

“Lord of the Iron Bow”: The Return Pattern Motif in the Fifteenth-century Baloch Epic *Hero Šey Murīd*

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Background

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are considered to be the heroic age of Balochistan and the classical period of Balochi literature. It was in the fifteenth century that the powerful Rind and Lāšār tribes, alongside a large number of other Baloch tribes, migrated from western Makran (now in Iran), conquering other Baloch tribes on their way. Their realm stretched to Sībī and Dāḍar in the eastern fringes of the present-day Pakistani Balochistan and formed the first unified Baloch confederacy (Qizalbāš 1979:19). Mīr Čākar Khān Rind, who ruled from his capital at Sībī from 1487 to 1511 (Harrison 1981:12) was nominated as “the Great Chief” of the Baloch confederacy and the chief of all the Baloches (Baluch 1965:121; Hetu Ram 1898:105; cf. Rzehak 1998:164).¹ Tradition holds that Mīr Bibagr Rind, Mīr Čākar’s nephew, gave the name Balochistan (lit. “country of the Baloch”) to the newly unified country (Badalkhan 1992:37, n. 23).² Chakarian Balochistan was composed of the presently Iranian and Pakistani Balochistans as well as a great chunk of Afghani Balochistan.³ Legend has it that under Mīr Čākar Rind the city of Sībī, then the capital of Balochistan,

¹ Mīr is an honorific title meaning “chief” or “leader.”

² Baloch (1983:188) traces the first use of the name Balochistan to the fourteenth century.

³ Balochistan presently lies within the borders of Iran (in the east), Pakistan (in the west), and Afghanistan (in the southwest). Its natural boundaries comprise the southeastern quadrant of the Iranian plateau from the Kirman desert east of Bam and the Bashagird mountains to the western borders of Sind and the Punjab (Frye 1960:1005). Its southern borders stretch from Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf to Sind, and the northern lines mark the delta of the Helmand River in Sistan up to south of Qandahar in Afghanistan (for details see Baloch 1987:19-21; Redaelli 1997:25-27; Harrison 1981:1-2; Spooner 1983:95-96 and 1989:599; Konieczny 1979:11). During the Chakarian period this whole region was more or less under the direct rule of the Baloch.

reached the height of its grandeur and attracted Baloch tribes from all corners of Balochistan. The population of Sībī, now a town of only several thousand souls, exceeded 100,000 (cf. Harrison 1980:13; Matheson 1967:9; Baluch 1958:171) and another 10,000 *rāpčis*—musicians, singers, storytellers, and cup-bearers—entertained the nobility and the masses (cf. Matheson 1967:9; Baluch 1958:170-171 and 1965:124).

Balochi oral tradition describes the Chakarian age as the age of heroism and gallantry when every Baloch young man of noble birth was expected to be an archer, a horse-rider, and a swordsman, as well as have at least one lover—generally these were women of low social class and usually of non-Baloch origin such as the Jatts and Dombs (Nasīr 1976:31; cf. Nasīr 1979a:228-29; M. K. Marī 1991:53, 80; Badalkhan 2002a:303). Noble sons were also believed to be well-versed in traditional Balochi poetry and were expected to compose their own poems, for the intelligence of a Baloch was also judged by his command of the art of poetry.⁴ They would play a musical instrument—preferably a reed-pipe (flute), since it is the instrument of an upper-class Baloch and all other musical instruments were played exclusively by musicians of a lower social class. This age produced some of the finest oral poems and epic cycles in Balochi oral poetry, poems that have been transmitted from generation to generation by a class of professional minstrels and common Baloches with no help of the written word.

The Legend of Šey Murīd

This age also produced the legend of Šey Murīd, the topic of the present discussion. The oral tradition recounts that Šey Murīd, son of Šey Mubārak, the chief of the Kahīrī tribe (Baluch 1977:244; cf. Qizalbāš 1979:19), was the chief companion of Mīr Čākar Khān Rind.⁵ Mīr Čākar

⁴ Baloch intellectuals generally believe that the thirty-year fratricidal war between the powerful tribes of the Rind and the Lāšār, which started because a band of youths from the latter tribe slaughtered the baby camels of a widow refugee of the former tribe, gave the first mortal blow to the sovereignty of the Baloch in Balochistan. This incident ignited a series of battles that completely undermined Baloch national strength. Nasīr writes that prior to this fratricidal war, Baloch nobles of the Chakarian Age lived a life of comfort and ease, unaware of the common problems of day-to-day life (1976:75).

