous epochs. Each epoch is described as a *qāpi* (gate) that

¹⁷ See Tudāri, *Nur al-ʿAnwār*.

¹⁸ Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat* (Saranjām), 43; Dāneshvar, *Zabur Haqiqat, Diwān-a Gawra*, 29.

¹⁹ See Unknown, *ʿAsrār-e mazhabi-ye Ferqe-ye ʿAhl-e Haq; Dāneshvar, Zabur Haqiqat, Diwān-a Gawra; Qobādi, Zabur-e Haqiqat* (Saranjām); Šafi-Zādeh, *Nāme-ye Saranjām*; Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*; Tāheri, *Saranjām* (*Majmuʿe-ye kalām-hā-ye Yārsān*); Tabriziyān, *Majmaʿ al-Kalām-e Saranjām ʿAhl-e Haq; Niknezhād, Ganjine-ye Yāri*.

²⁰ Sheykh ʿAmir, *Daftar-e Kalām-e Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʿAmir; Nawroz, Daftar-i Nawroz; Kā Boshir Bəzhui, Farmāyesh Kā Boshir Bəzhui; Jeyhun-ʿAbādi, Haqq al-Haqāyeh* (*Shāh Nāme-ye Haqiqat*); Elahi, *Borhan al-Haq; Šafi-Zādeh, Nāme-ye Saranjām; Tāheri, Saranjām* (*Majmuʿe-ye kalām-hā-ye Yārsān*); Tāheri, *Tārikh wa Falsafe-ye Sāranjām: Sharhi bar Nehlehā-ye Fekri wa Eʿteqādi dar Kordestān*; Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*.

metaphorically represents entry into a new spiritual and historical order. However, no period is deemed as the ultimate era, due to the Yārsān principles of God's infinite manifestations and the abrogation of the finality of prophethood, which suggest that the epochs of divine manifestation will be endless. As a result, any form of historiography will be inherently incomplete.

Despite disagreements regarding the exact sequence of some peripheral epochs in the divine history, Yārsān historiographers concur on the temporal order of three main *qāpis* (historical turning points): the divine epochs of Ali (*shari'at* [sharia] order in the seventh century), Shāh Khoshin (*tariqat* [Gnosticism] order in the tenth century), and Sultan Sahāk (*haqiqat* [truth] order in the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries). Following these three epochs is the era of spiritual households (Yādgār, 'Ibrāhim, and others in the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries). However, there are minor disagreements over the middle and transient phases, such as the epochs of Bābā Nā'us, Bābā Jalil, Bābā Sarhang, and Bohlul. These are known as the phases of royal guest-hood (Shāh Mimān) rather than *qāpis*.²¹ Some sources position some of these phases between Ali and Khoshin, while others suggest they occur between Khoshin and Sahāk.²² These middle phases are not considered *qāpis* because they do not establish a new spiritual order; they do, however, lay the groundwork for the emergence of a new *qāpi*. Drawing on authentic manuscripts used by Suri, Mokri, Dāneshvar, Qobādi, and Tāheri,²³ a tentative outline can be proposed to illustrate the epochs of divine history:

- Yort-e kas nazāni: the epoch of mystery before creation, known also as Yā²⁴
- Khāwankāri: the epoch of creation
- Royal epoch: the epoch of God's manifestation in the kings
- The epoch of Shari'at: Ali (seventh century)
- The epoch of Tariqat: Shāh Khoshin (tenth century)
 - Bābā Nā'us
 - Bohlul
 - Bābā Sarhang
- The epoch of Haqiqat: Sahāk (fourteenth century)
- The epoch of Bābā Yādgār and Shāh 'Ibrāhim (fifteenth–sixteenth century)
 - The epoch of the households

This outline is supported by some of the most authentic exegeses in the Yārsān tradition, such as Sheykh 'Amir's manuscript, Nawroz's *daftar*, and Kā Boshir Bəzhu'i's exegesis.²⁵ Although this divine history, as narrated in religious historiographies, has many ambiguities and inconsistencies, it is still key to explaining the origin, structure, and function of the sacred Yārsān *kalāms*.

This formative historical diagram is like a pictorial puzzle into which different pieces of the *kalāms* are fitted. This historical imagery serves as a cognitive map for all the *kalāms*. In other words, each *kalām* finds its historical position in one of the phases of this diagram. The *kalāms* in the Yārsān tradition are divided and separated according to the historical phases outlined in this divine historiography. These phases encompass epochs such as

²¹ See Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*, 32. Royal guest-hood refers to the middle and transient phases of the divine history.

²² For Ali to Khoshin, see Elahi, *Borhan al-Haq*; Šafi-Zādeh, *Nāme-ye Saranjām*. For Khoshin to Sahāk, see Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*; Tāheri, *Saranjām (Majmu'e-ye kalām-hā-ye Yārsān)*; Tāheri, *Tārikh wa Falsafe-ye Sāranjām*.

²³ Suri, *Sorudhā-ye Dini-ye Yārsān*; Mokri, *Divane Gawra. French – Gawrani*; Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat (Saranjām)*; Dāneshvar, *Zabur Haqiqat*; Tāheri, *Saranjām*.

²⁴ According to some oral traditions, the mysterious phase of Yā is also preceded by other unknown epochs such as Qodrat and Shantyā.

²⁵ Sheykh 'Amir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh 'Amir*; Nawroz, *Daftar-i Nawroz*; Kā Boshir Bəzhu'i, *Farmāyesh Kā Boshir Bəzhu'i*.

pre-Pərđiwari (the epoch before Sultan Sahāk: Shāh Khoshin, Bābā Nā'us, Bohlu, and Bābā Sarhang), Barzanjah (the short phase before the establishment of the Yārsān religion in Hawrāmān), Pərđiwari (the epoch of Sultan Sahāk after the establishment of the Yārsān religion), and post-Pərđiwari (the successors of Sultan Sahāk: Bābā Yādgār, Shāh 'Ibrāhim, etc.).²⁶ While there are no particular *kalāms* for the epochs of Ali, Mohammad, and prior, some *mar-amos* (religious verses in the *kalāms*) attributed to these can be found in different *kalāms*.

In the Yārsān religion, *kalāms* are attributed to historical epochs as follows. The *kalāms* of Shāh Khoshin, Bābā Nā'us, Bohlu, Bābā Sarhang, and Bābā Jalil are mainly associated with the pre-Pərđiwari era. The *kalām* of Rohtāw, which narrates the odyssey of dervishes in search of Sultan Sahāk, is ascribed to the Barzanjah epoch. The Pərđiwari era encompasses numerous *kalāms*, including *Dawra-y Shāndrwey*, *Goro Goro (groups)*, *Bārga Bārga*, *Dāmyār Dāmyār*, *Kala Zarda*, *Byā-w Bas*, *Gawāhi Haftan*, *Haftawāna*, *Cheltan*, and more. The post-Pərđiwari era includes many *kalāms* authored by figures like Khān 'Atash, Shāh Hayās, Sheykh 'Amir, Seyyed Bērākah, and others. It is worth noting that the *kalāms* of Bābā Yādgār and Shāh 'Ibrāhim belong to a transitional phase and are attributed to both the Pərđiwari and post-Pərđiwari eras.

The angel of scribing and the pre-eternal memory of the sacred text

Apart from the formative idea of divine history, two other concepts that serve as formative ideas and function as driving forces for the canonization processes in the Yārsān religion are the angelology of scribing and the idea of Qabālah. These ideas (the angel of scribing and the scripture of Qabālah) shape the Yārsān believers' religious memory about an archetypal sacred text. Upon examining these ideas, it becomes clear that they are significantly interconnected with the formative concept of divine history. In fact, the three concepts together collectively form a coherent system shaping the notion of sacred text in the Yārsān religion. We first delve into the angel of scribing before exploring the important concept of Qabālah in the following section.

The sacred text has an important symbolic position in Yārsān angelology, and Pir Musā—the angel of scribing sacred *kalāms*—is considered one of the most significant archangels (heptads), holding the third rank (after Benyāmin and Dāwud) in the theological hierarchy of angels. In successive manifestations of the divine history, Pir Musā is recognized as Mikā'il (in the pre-eternal world), Jāwər (Jāber) (in Medina), Sālih (in the pre-Pərđiwari epoch), Rokn al-Din (in Barzanjah), and Pir Musā (in the Pərđiwari era).²⁷ He has three main roles, all related to the act of writing and assigned to him by God. The first is that he should write down all human deeds and, as such, he is mainly described as the owner of the golden pen:

1. Gholāmān Musā// Qalam hān wa das Rokni Pir Musā// Gerd-i kerdāri 'āyish manusi// Xārān wa xāri dusān wa dusi.²⁸

O devotees, here is Pir Musā// he (Rokni and Pir Musā) is the owner of the pen// All the deeds, he writes// (he writes) the evil people as evil and the good ones as good.

