

**MYSTERIOUS MEMORIES OF A WOMAN:
ETHNO-LINGUISTIC MATERIALS
FROM RURAL MAZANDARAN**

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ABSTRACT

The texts and songs published here are in an eastern Mazandarani dialect spoken in the Caspian littoral in northern Iran. The informant is a rural woman recollecting the supernatural deeds of her father-in-law, who has been revered like a saint after his death. The stories are narrated in a most intimate manner, something rarely published previously in Iranian dialect documentations. The folkloric songs typify those sung in Caspian rice paddies by women, who have the dominant role in this rural economy. The stories and songs provide both linguistic and ethnographic data for this poorly studied but important province with its own unique culture among Iranian-speaking peoples.

INTRODUCTION

The vast amount of ethno-linguistic materials we collected in 2002 from a cluster of adjoining villages in eastern-central Mazandaran contains several anthropologically valuable pieces. We owe this achievement not only to our perseverance but also to being privileged to having been viewed as insiders to some degree. This ultimately won us the trust of the villagers and made them comfortable enough to share their most intimate thoughts and feelings with us.

¹ We are indebted to Dr. Douglas Val Ziegler for his miscellaneous notes and comments, which helped in improving the quality of this article.

Moreover, we were fortunate enough to record a good amount of material from the female residents of the villages, an opportunity rarely experienced by researchers of Iranian dialects. Among these, the recollections of Saburā Azizi offer the most dramatic insights of all.

Our main informant, Saburā Azizi, was a 65-year old widow when interviewed. Born in Gelekolā, she moved to the neighboring Kordkheyl village when she married Mir Hāshem at the age of thirteen; she has lived there ever since. Saburā had spoken her mother tongue all her life but was also familiar with Persian to some degree mainly because of her grandchildren. A fast speaker, as are most Mazandarani, she related several accounts of her life and sang many of the songs she used to sing in the rice fields when she was young. From the audio materials we recorded, we extracted three interrelated accounts, which are transcribed and translated below. These are followed by a shorter piece and several songs and a lullaby. The process of editing required exclusion of many extraneous words and sentences, often caused by interruptions by the other people present.

The first three texts are accounts centered on Saburā's father-in-law, Sayd Āqā, known also as Āqā Dāi 'Grand Uncle', who was believed to have been endowed with supernatural powers. He used his powers to cure people from mysterious illnesses. As narrated in Text I, when Saburā's mother was attacked by demoness *āl* while delivering her son, it was Sayd Āqā who saved her. Soon after that, Saburā herself fell ill, only to recover after she soaked Sayd Āqā's cloak in water and washed her body in it. This incident finally persuaded Saburā's father to give her in marriage to Sayd Āqā's son Mir Hāshem.

Text II begins with Sayd Āqā's foretelling of his own passing, his miraculously dug grave, and the descent of heavenly light on the corpse of this extraordinary man. Sayd Āqā's tomb is now in a separate chamber within the complex of *emānzāda* Sayd Qāsem, a major mausoleum revered and regularly visited by the villagers of the region. Saburā also recalls how Sayd Āqā was paid in cash for using his healing capabilities: parents would entrust their sick or disabled children to him until they were cured and then would "buy" them back. Saburā then quotes her mother-in-law who remembered holy men in



Sabura Azizi

green robes visiting Sayd Āqā and the latter's communication with the divine light. He resisted his wife's curiosity, who for five years repeatedly asked him who those guests were, but when he finally revealed the secret that they were Imams, the Imams stopped visiting him.

Now both Sayd Āqā and his son Mir Hāšem are gone, but not without a conspicuous memorial standing in Saburā's courtyard: the two-story trellises or shed called *nefār*. They are typical for the Caspian rural houses to stack the fodder and the like above the damp ground; they serve also as chicken coops to keep the fowls out of the reach of foxes at night. Even this ordinary structure in the courtyard is loaded with mystery in Saburā's account (Text III): after all, it is a memorial from Sayd Āqā and his father who built it. Saburā's father-in-law and husband still visit her frequently; reality and dreams are inseparable in her mind. Her memories are always with her.

The songs are those typically sung by women while working in the rice fields of the Caspian littoral. The dominant form is a quatrain (*do-beyti*) consisting of four rhyming hemistiches of eleven or twelve syllables each. The songs belong to various genres, mainly popular songs (V-IX), in which quatrains are supplemented by a recurring piece of four shorter verses. Songs X-XIII are melodically different as they are performed in the genre of *bolbol sar-e dār*, each piece of which is a quatrain followed by a couplet beginning with the phrase *bolbol sar-e dār gene* 'the nightingale on the tree says'. Some of the quatrains belong to the famous genre known as *amiri*, which usually begin with the prologue *Amir gete* or simply *gete* 'he would say'. Being oral in nature, the songs, *amiris* included, are extemporized freely by the singer and interpreted according to the circumstance. In this case the singer's brother and occasionally a lover are often referred. The texts conclude with a short popular song (XIV) and a lullaby (XV).

TEXTS

I

1. *sizde-sāle bīme ši hākérdeme. me ši-pier, véne kafš gerdéssε. xā, sayyed bīε-mā.*
2. *me mār-rε āl bavérde, Ša:bon-e sare — me xurde-berār. ve o véne gate-pier tefeng dāštεno. ve tefeng dar hedā^z — yéttā in-var-e dim, yéttā ún-var-e dim. kam-kam me nenā huš bemúo xār báie.*

