

南クルディスタンにおけるカーディリー・スーフィー教団  
比較歴史研究とフィールド調査より

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**The Qādirī Sufi Orders in Iraqi Kurdistan:  
A Comparative-Historical and Contemporary Survey**

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**Abstract:** Drawing on this author's recent field observations conducted in March and November 2025, this paper assesses whether the two characterizations of the Qādiriyya, or the Qādirī Sufi orders, of Southern (or Iraqi) Kurdistan that Martin van Bruinessen's seminal article [2000] on the Qādiriyya and the Qādirī shaykhs among the Kurds identified still hold true. The two characteristics that he had identified were: (1) the Barzanjī families' virtual monopoly, along with the Khālīshī-Ṭālabānīs, on the Qādiriyya in Southern or Iraqi Kurdistan, and (2) the Qādiriyya as practiced in Southern Kurdistan had been conspicuous in their use of percussion instruments during the *dhikr* and their body-piercing practices. This paper finds some qualification regarding the first count. It also finds confirmation as well as an emerging development regarding the second count.

**Keywords:** Qādiriyya, Barzanjī, Kasnazānī, *tekiye*, Kurdistan

## Introduction

It is said that the Qādirī Sufi orders were the most prevalent Sufi orders in Southern Kurdistan (Bāshūr-i Kurdistān) and Hawraman before Mawlānā Khālīd Shahrāzūrī (1193/1779–1242/1827) brought the Mujaddidiyya-Naqshbandiyya from Delhi, India, in 1811 [Algar 2001: 200; 2019: 200–201; see also Bruinessen 2000: 145–146].<sup>1</sup> This predominance, however, was likely not for long. The current scholarship can only trace back to the early eighteenth century when Shaykh Ismā‘īl Wuliyānī (also known as Ismā‘īl Qāzānqā’ī) (1081/1670–1158/1745), a Barzanjī ‘*ālim* from Nuda, or Node (نودی) in Kurdish, near Sulaymaniya and an ascetic trained by his father in the tradition of the Nūrbakhsh and Khalwatī-‘Alawī Sufi orders, went to Baghdad and was initiated by a Qādirī shaykh named Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī [Tavakkoli [1999]2002: 155–156; Bruinessen 2000: 134, 136; cf. Bruinessen 1992: 320]. One account, however, credits his father Muḥammad Nūdahī (d. 1126/1714) for already being a Qādirī shaykh and *murshid* and having initiated his two sons Ismā‘īl and Ḥasan into the Qādiriyya before they went to Baghdad upon his father’s death and received the guidance of Shaykh Aḥsā’ī at the al-Takiya al-Aḥsā’iyya [al-Mudarris 1983: 95, 497–498]. In either of the two accounts, Shaykh Ismā‘īl became Shaykh Aḥsā’ī’s *khalīfa* in Kurdistan. Based on these accounts, the rapid spread of allegiance to a Qādirī *murshid* among the followers of the Barzanjī *silsila*, who had previously been largely of the Nūrbakhshiyya, only appeared to have occurred at the time of Shaykh Ismā‘īl [Soltani 2001: 246], which would be roughly between the early 1720s and the mid-1740s.

This development was significant in two different senses. For one, this marked the first time that the Qādiriyya spread among the Kurdish tribes in Southern Kurdistan, particularly among the Barzanjīs. For another, it gave rise to a Kurdish Qādirī *murshid* who could initiate and license more Kurdish Qādirī shaykhs. It is narrated that Aḥmad Beig Zangane, the Ottoman-Government-appointed ruler (*farmānravā*) of Qaradagh and Sangaw was so impressed with the Shaykh Ismā‘īl upon meeting him and granted him the village of Wuliyān and his brother Ḥasan the village of Golezarde as their land grants (*toyūr*) [al-Mudarris 1983: 95; Soltani 2001: 246]. This timeline would indicate that the Qādiriyya predominance in Southern Kurdistan could have been as short as one hundred years or less. This is not meant to suggest, however, that the Qādiriyya is no longer prominent in Southern or Iraqi Kurdistan. In fact, the Qādiriyya continues to be one of the two dominant Sufi orders in Iraqi Kurdistan along with the Naqshbandiyya. In addition, the initial spread of the Qādirī Sufi orders was unlikely to be limited to the Shahrāzur region, to which the village of Nuda belonged. It is reported that Shaykh Ismā‘īl, in later life, moved to the Badinan region (the current-day Duhok Governorate of Iraq), settling in the village of Gardroy near Aqre [al-Mudarris 1983: 96; Soltani 2001: 246]. He also reportedly passed away in Mosul while