Pir Musā's second responsibility is to utilize the science of letters (*rəmāl*: reading the signs) to identify God's location (incarnation) in different historical periods. This is illustrated in the sacred text of *Diwān-i Rohtāw*, where Pir Musā successfully determines God's precise location in Barzanjah.²⁹ His third role is to write and scribe the sacred *kalāms* and, in Yārsān historiography, Pir Musā is credited with writing all the sacred texts in Pərđiwar.

²⁶ See Hoseyni, *Tarjome va Tafsi-r-e Diwān-a Gawra*, vol. 1, 13–15; Hoseyni, *Tarjome va Tafsi-r-e Diwān-a Gawra*, vol. 2, 14–16; Tāheri, *Saranjām*; Tāheri, *Tārikh wa Falsafe-ye Sāranjām*; Tāheri, "Negāhi bar Nosakhe Yārsān."

²⁷ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 688–692; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 302–306.

²⁸ Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 165.

²⁹ Tabriziyan, *Diwān-i Rohtāw*.

2. Hosayin ʿamr-ə mən bərdən sarānsar// bakhshānəm wanash ʿi saru ʿaw sar// tā na pərđiwar nəmānām mazhar// bi wa daftardār Musā qalam zar// Bənyām wa pir Dāwud wa rahbar.³⁰

Hoseyn obeyed all of my commandments// and I gave him this world and the *other world* (eternal world)// when I manifested myself in Pərđiwar// Musā, the owner of the golden pen, became the scribe [or the owner of *daftars*]// Bənyām became Pir and Dāwud the leader.

According to these sources, Pir Musā wrote the Pərđiwari scriptures in Hawrāmān, as well as the spiritual conversations between the companions.

The question arises, however, why did Pir Musā scribe the sacred *kalāms* in the Kurdish language? According to Yārsān's mythology, Pir Musā and six other archangels were responsible for creating seven languages and seven ethnic groups (Kurdish, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Roman, Indian, and Barbar). Since Pir Musā invented the Kurdish language and was the leader of the Kurds, his sacred scriptures are also written in Kurdish:

3. Sāləh (Pir Musā): ʿāfarid bimān na ko-y sarandil// bimān wa farzand bolbashar-ə dil// ʿaz nāməm Kord bi, [wa] kordān sarkhel// Qāzi nāməsh bi ʿarab nāwəsil// nāmish biā fārs Hamza-t naw hāmil// ʿesməsh tork byā Qomri nā sarmil// Khazān nāməsh bi far-angə nārwil// ʿesməsh byā hend ʿAhmad nā qawil// nāməsh barbar bi Neʿmat nā hawil// haft zwān na ʿema ʿijād-e tafsil.³¹

he created us in Sarandil (a sacred place)// and we became the children of Adam the captive// my name (Pir Musā) was Kurd [related to the Kurdish language], and I was the leader of the Kurds// the name of Qazi (an archangel) was Arab at that place // Hamzeh's name was Fars at that time// and Qomri's name was Turk at that time in Sarandil// Khazān's name was Farhang at that path// and the name of Ahmad was Hend// at that time the name of Neʿmat was Barbar// these seven language have been made by us.

This mythological narrative is the reason why Pir Musā's pre-eternal name is known as Kurd:

4. Ham bim wa farzan bashari ʿābāt// nāmem byā kord lafz-ə kordim wāt.³²

I became the descendent of Adam, the eternal father// My name was Kurd, and I spoke the Kurdish language.

Therefore, Pir Musā is regarded as the owner of *pen* and *daftar* (scripture) in the Yārsān religion:

5. Daftar dāranān// pir Musā wazir daftar dāranān// daftar dār-ə dawr pādshāw pīranān...// ham daftar dār-u ham dasgiranān (kalām-e haftanān).³³

He is the owner of *daftar*// Pir Mousa is *wazir* and the owner of *daftar*// he is the owner of *daftar* in the era of King and Pir (Sultan Sahāk) ...// he is not only the owner of *daftar* but also a helper.

³⁰ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 496.

³¹ Dakkeʿi, *Diwān-e Hazrat-e Bābā Nāʿus*, 261; Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 121; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 93.

³² Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 692; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 305.

³³ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 292.

As the verses of the above *kalām* indicate, Pir Musā is recognized as the owner of scriptures during the Pərđiwari era. However, the Yārsān tradition suggests that the sacred *kalāms* existed long before the Pərđiwari period, prompting the question: who was responsible for transcribing the *daftars* from earlier eras?³⁴ According to Yārsān tradition, Pir Musā's previous transmigrations, or *duns*, were responsible for scribing sacred texts and registering deeds in earlier periods. Essentially, each era's sacred act of writing was performed by an individual considered to be Pir Musā's *dun* at that time. Even after the Pərđiwari era, those tasked with writing *daftars* or possessing significant talent for interpreting *kalāms* were also viewed as spiritual hosts of Pir Musā (Pir Musā Mehmān: an individual hosting Musā's essence). For instance, in certain oral narratives, Mir Rostam, the son of Seyyed ʿAyāz, was believed to be the spiritual host of Pir Musā's essence during the divine period of Seyyed Bārakah in the nineteenth century.³⁵ Further, in addition to *kalām* writers, commentators also viewed themselves as Pir Musā's spiritual hosts. Therefore, the formative image of the angel of writing and his conceptual incarnation in people motivated and inspired many to scribe and interpret the holy *kalāms*.

According to Yārsān's angelology, each *kalām* is associated with a particular epoch in the divine history and had its own scribe and copyist. Such scribes are believed to be blessed and possessed with the essence of the writing angel (Pir Musā). In other words, *kalāms* and their writers belong to different phases of the divine history. Thus, the angelological idea of writing is already based on the concept of divine history as the most fundamental formative idea of the Yārsān religion.

Although different *kalāms* in the Yārsān religion are attributed to different historical eras and present divergent themes and topics, they mainly all employ a similar stylistic structure: *maramoʿi* structure. *Maramo* literally means *s/he says* (in an honorific form). Texts not deemed sacred do not adhere to the *maramoʿi* structure. To delve into this stylistic characteristic, we must examine *kalāms*' structure more closely. Each *kalām* is divided into relatively independent parts (described as *maramo*), which are in fact direct speeches uttered by holy figures. For example, the *kalām* of Bārga Bārga contains 72 *maramos*, each of which is the direct speech of a holy figure (72 narrators).³⁶ Each *maramo* is introduced by an introductory clause such as "X says." The following example (containing two *maramos*) illustrates this structure vividly:

6. Pir Qobād *maramo*:

Pir Qobād says:

ʿaw yāna-y **Tāher**// bārga-y shām luwā wast ʿaw yāna-y **Tāher**
The house of Tahir// the tent of my king descended into the house of Tahir
Baw kân-u karam qadim-ə **qāher**// na gərd hawar-e zātəsh-an **hāzər**
With his eternal grace, the almighty eternal God// he is present everywhere
Ja pərđiwar-dā shartəsh-an **sādər**// Pir Musā wazir Dāwud bi **nāzər**.
His pact has spread over Pərđiwar// Pir Mousa is Wazir and Dāwud is the overseer.

Pir Kāzəm Kangāwari *maramo*:

Pir Kāzəm Kangāwari says

ʿaw khāwar **zamin**// bārga-y shām wast-an ʿaw khāwar **zamin**
In the eastern land// the tent of my king descended in the eastern land
hokməsh magilo yasār-u **yamin**// khor zha khorʿāwā mā-waru **pasin**.
His sovereign decree is spreading over right and left (everywhere)// he returns the sun from the west (to the east).

³⁴ This does not mean there was a kind of sacred text before the Pərđiwari era. This statement is based on the narratives of the manuscripts and has no historical implications.

³⁵ Şafi-Zādeh, *Mashāhir-e ʿAhl-e Haq*, 152.

³⁶ See Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 367–399; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 238–276.

Each *maramo* can include several couplets, and its lines mainly rhyme with one another and often (but not always) have the same number of syllables. In many *kalāms*, the first line of the first couplet of a *maramo* is half the other line with regards to the number of syllables. In oral performance, this shortened line may be repeated twice by the reciter to compensate for the rhythm. These stylistic features (rhyming couplets along with the shortened line of a *maramo*) indicate the boundaries between consecutive *maramos* in a *kalām*.

