Mîrza Mihemed / Mirza Pamat: The Tales of the Fabled Hero in Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic Oral Sources[1]

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The field studies of Neo-Aramaic dialects that have proliferated recently have yielded many folklore texts. During the author's fieldwork (together with Christina Benyaminova) with one speaker of Neo-Aramaic, the sophisticated plot of a folk story with a hero named Mirza Pamat attracted his attention. A comparison of this story with other Neo-Aramaic field corpora has revealed not only that the plot of this story has clear parallels, but that the hero of the story is popular among several Christian groups of Neo-Aramaic speakers. Further research has shown that Mîrza Mihemed as a folktale hero is not restricted to the oral tradition of Aramaic-speaking Christians. Similar names may be found in Persian, Arabic, and Azerbaijani folk traditions, but the hero with the name Mîrza Mihemed or Mîrza Mehmûd is especially popular in the Kurdish oral tradition of fairytales. This suggests that the corpus of Kurdish tales about Mîrza Mihemed is the possible source of the Neo-Aramaic fairytales with this name of a hero.

This article explores the Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic oral corpora of texts with Mîrza Mihemed as a protagonist. My ultimate aim is to confirm whether the Aramaic and Kurdish Mîrza Mihemed tales belong to the same stock of traditional stories, or whether they are just random combinations of the name Mîrza Mihemed with certain folktale plots. The text of the article is construed as follows: first, the reader is introduced to the general context of Kurdish-Christian cultural interaction in various spheres; next, the Kurdish folktale traditions of Mîrza Mihemed are discussed; the third and the main part of the article deals with several Neo-Aramaic folktales with the same hero and their possible plot parallels within the Kurdish oral tradition.

1. Kurdish-Christian Cultural Interaction

Kurds and Christians lived in Kurdistan alongside each other for centuries. Most of the Western accounts of their interaction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are dominated by the issue of Kurdish atrocities against Christians. In recent decades it became more popular to focus on the sufferings of Kurds themselves from Ottoman or Kemalist rulers. Talking about

Christian and Kurdish mutual relations, the peaceful aspect of their interaction still remains largely unexplored. Every researcher or traveler familiar with the Near East has many times witnessed communication in everyday life between Arabs and Jews, Assyrians and Kurds, Turks, and Armenians. These observations are not intended to wipe out the memory of many mutual atrocities, but these sorts of peaceful interactions have inevitably left their imprint on the lore and culture of these communities. In the following, I will briefly summarize what is known about the mutual influence of Kurds and Syriac Christians (Assyrians) upon their languages, oral literature, and customs. I will do this with a particular focus on the Kurdish influence on Assyrians, because it corresponds to what will be discussed in the main body of the paper. In many cases where one finds common linguistic, narrative, or other cultural features, it is hard to say who influenced whom. On the other hand, one of the possible options is that both communities were influenced by some third cultural entity, or that the said feature could be a widespread regional or general phenomenon.

The mutual cultural influence between Kurds and Christians living in Kurdistan may well be clear to insiders, representatives of these communities. When it comes to the research literature, here it will suffice to highlight only the most significant issues. As far as social relations are concerned, there were long periods of peaceful coexistence between Kurds and Assyrians in Hakkari (Aboona 2008). The case study of Kurdish-Christian (Syriac) relations in Diyarbakir province shows a high degree of social, economic, and even political integration between these two population groups in the late Ottoman period (Gaunt 2012). The documentation of the earlier periods being scarce, it appears that good relations started to deteriorate significantly before the great crisis that occurred in Hakkari in 1843 (Eber 2008). Historical sources may always be insufficient and their analysis biased by nationalistic and political agendas, but there are undisputed linguistic data, especially in the area of lexical borrowings, which point to a very profound influence of Kurdish language on Neo-Aramaic, whether it be Turoyo or North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (Chyet 1995). The data concerning the Neo-Aramaic influence on Kurdish are less clear and less studied (Chyet 1997).

Talking about influences, one should not overlook the possibility of more complex processes than one-way influence. For example, certain linguistic phenomena may be explained as regional features, common to the main languages of Kurdistan. Discussing the mutual Kurdish-Aramaic influences, Michael Chyet points to several proverbs that are common to Kurds and Syriac Christians (Chyet 1995). In many cases these proverbs, which are not universal, are shared also by Arabs, Persians, and Turks (see also Sabar 1978). As another example, when Western readers first encounter a description of an Assyrian wedding, some customs may seem to them strange and probably unique to Assyrians. When a bride enters the groom's house, he and his fellows stand on the roof of the house; the groom throws an apple at the bride, sometimes aiming at her head (Lalayan 1914:31). Finding the same custom among Kurds (Sweetnam 1994:143), one may conclude that either Kurds influenced Christians, or the other way around. However, the custom is shared by Turks, and similar customs may be found in other places (Üstünova 2011). The types of the folktales and narrative motifs discussed below may not be shared by Kurds and Assyrians (Syriac Christians) alone. In most cases a painstaking investigation on a broad textual basis is needed to prove or disprove the direction of the

influence, but in the case of the stories of Mîrza Mihemed (Mirza Pamat), the very name of the hero may help to define the direction of influence.

2. Mîrza Mihemed in the Kurdish Oral Tradition

Kurdish folklore studies are currently a flourishing discipline. The first transcriptions and translations of Kurdish folktales appeared approximately 150 years ago. They were made by Western linguistic researchers. The modern situation is characterized by the activity of many native Kurdish researchers and amateur folklorists. In sum, it has brought about an immense corpus of published texts. On the other hand, the analytical component of this research is still insufficient. Even the outstanding researchers of Kurdish folklore, such as Heciyê Cindî, Ordîxanê Celîl, and Celîlê Celîl, have been concerned mostly with collecting and publishing the texts, rather than with analysis. One of the main problems for anybody researching Kurdish folklore is the lack of a comprehensive typological index of Kurdish folktales,[2] as has been produced by El-Shamy for Arabic (2004), by Marzolph for Persian (1984), and by Eberhard and Boratav for Turkish folktales (1953, hereafter TTV), to name but a few. Therefore, Kurdish folktales are underrepresented in such general typological works as Uther 2004.[3]

Even a cursory look at the lists of Kurdish folktales in the existing editions shows that one name occurs in the titles more often than others, namely that of the hero Mîrza Mihemed (MM). It has different variants of spelling and pronunciation, but the use of this name suggests that this must be the same hero.[4] Could it be that the many occurrences of this name in folktales merely testify to its popularity as a male name among Kurds? This may be the case, of course, but the roles of the personages with the name MM usually follow the pattern of the typical main

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[2] This was already pointed out by Allison (2001:15). The author refers to only two sources, which discuss narrative typology within Kurdish oral tradition (Spies 1972; Marzolph 1984). Additionally, two collections of Kurdish folktales translated into Russian have typological notes for each text (Rudenko 1970; Dzhalilov et al. 1989).

