

“Our Steppe is Vast ...”

Kurdish epics and tribal stories from Urfa, 1906

Collected by Oskar Mann

Edited, translated and introduced
by Barbara Sträuli

Kurmanji – English

GÖTTINGER ORIENTFORSCHUNGEN
IRANICA

Neue Folge 19

GÖTTINGER ORIENTFORSCHUNGEN

III. REIHE: IRANICA

Neue Folge 19

Herausgegeben von
Philip G. Kreyenbroek

2021

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

“Our Steppe is Vast ...”

Kurdish epics and tribal stories from Urfa, 1906

Collected by Oskar Mann

Edited, translated and introduced
by Barbara Sträuli

Kurmanji – English

2021

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet
at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2021

This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage
and processing in electronic systems.

Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Printing and binding: docupoint, Magdeburg

Printed in Germany

ISSN 0340-6334

E ISSN 2747-4925

ISBN 978-3-447-11663-3

e-ISBN 978-3-447-39179-5

Ji hunermendê nemir Bavê Selah û dengbêjên Efrînê re

To Bavê Selah (1952–2016) and the singers of Afrin

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	IX
Preface and acknowledgements	1
I INTRODUCTION	5
1 The Kurdish epics and stories from Urfa recorded by Oskar Mann	7
1.1 Oskar Mann and the “Kurdisch-Persische Forschungen”	8
1.2 Oskar Mann in Urfa	10
1.3 Oskar Mann’s working methods	12
1.4 Working with interpreters	15
1.5 Problems of transcription	16
1.6 Singers dictating versus singers performing	18
2 The singers of Urfa	20
2.1 Singing as a collective art	20
2.2. Osmanoglu	22
2.3 Sheikh Bozan the Berazi	23
2.4 Ayib Agha Temir	25
2.5 The dialect	26
3 Regional tribal history	28
3.1 Ibrahim Pasha Milli	28
3.2 Town and steppe	29
4 The regional epic tradition	32
4.1 Singer contacts between Urfa and Afrin	32
4.2 Regional repertoires	35
4.3. The southwestern ecotype of <i>Mem û Zîn</i>	38
5 The concept of history in the regional epic tradition	44
5.1 Remembering the past in everyday life and literature	44
5.2 What guarantees historical authenticity for audiences?	46
<i>Time</i>	47
<i>Topography</i>	48
<i>Personal names</i>	51
5.3 Tribal values shaping the narrative	54
5.4 Ethnographic information versus historical information	56
6 The present edition	58
6.1 Fieldwork and written sources	58
6.2 From transliteration to translation	59

II THE TEXTS (KURMANJI–ENGLISH)	69
Anecdotes (by Osmanoğlu)	65
1. <i>Îbrahîm Paşa û Dire‘i Beg</i> / Ibrahim Pasha and Dire‘i Beg	65
2. <i>Îbrahîm Paşa û Husên Beg</i> / Ibrahim Pasha and Huseyin Beg Beg	68
3. <i>Kuştina Êzdiya</i> / The Killing of the Yezidis	70
4. “ <i>Va hespa bi şûnê qantir raketîye</i> ”/ “This horse has lain in a mule’s place”	73
A history of the Milan leaders (ca. 1800–1906)	76
5. <i>Temir Paşa li Bexdad</i> /Temir Pasha Milli in Baghdad	86
6. <i>Temir Paşa û sazbandê xwe</i> /Temir Pasha Milli and his singer	83
7. <i>Ayib Axa</i> /Eyub Agha Milli	86
8. <i>Temir Axa û kilama Beyazê Emo Şeşperî</i> /Temir Agha Milli and the lament of Beyaz, daughter of Emo Şeşperî	89
9. <i>Îbrahîm Paşa</i> /Ibrahim Pasha Milli	98
Epics and Kilam	103
10. <i>Sîyamed</i>	103
11. <i>Alî(yê) Hacilarî</i> /Ali from Hajjilari	132
11b. (no title)	138
12. <i>Derwêşê Evdî</i> /Derwesh, Son of Evdi	139
13. <i>Mem û Zîn 1</i> /Mem and Zin 1	159
14. <i>Mem û Zîn 1</i> /Mem and Zin 2	184
Illustrations	229
III REGISTERS	243
Sources of photographs and maps	245
Glossary	245
Bibliography	257
Index of names and places	267

Abbreviations

General

Ar.	Arabic
cf.	confer
d.	died
dial.	dialectal
et al.	and others
Fig.	figure
fl.	floruit/flourished
i.e.	id est
imp.	imperative
Kurm.	Kurmanji
lit.	literally
MUZ	Mem û Zîn
n.p.	no pagination
n.d.	no date
OM	Oskar Mann
Ottom.	Ottoman
p.	page
par.	paragraph
Pers.	Persian
poet.	poetical
r.	regnavit/ruled
transl.	translated
transcr.	transcribed
Turk.	Turkish
WK	written Kurmanji