The sequence of multiple *maramos* forms a *kalām*'s overall structure. In narrative *kalāms*, the story's evolving plot unfolds through successive direct speeches by different persons in a continuous dialogue. A similar structure is employed for expressing cosmological or theological ideas. The idea is expressed in a tiki-taka style, whereby one person conveys part of the idea (by a *maramo*) and passes it to the next, who then passes it to the next, ad infinitum.³⁷

As previously discussed, religious texts that do not adhere to the *maramo*'i structure are not considered sacred. For instance, the exegeses of Sheykh 'Amir, Nawroz, and Khān 'Almās do not employ the *maramo*'i structure, and are thus classified as interpretations rather than sacred texts.³⁸ However, it is worth noting that Nawroz's exegesis includes a brief and enigmatic section of about thirteen pages composed in the *maramo*'i style. This section, however, is not recognized as part of Nawroz's exegesis. Indeed, followers of the Heydari household believe this section to be a sacred text of divine origin, presented by Seyyed Bārakah himself and his companions. Thus, the sacred *kalāms* are composed in a similar style across different periods. It is important to note that although the *maramo*'i structure governs all the sacred *kalāms*, they still exhibit different linguistic (more precisely, dialectological) strata synchronically and diachronically.

In fact, the Gorāni dialect employed in the *kalāms* does not rely on a unified and consistent linguistic structure: it is highly mixed and heterogeneous from both a synchronic and diachronic perspective. The particular linguistic nature of this dialect can only be explained according to its specific eco-linguistic condition, described as *literary koine* by some scholars.³⁹ To analyze the linguistic nature of the Gorāni dialect of *kalāms*, first we must explain the concept of "koiné" briefly. As scholars put it, a literary koiné is a kind of lingua franca comprised of regionally and genealogically related dialects.⁴⁰ The related dialects (in contact) are regarded as input varieties, and their long-term and continuous contact gives birth to a transient, intermediate space called a *feature pool*. The output dialect that emerges from this space is described as *koiné*, the linguistic features of which are selected from the feature pool, which contains multiple, heterogeneous, parallel and competing features taken from the input varieties. The koiné's ultimate features are selected and modified through different procedures, such as mixing, simplification, and leveling. As far as the mixing procedure is concerned, the koiné, in its early phases, is made by mixing linguistic features from the input varieties, making many intermediate, mixed, and parallel features observable in any koiné variety. Additionally, some novel feature may emerge from this contact that cannot be seen in the input dialects.

Just in the same way, the Gorāni koiné takes its divergent and parallel linguistic features from Kurdish dialects (such as Hawrāmi, Sorāni, and Kalhori) as input varieties via the procedure of mixing, and then modifies the features according to the processes of leveling and simplification. Therefore, many linguistic features taken from the input varieties can be seen in the mixed Gorāni koiné and, because of this, multiple forms (from different input

³⁷ In this context, the tiki-taka style refers metaphorically to a style of narration in which each narrator presents only a brief portion of a theological idea or religious story, then hands it off to the next narrator. This process continues until the end of the text.

³⁸ Sheykh 'Amir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh 'Amir*; Nawroz, *Daftar-i Nawroz*; 'Il Bag Jāf, *Daftar-e 'Il Bag Jāf*; Khān 'Almās, *Diwān-e Khān 'Almās*.

³⁹ See Minorsky, "The Gūrān," 76, 89; MacKenzie, "Some Gorāni Lyric Verse," 255, 258; MacKenzie, "Gūrāni."

⁴⁰ Trudgill, *Dialects in Contact*; Siegel, "Koinés and Koineization"; Mühlhäusler, "German Koinés: Artificial and Natural"; Mufwene, *The Ecology of Language Evolution*; Mufwene, "Jargons, pidgins, creoles, and koinés: What are They?"

varieties) serving the same function may exist in parallel in the Gorāni koine. The mixed and heterogenous nature of the Gorāni koine can be explained in different ways. For instance, different forms of the Ezāfeh linker (such as -i [-y], -ə, and -u [-w]), taken from the Sorāni, Kalhori and Hawrāmi dialects, can be seen in the same manuscript.

7. Chā haft dāna-w nur zāt-mān wash-yā-wan.⁴¹
 from seven one-Ez light essence-our emit-passive-prs.prf⁴²
 Our essence has been emitted from seven beams of light.
8. Laqā-w khwājā-m na to mehmāna.⁴³
 union-Ez master-my in you guest-be.prs
 The union with my God is guest in you [God has incarnated in you].
9. Pay raḥmat-ə to jam-an sarmas-ān.⁴⁴
 for mercy-Ez you gather-be.prs drunk-pl
 The drunks are gathered here for your mercy.
10. ʾima-ysh najāt dar chay qawā-y ḥaywān.⁴⁵
 we-too save give-prs.imp from garment-Ez animal
 Save us from the *dun* (transmigration) of animal.

Similarly, different inflectional endings (taken from different Kurdish dialects) can be seen in the *kalām* manuscripts. For example, in the following verses there are four divergent inflectional-verbal endings that mark the first-person singular subject in the present tense construction.

11. Shəma ma-wāch-di ʾaz-ish ma-wāch-um.⁴⁶
 you impf-say-prs.2pp I-too impf-say-prs.1ps
 You say, and I say too.
12. ʾAro ma-stān-i ʾaz haq-e mazlum.⁴⁷
 today impf-take-prs.1ps I right-Ez oppressed people
 Today, I avenge the oppressed people.
13. Ma-kyān-o-y na-y dam Dāwud wa hāwār.⁴⁸
 Impf-send-prs-1ps-3ps in-Ez moment Dāwud to cry (help)
 I send Dāwud to help at this moment.
14. Ma-ras-ə^m wa haq ʾemām-ān-ətān.⁴⁹
 Impf-reach-prs.1ps to right Imām-pl-your
 I avenge your Imāms.

In the same manner, there are different verbal endings marking the first-person plural subject in Yārsān manuscripts. The first example below (example 15) has been taken from the Hawrāmi dialect and the second (example 16) borrowed from the Sorāni dialect.

⁴¹ Dakkeʾi, *Diwān-e Ḥazrat-e Bābā Nāʾus*, 28.

⁴² Gloss abbreviations: Ez: Ezāfeh; prs: present; pst: past; prf: perfect; imp: imperative; impf: imperfective; pl: plural; ps: person singular; pp: person plural.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat*, 147.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

15. ʾAro gomrāh-ān bəkar-**mi** pāwan.⁵⁰
 today misguided-pl make-prs.1pp limitation
 Today, we put the misguided people in the prison.
16. Wargir-a kāsa b-əl-**im** wa pəsht tir.⁵¹
 take-prs.2ps.imp bowl imp-go-prs.1pp to back stable[barn].
 Take the bowl and let's go to the stable [barn].

Similarly, ergative agreement pattern (examples 17 and 18) and nominative-accusative pattern (examples 19 and 20) can be used in Yārsān religious texts. The first construction [possessive clitic [attached to the patient] and the non-inflected verb in the past tense] is more archaic than the second [the inflected verb agreeing in number with the subject in the past tense]. The interesting point is that older *kalāms* employ more ergative construction compared to more recent ones.

17. Nācha-w mucha⁵²-**mān** bash **kərd** na jam.⁵³
 sacrificial-share-and share-our divide **make** in jam
 We divided the sacred shares in the Jam.
18. Na rozh-ə ʾazal ʾaz to-**m** **kərd** payjur.⁵⁴
 from day-Ez pre-eternal I you-**my** **make** seek
 I sought you from the pre-eternal day.
19. Hazār-u pān-sad dun **kərdan-əm** gozar.⁵⁵
 thousand-and five-hundred dun make-pst.1ps pass
 I passed through one thousand and five hundred *duns* (transmigration).
20. ʾina **dā-m** najāt to nay qabāʾi.⁵⁶
 now give-pst.1ps save you in garment
 Now, I saved you from this garment (transmigration).

Alternatively, sometimes the literary koine does not follow any pattern of agreement, so the verb appears in a non-inflected form. This novel construction does not exist in the input varieties.

21. ʾidʾāswār-ān paydā **kərd** rakhshān.⁵⁷
brave-rider-pl find **make** rakhshān⁵⁸
 These brave riders found *rakhshān*.
22. Nām bābā ʾādam ʾema **bərd** ʾaw far.⁵⁹
 name father Adam **We** **bring** that *far*
 We brought the name of Adam to the divine blessing [we gave that divine blessing to the name of Adam].

⁵⁰ Dakkeʾi, *Diwān-e Hazrat-e Bābā Nāʾus*, 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵² *Nācha* and *mucha* are two different kinds of sacrificial shares in Yārsān ceremonies.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁷ Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat*, 264.

⁵⁸ In this verse, *rakhshān* is used primarily to rhyme with the previous verses. It could potentially signify *being luminous*, or it might be related to the plural form of *Rakhsh*, the name of Rostam's horse. Due to these potential meanings, we have chosen not to translate it.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

The heterogeneous nature of this dialect can be seen in all the manuscripts. For example, in the authentic manuscripts of Dāneshvar and Qobādi, there are at least four different inflectional-verbal endings just to mark the first-person singular subject in the present tense construction [-i; -m; -u[o]; -ina], while the input varieties have only one verbal ending for this construction.⁶⁰ Due to the feature pool of Kurdish dialects, the literary Gorāni koine is mainly described as Kurdish in religious texts:

23. hanət gəro-ye mawāchān kordi// ʾaw korda wa wərd mager-di// ʾākhər magno ʾaw sar-u gərdi.⁶¹

There exists a group of men speaking in Kurdish// that Kurd, don't belittle them// in the end, they ascend to the summit of that hill.⁶²

All the different, competing forms in Gorāni koine can be traced back to either the Kalhori, Hawrāmi, or Sorāni dialects. However, it should be noted that these divergent and competing features exist not only due to divergent features in the Gorāni feature pool, but may also belong to different historical strata. All in all, Gorāni koine is not like a unified, natural language, but more a *communicative space* synchronically and diachronically fed by the linguistic features of Kurdish dialects.