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<sup>1</sup> For a good general discussion of the Qādiriyya, see [Abun-Nasr 2007: 86–96]. In this paper, I use Southern Kurdistan (Bāshūr-i Kurdistān) and Iraqi Kurdistan (Kurdistān-i ‘Irāq) roughly interchangeably.

briefly visiting the town [Soltani 2001: 247]. Soltani, an Iranian historian, also mentions that two separate lines of the ten sons that Shaykh Ismā‘īl had spread the Barzanjī Qādirī Sufi orders from Shahrazur to Iranian Hawraman (Ourāmānāt), or part of the current-day Kermanshah and Kordestan provinces of Iran [Soltani 2001: 246–247; Modarres 1990, 82–83].<sup>2</sup>

As Martin van Bruinessen [2000: 131] noted a quarter century ago in his seminal article on the Qādiriyya and the Qādirī shaykhs among the Kurds, the Qādirī orders in Southern (Iraqi) and Eastern (Iranian) Kurdistan appeared to stand out, in contrast to the Qādiriyya in the other areas of the Islamic world, on two counts. First, the Qādiriyya in the region was “virtually monopolized” by two families, the Barzanjīs and the Ṭālabānīs. The Barzanjī Qādirī orders spread among the Kurds mainly by a geographical expansion of the families of hereditary shaykhs, not rapid appointments of numerous *khalīfas* as the Mujaddidī-Khālīdī-Naqshbandī orders later did upon the return of Mawlānā Khālīd from Delhi a century later [cf. Trimingham 1971: 72–73; Algar 1990: 32; Bruinessen 1992: 224–228; Bruinessen 2000: 145–146; Modarres 1979: 83–86]. Second, Bruinessen [2000: 131] noted that the Qādiriyya as practiced in Kurdistan had been conspicuous in their use of percussion instruments during the *dhikr* and also their practice, although separately, of piercing bodies with sharp objects. As Bruinessen noted, this practice was commonly associated with the Rifā‘iyya, not with the Qādiriyya outside Kurdistan [Bruinessen 1992: 219, 2000: 131; cf. Pinto 2012: 62–63].<sup>3</sup> Bruinessen assessed that, as of his field observations in the 1970s, the Kurdish Qādiriyya represented “a local synthesis of devotional and mystical exercises” [Bruinessen 2000: 131]. This was in line with a more general assessment that Trimingham rendered earlier regarding the seeming harmony under Ottoman rule among what he termed “the official Sunni legalism, the Sufi *tekke* cult, and the Folk cult” [Trimingham 1971: 69]. The goal of this paper is to assess whether these two

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<sup>2</sup> The Barzanjī Qādiriyya is not the only Qādirī orders that exist in Iranian Hawraman today. There are Khālīṣī-Ṭālabānī Qādirī *tekiyes* in Najjar and in Pawah, both of which had been run by the respective families of Khālīṣī-Ṭālabānī *khalīfas*. For the Ṭālabānī Qādirī Shaykhs, see [Bruinessen 2000:139–142; Soltani 2001: 317–327]. For the *tekiyes* in Najjar and Pawah, see [Soltani 2001: 328–334; Naderi 2016]. The Khālīṣī-Ṭālabānī Qādiriyya has been run separately from the Barzanjī Qādiriyya, but Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khālīṣ who set its central *tekiye* in Kirkuk and established his unique branch (*firqalferqe*) of the Qādiriyya, was a former student of Shaykh Ma‘rūf Nudahī, a Barzanjī Qādirī shaykh, who was also a teacher of future Mawlānā Khālīd [Bruinessen 2000: 139–140; al-Mudarris 1983: 398–400; Hosseini and Khezri 2024: 92].