Books, journals and archives

Arachne	Arachne. Objektdatenbank und kulturelle Archive des Archäologischen Instituts der Universität zu Köln und des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/
BBAW	Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivler
Celîl 2	Celîl, Ordîxane û Celîl, Celîl (Eds.) (2014). <i>Zargotina Kurda</i> Vol. 2: <i>Êpîka (Beyt, Dastan, Roman)</i> . Wien.
Celîl 9	Celîl, Ordîxane û Celîl, Celîl (Eds.) (2015) <i>Zargotina Kurda</i> . Vol. 9: <i>Çîrok, Çîvanok</i> .
Chyet, Dict.	Chyet, Michael L. (2003). <i>Kurdish-English Dictionary. Ferhenga Kurmancî-Inglîzî</i> . New Haven and London: Yale University Press
DCO	<i>Der christliche Orient. Monatszeitschrift der Deutschen Orient-Mission</i> , ed. by Johannes Lepsius, Potsdam: Verlag der Deutschen Orient-Mission, 1900–1923.
Farq	Farqînî, Zana (2013 ⁴). <i>Ferhenga Mezin a Kurdî-Tirkî. Bûyûk Kûrtçe-Türkçe sözlük</i> . Enstîtuya Kurdî ya Stenbolê. Istanbul.
glosbe	<i>glosbe. Kurmanji-English online dictionary</i> . https://de.glosbe.com/ku/en
Hadank (Ed.) 1926	Hadank, Karl (Ed.) and Oskar Mann (1926). <i>Die Mundarten von Khunsâr, Mahallât, Natânz, Nâyin, Sâmnân, Sîvand und Sô-Kohrûd</i> . Berlin und Leipzig.
îz	Îzoli, D. (1992). <i>Ferheng Kurdî-Tirkî/Türkçe-Kürtçe</i> . Istanbul.
K1	Notebook “Kirmânjî 1906/07 I”, by Oskar Mann (1906). <i>Aufzeichnungen zu kurdischen Sprachen und Dialekten: hauptsächlich Kirmandschî</i> . Archiv der BBAW, Nachlass Mann/Hadank, Nr. 170.
K2	Notebook “Kirmânjî 1906/7 II”, by Oskar Mann (1906/07). <i>Sammlung kurdischer Kunstpoesie und Sprachproben in nordkurdischen Dialekten</i> . Archiv der BBAW, Nachlass Mann/Hadank, Nr. 165.
Letters, ed. Kolivand	Kolivand, Mojtaba (Ed.) (2014). <i>Persische und kurdische Reiseberichte. Die Briefe des Berliner Orientalisten Oskar Mann während seiner beiden Expeditionen in den Vorderen Orient 1901–1907</i> . Harrassowitz.
Kurmancî	Institut kurde de Paris (1999). <i>Kurmancî. Rojnama taybetî ya Enstîtuya kurdî ya Parîsê li ser pîrsên zaravê kurmancî</i> . Hejmar 1–20. Spånga, Sweden.
OM	Oskar Mann
Omar	Omar, Feryad Fazil (1992). <i>Kurdisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch</i> . Kurdische Studien Berlin. Berlin.

Red	Redhouse, Sir James W. (1890, 1996) <i>A Turkish and English Lexicon</i> . Beirut.
St	Steuerwald, Karl (1972). <i>Türkisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch</i> . Wiesbaden.
Wehr	Wehr, Hans (1985 ⁵). <i>Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart</i> . Beirut und London.

Logograms of interviewees

HajM, MA, NA, PC, ŞG SŞ



Fig.1 Sheikh Bozan the Berazi (Photograph by Oskar Mann 1906)

Preface and acknowledgements

It is a folklorist's dream to discover oral literature collected long ago and hidden away in an archive. The Kurdish songs and epics published here were recorded by Oskar Mann, scholar of Iranian languages, at the turn of the twentieth century. In 2015, I found these texts in two of the six notebooks that the researcher filled during his second journey to the Orient in 1906/07 (Mann's bequest is archived in the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie in Berlin). For this edition, I selected all of Oskar Mann's transcripts from Urfa, most of them dictated by the Kurdish Berazi singer Sheikh Bozan. They are the earliest known documents of the epic tradition from the region, from which elaborate later variants of the same epics also survive, and their discovery opens up new vistas for Kurdish folklore studies. However, my main reasons for wishing to publish these texts is that Kurdish oral literature, though very beautiful, is little known as well as underrated. The long and colourful epics of the Euphrates region presented here deserve a wider audience.

The editing of Oskar Mann's transcripts is a continuation of my research on the tradition of the Berazi singers in the second half of the twentieth century (Sträuli (Ed.), Sorekli (transcr.) 2017). However, the pieces from 1906 reflect a different political context. Unlike the later literature, which was produced against a background of rising Kurdish national consciousness and state oppression, these earlier songs reflect Kurdish tribal dominance barely held in check by the Ottoman state. The men who dictated them to Oskar Mann were deeply interested in Kurdish tribal politics. They were raised in the steppe but had come into contact with the urban culture of Urfa. Textual comparison shows that they were the direct predecessors of the following two generations of singers west of Urfa.

The waning of nomadism and tribal life and the radical social change in the second half of the twentieth century led to the disappearance of much contextual knowledge about Kurdish oral literature. Such knowledge, shared by audiences and singers alike, needed no explanation at the time, but readers of these texts today may have difficulty visualising some of the objects referred to or understanding the motives of the protagonists. Having lived in the region, I felt a wish to gather the fragments of what can be known of Sheikh Bozan's and Ayib Agha Temir's background. An edition with commentary on the background history, with footnotes explaining the tangled references to everyday life, politics and customs in these anecdotes and songs seemed the best option.

In the introduction I took the opportunity to pursue topics not treated extensively elsewhere. One such is the different concept of history as it appears in the oral tradition of the Kurdish Southwest and, perhaps, in other regions. Another is the technique of transcription used by Western researchers before the arrival of the tape recorder. How did taking down dictations by hand influence the shape of the singer's text? A third point concerns the possible ways in which frequently sung epics changed in transmission over two or more generations of singers.

It was indispensable to preserve the original dictations in the dialect form and grammar in which Oskar Mann had written them down. This approach has met with criticism from

some Kurdish writers and teachers involved in the exacting task of promoting Kurdish literacy, who would have preferred an edition in modern written Kurdish. While the printing of Kurmanji texts full of apparent grammatical mistakes and loanwords from neighbouring languages runs counter to furthering written Kurmanji, all of Kurdish folklore and much of Kurdish classic literature is grounded in specific regional dialects and geographic areas. If the lexicon is replaced by modern Kurmanji vocabulary and the grammar smoothed over, important information disappears. The solution, I think, lies in different editions for different readers. I hope to publish a parallel edition for the reading public of Kurmanji, less encumbered with footnotes and with a corrected grammar.

Non-Kurdish researchers will never escape the fact that they speak on behalf of others. As a non-Kurd, I am acutely conscious of my limited perspective. Fortunately, scholarship is international, and knowledge is gleaned and accumulated in a dialectic process. I hope that other researchers, Kurdish and non-Kurdish, will approach these texts from their individual perspectives and correct any perceived imbalances of information.

