

# **A Critical Analysis of Maximilian Bittner's 1913 *Die heiligen Bücher der Jeziden* and the Figure of Sheikh 'Adî**

## **I. Introduction: Contextualizing Bittner's 1913 Publication**

### **A. The Artifact: *Die heiligen Bücher der Jeziden***

The analysis begins with the primary artifact: the title page of Dr. Maximilian Bittner's 1913 publication, *Die heiligen Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter: Nachtrag; Die kurdischen Vorlagen mit einer Schrifttafel* (Image 2).<sup>1</sup> This work was not an independent monograph but a formal paper, a *Denkschrift*, published under the immense institutional authority of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna (*Kaiserl. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*), specifically its "Philosophisch-Historische Klasse".<sup>2</sup>

The author, Dr. Maximilian Bittner, is identified as a corresponding member of this esteemed academy (Image 2). His academic profile confirms his position within the establishment of Austro-Hungarian Orientalism; he was a professor at the University of Vienna and the Consular Academy<sup>7</sup>, specializing in Semitic languages.<sup>8</sup> This context is not merely biographical; it is foundational. Bittner's work was presented not as a traveler's tale or a missionary's report, but as a rigorous, philological treatise emerging from the highest echelons of European scholarship.

### **B. The Academic Milieu: Early 20th-Century Orientalism**

Bittner's publication is a quintessential product of its time, emblematic of early 20th-century European Orientalism. This academic field, as defined in its modern sense from the late 18th century, was dedicated to the study of "Eastern" cultures, languages, and texts.<sup>9</sup> By Bittner's era, it was a mature discipline, complete with dedicated university chairs, international congresses, and learned societies.<sup>10</sup>

This scholarship was overwhelmingly characterized by a "textual-centric" bias. Academic prestige was derived not from ethnography or the study of living traditions, but from the "discovery," translation, and philological deconstruction of ancient texts.<sup>10</sup> This paradigm, heavily influenced by the study of the Abrahamic "Religions of the Book," was deeply ill-equipped to engage with a faith like Yazidism.

The "first period" of Yazidi studies, lasting until the 1970s, was defined by this methodology.<sup>12</sup> Scholars, Bittner among them, were engaged in a "search for 'roots'" <sup>12</sup>, sifting through a "confused medley" of beliefs to find a coherent, textual origin.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the non-textual, oral traditions that constitute the core of authentic Yazidism were systematically dismissed by Western researchers as "inadequate," "confused," and "naïve".<sup>14</sup> This academic environment was not a neutral observer but an active participant in shaping the Western conception of the "Orient," often essentializing it as static, exotic, and in need of Western interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

## C. The Institutional Canonization of Contested Texts

Bittner's 1913 *Denkschrift* was not a simple act of translation; it was a profound act of *canonization*. By publishing these texts under the imprimatur of the *Kaiserl. Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Bittner and the Academy were executing a powerful "authority transfer." The immense institutional prestige of one of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's premier scientific bodies was effectively transferred to the texts themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This act had lasting consequences. For decades, subsequent scholars cited Bittner's academic paper <sup>3</sup> as the definitive, foundational source for the Yazidi "canon." The institutional weight of the Academy laundered what were, in reality, highly dubious and contested materials—which, as later scholarship would demonstrate, were implicated in a known network of manuscript dealers <sup>5</sup>—into "primary sources." Bittner's work, therefore, serves as a primary case study in how the institutional apparatus of Orientalist scholarship could manufacture a "canon" for a non-textual religion, making the texts "academically real" regardless of their questionable origins.

This process was driven by a "textual-centric imperative." Yazidism is a profoundly oral religion, transmitting its beliefs, cosmology, and history through hymns (*qawls*) and spoken narratives.<sup>14</sup> This fact was not just an inconvenience but an *epistemic problem* for 19th and 20th-century European scholarship. Academics who were trained to analyze "scripture" were structurally incapable of valuing, or even properly studying, a tradition "conveyed through oral heritage".<sup>14</sup> The "discovery" of *Bücher* (Books), as advertised on Bittner's title page (Image 2), was celebrated precisely because it *solved* this problem. It forced Yazidism into the familiar, legible, and respectable "People of the Book" paradigm.<sup>5</sup> In this, Bittner's work *created* a textual Yazidism for the West, a "scholarly" construct that conveniently, and destructively, overwrote the authentic, oral one.