The pre-eternal memory of the Qabālah and the sacred text

There is a recurrent motif in the *kalāms* of the Yārsān religion: a pre-eternal and archetypal sacred text designated as the *Qabālah*.⁶³ According to some religious texts, God has hidden the holy Qabālah in a secret place, and his sacred avatars in different historical eras should find and present it to their followers as proof of their divine essence.⁶⁴ This scripture preserves the names of sacred figures who have been and will be incarnations of God throughout divine history. Therefore, the sacred Qabālah is used as testimonial proof of the divine essence of a sacred figure who claims to be God's incarnation in a particular era (*qāpi*). The Qabālah, as divine testimony, plays an important role in the epochs of divine history.

For instance, Ali—as the perfect manifestation of God—hid the Qabālah in the Kufa mosque and then informed his followers that a future individual would find and present the Qabālah to them, signifying this person as his reincarnation. This prophecy was fulfilled by Shāh Khoshin, whose name was mentioned in the Qabālah, and thus people recognized him as the reincarnation of Ali.⁶⁵ The event is described in detail by Sheykh ʾAmir in his exegesis:

24. Wa qawāy Khoshin mashhurin-awa// qabāla-sh nyān wa horrina-wa// kāsa-y māst ʾāward// Khoshin dast kishā kāsa-y māst ʾāward// nishāna ja dun ʾAli ʾizhār kərd// zānāsh Shāh Khoshin mortazā ʾaw fard.⁶⁶

With the garment (transmigration or incarnation) of Khoshin which is very well known// he hid the Qabālah in a mountain// he brought a bowl of solid yogurt// Khoshin stretched his hand and brought the bowl of yogurt// he showed the *dun* of Ali// they knew that Shāh Khoshin is ʾAli Morteżā.

⁶⁰ Dāneshvar, *Zabur Haqiqat, Diwān-a Gawra*; Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat*.

⁶¹ Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat*, 196–197.

⁶² It is worth noting that the term *kord* in this context refers to the circle of Yārsān believers (in the end times) who are predominantly Kurdish, but it does not necessarily indicate a specific ethnic group in its broader sense.

⁶³ This term literally refers to a signed deed as a legal instrument in writing.

⁶⁴ See Ivanow, *Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*; Tāheri, *Saranjām*; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*; Sheykh ʾAmir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʾAmir*.

⁶⁵ Ivanow, *Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*, 26–7.

⁶⁶ Sheykh ʾAmir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʾAmir*, 69.

Similarly, before his occultation, Shāh Khoshin concealed the Qabālah within a mysterious mountain, asserting that his future incarnation would reclaim the scripture.⁶⁷ The same also occurred in the era of Sultan Sahāk. In fact, Sultan Sahāk found the hidden Qabālah of Shāh Khoshin, thereby validating his claim as the ultimate manifestation of God.⁶⁸ Even after the Pərđiwari era, many holy figures—such as Qərmezi, Mohammad Beyg, and ʿAtash Beyg, who claimed to host the divine essence—had to present this mysterious scripture to their followers in order to prove their divine essence.⁶⁹

This idea also had a profound influence in the nineteenth century. When Seyyed Bərākah, for instance, proclaimed a new spiritual epoch, he claimed to have found the secret Qabālah.⁷⁰ As per certain oral narratives, Seyyed Bərākah discovered the scripture of Qabālah and then distributed it among his dervishes, much like a spiritual leader would distribute sacred shares of sacrificial food during a ceremony. Each dervish then composed a *daftar* inspired by his divine share of the secret Qabālah. During this era, numerous holy *daftar*s were created and viewed as manifestations and rewritings of the sacred Qabālah.⁷¹ Consequently, this formative idea served as the basis for text production and the authenticity of texts produced during Seyyed Bərākah's period. Additionally, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prior to Seyyed Bərākah, Shāh Hayās asserted in the introductory pages of his *daftar* that he had discovered the mysterious Qabālah. He further claimed that his holy speeches were derived from this ancient text.⁷²

The Qabālah, esteemed as the most ancient Yārsān religious text, is frequently echoed in the works of numerous Yārsān *kalām* writers, who portray their *daftar*s as exact replicas of this pivotal text and thereby affirm the authenticity of their manuscripts. This clearly demonstrates the formative nature of this idea. However, the question arises: what is the content of the Qabālah as a pre-eternal text? According to some religious texts, the Qabālah is a testament to the incarnations of God in *divine history*.⁷³ Indeed, it includes the names (and even signatures) of the sacred figures, as manifestations of God, in past and future epochs. A person claiming to embody the divine essence in a specific era must present his name from this text to the people during his divine sultanate.

Accordingly, we can now explain the relation between the formative idea of Qabālah and different types of *kalāms*. To this end, however, we must first describe the different types of *kalāms* in the Yārsān religion. From a content analysis perspective, *kalāms* can be divided into three groups. The first, called narrative *kalāms*, is mainly confined to narrating historical events as they happened to holy figures of the Yārsān religion. Titles of such *kalāms* include: *Dawra-y Kalām-e Shendrwey (Gəlim Wa-Kol)*; *Dawar-y Bābā Hendu*; *Dawar-y Shyāni*; *Dawar-y Shekh Safi*; *Dawar-y la dāyk Bun-i Shāh ʿIbrāhim*; *Dawar-y Jānəshini Shāh ʿIbrāhim*; *Dawar-y Zolāl Zolāl*; *Diwān-i Rohtāw*; and *Dawar-y Qoltās*.

To illustrate this category, we dissect the structure of one such *kalām*, the *kalām* of Shendrwey (Gelim Wa-Kol), which is classified as a narrative *kalām* because its text primarily

⁶⁷ Dāneshvar, *Zabur Haqiqat*, 26; Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 40.

⁶⁸ Ivanow, *Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*, 53, 73.

⁶⁹ It should be noted that in some related minority religions, such as the Shabak and Bektāshi traditions, there is also a memory of an ancient sacred text inherited by these communities' sacred leaders from the sacred Imāms or unseen world. For example, when Hāji Bektāsh tries to show his divine essence to the mystics of Anatolia, a green letter descends from the sky to him. This letter contains information indicating his divine essence. See Doghān and Soltāni, *Velāyat Nāneh*, 107; ʿAmjadi, *Boyroq Farmāni Hazrat-i Sheykh Safi*.

⁷⁰ Nawroz, *Daftar-i Nawroz*, 206.

⁷¹ Humat, *Daftār-e Haqiqat-e Chehel Tani*.

⁷² Shāh Hayās, *Saranjām-e Shāh Hayās*.

⁷³ Therefore, the idea of Qabālah cannot be separated from the idea of divine history. This shows that the three formative ideas are interconnected. See Ivanow, *Truth Worshipers of Kurdistan*; Tāheri, *Saranjām*; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*; Sheykh ʿAmir, *Daftar-e Kalāme Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʿAmir*.

narrates a story.⁷⁴ The significant episodes of this *kalām*, presented in the order they appear in the text, follow the below outline:

25. Plot of the *kalām* of Shendrwey

- The ship (carrying Benyāmin and other passengers) is caught in a sea storm
- A mountain and the angels ask Dāwud to save the ship and its passengers
- Intercession (prayer) by heptads, asking God to save *Gelim-wa kol*
- Sending Dāwud to save the ship
- Dāwud saving the passengers in the ship
- Dāwud's guilty act (initiating the ship's passengers as a Pir without permission from Sahāk)
- The punishment of Dāwud by fire
- Conflict between Mir and Dāwud
- Dāwud's repentance
- Intercession by angels, asking God to forgive Dāwud
- Sahāk's acceptance of the request
- Benyāmin and Sahāk's initiation of the ship's passengers into the Yārsān religion
- Introducing the heptads as Pir
- Nomination of Dāwud as a Pir for a particular group (some of the ship's passengers)

The second group, described as testimonial *kalāms*, encompasses *kalāms* that specifically express the *duns* and transmigrations of sacred figures throughout divine history. This main task of this type of *kalām* is to report the transmigrations of holy figures in different historical periods alongside their names and identities in those eras. Some examples of testimonial *kalāms* include: *Gawāhi Haftan*, *Gawāhi Haftawāna*; *Gawāhi Haft Khalifa*; *Gawāhi Haft Sāzchi*; *Gawāhi Haft Guyanda*; *Gawāhi Haft Gozachi*; *Gawāhi Haft Saqqā*; *Gawāhi Chāharda Badān*; *Gawāhi Haftad-u Du Pir*; *Gawāhi Nawad-u No Pir-ə Shāho*; *Gawāhi Shast-o Shash Gholām*; *Dawra-y Dāmyār Dāmyār*; *Dawra-y Bārga Bārga*; *Dawra-y Cheheltanān*; *Dawra-y 'Ali Qaladar*; *Kalām-ə Haftan*; and *Mo'arefi Haftan*. The below example illustrates this type briefly:

26. Pir Qānun: 'āmām na Shamām//... maday gawāhi 'azalin payghām// nāmem Foqān bi war na samā-y jān// farzan wa 'ādam nāmem bi Omām// nāmem Fonun bi chā kufay badān//... chā lorestāndā nāmem bi Khomām// 'igām chay hozur dim shā-y gerdin dām//... 'abd wa yāhu-yān nāmemā Qānun.