I undertook this edition as an independent scholar with a long-standing family connection to the region of Urfa, free from any career-related pressure to publish. My thanks go to the Elisabeth-Jenny-Stiftung Basel for its contribution to the publication costs.

As in my preceding edition, unravelling the singers' stories was possible only with the help of knowledgeable Kurdish partners from the former Berazi confederation west of Urfa and in Switzerland. I am deeply indebted to them for generously and patiently explaining unknown words, idioms and local references. I wish I could reproduce both their serious and witty comments and the sound of their voices. My special thanks go to Perwîz Cihanî who, with his comprehensive knowledge of Kurdish classic and oral literature, helped me with some tricky textual problems. I would also like to thank the many Kurdish friends who encouraged me by taking an interest in my undertaking.

I might have given up at one point, had it not been for a visit to Celîlê Celîl in Vienna whose enduring commitment to preserving and documenting Kurdish folklore provided the encouragement for me to go on.

I am greatly indebted to Philip G. Kreyenbroek, former Head of the Department for Iranian Studies at Göttingen University and General Editor of the Göttinger Orientforschungen (New Series Iranica) for his support and his readiness to include this publication in the series.

My sincere thanks to Stephan Specht, publishing director at Harrassowitz, and to Jens Fetkenheuer of the production department for his expert advice and proficient formatting of this volume. I am indebted to Matthias Beilstein, cartographer, for the map of the regional tribes.

I would like to thank the following individuals and institutions for their unhesitating help and technical support:

- Wiebke Witzel of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW) for dealing with all questions about Oskar Mann's estate at the BBAW.

- Gabriele Teichmann, former curator of the Max von Oppenheim Foundation, for her generous help in obtaining photographs from the Foundation's collection.

- The staff of the Handschriftenabteilung of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and of the Sonderlesesaal of the University Library Basel for helping me with photographic and textual material.

– Maria Anna Six-Hohenbalken for pointing out unknown publications hidden in Viennese Libraries.

I am grateful to Christine O'Neill for correcting my English in the manuscript; any mistakes remaining are not hers. Crucial for the development of this volume was the sound criticism of Carol Leininger who mentored the growth of this project over the years and Regula Hohl who asked the right questions. Finally, I thank my husband for his unwavering support and cheerful patience and my siblings for bright ideas from their own fields of expertise.

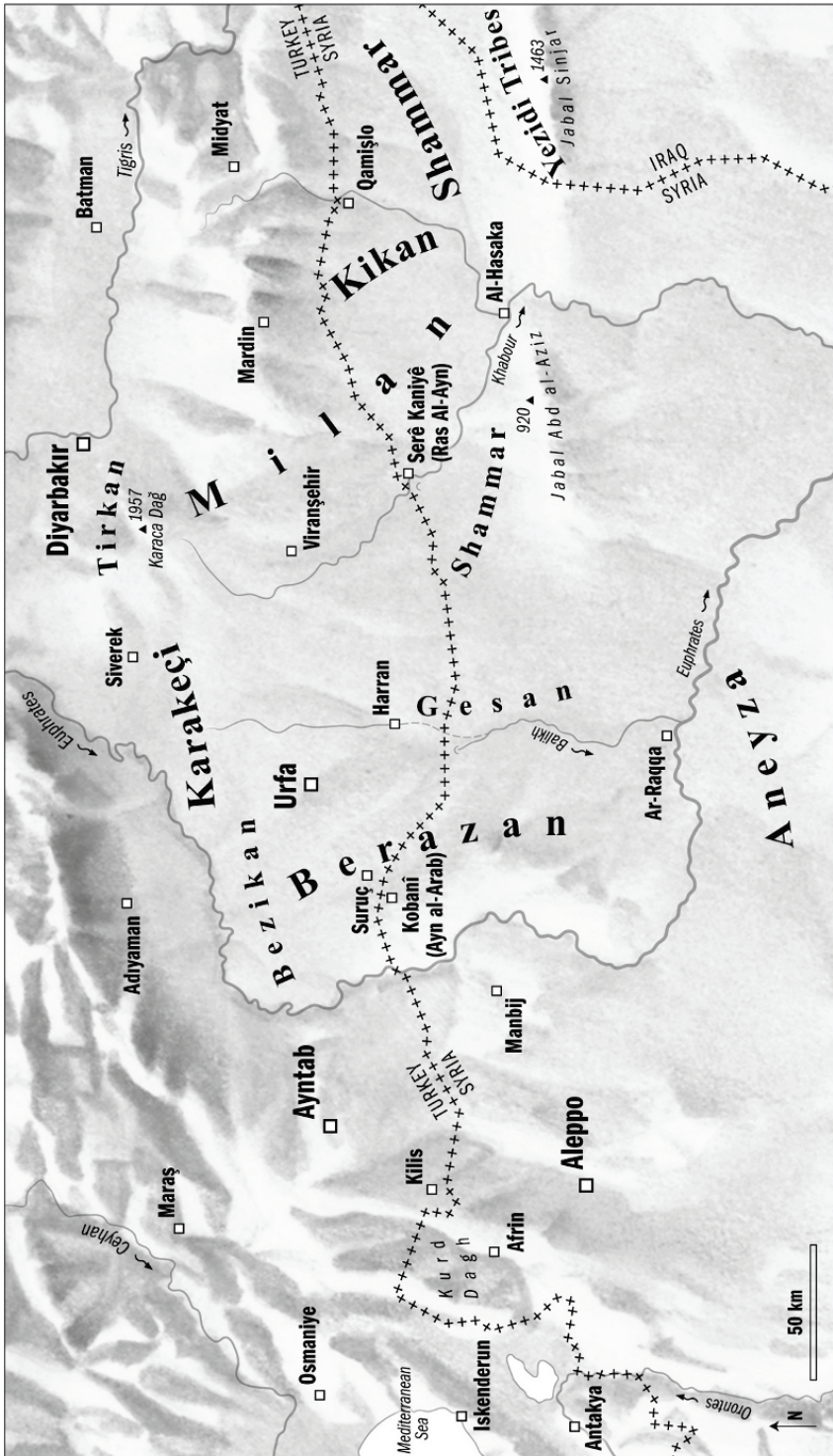


Fig. 2 Approximate territories of important tribes mentioned by Sheikh Bozan
© M. Beilstein

