

BAYTĀ GILĀVĪĒ - A LAMENT FOR A NOBLE WOMAN OR EVIDENCE FOR POLYGAMY AMONG THE YEZIDIS

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Funeral lamentation is one of the most ancient aspects of man's creative activity, as the universal reality it reflects is one of humanity's deepest distresses. This also explains why mourning songs have always accompanied mankind, unlike other kinds of folk poetry, which appear and vanish together with temporary realities or temporary attitude to them.

The Yezidi laments have never been a subject of special research. The only exception is probably the book of M. Rudenko,¹ where the author emphasizes the richer variety of genres and colourfulness in Yezidi folk poetry as compared to that of the Kurds.²

Detailed study of Yezidi laments as a significant constituent of the Yezidi folklore, and especially in the general context of the keening tradition of the Iranian peoples, is a matter of specific interest, first of all due to the Yezidi's unique religious consciousness.

The fact, that the Yezidis trying to separate themselves from Islam, did not adopt Arabic script mainly associated with this religion, nor did they adopt any other particularly, in order to preserve their identity, brought this nation to obscurity and a prohibition of literacy. The same factor gave a powerful stimulus to the development of a rich oral tradition, which various samples having remained for centuries unfixed, changed and gave birth to new versions.³ These first concern the laments of Yezidis, as those of the people rejecting the institution of professional keeners. The Yezidis spiritual masters deploring their own wards, strictly preserve the tradition of mourning *qawls* and *beyts*, but the plots and versifications of specific laments performed by others, undergo constant transformations. In both cases we can not exclude that one suffering the tragedy personally, is adding his own share to the text of a well-known lament.

"The Song of Glavi" belongs to the so-called *sujét* laments (i.e. mourning songs with a plot, or threnodies) of the female cycle. Such mourning songs are being composed on the death of a prominent person, especially if he (she) died under specific circumstances. Apart from the other functions peculiar to laments in general, like ritual, magic, communicative and social, as well as the function of etiquette or that of catharsis, *sujét* lamentation also has a rather practical, I would say psychological function, attracting attention to somebody's death, and what is very important - to the death of a historical personality. In this connection M. Rudenko notes: "It is not only you who feel the grief of loss: the people have lost more prominent persons and even under more tragic circumstances" - this is the implication of a *sujét* funeral lamentation".⁴

Unlike other laments which are practically impossible to record outside of ritual, due to their sacred character and superstitious fear of a keener, *sujét* laments, being at the same time historical (or sometimes heroic) songs are principally allowed to be recited to a listener. Although even here, we have to take into consideration the yezidis' zealous striving to shroud in mystery everything concerning their religious rites.

I was lucky to write down a remarkable version of *Bayt 'a Gilāvīē* from a famous

performer and connoisseur of Yezidi folk songs Gulizar Tamoyan,⁵ from Armavir region, Armenia. *Bayt'a Gilāvīyē* as a lament deploring loss of the most respectful women in the Yezidi community, had been for many years performed by the mother of Gulizar, from whom she inherited both her talent and her honourable mission.

The text of the *beyt*, in order to be understood in a proper way, requires additional commentaries, not only because it presupposes a knowledge of certain peculiarities of Yezidism, but also because some semantically meaningful parts of the narration are omitted. It is a characteristic feature of many Yezidi, as well as Kurdish laments, in which the omitted verses are replaced by a so-called *širōvakirin*, i.e. commentaries in prose, or rather, prose narration. Though, at the funeral rites, the emotional tension does not allow the performer to break the verse, all the more, those present are supposed to know the plot of a famous lament.

We present below the short plot (its considerable part is left out of the text's scope), the text and the English translation of *Bayt'a Gilāvīyē*, which, in addition, is important as probably the only, or at least one of the rarest folklore samples indicative of polygamy among the Yezidis.

