

Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish Folklore from Northern Iraq

A Comparative Anthology with a Sample of Glossed Texts

VOLUME 2



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36. MAR GIWARGIS (ST GEORGE)

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Audio: <https://nena.ames.cam.ac.uk/audio/218/>

Summary

Giwargis was a Greek military leader. He came to a city steeped in moral corruption, but defended the locals from a serpent. He also saved the king's daughter, who was about to be sacrificed to the serpent. Giwargis came to the region (today's northern Iraq) and became a Christian. The pagan locals enslaved him, but he survived. He freed himself and became a religious teacher.

The speaker continues the story with the miracle attributed to Mar (Saint) Giwargis, which she personally witnessed. A Kurdish neighbour came to her with her sick child. The narrator advised the Kurdish woman to take him to the church, bring an offering to Mar Giwargis and leave the sick boy there. The woman did this and her son was healed. The child's mother was very grateful, but the Christian woman (the story-teller) warned her. They—the Kurds—should stop desecrating Christian holy sites, lest a bigger disaster fall on them.

(1) Zarifa Toma Goriyal Zàyya.[|] mən māt 'Inəške.[|] 'u 'ana
'inəškèθe-wan.[|] 'ana, k-əbet maxkannax qəsettət Mar Gîwàrgis?[|]
šmeli Mar Gîwàrgis.[|] yăḏən maxkiwa naše gore.[|]

(2) xa qa'əd gòra wewa.[|] bas lewe t-àxxa.[|] yōnānāya.[|] θele l-xa
mḏiθa.[|] xzele řaba ḏūlum.[|] bas 'ani qam-'awḏila qəṣətta.[|] malkət day
mḏita mære, 'ən k-əbettən 'axni 'əθ xùwe, gu xa wàdi, hole sîdella.[|]
'ən lè yawax xa brata řale diyye,[|] lè mṛapele miya.[|]

(3) 'awu tule l-xāš sùsa.[|] 'ətle sèpa.[|] xəšle pləṭle xuwe,[|] sṛaxa=w
mṣarṣòre řale diye.[|] 'awu 'u 'awu wela plaša muḡḏaḏe.[|] yă'āni waḏa
šarre.[|] wedle šarre.[|] qam-maxelex niza gu pummət daw xùwe.[|] qām-
qaṭalle.[|] swele wadi b-dəmma.[|]

(4) mære, 'hola muθeθa brāt mālka,[|] yomət brāt malka t-axəlla
'aw xuwe.[|] qam-šaqaḏla darela l-xaṣət sùsa,[|] nabəlla kəs baba diyya.[|]
mà wedla našwaθa diye?[|] qam-dawqile.[|] ráqa=le, rìqa.[|] 'aw hole
'əθya làxxa[|] hole wiya tābət 'alàha.[|]

(5) dukθət d-we 'àwa,[|] lè yḏiwa 'alaha.[|] mà we?[|] sənàme wewe.[|]
qām-dawqile[|] qām-darile b-səjən.[|] qām-maxile, 'aḏbile.[|] 'awa har šà'x
wewa.[|] 'əḏwale ruḥət qùḏša[|] 'u raba qaddiša pəšle.[|]

(6) mà wedle?[|] muplexle 'arxət qāmāye.[|] 'arxət qāmāye řaba
zàhme yawya.[|] 'arxət qāmāye yawele farša gòra[|] 'u xa farša xena
rèše.[|] qam-darilu gu day 'àrxe.[|] kma d-qam-taxnile[|] là mətlex, kma d-
qam-mazwerile là mətlex.[|]

(1) I am Zarifa Toma Goryal Zayya from the village of Enishke. I come from Enishke. If you want me I will tell you the story of Mar Giwargis (St. George). I have heard about Mar Giwargis, I know (the story), the elderly used to tell (us).

(2) He was a great leader, but he was not from here. He was Greek. (Once,) he came to a city and found a great injustice (being done there). But they made it into a story. 'If you care for us, there is a serpent in a wadi, which that has blocked the water. If we do not offer it a girl, it will not let the water flow,' said the king of that city.