[3] It mentions only 151 Kurdish versions for more than 2,500 tale types. For example, the entry on the famous universal plot ATU 707 "The Three Golden Children" does not refer to any Kurdish version, but at least two Kurdish versions have been published long ago; see Rudenko 1970:147-55, no. 50; Dzhalilov et al. 1989:71-80, no. 4.

[4] The various forms and spellings of this name may be classified into two groups using two different derivatives of the Arabic root *ḥmd*—*Muḥammad* and *Maḥmūd*. *Muḥammad*: Mîrza Mihemed (Îşler 2014; Öner 2016), Mîrze Mihemed (Demir 2016; Alakom 2002), Mîrza Meheme (Medenî Ferho 1995), Mīrza Miḥammad (MacKenzie 1962); Mîr Mihemed (Demir 2016), Mîr Mihê (Zinar 2003-05). *Maḥmūd*: Мирзə Мəh'муд (Cindî 1962), Мирзə Мə'муд (Cindî 1969), Мирза-Мамуд (Druzhinina 1959; Rudenko 1970), Мирза Махмуд (Dzhalil 1989), Mîrze Memud (Alakom 2002), Mîrze Mehmûd (Evdal 2006). It appears that the oral tradition did not pay attention to the etymological difference of two major variants of this name, Mîrza Miheme and Mîrza Mahmud, using both of them for the same hero. See, for example, Kurdish texts with the same plot using both variants in (3.2.1). Note also the variants Mîr Mihemed and Mîr Mihê. The first element, *mîr*, is etymologically derived from Arab. *ʔamīr*, "commander, prince, emir," with basically the same meaning as *mîrza* (*mîrze*) < Pers. *mirzā* ("prince").

male hero of a fairytale, who kills monsters and dragons and finally marries a princess.[5] Very often MM is himself a prince, which finds corroboration in the meaning of his name, because *mîrza* in Kurdish means "prince."[6]

Therefore a number of folktales may constitute a sort of corpus of tales with the same protagonist. The scope of the present paper does not permit a comprehensive account of the corpus of folktales about MM. We may imagine a collection of stories with MM as the main hero as a corpus unified by certain narrative features; however, the tradition is free as regards the use of this or other names in variants of the same plot. Bünyamin Demir (2016) attempted to define the range of narrative motifs that characterize the corpus of MM's tales. The present paper proposes to move in another direction: to demonstrate which plot types constitute the core of the corpus in question. As will be shown below, there are a number of Kurdish texts with MM as a hero which belong to the widely known plot type ATU 301. It is argued that Kurdish texts belonging to the type 301 typically have MM as their main figure. Therefore, it can be shown that this narrative type at least is one of the plots typically ascribed to MM in the Kurdish tradition.

The following summary of what we know about this corpus does not claim to be exhaustive. It merely seeks to show that the stories with this hero are notably popular among Kurdish storytellers. It should be noted that the title of a story does not always include the name of the hero.

As far as could be judged by the sources at the author's disposal, the earliest recordings of such stories were made by the outstanding Kurdish folklorist Heciyê Cindî. His collections of Kurdish folktales appeared in several volumes.[7] He recorded the tales in Armenia. Three significant collections of Kurdish folktales that appeared in Russian translations in the Soviet Union all include MM fairytales.[8] Folktales collected by the writer Emîne Evdal, who lived most of his life in Soviet Armenia, were published posthumously with Russian translations. They include another three MM fairytales.[9] Another group of publications come from what may be

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[5] This role was aptly summarized by Ulrich Marzolph (1984:24): "Die typische Heldenfigur ist der Prinz (*pesar-e pādešāh*), im weiteren Verlauf der Erzählung einfach Jüngling (*ǧavān*) genannt, hierbei oft auch der jüngste von drei Söhnen des Königs, wobei den beiden älteren negative Rollen zufallen. Dieser Held vollbringt Abenteuer, besiegt Dämonen und Ungeheuer, bewältigt schwierige Aufgaben und erlangt hierbei oder hierdurch endlich die geliebte Prinzessin."

[6] *Mîrza*, "prince; fils de prince" (Nezan, Bedir Khan, and Bertolino 2017:1038).

[7] "Diranzêrîn" (Cindi 1957); "Чьлкэзи, бьлбьли ь'эзарэ," "Мирзэ Мə'муд у həспе wи," "Мəймун Ханьм у Мирзэ Мə'муд" (Cindî 1961); "Шире шер э'йаре шерда," "Голбарин" (Cindî 1962); "Мирзэ Мə'муд у П'əри ханьм," "Мирзэ Мə'муд у дew," "Мирзэ Мə'муд," "Мирзэ Мə'муд у хушка wи" (Cindî 1969); "Мирзэ Мə'муд у Дургəр ог'ли," 1980, "Мирзэ Мə'муд у бре wи" (Cindî 1988); "Mîrmehmed û beq," "Mîrze Mehmed û Kraszêrîn," "Mîrze Memûd û beran" (Cindî 2005).

[8] "Mîrza-Mamud" (Druzhinina 1959); "Mîrza Mamud and Khezaran Bolbol," "Mîrza-Mamud" (Rudenko 1970); "Mîrza Mahmud and Dunya Guzal," "Mîrza Mahmud and Three Girls," "Hatun Maymun," "Mîrza Mahmud" (Dzhalilov et al. 1989).

[9] "Mîrze Mehmûd," "Dar," "Bozelî," "Gulperî" (Evdal 2006).

called a new generation of Kurdish folklorists from Turkey,[10] including one book published in Germany.[11] A special case is the MA dissertation of B. Demir (2016; Artuklu University, Mardin): the work is based on eight untitled MM fairytales, which are published for the first time in this dissertation. The majority of these texts are in the Kurmanji dialect. These more than 40 texts may serve as proof of the popularity of this personage in Kurdish tradition. An additional indication that MM is not a marginal figure in Kurdish oral tradition is the set expression *çîrokên Mîrza Mihemed*, "the fairy tales of Mîrza Mihemed," which was included in an authoritative Kurdish dictionary (Nezan, Bedir Khan, and Bertolino 2017:1038).