Despite the fact that according to the official doctrine of the Yezidism, polygamy is forbidden, its rare cases are excused if the first wife cannot have a child. Although one could trace the undoubtful influence of Islam here, such concept occurs even now among the Yezidis of Armenia, having lived in an almost purely Christian milieu for more than two hundred years.

Once Mir Hawas (Hawash), says the story, visits one of his kins, who trying to please his honourable guest, gives him as wife, the beautiful and clever Glavi, his younger and most beloved daughter. Mir Hawas brings Glavi home, where his first wife, being jealous, decides to kill the young lady.

Some time later, Mir Hawas sets out on a journey. In several days he is overtaken by a rider with a message. With the foreboding of evil, Mir Hawas reads the letter saying that Glavi is close to death, and that he has to be right back as he may miss seeing her alive.

Being back, Mir Hawas finds out that Glavi has already been buried. He goes to the graveyard and asks the graveyard watchman where the grave of Glavi is. On the grave of Glavi, Mir Hawas turns to God praying to reanimate his beloved wife for a while, in order to learn the cause of her death. So, the grave opens and Glavi talks to Mir Hawas. She complains that Mir had left her with the villain who poisoned her, that no one came to see her while she was sick for eighteen days. Mir Hawas is ready to give everything, in order to get Glavi back, but her death is God's will. So Glavi is dead and Mir Hawas buries her again.

Bayt'ā Gilāvīyē

- 1 **Hātiya qāsīdē čiyāna,**
Warē amē bikin xabaryāna,
Āx li minē, sarāya rē ma bityāna.

- 2 Hātiya qāsidē dardā,
Sōrānikē sōra bardā,
Āx li minē, rašxataka raša sardā.
- 3 Hātiya qāsidē zēy,
Rašxataka raša lēy,
Ā li minē, navē Gilāvīyā mina lēy.
- 4 Azē wē rašxatē dixunim,
Qa t'ī p'āk tē nāvinim,
Divēžim, barē xwa didima, pištā xwa lē vidigaṯnim.
- 5 Gō: “haṯē bōrō, a'slē tayī li xās,
Da tu bažō qawātā Xidir-nābi-Xirdīlyās,
Āx li minē, t'irba zarībā mi durvā bira nās”.
- 6 Čuma h'āfā goṯistīna,
Pirsakē xāstyē dirgiwīnā,
Āx, gō: Galō t'irbā xarībā k'ī bi k'ina?“
- 7 Čuma h'āfā goṯestānī,
Pirsakē xāstyē dirgiwīnā,
Āx, gō: “Galō t'irbā xarībā min k'izānī?”
- 8 Darē t'irbē li min vakir,
Gilāvīyē āx-ū-barē sardā r'ang guhēī bū, min nās nakir.
Āx li minē, Gilāvīyē xayidī pišt min bakir.
- 9 Mīr gō: “Qudratā yakē di xafurē,
H'āfā t'irbā Gilāvīyā min k'išīyā nūra,
Avā yakā na qabūla.”
- 10 Qudratā yakē di rah'mānē,
Rōh'ē hātiya dast ū p'iyānē.
Gilāvi rūništiya Mīr H'awāsr'ā dika xavardānē
- 11 Mīr gō: “Gilāvīyē ži Suxinē,
Halā bēža pirsā vē gōtinē,
Halā čikā čī h'awalē ta mirinē?”
- 12 Mīr gō: “Sad h'ayfā tayī dēmē nārī,
Gardanē mōrē miržān ū k'arībārī;
Āx li minē, aw ži čūna āx-ū-barē gōṯāna tārī”.
- 13 Mīr gō: “Gilāvīyē, sad h'ayfā ta wī davī wa dirānā,
Ta wī mōriyā, wī miržānā,
Sad hayfā ta tu ži čūyī āx-ū-barē gōṯistānā.

