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 folkloric 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.
20. A FAMILY HORSE

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Recording: Lourd Hanna
Audio: https://kurdic.ames.cam.ac.uk/audio/249/

Summary

A family had a horse which was very well-known in the region. People called it ‘the family horse’. Nobody would mount it. Once a year, the horse would be taken out of the stable for people to see and praise it.

Once, someone stole the family horse. The owner of the family, who had witnessed the theft, mounted his ‘normal’ horse and chased after the thief. At some point, the owner of the family horse was able to reach the thief and stop him. However, he did not do so and instead let him go.

His sons criticized him, asking why he did not stop the thief. The father reasoned that he let the thief go to save face, since otherwise the reputation around the ‘family horse’ and their family would be ruined.

(2) t-bēzōn, ha-bū na-bū, kas šō xodē mastēr nā-bū, kas šō baniyā ṣī dōrawintēr na-bū, zamānakī wē davarē xalkē čē t-kēr? har bōnāmālāke ḥaspē ῶkūnē, jēhēlē galā gala gala gala läv ha-bū.

(3) tō-bēzōn āv ḥaspē hanē, har tō nāvē bōnāmālē tē-hāt-a niyās. ya’nī xalkē av ḥaspē bōnāmālē t-niyāsī. kas lē vī ḥaspē sīyār nā-t-bū. sālē jārakē av ḥaspē dārē t-xōst ništī xalkē tē-dā. ū xalkē madhā pē tō-kērēn. ū xalkē ḥaspē xo bo ṣā ḥaspē tō-sōbāhānēn.

(4) ḥaspē bōnāmālē yē čāwā bū? bābē ḥaspī yē bōnāmālē bū, Pōxinē. kūrē wī ḥaspī ṣī bō wē bōnāmālē t-mā. kasē lō vī ḥaspī ṣē hār qimātā wī lē sīyār nā-bū. tōnē dārē tō-xōst bo jānī, ū vā-sārta-vā tō govē dā.

(5) t-bēn sālākē ḥaspē bōnāmālākē kō gala gala galak yē barnīyāz bū ū xalkē hamī, ‘ya’nī nāv-ū dangēt wī ḥaspī čē būn?’ ēk hāt-a doẓiyēt ḥaspī. xo āvēt-ā t govē-va, ū xo āvēt-ā sar pōstā ḥaspē wā. vā ḥaspē wā ṭaṛavānē.
(1) My name is Herish. I am the son of Rashid Bag Barwari, and I am from Barwari. [I am] the grandson of Tawfiq Bag Barwari, [who is] the son of Haji Rashid Bag Barwari. I am going to tell you the story of ‘the family horse’, the way I have been told it by the elders.

(2) It is said that there was and there was not, [but] there was nobody greater than God, and no bigger liar than man. What did the people in this region do once? Each family had a young, reliable horse that was very, very strong.

(3) It is said that this [particular] horse (i.e. the horse of a certain family) was known in every family. That is, people knew this horse as the ‘family [horse]’. Nobody would mount this horse. Once a year, they (i.e. the family) would bring [the horse] out for people to see. And people would praise it (i.e. the horse) and compare their horses to those [family] horses.

(4) [But] what was the family horse like? Its father, Pekhine, also belonged to this family. Its colt also stayed with the same family. Because of its value, nobody would mount the [family] horse. It was only brought out of the stable for people to see its grandeur, and then hidden again in the stable.

(5) It is said that the horse of [a] family became so famous that everybody [said], ‘Well, what is [so] special about this horse? What is it famous for?’ A [certain] person came to steal the horse. He went into the stable and mounted the family horse.\(^1\) He stole the horse.

\(^1\) Lit. He threw himself into the stable and he threw himself on the horse.
(6) zalâm zi, xodânê ḥaspi pê hasât. dît êkî ḥaspê wâ bêr. got-a kûrêt xo, `helûn wê řâ-bê-gahên hatkâ ma čû. êkî ḥaspê ma bêr, yê bûnamâlê. avê bûbê ḥaspê, ov bûbê bûnamâlê.

(7) ya`ni žê bêbû kâlâ-vâ ḥaspû bûnamâl pêk-vâ bûn, nažat bo nažâtî. gotî âv žalâmê xodânê ḥaspi čû lê ḥaspê xwa siyûr bû. û kûrêt wî žê dû âv div. katnâ dîv ḥaspê, katnâ dîv. û ḥasp řâ-gorên çârgâvâ.