Why did Kurdish tradition choose this name for the main hero of fairytales? One possible explanation may be based on another part of oral tradition, the Kurdish historical songs, which sometimes refer to non-fictional historical events. One of the heroes of these songs in Yezidi oral tradition is Mirza Mohammed (Allison 2001:79), probably identical with Mirza Mamad (Dzhalilov 2003:174-76). There are also reports by western scholars and travelers who visited Kurdistan in the nineteenth century of a certain legendary religious (and adventurous) authority named Mirza Mohammad, who was also known among Yezidi Kurds.[12] Therefore the possible evolution of this figure could be from a historical person, through the role of a hero of historical songs, to that of the hero of fairytales.

Is MM, with whatever variants of this name, only a popular hero of Kurdish fairytales? In fact, there are some indications of the popularity of the names Muḥammad and Maḥmūd in the Arabic oral tradition. Especially popular is Muḥammad the Clever (*muḥammad iš-šāṭir*) in oral texts from Palestine and Egypt (Lebedev 1990:308; Sirhan 2014:53). Among the Arabic folktales collected by Lady E. S. Drower in Iraq, one encounters the protagonists Melek Muhammad and Mahmud (Buckley 2007). A number of Turkish folktales have Mehmet as a hero (TTV). A hero Mamed or Melik Mamed is found in Azerbaijanian folklore (Bagrij and Zejnally 1935), but this name does not appear to be so popular as Muḥammad the Clever in Arab folklore. Persian tradition has a hero named Malik Moḥammad (Osmanov 1987). The only native tradition prone to use this specific combination of the title "prince" (*mîrza*) and the name Muḥammad is the Kurdish oral tradition. The popularity of the derivatives of the names Muḥammad and Maḥmūd in the folktales from the Islamic world in general may have contributed to the specific popularity of the name Mîrza Mihemed (Mîrza Mehmûd) in the Kurdish tradition.

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[10] "Mîrza Mihemed û çavreşa qîza mîre ereban" (Îşler 2014); "Mîrza Mihemed û Çilkezî," "Mîrza Mihemed û Urfût," "Mîrza Mihemed û Nasiro" (Öner 2016); "Mihemedê Nêçîrvan" (Keskin 2019).

[11] "Mirzemhema;" "Mirzemhema und der Vogel Teyre Simir" (Yas 2010).

[12] "After all had retired to rest, the Yezidi Mullah recited, in a low chanting tone, a religious history, or discourse, consisting of the adventures and teachings of a certain Mîrza Mohammed" (Layard 1853:88); "The teachings of a certain Mirza Muhammed are also said to be propounded by the Izedi Sheikhs" (Ainsworth 1861:40).

3. Mîrza Mihemed in the Oral Traditions of Aramaic-Speaking Christians

3.1 Method

In the main body of this work, dealing with the analysis of the plot of selected folktales with MM as the main hero, I will adopt the following procedure. A Neo-Aramaic text is retold according to narrative entities, usually called "motifs" in narratological studies. The next step is the identification of the type of story in question. It is the specific constellation of narrative motifs and their characteristic sequence that needs to be studied in order to define the type to which a given folktale belongs. Then, a Kurdish story with a similar plot is compared with its Aramaic parallel story: all the deviations of its plot from that of the Aramaic story are registered. This analysis aims to determine whether a given Kurdish story belongs to the suggested tale type or not.

For the purposes of this article, only Neo-Aramaic texts are being retold completely. As far as the relevant Kurdish texts are concerned, only their divergences from the storyline of the parallel Aramaic text are discussed. This does not imply that the Kurdish texts are regarded as secondary to their Aramaic plot parallels. On the contrary, it is understood that the Aramaic versions are, most probably, retellings of the Kurdish originals within the tradition of MM folktales.

3.2 The Traditions of Eastern Syriac Christians

By "Eastern Syriac," we mean that branch of the Syriac Christian world which originally belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, and later split into the traditional church of the same name, and the Catholic, "Chaldean" Church (Murre-van den Berg 2018:771). These communities historically occupied regions in eastern Turkey (Silopi, Hakkari, Van), northern Iraq (Dohuk, Nineveh, Arbil), and North-Western Iran (West Azerbaijan). In all these areas, Syriac Christians lived in close contact with the Kurdish population. In Iranian Azerbaijan, the contact with the Kurdish language was less extensive, because the majority of the local population consisted of Azerbaijani-speaking Turks, at least from the time around the rule of Shah Abbas (1571-1629) until today. It appears that Kurdish was more influential in Urmia in the Middle Ages, but the presence of Kurdish speakers in Iranian Azerbaijan is still considerable.

The texts discussed here represent the three main regions of the Eastern Syriac world: Hakkari in Turkey (3.2.1), the province Duhok in Iraq (3.2.2), and the region of Urmia (3.2.3, and a parallel text in 3.2.1) in Iran. Since most of the Christian population left these regions during the twentieth century, the texts were recorded in the diaspora (Russia, Georgia, and Finland).

As far as the phonetic shape of the hero's name is concerned, there are several variants in Neo-Aramaic sources: Mirza Pamat (3.2.1), Mərza Pămət (3.2.2), Mirza Mamed (3.2.1, 3.2.3). All of them are derived from a Kurdish name of the type Mîrza Mahmûd with the series of vowel shifts û > e > a/ə, and a consonant shift m > p. The shift û > e may be explained by contamination with the name Mihemed; m > p could have been triggered by dissimilation.

3.2.1 "A Tale of the King"

This text was recorded by Christina Benyaminova (Tumasova), in Moscow, from a speaker of the Ṭāl dialect, one of the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects. The informant, Avdisho Khambeshaya, was born in Georgia and moved to Moscow twenty years ago. The speakers of the Ṭāl dialect, who live in Russia, Georgia, Sweden, Germany, and Australia, all originate from a group of villages located in the province of Hakkari (Turkey). The forefathers of this informant left Turkey in the second decade of the twentieth century and moved to Georgia.

The recording was made in two sessions, because at the first attempt to tell the story the informant was not sure that he would be able to reproduce it as a whole and stopped before completing the story. The first fragment, recorded in November, 2013, was published in a master's thesis (Tumasova 2015) by Christina Benyaminova (Tumasova). The recording is reproduced in the eCompanion to the present article.