Pir Qānun: I came from Shamām//... I am testifying about the pre-eternal message// my name was Foqān before the sky and Jām// When I was a descendant of Adam, my name was Omām// in the Kufa inhabited by unfaithful people, my name was Fonun//...in the Lorestan (the era of Khoshin) my name was Khomām// now in Pərđiwar I have seen the sovereign King who is the owner of all the traps// I am servant to God, and my name is Qānun.⁷⁵

Finally, the third group of *kalāms*, described as ritual-performative *kalāms*, have neither a narrative function nor testimonial role. Instead, they are used in rituals, ceremonies, and prayers. A list of these type of *kalāms* include: “Do‘ā-y Māra Bərin” (prayer for concluding a marriage); “Do‘ā-y Talāq” (prayer for divorce); “Do‘ā-y Jawz” (prayer for initiating); “Do‘ā-y New-Nān” (prayer for naming ceremony); “Do‘ā-y Ghosl-i Mayt” (prayer for washing the corpse of a dead); “Do‘ā-y Khaksəpāri” (prayer for funeral ceremony); “Do‘ā-y Ghosl” (prayer for washing body as a religious ritual). Example 27 below, part of the prayer for concluding a marriage, illustrates a performative *kalām*:

⁷⁴ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 400–451; Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 198–222.

⁷⁵ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 834.

27. Na halāl zyātər makərđi harām// warna halāli jofttān mabo zām//... hāmsaritān maw bātāl-u bad nām//... pārez bəkərđi roh na tiz-u zām// wa fəsq-u fāsəq makərđi qyām// ʔiqrār bāwardi wa notq-u kalām// sekke bezhandi wa ʔamr-ə khwājām.⁷⁶

Except *halāl* enjoyments, do not look for *harām*// otherwise the legitimacy of your marriage would be harmed// your marriage would be dissolved and it would become infamous// save your souls from mockery and wounds// do not engage in corrupt deeds and do not follow corrupt people// put faith in the sacred *kalāms*// produce your coins in accordance with God's commandment.

While pointing to these three types, it is also important to note that this classification pertains only to prototypical *kalāms*, as numerous others exhibit a mixed nature. In this mixed type, some *maramos* are viewed as testimonies and others as narratives. A list of *kalāms* possessing this mixed nature includes: *Dawra-y Cheheltan*; *Dawra-y Bābā Sarhang*; *Dawra-y Piraw-Pirāli*; *Dawra-y Bohlul*; *Kalām-i Haftan* (*Khazāna*); *Dawra-y Kalām-i Shāh Khoshin*; *Dawra-y Bābā Nāʔus*; *Dawra-y Sāwā*; *Dawra-y Bābā Yādgar*; *Dawra-y Paydāyesh-e Haftawāna*; *Dawra-y ʔabedīn Jāf*.

Using this typology, we can now address the question of the relationship between the concept of the Qabālah and the various types of *kalāms*. As previously stated, the Qabālah text contains testimonies of the transmigrations and names of holy figures throughout divine history. Therefore, it could be posited that the mythical text of Qabālah shares similar content/structure with testimonial texts. This is because testimonial texts also primarily serve the same function, namely, testifying on the transmigrations of sacred figures throughout divine history. Consequently, it can be inferred that at least some religious texts (the testimonial ones) have been composed based on the memory of the formative idea of the Qabālah. It is worth noting that even in narrative *kalāms*, the testimonial style is quite prevalent. This indicates that the formative idea of the Qabālah played a significant role in the composition of *kalāms*.

From the perspective of oral literature, the idea of the Qabālah is a formative past, serving as a source of authenticity for *kalāms* created according to the earlier oral tradition.⁷⁷ The Qabālah can also function as a divine memory, offering identity (names), history (past: previous incarnations), and imagination (future: future incarnations) to the community. Essentially, the Qabālah represents a condensed image of the Yārsān community's collective spiritual memory. In the next section, the Yārsān process of canonization will be discussed.

The Yārsān canonization process

As previously noted, Yārsān tradition relies primarily on *kalāms* passed down orally. These oral *kalāms* are mainly characterized by their multiplicity (as they are attributed to different people in different historical eras) and relative independence from each other (each *kalām* is dedicated to a specific topic or provides narration for a specific historical period). The two attributes of orality and rhizomaticity⁷⁸ (being multiple and scattered) stand out as the *kalāms*' most significant characteristics. As far as the orality of *kalāms* is concerned, there is much stylistic evidence. For example, the *kalāms*' highly repetitive, short, memorable, and mnemonic structures clearly show this. Additionally, the elimination of third-person narratives, the exclusive reliance on dialogue and direct speeches, and the use of repetitive lexical expressions all reflect the *kalāms*' oral nature. In fact, *kalāms* are founded on a series of formulaic expressions with roots in an oral tradition.

This oral tradition had a close connection with many symbolic Yārsān rituals and ceremonies. For example, particular *kalāms*—such as *Qoltāsiān*, *Mərno*, and *Kaḷa zarda*—had

⁷⁶ Tāheri, *Saranjām*, 276.

⁷⁷ Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings*.

⁷⁸ Rhizomaticity is a term derived from Deleuze's philosophy and describes an assemblage of multiple elements arranged in a non-hierarchical structure.

been specified for ritual occasions such as the Qoltās fasting, Mərno ceremony, and sacrifice ceremony. These oral *kalāms* were not only performed in ceremonies, as they were also used to narrate the historical events that led to the establishment of the religion. Therefore, this oral tradition served performative aims and also recalled the community's historical dimensions. For instance, the Mərno *kalām* was recited as a part of the Khāwankār ceremony and also narrated the events leading to the establishment of the Yārsān religion in Barzanjah and Hawrāmān.⁷⁹ This multimodal tradition (*kalāms*), performed with music and *samāʿ* in ceremonies, could not be reduced to a written text. The multimodal and performative *kalāms* were the basis of the Yārsān community's oral cultural memory; a cultural memory formed around symbolic rituals associating historical and religious information.⁸⁰

With regard to rhizomaticity, *kalāms* were mainly scattered oral speeches, not organized and collected in a single comprehensive book. Although some informants claimed that a comprehensive canon (*Nāma-y Saranjām*) containing all the *kalāms* has existed since the founding of the religion, no evidence supports this claim. A thorough examination of the manuscripts available in the Yārsān community reveals no evidence for a comprehensive manuscript containing all the *kalāms* prior to the nineteenth century (thirteenth hijri), a fact readily apparent in later centuries. Moreover, no manuscript containing *kalāms* has been found prior to the eighteenth century. Therefore, until that time *kalāms* were mainly oral, and as scattered divine speeches they were not organized in a comprehensive manuscript.

There are two pieces of evidence demonstrating the lack of such a text: the fact that there are no written manuscripts of the *kalāms* dated earlier than the eighteenth century and the fact that the early books of the Yārsān religion make no mention of a sacred text with a particular title.⁸¹ To prove the latter, we must do an archaeological study on the Yārsāni manuscripts.

For an archeological study of the idea of a sacred text in early Yārsān texts, we can examine two distinct sets of manuscripts: we can scrutinize the sacred *kalāms* for any trace of a comprehensive sacred text with a specific title and we can analyze early texts by Yārsāni poets and commentators from the initial stages of the religion. As we have previously explored the religious *kalāms* and explained their lack of reference to a sacred text with a distinct title, we will not revisit this subject here. Instead, we focus exclusively on the texts created by early Yārsāni poets and commentators from the beginning of the religion to the nineteenth century, marking the era of canonization in the Yārsān community.

Among Yārsāni commentators and poets, Qoshchi Ughli (sixteenth century) is regarded as one of the earliest, a contemporary of second-generation Yārsāni sacred figures and a follower of Shāh ʾIbrāhīm. As a Turkish speaker, Qoshchi Ughli frequently highlights the contrast between the ancient Gorāni *kalāms* and his Turkish *daftar* in his book. Below we cite some of his enlightening verses about Gorāni *kalāms*.