3. *vešun unje mére badíne. véne piér-esse biamúne xāsgār. emā rāzi nái-bimi. ungeder bāūtene, “emā véne vére Mir Hāšém-esse xār hākenim.” nenā-re sar daxétene,² bobā rāzi náie.*
4. *kam-kam men nexār báime, čeng báime. šiš mā-e temum me das haminti mis biē. éttā jā kat bíme.*
5. *éttā šō xō vímbo véne gate-pier bemú⁶ bāúte, “váčē! te čēči ε berme kéndi?” bāúteme, “berme kerdemo me pier dánio me dass-o-bāl čeng báie.” bāúte, “ve te čēči pier ε?! men te pier hásseme. me vačē-e kār-re hačel níngen! me vačē-re zan hādin!”*
6. *ba:d ez un, esā badíme éttā kamer-šāl déno bāúte, “intā-re hič kás-esse beruz náde! éttā xār-e jā vánni, še sar-tann-ε šúnni, te xār vóni. me vačē-re zan hādin! me vačē-e kār-re hačel níngenin!”*
7. *meⁿ sevāi-sari rāss báimo badíme me sarín-sar éttā kameršāl káto. bāúteme, “nénā! éttā ō garm hākenin, me še sar-tann-ε básurem.”*
8. *unmo:qe sābun dāni-biē. anjilī^e gelām o āquz-e gelām o angir-e gelām o kenji-e gelām-re báitemo še sar-tann-ε bašósseme.*
9. *me nenā o me xāxer, Mašti Habbā, vešun ō-re bavérdene kelum-e dele. kelum éttā sulāxi dášte. vešun in sulāxi-je mére ešāne. men in kameršāl-ε baitemo ō-e dele bieštemo badíme in kameršāl-e ō sabze-mod báio. vén^eje še sar-tann-ε bašósseme.*
10. *me xāxer bāúte, “bóbā! nádumbe čēči ō-e dele dāre, ō sabze-var báie.” [áme pier] bāúte, “gab nāzen! véne ru niār! mére^εm xābnemā hākérde Āqā Dāi.”*
11. *ba:d ez in men xār báime. xār báime, me pier búrdε raj o vešun gesben biārdeno aqd hākérdeno ārusi hākérdemi.*

SABURĀ’S MIRACULOUS RECOVERY
AND HER MARRIAGE

1. I was 13 when I married. My father-in-law (Sayd Āqā) was endowed with miraculous powers.³ After all, he was a *sayyed* (i.e. descendent of the prophet).
2. [The story goes as follows.] My mother was haunted by the *āl*⁴ when she was delivering my younger brother, Sha’bān. Sayd Āqā and his grandfather

² Var. of *daketene*.

³ Lit. ‘his shoes would turn around’: it is a general belief that people with metaphysical power have the ability to rotate the shoes left at a doorway of, say, an *emāmzāda*, i.e. a shrine to a minor saint.

⁴ *Āl* is a supernatural being believed to attack and kill a mother after she delivers a child.

had a rifle. He fired his gun — once on this side of [her] face and once on the other side. Gradually my mother regained consciousness and [eventually] recovered.

3. They [Sayd Āqā and his family] saw me there for the first time. Suitors came [to solicit me in marriage] for her father⁵. We were not content. Then they said: “We must match her with Mir Hāshem.” They were very demanding of the mother (lit. ‘they fell on the mother’s head’), [yet] the father was not content.
4. Gradually I became ill. I was paralyzed. For a full six-month period my hand was clenched in a fist. I sat in a corner.
5. One night I dream[ed] that her⁶ grandfather (i.e. Sayd Āqā) came and said: “Child! What are you weeping for?” I said: “I was weeping [because] my father was not here and my arm was paralyzed.” He said: “What kind of father is he to you? *I* am your father. Don’t ruin my son’s affairs! Furnish my son with a wife!”
6. After that I saw him offering [me] a cloak and he said: “Don’t make this known to anyone! You’ll take [it] to a certain safe place, will wash your head and body, [then] you will be well. Furnish my son with a wife! Don’t ruin my son’s affairs!”
7. I rose early in the morning and saw there was a cloak lying at my headrest. I said: “Mom! Heat up some water [so] that I can wash my head and body.”
8. There wasn’t any soap at that time. I took [some] leaves of fig, walnut-tree, vine, and sesame, and I washed my entire body [with them].
9. My mother and my sister, Mashti⁷ Havvā — they brought the water into the stable. The stable had a hole [on its wall]. They would watch me through this opening. I took the cloak and placed it in the water and [then] saw that the water turned greenish. With that I washed my body thoroughly.
10. My sister said: “Father! I don’t know what it is in the water [that] turned the water green.” [Father] said: “Stop talking! Don’t bring [it] to her attention! Āqā Dāi (i.e. Sayd Āqā) appeared in my dreams, too.”
11. Afterwards I got well. [When] I recovered, my father went after [them]. They brought [a] sheep [to sacrifice], contracted for the marriage, and we had a wedding ceremony.

⁵ Here the informant points at her daughter who is listening.

⁶ Saburā again points at her daughter who is Sayd Āqā’s granddaughter.

⁷ Mashti, or more properly Mashhadi, is a title carried by those who have made at least one pilgrimage visit to Mashhad in the northeastern Persia, where the eighth Shiite Imam is buried.

II

1. *unje ke perteqāl dār dāre, véne var véne qavr-e sar perteqāl dāšte. ve de ruz xāsse bávoše ke bāmire, Ra:met motevalli-e pier Taqi motevalli-re bāūte, “te in perteqal-ε bóji, mésse inje qaver bákend!” bāūte, “inje hame kubār ε, men če-juri bákendem?” bāūte, “éttā keleng bāzeni, me qaver āmāde vónε.”*
 2. *éttā keleng bazúε, qaver še āmāde báie. qaver ke āmāde báie, ve bemú^ε sere. še zenā-re bāūte ke “bur! Šex Ali Akber-re biār, me sar-ketār-re báire. še xede-re ru be qeble derāz hākérdo, me ši-mār bemú^ε benā be berme hākérdén.*
 3. *vére bašóssene lā hākérdene in hayāt-e dele vére kafen hākérdeno nur bemú^ε bene. se dafε čarx hāite čarx hāite, in dafε harket hākérde búrde. in Kerdexeli-e del dáie pāre bie. gétene, “xédā! ve inti sayyed-e pāk-i bie emā nádunessemi.”*
 4. *hamin Kelle Qolm Ali véne nazri bie. me ši-pier-je vére bis temen baxrîne. bāūtene, “te jad hākene me vače námire, bāmunde.”*
 5. *šiš-háf-tā vačun véne nazri ne; har kedum penjā-temen penjā-temen.*
 6. *me amu-peser-e vačun, pan^l-šš-tā bamérdene. éttā nemāšun biārdo bāūte, “Mir Hāšem! meⁿ vače néxāmbε.” vače-re ám^e sere biešto še biešto búrde. vače xār báie. ay penjā temen biārdene vače-re baxrîne bavérdene.*
- * * *
7. *me ši-mār géte, qadim kersi-ben dáine. ande āqāyun sabze-puš sabze-puš emúne véne pali ništεno xiāl hāken inti géte ke, me ši-pier-re géte, “āy Sayyed! inān ki ne?” pan^l sāl-e temum vére inti demāssie ke “inān ki ne?”*
 8. *zenā dío, maselan, nur éne véne pali o so:bet kénne. ungeder čerāq-mušī su bís — barq keje dáie?*
 9. *ande zenā jesseju hākérde, ve beruz nédā^f. bāūte, “āre, inān emāmun hássene énnε me pali.”*
 10. *me ši-mar čun saxt-be-saxt hākérde^f, ve bāūte. ve návessε bā^ure. vešun qar hākérdene búrdene.*