(8) kûrêt wî žîk yê û dîv-va, û bûbê û dîv dêzîkarî-va. dêzîkarî lê ḥaspê bûnamâlê siyûr-â. bûb žê lê ḥaspê xo siyûr-â. har du kûr žê av dû wařêt wây di. ŋê ki žê bûgûr hayâ, lê lê siyûr bûyn.

(9) ṭê-bêzên bêb gahašt-ê dêzîkarî. dastê xwa hâvêt, û dâ gahît pûtkû wî nà-gahašt-ê, dastê xwa zêvořând-avâ, û havsârê ḥaspi bo lêxav-vê kešû, û ḥasp řâ-wəstand. dêzîkar žê žê falûtû.
The man, the owner of the horse found out [about the robbery]. He saw that a person had taken their horse. He said to his sons, ‘Get up, go and reach the thief, for we are disgraced. Someone has taken our horse—the family horse.’ [Both] the horse’s father [and] the father of the family [said so].’

From the days of old, from one generation to the other, the horse and the family had lived together. It is said that the owner of the family horse went and mounted his [other] horse. And his sons followed him. They went after the [family] horse, they went after it. They galloped on their horses towards the thief.

The sons [went] behind their father, and the father went after the thief. The thief was riding the family horse. The father was on his [other] horse. Similarly, his two sons followed each other. Even though it was [extremely] windy, they were riding their horses.

It is said that the father reached the thief. He stretched out his hand to grab the thief’s scarf [but since] his hands did not reach it [the thief’s scarf], he withdrew them. He (the father) pulled the reins of his horse and made it stop. The thief rode away.

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2 Lit. Our honour went.
3 Lit. from fathers and grandfathers.
4 Lit. The thief escaped from him.
\textbf{(10)} hatā ḱūrēt wi gaḥištān-e,\,| got-e, ‘bābo! ta ʾā mālā ma ḫrā kār?\,| wē gāvē dāsē ta ḫa-gāhāšt-e! ta būcī na-gār?\,| got-e, ‘rūnēn! ma ʾaql xarēj kār.’\,|

\textbf{(11)} go, ‘waxṭē az gaḥāštīm ḩaspē bānāmālē,\,| avē hōnda sāl-a am ʾāb bābū bāpūr-va madhā pē ḫa-kayn,\,| ṭa ḫa-bayn nāv xalḵē,\,| tu zānī ʾā hāt sarē mēn?\,|

\textbf{(12)} gotī, ‘waxṭē mē dīti mē dāsē xwā dā hāvēm\,| pātḵā dōzī dā-gērōm,\,| dā xalḵ hānī zānītōn\,| dāzīḵārāḵ hāt ḩaspē mā dōzī,\,| yē bānāmālē,\,| avē sarē hōndāsāl-a nāv ū dangēt wē čūyn.\,|

\textbf{(13)} ‘dā bēžōn, “ēḵi ḩaspē wā dōzî,\,| ū hīn bō ḩaspēt xwā yēt sīyārē\,| bo ḩaspē bānāmālē ṭā gaḥāštōn.”\| bēlā ḩaṣp bo wī bitī bas bēlā madḥēt ḩaspī bō-minē.’\,
(10) When his sons caught up with him, they said, ‘Dad, why did you ruin our home?! A while ago you could have reached the thief! Why didn’t you grab him?’ The father said, ‘Calm down⁵! I acted wisely.’

(11) He (the father) said, ‘When I approached the family horse—the one which we have been praising for so long and which we take around for people to see—do you know what I thought of?’

(12) He (the father) said, ‘When I saw that I could stretch out my arms and grab the scarf of the thief, [I thought that] people would figure out that a thief had come to steal our horse—the family horse— the one which has been famous and well-known for so many years.’

(13) [The father continued] ‘[Later] people would say, “Someone stole your [family] horse. And you could reach the family horse with your riding horses.”⁶ [So instead,] let the [family] horse be the thief’s, but let the praise of the [family] horse remain with us!’

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⁵ Lit. Sit down!

⁶ Implying that this would have exposed the horse’s lack of any special powers.