- 14 Gilāvīyē gō: "Mīrō, ta az hēnāra,
 Ta az nāvā zeī u zīvda waz dižbāra,
 Ta az dastē zālīmaka zālvā dispāra,
 Avē zālīma bar sarē sivā dā min k'āsa ža'ra".
- 15 Gō: "h'īzda šavē hāvīnē,
 Naxāšbūm, k'atīma nāv nīvinē,
 Āx li minē, qa nahāta sar min lēzīmaki xūnē".
- 16 Gō: "h'īzda šavē hāvīnē žīmāra,
 Mīn na xārīya, na vaxāra,
 Āx, xufē xwa av ū hēsīrādā dubhāra".
- 17 Mīr gō: "Gilāvīyē, xāzil tu bihatāy li k'īrīnē,
 Mīn barānbarī ta zēt bāvītā nāv mēzīnē,
 Bonā di qīrārā vē avīnē".
- 18 Gilāvīyē gō: "Mīrō, haṭa birā tuyī xās bī,
 Sōrgulānaka nāvā bāxāna gaš bī,
 Birā jīyē Gilāvīyē āx ū faš bī".
- 19 Gilāvīyē gō: "Mīrō, haṭa birā tuyī sāx bī,
 Sōrgulānaka nāvā bāx bī,
 Birā jīyē Gilāvīyē xāli-āx bī".
- 20 Mīr gō: "Barō, li sar barā,
 Tu xwadē kī, p'ēxambarā,
 Tē āx-ū-barē sārda xīrāv nakī xwaš nadara".
- 21 Mīr gō: "Har'a bōrō sar sēk'inē,
 Tu xwadēkī, vē āsīnē,
 Tē xwadā xīrāv nakī ēa'v ū birīyēd balak, vē navsīnē."
- 22 Li duāē vān qanjā, li vān xāsā,
 Gilāvī bū stīkē, ču māli šamsā.

The Song of Glavi

- 1 *The messenger of the mountains⁶ came,
 Let us talk,
 Woe is me,⁷ in the palaces our ways were interrupted.*
- 2 *The messenger of grief,
 A small dagger is hanging,
 Woe is me, there is a letter in his hand.*

- 3 *A quick messenger came,
There is a black letter in his hand,
Woe is me, the name of my Glavi is on it.*
- 4 *I am reading this letter,
There is no good news in it.
I am talking and turning round, (I am) turning to the road.*
- 5 *“O,⁸ (my) grey⁹ horse, you are of pure race (you are a thorough-bred)
Tear with the power of Xidir-nabi-Xird-Ilyas,¹⁰
Woe is me, show me¹¹ from far-away the unknown grave (of my beloved).*
- 6 *I approached to the edge of the graveyard,
Asked the graveyard watchman:
“Man, which graves are unidentified?”*
- 7 *I approached to the graveyard,
Asked the graveyard watchman:
“Man, where is the grave of my unknown¹² (one).*
- 8 *The grave opened,
The colour of Glavi’s face was changed under cold soil and stones,¹³
and I did not recognize her.
Woe is me, Glavi has turned back to me.¹⁴*
- 9 *Mir said: “By God’s¹⁵ Will
Holy light appeared on Glavi’s grave,
Her death was not accepted”.*
- 10 *Of God’s¹⁶ Will
The spirit again came into the body [lit.: the hands and legs],
Glavi sat and started talking with Mir Xavas.*
- 11 *Mir said: “Glavi from Sokhin,
Please, tell me,
What was the cause of your death?”*
- 12 *Mir said: “A hundred times (I feel) sorry for your shining face,¹⁷
Your neck with coral and ebony beads,
Woe is me, all this has gone to the dark grave.¹⁸*
- 13 *Mir said: “Glavi, A hundred times
(I feel) sorry for your mouth and teeth, your beads and corals,
A hundred times (I feel) sorry that you left for the grave”.¹⁹*
- 14 *Glavi said: “O Mir, you left (gave away) me,²⁰
You had chosen²¹ me among gold and silver,
But you gave²² me to the old dame,²³
And this villain, once in the morning, gave me a cup of poison.*

15 *In summer for eighteen nights,*

I was sick, (I was) abed,

Woe is me, no one of my relatives came to see me.