Sayd Āqā's tomb in the emāmzāda Sayd Qāsem

SAYD ĀQĀ'S DEATH AND HIS MIRACLES

1. Over there, where there are orange trees, next to it [there was another] orange tree standing at his [current] grave. Two days before he died (literally: would have died), he (Sayd Āqā) told Taqi the custodian, father of Rahmat the [current] custodian, "You pull out this orange tree and dig me a grave here!" He said, "It is all rocky here; how would I dig out?" He said, "If you make a single stroke of the pick-axe, my grave will be ready."
2. He struck the pick-axe once and the grave was ready by itself. When the grave became ready, he came home. He told his wife, "Fetch Sheik Ali Akbar [the cleric] to hold my head and chin."⁸ He lay in the direction of Mecca. [As soon as] my mother-in-law arrived, she started weeping.⁹
3. They washed and laid him down in this courtyard and wrapped him in a shroud. [Then] the [heavenly] light came down. The light twirled three times and finally went away. These [fellow villager] Kordkheyli's hearts tore apart (ached in pain). They were saying, "O God, such a pious man he was and we didn't appreciate him."
4. This very Kal Gholām Ali was his trust. [His parents] bought him from my father-in-law for twenty tumans. They (the parents) told [my father-in-law], "May your ancestors not [let] my child die [but] stay alive."
5. Six to seven children are entrusted to him, each for fifty tumans.
6. Five or six of my cousin's children [had] died. One evening [my cousin] brought [an ill child] and said, "Mir Hashem! I don't want [any more] children." Then he left the child at [our] house and left. The child became well. Then they brought 50 tumans, bought the child [back] and took [him/her home].
7. My mother-in-law used to say: Those days they were [sitting] under the *korsi*.¹⁰ So many men in [holy] green robes would come and sit next to him [under the *korsi*], and you can imagine that she would so say to my father-in-law: "O Sayyed, who are they?" For a full five-year period she kept asking (lit. stuck at) him who they were.
8. The wife would see, for instance, that light would come near him and they would communicate. At the time, light came from a lantern; electricity was not available.

⁸ A rite observed just before death.

⁹ Apparently because she found her husband dead.

¹⁰ *Korsi* is a large stool, under which is placed a brazier of coal covered with ash and over which is spread a large quilt that covers all four sides. It used to be the primary source of winter heating in Persian houses before fossil fuels become widely available at reasonable prices.

9. So much she insisted, [yet] he did not tell [his secret]. [Finally] he said: “Yes, these are Imams who come to me.”
10. Because my mother-in-law took [this matter] seriously, he told [the secret finally]. He should not have told, [for] they (the Imams) were annoyed and left [him forever].

III

1. *ve hameš sere dāre. áme kerkā šúnne nefār-sar. nefār-sar xeséne. badími nefār-sar-e čel-o-ču hame bapíssene. bāúteme, “vače jān! inje, kelum-e pali, mé-vesse éttā ke^rk-keli deres hāken!”*
2. *ve em nemāšun ke pe dar-biārde, hamun šō badíme bemúne sere pier o vače. ande-tumi pier o vače bemúne sere, nemāz kerdene, qezā xerdene; ba:d ez nemāz šíne ún-var, sāāt-e čār harket kerdene.*
3. *in-dam bemú^e, badíme in darven-e setun-ε pešt hedāe. bāúte, “vače!” bāúteme, “bá:le?” bāúte, “in kelum-e pali pe dāre, xāni čeči deres hākeni?” bāúteme, “xāmbi ke^rk-keli deres hākenim.” bāúte, “xerāb náde, nefār-re me yādegāri bái dār!” bāúte, “in nefār me pier, Sayd Mir Āqā^e nefār hásse. vére xerāb náde, bái dār!”*
4. *men benā be bermē bakerdén, bāúteme, “ā gad-bābā! esā me das čeči dāre? esā hame vāresā talek-o-taxsim hākérdene.”*
5. *sob badíme me gate-rikā biamúe. biamúne garj baitene biārdene, simun biārdene. Terān-e rikā em bemúo, jema’aytí baitene, vére garj-ε-gel bakešino, vére baitene sar-digúno, haleb-maleb baitene sar-digúno.*
6. *de-se šō báie — esā [nefār] xār báie — bemúne. bāúte, “intā-re me yādegāri bái dār!”*
7. *in nefār-e sargezešt inti hásse. hameš pier o vače sere dārene.*
8. — *xō vīndi, xāle?*
— *hameš sere dārene. emā be pešti-e vešun dāremmi-mā. ay áme kār hākérdén čeči ε!*

THE NEFĀR¹¹

1. He (the father-in-law) is always home.

Our chickens go onto the *nefār* and sleep on it. [Once] we noted that the wood of the *nefār* was all rotten. I told [my son], “Dear child! Here, next to the stable, make me a chicken coop.”