<sup>3</sup> Paul Pinto’s research is interesting not just because it comes from the more recent data that he collected in the field from 1999 to 2010 but also because it relates both to the Rifā‘ī and Qādirī orders in Northern Syria, where some of the Shaykhs and their *murīds* were Kurdish. See [Pinto 2002, 2010a, 2010b, 2016].

characterizations of the Qādiriyya of the Iraqi Kurdistan still hold true, based on this author's recent field observations conducted in March and November 2025.<sup>4</sup>

### Field Observations in Kalakchi, 2025

Kalakchi (کەلەکچی) is a subdistrict (*nāhiye* or *qariya*) of the district (*qazā* or *qadā'*) of Shaykhan, one of the seven districts that compose the Duhok Governorate (*pārezgā* or *muḥāfaẓa*) of Iraq. Duhok is one of the three original governorates under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) along with Erbil and Sulaymaniya.<sup>5</sup> Kalakchi is a relatively small township, with a population of approximately 20,000 residents and located between Duhok and Erbil (Hawler), roughly 90 kilometers away from each of the two larger cities. In terms of tribal affiliations, the majority of Kalakchi residents ascribe themselves to the Goran tribe (*'ashīrat-i Gourān* عەشیرەتی گۆران), a subtribe of the larger Omari (or Omeriyan) tribe which stretches to the western part of Southern Kurdistan from the eastern part of Northern Kurdistan.

#### (i) Seemingly Non-Barzanjī Qādirī Tekiye

As of 2025, there are three *tekiyes* in Kalakchi. In Kurdistan, *tekiye* (تەکیه) refers to the Qādirī Sufī order lodge, or a site for devotional practices, contrasting itself to *khāneqā* (خانەقا) which refers to the Naqshbandī Sufī order counterpart.<sup>6</sup> One of the *tekiyes* in Kalakchi is run by a certain *Khalife* Hasan and is attributed to the Barzanjī Qādiriyya and a second one is a Kasnazānī *tekiye*, which will be discussed below. A third one is hosted inside, or constitutes part of, the mosque called the Sayyid Muḥammad Kalakchi Mosque (مەزگەوتی سەید محمد کەلەکچی). This *tekiye* was until recently headed by al-Shaykh Sayyid Muḥammad Kalakchī, who is dubbed “Shaykh Muḥammad, son of Shaykh Muṣṭafā and a descendant of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Geylānī” (سەید محمد سەید (الگەیلانی مصطفی نەوهی شیخ عبد القادر). While Sayyid Muḥammad still attends, as of 2025,

<sup>4</sup> The author expresses his special thanks to Sohrab Ahmadian and Mostafa Khalili, who accompanied him in these field observations. Additional thanks to Burhan Nadhim who facilitated some of the visits to the Kasnazānī and other Qādirī *tekiyes*.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, although Shaykhan is under the *de facto* control of the KRG, it is part of the disputed territories between the central Government of Iraq in Baghdad and the KRG. Its residents, therefore, do vote in the federal elections of Iraq, but are barred from participating in the regional elections run by the KRG. The central Government considers Shaykhan part of the Ninawa Governorate, which is outside the zone of autonomy awarded by the 2005 Constitution to the KRG. For the background of the disputes, see [Meier 2020]. Since April 2025, Halabja has been recognized as a fourth governorate by the central Government.

<sup>6</sup> In Kurdistan, there are lodges that call themselves simultaneously *tekiye* and *khāneqā*. Upon interrogation, however, it often reveals that those lodges lean toward either the Qādiriyya or the Naqshbandiyya, even if the presiding Shaykhs may claim both are true (حەقی). Regarding the view of Shaykh ‘Uthmān Sirāj al-Dīn Ṭawīla’ī on the importance of the Qādiriyya, see [Hesami-Naqshbandi 2020: 36–37].