28. The ancient *kalām* is in Gorāni// now I am composing *kalāms* in Turkish.⁸²
29. The ancient *kalām* comes to speech// and the divine grace may be shown to us.⁸³
30. I say my Turkish (poem) [which] is similar to Gorāni manuscripts// that is neither Arabic nor Turkish.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ The Mərno *kalām* is a part of the *kalām* of Rohtāw, which narrates the episode of the Mərno cave.

⁸⁰ Assmann, "Tradition, Writing, and Canonisation: Structural Changes of Cultural Memory," 118.

⁸¹ With regards to the former, although the religious manuscripts in Gorāni koine date back to the eighteenth century, Gorāni literary texts trace their origins to at least the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See Sajjādi, *Mezhu-y ʾAdab-i Kordī*; Khaznadār, *Mezhu-y ʾAdab-i Kordī*; Borakaʾi, *Mezhu-y wezha-y Kordī*; Roḥāni, *Tārikh-e Mashāhir-e Kord*; Hoseyni ʾAbbāriki, "Yāftehāʾi Novin dar Bāre-ye ʾAhval va ʾAshʾār-e Mollā Pareshān"; Morādi, "Hawlek Bo Nusinawa-y Zhyān-u Basarhāti Yosf Yāska (1593–1630)."

⁸² Qoshchi Ughli, *Daftar-e Kalāmāt-e Torki*, 178.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 296.

31. At that time Sultan was a Gorāni, I said *kalāms* in Turkish// Now that I have been incarnated in a different *dun*, I speak in Turkish.⁸⁵
32. Among 72 nations, God said his commandments in Gorāni// He knows the Diwān because he is the king of kings.⁸⁶

In the above verses, Qoshchi Ughli explicitly refers to the holy *kalāms* in the Gorāni language and states that his Turkish poems also originate from this divine source. Furthermore, the use of the adjective *ancient* to describe the language (Gorāni) of *kalāms* suggests that, even in his time, there was a kind of linguistic diglossia in the Yārsān community. In fact, the Gorāni *kalāms* were considered ancient compared to the vernacular dialects used by Yārsān followers in their everyday lives at the time. However, even though he frequently refers to Gorāni *kalāms* (as the source of his Turkish poems) in his *daftar*, he does not describe them as a book with a specific title. Despite his frequent references to the four holy books of three famous religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism), he never mentions a specific Yārsān book with a particular title to be cited against them:

33. Four books have come from the truth, all of which are in our hands// Torah, Bible, Psalms and the Quran// Four verses of the Quran have remained as secrets, and the rest of the verses (30 parts) are available [referring to the presence of the secrets of the Quran in the Yārsān community]⁸⁷.
34. Four books have come from the truth that we believe in// the Bible, the Torah, the Quran, and the Psalms...⁸⁸
35. Qoshchi Ughli has obtained the divine meanings and informs you about the four books// Even the deniers have received the news, so go eagerly to Shāh ʿIbrāhim.⁸⁹

Therefore, although he refers to the *kalāms* as individual divine speeches, he does not refer to them as parts of the same book. Perhaps the term *kalām* here refers to oral religious speeches performed by Yārsān people at that time. Therefore, the *kalāms* might exist in the form of independent and scattered oral speeches but not that of a unified book or comprehensive canon. As a result, Qoshchi Ughli does not mention any such book.

Although Qoshchi Ughli's poems do not contain any trace of a specific sacred book with a particular title belonging to the Yārsān religion, he occasionally uses the word *daftar* (religious manuscript) to refer to some holy *kalāms*:

36. O Yārsān people, Let's call our beloved leader// ... sit down in the *jam* of truth and converse with each other// read the *daftar* of religion and remove the grudge from the heart.⁹⁰
37. Qoshchi Ughli reads the verses of the *daftar*.⁹¹
38. They presented the *daftar* of truth to our beloved// ... // They gave the ethics and divine principles to Gorāni people.⁹²

Based on Qoshchi Ughli's poems, it can be concluded that, in his era, there was no idea of a comprehensive book containing the *kalāms*. Moreover, his use of the word *daftar* implies the limited possibility of the existence of written copies of some *kalāms* (which may have been chosen randomly or deliberately). However, his poems, taken as a whole, do not provide

⁸⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 74, 45, 101.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 230

⁹⁰ Ibid., 189.

⁹¹ Ibid., 201.

⁹² Ibid., 223–4.

evidence for the existence of a comprehensive Yārsān canon akin to the holy books of religions such as Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, his poems indirectly refer to a diglossic situation in the Yārsān community of that era. In fact, there is an implication that the Gorāni variety used in the *kalāms* was considered archaic compared to the vernacular dialects used by the Yārsān community at the time.

After Qoshchi Ughli, other important figures, mainly regarded as religious commentators, appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first is Khān ʾAlmās, the brother of ʾAtash Beyg, the leader of the ʾAtash Beygi household. Khān ʾAlmās lived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and his *diwān* (book) is regarded as one of the pioneering Yārsān exegeses.⁹³ A significant part of his *diwān* can be considered an exegesis on rituals, pilgrimages, and other religious ceremonies; the rest of the book presents predictions for the future. Another poet, Sheykh ʾAmir, emerged at almost the same time, also as part of the spiritual movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during which many exegeses and *daftar*s were produced in the Yārsān community. Considered one of the greatest interpreters of the Yārsān religion, Sheykh ʾAmir was a disciple of Seyyed Farzī, a leader from the Khāmushi household. In his *daftar*, apart from elucidating its mystical themes, Sheykh ʾAmir explains the historical periods of the Yārsān religion in detail.⁹⁴ Perhaps his book is the first text presenting a comprehensive image of the historical epochs (*qāpi*) of the Yārsān religion. Therefore, while Khān ʾAlmās explains rituals and the future, Sheykh ʾAmir focuses more on mythical themes and the past (history).

These two poets are recognized as the most authentic commentators in the fields of ritual, historical, and gnostic themes. Their interpretations likely emerged as a result of the diglossic nature of the Yārsān oral tradition, described as *ancient Gorāni* by Qoshchi Ughli. In other words, these works were likely produced to facilitate understanding of the oral Gorāni tradition, which probably also existed in written form but in a very limited way at the time. However, despite the fact that both poets described and interpreted very important Yārsān themes and rituals, neither referred to a holy book with a specific title such as *Saranjām* or *Diwān-e Gawra*. Instead, Khān ʾAlmās and Sheykh ʾAmir use only the words *kalām* and *daftar* to refer to the Yārsān religious tradition.⁹⁵

Around the same period, Shāh Hayās, the leader of the Shāh ʾAyāzi spiritual household and known as the author of a sacred *daftar*, emerged. Describing himself as *Shāh Mimān* (the host of the divine essence), Shāh Hayās considered himself more than just an interpreter. His *diwān* is not regarded as an exegesis, but is considered a sacred *daftar* illustrating his and his companions' divine essence, narrating the divine dialogues between them.⁹⁶ The sacred *daftar* of Shāh Hayās is completely different from the books of other poets and interpreters. The theme of his *daftar* is very similar to that of the sacred *kalāms*, in which a holy figure narrates re-incarnations of himself and his angels throughout history. His *daftar* was also composed in the *maramoʿi* style, in contrast to the exegeses of Khān ʾAlmās and Sheykh ʾAmir. Therefore, thematically and stylistically, Shāh Hayās's *daftar* is more like a sacred *kalām* than an exegesis.

The composition of a book in *maramoʿi* style (such as the sacred *daftar* of Shāh Hayās) in this transitional period suggests the Yārsān production of sacred *kalāms* had not been abandoned even in the eighteenth century, indicating that the idea of a final canon had not been formed until that time. Indeed, while some scholars (such as Khān ʾAlmās and Sheykh ʾAmir) were engaged in producing exegeses and interpretations of the ancient tradition, some holy figures (such as Shāh Hayās) still continued to produce sacred *kalāms* in the *maramoʿi* style. Shāh Hayās, like his contemporaries, mentions words such as *daftar*, *daftar-khāna* and *kalām*

⁹³ Khān ʾAlmās, *Diwān-e Khān ʾAlmās*.

⁹⁴ Sheykh ʾAmir, *Daftar-e Kalām-e Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʾAmir*, 98, 66–73.

⁹⁵ Sheykh ʾAmir, *Daftar-e Kalām-e Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʾAmir*, 18, 19, 26, 59, 84; Khān ʾAlmās, *Diwān-e Khān ʾAlmās*, 52, 178, 191.