## II. Critical Deconstruction of a Title: "Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter"

### A. The Pejorative as Academic Terminology

The full title of Bittner's work, *Die heiligen Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter* (Image 2), is a stark reflection of the academic and cultural biases of his time. The use of the term "Teufelsanbeter" (Devil-Worshippers) is central to this analysis. This designation is, and was, "erroneous"<sup>5</sup>, "deeply offensive" to the Yazidi people<sup>19</sup>, and factually "wrong".<sup>19</sup>

It stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of the Yazidi veneration of Tawûsî Melek, the Peacock Angel. In Yazidi theology, Tawûsî Melek is the leader of the archangels and God's benevolent representative on Earth.<sup>18</sup> Outsiders, primarily from surrounding Muslim communities, long ago associated this complex figure with the Islamic conception of Shaitan (Satan) as a fallen, rebellious angel, leading to the "devil-worshipper" accusation.<sup>19</sup>

This pejorative exonym has a specific genealogy. It was not a neutral descriptive term but a sectarian slur, originating in hostile Islamic *fatwas* (religious edicts) from the 16th to 19th centuries that condemned the Yazidis as heretics and infidels, justifying their persecution.<sup>5</sup> This "sensational epithet" was then enthusiastically adopted by "fascinated Westerners"<sup>19</sup>—travelers, missionaries, and Orientalist scholars—who found in it a thrilling confirmation of an exotic, "othered" Orient.<sup>5</sup> Bittner's academic contemporaries and predecessors were all deeply engaged with this trope, citing it in their own works.<sup>5</sup>

### B. The Orientalist Function of the Title

The most revealing linguistic feature of Bittner's title is the simple German word "oder" (or). The title is not *Die heiligen Bücher der Jeziden, die fälschlicherweise Teufelsanbeter genannt werden* ("The Holy Books of the Yazidis, who are falsely called Devil-Worshippers"). Instead, the "oder" functions as a sign of equivalence. It presents the hostile, pejorative exonym as a *valid academic alternative term*, an objective synonym for "Jeziden." Bittner, as a professional philologist<sup>8</sup>, was making a deliberate choice. He was, in effect, laundering a sectarian slur<sup>5</sup> into a supposedly neutral, academic category, solidifying the misrepresentation within the scholarly record.

This phrasing reveals a fundamental duality at the heart of the Orientalist project. Bittner's title is a microcosm of this contradiction, as it attempts to *both* pathologize *and* civilize its subject simultaneously.

1. **Pathologizing:** The term "Teufelsanbeter" exoticizes the Yazidis, framing them as a

sensational object of study—the "alluring and a threat" that Edward Said described.<sup>9</sup> It renders them "other," a cult practicing "orgiastic rites" as rumored in Kurdistan.<sup>5</sup>

2. **Civilizing:** The term "Die heiligen Bücher" (The Holy Books) does the opposite. It *civilizes* the subject, elevating them from a "primitive" oral cult to a "respectable" textual religion. It attempts to fit them into the "People of the Book" framework, which was the only paradigm Western scholarship truly valued.<sup>5</sup>

Bittner's 1913 work is therefore an attempt to have it both ways. He is fabricating a "Yazidi" that can be both sensational enough to be "exotic" *and* scholarly enough to be the subject of a high academic *Denkschrift*.

## C. The "Jeziden" Eponym Debate

While Bittner's title fixated on the sensational "Teufelsanbeter" epithet, it simultaneously glossed over the genuine and complex debate surrounding the name "Jeziden" (Yazidi) itself. At the time, and continuing into the present, scholarly debate was divided on the eponym's origin.<sup>21</sup>

- One school of thought, now favored by most Western academics, derives the name from the Umayyad Caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiya (d. 683), whom the 'Adawiyya order (the precursor to Yazidism) may have initially revered.<sup>5</sup>
- The other school, often preferred by Yazidis themselves, derives the name from the Old Iranian term *yazata* (or Middle Persian *yazad*), meaning "divine being" or "venerable," thus linking the faith to ancient Iranian religious roots.<sup>19</sup>

This complex etymological and historical question was largely obscured by the much more lurid "devil-worshipper" discourse, which Bittner's title unfortunately chose to foreground.

## III. The "Grosse Heilige": Reconciling the Two Sheikh 'Adîs

### A. The Figure from Image 1

The second artifact, a text fragment reading "( Scheich 'Adî, der grosse Heilige der Jezîdîs. (" — "( Sheikh 'Adi, the great Saint of the Yazidis. (" (Image 1), represents the crystallized Western understanding of the figure in Bittner's era. This fragment, likely a chapter heading or explanatory footnote from a contemporary work<sup>3</sup>, presents Sheikh 'Adi as a simple, static figure: the foundational "Saint" of the religion.