2. In the evening that [my son] was setting the foundation, the father [-in-law] and [his] son came home. As soon as the father and son came home, they would say their prayers, eat something, and then, after the prayers, they would go over there (to the next room); then at four o’clock they would set off.

3. This time [however] I saw that he leaned against the veranda column and said, “Child!” “Yes?” I replied. “What do you want to make next to (?) the stable?” “We want to make a chicken coop,” I answered. He said, “Don’t destroy [it]; keep the *nefār* as my memorial!” [And then] he said, “This *nefār* belongs to my father, Sayd Mir Āqā. Don’t destroy it, keep [it].”

4. I began weeping and said, “O grandpa! What is now [left] in my hand[s]? All of [your] heirs have already divided everything [among themselves].”

5. In the morning I saw my older son arrived. They began bringing plaster and cement. The son who lives in Tehran came as well. Together, they coated the *nefār* with [a mixture of] plaster and mud. They built it up and covered it with tin [sheets] or the like.

6. Two to three days passed — now it (the *nefār*) was done — [when] he (Father-in-law) came. He said, “Keep it as a memorial to me!”

7. This is the story of this *nefār*. Father and son are always home.

8. [Someone asks:] Do you dream [about them], aunt?



The *nefār* in the courtyard

¹¹ *Nefār* is two-story shed/trellis built in the yard.

— They are home all the time. We owe our mere existence to their support. [Without it,] what would be the use of all these efforts?”

IV

1. *keje dáie emā vače-re lālāi hedā bi bóim? zamin-sar nano kárdemi, vače-re nano-e dele dingúmi. jole tā sāxe-karb bíe. balu zúmi, balu-je binj kárdemi. teler náverdimi, unmoqe rasm náie.*
2. *vače-re nano-e dele teryāk dāmi. hamun-je xérdeno, tā zo:r-e pali hamun-je dáine-mo. ay zo:r emúmi-mo nahār dères kárdemi-mo, kime-sar nāhār xárdemi-mo. ay ba:d ez nāhār ay vače-re ke:f dāimi¹² o vače tā nemāšun unje dáie.*

OPIUM FOR LULLABY

1. What a funny idea it is that¹³ we would have said lullabies to the babies! We would build a hammock at the field, and put the child inside it. The depth of water [in the rice field] would reach [our] knees. We hoed [the land] and sowed the paddy with the hoe. We wouldn't carry the tiller; it was not common in those days.
2. We would give opium to babies in the hammock. They would eat [it] right there and till about noon they would stay there [calm]. Then around noon we would come [back] and prepare lunch and would eat [in] the hut.¹⁴ Then after the lunch, again, we would please the baby [with opium] and he would stay there [calm] till the evening.

SONGS

V

*mosalmunun! mére šabgir varénne
āx, mére bā kamer-e haftir varénne
mére bavérdene Terkemun-e dam
Terkemun kāfer o gelile be-ra:m*

¹² For the expected *dāmi* ‘we would give’.

¹³ Lit. ‘Where was it there’

¹⁴ *kime-sar* is a shed or hut built on the field and is used for storage, resting, and boar-watching.

men armun še hāl-e do:r
še večku¹⁵ berār-e do:r
kénde Sāri kār-e do:r
te dass-e xedkār-e do:r

O, Moslems! They are carrying me away at the crack of dawn.
 O, they are taking me away with a pistol on the[ir] waist.
 They took me to the vicinity of the Turkmen [tribes].
 Turkmen [are] unbelievers and the bullet [is] ruthless.

I aspire¹⁶ [my] own [current] calmness,
 my little brother,
 [he who] is working in Sari,
 the pen [in] your hand (*sic!*).

VI

belendi niš¹⁶ me velend-e nefār-ε
belbel xaver biārde nōbehār ε
dār-e čel-ču-rε bā¹⁷r ánde nēnāle
baterkessé del dārmo qam-e yār-ε

I was sitting [on] the heights, on the lofty *nefār*.
 The nightingale brought the news that it is early spring.
 Tell the tree branches not to lament so much.
 I have a blasted heart for the care of the beloved.

VII

belend-e bālxεε, belend-e lame
véne sar ništ bio Āl-e Mohammed
har ki men o téré bázune to:met
vešúnne bákuše Darviš Mohammed

The lofty balcony, the long mat.
 On its top had sat the Dynasty of Mohammad.¹⁷

¹⁵ Variant of *pečku*.

¹⁶ Lit. 'I would turn around'; turn around something means to adore or worship it.

¹⁷ The prophet; to witness our innocence.

Whoever lay the blame on you and me,
May Dervish Mohammad¹⁸ kill them!

VIII

*miun-e čār-dari Qālum be gerdeš
me gol dāš šúne rā šāzāde raveš
elāi bāmire gol dāš-e ham-češ
nádime gol dāš-e, hásseme nāxeš*

[As in §V]

In the middle of the four-door room Gholām is strolling.
My beloved brother walks in the manner of a prince.
May die the evil eye that is targeting [my] dear brother.
I haven't seen [my] dear brother, [so] I'm ill.

IX

*āx, še yār-e badimo takke nāle-sar
tan Ali-je qevā Qorān sāxe-sar
besāb-e čā hākérdo dard-e sar
níšte guš hādem nohe-ye delbar*

Alas! I saw my beloved in the courtyard of the *takiya*.
[His] body [was covered by a] gown from Ali, and the Koran at the knee.
The damn flu gave me a headache.
It didn't let me listen to the recital of wailing songs [sung] for the beloved.

X

*g^ét^é,
ašun xō badimā¹⁹ men še²⁰ Ali-re
sio dasmāl davéssō še gali-re*

¹⁸ A saint believed to be buried at a revered spring near the village.

¹⁹ *badime* in normal speech.

²⁰ *še* is pronounced *ši/šī* in this line and the next, and *ame* in the third line is pronounced *ami*. The closer front vowel is perhaps influenced by the meter of the poem and the rhyming words *Ali*, *gali*, and *badi*.

age xānne bā^uren ámi badi-re
bázene xerusek šéme gali-re

volvol sar-e dār géne ey zāri-zāri
me gol dāš báio sarbāz-e Sāri

He would say,
 Last night I dreamed of my Ali.
 He [had] wrapped a black kerchief [round] his throat.
 If it is their intention, it is malignant about us,
 May croup-cough attack your throat!