In February, 2014, a continuation of the story was recorded by the same informant. This text, which is much longer, will be published in due course in a collection of texts from a number of speakers of the Ṭāl dialect (subdialect: Badaraye). In the following, a summary of the content of this text is given. It is based on the transcription of the first part by Benyaminova, and on an unpublished transcription of the second part, prepared by Benyaminova, in collaboration with A. Lyavdansky. In the following discussion, this text is referred to with the siglum BL.

1. There was a king who had three sons. The name of the youngest son was Mirza Pamat (MP).

2. The king had a garden with all kinds of fruits. Once he noticed that all the fruits had been stolen.

3. He called up his sons and ordered them to guard the garden the next year when the new fruits were ripe.

4. The two older sons tried to guard the garden one after another, but they failed, having been overcome by sleep. While they slept, an ogre stole all the fruit.

5. Then it was MP's turn to guard the garden. Feeling that sleep was overcoming him, he went to a Jew and demanded a remedy against sleep from him.

6. The Jew advised him to cut a finger and to pour salt on the wound. This helped MP to stay awake, and he saw the ogre who came to steal the fruit.

7. MP struck the ogre with his sword and wounded him. The ogre fled, and the lad followed him by the trail of his dripping blood until he came to a well where the ogre disappeared.

8. The youth went to his father and asked him to provide warriors to help him with the ogre. His brothers also went with him to the well.

9. They tried to go down the well with a rope. The oldest and the middle brother failed, being scared of the darkness inside the well, but MP managed to reach the bottom of the well.

10. In the well he saw the ogre dying and three girls. The girls told MP to leave the place lest the ogre kill him. But the youth disobeyed the girls and killed the ogre.

11. He sent all three girls up to his brothers. The youngest girl didn't want to go up before MP, because she believed that the brothers would cheat him and leave him in the well.

12. Forced by MP, she agreed to go up and gave him three keys, with instructions on what to do with them. There were three rooms at the bottom of the well. In the first room he must take the hen

with small golden chickens; in the second room, a magic sword; and in the third room, a wild horse. He must try to use the horse to throw him up to the top of the well; if he failed to stay on the horse, it would throw him down.

13. MP carries out the instructions, but the horse throws him down and he falls into another world, into another city.

14. There he meets an old lady who invites him to live with her as a son.

15. In the meantime, the two brothers and the three girls come to the king; the brothers offer the youngest girl to the king as a bride. They say that MP has fled.

16. The youngest girl agrees to marry the king only if they bring her a hen with seven golden chickens.

17. Meanwhile, MP asks the old lady for water, and she brings him cattle urine, explaining that the supply of water is controlled by a dragon.

18. MP witnesses a young girl being brought, to be eaten by the seven-headed dragon in exchange for water.

19. He talks to the girl and lays his head on her knees to sleep while waiting for the dragon. Her tears wake him up.

20. The hero kills the dragon, cutting off all seven heads. The girl makes a sign on the body of MP, with the blood of the dragon.

21. After killing the dragon and opening the source of the water for the people, MP returns to the old lady and hides.

22. The girl tells the story of her rescue to her father, the king of that country. He orders all the young men of the country to come to him. The princess checks all the youths without success.

23. Someone says to the king that an old lady has a son. His servants bring MP to the king. The girl recognizes him as her rescuer.

24. The king offers MP everything: his daughter, and his kingdom. MP declines everything.

25. MP comes back to the old lady, and she explains to him what to do in order to return to the upper world. He needs to ask the bird Simarkho to take him to his country; but he also needs to ask the king to give meat and wine, for Simarkho, to feed her on the way home.

26. MP comes to the king and asks him to provide meat and wine. The king grants his request.

27. Simarkho and MP fly to his father's kingdom. MP feeds the bird with meat and wine. When the meat is finished, he cuts a piece of flesh from his leg and gives it to her. Having realized that the meat is human, the bird hides it under her tongue.

28. When they land in the father's kingdom, Simarkho takes the flesh out of her mouth, puts it back on MP's leg, and flies away.

29. The king does not recognize MP and does not accept him, because he believes that he was eaten by the ogre.

30. The bride of the king is shown different chickens with seven small chickens, but none of them are any good. Only one set of chickens finds favor with the bride, the one brought by MP, and she understands that MP has returned.

31. MP is invited to the king, and the girl announces that this is Mirza Pamat. He tells the whole story to the king. His brothers are forgiven; all three brothers marry. Only the king is now left without a bride.

32. MP suggests stealing the wife of a Jew as a bride for his father. Overcoming many obstacles (seven doors with seven keys and others), MP brings the woman to his father.

Seven texts with the same plot and with the same hero, named Mîrza Mihemed, were identified within the available Kurdish (Kurmanji) and Neo-Aramaic sources. (The sigla used to refer to these texts in the subsequent discussion are given in boldface.)

Aramaic examples:

"A King and Three Sons" (*Malka u ṭla bruni*). The text was recorded by K. Tsereteli between 1944 and 1962 in Georgia from Rezo Khoshabayev, a speaker of Christian Urmi Neo-Aramaic. It was published in phonological transcription with Russian translation in Tsereteli 1965:104-17 (story no. XIV). The name of the hero is Mirza-Mamed. **T**.

Kurdish examples:

1. "Мирзэ Мəʾмуд у тайре симьр" ("Mirze Mehmud and Tayrê Sîmir"[13]). It was recorded by Hejiyê Cindî in Tbilisi (Georgia) from Têliyê Esedê Biro (Cindî 1962:169-76). **C62**.

2. "Мирзэ Мəʾмуд у бре wи" ("Mirza Memud and His Brothers"). The text was recorded by Hejiyê Cindî in Armenia from Ecemê Hemîdê Huso (Husoyan) from the village Emençayrê, Kars province, Turkey (Cindî 1988:135-40). **C88**.

3. "Gulperî."[14] Recorded by Emînê Evdal in 1950 from Kamile Alo originating from the village Alagyaz (Elegez) in Armenia (Evdal 2006:175-78). The name of the hero is Mîrze Mehmûd. **E**.

4. "Mirzemhema und der Vogel Teyre Simir" ("Mirzemhema and the Bird Teyrê Simir"). The author of this collection of folktales does not give the names of the informants for each tale. He has recorded most of the tales from his father, who lived in the province Siirt, but he added some material from other informants and did some editing of the original texts. The text is available only in German translation (Yas 2010:45-54). **Y**.