⁵ On one occasion Murīd addresses his father as “the king of the Kahīris of Chatur” (Baluch 1977:290). However, some other traditions record Šey Murīd’s father as Mīr Mubārak Rind (Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 313), and say that he belonged to the Rind tribe, the tribe whose chief was Mīr Čākar, but the majority of the oral sources attribute them to the Kahīrī tribe.

and Šey Murīd were inseparable companions, hunting by day and enjoying gatherings of music, singing, and drinking at Mīr Čākar's palace by night. Baluch writes that Murīd was famous as having "mastered the art of swordmanship, horsemanship, and arrow-shooting. His bow made of steel was so heavy that he was known as the owner of the "Iron bow," because none but he alone could draw and shoot arrows from it" (Baluch 1977:244). The legend is that one day when Mīr Čākar and Šey Murīd are returning from a day of hunting they stop at the town where their fiancées live. Since a Baloch fiancée never appears before her betrothed, Mīr Čākar and Šey Murīd decide to visit each others' fiancées. Šey Murīd goes to Mīr Čākar's fiancée, who brings him clean water in a silver bowl. Murīd, dying of thirst, drinks the entire bowl in a single gulp and becomes sick. However, when Mīr Čākar goes to Šey Murīd's fiancée Hānī, the daughter of the Rind noble Mīr Mandaw, she brings him clean water in a silver bowl in which she has placed dwarf palm leaf, properly washed.⁶ The Chief is surprised by the pieces of straw, but he drinks the water with care in order to avoid swallowing the straw (Šād 2000:446-47). When he leaves Hānī he finds Murīd vomiting and sick. Murīd tells him that the water has made him ill because he drank a lot of water on an empty stomach. Now Mīr Čākar realizes that Hānī had acted wisely by putting pieces of straw into the water. Captivated by her intelligence and enchanted by her unmatched beauty, he makes up his mind then and there to employ any means to have her as a wife.

Some time later, Mīr Čākar organizes a party where everyone grows drunk while musicians play music and sing heroic songs. At the height of the drinking and music-playing, Mīr Čākar asks the nobles to make vows on which they must pledge their lives (Nasīr 1976:75).⁷ Every chief at the

Al-Qādrī writes that Murīd was recruited as a soldier in the army of Mīr Čākar Khān Rind (1976:156).

⁶ Dames 1907:I, 54; Z. S. Baloč 1965:179, n. 3; Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 314; Baluch 1977:244. Qizalbāš (1979:20) writes that Hānī was Murīd's cousin. In some versions her father's name is reported as Dīnār (Šād 2000:440 ff.; Farīdī 1983:55), as well as Sardār Dīnār (Rooman 1967:13), but the majority of the sources report Mīr Mandaw as the name of Hānī's father.

⁷ *Rindānī kawl* ("vows of the Rinds") are very famous in Balochi oral tradition and have remained proverbial to this date. Each one of them is also the subject of one or more poems and there is hardly any Baloch of a certain age who does not know about any of these *kawls* (cf. Dames 1907:26 ff.; Elfenbein 1990:I, 354-65; Badalkhan 1994:185-86; Š. Marī 1970:4 ff.; Farīdī 1983:42 ff.; H. Marī 1987:233; Nasīr 1976:75-92; Baluch

gathering makes a vow. Mīr Jāḍo swears that he will chop off the head of anyone who touches his beard at the assembly of nobles. Then Bibarg vows that he will kill anyone who kills Hādeh. He is followed by Mīr Haibitān who vows that if anybody's camel joins his camel-herd he will never give it back. At last, comes the turn of Šey Murīd, who, "striving to outdo all the rest . . . swore that if anyone came to him in supplication, he would grant anything he wished" (Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 313).⁸ Later on, Mīr Čākar tests Mīr Jāḍo's word by asking his maidservant to put his baby son upon his lap. When the son is placed in his lap he grabs his father's beard. Full of wrath, Jāḍo unsheathes his sword and smites the head of his milk-sucking baby in the presence of all the Rind nobles (cf. Baluch 1977:314-15; Š. Marī 1970, Dames 1907:27; Qizalbāš 1979:22). Mīr Čākar also tests Bībagr and Haibitān, finding them true to their word.

