



Çıla / Çıra in Raa Haqi Belief and Folklore

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Summary

This entry examines the place of the light source known as çıla or çıra in Raa Haqi belief and folklore, focusing on the relationship between worship practices and the body, the senses, affect, and emotions. Used in religious ceremonies in place of a candle, the çıra is made from oil-soaked cloth or beeswax. It is regarded as the visible sign of the connection between Na Dina and A Dina, as the divine light of Haq, and as a guide that shows human beings the way. Yet the çıra is not merely an object symbolising a belief. When lit, its light, the scent of beeswax or oil-soaked cloth, and the warmth of its flame transform the place of worship into a distinctive atmosphere perceived through the body. The meaning of the çıra is explained through a creation narrative in which Gabriel, in a world engulfed by the flood, first perceives a faint light and then the scent of divine power spreading with it. Gabriel's intoxication by the scent and his vision of the weeping Ana Fatma within the light convey that sacred knowledge is first experienced through sight, smell, and affect. Ana Fatma's appearance with a red crown, a green medallion, and a red earring is linked to the future deaths of Ali, Hasan, and Hüseyin, connecting the light of the çıra with the memory of Karbala and mourning. The çıra is lit in homes every Thursday evening, as well as during Cems, visits to sacred places, sacrificial ceremonies, cemetery visits, niyaz offerings, and the presentation of çıralık. A çıra lit at home enables people to participate from afar in the Cem of the Forty and the saints, believed to assemble at Qelxer. During the Cem, individuals light their çıras and assume a bodily posture of prayer; after the prayer, the separately offered lights are carried to join the other flames. Individual intentions thus find a place within a shared field of light and a collective sense of community. During the Cem, the çıra combines with bodily posture, prayer, the sounds of the tanbur and the human voice, the taste of the lokma, and the coordinated movement of the congregation. The çıra is therefore not merely a practice that speaks of the presence of the sacred; through light, scent, warmth, sound, taste, movement, and shared feeling, it renders that presence perceptible within the body.

Keywords: aa Haqi, Ana Fatma, beden, body, Cem, çıla, çıra, divine light, Donnerstag, Duft, Duft der göttlichen Kraft, duygu, duyular, emotion, Gefühl, göttliches Licht, ılık, koku, Körper, kudret kokusu, Licht, light, nur, perşembe, Raa Haqi, scent, scent of divine power, senses, Sinne, Thursday

Light, Scent, and the Connection between Worlds [1]

Çıla or *çıra* is the name given to an oil-soaked cloth used in religious ceremonies in place of a candle; it may also be made from beeswax. Holding a special place in spiritual life, the *çıra* is regarded as a symbolic connection between *Na Dina* (Zahir) and *A Dina* (Haq Dina/Batın). It is perceived as Haq's divine light and illumination and serves as a guide that shows people the way in darkness. Its use in *Cems*, at sacred places, on Thursday evenings, during sacrificial ceremonies, in cemeteries, and in various prayer practices demonstrates that the light of the *çıra* is not confined to one particular sphere of religious life (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Lighting a *çıra* does more than illuminate a dark space. The visible flame, the light spreading through the surroundings, the scent of the oil-soaked cloth or beeswax, and the warmth felt near the fire alter the sensory qualities of the space. In front of the *çıra*, the worshipper adopts a bodily orientation involving sight, smell, and touch. The atmosphere created by the *çıra* transforms an everyday setting into a place set apart for worship while bringing the participants' attention, silence, memories, and emotions into a shared focus. The *çıra* is therefore not simply a sign representing the sacred, but a medium through which the presence of the sacred becomes perceptible in the body and in space (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2006, 4-37).

The Faint Light Seen by Gabriel

The narrative explaining the meaning of the *çıra* begins at a time when "earth, water, and sky were engulfed by the flood". Haq sends the angel Gabriel into the world and asks him to find out whether he can see anything. Gabriel wanders between earth and sky for seven years, but returns to *Haq Dina* without having seen anything. When Haq tells him to go a second time, he returns to the world and continues wandering between earth and sky. Just as he loses all hope of seeing anything, he notices a faint light in the middle of the waters (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Gezik 2009,

4-34).