5. "Çîroka duyemîn" ("The Second Fairytale"). This text and the next one on the list were published within a master's dissertation dealing with the narrative motifs of Mirza Mihemed fairytales (Demir 2016:156-68). Recorded by Mehmet Yıldırım and Bedrettin Kırkağaç in Erciş (Kurd. Erdîş) from Sakîne Yıldırım, who was born in the village Qeremêlik near Erdîş. The name of the hero is Mîrze Mihemed. **D2**.

6. "Çîroka heftemîn" ("The Seventh Fairytale"). Recorded from Rukiye Izçi, without indication of the informant's origin (Demir 2016:200-14). The hero's name is Mîr Mihemed. **D7**.

The plot of all these stories represents the widespread tale type ATU 301, "The Three Stolen Princesses." The succession of episodes, and a number of motifs, allow us to assign all the eight texts to a subtype 301A, which usually is found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean (Puchner

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[13] Kurd. Teyrê Sîmir (Simir) may function as a personal name, but the first element means "bird." Therefore, this appellative may be translated as "the bird Simir." The name Simir must be a Kurdish adaptation of the name of the Persian mythological bird Simurgh, سیمرغ.

[14] This is the name of the main heroine.

2002:1365).[15] There are several narrative features shared by all eight variants. These features are presented below as episodes:

1. *The hero guards the garden*.[16] Three princes guard the king's garden at night in an effort to catch a creature which steals all the fruit (apples). Two older sons fail to fulfill their task because of fear or sleepiness; only the youngest son manages to catch the thief (it turns out to be a *dev*) and to wound him. Usually, the youngest son overcomes his sleepiness by cutting his finger and pouring salt on the wound (motif H1481; BL, T, E, Y).

2. *The hero kills the wounded* dev *(or three* devs*) in the underworld*. The way to the underworld is a well. After killing the *dev*, the hero rescues three girls to become brides for three brothers. In some versions one of the girls warns the hero of the taboo of striking the *dev* twice (motif C742; T, C88, E, D7).

3. *The hero falls down into another underworld*. When taking away the girls sent by the hero from the well, the older brothers betray the youngest brother and leave him in the well. Following the instructions of the youngest girl, the hero is ready to meet a white and a black sheep;[17] his task is to jump on the white sheep to get into the upper world. But the hero jumps on the black sheep[18] by mistake and falls "seven layers down."

4. *The hero kills the dragon in the next underworld*. The old lady with whom the hero stays in the underworld offers him her urine instead of water, because the dragon[19] keeps the water and only gives it when he is given a girl to eat. The king's daughter is going to be sacrificed the day the hero comes. Waiting for the dragon, the hero falls asleep and is awakened by her teardrop (BL and T). Once the dragon has been killed by the hero, the rescued girl smears the dragon's blood on the hero's back: it helps to recognize the hero among the many men who pretend to be the dragon-slayer.

5. *The hero saves the chicks of the bird Simurgh from a serpent*. This deed is intended to win the heart of the bird Simurgh,[20] who is able to bring the hero back to his world (the light world). The hero kills the serpent (or dragon) who was the bird's eternal enemy and ate her chicks every time

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[15] The survey of the existing indexes and the present research suggests that this subtype is widespread in Anatolia and Iran. Is this really an oicotype specific to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East? This question merits further study.

[16] The only version without this episode is D7. Instead of this, there is an episode with a long-bearded dwarf, who asks each of the brothers for food and beats them after they reject his request. Only the youngest brother wounds the dwarf, who disappears in a well. Uther (2004:I, 177) describes this variant as one of the possible introductory episodes for tale type 301.

[17] In C62 and E the girl says that the sheep come every Friday. The importance of Friday is typical for Kurdish texts (Ritter 1967:18), but it must be an Islamic motif, not necessarily specific to Kurdish texts. In D2 and D7 the sheep appear with the help of magic objects: a ring (D2), or two feathers (D7). This motif appears in complementary distribution with the "Friday" motif.

[18] The sheep fight each other and change their color while fighting (C62, C88, E), which complicates the hero's task.

[19] The dragon is seven-headed in BL, T, and D2.

[20] Kurd. *Sîmir*, Aramaic *Simarkho* (BL), or *Simurkosh* (T). One of the Kurdish versions has the bird's name Pava (E). The versions C88 and D7 do not name the bird.

the bird produced them. When the bird finds the hero near its chicks, she thinks the boy is the enemy, but the chicks defend him, saying to their mother that it is he who saved them from the serpent.

6. *The bird Simurgh brings the hero back to the light world.* In order to sustain the bird during the long flight, the hero must provide it with food and drink (seven sheep tails and seven wineskins of water).[21] When there is no more food (or when the last piece of meat drops down), the hero cuts a piece of his thigh to feed the bird. Upon landing, having kept the piece of human meat under its tongue, the bird restores the muscles of the hero's thigh. Only two versions preserve the motif of the bird's checking the stages of the flight by asking the hero what it is like (T and C62).[22]

7. *The hero wins his own bride through tricks and (or) a contest.*[23] There are two distinctive strategies: 1) the hero asks an old lady to bring some food (milk, porridge, apple) to the bride, who does not want to eat anything; he hides a ring inside the food as a sign of his presence for the girl (T, D2, D7); 2) the hero works for a blacksmith (or goldsmith) and, with the help of magic, performs difficult tasks for the bride(s), producing a golden hen dancing on a golden tray or the like (BL, C62, E); he also takes part in a *jereed* (Kurd. *cirîd*, Tur. *cirit*), a horseback game (C62, E).[24]

The most important result of this comparison is that the plots of Aramaic and Kurdish versions are very similar. There are only two motifs shared by the Aramaic versions and lacking in the Kurdish versions: the magic sleep of the hero waiting for the dragon (D1975) in episode (4) and his being awakened by a tear of the girl (D1978.2). The present collection of eight stories is too small to conclude that these motifs are characteristic of the Aramaic oral tradition. Given the universal nature of this combination of two motifs within the tale type ATU 300 (see Uther 2004:I, 174), it may well have been lost only in that part of the Kurdish tradition which is currently available to the author. Talking about local features, one may point out the *jereed* (equestrian competition) motif in some of the variants. It is shared by Turkish and Kurdish variants of ATU 301A.

Some motifs have rare variants or unusual aspects, whose significance is not always clear. Thus, in one of the variants, the girl gives her instructions from above, when she has already left the well (T). Two of the girls in the first netherworld have red apples (D2). This is

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[21] There is a certain degree of variation in the list of products, but it does not seem significant. One of the sources has forty instead of the usual seven (tails and wineskins).