Now it comes time to test Šey Murīd. Murīd hosts a festive gathering and invites renowned musicians to entertain the audience. The musicians play to the best of their art "and at the close of the function, Sheh Murīd, dead drunk, in an ecstatic mood avowed to bestow whatever they demanded" (Baluch 1977:246). The musicians, in accordance with a premeditated plan conceived by Mīr Čākar, ask him to renounce his engagement to Hānī.⁹ The unexpected demand distresses his heart and he

1977:246, 314, 319; Qizalbāš 1979:20; Al-Qādrī 1976:128-30, 156; Gimmī 1961:48; Šād 2000:110-14; Šāwānī 1996:40-47).

⁸ Mīr Čākar is noted to have also made a vow: *Rindān kawl kutag dīwwānā / yakke Čākar-i Šeyhakkā / ikrār int manā tān zindā / drogā man na bandān wassā* ("The Rinds made vows in the assembly / one [among them] was Čākar son of Šeyhak, / [he vowed:] 'it is my vow that as long as I live, / I will not lie intentionally'"; Badalkhan 1991, I:246; cf. Elfenbein 1990, II:360-61).

As with the rest of Balochi oral literature, no full-scale collection of the available material about the legend of Šey Murīd and Hānī has been undertaken so far. I have carried out several tours to different parts of Balochistan and collected as much material as possible, but my collection is far from exhaustive. However, different episodes are given in different sources and, as such, one may find one episode in one source but another in another source; no attempts have been made to compile them into a single volume. Only recently, Šād (2000:440-511) has published 16 poems related to this romance, but a number of episodes are still missing in his collection. Here I have also quoted from my field notes, sometimes without page numbers because they still need to be organized systematically.

⁹ H. Marī (1987:127-28) records that Mīr Čākar himself asks Murīd to denounce his engagement with Hānī, but the majority relates the legend as mentioned above. The romance of Hānī and Šey Murīd is one of the most famous legends in Balochi oral tradition. Almost every Baloch, as I can affirm from personal experience as a local

replies in this way (Badalkhan 1991:II, 146):

<i>Šeyhā jawāb gardentag at man Hānīā dāt nabān</i>	The Šey replied [thus], “I cannot break my engagement with Hānī, ¹⁰
<i>manī dištāriey nāme pir int</i>	She takes the name of being betrothed to me,
<i>manī nākoey sawlen duttuk int šumā loṭit mani myāney luṛā</i>	She is the grown-up daughter of my uncle, You should ask me for the sword of my loin as a reward,
<i>dastey du-gošen hanjarā</i>	Ask for the double-edged dagger of my hand,
<i>misri kamān gon jāboā borā gon rakšey kurragā</i>	The Egyptian bow with the quiver, Accept my [riding] mare with the stallion colt,
<i>zeney hazāri markabā</i>	Ask for my riding horse with the saddle worth thousands,
<i>pākeḍa u pull u taḍān</i>	[The riding camel] with its saddle, flowers and ornaments,
<i>guḍa Šey dādinān band nabīt</i>	Then [you will see that] Šey will not hesitate to give rewards,
<i>bali mihr dādinī šeyhe na int.</i>	But love is not something one can give as a reward.”

But the musicians will not accept any gift except for the announcement of the annulment of his engagement with Hānī. They begin mocking him, saying that he is not accustomed to giving gifts and that Mīr

scholar and as a student of oral traditions, remembers some poems or fragments of poems from this legend. Similarly, there is hardly any work on Balochi oral poetry with no mention of the story (see for example, Dames 1907, poem no. XXII; Baluch 1977:244-99; Šād 2000:440-511; Nasīr 1976:93-136; H. Marī 1987:125-66; Hetu Ram 1898:145-46 [the translator has wrongly taken the name Murīd as a word and translated it “attendant”]; Š. M. Marī 2000:101; Hāšmī 1986:73; Qizalbāš 1979:18-28). Breseeg (2001:56) reports that even in Sind, where Baloch have lost their language and speak Sindhi, they sing songs from the cycle of Murīd and Hānī at their wedding celebrations and on other festive occasions. Modern poets also draw on the accounts of Murid, comparing his suffering for his beloved Hānī with their sufferings for their motherland, Balochistan. In this latter case, Nasīr has composed some touching poems comparing his suffering with that of Murīd’s for Hānī. Minstrels from all over Balochistan sing poems from this cycle with great passion, dedication, and veneration. It is always fascinating to be among the audience at such a public performance. It is a pity that the written word, and above all the translation into a second language, cannot convey some of the epic’s passion and musicality.

