In 1951, the secluded Neo-Aramaic-speaking Jewish community of Zakho migrated collectively to Israel. It carried with it its unique language, culture and customs, many of which bore resemblance to those found in classical rabbinic literature. Like others in Kurdistan, for example, the Jews of Zakho retained a vibrant tradition of creating and performing songs based on embellishing biblical stories with Aggadic traditions.

Despite the recent growth of scholarly interest into Neo-Aramaic communities, however, studies have to this point almost exclusively focused on the linguistic analysis of their critically endangered dialects and little attention has been paid to the sociological, historical and literary analysis of the cultural output of the diverse and isolated Neo-Aramaic communities of Kurdistan. In this innovative book, Oz Aloni seeks to redress this balance.

Aloni focuses on three genres of the Zakho community’s oral heritage: the proverb, the rewritten biblical narrative and the folktale. Each chapter draws on the author’s own fieldwork among members of the Zakho community now living in Jerusalem. He examines the proverb in its performative context, the rewritten biblical narrative of Ruth, Naomi and King David, and a folktale with the unusual theme of magical gender transformation. Insightfully breaking down these examples with analysis drawn from a variety of conceptual fields, Aloni succeeds in his mission to put the speakers of the language and their culture on equal footing with their speech.

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CLOSING REMARKS

It is my hope that this book has shown the potential inherent in the folkloristic and literary study of Jewish NENA material. As stated in the Introduction, this book is but a first step. Many genres that are represented in the audio-recorded database but do not appear in this book, as well as many additional examples of genres that are represented here, await subsequent studies. Furthermore, content-based approaches to the study of previously published NENA material will surely prove fruitful.

The three chapters of this book have dealt with three oral genres, whose analytical units progressed from smallest to largest. The first chapter dealt with proverbs, the second with the motifemes of an enriched biblical narrative, and the third with a folktale. Each of the themes of these three chapters deserves future attention. The first chapter dealt with only one member of the family of gnomic genres, the proverb. Other members that are represented in the recorded database were not included: jokes, riddles, aphorisms, anecdotes, idiomatic expressions, and more. The second chapter contains an analysis of only a single example of the several enriched biblical narratives recorded in the audio database. These, as well as related published texts, in

1 Though idioms and idiomatic expressions are usually not considered a genre of folklore, but rather a linguistic category, they also belong in the gnomic category.
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particular the Jewish NENA Midrashim,\textsuperscript{2} await a study uncovering their sources and their ties to previous and contemporary works and traditions. The folktale featured in the third chapter is, as mentioned, one of the shortest of the many folktales recorded in the database. Additionally, the most important collection, both folkloristically and linguistically, of Jewish NENA folktales—the Mamo Yona stories\textsuperscript{3}—remains unpublished and unstudied.

The abundance of Neo-Aramaic material presented by recent scholarship and the relative neglect of content-oriented study focused thereupon bring to mind the words of the anthropologist Alfred I. Hallowell, which though directed to anthropologists are relevant also to us:

So far as the anthropologists are concerned, I believe it is fair to say that while it has been customary over a long period to collect a representative sample of the oral narratives of the people they happen to be studying, it is an open secret that, once recorded, very little subsequent use may be made of such material. Indeed, these archival collections, once published, often moulder on our shelves waiting for the professional folklorist, or someone else, to make use of them in a dim and uncertain future.\textellipsis

This marginal position which oral narratives have occupied in anthropological studies is not due to the inherent nature of the material but to a failure to exploit fully the potentialities of such data. (Hallowell 1947, 544–45, quoted by folklorist William Bascom 1954, 333)

\textsuperscript{2} Sabar (1985).

\textsuperscript{3} See ch. 3, fn. 2. See also Sabar (2005).
It is my hope that we shall not let the uniquely fascinating and varied Neo-Aramaic material “moulder on our shelves,” nor that we treat it merely as raw material, inorganic deposit, for grammatical analysis.