This simple honorific, however, obscures the single most complex, dynamic, and important historical process in the formation of Yazidism: the radical, posthumous transformation of the

historical figure of Sheikh 'Adi. The man who lived and the "Saint" who is venerated are two distinct, though related, personae. Understanding Bittner's work requires a clear delineation of this schism.

## B. The Historical Figure: Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir

The historical record provides a clear, if partial, portrait of the man known as 'Adī ibn Musāfir.

- **Identity:** He was a 12th-century (c. 1070s–1162) Sufi mystic and sheikh.<sup>26</sup>
- **Origin:** He was an Arab from the Beqaa Valley (modern-day Lebanon) and, crucially, of Umayyad descent.<sup>26</sup>
- **Training:** He was not a provincial mystic but a product of high Islamic urban scholarship. He studied orthodox Sunni Sufism (of the Shafi'i school) in Baghdad, the heart of the Abbasid Caliphate, under some of the most prominent teachers of his day.<sup>26</sup>
- **Career:** Seeking an ascetic life, he left the "political and doctrinal rigidity" of Baghdad and settled in the remote, mountainous valley of Lalish, northeast of Mosul.<sup>26</sup> This area was inhabited by Kurdish tribes adhering to local, pre-Islamic traditions.<sup>24</sup>
- **Teachings:** In Lalish, 'Adi's asceticism and reputation for miracles attracted a large following, and he founded the 'Adawiyya Sufi order.<sup>26</sup> His own extant writings show him to be an orthodox Sufi, teaching adherence to the Quran and Sunna.<sup>26</sup>

## C. The Theological Figure: The "Grosse Heilige"

The "great Saint" of the Yazidis (Image 1) is the product of a centuries-long syncretic transformation that occurred after the historical 'Adi's death in 1162. His 'Adawiyya order, isolated in the Kurdish mountains and increasingly populated by local converts, "gradually diverged from mainstream Sunni Islam".<sup>29</sup>

Over generations, the memory of Sheikh 'Adi and his Sufi teachings "gradually merged with the local traditional religious beliefs" of the Kurdish populace.<sup>26</sup> These local beliefs were "non-Islamic" and possessed a "mythology" and "cosmogony" that had "many points in common with those of ancient Iranian" religions.<sup>24</sup>

In this process, the historical man was transfigured. In modern Yazidism, Sheikh 'Adi is not merely a historical saint but a central *theological* figure:

1. **A "Religious Reformer":** He is seen as the figure who shaped and organized the Yazidi faith.<sup>20</sup>
2. **The Founder of the Social Order:** He is credited with establishing the unique Yazidi caste system (of Sheikhs, Pirs, and Murids) that governs the community.<sup>30</sup>
3. **A Divine Being:** Most importantly, he is venerated as an avatar, or emanation, of Tawûsî Melek (the Peacock Angel), and thus an incarnation of the divine mystery itself.<sup>26</sup>

His tomb at Lalish, where the historical man was buried, was transformed from a simple Sufi

zāwiya into the "holiest site in Yazidism" and the focal point for global pilgrimage.<sup>20</sup>

## D. Synthesis and the Hereditary Catalyst

The dissonance between the 12th-century Sunni Sufi and the divine "great Saint" is the key to Yazidi history. A comparative analysis clarifies this profound schism.

**Table 1: The Two Sheikh 'Adīs: A Comparative Analysis**

Attribute	Historical Figure (Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir)	Theological Figure (Êzîdî Saint 'Adî)
Era	12th Century (c. 1070s–1162)	Eternal (divine) / 12th Century (earthly life)
Origin	Arab, Umayyad Lineage <sup>26</sup>	Divine emanation; Avatar of Tawûsî Melek <sup>26</sup>
Affiliation	Sunni (Shafi'i) Sufism <sup>26</sup>	Yazidism (seen as founder/reformer) <sup>20</sup>
Teachings	Based on Quran and Sunna <sup>26</sup>	Syncretic; center of Yazidi mythology <sup>24</sup>
Role	Founder of 'Adawiyya Sufi Order <sup>26</sup>	"The Great Saint" [Image 1], divine avatar, center of pilgrimage <sup>31</sup>

This radical transformation was not accidental. It was catalyzed by a key decision made by the historical 'Adi. Before his death, he named his *nephew*, Sakhr Abu l-Barakat, as his successor.<sup>26</sup> This "decision to keep leadership within his family" <sup>31</sup> was the crucial catalyst. It established a *hereditary* leadership lineage, not a *doctrinal* or merit-based one.