¹⁰ Lit., “I cannot give Hānī.”

Čākar, the great chief, is the only one worthy of this deed (Badalkhan 1991:II, 146).

<i>pahlawān jawāb gardentag at</i>	The minstrel responded as such:
<i>Šeyhen Murīd gošān bidār</i>	“Šey Murīd, keep your ears attentively open,
<i>taw dādinī marde naey</i>	You are not a man of bestowing gifts,
<i>dādān hamā mard dayant</i>	Only those men give gifts
<i>piren pitān dād dātag ant</i>	Whose ancestors (lit. aged fathers) have given gifts,
<i>dādānī laik Čākar int</i>	[Only] Čākar is worthy of bestowing gifts,
<i>Rindey kawīhen mastir int</i>	Who is the mighty chief of the Rinds,
<i>Sībī kalātey wāja int</i>	[And] is the master of the Sībī fort.”

Now Murīd realizes that he has lost the bet; if he does not keep his vow he will be mocked and future generations will have contempt for his name. So he then and there announces the end of his engagement with Hānī. The poet continues (Badalkhan 1991:II, 147):¹¹

<i>nīn Šeyhā hayāl kut mān dilā</i>	Now Šey thought in his heart,
<i>parčā watī labzā warān</i>	Why should I break [lit. eat, deviate from] my word,
<i>kawmā dap o nāmī bibān,</i>	And become ill-famed among my people?
<i>šartā wa zānān burt manā</i>	I know that I have lost the bet,
<i>drogband bān gon Čākarā</i>	[Why should] I become a liar with Čākar?
<i>Hānī na dīstag čonen kase</i>	I have not seen Hānī and don't know what she looks like.
<i>naey sabzale naey gorage</i>	She is [probably] neither a bronzed one nor a blonde one, ¹²
<i>balken čo mulkey mardume</i>	Maybe she is like any other person of the country,
<i>bāndā manā maṭṭe rasīt</i>	Soon [lit. tomorrow] I will find an equal to her.

Thinking along these lines, he tells the minstrels (Badalkhan 1991:II, 147; cf. Qizalbāš 1979:22):

<i>Hānī manī dašt dar int</i>	“Hānī is beyond my power,
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¹¹ The majority of singers from Makran dramatize this episode so that the audiences laugh at the musician's mockery of Šey Murīd.

¹² That is, of a fair complexion.

dištārīey nāme pīr int She is only nominated as being betrothed
to me,
justā ča ā mātā kanit Ask [for her from] her mother,
mātā u ārīpen pitā From her mother and her venerated
father.”

But when the news is taken to Hānī she rebukes Murīd (Badalkhan 1991:I, 38; cf. Elfenbein 1990:II, 378-79):¹³

tām mard waθī loyī kasān “Who is the man who gives away the
persons of his house,
lozey amullen bānukhān The precious ladies of his house?
baškī awā kassāna dān [One] gives as gifts to persons
borā yon tāsen dorawān His mare with silver stirrups,
jāney amīrī walḍahān The lordly clothes of his body,
par baškayā mard dayān Men give such things as gifts.
tām mard waθī māhen janān Who is the man, who his moon-like
ladies
baškī hawā kassāna dān Gives as gifts to men?
lajj baškayī čīe na int Honor [i.e., of women of a house/family]
is not a thing to be given as a gift.”

And she further rebukes him saying:¹⁴

“O Murīd, taw dīst ki lāngaw “O Murīd, when you saw that minstrels
pa drohe atkag ant had come with a plan,
ki Mīr Čākarā parmātag ant That Mīr Čākar had instigated them,
labb u malāme dātag ant [He had] given them gifts and
compensations,
ki atkān taī kulley dapā When they had come in front of your
house,
watī čang u rabābe sāz kutān When they had tuned their musical
instruments [lit. harps and lutes],
taw dīst ki diga hičč nazīrant You saw that when they accepted nothing,
ešān šarte ast int they had a plan [lit. condition],
ki ahān manī nām-i dap int That they had my name upon their

¹³ Cf. Badalkhan 1991:II, 148 and Š. Marī 1970:60-61. A short variant, given in Gamšād, runs as follows: *marde watī myāney luṛā / mišrī kamān gon jāboā / zeney hazārī markabā / dant pa watī wašnāmīā / hičč kas čušen kār na kant / sangīn-paren dostā na dant* (1998:190-91) (“A man [gives] the steel blade of his loins / his Egyptian bow with quiver / thousands worth of steed with the saddle / gives for his good name / nobody does such a thing / to give his precious and well-regarded beloved”).

