DISTRICT OF HOWRAMAN, KORDESTAN

This week I am still disabled for a trip (casted ankle); but my mind is already on the way to the next one... So I propose a compilation of the pictorial report by photographer Shahiya KASHANI, after her exhibition in the kurdish institute in Paris.

The issue is a customary festival of the Kordi in a far iranian valley near iraqi border.

The valley of Howraman is isolated and picturesque. Actually kordi cattlers never were frankly dominated, even during the antique reign of the Medes (mithraist religion). After centuries of alevi and more or less yezidi proeminency in N-W Iran, the heterodoxy of the eastern Kurds is still notorious: most famous regional communities are Yezidis, Yarsanis (Ahl e Haqq) and Shabaks (iraqi Kizilbash). Westwards, the turkish part of Kordestan is largely alevi, as most other Kurds – i.e. the majority, including the hawramani – are sunni muslims.
JEYHONDABAD'S SURROUNDINGS near Kermanshah. At the turn of the century, yarsani reformer HAJ NEMAT gave birth there to Nur Ali ELAHI and sister Jan MALEK NEMAT, two major proselyt translators of the saint Books of the Yarsani. Yarsani / Ahl-e-Haqq are a local heterodox sect, presumably inspired of the Yezidi beliefs and music. After Nur Ali ELAHI’s teachings, an urban version of the order branched in Tehran, and they are now even taught among migrants in the US, Germany, so on...
NEAR PAVEH: ENTERING THE HOWRAMANAT
From Marivan, numerous villages of the Howraman valley are hardly accessible, as the tracks are bumpy. Mountain landscapes are impressive. In the Howraman District, kordi Natives are sunni muslims. The valley is 50 km away from Halabjah, an iraqi city that was notoriously poisoned and bombed by Saddam Hussein.
Proprietary demands are embodied in large fabrics around sacred places.
HOWRAMAN-AT-TAKHT: RIVALRY OF SUNNI MYSTICS

Very isolated in a far, rocky valley, the place usually competes with Abyaneh and Masouleh for championship of the Iran’s most picturesque village. The Hawraman Valley was the theatre of a rivalry in influence of the different Sunni Sufi orders.

In 1820, Sunni Sufis were competing for influence in Iranian Kordestan. After being taught by Shah Ghulam Ali (d. 1824 AD) in Delhi, Mawlana Khalid Sharakuzi (1779-1827) was committed for re-starting the Indian Mujadidi branch of Naqshbandiya in S-E Kordestan as the Khalidiyya, in spite of the local pre-eminence of surrounding Qadiri-Kasnazaniyya (Suleymanieh, Iraq). Khalidi were unexpectedly better tolerated by Sufis of the Qadiri-Talebaniyya (Kirkuk), who held them as their equal in mysticism. Competition vs Kasnazaniyya escalated so much that Sharakuzi finally sheltered in Bagdad, then Damascus. From 1820 to 1950, numerous Khalidi zawiyya of Siraj AD-DIN sheikhs in Hawraman-Halabja, Sanandaj & around, were still very cooperative with Qadiri-Talebaniyya of Kirkuk, so that Siraj’s successor, Ziya AD-DIN was initiated in the Talebaniyya way & then permitted loud zekr-i-jahr among Naqshbandi-Mujadidi-Khalidi. Despite the order had spread successfully to Mazandaran, Gilan, Lebanon, Syria, Macedonia & Java, as the Naqshbandiya Khalidiyya, his kordi activities & lineage were interrupted after Muhammad Uthman Siraj AD-DIN II passed away in 1997.
IN HOWRAMAN  Pir –e- SHALIYAR was presumately a mighty mithraic authorithy until he departed in Howraman. Unexpectedly, his tomb (ziyara) may have get then an islamic significance as it is still venerated now by sunni derviches of the local Kasnazaniyya sub-order of the bagdadi Qadiriyya.
MIRACULOUS STONE  
On springtime, villagers used to collect samples of the miraculous Pir's. Samples are mighty in healing and blessing. Whatever the size of the samples, the tombstone is presumed to grow again then.
ZIYARA    PIR - E – SHALIYAR

Fabrics are marks for vows near the Ziyara. Inhabitants commemorate annually the love story of the Pir with an uzbeki princess. After healing her, he is reported to have married her; and the annual festivity is held as the celebration of this wedding. Scholars claim the festival was formerly an Angel festival of the Mithra. History speaking, the islamization of the ritual is unclear.