⁹⁶ Shāh Hayās, *Saranjām-e Shāh Hayās*.

in his sacred book, but makes no reference to a book with a specific title as the sacred book of the Yārsāni people.⁹⁷

Zonnur, another sacred figure in the same historical period, considered himself a divine host (Shāh Mīmān) accompanied by sacred angels. Similar to Shāh Hayās's book, Zonnur's *daftar* was also composed in the *maramo'i* style of the classical religious *kalāms*.⁹⁸ In his text, together with his angels, he testifies to his divine nature and narrates his manifestations throughout history. It should be noted that Zonnur belonged to the Khāmushi family on his mother's side (ʿAsmara, Zonnur's mother, was Seyyed Rezā's daughter, and Seyyed Rezā was Khāmush's brother who migrated to Lorestan). In the same period in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Seyyed Farzi of the Khāmushi household also wrote a *daftar* in the *maramo'i* style.⁹⁹ The coexistence of these numerous texts in the *maramo'i* style in this historical period again indicates that the idea of a final canon still had not formed within the Yārsān community at that time, and sacred figures considered themselves free to produce sacred texts.

Just like Qoshchi Ughli, Zonnur and Farzi also use the terms *kalām* and *daftar* in their texts, but make no mention of a sacred text with a particular title such as *Saranjām* or *Diwān-a Gawra*.¹⁰⁰ An interesting point to note is that Farzi refers to his own manuscript as a *daftar*.¹⁰¹ This could indicate that either he considered his manuscript to be sacred, comparable to the ancient written *kalāms* also called *daftar*, or he used the term to emphasize the written nature of his *kalāms*.

Thus far, we have traced two parallel movements of interpretative *daftar*s by Yārsāni poets and commentators (e.g., Qoshchi Ughli, Khān ʿAlmās, Sheykh ʿAmir, ʿIl Bag Jāf, etc.) and sacred *daftar*s (based on the *maramo'i* style) by sacred figures (e.g., Shāh Hayās, Seyyed Farzi, and Zonnur) up to the 18th century. The first movement provided interpretations and explanations of the ancient Gorāni *kalāms* by following the style of classical Gorāni poetry, while the second produced new sacred texts following the *maramo'i* style of the ancient *kalāms*.

The coexistence of these discourses and movements illustrates the transitional nature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, sacred figures' production of new *kalāms* in the *maramo'i* style indicates that the concept of an ultimate and unified canon still had not been formulated in the Yārsān community at that time. In addition, the emergence of exegeses in this transient period shows the Yārsān community's strong drive to establish a unified canon for their heterogeneous and divergent oral traditions. Although there were individual and scattered *kalāms* (oral and written) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Yārsān religion did not consider itself bound to a single ultimate canon, and was therefore still open to new sacred texts.

The most significant step in creating a unified canon, although not necessarily with the desired outcome, may have been taken by Seyyed Bōrākāh, the leader of the Heydari household (a branch of the Khāmushi family) in the nineteenth century. Bōrākāh's project was initiated prior to the efforts of the Elahi family and those of other households for canonization in the 20th century. It is important to note that the Khāmushi family's revolutionary project of writing the *kalāms* and producing a canon (out of scattered texts) was no coincidence. Throughout history, in fact, prominent figures in *kalām* and exegesis writing—such as Khāmush, Sheykh ʿAmir, Sheykh Farzi, and Zonnur (through his mother)—were all members of the Khāmushi family, as there was a tradition of writing *kalāms* and exegeses in this family.¹⁰² Even before the time of Seyyed Bōrākāh, Darvish Zolfaqār—a follower of Seyyed

⁹⁷ Shāh Hayās, *Saranjām-e Shāh Hayās*, 11, 16, 22.

⁹⁸ Zonnur Qalandar, *Daftar-e Zonnur*.

⁹⁹ Seyyed Farzi, *Kalām-e Hazrat-e Seyyed Farzi wa Yārānash*.

¹⁰⁰ Zonnur Qalandar, *Daftar-e Zonnur*, 3 (373), 15 (385); Seyyed Farzi, *Kalām-e Hazrat-e Seyyed Farzi wa Yārānash*, 64, 67.

¹⁰¹ Seyyed Farzi, *Kalām-e Hazrat-e Seyyed Farzi wa Yārānash*, 16, 37.

¹⁰² For Khāmush, see Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra*, 647–655; Qobādi, *Zabur-e Haqiqat*, 262–273.

Ya‘qub-e Gorān, an eighteenth-century Khāmushi leader—also presented a new *daftar*.¹⁰³ There was already a long history of *kalām* production in this household. However, the revolutionary project of scribing, revising, and interpreting the sacred *kalāms* and establishing an ultimate canon began in the era of Seyyed Bērākah.

Seyyed Bērākah (Heydar Heydari) (1795–1873) declared his divine era in 1834, and some dervishes gathered around him who are known as the forty-one dervishes.¹⁰⁴ The miraculous aspects of his divine essence were related to revealing the secret Qabālah in the form of a book (known as *Dafāter-e Chehel Tani* (*Forty Ones’ Daftars*)) and also to producing and scribing the sacred *kalāms*. These divine aspects made him the most significant figure in the Yārsān canonization process.

As per certain oral narratives, Seyyed Bērākah found the secret Qabālah¹⁰⁵ in the form of a mysterious manuscript in the chest of his eldest son, ‘Ayāz. In this narrative, ‘Ayāz functions as a symbol for the mysterious mountain in which the Qabālah was hidden. Then, through a miraculous act, Bērākah retrieves the Qabālah from the mysterious location and gives it to his favorite dervish, Nawroz, to share with the other dervishes. Just like the sacrificial share distributed among those participating in Yārsān ceremonies, the Qabālah was divided among the dervishes, each of whom took his share of the mysterious text, and each divine share was then crystallized in the form of a *daftar* written by a dervish (the output is about thirty-eight *daftars*).

In fact, the sacred share enabled the dervishes to compose religious *daftars*, resulting in the creation of Seyyed Bērākah’s *Forty-Ones’ Daftars*.¹⁰⁶ It is claimed these *daftars* originated from the secret Qabālah promised to believers for years. Here again we see the deep dynamic relationship between the concept of the Qabālah and the sacred text in the Yārsān religion. It is worth mentioning that, according to oral narratives, Seyyed Bērākah and Nawroz inspired *Forty-Ones’ Daftars* from the other dervishes. In fact, these multiple *daftars* should not be considered as works individually authored by different dervishes. Indeed, as the manifestation of the secret Qabālah, this book ought to be viewed as a collaborative and inspirational work.

It should be noted that Seyyed Bērākah and his followers not only produced sacred texts and commentaries, but also established the institute of scribing, interpreting, and preserving the sacred manuscripts, known as *Daftar-khān-ay ‘Alā-y Heydari* (The Divine Heydari House of *Daftars*). This house served as a location for scribing and preserving religious *daftars* and can be considered the first official Yārsān institution for canonization. The idea of *Daftar-khān-ay ‘Alā-y Heydari* is frequently mentioned by Bērākah’s descendants, such as Seyyed Rostam and Seyyed Shams al-Din, in their correspondences. In this house, the texts were not only collected and copied, but also revised and edited by trustworthy and recognized scholars and commentators. This procedure was called *sarrāfi* (testing coins), which refers metaphorically to revising and editing the manuscripts according to the texts authenticated by the Heydari leaders in order to distinguish authentic and non-authentic texts. In this historical epoch, some *daftars*—such as *Forty-Ones’ Daftars* and the *kalāms* of the Pārdiwari era—were scribed by Seyyed Bērākeh, his special secretaries (e.g., Mirzā Ramazān), and other scribes.¹⁰⁷

The process of scribing and revising religious manuscripts was more developed by the era of the spiritual leadership of Seyyed Bērākah’s grandson, Seyyed Rostam (1873–1934).¹⁰⁸ During this time, renowned scribes such as Bahrām Abbās-wandi and Kā Rahim Kākā’i transcribed *Forty-Ones’ Daftars* and the ancient *kalāms*. However, the Heydari canonization

¹⁰³ Zolfaqār-e Gurān, *Daftar-e Zolfaqār-e Gurān*.

¹⁰⁴ Šafi-Zādeh, *Mashāhir-e Ahl-e Haq*, 152–153; Soltāni, *Khāndan-hā-ye Haqiqat*, 38–41.

¹⁰⁵ Nawroz, *Daftar-i Nawroz*, 206.

¹⁰⁶ Humat, *Dafāter-e Haqiqat-e Chehel Tani: Kalām-e Dowre-ye Seyyed Bērāka*.

¹⁰⁷ Yusofi, *Daftar-e Yārsān, Zabur-e Haqiqat va Runewis Konandegān-e ‘An ‘az ‘Aghāz tā konun*.