I INTRODUCTION

1 The Kurdish epics and stories from Urfa recorded by Oskar Mann

In the spring of 1906, Sheikh Bozan and Ayib Agha Temir, two Kurdish singers, dictated several pieces from their repertoire to the German researcher Oskar Mann (1867–1917). Mann, who was on his second journey to the Orient, had met the two men in the city of Urfa. Their epics and tribal stories survived in two of Mann’s notebooks that are archived in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW).¹ Published here for the first time, they open an unexpected new window onto the Kurdish oral literature of the Kurdish-speaking Southwest. The published corpus of Kurdish oral literature from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seemed to be complete, but these fourteen texts add a wonderfully datable and multifaceted collection to what we already know. The texts that Oskar Mann recorded range from tribal anecdotes to classic Kurdish epics, and they are the earliest known testimony of Kurdish oral literature from the Urfa region.

The main purpose of this edition is to place and interpret these texts within their local context as far as is possible after more than one hundred years. For the deciphering of corrupt passages and textual cruxes that required specific local knowledge, I collaborated with Kurdish partners from the region of Suruç, home of the singer Sheikh Bozan.² Their insights, together with historical, ethnological and literary information on the region gleaned from travellers’ reports and new research, furnished the core information to the introduction and notes to the individual texts.

As is reflected in these dictates, the Urfa region before the First World War was a mosaic of languages, minorities and religions. The men whose stories Mann collected had grown up in a contact zone of Kurmanji, Arabic, Turkish, Armenian and Syriac. They moved between the city and the steppe, and at least one of them, Sheikh Bozan, was influenced by the oral traditions of two major Kurdish confederations, both of which were present in Urfa: the Milan confederation to the east of Urfa and the Berazi confederation to the west.³ A Kurdish national discourse was as yet unknown in the region. The world view of these singers was shaped by the tribal values that determined nomadic life in the Syrian steppe, values shared with the neighbouring Arab Bedouin tribes. Not surprisingly Celadet Bedir Khan and Roger Lescot, who worked intensively to establish Kurmanji as a written language in Syria before and during the Second World War, complained that the impure dialect of the singers in this language contact zone affected the quality of their epics and songs.⁴ From a contemporary perspective, however, such a position can no longer be

1 The joint bequest of Oskar Mann and Karl Hadank is divided between the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and the Berlin State Library.

2 See Section 6.

3 The term “Berazi” is employed here as it was employed in the first half of the twentieth century. The Berazi confederation is now dissolved. People rarely speak of being “Berazi”, but rather of being members of a subtribe such as the Dinnan, Pijan or Sheddadan.

4 Lescot (Ed.) 1942, *Mamé Alan*, V.

maintained. Here I argue for the importance of documenting Kurmanji dialects, in our case this south-western variant of Kurmanji with its rich and complex vocabulary.

In order to position these newly discovered texts, I describe the context of their dictation and their historical background as much as possible, as well as their influence on the later regional tradition. Section 1 deals with Oskar Mann's stay in Urfa, his working methods, his collaboration with the interpreters, and questions of transcription and dictation. Section 2 provides information on the Kurdish singing tradition of the region at that time and the singers and interpreters Sheikh Bozan, Ayib Agha Temir and Osmanoğlu, who dictated the texts. Since several of their pieces as well as various letters of Mann from Urfa (excerpted here) are about Ibrahim Pasha Milli, Section 3 provides some background on the Milan leader and the political situation around Urfa at the beginning of the twentieth century. Section 4 deals with the networks and repertoires of singers between Urfa and Afrin between 1906 and the 1980s, and, with a description of the local ecotype of *Mem û Zîn*, exemplifies the independence of the regional tradition. With the emergence of these variants of Kurdish classic epics by Sheikh Bozan and Ayib Agha Temir, a new textual situation for Kurdish folklore research has been created: For the first time, it is possible to obtain a diachronic view of a regional oral tradition. Section 5 investigates the concept of history of Kurdish singers and their audiences as observable in these texts, a concept which differs from the Western reliance on a strict chronology and which uses other means to create historical authenticity. In Section 6, I outline the working process and the use of sources for this edition. The glossary lists the loanwords from Arabic and Turkish that were part of the singers' dialect as well as regional usages of common Kurmanji words and special expressions from the Berazi dialect.

1.1 Oskar Mann and the “Kurdisch-Persische Forschungen”

Oskar Mann's life work consisted in recording and describing, sometimes even discovering, little-known Iranian languages, including Kurdish. On his two major journeys through Iran (1901–1902) and the Ottoman Empire (1906–1907), he collected oral texts⁵ – narratives, epics and classic poetry – which he asked local informants to dictate to him. Based on this material, he aimed to establish the framework and grammar of the language or dialect in question. His second journey, on which he met the singers Sheikh Bozan and Ayib Agha Temir, led him from Aleppo via Urfa, Siverek, Diyarbakir and Cizre to Mosul, Basra and Iran, from where he returned to Berlin in the autumn of 1907.

This ambitious undertaking was financed by the Prussian Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Religious, Educational and Medical Affairs and the Treasury of the Reich.⁶ The German Emperor Wilhelm II took a personal interest in Mann's expedition. Mann published the results of his travels in an impressive series projected to include twelve volumes, the “Kurdisch-Persische Forschungen”.⁷ He and Karl Hadank, who succeeded

5 I use the word “text” also for oral performances and dictations as I share Laurie Honko's opinion that a text cannot exclusively be defined as such without anterior speech and that “there is no need to deny speech text-like qualities” (Honko 2000: 13-14).