This hereditary structure, combined with the endogamous caste system 'Adi's order established <sup>20</sup>, created a closed social-religious container. This insulation from the outside world allowed the indigenous, pre-Islamic Kurdish beliefs <sup>24</sup> to gradually syncretize with, and ultimately absorb and transform, the founder's original Sufi teachings. The "great Saint" of Image 1 is the theological end-product of this unique social and hereditary structure.

## IV. The "Heiligen Bücher": A Century of Scholarly Debate on Authenticity

### A. The "Discovery" of the Yazidi Canon

The core of Bittner's 1913 publication (Image 2) is its presentation of "Die heiligen Bücher" (The Holy Books) of the Yazidis. These refer to two specific texts: the *Kitab al-Jilwa* (Book of Revelation) and the *Mishefa Reş* (Black Book).<sup>16</sup> The history of their "discovery" is central to a critical analysis of Bittner's work.

For centuries, rumors had abounded of a secret Yazidi holy book.<sup>5</sup> This fascination was driven by the Yazidis' precarious political and social position. As a community surrounded by "People of the Book" (Muslims and Christians), their lack of a "written revelation" was used as a pretext to label them "infidels"<sup>17</sup> and "fit objects for every species of indignity and persecution".<sup>5</sup> The existence of a "book" would have offered a measure of protection.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the "curiosity" of Western and American travelers, missionaries, and scholars created a literal "market for 'Yazidi books'".<sup>5</sup> This market was, by all accounts, "served by members of the local Christian community"<sup>5</sup>, most notably an Assyrian from Ankawa named Jeremiah Shamir, a "known manuscript dealer".<sup>16</sup>

Copies of these purported "holy books" began to circulate. They were first published with great fanfare in 1911 by a Carmelite from Baghdad, Père Anastase Marie de Saint-Élie, who described them as "one of the greatest literary treasures of our century".<sup>5</sup> Bittner's 1913 work, then, is a direct successor to this event. It is the "more full," rigorous, and academic publication and analysis of these same texts, complete with German translation and linguistic notes.<sup>5</sup>

## B. The Scholarly Consensus: Forgery and Fusion

The authenticity of these two books has been "questioned" from the moment they appeared.<sup>16</sup>

- **The Case for Forgery:** The scholarly critique began almost immediately. As early as 1916, the respected Orientalist Alphonse Mingana asserted that all translations published to date (a category that squarely included Bittner's) were "based on inauthentic documents".<sup>16</sup> Modern, critical scholarship largely concurs, with leading scholars in the field labeling the texts, strictly speaking, as "fakes".<sup>5</sup> The arguments against their authenticity are strong: their provenance is tied to a commercial manuscript dealer<sup>16</sup>; their content includes "much material unrecognizable to Yazidis"; and their linguistic dialect is inconsistent with the known oral tradition.<sup>5</sup>
- **The Case for "Fusion":** This "fake" label, however, is not the full story. The texts are not *total* inventions from whole cloth. The scholarly consensus is more nuanced, describing them as a "fusion of authentic Yazidi traditions and beliefs with Western forgeries".<sup>32</sup> Their contents do, at times, "corroborate Yazidi oral tradition"<sup>35</sup> and include "some genuine Yazidi traditions".<sup>5</sup> This "fusion" was likely a necessary component of the forgery's plausibility, designed to be recognizable to any Yazidi who might see it, while being framed in a "book" structure for its Western audience.

## C. The Primacy of the Oral Tradition

The entire debate over Bittner's "Bücher" highlights a central misunderstanding of the Yazidi faith. The 19th and 20th-century obsession with these texts (and their authenticity) obscured the *actual* source of Yazidi religious knowledge. Yazidism is, and has always been, a profoundly oral religion.<sup>18</sup>

Beliefs, cosmology, myths, and rituals have been passed down for centuries "through hymns, storytelling, and poetry".<sup>13</sup> For most of Yazidi history, reading and writing (especially of religious texts) was "forbidden" to the laity, with religious knowledge "transmitted orally by special 'experts'" and a single lineage of sheikhs.<sup>14</sup>