most of the devotional practices as well as congregational prayers (نوێژی جه‌ماعه‌ت) that are held at the *tekiye*/mosque, he officially handed over in August 2021 the reign of the “Qādirī *ṭarīqat*, *tekiye*, *khāneqa* and mosque” of the Kalakchi subdistrict (تەریقه‌تی قادری) و ته‌کیاو خانه‌قاو (مزگوتی ناحیه‌ی که‌له‌کچی) to his eldest son, Sayyid Aḥmad [Instagram 2021]. One of his other sons, Sayyid Yūnes, is an established Qurʾan reciter (*qāriʾ*) and he does *adhān* (the call to prayer), recites Qurʾanic verses before the prayers, and sings poems (*qaṣīda-khānī*) during the *dhikr* ceremonies.

Regarding the *silsila* (or *silsile-yi ṭarīqat*) of Shaykh Sayyid Muḥammad, his son and the designated successor Aḥmad recounted as follows:

My father has obtained two *khilāfat* (*khalīfa*-ship). One is *khilāfat-i Barīfkānī* and it leads to Shaykh Nūreddīn Barīfkānī and through him, it reaches Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Geylānī. He also has *khilāfat-i Wuliyānī* through Shaykh Sa‘īd Barzanjī, and this will also reach Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Geylānī. Each of the two *silsilas* reaches him and what is important is that this makes him a Qādirī *khalīfa*.

Shaykh Sa‘īd Barzanjī (d. 1908) was a grandson of Shaykh Kak Aḥmad, who in turn was the son and successor of Shaykh Ma‘rūf Nudahī [cf. al-Mudarris 1983: 572–587], a teacher of Mullā Khālīd Shahrāzūrī (future Mawlānā Khālīd Naqshbandī). Each of these Barzanjī Shaykhs successively headed the Qādirī Sufi order in Sulaymaniya, the capital of the Baban Emirate. And after the fall of the Babans, the Barzanjī Qādirī Shaykhs even became “de facto rulers” of the area [Jordan 2022: 37]. By the time of Shaykh Sa‘īd, Sulaymaniya was incorporated under direct Ottoman rule and his fame led Sultan Abdul Hamid II to invite him to Istanbul. Shaykh Sa‘īd, however, was killed along with his entourage on route to the Ottoman capital, incidentally in Mosul [Rouhani 1992: 598; Barth 1953: 62]. In contrast, Shaykh Nūreddīn Barīfkānī was a Mosul-born and Mosul-based Qādirī shaykh who had received his *ijāza* from Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī al-Moṣulī, another Mosul-born and Mosul-based shaykh [al-Mudarris 1983: 604]. It is interesting to note that neither of these Moṣulī Shaykhs was a Barzanjī in terms of *nasab* (lineage), although they were both Sayyids. Neither Bruinessen [2000: 143] nor Mudarris [al-Mudarris 1983: 604] mentioned whom Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī al-Moṣulī (also known as Shaykh Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Moṣulī al-Khuḍrī)<sup>7</sup> obtained his *ijāza* from. Contemporary sources connected to Mosul, such as Shaykh Mukhlif al-‘Alī al-Qādirī, attribute Shaykh Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Jalīl’s Qādirī *ijāza* to Shaykh Ismā‘īl Wuliyānī Barzanjī [al-Qādirī 2021]. This is also interesting in that this would indicate that in Mosul and the areas surrounding Mosul such as Badinan, there have been Kurdish Qādirī *silsilas* that connect local Shaykhs to

<sup>7</sup> His *nisba* seems to be al-Khuḍrī, not al-Khufri as Bruinessen [2000: 143] mentioned it.

‘Abd al-Qādir Geylānī through Barzanjī Shaykhs but these Mosul-area Shaykhs are themselves non-Barzanjīs in terms of *nasab*.<sup>8</sup>

This also applies to Shaykh Sayyid Muḥammad Kalakchī. His family is locally considered Kurdish and belonging to the local Goran tribe. But the family, both Shaykh Muḥammad himself and his sons, insist that they are a Sayyid family related to Imām Ḥasan. For them, this is an important point in that most of the Kurdish Qādirī Shaykhs, according to them, claim that their lineages trace back to the family of Imam Ḥusayn, not Imām Ḥasan.<sup>9</sup> With this Imām Ḥasan lineage, the Shaykh Sayyid Kalakchī family claim that they are direct descendants of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Geylānī, meaning that they are connected to the presumed founder of the Qādiriyya through both the *silsila* of the *ṭarīqa* and the *nasab* (or *silsila-yi nasabī*).