As Gabriel approaches the light, he sees it grow increasingly bright. Eventually, he realises that it is emanating from a long, glass-like space. Yet light is not the only thing he perceives: a scent also spreads from the same place, and Gabriel becomes intoxicated by it. The first sign of sacred presence thus emerges through sight; as he draws nearer, the light intensifies, and the bodily effect of the scent deepens the experience. Gabriel does not yet understand the meaning of what he has seen, but through light and scent he senses the existence of a realm distinct from the ordinary world (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

The sequence of the narrative demonstrates that sacred knowledge is not acquired through verbal explanation alone. Gabriel first sees the faint light, then moves towards it, witnesses it growing brighter, breathes in the scent spreading from it, and becomes intoxicated under its influence. Only after returning to Haq is the meaning of what he has witnessed explained to him. Sensory encounter precedes knowledge: sight, smell, approach, and wonder prepare the way for understanding sacred meaning. In accordance with this narrative, the practice of lighting the *çıra* likewise transforms the relationship with the sacred into a bodily and sensory encounter.

Ana Fatma, Colours, and Mourning

As Gabriel is about to leave the place from which the light emanates, a weeping figure appears within it. She wears a red crown on her head, a red earring in her ear, and a green medallion around her neck. Astonished by what he has seen, Gabriel returns to *Haq Dina* and asks what these things mean. Haq explains that the light is his own divine light, which appears when a person has lost hope, and that the scent spreading from it is the scent of divine power. He tells Gabriel that the weeping figure is Ana Fatma (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

The red crown on Ana Fatma's head represents her husband Ali, who will be martyred; the green medallion around her neck represents her son Hasan, who will be poisoned; and the red earring in her ear represents her son Hüseyin, who will be killed at Karbala. Ana Fatma weeps over these future losses. Colours, tears, astonishment, and mourning are thus added to the light and scent of the narrative. Sacred light thereby becomes connected not only with illumination and hope but also with the pain and memory associated with the losses of the Ahl al-Bayt. Within a single narrative, the light of the *çıra* carries both the sense of guidance that appears at the moment of greatest despair and the grief that recalls losses past and yet to come (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

In this respect, the *çıra* creates a setting of worship in which different emotions can coexist. While the brightness of the flame reinforces feelings of hope and protection, Ana Fatma's tears keep alive the collective memory associated with the deaths of Ali, Hasan, and Hüseyin. The red and green colours, the apparition within the light, and the scent of divine power bring historical figures and sacred narrative into the setting of worship not only as ideas, but also through visual and olfactory associations.

Beeswax and the Scent of Divine Power

In *Raa Haqi* narratives, *bala*, or honey, is regarded as a *lokma* of divine power and is believed to have come from paradise. Selling honey is therefore considered sinful; it should instead be given to those in need, especially older and ill people. The *çıra* may also be made from beeswax, the purpose of which is explained as releasing the scent of divine power. The taste of honey, the scent of beeswax, and the light of the *çıra* become manifestations of the same sacred source perceived through different senses (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

When a beeswax *çıra* is lit, the scent of divine power described in the narrative becomes perceptible once more within the ritual space. Scent provides one means of bodily

perceiving a sacred presence that cannot be seen or touched. As the scent spreads through the space, participants breathe the same air and share the setting of worship as a common bodily experience. While the light of the *çıra* draws their gazes towards a common point, the scent envelops the entire space without remaining bound to any particular direction. The mystical atmosphere created by the *çıra* is thus established through the simultaneous diffusion of light and scent.

Thursday Evening and Participation in the Cem of the Forty

The *çıra* is lit in homes every Thursday evening, and prayers are recited before it. *Pancseme* or *Pencşemi* is the day on which *Cems* are concluded, fasts are broken, and saints are believed to gather at sacred places. On Thursday evening, the area in front of the household hearth is swept and cleaned, and a fire is lit. Lighting the *çıra* at home combines with cleaning, preparing food, praying, and gathering family members in the same space to form a weekly rhythm of worship (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

The Forty and the saints are believed to hold a *Cem* known as *Cemê Qelxeru* every Thursday on Mount Qelxer in Mazgirt. By lighting a *çıra* and praying in their own homes, people participate in this *Cem*. Through the small flame at home, a person who is not physically present at Qelxer thus establishes a simultaneous connection with the unseen *Cem*. In this context, the *çıra* is not merely a symbol explaining the relationship between *Na Dina* and *A Dina*, but a ritual medium connecting distant places, the living with the saints, and domestic worship with the sacred mountain (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

The Body, the Senses, and the Shared Atmosphere of the Cem

Those attending the *Cem* bring *niyaz* and a *çıra* with them. Upon reaching the place of the ceremony, the *çıra* is lit first,

after which a prayer is received for the *niyaz*. Those about to receive the prayer place the big toe of the right foot over that of the left, bend slightly forwards, and assume the *pençeyi divan* posture. When the *pir* or dervish calls out “*Himet kere*”, the congregation responds, “*Himet Haq ra*”. Once the prayer has ended, the burning *çıra* is carried to join the other lights, and those who have received the prayer take their places among the congregation (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2006, 4-37).