The nightingale on the tree constantly bemoans (?);
 My dear brother was drafted in Sāri.

XI

g^ét^é,
āšeqi hākér^dmo čār sāl-e tayār
de sāl-e dezzi o de sāl-e āškār
ādem men nádime mesl-e te bi-yār
men háss^émē te āšeq, te mardem-e²¹ yār

bolbol sar-e dār géne dār-e sár-esse
hākenem rā-dāri men še gol dāš-esse

He would say,
 I was in love for four full years;
 Secretly for two years and overtly for [another] two years.
 I have not seen anyone as lonely as you.
 I am loyal to your love — you favorite of others.

The nightingale on the tree says for the tree:²²
 I would do road-keeping for my dear brother.

²¹ The suffix *-e* in this line and line 1 is pronounced *-i*.

²² Lit. ‘for the top of the tree’.

XII

gétē,
ivun-e čār-dari čār da:ne dānne
kijā-e xande-ru delbar nédānne
ivun-e čārdari! men čār dar-e te
kijā-e xande-ru! men delbar-e te

[as in X]

He would say,
 The four-door *ivān* has four spans.
 The good-humored girl does not have a lover.
 “O, [the girl who is sitting in] the four-door *ivān*! I [am] your four doors.
 The smiling girl! [Let] me [be] your beloved.”

XIII

āx, g^ét^é,
me mār méré ba étte qaribi hedā^é
kolésang baito hevāi hedā
me češ-e asli-re mirābi hedā
kolésang baito méré hevāi hedā

bolbol sar-e dārā bā^urin me zār-ε
étta paygom dārémbe bā^urin me²³
mār-ε

Ah! He would say:
 My mother gave me [in marriage] to
 a stranger.
 She got a sling and flew me away.
 She gave my tears to the water
 distributor
 She wasted me away to nothing.

Tell the nightingale on the tree my



A window of the *emāmzāda*

²³ *me* in these last two lines is pronounced *mi* by the informant.

humility:

I have a message; send it to my mother!

XIV

*Mónavver-jān, Mónavver!
esā dar šúni safer,
mérē še hemrā báver!*

Dear Monavvar, O Movavvar!
Since you are going on a trip,
Take me with you!

LULLABY

XV

*lālā lālā te lā-e do:r
te gavāre telā-e do:r
te nenā me dedā-e do:r*

*lālā kēmbō te bāxesi
deā kēmbō te héressi*²⁴

*lā lā lā lā te lā-e do:r
te lālā xār-e jā-e do:r
vače hākene, lālā-e do:r
te mār dar-e sa:rā-e do:r*

lālā lālā, [may I turn] around your bed,
around your golden cradle,
around your mother, [who is] my sister.

I say lullabies, may you sleep.
I pray, may you wake up [eventually].

lā lā lā lā, [may I turn] around your bed,
around your fine bed.

²⁴ Or *veressi*.

Child may do [sleep]! [May I turn] around [your] catnap,
around your mother, [who is working] in the field.²⁵

LINGUISTIC NOTES

The dialect belongs to the lowland Mazandarani group.²⁶ It is fairly central to the chain of mutually-intelligible idioms extending from Nur in the west to Behshahr in the east, along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. We will not describe the grammar of Mazandarani here, but to assist the reader in understanding the language of the text, we will briefly explain certain features of the dialect.

Transcription. The style here complies with other Mazandarani texts we have published, e.g. hyphenation of the oblique marker *-e*, the postpositions *-(r)ε* and *-je*, and other postpositions when the oblique marker is absent. Superscripted letters signify the phonemes which are predictably omitted, e.g. *hedā^ε* ‘he gave’ (I.2), *bā^ur(e)* (II.10, VI.3), *mérε^ε m* ‘me too’ (I.10), *mεⁿ* ‘I’ (I.7, etc.). Certain words such as *o* ‘and’, *εm* ‘too, also,’ and the copula verb (e.g. *ε* ‘is’) are pronounced together with the preceding word, yet they are shown as separate words in the transcription.

Phonemes. The consonants are essentially the same as those in Persian, except that the uvular *q* is a voiced fricative [ɣ] in all positions and that *k* and *g* are not as palatalized before the front vowels as they are in Persian. In the speech of this informant, labial plosives alternate with *v*, e.g. *velend ~ belend* ‘high’, *volvol ~ bolbol* ‘nightingale’ (X-XIII), *večku* (V.6) for the more common *pečku* ‘little’.

The vowels are *a*, *e*, *i*, *ā*, *o*, *u* (approximately the same as in colloquial Persian), as well as *ε*. The latter has a wide allophonic distribution, ranging between [ε], [e], and [ɐ], depending on the neighboring consonants and the position of the stress. Likewise, *e* is not a stable phoneme as it alternates with the more raised sounds [i] and [iː]; for instance, what is normalized throughout the texts as *me* ‘my’ is sometimes recorded *mi* (in most songs); similarly *ame* ‘our’

²⁵ Persian translation of the lullabies: ... *dowr-e bestar-at [begardam] / dowr-e gahvāra-ye talā-ye to / dowr-e mādar-at, [ke] x'āhar-am [ast] // ... dowr-e bestar-at [begardam] / lālā mikonam [tā] to bex'ābi / do'ā mikonam, [bu] to barxizi // dowr-e bestar-at [begardam] / dowr-e jā-ye xub-e x'āb-at // bačča [x'āb] konad. dowr-e x'āb [-at begardam] / dowr-e mādar-at [ke] dar sahrā-st.*

²⁶ On Mazandarani dialects, see H. Borjjan, “Mazandaran: Language and People: The State of Research,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 8/2, 2004, pp. 289-328.

as *ami* (X.3), *še* ‘self’ as *ši* (X.1,2), and occasionally the suffix *-e*, e.g. *sāl-i* (XI.1), *mardem-i* (XI.4). These variations are observed mostly in the songs and may be partly due to the influence of the meter of the song, the rhyming position, and a mixture of dialects.