A ceremony of silent *dhikr*, March 2025. Photo taken by a *murīd* of the Shaykh in the author’s presence.

<sup>8</sup> Whether this is unique to the Mosul among the different regions of Southern Kurdistan awaits further investigation. That both Shaykh Ismā‘īl Wuliyānī and Shaykh Sa‘īd Barzanjī happened to pass away in Mosul may turn out to be related to why they appear in the Moṣuli *silsilas*, in which case the Bruinessen thesis may need to be slightly modified to accommodate this anomaly.

<sup>9</sup> By “most of the Kurdish Qādirī Shaykhs” they may mean the Barzanjī Shaykhs.



Sayyid Muḥammad Kalakchī (second from right) with his sons Yūnes (third from left) and Aḥmad (fourth from left), November 2025. Photo taken by a *murīd* of the Shaykh.

## (ii) Kasnazanī Qādirī Tekiye

A second active Qādirī *tekiye* in Kalakchi is that of the Kasnazānī Qādirī order (*ferqe-yi Qādiriyya-yi Kasnazāniyya*). According to the current *khalīfa*, Khalīfa Zāher, the Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* in Kalakchi was established around 1979. It was prompted by the visit of the Shaykh's *khalīfa* in Erbil (Hawler) to Kalakchi, where there was no Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* until then, in his propagation (*da'wa*) drive in the occasion of Shaykh Muḥammad's ascension to the helm of the Kasnazānī Qādiriyya in 1978. The previous Shaykh, Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm al-Kasnazān presided over the Kasnazānī Qādirī *ferqe* for 39 years from 1939 until his passing in 1978 [Fatoohi 2020: 174]. His son and successor, Shaykh Muḥammad, wanted to renew the commitment of the existing *murīds* to himself and expand the *ferqe*'s reach beyond that of his predecessor's [Jordan 2018: 224]. As the existing scholarship on the *ferqe* has noted, Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm had a substantial following owing to his "sacred powers" [Barth 1953: 85] as well as the "good relations" he cultivated with the Ba'athist state of Iraq [Bruinessen 2000: 138, n26; cf. Jordan 2022: 158–159].

According to *Khalīfa Zāher*, those who joined to start a Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* in Kalakchi in the early 1980s were all young men in the twenties, who did not have much previous engagement with the Qādiriyya. Kalakchi being a township in a rural region, the agricultural workers (*fellāḥān*) are one of the most common occupations in the area and they are also well represented, along with workers of other working-class occupations (or *kreḳārān*), among the *murīds* of the Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* in Kalakchi. Therefore, Barth's observation [Barth 1953: 82] seven decades earlier that the dervish sects in Southern Kurdistan were popular in the rural districts and among the less privileged sections of the population seems to continuously apply with regards to the rural Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiyes* as the one found in Kalakchi.

The size of the *murīds* in the Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* in Kalakchi fluctuated over the years, according to the current and third *khalīfa*, who has served in that position for the last 12 to 14 years. But it mostly kept roughly about at least 60 *murīds*. As the *murīds* who had joined in the 1980s have aged over the years, the median age of the *tekiye*'s *murīds* also increased, now the younger ones had become a minority. In terms of the method of recruitment, only the invitation (*da'wa*), or a "missionary activity" (Jordan 2018, 230), is used for the purpose. Those who participate in the *dhikr* and *samā'* ceremonies, including the singers and percussionist, are all *murīds*.