(3) He mounted his horse, carrying his sword. He went and the serpent came out shrieking and screeching at him. They both started fighting, I mean, duelling. They started fighting and he struck the serpent in the mouth with his bayonet. He killed him and the wadi was stained with its blood.

(4) The king's daughter was brought on the day that the serpent would eat her. He took her, put her on the back of a horse and brought her to her father. But what did his people do? They arrested him, (so) he fled and came here and became a follower of God.

(5) The region where he was did not know God. What were they? They were pagans. They arrested him and put him in jail. They beat him and tortured him. But he still survived. He had the Holy Spirit in him and became a great saint.

(6) What did they do? They made him work at a mill (like those) of old. A mill in the past was very hard (to work in). A mill in the past had a large flat stone and another stone on top of it. They put him in that mill and no matter how hard they made him grind, he did not die. No matter how hard made him spin [the millstone], he did not die.

(7) *qemle* ʔu *plàtle*.¹ *wele malpàna*.¹ *wele tawa*,¹ | *wele mākərzàna*.¹ ʔu *xəšle šəmme l-maθwaθa külle*.¹ *maθwaθət Šapna*.¹ *kut maθa*... *ṛabe maθwaθa ʔtle*,¹ *Mār Gīwargis*.¹ *hol ma t-ile piša naša gòra*¹ ʔu *mìθa Mar Gīwàrgis*.¹ *qurbanət xèle*.¹

(8) ʔaxni ʿabdàxle¹ ʔu *k-əbaxle*, *hole gu màθan*.¹ *tre gaye b-šeta yoðaxle duxràna*.¹ ʔu ʔaxni *mhuỳəmmne ʔebbe*.¹ *məndi d-ṭalboxle ʔəmər*.¹ *čùg² lele mira la*.¹ *ʔawwa hole mḥuṣla mərətan*.¹ *ʔayye-la qəsettət Mar Gīwàrgis*,¹ *qurbanət xele*.¹

(9) *har ʔawa Mar Gīwàrgis diyan*,¹ *jmele naše müšəlmane*, *jmèle*¹ ʔu ʔaya *qam ʔenan* ʔu *kəslan wela*.¹ *yaʔni gu bəθa diʔ³ brela*.¹ *θela jmela=w là xəslə⁴ ʔəlle diye*.¹

(10) *yāʿāni ʔani müšəlmane qam-ḥamyala màθa*.¹ *ʔəsrí=w xamša šənnē*¹ ʔaxni *maθan šqile l-mḥājrìn*.¹ *m-ʔamlàkan*¹ ʔu *mìyyan*.¹ *xazinàt diyan*¹ ʔu *fanàdəq diyan*,¹ *kulla pəšla p-ʔidàθey*¹ ʔu ʔaxni *pəšlan baṭile gu màθa*.¹ *bnunan*, *külle*.¹

¹ This is a reflex of the pre-modern Aramaic (Syriac) word for ‘good’, *tāḫa*. In this dialect, it seems to have undergone a semantic narrowing into the religious domain—here, it is used in the meaning of ‘saint’, likely by the association of this word with Syriac and the Syriac Bible (cf. also the Syriac *tūḫānā* ‘blessed’).

² From *ču ga* ‘not once’.

³ This possessive particle has the base *diʔ*, though *diy-* occurs elsewhere. The glottal stop was likely inserted for emphasis: ‘It was in *my* house that this took place.’

⁴ I am not familiar with the verb *xayəs/xəsle* (from the root *xys*) in other NENA dialects. Hezy Mutzafi (personal communication) has suggested a connection to the Classical Aramaic verb ‘to have mercy’ (> here apparently ‘to love, respect’), from the root *ḥ(y)s*.

(7) He got up and left. He became a teacher, a pious man and a preacher. His name spread across all the villages, the villages of the Sapna Valley. Every village... He has many villages, Mar Giwargis. [He did this] until he grew old and died. (May I be) a sacrifice for his power.

(8) We worship him and love him, he is in our village, we hold his memorial twice every year. We believe in him and whatever we ask him, he commands... He has never denied us a request. He has fulfilled our desires. This is the story of Mar Giwargis, (may I be) a sacrifice for his power.

(9) It was our Mar Giwargis... Muslim people gathered together—this all happened in front of our eyes, I mean it happened in my home—they gathered, but did not respect him.