Stress. The stress is usually word-final, but some morphemes, particularly in verbal categories, cause the stress to shift away from final position to (1) the negative morpheme: *ná-duⁿ-mbe* ‘I don’t know’ (I.10), *ná-duness-emi* ‘we didn’t know’ (II.3), *ná-verd-emi* ‘we wouldn’t take’ (IV.1), *ní-ešt-ε* ‘it didn’t allow’ (IX.4), *ní-^lngen* ‘don’t throw!’ (I.5) — (2) the preverb or verbal prefix in the imperative and the subjunctive present: *bá-i^r* ‘take!’ (III.3), *hā-ken-im* ‘that we do’ (I.III), *bój-i* ‘you should pull up’ (II.1) — (3) the syllable before the last in the indicative present: *ešā-ne* ‘they would look’ (I.9), *var-énne* ‘they are carrying’ (V.1) — (4) the first syllable in the verbs to be: *hássene* ‘they are’ (II.9), *dáine* ‘they are in’ (II.7) — (5) the last syllable of the stem in the forms built on the past stem: *níšt-eno* ‘they would sit’ (II.7), *gerdéss-ε* ‘it would turn’ (I.1), *gét-ene* ‘they would say’ (II.3), *ba-vérd-ε* ‘it took’ (I.2), *hā-kérd-ene* ‘they did’ (I.10) — (6) In the latter case the position of the stress is not stable; it optionally shifts onto the preverb; this shift is heard mostly between two consecutive vowels, e.g. *baíme ~ báime* (pronounced *báyme*) ‘I became’ (I.11, passim); *baíε ~ báíε* (*báyyε*) ‘it became’ (I.10, passim); *hāíte* ‘it gained’ (II.3), *bāúte ~ bāúte* (or simply *bāíte*) ‘he said’ (I.3, etc.); similarly, in the stems *bait-‘took’* (I.9, III.5, XIII.2), *biešt-‘placed’* (I.9, II.6), *biārd-‘brought’* (I.11, II.6, III.2,5, VI.2). The stress may even shift from the final vowel of the past stem all the way over another vowel to the preverb: *ba-keší-ne ~ bák^εšine*, ‘they pulled’ (III.5), *ba-x^εrí-ε ~ baxriε* ‘he ate’. It is not always easy to say where the morphological stress is as it is concealed by syntax stress. — (7) Verbal nouns are stressed on the final syllable, e.g. the past participle *baterkessé del* ‘blasted heart’ (VI.4) and the infinitive *benā be berme hākerdén* ‘starting to weep’ (II.2).

Cases. Mazandarani has preserved a binary nominal case system. The direct case is unmarked. The oblique marker is the unstressed suffix *-e*, as in *āqúz-e gelām* ‘walnut-tree leaves’ (I.8), *dār-e čel-ču* ‘tree branches’ (VI.3), *vačé-e kār* ‘child’s affair’ (I.6), *amu-pesér-e vačun* ‘cousin’s children’ (II.6), *darvén-e setun* ‘porch’s column’ (III.3). Adjectives precede the head noun suffixed by *-e*, e.g. *xār-e jā* ‘fine place’ (I.6), *velend-e nefār* ‘lofty *nefār*’ (VI.1).

However, in many instances the two words combine into one: *sāxe-karb/sar* ‘kneecap’ (IV.1, IX.2), *nāle-sar* ‘courtyard’ (IX.1), *gate-pier* ‘grandfather’

(I.2), *gad-bābā* ‘grandpa’ (III.4), *gate-rikā* ‘elder son’ (III.5), *xurde-berār* ‘younger brother’ (I.2), *sabze-mod* ‘greenish’ (I.9), *sabze-var* ‘greenish’ (I.10).

Sometimes *-e* is not an oblique marker but a Pers. *ezāfe*, as in *sar-e dār* ‘on the tree’ (XI.6) for the more authentic Mazandarani *dār-e sar* (XI.6); *pešti-e vešun* ‘their support’ (III.8) for Maz. *vešun-e pešti*; *češ-e asli* ‘eye tear’ (XIII.3) for Maz. *asli-e češ*.

Postpositions and related morphemes. Postpositions outnumber prepositions in Mazandarani. The object of a postposition is normally expressed in the oblique case, e.g. *qāvr-e sar* ‘at the grave’ (II.1), *Ša:bón-e sare* ‘at [the birth of] Sha‘bān’ (I.2), *véne sar* ‘on its top’ (VII.2), *véne var* ‘to it’ (II.1), *ō-e dele* ‘in the water’ (I.9,10), *nanó-e dele* ‘in the hammock’ (IV.1,2), *kelúm-e dele* ‘in the stable’ (I.9), *kelúm-e pali* ‘by the stable (III.1,3)’, *mé pali* ‘next to me’ (II.9), *véne pali* ‘next to him’ (II.7,8). *Terkemún-e dam* ‘near the Turkmen’ (V.3). The oblique marker is optionally dropped and the postposition is added directly to the word it qualifies, e.g. *kersi-ben* ‘under the *korsi*’ (II.7), *nefār-sar* ‘top of the *nefār*’ (III.1), *kime-sar* ‘at the hut’ (IV.2), *sarin-sar* ‘at headrest’ (I.7), *sevāi-sari* ‘early morning’ (I.7)

The following postpositions call for separate treatment: (1) the accusative marker *-(r)ε*, added to the direct case: *še yār-ε badimo* ‘I saw my friend’ (IX.1); (2) the ablative-instrumental marker *-je*, normally added to nouns in direct case and to pronouns in oblique case: *sulāxi-je* ‘from the hole’ (I.9), *ši-piér-je* ‘from the father-in-law’ (II.4), *balú-je* ‘with the hoe’ (IV.1), *vén^εje* ‘with that’ (I.9); and (3) *vesse* ‘for, in order to’ with full or short form appearing usually with direct and oblique cases, respectively: *mé-vesse* ‘for me’ (III.1), *mé-sse* ‘for me’ (II.1), *piér-esse* ‘for the father’ (I.3), *hič-kás-esse* ‘to nobody’ (I.6), *dār-e sár-esse* ‘for the tree’s top’ (XI.6).