Regarding the body-piercing or perforation practice (*ḍarb al-sayf*, *ḍarb al-shīsh* and *ḍarbāsha*) previously observed among the *murīds* of the Kasnazānī Qādiriyya in Kurdistan and the Arab part of Iraq (Jordan 2018, 230; 2021, 837-838, 841), *Khalīfa Zāher* told this author that the current Shaykh of the Kasnazānī Qādiriyya, Shaykh Nehro, had banned the practice a couple of years earlier and that therefore they do not perform it any longer. Asked whether the *murīds* in the Kalakchi *tekiye* are content with the Shaykh's decision, the *Khalīfa Zāher* noted that the Shaykh's prohibition is final and it does not matter whether the *murīds* liked performing the practice or not, although he acknowledged that they liked performing it before the ban.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> When this author along with his colleagues visited the Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* in Kalakchi for the second time in November 2025, the *murīds* were constructing their new *tekiye* literally by hand during their after-work hours at night. *Khalīfa Zāher* told us that they had not received any financial help from the the Kasnazāniyya order for the construction or the Shaykh (i.e., Shaykh Nehro).



A spontaneous practice of dervish-style *samā'* at the Kasnazānī Qādirī Tekiye in Kalakchi, March 2025. Photos taken by the author.



A spontaneous practice of *qashida-khānī* at the construction site of a new Kalakchi *tekiye*, November 2025. Photo taken by the author.

The author and his colleagues have also visited the Kasnazānī Qādirī *tekiye* in Sulaymaniya in March 2025 and had an opportunity to sit in a *dhikr* ceremony attended by the current Shaykh, Shaykh Nehro, himself.





*Dhikr* ceremonies at the Kasnazānī Qādirī Tekiye in Sulaymaniya, March 2025, the bottom one with the presence of Shaykh Nehro. Photos taken by Mostafa Khalili.

## Conclusion

In this short paper, I have attempted to assess whether the two characterizations of the Qādiriyya of Iraqī Kurdistan that Martin van Bruinessen's seminal article [Bruinessen 2000] on the Qādiriyya and the Qādirī shaykhs among the Kurds identified still hold true, drawing on this author's recent field observations conducted in March and November 2025. The two characteristics that he had identified were: (1) the Barzanjī families' virtual monopoly, along with the Khālīshī-Ṭālabānīs, on the Qādiriyya in Southern or Iraqī Kurdistan, and (2) the Qādiriyya as practiced in Southern Kurdistan had been conspicuous in their use of percussion instruments during the *dhikr* and their body-piercing practices.

On the first count, the author has found that although connections to the Barzanjī Qādirī Shaykhs in the *silsila* of Ismā'īl Wuliyānī are indeed indispensable in the Qādirī sufi orders in Iraqī Kurdistan today, save for the Qādiriyya connected to the Kirkuk-based Khālīshī-Ṭālabānī Shaykhs. One qualification, however, may be made as to those Qādirī Shaykhs in the *silsila* of Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī al-Moṣulī. Even though Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī places himself in the *silsila* of Shaykh Ismā'īl Wuliyānī Barzanjī, neither he himself nor his well-known successor, Shaykh Nūreddīn Barīfkānī, was a Barzanjī in terms of *nasab* (lineage). And the Qādirī Shaykh this author has visited in Kalakchi also shared this characteristic. Whether this seeming expansion of non-Barzanjī Qādirī shaykhs is limited to Mosul and the Badinan region is yet to be determined. However, at least, in the western part of Southern Kurdistan, the expansion of the Qādiriyya did not occur through the migration of Barzanjī shaykhs; rather it expanded through the appointment of a new *khalīfa* (who would start acting as a hereditary shaykh himself), by and among non-Barzanjī Qādirī shaykhs in the area (or so it appears).

On the second count, the use of percussion instruments and the dervish style *samāʿ* during the *dhikr* ceremonies are still widely observed among different Qādirī *tekiyes* in Southern Kurdistan. Regarding the body-piercing and perforation practice, a new trend may be emerging after the ban of the practice by the new Shaykh of the Kasnazānī Qādiriyya, Shaykh Nehro, who took the helm of the order in 2020 when his father, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Kasnazān, passed away. The Kasnazānī Qādiriyya appears to attract many, if not the most, *murīds* in the Barzanjī side of the Kurdish Qādiriyya today, although whether and how its practices may undergo change under the tutelage of the new Shaykh remains to be seen.

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