¹⁴ Transcribed from the singing of Mullā Kamālān, the most famous minstrel from Iranian Balochistan (Badalkhan 1993:III, 22-38).

	tongues.
<i>dištār kujām čizzen Murīd</i>	Betrothed is a person [lit. what a thing], O Murīd,
<i>ā peym na bitt pa dād u harīd</i>	She cannot be given either as a gift or sold!
<i>to hanjar ča lānkā kaššiten</i>	You had to pull out your dagger from your loin,
<i>ča nukkā zubān it dar kuten</i>	You had to cut [lit. pluck out] their tongues out of their mouths,
<i>nin šuten gon Čākarā gungī</i>	Then they had gone to Mīr Čākar and
<i>kuten</i>	spoken in dumbness,
<i>guḍa taw yakk yādgāre er kuten</i>	Then you would have left a memorable record behind you.”

Murīd, for his part, still believes that Mīr Čākar, as the great chief of the Baloch, would not take his betrothed from him. In one of his poems he says (Badalkhan 1991:II, 148):

man na zāntag ki Čākar-i Šeyhak čoš kant
bārt mani dištārā manā ponz u goš kant

I did not know that Čākar, son of Šeyhak, would behave this way,
He would take away my betrothed and dishonor me [lit. cut my nose and ears].

Soon after the annulment of Murīd’s engagement with Hānī, Mīr Čākar sends messengers to Hānī’s father demanding her hand in marriage. In no time she is married to Mīr Čākar. But Murīd is so shaken by this turn of events that he abandons his former life and passes the days and nights roaming around the palace of Mīr Čākar, composing poems eulogizing Hānī’s beauty and openly expressing his passionate love for her. According to tradition these poems were then memorized by minstrels of the Lāšārī tribe, the tribe at war with the Rinds, and the scandalous news of Murīd’s love for Mīr Čākar’s wife became the talk of every household in Balochistan.

Murīd’s father, Mīr Mubārak, learns that the wandering of his son about the palace of Mīr Čākar Rind has brought a bad name to the Chief and that his bodyguards may harm him. Mubārak tries to convince Murīd to refrain from his actions as follows (Badalkhan 1991:II, 150; cf. Nasīr 1976:108):

bill O Murīd, bill O Murīd “Leave, O Murīd, leave, O Murīd,
bill O Murīd, bad peylān Leave, O Murīd, misdeeds,

<i>bad-peylī o bad-rāhīā</i>	(Leave) misdeeds and wicked actions,
<i>akl o sarey gumrāhīā</i>	(Leave) the deviation of mind and heart.
<i>Čākar taī maṭṭey na int</i>	Čākar is no equal to you,
<i>lakk o hazārey wāja int</i>	He is the master of hundreds of thousands,
<i>zeney sare kull nugrah int</i>	His outer part of the saddle is all made of silver,
<i>aspey lagām peroza int</i>	His horse's bridle is [bedecked] with turquoise,
<i>zene jaz o murwārid int</i>	His saddle is bedecked with precious stones and pearls,
<i>robande lāl o gawhar int</i>	His head cloth is strewn with rubies and gems,
<i>gon čill hazārā swār bītt</i>	He rides with forty thousand of his cavaliers,
<i>pošindag o tāzī sawār</i>	All of them are well-dressed, armed, and expert riders, ¹⁵
<i>pullen payādag bešumār</i>	[Besides, his] flower-like infantry is countless,
<i>taī pujjagey handā na int</i>	He is not in your approach [i.e., you cannot compete with him].”

But, Šey Murīd, aware that the Chief is only an elected official and not superior to others, replies to his father as follows (Badalkhan 1991:II, 150):¹⁶

¹⁵ Lit. expert riders of slender mares.