The emphatic suffix *-mā/-mo* is unstressed and is similar to *-va* in the dialect of Bābol, *-ā*, *-ke*, and *-dige* in colloquial Persian, and *-dia* in Tajik Persian. Examples are: *xā*, *sayyed bíc-mā* (I.1), *hamun-je dáine-mo*. *ay zo:r emúmi-mo nahār deres kerdemi-mo*, *kime-sar nāhār xérdemi-mo* (IV.2).

The connective *ke* has the same role it does in Persian, and the frequency of its usage shows substantial variations; for instance, it is used six times in Text II, once in Text III, while it is absent elsewhere.

Personal pronouns. There are two basic sets of personal pronouns:

Direct: *mén*, *te*, *ve*, *emā*, *šemā*, *vešun*

Oblique: *me*, *te/téne*, *véne*, *áme*, *šéme*, *vešúne*

Other pronominal cases are formed by the coalescence of either of the two basic sets (direct and oblique) and postpositions $-(r)\varepsilon$, $-je$, and $-(ve)sse$; e.g. the accusative set is: *mére*, *tére*, *vére*, *emāre*, *šemāre*, *vešún(n)ε*. In contrast to Persian, Mazandarani has no suffixed pronominal clitics.

The reflexive pronoun *še* ‘self’ is used for all persons and occurs as (1) a reflexive: *mére še hemrā báver* ‘take me with you’ (XIV.3) *še xede-re ru be qebla derāz hākérdo* ‘he laid himself in the direction of *qebla*’ (II.2) — (2) an emphatic: *še biésto búrdε* (cf. Pers. *x^vod gozāšt raft*) ‘he left (by) himself’ (II.6), *qaver še amāde báie* ‘the grave was ready (by) itself’ (II.2) — (3) a possessive adjective: *še zenā-re bāúte* ‘he told his wife’ (II.2), *še sar-tann-ε šúnni* ‘you’d wash your head and body’ (I.6), *še yār-ε badimo* ‘I saw my beloved’ (IX.1), *še večku berār* ‘own/my brother’ (V.6).²⁷

Verb endings. Three full sets of personal ending in Eastern Mazandarani are shown in the table below. Set I is used for the indicative present, II for the preterit and the imperfect and for the present of the substantive verbs, and III for the subjunctive present. Māzandarāni lacks the present perfect tense.

Verb Endings			
	I	II	III
Sg. 1	$-(\varepsilon)mb\varepsilon/m\varepsilon\varepsilon$	$-(\varepsilon)m\varepsilon$	$-\varepsilon m$
2	$-(\varepsilon)ni$	$-i$	$-i$
3	$-(\varepsilon)n\varepsilon$	$-\varepsilon$	$-e$
Pl. 1	$-(\varepsilon)mbi/m\varepsilon\varepsilon$	$-(\varepsilon)mi$	$-im$
2	$-(\varepsilon)nni$	$-(\varepsilon)ni$	$-in$
3	$-(\varepsilon)nne$	$-(\varepsilon)n\varepsilon$	$-\varepsilon n$

The table would be an oversimplification without the following adjustments: (1) Set II 3rd singular ending is optionally omitted, e.g. *hedā^ε* ‘he gave’ (I.2) — (2) In the 1st and 3rd singular and the 3rd plural, the ending vowel ε may turn to *o* often when united with the following connective particle *o*, e.g. *huš bemúo* (for *bemúε-o*) *xār báie* ‘she gained her consciousness and became well’ (I.1), *éttā šō xō vímbo* (for *vímbe*) *véne gate-pier bemú^ε* ‘one night I dream that her grandfather came’ (I.5) — (3) In Set I, when the stem ends in either *r* or *l*, $-m\varepsilon$ and $-mi$ are used optionally for the 1st sing. and plural: *dārmo* ‘I have’ (VI.4),

²⁷ See also H. Borjian, “Personal and Reflexive Pronouns in Mazandarani,” *Orientalia* II, Yerevan, 2004, pp. 7-13.

dārémbe ‘I have’ (XIV.6) — (4) When the stem ends in a liquid consonant, the latter assimilates to the *n* of the ending of second and third singular: *vánni* (← *var-* + *-ni*) ‘he carries’ (I.6), *šúnni* (← *šur-ni*) ‘you’ll wash’ (I.6), (*né*)*dānne* (← *dār-ne*) ‘it has (not)’ (XII.2,3), but *vár-enne* ‘they are carrying’ (V.1) — (5) When the stem ends in *n*, *n* assimilates to the *n* or *m* of the endings *-nni*, *-nne*, *-mbe*, or *-mbi*, e.g. *kénne* (← *ken-* + *-nne*) ‘they do’ (II.8), *na-duⁿ-mbe* ‘I don’t know’ (I.10) — (6) A dissimilation process from *nn* to *nd* occurs when the stem ends in *n*, e.g. *kénde* (← *ken-* + *-ne*) ‘he does’ (V.7), *berme kéndi* (← *ken-ni*) ‘you (sg.) cry’ (I.5), *víndi* (← *vin-ni*) ‘you see’ (III.8).²⁸

Stems. The stems which call for explanation include *kend-/kendess-* ‘dig’ and *mund-/mundess-* ‘stay’, with the *d* in their stems, e.g. *bá-kend* ‘dig!’, *bá-kend-em* ‘that I dig’ (II.5), *bá-mund-e* ‘that he remains’ (II.4). The verb *dinguen* ‘to place, to throw’ appear with a denatalized stem: *sar d-igú-no* ‘they placed on’ (III.5) vs. *d-ingu-mi* ‘we placed’ (IV.1); its present stem is *ing-*: *hačel n-ing-en* (lit. ‘do not leave it absurd!’) ‘don’t ruin!’ (I.5), instead of the commonly used (*y*)*el-*.