16 *For eighteen nights in summer,*

I neither ate, nor drank,

Woe is me, my lot was water and tears”.

17 *Mir said : “Glavi, if you could have been bought (lit. sold),*

I would have given gold equal to your weight,²⁴

For the sake of love”.

18 *Glavi said: “O Mir, go and be happy,*

Be a red rose in the shining gardens,

And may the place of Glavi be earth and stones”.

19 *Glavi said: “O Mir, go and be healthy,*

Be a rose in the garden

And may the abode of Glavi be dust and earth”.²⁵

20 *Mir said: “Stone on stones,*

In the name of God and prophets,

Under the ground and stones may you not spoil that beautiful appearance (of her)”.²⁶

21 *Mir said: ”Go, grey horse, go quietly,*

In the name of God and this behest;

Do not spoil your beautiful eyes, eyebrows and yourself”.

22 *With the blessing of these kind and holy souls,*

Glavi became sti²⁷ and went to the women of Shamsani (clan).



Mother and daughter
Goga Sheikh Mirzo and Gulizara Sheikh Mamude

NOTES

1. М.Б. Руденко. *Курдская обрядовая поэзия. Москва, 1982.*
2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
3. A different version of *Bayt'a Gilavye* with similar plot, was written down by M Rudenko from another informant in Armenia. Its text and Russian translation were included in her book (*op.cit.*, pp.87-89, 111-114).
4. *Op. cit.*, p.17.
5. A famous performer by no means should be understood as a professional keener. As it has been already said, the institution of professional keening does not exist among the Yezidis. Recognized performers are invited for this honourable mission to the families they personally know and respect, and only if it concerns such specific laments as *Bayt'a Gilavye* which is not an obligatory part of mourning and can be heard only in special cases, like the funeral of a respected woman. As for such important laments as *Qawle Malake Faxradin* or *Qawle Sare -marge*, they are supposed to be performed by the spiritual masters of the late.
6. *The messenger of the mountain*, as well as *the messenger of grief (verse 2, line 1)* and *a quick messenger (verse 3, line 1)* – definitions of the person who brought sad news.
7. In similar contexts the form *ax* is usually explained as an interjection expressing disappointment, grief, etc., emphasizing the emotional tension of the situation. Apart from it, another interpretation of this form is also possible: it could be the substantive *ax*, meaning “dust, earth” and thus, being a constituent of a presupposed phrase “earth (dust) on my head” (cf. Persian *xāk tū saram*, etc.), as also a usual expression of grief. In modern Kurdish, the common form for “earth, dust” is *a'rd* (Arab. ‘ard).
8. In Kurdish folklore and especially in poetry, *gō*, i.e. “said” has a so-called “function of brackets”, introducing direct speech. Sometimes, it is preceded by an interjection, which is supposed to refer to the phrase in brackets, i.e. to the direct speech itself (*See, e.g. verse 6, line 3*).
9. The word *bōr-* (final *-ō* is the formant of vocative masculine) in Kurdish means “gray” mainly in applying to the colour of a horse.
10. *Xidir-nabi-Xirdilyās* - should be *Xidir-nabi-Xidir-ilyās* (the latter - with metathesis). *Xidir-nabi* and *Xidir-Ilyas* are two significant figures of folk beliefs and popular folkloric characters of many Iranian peoples, including the Yezidis. Due to a number of similar features, common function, etc. they are often identified with each other, seldom – with the other saints of Near Eastern peoples (see in details: *А.А. Папазян. Аль-хидр и Илья: Мифологические истоки аналогии. - Палестинский сборник, 28 (91). Ленинград, 1986, сс. 89-97*).
11. Lit.: “acquaint “ or “familiarize me”.
12. I.e. “my beloved”; *xarib* (Arab. *ḡarīb*) literally means “stranger, alien”, and also “poor, miserable”. In certain context it can mean “dear” as an expression of sympathy or affection, especially towards the nearest relatives, beloved persons, children, etc.
13. Apprehensions that the appearance of the departed would be spoilt in the grave is one of the main motifs of Yezidi and Kurdish laments. Cf. also: *Tirs a min vē tirs eya miška-ma'r xir av bikin badane šayā, gulā govandā, ... - I am afraid that mice and snakes will spoil the beautiful body, the rose of a round dance...* (*Rudenko, p. 72*). Kurdish *ax-ū-bar* is a *dvandva* formation from *ax* “soil, earth” and *bar* “stone” – both are archaic words mostly occurring in folklore: *bar* in Kurmandji vernacular language is completely unknown and appears rarely in the above construction only. In Southern Kurdish, on the contrary, it has a common use in the meaning “stone; hard”. It is also a wide-spread form for “stone” in Luri dialects, dialects of Central Iran, Yazdi, etc. The form can be traced back to OIr. **writta-*.
14. *Gilavye xayidipiš min bakir* – lit.: *Glavi turned her back to me*, i.e. *Glavi took offense with me*. The informant proposed also the variant *vakir*, as a dialectal alteration of initial *b/v-*. However, *vakir* here is hardly applicable, as it definitely means “opened” (i.e. here “opened her back”). In the given context *bakir* meaning “turned” (perhaps, from *bar-kir*) is more suitable for semantic reason.
15. Lit.: *xafir* (Arab. *ḡafīr*) means “merciful” is one of the God’s attributes.
16. Lit.: *rahmān* (Arab. *rahmān*) also means “merciful” and is used as one of God’s characteristics.
17. Lit.: *dēmē narī* means “fiery face” (Arab. *nār* – “fire”), *dēm* “face” is an archaic word which