6 Witzel, *Einleitung zum Nachlass Oskar Mann (1867–1917) und Karl Hadank (1882–1945)*, 1999, 1.

7 Mann, Oskar und Hadank, Karl, *Kurdisch-persische Forschungen: Ergebnisse einer von 1901 bis 1903*

Mann after his sudden death at the age of fifty in 1917, managed to publish a total of seven volumes, beginning with “Die Sprache der Mukri-Kurden” (Vol. I 1906, Vol. II 1909). Mann collected the texts for these first two volumes on his first journey through the Persian empire. In Soujbulaq (Mahabad), the Mukri singer Rahman-i Bekir had dictated to him his entire repertoire of long Kurdish epics, a genre Mann came across again in Urfa. The meeting with Rahman-i Bekir kindled Mann’s interest in oral Kurdish literature, and he later published an extensive treatise on it in “Die Sprache der Mukri-Kurden”.⁸ Most of his observations were validated by later research.

A considerable part of Mann’s writings, especially from his second journey, remained unpublished, including the fourteen dictations from Urfa.⁹ They would have appeared in volume IV of the “Kurdisch-Persische Forschungen” with the provisional title “Die westlichen Kirmändschî-Dialekte. Volksepen und Proben aus der Kunstpoesie”.¹⁰ These fourteen texts from Urfa range from simple anecdotes to beautiful *kilam* and popular epics of considerable literary quality.

Mann’s texts from Urfa were written down in the same decade as Hugo Makas’ texts from Mardin (200 km east of Urfa) and Albert v. Le Coq’s texts from Kilis (200 km west of Urfa).¹¹ Mardin, Urfa and Kilis are situated on the northern edge of the Mesopotamian steppe, which is today cut in two by the Turkish-Syrian border. The three collections dating from the turn of the twentieth century document the oral literature of the Kurdish semi-nomads and villagers of the steppe, who represent *de facto* a Kurdish minority culture, as at that time, the greater part of the Kurmanji-speaking population lived in mountainous areas. The three collections share a number of characteristics regarding singers’ repertoires, genres, names and poetic features (described in Section 4).

Mann’s Urfa texts fall into two groups: classic epics (*saz*) and tribal stories dealing with local historical events. Among the latter, Sheikh Bozan’s history of the leaders of the Milan confederation (Nos. 5–9) stands out as unique. It culminates in a hymn of praise to Ibrahim Pasha Milli, a rare example of the praise genre. The texts from Urfa further include the very first transcript of the war epic *Derwêşê Evdî*¹² (No. 12) and two hitherto unknown beautiful laments, one by the wife of a Milan chief (No. 8) and the other by a caravan leader from the Besiki tribe (No. 11). Finally, Mann wrote down two variants of the romance *Mem û Zîn*, dictated to him by Sheikh Bozan and Ayib Agha Temir respectively (Nos. 13–14).¹³ This

und 1906 bis 1907 in Persien und der asiatischen Türkei ausgeführten Forschungsreise.

- 8 “Einleitung über Inhalt und Form der ostkurdischen Volksepike”, in: *Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden*, Vol. II (1909), pp. xv–li. Mann wrote this essay after his second trip, and although he does not say so, the information he gathered from the singers of Urfa certainly influenced its content.
- 9 From the material Oskar Mann collected on his second journey in the Ottoman empire, Karl Hadank published the volume *Die Mundarten der Zâzâ, hauptsächlich aus Siwerek und Kor* (1932).
- 10 Mann used the term “West Kirmangî” for Kurmanji and “East Kirmangî” for Mukri or Sorani (VII. Bericht an die Akademie, October 16, 1907), Letters, ed. Kolivand: 664.
- 11 Makas 1897–1926; v. Le Coq 1903. In his introduction to the text collection from Kilis, Albert von Le Coq promised to publish a second volume with background information to the texts, but he never did.
- 12 Whereas Sheikh Bozan calls his hero *Derwêş*, the latter is called *Dewrêş* in almost all later versions of the region. I keep the distinction by referring to Sheikh Bozan’s epic as *Derwêşê Evdî* and to the other variants as *Dewrêşê Evdî*.
- 13 In the region, this epic is often called *Memê Alan*, not *Mem û Zîn*, but Sheikh Bozan and Oskar Mann only used *Mem û Zîn*.

duplication is particularly fortunate, because the documentation of Kurdish oral literature has always taken an erratic course; it rarely happened that two variants of the same epic were transcribed at the same time and in the same place.¹⁴

1.2 Oskar Mann in Urfa

Oskar Mann was but one of many travellers to the region at the turn of the twentieth century when the interest of European nations shifted towards the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire.

Foreign officers or spies (Mark Sykes, Ely Bannister Soane), archaeologists (Max von Oppenheim and Felix von Luschan) and linguists (Eduard Sachau in 1897,¹⁵ Albert von Le Coq in 1901, Oskar Mann in 1906) rode through Mesopotamia, wrote travel reports and published research, and also often gathered strategic information for their governments.

The Baghdad Railway construction, which started in 1899, opened up the region further. In their request to Emperor Wilhelm II for funding Mann's second journey, Eduard Sachau and his co-signatories from the Prussian Academy claimed that the project was justified by German interests in the East:

In the whole area in the future to be crossed by the Baghdad Railway, from Cappadocia to the gates of Baghdad, the Kurdish nation is the predominant one, both in economic and political matters. How far Mr. Mann can succeed in visiting these Kurdish peoples in their various homes will depend very much on the current constellation of circumstances; but due to his language skills he will certainly come much further than anyone before him.¹⁶

European and American missionaries provided meticulous reports on the Christian minorities and the political situation in the Ottoman eastern provinces. One year after the 1895 massacre of the Armenians of Urfa, the German Orient Mission of Johannes Lepsius started to work in the city.¹⁷ The mission's journal *Der christliche Orient* is a source of detailed information on the situation in Urfa at the time of Mann's visit.¹⁸

Another valuable source are the reports to the central government by the provincial officials of the vilayets of Urfa and Aleppo, in which they describe their attempts to curb the rebellious Kurdish and Arab tribes of the surrounding area.¹⁹ Ibrahim Pasha Milli was often involved in these local skirmishes. Around the turn of the century, he evolved from a tribal leader of the Milan confederation into a powerful regional player. Not surprisingly, Ibrahim Pasha Milli plays an important role in the anecdotes dictated to Mann.