From early February, custodians parcel walnuts of the Pir's orchard to the villagers as an invitation and blessing. Villagers return sugar-lump, tea leaves and grains to the sanctuary, for festival preparations purpose. Religious ceremonies occur in three steps (one day per week from the 4th of February), and are held as a seasonnal ancestor of the Christmas celebration. On the first Wednesday after 21st January, they celebrate the sacrifice Day.
PENITENCE? This uncommented picture is supposedly related to Pir-e-Chaliyar ceremonies but I don't have any explanations for this. Traditional kolobal jacket are sheep-shaped.
SACRIFICE DAY: SLAUGHTER About sixty sheeps & beefs are slaughtered by a dedicated family in the streets for the occasion....the spurring blood is supposed to return to the earth and regenerate so the deity MITHRA for resurrection / rebirth purpose. Here a man is warming up with Daf framedrum.
Inhabitants attempt the spectacular exhibition of the derviches on the sacrifice evening.

« Participation in a dhikr/zekr has different degrees, especially in rituals that are open to all: while some people perform the dhikr others watch. The different means of participating and listening lend the dhikr its characteristic mixture of extatic and aesthetic experience: it is simultaneously – but to different degrees for different participants – a religious ritual and an artistic performance.(...) » (Samuli SCHIELCKE)
KASNAZANI SUFIS PERFORM ZEKR in south east of Kordestan, kordi Kasnazani of Iran and Iraq used to celebrate Zekr weekly. Pir-e-shahliyar festival is a special occasion for an outdoor performance.
Here Kasnazani derviches have their collective Zekr (dikr), a transe for prayer, consisting in breathing practices. Ca 1150 AD, the technique was first adopted by the heterodox Yasaviyya (Turkestan) and spread after they infected locally the Vefaiyya, the Safiyya, the Rifaiyya and the Qadiriyya.
BREATHING THE NAME OF GOD  « L'apprentissage utilise la technique du zikr ou anamnèse qui consiste dans la répétition de la phrase « il n’ y a de Dieu que Dieu » (NLDR « Alla u’ allah ») ainsi que les danses codifiées depuis le XI eme siècle accompagnés de musique (...) ». (Delphine EVOOON)

After central asian orders adopted this breath technique, this spread all over the sufi groups, excepting the Ba’alawiyya (Yemen) and the Naqshbandiyya (India and central Asia), which developed the silent version of this ritual remembrance.
Kasnazani Members remove their turbans and shake their distinctive hairdress in the rhythm of the ‘Name breath’.

“... les têtes se penchent en tout sens, les mouvements du corps se précipitent: il ne sort des poitrines plus que des cris inarticulés, des espèces de râlements, (...) Aussitôt les derviches, sans cesser de chanter, se mettent à balancer leur corps, ils se baissent jusqu'à terre et se redressent brusquement. Lorsque le chant les a fatigués, ils poussent des gemissements qui ne semblent pas sortir de poitrines humaines. Malgré tout les mouvements s'accélèrent, les mugissements deviennent de sauvages rugissements; les religieux touchent la terre de leur turban, (...) ils jettent leurs bonnets pointus, leur longue chevelure se repand sur le visage, elle bat les joues, (...) ils se dévêtissent à demi. Et quand la voix commence à leur manquer, ce n'est plus un chant qui sort de ces poitrines épuisées, on n'entend plus qu'un hou! Puis une sorte d'aboiement ou de hurlement ou l'on ne distingue plus que les hou! Hou! Hou! Hou.”

(Philippe AZIZ)

“Gradually with the repetition and corresponding rhythmic movements a strong emotional exaltation is produced which finds an outlet in more and more violent movements until it results in an orgy of ecstatic excitement. Very frequently, the dhakir fall out in a Trance and when in this State they are referred to as majdhub.[NLD : ar attracted ]

(JS TRIMINGHAM)
ZEKR WAS HELD AS ‘HOWLING’ Medieval observers of the repetitive Zekr by the Rifaiyya (Bassorah) had nicknamed this order « howling derviches ». During the performance, Rifai and Kasnazani both use to demonstrate their skills in miraculous piercings, wounds, so on.
MIRACLE DURING KASNAZANI ZEKR  In the peakng transe of the Kasnazani Zekr, some members used to demonstrate the inherited mightiness (Baraka) of their master AL JILANI, by performing miracles without any wounds.
Kordi specialities are stone swallowing, incense swallowing, snake biting, breast cutting.
ARRIVAL POINT The procession of the Kaznasani derviches arrives the Ziyara.
Inside the Ziyara: Magical Soup & Relics

In the building, fellows used to cook a blessing soup and the liver meat.

Each of 5 clans sits in a dedicated place. The procession continues the Zekr for hours. Participants kiss a relic of the Pir (top, right)
SHARING THE SACRED MEAL

After the festivities, participants share the ceremonial Bread and dispatch a special yoghurt in the Village.

Women are reported to use the Yoghurt as a starter to make more yoghurt, and so brings presumed prosperity to every dairy products all along the year.
B I B L I O . . .