[22] On this motif in the literature of Ancient Mesopotamia, in Hellenistic and Jewish sources, and in Arabian and Kurdish folklore, see Aro 1976.

[23] The episode is absent from the version C88.

[24] The same versions have another motif of the hero assuming the appearance of a baldpate (bald boy); cf. the Turkish personage Keloğlan (Paksoy 2001).

related to the motif of the apple garden (C62, Y), or an apple tree within the garden (T, D2).[25] Other versions have a garden with various kinds of fruit.

Special attention should be given to two motifs which are present only in the Neo-Aramaic version BL. Both involve Jewish characters who are held up for ridicule. The first one is an extension of the motif H1481 (*Thumb cut and salt put on it in order to remain awake*). In most of the versions where this motif is present, there is no question about the origin of this idea; it looks like a trick invented by MM himself. But in BL Mirza Pamat goes to a Jewish man and asks him for a remedy against sleepiness (motifs 5-6 in the summary given above). At first the Jewish character hides this secret and gives this advice only when he is scared by the threats of Mirza Pamat (Tumasova 2015:65):

(73) *zille go beṯad huḏaya. kis huḏaya politle sepa midde pqaṭlannux.* (74) *maddi dermana xa dermana halli šinṯi ṭla hal qadimta.* (75) *huḏaya midde leṯ dermana čuməndi. adia midde bqaṭlannux.* (76) *huḏaya midde ṭlalew aya səbutux prumla dri məlxa i šinṯux le aṯi.*

(73) He went to a Jew's house. (When he came) to the Jew he took out the sword and said: "I will kill you! (74) Tell (me), give me a remedy in order not to sleep until the morning!" (75) The Jew said: "No remedy, (I have) nothing."—"Now I will kill you!" (76) The Jew said to him: "Cut your finger, pour salt (on it), and sleep won't come to you."[26]

The story concludes with another episode in which a Jewish character is treated in a mocking fashion (motif 32). Mirza Pamat steals the wife of a Jew to give his father a wife. Once again, the Jewish figure is handled derisively, and he appears to be one of the villains tricked and/or killed by the hero. Given the background of the other seven texts from the group of oral sources, these motifs are distinctive of the Neo-Aramaic version (BL). Are they specifically Christian (Assyrian)? It is impossible to give a definite answer based on only eight texts, but at least one parallel from an Assyrian source may be relevant. There is an episode with a Jewish character in the Assyrian epic tradition about the hero Qaṭīne Gabbara known through the poem "Qaṭīne Gabbara" by William Daniel.[27] Qaṭīne Gabbara is a hero of the same type as MM (Mirza Pamat). He comes to a Jewish blacksmith to buy a unique sword from him. The blacksmith tries to trick the hero by offering him all kinds of other swords rather than the right one. The hero being insistent (there is no scaring by death), the blacksmith finally agrees to sell to him the right sword but demands the enormous sum of ten gold coins (Daniel 1961:I, 34-37). The oral tradition about Qaṭīne Gabbara originates from Hakkari, where our version BL was originally transmitted. Therefore, these episodes involving encounters with Jewish characters (portrayed in

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[25] This motif finds explanation in one of the Persian versions of ATU 301, "Apple Orchard" (باغ سیب). The apple tree in the king's garden bears three apples at a time for each of his sons. When the elder brothers fail to guard the tree, each of them overlooks the thief (*dev*) who steals two apples one by one. Only the youngest brother manages to guard his apple. Later, in the well, he sees these very apples in the hands of two girls, who are, according to some versions, the *dev*'s daughters (https://rasekhoon.net/article/show/1230373/باغ-سیب).

[26] The translation of this passage is by the present author.

[27] On this tradition and on the poem of W. Daniel see Donabed 2007. This poem has not yet been translated completely into any European language. There is only a Russian translation of the first volume.

unflattering terms) may represent a specifically Assyrian theme. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that this theme is part of the common Near Eastern tradition.

As was shown by the analysis of the episodes and motifs of eight Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic (Assyrian) fairytales belonging to the same tale type (ATU 301), these versions are very close to each other in their plot. The Assyrian versions do not show a set of elements that would suggest that they belong to a separate tradition. There is only one specific motif shared by the Assyrian versions, but this is an exception, since it is archaic and known from other national traditions. On the other hand, stories with the same plot are found in Turkish and Persian oral traditions.[28] At this stage of the research, only the name of the hero Mirza Pamat (Mirza Mamed) helps to conclude that these two Assyrian versions originate from Kurdish oral tradition.

3.2.2 The Tale of Mərza Pămət

This text was recorded by Geoffrey Khan in 2005 from Dawiḏ ʿAdam, a speaker of the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialect Barwar.[29] The informant was born in the village Dure (Duhok province, Northern Iraq). The informant's family left Iraq around 1980 and the recording was made in Turku (Finland). The transcription and the translation of this text into English have been published by Khan (2008:1752-61).[30] The speakers of the Barwar dialect are Christians, the majority of whom belong to the Assyrian Church of the East (2008:6). In the area where they lived until the end of the twentieth century, Kurdish was the main contact language alongside Arabic. The Neo-Aramaic Barwar dialect exhibits a profound degree of influence from Kurdish, which is reflected in its lexicon and grammar (2008:18-22). According to Khan, the village of Dure was Assyrian, but the majority of the local population were Kurds. This text will be referred to here as **GK**.

1. Mirza Pamat is a robber and hunter who lives in the mountains.

2. He catches a lion, a bear, a tiger, and a fox, and brings them to his home to live with him.

3. On the initiative of the fox, the animals choose him as their leader.

4. The fox suggests that the animals should help their host Mirza Pamat and bring him a wife.

5. For that purpose, the fox sends the bear to catch a sheep, to flay it, and to have a goldsmith attach bells to every hair on the sheep's skin. This becomes a costume for the bear, who dances in it and entices the king's daughter to come out.

6. With their noise and dancing the fox and the bear make the daughter of the king come out on the palace roof. The bird Simarkho catches the girl and brings her to Mirza Pamat, and the girl becomes his wife.

7. The king offers to enrich anyone who can bring his daughter back.

8. An old witch is ready to help.

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[28] Interestingly, there are Persian variants of ATU 301 with the hero named Malik Muḥammad (Osmanov 1987:53-71, 109-24). One of the Arabic versions of ATU 301 has a hero with the name Muḥammad (Lebedev 1990:118-23).