(10) I mean, the Muslims occupied the village. For twenty-five years, our village was occupied by immigrants. Our property and our water supplies, our storehouses and hotels fell into their hands. We became unemployed in our (own) village, all our children.

(11) ʔu lè xesi wətwā⁵ ʔeta.¹ zadiwa zəble, zadiwa willəše.¹ zadiwa kùl məndi.¹ xa yoma xa bəxta θela.¹ ʔtla xa brona jwànqa.¹ mərə, ʔammət yà⁶kub, məri, ʔhà.¹ qùrðəθ muḥkela.¹ m-qurðəyāt ʔaxni lè mfarqax tārā.⁷ ʔaxni ʔu qurðaye lè mfarqax.¹ wax qime kulle muxðaðe.¹

(12) mərə, ʔroni jwànqa,¹ hole mpala kudyom xnàqa.¹ məri, ʔam-nablàtte l-doxtores?¹ qam-nablale, kùlle doxtore qam-maxeðrəle.¹ məri, ʔmáwerre gu day ʔəta t-letu xyasa ʔəlla diya.¹ màwerre gawa diya.¹ glùq tārā baθre diye.¹

(13) šuq t-šàrəx.¹ šud mà ʔawəð.¹ qbul xa qubla ʔale diye, bronax b-nàyxex.¹ səqla,¹ ʔu qam-mădəmxale brona gu ʔəta¹ ʔu galqale tārət ʔəta¹ ʔu qbəlla xa ʔərba qa Mar Gîwərgis.¹ bronət diya bšəmle.¹

(14) ʔayya ʔana¹ kəsli brəla.¹ mənni brela.¹ ʔu ʔana=w ʔammət daw brəna ʔaba xwaryaθa waxwa.¹ ʔu ʔaba y-aθyawa,¹ yaʔni l-bèθan.¹ mərə, ʔalah yawəllax.¹ ʔalah naṭərrax ʔišàlla.¹ ʔawa broni qam-mānixàtte.¹

(15) məri, ʔaddiša gərə-le.¹ lètu xyasa ʔəlle.¹ lètu jyāz,¹ wetu zəble¹ ʔu künüşyàθa¹ ʔu tlaya jùlle.¹ lè bayya¹ lè qabəlla mənneXu.¹ məri, ʔawa, ʔaw məndi zərə qam-awədlax.¹ dārətu bəla¹ t-la ʔaθe l-xa məndi gərə ʔəlleXu.¹ ʔu ʔəyye-wa, brati.¹

⁵ Probably intended: *lé xesiwa* ‘they did not respect (imperfective)’. Instead, however, we find the present form *lé xesi* ‘they do not respect’, apparently along with *wətwā* ‘you (MS) were’.

⁶ Instead of the expected *yaʔqub*.

⁷ Lit. leave the door. Presumably, an idiom meaning ‘differ’.

(11) You would not have loved the church. They used to dump rubbish, a mess, everything. One day a woman came up to me. She had a young boy. ‘Mother of Yakub,’ she said. ‘Yes,’ I said. She spoke Kurdish and we and Kurdish women cannot be told apart [when speaking Kurdish]. We and the Kurds cannot be told apart [based on speaking]. We all grew up together.

(12) She said, ‘My little boy faints every day [from] coughing.’ ‘Have you taken him to the doctor? She had taken him [to many doctors], she had taken him around all the doctors. I said, ‘Take him into the church, which you do not respect. Take him inside it. Lock the door behind him.

(13) Let him scream and do whatever he likes and make an offering on his behalf, and he will be healed.’ She went up to the church, put her son to sleep, locked the door and made an offering to Mar Giwargis. Her son got healed.

(14) This happened in my house, it happened with me [present]. The boy’s mother and I became close friends and she used to visit our home often. She said, ‘May God grant you [a long life], may God keep you, God willing. You brought relief to my son.’

(15) I said, ‘He is a great saint, but you pay him no respect and do not honour him, you [throw] rubbish, a mess, hang your clothes there. He does not want this and will not accept it from you. He has done you something small for you, but be careful lest something more grave befalls you.’ This was [the story], my daughter.