Simple tenses. There are five constructions:²⁹

Present indicative: Pres. stem + Endings I, e.g. *kémbo* (or *keⁿ-mbe*) ‘I do’ (XV.4), *é-nne* ‘they come’ (II.9), *šú-nne* ‘they go’ (III.1), *ge-ne* ‘he says’ (X.5), *déno* (or *de-ne*) ‘he is giving’ (I.6).

Present subjunctive: Preverb + Pres. stem + Endings III, e.g. *há-ken-e* ‘may he do’ (II.4), *bá-xes-i* ‘that you sleep’ (XV.4), *héress-i* ‘that you stand’ (XV.5), *bā(u)r-e* ‘that he says’ (II.10).

Imperative: Preverb + Pres. stem + zero (sg.), *-in* (pl.), e.g. *ba-i^r dār* ‘keep (lit. get [and] hold)!’ (III.3), *bur* ‘go!’ (II.2), *níngeŋ* ‘don’t throw (sg.)!’ (I.5), *níngeŋ-in* ‘don’t throw (pl.)!’ (I.6).

Preterit: Preverb + Past stem + Endings II, e.g. *de-māssí-ε* ‘it stuck’ (II.7), *hā-it-ε* ‘it gained’ (II.3), *bi-amú-ε/bemúo* ‘he come’ (III.5), *búrd-ε* ‘he went’ (I.11), *ba-xri-ne* ‘they bought’ (II.4), *vére ba-it-ene sar-digú-no* ‘they took and placed it on’ (III.5).

²⁸ See also H. Borjjan, “Personal endings in Eastern Mazandarani verbs” (in Persian), *Dialectology/Guyeš-šenāsi*, no. 3, Jan. 2005, pp. 13-19.

²⁹ Mazandarani lacks the present perfect tense.

Imperfect: Past stem + Endings II, e.g. *gét-ε* ‘she would say’ (II.7), *emú-ne* ‘they used to come’ (II.7), *ší-ne* ‘they would go’ (III.2), *níšt-eno* ‘they used to sit’ (II.7), *ešā-ne* ‘they were looking’ (I.9), *kát-o* ‘it was lying’ (I.7).

Verbs to be and to become. These Mazandarani verbs are far more complex than those of Persian. They are based on the stems listed below for the affirmative, while the negative ones demonstrate variation.

	be	be in	Become
present	—	<i>da(r)-</i>	<i>vo-</i>
subjunctive	<i>bo-/vo-</i>	<i>da-vo-</i>	<i>ba-vo(š)-</i>
past	<i>bi-</i>	<i>dai-</i>	<i>bai-</i>

(1) The copula is formed by suffixing Set II endings (which otherwise belong to the preterit) to nominals or to the stem *hass-*, e.g. *mēn te pier háss-eme* ‘I am your father’ (I.5), *vačun véne nazri-ne* ‘children are his trust’ (II.5), *inān ki-ne?* ‘who are they?’ (II.7), *te čeči-ε bεrme kéndi?* ‘what are you weeping for?’ (I.5). The past stem is *bi-*, e.g. *jole tā sāxe-karb bí-ε* ‘the depth was up to the knee’ (IV.1).

(2) The existential verb *daién* ‘to be in/there, to exist’, e.g. *ve sere dár-ε* ‘he is (at) home’ (III.1), *pier o vače sere dár-ene* ‘father and son are (at) home’ (III.7), *emā be pešti-e vešun dár-emmi* (for more common *dár-emi*) ‘we owe our mere existence to their support’ (III.8), *kersi-ben dai-ne* ‘they were under the *korsi*’ (II.7), *me pier danio* (= *da-ni-ε*) ‘my father was not there’ (I.5), *unmo:qe sābun da-ni-bi-ε* ‘there wasn’t soap at that time’ (I.8).

(3) Verb *baién* ‘to become’, e.g. *xār vo-ni* ‘you’ll become well’ (I.6), *nexār bai-me* ‘I became ill’ (I.4), *bobā rāzi nái-ε*³⁰ ‘the father was not content’ (I.3), *emā rāzi nái-bi-mi* (pluperfect) ‘we were not content’ (I.3), *bá-voš-e* (subj. pres.) ‘that it become’ (II.1).

Periphrastic and durative tenses. The periphrastic tenses are formed by the past participle (p. p.)³¹ of the main verb followed by conjugation of to be:

³⁰ *náiε* is the negative form of both *baie* ‘it became’ and *bie* ‘it was’.

³¹ The past participle is formed by adding to the past stem the preverb and optionally the suffix -ε.

Pluperfect: p. p. + preterit of ‘to be’ (*bi-mε, -i, -ε, -mi, -ni, -nε*): *ništ^ε bío* ‘it was sitting’ (VII.2), *kat bíme* ‘I had fallen/lying (I was paralyzed)’ (I.4)

Past subjunctive: p. p. + subj. past of ‘to be’ (*bu-/bo-εm, -i, -e, -im, -in, -εn*)

Pluperfect subj.: p. p. + *bi*³² + subj. past of ‘to be’: *hedā bi boim* ‘we would have given’ (IX.1)

The progressive formation makes use of the verb *daién* ‘to exist’ as the auxiliary: *dar šuni* ‘you are going’ (XIV.2), *dáie pāre bíc* ‘it was bursting’ (II.3). Note that the main verb always conjugates (in the present or preterit tenses), while the conjugation of the auxiliary is optional.

Modals. The verb *véne/vésse* ‘must, ought to’ is impersonal and is usually followed by the subjunctive of the main verb: *εmā véne vére Mir Hāšem-esse xār hākēnim* ‘we must arrange her for MH’ (I.3), *ve návesse bā^ure* ‘he shouldn’t have said [it]’ (II.10). Another modal is *xā-/xāss-* ‘want’, as in *xāmbi kē^lk-keli dēres hākēnim* ‘we want to make a chicken coop’ (III.3).

³² The past participle of the verb ‘to be’.