[29] Kurd. *berwar*, "slope, incline, descent" (Chyet 2003:45).

[30] The audio recording is available at https://nena.ames.cam.ac.uk/audio/49/.

9. The witch takes a pot which moves like a helicopter, and she flies to the house of Mirza Pamat.

10. The witch tells Mirza Pamat that she wants to join the group and live with them in the house.

11. Under the pretext of the need to wash Mirza Pamat's wife, the witch secretly puts the king's daughter into her magic pot and flies her back to the father.

12. The fox and the bear again steal the king's daughter with the help of Simarkho.

13. The witch again offers her help to the king; she comes to the house of Mirza Pamat, but the animals kill and dismember her.

14. The king raises the army against Mirza Pamat, but the army fails to overcome him and his animals.

15. Mirza Pamat and his wife leave the animals to start living on their own.

16. The fox pretends to be ill and feigns death to check the behavior of other animals and their attitude to him.

17. When the fox really dies, his fellow animals do not believe him.

Tale type: ATU 535 "The boy adopted by tigers (animals)"; TTV 36 "Der Fuchs als Schulze." Marzolph 1984, *545; ATU 545B "Puss in Boots."

Kurdish parallels:

1. Mirza-Mamud. The text was recorded from Nazar Akhmet in Mary (Turkmenistan). The informant was born in 1907 in Zangilan (formerly in Iran, now in Azerbaijan). The text was published in Russian translation by Rudenko (1970). **R**.

2. Mihemedê Nêçîrvan. This Kurmanji text was recorded from Şikriyê Pîrkanî (Midyat—Mardin) by Adnan Arslan in 2016. It was published by Keskin (2019:127-28). **NK**.

These three texts have the same plot with several divergences in the instantiation of certain motifs, which is shown in the following summary of the episodes. Again, the same episodes occur in the same order in all three texts.

1. *The hunter gathers a group of animals in his house (cave)*. The group of four or five animals includes a fox (GK, R, NK), a wolf (R, NK), a lion (GK, NK), a bear (GK, R), a tiger / a leopard (GK, R), and a bird (GK, R, NK).[31] The bird is called Simarkho (GK) or Simurgh (R). The number of partridges killed by the hunter every day corresponds to the number of members of his household (R, NK). The fox has a leading role in this group, which is manifested in different elements of the narrative. In GK and NK the animals choose him as their leader (GK) or housekeeper (NK). In R the fox invites other animals to live with the hunter.

2. *The animals kidnap the king's daughter*. Apparently, the key element of this narrative must be a ruse by which the animals entice the king's daughter to come out of her room, to help the bird to grab and take her to her future husband (GK, R). Only in NK is this absent: the bird alone grabs the girl without any tricks. The ruse in R is that the fox is ploughing a field using the bear and the wolf as draft animals, which forces the king's daughter to come out (cf. TTV, type 36 III.8).

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[31] In GK the bird appears only at the moment of kidnapping the king's daughter.

Another cunning trick is used in GK: the fox arranges a performance—the bear dances in special attire with bells, and the fox makes a great noise.

3. *A witch brings back the king's daughter to her father.* A witch,[32] hired by the king, uses a specific magical transportation device: a pot-helicopter (GK), a floating clay vessel (R), or an artificial bird (NK). With this device she reaches the location of the hero, and with the same device she brings the king's daughter back to her father. When the witch tries to become a member of the hunter's family, she pretends to be a pilgrim who lost her fellow pilgrims (R, NK). In GK there are only traces of this motif: "I am a stranger. I have no relatives here. . . ." In every version the witch puts the king's daughter into her magic vehicle by a kind of ruse or trick.

4. *The animals again kidnap the king's daughter.* This is achieved by the bird alone (NK), by the bird with the help of the fox (R), or by the fox and the bear (GK).

5. *The king comes with the army, but the animal army overcomes the human army*. The versions R and NK go into detail describing how the animal army is gathered: wolf summons his fellow wolves, lion summons lions, etc. GK uses only a very short remark to describe this army: "the animals were numerous" (*heywane rabe wawa*).

The text GK has an additional episode: the fox feigns illness, but the animals do not believe him. This episode is authentic in plot 545 and was probably lost in the other two versions in the course of the transmission. It is highly relevant to the question of the tale type of our story. There is a problem defining the tale type of this story with the help of the Europe-oriented index of Aarne-Thompson-Uther (Uther 2004). More helpful here are the indexes of Eberhard and Boratav (1953, TTV) and Marzolph (1984) for the Turkish and Persian traditions, respectively. The Turkish type 36 in TTV squares very well with our story, including a specific realization of the motif of the ruse to steal the princess (TTV type 36 III.8).[33] The Persian type *545 (Marzolph 1984) has many variants, some of which share several motifs with our story. The number 545 is taken by Marzolph from the Aarne-Thompson index, but the description of its variants 545A and 545B in Uther 2004 does not correspond to the plot of the present Kurdish-Aramaic story. It is true that the helper is the fox (= the cat in Uther 2004), and there are some common motifs, but the story is fundamentally different. On the other hand, Uther (2004) assigns the Turkish type 36, which is exactly the type of our story, to ATU 535, "The boy adopted by tigers (animals)." Although ATU 535 shares two key motifs with TTV 36 (the hero and the animals become one family; the animals find a wife for the hero), a very important group of motifs related to the outstanding role of the fox as a helper in the discussed story makes this decision of Uther unsatisfactory. Therefore, Marzolph is right in identifying the similar Persian stories with ATU

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[32] Neo-Aramaic *ṭoṭo sere* ("old woman of magic") is a loan-translation from Kurdish *pîra sêhr*. Neo-Aramaic *sere* (pl.) ("magic") might be a loanword from Arabic *siḥr* ("magic"). Nevertheless, since it is used only within the phrase "old woman of magic" in the corpus of Neo-Aramaic texts from Barwar (Khan 2008), it must be a loanword from Kurdish, because the phrase *pîra sêhr* ("old woman of magic") is idiomatic and specific for Kurdish. For other attestations of *pîra sêhr* (*pîra sêr*) in Kurdish see Celîl and Celîl 1978:II, 283; Demir 2016:174, 176.

[33] There is one more motif shared by the story under discussion (it is found in GK) with the Turkish variants: when the witch comes again to bring the king's daughter back, she is killed by the animal team (cf. TTV type 36, motif 9).

545. Moreover, the motif of the fox feigning illness in GK brings at least this variant even closer to 545, namely to 545B ("Puss in Boots").