In this practice, the *çıra* connects a person’s individual *niyaz* with the community’s shared worship. Placing the separately brought *çıras* side by side gathers individual intentions within a common field of light. Bodily posture, the bowing of the head, the exchange of words between the *pir* and the congregation, the sound of the *tanbur*, the hearing of *Kılamê Haqiye*, *beyit*, or *deyiş*, the movements of the *semah*, the warmth of the fire, and the taste of the *lokma* shared at the end of the ceremony all form parts of the same experience of worship. The light of the *çıra* constitutes one of the visual and olfactory centres of this multisensory setting.

In the state known as *tewt*, described as the culmination of the *Cem*, the *pir* or dervish is believed to bring news from the *botın*. Narratives of miracles in which dervishes approach the fire, touch glowing embers to their bodies, or immerse their hands in boiling water present a more intense manifestation of the relationship that worship establishes with the body and the senses. The measured light of the *çıra* flame and the miracles involving fire during the *Cem* reflect different levels of the same understanding of sacred fire. Here, fire is both a material element that illuminates and warms and a power through which a person’s relationship with sacred beings is tested in bodily form (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2006, 4-37).

Distress, Sacred Places (Jiare), and Relations with the Dead

People in distress light a *çıra* and pray. The explanation of

the *çıra* in the Gabriel narrative as a divine light appearing when all hope is lost gives special meaning to its use in times of hardship. As the person voices a request before the flame, the visible light and the spreading scent become enduring material signs of the prayer within the space. For as long as the flame continues to burn, the prayer assumes a visible and perceptible presence (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

A *çıra* is also lit during visits to sacred places, animal sacrifices, and cemetery visits. At *jiars*, the burning *çıra* makes visible the relationship between the natural setting, the saint, and the visitor. In practices concerning the dead, the belief that scent can reach *A Dina* is also important: the aroma of food offered for the benefit of the deceased is believed to pass through the gate of the hereafter. The scent of divine power released by the *çıra* and the aroma of food offered for the dead demonstrate that scent is understood as an element capable of establishing a relationship between the living and the unseen world (Gezik and Çakmak 2010; Çakmak 2007, 59-71).

The *çıra* is also lit when an annual contribution is presented to the *pir* and when *çıralık* is given. In this context, light sanctifies not only individual prayer or the relationship with unseen beings, but also the bond of service and reciprocity between the *pir* and the *talip*. Presenting *niyaz*, *lokma*, and material contributions in the presence of the *çıra* brings light, prayer, labour, sharing, and social relations together within the same ritual framework (Gezik and Çakmak 2010).

Conclusion

In *Raa Haqi* belief and folklore, the *çıra* is neither a simple source of illumination nor merely a symbol representing sacred light. When a *çıra* made from oil-soaked cloth or beeswax is lit, the resulting light, scent, and warmth transform the place of worship into an emotionally charged environment perceived through the body. Gabriel's first sight of the faint light, his subsequent intoxication by the scent of divine power, and his encounter with the weeping

Ana Fatma within the light demonstrate how sacred meaning is revealed through the senses and affect. The *çıra* connects homes on Thursday evenings to the unseen *Cem* at Qelxer, visitors to saints, the living to the dead, *talips* to the *pir*, and individual intentions to the congregation. During the *Cem*, it combines with bodily posture, prayer, music, movement, fire, and *lokma* to create a multisensory setting of worship. The *çıra* thus does more than make Haq's divine light visible; through the scent of divine power, the warmth of the flame, shared voices, bodily movements, and collective emotions, it makes the presence of the sacred perceptible.

Endnotes

[1] This entry has been adapted to an encyclopaedia format on the basis of the entry "Çıla / Çıra" in Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak's *Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi / Dersim Aleviliği İnanç Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi: A Dictionary of Terms Relating to Dersim Alevi Belief), together with supplementary information from the entries "Adır / Ağır", "Cebrail / Cıvrayıl", "Ana Fatma", "Cem / Cevat", "Çewres / Çel", "Pancseme / Pencsemi", "Qelxer / Çel Mirow", "Jiar / Ziyaret", "Niaz / Niaz (Riza)", "Loqme / Lomey Xızırı", "Samiya Merdu / Xarina Mırinan", and "Çıralıxe".

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