never occurs in modern colloquial speech (cf. Middle Persian *dēm*, Armenian *dēm-k'*, etc.).

18. Lit.: “earth and stones of a dark grave” (see: note N 7).
19. See the previous note.
20. Lit.: “You send me”; the verb *hinārtin* (*hanārtin*) is confined exclusively to the Southern Kurdish dialects, vs. *šandin* in Northern Kurdish. This is an extremely rare, if not the only case of the use of this verb in the Yezidi sacred texts. It goes back to OIr. **ham-dāra-*, cf. Manichean Middle Persian *hannār-* “to direct (the eyes)”, Khot. *handāra-* “to take care” (G. Asatrian, VI. Livshits. *Le système consonantique de la langue kurde*. – *Acta Kurdica*, N1, 1994, § XX, 3, p.96).
21. Lit.: “You chose me”: *waz dižāra* should be *waz dibžāra* (metathesis) (*bižārtin* – “to choose”).
22. Lit.: “You give me”.
23. The word *zāl* is interpreted by the informant as “dishonest”, as a result of an apparent semantic contamination with *zālim*. But most probably, it means “an old woman”, as the same form in Southern Kurdish and Persian. In favour of the latter meaning is also the fact that the word is referred to the elder wife.
24. Lit.: “I would have thrown gold to the weight equal to you(r weight)”.
25. The informant interprets *xāl-f-āx* as “empty”. I would rather suggest another semantically convenient translation of this *dvandva*, i.e. “dust and earth” or “grave”, from *xālī* (also *xwālī*) – “dust, ash” and *āx* – “earth, soil” (see also note N 7).
26. This is a kind of invocation, recited with the purpose of preserving the face of the beloved unchanged in the grave (*nadar*, Arab. *naḍar* “view, face, image”) (see also note N 13).
27. According to Sheikh Shams family tradition, the forefather of this clan had three daughters, who became the Sainted ladies (*stī*) of the Shamsanis - *Stīa Gulān*, *Stīa Strī* and *Stīa Nasrat*. Thus, Glavi after death was reckoned among them.