¹⁰⁸ Soltāni, *Khāndan-hā-ye Haqiqat*, 41–45.

movement reached its peak during the leadership of Shams al-Din Heydari (1934–1948), Seyyed Rostam's son.¹⁰⁹ Shams al-Din encouraged his scribes to re-scribe the main *kalāms* and *daftars*, conducted training courses on sacred *kalāms* for his followers, and trained commentators (e.g., Darwish 'Ali-Mir Darwishi and Kā Boshir Bəzhu'i) whose commentaries are regarded as authentic exegeses for understanding the Heydari-produced manuscripts. During his leadership, Shams al-Din asked his trustful commentators and scribes (such as Kā Boshir Bəzhu'i and Darwish 'Ali-Mir) to scribe the holy books (*Forty-Ones' Daftars* and *Pərđiwari kalāms*) and then revised and signed the scriptures.¹¹⁰ These processes did not end here, however, as many other scribes (Mirzā Haq Murād Kākāi, Khalifa Yār-Mohammed, Wesā Māref, etc.) also re-wrote the authentic texts produced by the Heydari.¹¹¹

Shams al-Din's leadership was so significant because he established a process of evaluating and revising manuscripts according to criteria acknowledged by his familial tradition. Indeed, he recognized certain canonical manuscripts as valid texts and assessed the authenticity and originality of other manuscripts accordingly. A manuscript was deemed authentic only if it aligned with the canonical ones. When a newly scribed text closely matched those deemed authentic, Heydari leaders would endorse it as an acceptable manuscript.

This procedure, specifically the process of scribing, assessing, and revising the religious manuscripts by trusted commentators in the Heydari household and endorsing the scriptures with an official seal and signature, was described as *sarrāfi-ye daftar* (testing coins (analyzing) of *daftars*). The aim of this process was to distinguish between authentic and non-authentic manuscripts, with Heydari leaders signing the authentic manuscripts and instructing their dissemination among followers. These discursive procedures were employed to produce a final and reliable canon that could be trusted by the whole community.

The list of the scribes and commentators of religious *daftars* extends beyond the names mentioned above. The revolutionary movement started by Seyyed Bərākah inspired other spiritual households to produce sacred texts and exegeses. For instance, after the Heydari family movement, the movement led by Hāji Ne'mat 'Allāh Jeyhun-'Abādi and his son Nur-Ali Elahi holds significant importance. Hāji Ne'mat's main works are explanations and interpretations of the Yārsān oral and theological traditions, and his son tried to create a kind of ritual and historical canon in writing *Borhan al-Haq*.¹¹² However, political events eventually halted this family's work. Another example is the Shāh 'Ibrāhimi family, who also endeavored, quite significantly, to produce a canon, as they had access to some *kalāms*. In this regard, a leader like Qāsim 'Afzali holds great significance as he not only attempted to produce a specific canon (based on his household's tradition and also according to the manuscripts available to his family), but also authored many explanations and commentaries on the canon produced. The contributions of the Moshā'sha'i (or 'Atash Beygi) family are also highly significant in the creation and establishment of the Yārsān sacred canon. Further, in addition to these household movements, individual and personal projects have also been carried out in recent decades by scholars such as Hoseyni, Šafi-Zādeh, Tāheri, etc., who tried to compile a comprehensive book from the holy Yārsān *kalāms*.¹¹³ Of course, none of these achieved the status of a canon. It seems quite likely that all these familial and personal efforts may have been influenced by Seyyed Bərākah's revolutionary project.

It should be noted that the processes of canonization and production of *kalāms* were being carried out concurrently by several households (a few of which have been discussed and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 45–50.

¹¹⁰ For *Forty-Ones' Daftars*, see Humat, *Dafāter-e Haqiqat-e Chehel Tani: Kalām-e Dowre-ye Seyyed Bərāka*.

¹¹¹ Soltāni, *Khāndan-hā-ye Haqiqat*, 47–49; Yusofi, *Daftar-e Yārsān, Zabur-e Haqiqat va Runewis Konandegān-e 'An 'az Aghāz tā konun*.

¹¹² Elahi, *Borhan al-Haq*.

¹¹³ Hoseyni, *Diwān-a Gawra; Šafi-Zādeh, Nāme-ye Saranjām; Tāheri, Saranjām*.

mentioned here) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (thirteenth and fourteenth hijri), resulting in a multitude of manuscripts diverse in both structure and content. As the Yārsān community consisted of numerous households, each with a degree of autonomy, no single family could oblige other households to recognize a specific canon.¹¹⁴ The rhizomatic structure of the Yārsān community, the multiplicity of spiritual families, the subsequent plurality of leadership, and the concurrent existence of parallel and heterogeneous processes of canonization are the main reasons for the lack of a final and ultimate canon in this community. Although each family named its own canon as *Nāma-y Saranjām* (The Ultimate Letter), not a single one was recognized as the ultimate canon.

On the other hand, the *kalāms'* oral origin and their divergence stemming from different oral performances rendered the creation of a unified and ultimate canon impossible. In fact, since each manuscript had been taken from a specific performance, they exhibited significant differences. Additionally, the lack of a single leadership for unifying the diverse manuscripts (the mouvance phenomenon) led to the emergence of many divergent texts in different households.¹¹⁵ Consequently, several assortments of different *kalāms* emerged in the Yārsān community. Although the *kalāms* (in the assortments) had many convergences in form and content, they also showed significant variety due to their different performance and scribing processes.

Finally, it can be said that the canonization process in the rhizomatic Yārsān community is still ongoing and may remain a never-ending endeavor. This can be attributed to another significant factor: the infinite history of divine manifestation and writing. In fact, since the Yārsān history of divine manifestations is not finished, and new revelations and incarnations may lead to the emergence of new sacred texts (like Shāh Hayās, Zonnur, and others), the idea of the ultimate canon has still not been established in this society. In other words, the infinite history of manifestation will probably lead to the endless writing of sacred *kalāms*.

Despite the fact that the canonization process failed to achieve its intended goal, it still instigated profound changes in the Yārsān oral tradition. By adopting the writing medium, this religious community made the transformation into, what Assmann terms, *cultural diglossia*.¹¹⁶ In this process, Yārsān cultural texts were divided into ancient, central, original texts and new, marginal, non-original ones. This cultural diglossia was also based on a linguistic diglossia (literary Gorāni koine versus vernacular dialects) in which the language of the central texts is regarded as formal and archaic while the language of the other texts is considered vernacular. In the Yārsān community, the language of religious texts is unintelligible to ordinary people without interpretation and translation. This language is even considered sacred, bearing special names such as *sayidāna* language, *omrāni* language and *kalām* language. The emergence of cultural texts and linguistic-cultural diglossia, alongside the growing dominance of the tradition of writing *kalāms*, gradually led to the emergence of a tradition of exegesis (writing) in Yārsān society.¹¹⁷ This divided the Yārsān community into two groups, *kalām* reciters/commentators and ordinary people/listeners; a result of the specific history of canonization in Yārsān society.

Conclusion

This article has explained the process of canonization in the Yārsān religion. To this end, we first explored the formative ideas behind this process and also scrutinized the style of the sacred Yārsān texts. The findings showed that, although these sacred texts are attributed to different historical periods and include different themes, they all follow the *maramo'i*

¹¹⁴ Sultan Sahāk deliberately divided the Yārsān community into several households and gave them relative independence. This led into the emergence of a rhizomatic community not reducible into a canonical leadership.

¹¹⁵ For the mouvance phenomenon, see Zumthor, *Essai de Poétique Médiévale*.

¹¹⁶ Assmann, "Tradition, Writing, and Canonisation: Structural Changes of Cultural Memory," 121.

¹¹⁷ Sheykh ʿAmir, *Daftar-e Kalām-e Haqiqat Hazrat-e Sheykh ʿAmir*; Nawroz, *Daftar-i Nawroz*; Kā Boshir Bəzhui, *Farmāyesh Kā Boshir Bəzhui*; Khān ʿAlmās, *Diwān-e Khān ʿAlmās*.

style; a style specific to sacred texts, thus separating them from literary and exegetical works. In addition, this study also explained the formative idea of divine history and illustrated how this concept serves as the cornerstone of Yārsān collective memory. This idea had a pivotal role in the emergence of the holy Yārsān texts. Then, we conducted a thorough examination of some angelological ideas and the concept of the Qabālah, shedding light specifically on their significant roles in the emergence of the sacred texts and validating Yārsān canonization processes. The findings revealed that at least one type of holy texts has a deep structural-thematic connection with the concept of the Qabālah.

Following on, this article then demonstrated how the canonization process was pursued differently by various households, leading to heterogeneous and parallel processes of canonization. These movements were not able to form a single, unified canon within the community. Apart from the multiplicity of parallel canonization institutions, another factor was also effective in hindering the creation of a unified canon: the idea of the infinite manifestations of the sacred in divine history. This idea led to the continuous emergence of new sacred *daf-tars* and prevented the establishment of an ultimate canon in the Yārsān community. Finally, the divergent oral performances—i.e., the *kalāms*' origins—can also be regarded as another reason for the lack of a unified canon.

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