The *true* Yazidi textual tradition is this vast, complex, and sophisticated body of oral literature—the *qawls* (hymns) and *beyts* (verses). The serious, inductive, academic study of this *authentic* oral tradition only began in the post-1978 era (Bittner's "second period"), with the work of Yazidi intellectuals like the Celil brothers<sup>13</sup> and, most definitively in Western scholarship, with the work of philologists like Philip Kreyenbroek in the 1990s.<sup>12</sup>

## D. Synthesis: The Books as "Contact Artifacts"

The century-long scholarly debate over the "holy books" that Bittner published reveals their true nature. The academic pursuit of a simple "authentic" or "inauthentic" binary, as summarized in the table below, is less productive than understanding their origin.

**Table 2: Scholarly Consensus on the *Mishefa Resh* and *Kitab al-Jilwa***

Evidence for Forgery (Scholarly Consensus)	Arguments for Partial Authenticity / Hybridity	Key Figures in the Debate
<b>Provenance:</b> "Discovered" by non-Yazidis. <sup>34</sup> Circulated by commercial manuscript dealers (J. Shamir). <sup>16</sup> Created for a "market" of Westerners. <sup>5</sup>	<b>Content:</b> "Fusion of authentic... traditions". <sup>32</sup> "Corroborate[s] Yazidi oral tradition". <sup>35</sup> Includes "some genuine Yazidi traditions". <sup>5</sup>	<b>P. Anastase Marie:</b> Original publisher (1911), promoter. <sup>5</sup>
<b>Content:</b> "Much material unrecognizable to Yazidis". <sup>5</sup> Philological/dialectal inconsistencies. <sup>5</sup>	<b>Motive:</b> Created to satisfy "People of the Book" paradigm for protection <sup>5</sup> and to meet Western demand. <sup>5</sup>	<b>M. Bittner:</b> Academic publisher (1913), lent scholarly legitimacy. <sup>5</sup>
<b>Context:</b> Contradicts the fundamentally oral nature of Yazidism. <sup>14</sup>		<b>A. Mingana:</b> Early critic/debunker (1916). <sup>5</sup>
		<b>P. Kreyenbroek:</b> Modern scholar; champion of the <i>oral</i>



		tradition. <sup>12</sup>
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The evidence strongly suggests that the "market" was the true "author." The *demand* from "curious Westerners" <sup>5</sup>, rooted in their own textual-centric biases <sup>14</sup>, directly *caused* the *creation* of a supply. Local entrepreneurs <sup>16</sup> fabricated a product to meet this demand. Bittner's 1913 academic treatise was, in this sense, the final stage of a commercial transaction. He served as the unwitting (or, at best, uncritical) high-profile academic consumer, who then used his institutional authority to launder a "fake" <sup>5</sup> into a "primary source".<sup>3</sup> Therefore, to call the books simple "forgeries" is to miss their significance. They are better understood as *contact artifacts*. As the "fusion" <sup>32</sup> of real oral lore <sup>35</sup> and manufactured text, they are a hybrid, born from the violent collision of two mutually uncomprehending worlds: (1) the authentic, esoteric, oral Yazidi tradition <sup>13</sup>, and (2) the rigid, textual, "People of the Book" expectations of Western academics.<sup>5</sup> The forger(s) embedded *real* lore to make them plausible, but they *framed* this lore within a "book" structure <sup>36</sup> that was legible to a Western, Christian-educated audience. Bittner, the philologist, treating them as pure, ancient "Vorlagen" (sources) (Image 2), missed this syncretic, modern origin entirely. He was analyzing the *artifact of contact* as if it were the *source itself*.

## V. Special Focus: The "Schrifttafel" and the "Secret" Yazidi Alphabet

### A. The "Script Table" as Philological Prize

The user's query draws special attention to the "Schrifttafel" (script table) mentioned on Bittner's title page.<sup>1</sup> This element was not an afterthought; it was central to the "discovery" and its academic reception. This "Schrifttafel" was the *other* sensational part of Père Anastase Marie's 1911 publication. Marie had presented a facsimile of the *Kitab al-Jilwa* written in a "previously unknown script".<sup>34</sup> This was the physical "Yezidi alphabet" <sup>34</sup> that had been rumored to exist as a "secret script" <sup>33</sup> to guard the holy books. Marie himself noted that it appeared to be a pastiche, "with particular characters, some of which resemble Arabic, others Hebrew, some Chaldean, and several Mandaite".<sup>34</sup> Like the books themselves, the authenticity of this script was "considered unauthentic by some researchers" from the beginning.<sup>34</sup> Earlier reports, for instance, had dismissed the very notion of a "secret language" among the Yazidis as "without foundation".<sup>34</sup>

### B. The Script as a Tool of Verisimilitude

The "Schrifttafel" was not an incidental part of the 1911/1913 publications; it was *essential* to the forgery's success. The forger(s) brilliantly understood their target audience: European Orientalists and philologists. To successfully sell a "secret book" <sup>33</sup> to a professional Semiticist like Maximilian Bittner <sup>8</sup>, one must also provide a "secret script."

