This comparative anthology showcases the rich and mutually intertwined folklore of three ethno-religious communities from northern Iraq: Aramaic-speaking ('Syriac') Christians, Kurdish Muslims and—to a lesser extent—Aramaic-speaking Jews. The first volume contains several introductory chapters on language, folklore motifs and narrative style, followed by samples of glossed texts in each language variety. The second volume is the anthology proper, presenting folklore narratives in several distinct varieties of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic and Northern and Central Kurdish. The stories are accompanied by English translations. The material includes different genres such as folktales, legends, fables and anecdotes, and is organised into seven thematic units. The folkloristic material of these three communities is shared to a large extent. The anthology is, therefore, a testament to the intimate and long-standing relations between these three ethno-religious communities—relations that existed in a multilingual environment centuries before the modern era of nationalism.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found here: www.openbookpublishers.com

Cover image: The village of Harbole, south-eastern Turkey (photograph taken by Bruno Poizat in 1978 before the village's destruction). Cover design: Anna Gasso.
13. A ‘PIOUS’ FOX

Masoud Mohammadirad

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Recording: Lourd Hanna

Audio: https://kurdic.ames.cam.ac.uk/audio/235/

Summary

A cunning fox was starving and went into a village full of chickens pretending to be a pious Muslim. He told the rooster deceptively that the Islamic era had begun and no injustice remained in the world, so he was on pilgrimage to Mecca. The rooster fell for his deception and decided to accompany the fox on his pilgrimage to Mecca. Later, the dove joined them as well.

In the evening, the fox took both of them to his den to rest. He deceived them into a deal: anyone who would make a noise during the night would be eaten. Using this trick, the fox killed the rooster and ate it.

When daylight came, the dove also started to make a noise. The fox was about to eat her too, but the dove asked him about his religion. If he told her what his religion was, she would let him eat her. As soon as the fox opened his mouth and answered he was a follower of Muhammad, the dove flew away. The fox said, ‘I wish I had said I believed in Christianity; I would have eaten her by now!’
(1) tab’an mən nāw-əm Háwsar Nadzāt Bāpjī Rahmān Sūrsī-ya.

(2) tsīrok‘i aw jára-m ka da-m-hawē bās-ū xwāsak-ī la-sar bē-
kām, ŋ āwē-ū kalaşēr-ū kōtār-a. da-lē ha-bū na-bū ŋ ōzak la řōzān|
kas la xwāy gawratar nā-bū. ŋ ōwīyāki zor zor ŋērbāz-ū ŋ ŋōr-īš makār|
ha-bū. ŋ

(3) ha-bū na-bū! kas la xwāy gawratar nā-bū. ŋ ōwīyāki galak|
ňērbāz-ū ŋ galak‘-īš makār ha-bū. ŋ ōzak la řōzān ŋ ōwī law hāra|
nāxōsāy ka tē-y-dā bū! wisti xo-y řōzgār kā. dzā ņērak‘-ī īnā-w|
ňērak‘-ī bōrd ŋ ōwē yat-a godak‘ī.

(4) dīt‘i māmōr-ū mōrestrial hamū ēmništīna lagar dānī a-xon.|
karažb‘-ū la nāw-yān-ə-w dam dama a-qoqini. ŋ got‘i, ‘ba xwāy|
dāl! ŋ got‘i lē-yān nēzik boaba-w ŋ mōrestrial īmān ŋ ŋāyān kōrd-ū ŋ hār|
ātān. ŋ

(5) got‘i kalaşēr/karažb l-i wa dūr kātowa. ŋ got‘i, ‘bōrā g‘īyān|
lō lē-m wa dūr a-kawīawa? ŋ ato nē-zānī sardami mahdi-
muhamadi-ya? ŋ zūlm-ū zordārī na-māya-w ŋ ‘adālāt hamū dunyāy|
gortī-ya. ŋ amn-īš ba din bū-yma-w gaŋyam-oawā, ŋ ba tamāy|
hadže-ma."
Well, my name is Hawsar Najat Bapir Rahman Surchi. I am from Shaqlawa. My mother is called Jamila. I was born on 2 December, 1988.

