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.

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21. A MAN AND HIS DOG

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Audio: https://kurdic.ames.cam.ac.uk/audio/238/

Summary

This story is about a certain Uncle Gawro (K. Mām Gawro) and his dog. Once, Uncle Gawro’s dog bit the daughter of Gawro’s neighbour. The girl was taken to Erbil since it was feared that the dog had rabies. Uncle Gawro also was taken to Erbil along with his dog in order to have the dog examined. It turned out that the dog did not have rabies, and Mām Gawro was set free.

Since he was angry with the dog, Uncle Gawro beat his dog with a stick. Then he left his dog behind and went to the market in Erbil to buy some items for his supermarket in Shaqlawa. He came back home on a bus. On arriving home, he saw that his dog was already waiting there at his house, wagging its tail for him. Uncle Gawro was astonished that his dog could find his way all the way from Erbil to Shaqlawa. He was amazed by his dog’s loyalty towards him and regretted beating him.

(2) Mām Gawro ... polisak jîrînē wân bū. tabʿan mâr-yân la gundî bûn aw zamān. ūrožak aw kîtsî mâm ... aw polisa a-čû-a qutâbΧâna, ... aw šayây Mām Gawro pēr-i dâ-ya pê-y-ū qapərâk'ī lē dā.


(4) ʿd-abē bə-grin bə-bây-nə ... sagay bə-bây-nə Hawlērê. wa b-čiñ-a ... tūš da i kalê bûbî aw tsêtak'i wa-ya. amuhi, hâtən Mâm Gawro-yân palbast kârd-ū gərti-yân dagał şagakà-y. suwări musalaĥâ-yân kârd-ū lo Hawlērê.

(1) Uncle Gawro had a dog. Mam Gawro was famous, he had a dog. In the old days, people would keep dogs for protection from attacks, lootings and so forth.

(2) Mam Gawro had a neighbour who was a police officer. Needless to say, at that time, people used to live in villages. One day when the daughter of Uncle ... er... the police officer was going to school, Uncle Gawro’s dog attacked her and bit her on the foot.

(3) The dog bit her. She went to the hospital. They (i.e. people) said, ‘It’s likely that the dog has rabies: she should definitely be transferred to Erbil. Who is the owner of the dog?’

(4) [People continued] ‘We should catch [the owner] and take [him and] the dog to Erbil. Let’s go to [Erbil] ... [it’s possible that] she has been infected with a dog disease called dal kal or something like that.’ Anyway, they came, arrested Uncle Gawro and his dog, put him into a police car, and headed towards Erbil.

(5) Uncle Garo felt sad and at a loss. He started [cursing the dog]—earlier he had been surrounded by the police—he said, ‘Damn you, dog! I shall get rid of you! [Look] what you’ve done to me!’

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1 Lit. raise.
2 Lit. violence.
3 Lit. At the time, their houses were located in villages.
4 Presumably, a dog-transferred disease like rabies.
5 Lit. May I treat your father like a donkey.
6 Lit. I shall put you [down] from my shoulders.
(6) baw garmåyaw bo čüyn—na 'afwan buhår bû. ġün čün fâhs-yân kârd. şagaka awa dar-čû hâr nà-bû, sâq bû. walâ got-ya'n, ... 'Mâm Gawro, xalâs-a ta 'afû-yû-û sagaka-t tsè balâ-y têyâ [niya].

(7) walâ Mâm Gawro sûrâl tapüčkâk'î gawra-y dit. la ... aw hâr lagari wi dâ bû čûka a-y-nâsî. sagaka Mâm Gawro-y a-nâsî. walâ har handê dit maţraqâk'û-i lê [dâ]

(8) tap lê sây-i dâ, 'hay am la bâbaka-t ba karânaway lê bo-kâm! atô bâbê msêt awêy lê kârd. dzûnî dzûnî, dzûnî pîs dây-e. šâk awa kât. kat čoka zarbaka gala qawîn bû.

(9) Mâm Gawro-ş got-i, 'warâ wara hatîmâ! a-čêm nûw bûzâr. —dokânâk-ê-i ha-bû, dokân. wa bir-ôm dê môn kôchâ bûm. dokânêk-i kôchâ-y ha-bû.

(6) They headed [towards Erbil] in the heat—oh, pardon! It was during the Spring. They went and examined [the dog]. The dog did not have rabies, it was healthy. They said, ‘Uncle Gawro, it is done, you are forgiven. Your dog has no fault!’

(7) Uncle Gawro turned round and saw a big cudgel. The dog was still with him, since it knew Uncle Gawro. The dog knew Uncle Gawro. All of a sudden he beat the dog with the thick cudgel.

(8) He hit the dog [with the stick and started cursing it], ‘Damn you?! You have irritated me.’ He cursed the dog using unpleasant words. The dog fell [to the ground]. It fell, since the blow was very heavy.

(9) Uncle Gawro said [to the dog], ‘Come, come [after me], you filth! I’m going to the bazaar [of Erbil].’ He had a shop, a shop. I remember that; I was a little boy [at that time]. He had a small shop [in Shaqlawa].

(10) He went [to the bazaar and] said, ‘I will buy some stuff, sugar and such things for the shop.’ He spent approximately an hour in the bazaar until he finished shopping. Then he took a bus, a Thomas bus,9 and returned to Shaqlawa. Back then there were no cars, there were only buses.

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7 Lit. May I treat your father like a donkey.
8 Lit. You took out my father [out of his grave].
9 A bus network in the region named after the bus manufacturer.

10 Speech muffled.
He returned to Shaqlawa and saw that his dog was in front of the door and was wagging its tail for him. ‘Ah,’ Uncle Gawro said, ‘O man! How is it possible that the dog could travel from Erbil all the way to my house [in Shaqlawa]?’ He saw the loyalty of his dog and said, ‘It doesn’t matter [what you did], I forgive you, stay [here]!’ Yes.