14 von Le Coq published two versions of *Mem û Zîn* from Kilis that were dictated a few days apart in 1903. Lokman Turgut compared two versions of *Cembelî kurê Mîre Hekkarî* from Tur Abdin, which were, however, not recorded at quite the same time nor in quite the same place (Turgut 2002).

15 See Sachau 1900.

16 Letter to the German emperor Wilhelm II of July 25, 1905, signed by Sachau, von Richthofen and Pischl, in: Letters, ed. Kolivand: 436–39. (The translations of all quotations from secondary sources in this publication are by the editor, unless otherwise indicated).

17 Kieser 2000: 228.

18 *Der Christliche Orient*. Monatsschrift der Deutschen Orientmission. Potsdam 1899–1923.

19 See Ünal 2007.

On his second journey to the Ottoman Empire, Mann intended above all to document the Kurmanji (“Kirmanji”) language. Coming from the port of Alexandretta (now İskenderun), he arrived in Aleppo on March 31, 1906. When despite a long search he could not find a Kurmanji-speaking informant, Mrs. Koch, the wife of a German merchant and “mother” of all German travellers in Aleppo, arranged for a Kurd named Osmanoğlu to come from Urfa.

I’m still sitting here waiting for the telegraph message about the money deposit. But now I have at least found work. Mrs. Koch sent for a Kurd from Urfa for me. The man is not particularly intelligent, but it’s enough for grammatical and lexical studies. I work 3–4 hours a day with him. My cook Jusif is very skilled at providing dragoman services.²⁰

Mann’s dictations from Aleppo and Urfa are contained in two notebooks, “Kirmanji I 1906/07” and “Kirmanji II 1906/07” (henceforth “Notebook K1” and “Notebook K2”). Mann’s Notebook K1 shows that with Osmanoğlu’s help, he compiled a Kurmanji vocabulary which included terms for animals, fruit, vegetables and clothing. He also recorded verb forms, kinship terms and two anecdotes about Nasreddin Hoca as well as four anecdotes that are included in this edition (Nos. 1–4).²¹ These four texts are very simple in style because Osmanoğlu wanted Mann, who was new to Kurmanji, to understand him; nevertheless, they are of ethnological and historical interest. The first two deal with Ibrahim Pasha Milli, the third with a tragic massacre of Yezidis and the fourth with horse breeding, for which Urfa is known from time immemorial. Mann had been studying Kurmanji for six weeks when he departed from Aleppo. His mule caravan reached Urfa on May 23, 1906. He immediately rented a room in a modern-looking *xan* at the Serail Gate (“It almost looks like a European hotel here”; cf. Fig. 5) and visited the wali, as was required of all foreign travellers. In the wali’s *konak*, Mann was introduced to Ihsan Beg, an intellectual exiled from Istanbul who would prove very useful.²² Next, he contacted the Franciscans, various European residents and the members of the German Orient Mission of Lepsius in the city.²³ Among the latter was the Swiss paramedic Jakob Künzler, who was profoundly knowledgeable of Urfa and its Kurdish minority.²⁴ Mann had Künzler treat his sprained ankle, but it is not known to what extent he made use of the paramedic’s local expertise. Künzler’s own contribution to Kurdish folklore is discussed in section 2.1 and in the introduction to song No. 11.

Owing to his excellent knowledge of Persian, Mann quickly became acquainted with notables of the city who sought him out to test their Persian language skills. Three days after his arrival, Ihsan Beg introduced him to the singer (“bard”) Sheikh Bozan, whom Mann hired immediately:

20 Letter to Martha of May 8, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 487. In addition to his native language Persian, Mann’s cook Jusif, who interpreted for him, spoke Turkish, Armenian and French.

21 Notebook K1, 16–24.

22 Letter of May 21, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 496.

23 Letter of May 31, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 498. For a detailed description of the European colony in Urfa at the time of Mann’s sojourn, see Kieser 2000, sections 1.7 and 2.10.

24 For Jakob Künzler’s life and work, see Kieser 2001.

... he brought me a regular bard, Sheikh Bôzân from the tribe of the Bârâzân from Surûj, with whom I work really well, already 14 pages, of which 10 [pages are] Mâm and Zîn! Unfortunately, the old man is somewhat greedy for money, but I keep down the prices as much as I can.²⁵

Over the course of three weeks, Sheikh Bozan dictated nine different epics, laments and tribal stories to Mann. At first Mann was critical ("The man doesn't know as much as my good Rahmân in Soujbulâq, but he is still a good find"),²⁶ but his respect for Sheikh Bozan grew over time ("old Sheikh Bozan is a really splendid fellow and a fine bard").²⁷ After two weeks of intensive work, a second singer presented himself to the researcher, and within ten days, Ayib Agha Temir, as he was called, dictated to Mann a long variant of *Mem û Zîn*. Mann also came across an Armenian woman from Bucak (Siverek) in Urfa, who spoke Zaza. He was excited as Zaza was less well-known and thus a more attractive field of investigation than Kurmanji.²⁸ Thanks to the two singers from Urfa and rather contrary to expectations, Mann had quickly reached an important goal of his journey, which was to collect enough material for a description of the Kurmanji language. He concluded his work in Urfa, and on June 25, 1906 he travelled on to Siverek.²⁹

Only later did Mann realise how lucky he had been with Sheikh Bozan and Ayib Agha Temir and how generous they had been. As his letters show, during the rest of his journey, he found no local partners, Kurdish or otherwise, who would dictate to him such rich traditions ably, willingly and without constant prodding.³⁰

1.3 Oskar Mann's working methods

Information on Mann's working methods is provided by his sketchy diary and the more detailed letters to his sister Martha in Berlin, as well as indirectly by the two notebooks he filled with the singers' dictations. The purpose of his letters to Martha clearly was to record the necessary background information for later publication. They contain detailed descriptions of the landscapes he rode through, the meals he ate, the hostels, the Ottoman postal system and the social contacts he made at the various travel stations. In his otherwise very sketchy diary, he meticulously recorded the dates of his working sessions with the singers. Over the course of four weeks, Mann met Sheikh Bozan twenty-four times and Ayib Agha Temir nine times. He wrote to Martha on June 3, 1906:

25 Letter of May 31, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 497.

26 Letter of May 31, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 500. Mann was correct in his assessment of the two singers. Rahman-i Bekir from Soujbulaq was an exceptional singer, especially as regards poetic ornamentation.