This time the story I am going to tell concerns [a] fox, [a] rooster, and [a] dove. It is said that there was and there was not, [but] once there was no one greater than God. There was a very, very cunning and crafty fox.

There was and there was not, [but] there was no one greater than God. There was a very cunning and crafty fox. Once, the fox wanted to relieve himself from the bad state (i.e. hunger) that he was in. He devised a scheme[1] [and] set off to a village.

He observed that many chickens and hens were busy roosting[2] [and] eating seeds. The rooster was crowing among them. The fox thought,[3] ‘[What a chance] God has granted [me]!’ [It is] said [that] he approached them. The hens ran away. They fled.

[It is] told [that] the rooster kept his distance from him. He (the fox) said, ‘Brother! Why are you keeping your distance from me? Don’t you know that we’re currently in the Islamic era?[4] No injustice is left. Justice has spread all over the world. I have become pious and have repented,[5] I want to go on pilgrimage [to Mecca].’

[1] Lit. He brought a trick, he took a trick.
[3] Lit. he said.
(6)  kalashîr fêkrak'i kêrd-awû. got-i, 'ba xway xo-y şêtak'i čâk-a. ato a-tsi hadzê-û āmn-iš lagar-êt d-êm.' wa ñey katôn. gunz-yân ba dzê heştû/ baraw şwêni mabast. gayštn-a nûw dâr-û baxâtak'i-û bastânêk'i.


(8)  gotî, 'kûka giyân, lo gô-t lê na-bû-a? ī esta sardami muhamadî-mahdî-ya zûlmû zordâri na-maya-wî ka amâ-û gaṟay-na- wa-baw ŋêwi-û gaṟayt-o. ba tamây hadzê-yna. wałâ xo kotër got-i, fêkrak'i bâş-a. āmn-iš lagar-û d-êm lo hadzê.'

(9)  gotî wa rê kâtôn. rêvi fêrbûz-iš-yân wa pêş kâtî ba šêkl-û šewakê mutadaywêni tawû! ka'anahû am ŋêvi-ya qât qat qat hits gunâh-i na-kêrdî-na! lo hadzê wa rê kâtî-na. rêvi hårdûk-i ba fêrân bêrdn-a kulânê xo-yî kunêy ŋêviyân. darga-û-û lasar qapât kêrdôn.
The rooster pondered over [the fox’s words and] said, ‘Indeed, this is a nice thing. If you’re going on pilgrimage [to Mecca] I will accompany you.’ They set off. They left the village and headed towards the destination. They arrived at a forest.

They saw that a dove was in the tree. He was cooing. He saw that the fox and rooster were together. He thought, ‘What a surprise! Does it make sense for the fox and rooster to be together? The world has gone wrong.’ The dove pondered over this. He looked at the rooster [and] said, ‘Hey rooster! What’s up? [You are] with the fox!’

He said, ‘Dear brother! How come? Haven’t you heard? Now we’re in the Islamic era. There is no more injustice and tyranny. We have repented. Even the fox has repented. [And] now, we intend to set off on pilgrimage [to Mecca].’ The dove said, ‘That’s a good idea. I too will come with you on pilgrimage.’

[It was] said that they set off. The cunning fox was leading them, exhibiting piousness at his best! As if he had never ever committed any sins! They had set off on pilgrimage. The fox tricked them both and took them to his den, the fox’s den. He shut the door on them.

6 Lit. said.
7 Lit. Is it goodness, (you are) together with the fox?
8 Lit. converted.
(10) got-i, ‘wā hēwāra dā hāt\| aw jā wāxtī nūstnī\-ya.\| bas kas kas iz\‘āj nā-kāl čūnka řē-n dūr-a hatā gayn-a hadżē.\| karabāb-ū kotār-īš gotī-yān, ‘basar hār dū čāwān!\| bas got-i, ‘hā\| pēš away bə-nwīn\| d-\-ābē am ‘tifāqāk-\-ān kārdābi!\|)