The "Schrifttafel" that Bittner gave equal billing to on his title page (Image 2) served a crucial function. It *explained* the secrecy. It provided a tangible *reason* why these texts had never been seen before. They were "secret" because they were written in a *cipher*. This brilliant move provided a *philological puzzle* for an academic like Bittner to solve, a "script table" to be drawn up and analyzed. This act of scholarly decoding served to distract from the more basic, and unanswerable, questions of the content's provenance. The script was the lock, and the books were the treasure; by presenting both together, the forger made the treasure seem that much more real.

Bittner's publication of the "Schrifttafel" is, in itself, a perfect metaphor for the entire Orientalist project. It is an act of *objectification* and *codification* of a fiction. It takes a living, breathing, esoteric, and oral tradition <sup>14</sup> and "flattens" it into a *cipher* to be *decoded*—a "script table" [Image 2]. This act of decoding, of turning the "mysterious" <sup>21</sup> and "secret" <sup>33</sup> East into a body of data to be cataloged, analyzed, and "known" by the Western academic, is the essence of the Orientalist endeavor.<sup>10</sup> The tragic irony is that the "secret" Bittner so meticulously unveiled was a modern fabrication, while the *true* esoteric oral traditions <sup>13</sup> remained unstudied, unknown, and dismissed as "inadequate".<sup>14</sup>

## VI. Conclusion: The Legacy of Bittner's 1913 Work

### A. A Primary Source for What?

Bittner's 1913 publication <sup>4</sup> is, without question, a foundational text in the field of Yazidi studies. It is not, however, a primary source for the Yazidi religion, as he intended. Rather, it is an invaluable *primary source for the history of early 20th-century Orientalist scholarship*. It perfectly preserves and exemplifies the methodological flaws and inherent biases of its era:

1. **Textual-Centricity:** It demonstrates the field's complete bias against, and misunderstanding of, the primacy of oral traditions.<sup>14</sup>
2. **Sensationalism:** It shows the scholarly acceptance and legitimization of pejorative, sensationalist tropes like "Teufelsanbeter".<sup>5</sup>
3. **Institutional Laundering:** It is a case study in the use of a prestigious academic body (*Kaiserl. Akademie*) to legitimize materials of highly dubious origin.<sup>4</sup>
4. **Market-Driven "Discovery":** It reveals a critical failure to recognize how the academic "market" for texts <sup>5</sup> had, in fact, *created* the very objects of its own study.<sup>16</sup>

## B. The Epistemic Legacy

The ultimate legacy of Bittner's 1913 work is one of inadvertent, but profound, "epistemic violence." By publishing and lending his academic and institutional authority to these "fakes"<sup>5</sup>—texts that were debunked by scholars like Mingana as early as 1916<sup>16</sup> but which nonetheless remained in the academic canon—Bittner helped *create* a false textual tradition. This false canon, reified by its inclusion in a *Denkschrift*, subsequently *obscured* the *authentic* oral traditions of the Yazidis for decades. As the research indicates, the *real* study of Yazidi oral texts did not begin in earnest until the 1970s and 1990s.<sup>12</sup> This means that for *sixty years*, the field of Yazidi studies was, to a large extent, analyzing Bittner's "fusion"<sup>32</sup> rather than the real faith. The "books" became a barrier to understanding, a false canon that made the *real* oral tradition seem "degenerated" or "confused"<sup>14</sup> in comparison. Bittner's work, intended as an act of preservation and "discovery," thus became an act of replacement. It substituted a living, dynamic, oral religion<sup>17</sup> with a static, inauthentic, and fabricated "book"—a classic, if unintentional, maneuver of colonial knowledge-production.<sup>9</sup> The 1913 publication is not a window *into* Yazidism; it is a mirror reflecting the biases and methodologies of the academic world that produced it.

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