27 Letter of June 13, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 503.

28 Travel diary 1906/1907 of the second journey to the Middle East, entry of June 3, 1906: 8.

29 Mann was thrilled to have discovered a Zaza-speaker from Siverek. Nobody had known that the language was spoken so far to the west.

30 "I haven't found anything decent here. I was looking for the Bohtan dialect here, but I couldn't find such a great singer like e.g. Rahman in Soudschbulag or Sheikh Bôzân in Urfa." Letter from Bitlis September 25, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 551.

I work with Sheikh Bozan 5 hours daily, plus about 3 hours on the translation of the dictated ...³¹

and on June 13,

Otherwise, the days pass now rather monotonously, work and work, but with very good results. (...) Since yesterday, I have also found another bard who speaks the pure Urfa dialect. He comes regularly in the afternoon, while Sheikh Bozan is being squeezed out in the morning.³² So, 8 or 9 hours of intensive work including the exact translation.³³

Taking down a dictation in longhand from a narrator is beset with many obstacles.³⁴ Mann actually managed to transcribe long epics better than previous researchers in the field; his collection of texts from the Mukri-singer Rahman-i Bekir from Soujbulaq is an outstanding achievement. His consistent use of interpreters, and the reliable payment he offered his Kurdish partners for their work, may have helped.³⁵ Also, like many educated people of his time, Mann had impeccable handwriting, and practice must have made him a fast writer.

In Urfa, Mann used Notebook K1 for Sheikh Bozan and Notebook K2 for Ayib Agha Temir. He must have made first drafts of the dictations on loose sheets which he then discarded. The same day or the following morning at the latest, he went through the most recent draft with his interpreter, simultaneously writing a fair copy into the notebook of the singer in question. He put the Kurmanji text in Latin script on the left-hand page and the German translation in Sütterlin script on the right-hand page. On the right, he also noted Turkish and Persian synonyms for Kurdish terms, which the interpreters gave him, or conspicuous grammatical forms with which he was not yet familiar.

On his journeys, Mann was under constant time pressure. The notebooks show that he did not concern himself with linguistic analyses unless he was dealing with something as spectacular as the newly-discovered Zaza forms, which he described in a letter to his mentor Friedrich Carl Andreas.³⁶ He took no firm decisions regarding the form of transcription but wrote down what he heard, even if a noun in a given position had a different ending at its second appearance (e.g. êvarî and êvarê).³⁷ Mann also freely changed

31 Letter of May 31, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 500.

32 "..., while Sheikh Bozan is being squeezed out in the morning": This remark is typical of Mann. His letters reflect an unvarying attitude of colonial superiority towards the local people he encountered on his journeys, which makes them an off-putting read at times. In his view, the uneducated are "greedy", "not especially intelligent", "rascals", "thieves" and always ready to cheat him, which, not surprisingly, they sometimes did.

33 Letter of June 13, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 503.

34 The problems arising were aptly described by the Turkologist Wilhelm Radloff: "The recording of the songs by dictating was fraught with great difficulties. The singer is not used to dictating so slowly that one can follow with the pen, so he often loses the thread of his narrative. Because of these omissions he then gets lost in contradictions which cannot easily be solved by questions, as questions confuse the singer even more." In: *Proben der Volksliteratur der nördlichen türkischen Stämme*, part V, 1885, quoted by L. Honko in Heissig and Schott (Eds.) 1998: 189.

35 Letters, ed. Kolivand: 504. During his journey, Mann constantly worried about money and kept meticulous accounts.

36 Letter of July 5, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 514–15.

37 Karl Hadank noticed this, too: "We should not be surprised that in O. Mann's notes the same word does

the spelling of words and names in the process of writing, knowing that he would decide on one or the other when preparing the manuscript for publication back in Germany.

His prior knowledge of Iranian languages and literatures allowed him to follow Sheikh Bozan's dictation very quickly. Halfway into his stay in Urfa, he gave up translating into German the new text of the day in its entirety and just wrote down those passages he did not immediately understand or limited himself to recording his interpreters' short explanations of difficult passages.

He was set on documenting the spoken language and consequently accepted only true native speakers as partners.³⁸ At the same time, he regarded parameters such as age, religion, literacy and occupation of his informants as irrelevant. Interestingly, he did not even ask what other languages his informants spoke apart from their mother tongue. He rarely mentioned the personal names of his partners and sometimes only noted "working with Zaza from Bydschaq", "working with the Kurd" and so on. When Karl Hadank took over Mann's papers after his death, he was appalled at the lack of background information.

At the very first examination of the Kurdish-Persian estate of O. Mann, owned by the Prussian Academy of Sciences, I found that except for a notebook with brief geographical summaries there were only collections of linguistic records while I missed a diary-like travel account from which it would have been possible to extract the necessary information about the external circumstances in the collection of the texts, their origin, perhaps also the degree of their reliability, as well as explanations of a literary, biographical and historical-geographical nature.³⁹

Mann's sister told Hadank in a conversation that her brother, rather than writing down his observations, memorised much of the information he gathered during his travels:

Miss Martha Mann told me (on 17 August 1921) of a statement uttered by her brother that he had only written down a part of what he had learned and experienced during his travels; the rest he kept in his memory, and this unwritten knowledge would have to be put on paper on some occasion. O. Mann wanted to complete the first Mukri-volume before his second trip, because in the case of his death hardly anyone could have dealt with the subject by referring to his notes exclusively.⁴⁰

Mann learned a lesson from the mistakes of the first trip; on his second trip, he produced a clean copy of each transcript immediately after writing down the singer's dictation. Nevertheless, in editing the present volume, I faced the same difficulties as Karl Hadank. Without the support of local Kurdish partners speaking the dialect of Sheikh Bozan and Ayib Agha Temir and my own prior knowledge of the language and the region, this edition would not have seen the light of day.

not always occur in the same form. A certain indefiniteness and flexibility, a wavering and a slight variability of pronunciation are part of the essence of the dialects, which are essentially only passed on orally." (Hadank (Ed.) 1926, *Die Mundarten von Khunsâr, Mahallât, Natânz, etc.*, Vorrede, XX).