(11) gotī-yān, ‘farmū janābī řīwī pē-mān bə-rē\-ū\| atū řēraw-i.\| got-i, ‘hārkāsī dangak\’ī bə-kātān-ū\| šawē xaw-\-ān lē tār kāl d-\-ābī bə-xorē!\| karabāb-īš got-yān, ‘hamū\-mān řāzī-\-na.\| mādām ēsta sardāmī ʿadālat-ū zułm-ū zordārī na-māya-\| sardāmī dādpwarātyē\-ya\| ka wā bē kaskās kas-mān nā-xwā.\|)

(12) baw qəsray řēwī tē-y kātān.\| got-i səbayna dā hāt wāxtī barabayānī.\| karabāb la xo\-y řā-na-gōrt-ū tēr-ī qūqānd.\| got-i řīwī got-i, ‘ādī ama ‘tifāq-mān wa na-bū ka to dangī nā-kāy-ū la xaw-mān na-kāy\| řē-mān dūr-\-a?\|)

(13) ‘dā ka wā-t-ā ēstā wāxtī away hāt\| qānnūnakay dzē ba dzē käyn.\| nāčār karabāb-yān kūšt-\-ū goštaka-y xwārd.\| aw jāray ka řož har-āl kotār-īš bērga bērg-ī kārd-ū danga dangī-ī durus kārd.\| řīwī-\-š muhāwla-y kārd kotārakā-\-š bə-xwā,\| ba har fort-ā fērakāi bi!\|
(10) [The fox] said, ‘It’s getting near evening. It’s time to sleep. But no one should disturb anyone since we have a long way ahead of us until we reach Mecca.’ Then the rooster and dove said, ‘All right!’ He (the fox) said, ‘But we need to make a deal before we go to sleep!’

(11) They said, ‘Go ahead Mr. Fox, you tell us! You’re the leader.’ The fox said, ‘Anyone who makes a noise and disrupts our sleep\(^{10}\) shall be eaten!’ The rooster [and dove] said, ‘We are all in agreement. As long as we live in a period of justice in which tyranny has no place, none of us is going to eat someone else.’

(12) They fell for the fox’s story.\(^{11}\) [It is] said [that] the early morning before sunrise came. The rooster could not control himself and crowed a lot. It is said that the fox said, ‘Didn’t we make a deal that you wouldn’t make any noise nor wake us up [since] we’ve got a long way ahead of us?’

(13) [The fox continued,] ‘Now that this is the situation, it’s time [for us] to perform the rule that we established.’ They killed the rooster and he (i.e. the fox) ate its meat. When the sun rose, the dove started cooing and making noise. The fox attempted to eat the dove too by any means [possible].

\(^9\) Lit. on both eyes.

\(^{10}\) Lit. makes the sleep darken/confused for us.

\(^{11}\) Lit. By the fox’s saying they fell into it.
(14) qapäräkkə̄lə dā-w dawi xo-y lo kərd-uwawə. | baɭəm | kotər zor zor zor zor la rīwi ziraktər bū. | got-i, ‘jənəbi rīwi ə-zənəmt da-t-hawə bə-m-xəy. | ītəfəqaqəš-eət har la bidāya lo àw bābatay bū. | bas pē-m bə-rə̄ atū sar ba tə tāyafəkə̄u sar ba tə dinakə̄-i?  ’


(14) He attempted to bite the dove and opened his apron to catch her. The dove, however, was much cleverer than the fox. She (i.e. the dove) said, ‘Mr. Fox, I know you plan to eat me. The whole thing was meant to be so since the beginning. Just tell me which religion you follow.’

(15) He said, ‘Why are you asking [this question]?’ She said, ‘I just want to know. Then you [can] eat me.’ He said, ‘I am a follower of the prophet Muhammad’s tribe.’ As the fox opened his mouth, the dove flew away. The fox said, ‘I wish I had said that I was a Christian, and a follower of the Jardzəsî tribe.' Then I would have eaten the dove.’

It is finished. As for me, I came back [from the events of the tale] and nothing was allocated to me [by the characters in the tale].

\[12\] I.e. the Christian tribe. During the pronunciation of this word he would have pressed his jaws together and so held the bird in his mouth.