It can be concluded that the type 36 in TTV and *545 in Marzolph 1984 has no reliable correspondence in Uther 2004. It cannot be decided here, but there are reasons to believe that these types represent a Middle Eastern oicotype of ATU 545B. If this is true, the Kurdish-Aramaic variants discussed here are additional examples of this local manifestation of the universal tale type.

3.2.3 The Tale of Mali Mamed and Mirza Mamed

This text was recorded by K. Tsereteli between 1944 and 1962 in Georgia from Vano Khoshabayev, a speaker of Christian Urmi Neo-Aramaic. It was published in phonological transcription with Russian translation in Tsereteli 1965:54-63 (story no. VIII). The plot of the story may be identified with ATU 314 ("Goldener"), with some reservations. Kurdish parallels to this story have not yet been found. There is a Kurdish fairytale that shares very important episodes with this Neo-Aramaic text, "Mirza Mahmud and Dunya Guzal" (Dzhalilov et al. 1989:108-17). The core of this Kurdish story belongs to the expanded variants of the type TTV 204 ("Die Geschichte des Sinan Pascha") with one episode which corresponds to ATU 449; it has no exact parallels in Uther 2004. However, the opening episodes of the story follow the pattern of ATU 314: a childless king meets a dervish, who gives him an apple to share with his wife as a promise of future children; the king promises to give one of two children to the dervish; the dervish takes one of two boys with him. This opening with the motif of a child promised to a dervish is shared by the Neo-Aramaic text "Mali Mamed and Mirza Mamed" and the Kurdish text "Mirza Mahmud and Dunya Guzal." Since the hero Mirza Mamed can only be of Kurdish origin, the discussed Neo-Aramaic text may be considered as indirect evidence of the existence of this type of oral narrative in the Kurdish tradition.

3.3 The Traditions of the Western Syriac Christians

By "Western Syriac" we mean that part of the Syriac Christian world which is associated with the Syriac Orthodox Church.[34] The core location of Western Syriac Christians is the Ṭur Abdin region in the vicinity of the city of Midyad (Turkey, Mardin province). The oral tradition of the Western Syriacs is known through the recordings of their spoken language, a Neo-Aramaic language, Ṭuroyo (Surayt), through the work of such linguists as Eugen Prym and Albert Socin, Helmut Ritter, Otto Jastrow, and others. In 2018-19, a number of new recordings were made in Ṭur Abdin by the Russian linguistic expedition headed by Sergey Loesov.[35] In the following, I will briefly discuss only the texts recorded by Helmut Ritter in Istanbul, because up to now the folktales with this Kurdish name of the hero Mirza Muḥamma (Mḥamma) were only found in the

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[34] As is the case with the Eastern Syriac Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church has split into the traditional one and the Syriac Catholic Church (Murre-van den Berg 2018:771).

[35] For a publication of one of the Kurdish fairytales, Zêrka Zêra, retold in Turoyo and recorded by Sergey Loesov, see Häberl et al. 2020.

corpus of texts that was recorded by this researcher in the 1960s. Ritter observes that most of the fairytales and other narratives he recorded from Ṭuroyo speakers are of Kurdish origin. This is stated by the speakers themselves, and the Kurdish origin of the texts is confirmed by Kurdish formulas, the mentions of the *Molla* as a main religious figure (rather than *qašo*, "priest"), and by the fact that Friday is the most important day of the week (1967:18).

There are two texts with the same core plot of the type ATU 552 ("The girl who marries animals"): "Mirza Muḥamma and his brothers" (Ritter 1969, no. 61) and "Koese the two-haired" (Ritter 1969, no. 67).[36] They have one Kurdish parallel with the same basic plot, "Mirzemehmed" (Cindi 1962:II, 133-39). One of these three stories (Ritter 1969, no. 61) is complicated by the presence of features of the story ATU 304 ("The Dangerous Night-Watch"). Again, these stories belong to that group of plots where a young hero, usually a prince, struggles with demons and dragons and finally marries a princess.

Another Ṭuroyo story has a hero Mirza Mḥamma, a king's son: "Jusuf Pelawan" (Ritter 1971, no. 113). The text has no clear parallels in the sources we studied. Further investigation is needed to define its tale type. An interesting feature of this story is that the storyteller calls the hero Mḥammad throughout the story, and identifies the hero with the popular name only once, switching to Mirza Mḥamma.

Conclusion

The name Mîrza Mihemed (Mehmud) is an integral part of the Kurdish oral tradition of fairytales. It is the most popular name of the main male hero of the fairytales, usually a prince, the youngest brother, or a bold boy, the one who kills dragons and demons and finally marries a beautiful princess. The available texts of Mîrza Mihemed fairytales testify to the northern part of Kurdistan as the localization of these traditions, the places where the Kurmanji dialect is spoken. This name as a typical name of the fairytale hero seems to be unique to the Kurdish tradition. If it appears elsewhere, it must be considered a borrowing from Kurdish folklore.

The folktales, or, to be precise, fairytales with the main male hero Mirza Muḥammad (Maḥmūd), were found in different branches of Christian Neo-Aramaic oral traditions. First of all, there are examples of this tradition in the areas with very close contact between Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic speakers (Hakkari and Ṭur Abdin). There are also two texts originating from the Urmia region in Iranian Azerbaijan, where the main contact language for speakers of Neo-Aramaic in recent centuries was Azerbaijani (Azeri Turkish). It is argued that all the Neo-Aramaic fairytales with the main male hero named Mirza Pamat (Mamed) or Mirza Muḥammad are borrowings from the Kurdish oral tradition. The calque (loan translation) from Kurdish in a Neo-Aramaic text[37] is additional evidence of the borrowing of the story from a Kurdish source.

Some of the Neo-Aramaic texts with the name Mîrza Mihemed which do not have exact or close parallels in the corpus of Kurdish folktales provide indirect evidence of the existence of such narratives in the Kurdish tradition. Therefore, the recordings and publications of the Neo-

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[36] The name of the hero is Mirza Mḥamma.

[37] Neo-Aram. *ṭoṭo sere* < Kurd. *pîra sêhr*, "old woman of magic."

Aramaic texts may indirectly contribute to the corpus of Kurdish folktales. This in itself is not a novelty, but if one takes Mîrza Mihemed stories, the case for the borrowing of a text with this name from Kurdish folklore may be based on a more convincing argument than a tale type, which is in most cases unspecific to a given tradition.

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