38 Mann 1906, "Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden" I, XXXV.

39 Hadank (Ed.) 1926, Vorrede, IX.

40 Hadank (Ed.) 1926, Vorrede, XIII.

1.4 Working with interpreters

Mann tried to work with a hired interpreter, but during his first days in Urfa, this was not always possible. He seems to have employed various locals who came to visit him in his *han*:

Among other things, a captain ... from Sulaimaniye ... came for a chat almost every morning for several days. (...) By mustering my best behaviour and constantly offering numerous cigarettes, coffees and sodas, I keep him here until Sheikh Bozan arrives. Then the captain with his quite good Persian is a valuable help in translating Kurdish.⁴¹

As this and other passages show, Mann had as yet no clear concept of the different Kurdish dialect regions. He sometimes used native Sorani-speakers as interpreters of Kurmanji. His regular interpreter in Urfa, however, was a Kurmanji Kurd from a village near the city. In a letter to Martha, he calls him “Osman”:

In the morning, I usually translate Sheikh Bozan’s dictation of the preceding day together with my Osman, then let Sheikh Bozan come and have him dictate for over two hours. In the afternoon, after coffee, the dictation continues.⁴²

After his departure from Aleppo, Mann did not write about his first teacher Osmanoglu again. But “my Osman” mentioned here may refer to the same man with more familiarity. Osmanoglu may have returned to his home region of Urfa with Mann.

According to the notes in the margin of Sheikh Bozan’s dictations, Osman and Mann used Turkish as their common language. Mann worked with Osman until June 12, 1906 when he found an interpreter who was far better qualified. Ihsan Bey, who had already introduced Sheikh Bozan to Mann, presented a highly educated interpreter named Emin Efendi to him. Mann was thrilled:

Monday 11 June: In the evening, Ihsan Bey sent the message that he had found a “savant kurde” for me. The man was the editor of a Persian newspaper in India, is a Kurd from Sulaimaniye, speaks fluently and very fine Persian and Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic as well as writing all these languages. I engaged him on the spot till Sulaimaniye.

(...)

Wednesday 13 June: I sacked Osman in the evening.

(...)

Thursday 14 June: paid off Osman early in the morning.⁴³

As Mann’s notebooks show, he communicated with Emin Efendi in Persian. Emin Efendi accompanied Mann on his journey and remained in his service until the end of July 1906. Thanks to his excellent command of languages and his vast literary knowledge, the collection of texts grew rapidly. Whenever Mann had no Kurdish informants at hand, he

41 Letter of June 3, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 502.

42 Letter of May 31, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 497.

43 Reisetagebuch 1906/1907 von der zweiten Reise nach Vorderasien, entry of June 14.

had Emin Efendi write down from memory classic Kurdish poetry in his native language Sorani:

At the moment he is writing down for me all those classic poems that I wanted to collect later in Kerkuk, Sulaimanye etc., together with a literal translation into Persian and a lengthy commentary.⁴⁴

Towards the end of his stay in Urfa, Mann also asked Emin Efendi to take down Sheikh Bozan's dictations of *Derwêşê Evdî* and *Aliyê Hacilarî* in his own handwriting. He wanted to obtain samples of written Kurmanji in the Arabo-Persian script, which he then intended to publish in his future volume IV.4, "Westkirmandschi". He had used the same procedure for "Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden" in which he had published a handwritten text by his interpreter Mirza Jawad from Persia.⁴⁵ Emin Efendi used a separate notebook that Mann must have given to him for these transcripts.⁴⁶ It seems that Mann was also present in the room and, as the singer spoke, wrote the texts down simultaneously. At any rate, his texts of the two epics in Notebook K1 correspond almost word for word to Emin Efendi's Arabo-Persian transcripts.

Later in their journey, Emin Efendi collected a large Zaza vocabulary⁴⁷ for Mann and produced a long list of Sorani words with Persian translations. Unfortunately, he was a heavy drinker, which led to fierce arguments with his employer. The two had a final quarrel in Elazig after which Emin Efendi left Mann on the spot, taking with him the salaries of the mule drivers. Mann played a considerable part in this conflict. Throughout the journey, he behaved condescendingly to his local servants, mule drivers and interpreters. It was as if he had set himself up to be cheated by Emin Efendi,⁴⁸ something that promptly came to pass.⁴⁹ Emin Efendi's notebooks in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy are still unexplored. His contribution to Mann's work during their joint itinerary was considerable.

Mann's methods of working with his interpreters resulted in manuscripts that contain only very few corrupt passages or incorrect translations. It would be useful to know whether an interpreter was present during the dictation to help Mann understand the singer's pronunciation. Certainly, an interpreter was always present during the second phase when Mann produced the fair copy and the German translation.

1.5 Problems of transcription

Oskar Mann's first transcriptions from Urfa show that his knowledge of Kurmanji was still limited. Had he lived to publish these texts, he would certainly have eliminated a host of initial errors. Among other things, he seems to have ignored certain particles and plural endings that in everyday Kurmanji are only weakly emphasised. The preposition *li* can be

⁴⁴ Letter of June 13, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 503. For Emin Efendi's manuscripts, see Bibliography.

⁴⁵ See Mann, *Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden*, 1906, Vol. I, XXVII and the unnumbered three pages at the end.

⁴⁶ Emin Efendi's personal notebook survived among Mann's papers (*Kladde des Emin Efendi (1906–1907)*, Archiv der BBAW, Nachlass Mann/Hadank, Nr. 190).

⁴⁷ Archiv der BBAW, Nachlass Mann/Hadank, Nr. 184.

⁴⁸ Letter from Siverek of July 13, 1906, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 520.

⁴⁹ Letter of July 27, 1906 from Mesereh, Letters, ed. Kolivand: 526–27.