¹⁶ The version in Baluch (1977:275; trans. p. 290) goes as follows:

<i>ān gon hamzādagān čarhī</i>	He bestrides at the head of thousands of cavalry,
<i>mān waṭhī šad hamzādagān</i>	I only with a hundred of my relatives;
<i>lawhen kamāney wažahān</i>	I am owner of the iron bow,
<i>man dī Murīdān maṛdwaren</i>	I am Murīd, the man killer;
<i>čamsuhr o āšiq dilbaren</i>	A greatly loved lover with red eyes
...	...
<i>bāwar kan O šeh nangaren</i>	O, the generous Sheh,
<i>Čatren kahīrey bādšāh</i>	the king of the Kahīris of Chattur, believe me.

The version recorded in Gamšād runs in this way (1998:82-83):

<i>bābā manī, bābā manī</i>	O my father, O my father
<i>ā Čākaren man dī Šeyān</i>	if he is Čākar, I am Šey too
<i>man ham baden marde nayān</i>	I am not an inferior (lit. bad) man either
<i>Čākar pawānke šartir int</i>	Čākar is a little superior to me
<i>kaṭarey mušte tanga int</i>	the hilt of his dagger is of gold
<i>sardārīey nāme pīr int</i>	he takes the title of the chiefdom
<i>pāge dupečā mastir int</i>	his turban is only bigger by two rolls than mine
<i>ač man gabarre zyāt na int</i>	he is not superior to me even by the value of a coin;
<i>harden baloči jeṛawān</i>	whenever in crises of the Baloch [nation]
<i>man ham waṭī boren bihān</i>	I have, my chestnut mare

*ā Čākar int gar Šeyhakey
man dī Murīdān pulguden
čammsuhr o āšik dilbaren
ač Čākarā kamtir nayān
čamman gabbare gihtiren*

sardārīey nāme pirint

“If he is Čākar [the son] of Šeyhak,
I am too, the Murīd of flowery clothes,
I am the red-eyed, heart-capturing lover,
I am no inferior to Čākar,
He is a bit [lit. value of a coin] superior to
me, as
He has only the title of *Sardār* added to his
name.”

He explains to his father that he has no fear of Mīr Čākar (Qizalbāš 1979:24):

čo manā dāiyān na lolentā

čo manā mātā šīr na mečentā

*sar watī šúmmen Čākarā
pallīn*

“Midwives had not lullabied me in such a
manner,
My mother had not suckled me in such a
way,
That I go into hiding to protect my head
from the wretched Čākar.”

Upon hearing these rude remarks concerning the mighty chief of the Baloch, his father pulls off his shoe and beats Murīd in the assembly of the Rinds (Dames 1907:I, 56; Nasīr 1976:110). Murīd decides to leave the country and visit unknown lands across the seas.¹⁷ He follows a group of mendicants going to perform pilgrimage at the Muslim holy cities of Mecca

*pīskentag o nyāmā jatag
ā gon hazārān čarhī
man gon watī hamzādagān
čamhuhr o āšiq dilbaren
pa ɣeyratey nāmā mir ant
kārčey sariš perozag ant
zahmā pa dantānān gir ant*

*zīr ant tanakken ɖangare
band bar kalātānān na bant*

brought too and placed in the middle [of the army]
he [Mīr Čākar] mounts with thousands [of followers]
I, with my colleagues
[who are] red-eyed and heart-capturing lovers,
who sacrifice their lives for the name of honor
tips of their daggers are of turquoise
[they are such expert swordsmen that] they catch
swords with their teeth
even with a thorny branch of a tree
they cannot be stopped in forts [i.e., even with an
ordinary branch of a tree they capture forts].

Cf. Qizalbāš (1979:26) for another version; see also Mayer 1900-07:III, 17.

¹⁷ Murīd says to his father as such (Nasīr 1976:110):

*bašk int ki arīpen pitey
littir manā tiā jaten
Rindān du demī nārīten
honān ɖagārā rej kuten*

“I forgive you because you are my venerated father.
If another person had hit me with a shoe,
(I would have given such a battle) that the Rinds would
have moaned on both sides,
The blood would have soaked the earth.”

and Medina in Saudi Arabia and remains there, as tradition has it, for 30 years. One of the poems attributed to him states:¹⁸

<i>čīḍ Makkahey čaḍentagān</i>	[I] shook the ropes at Mecca ¹⁹
<i>gon dast o gunāhen čambawān</i>	With my sinful hands and fingers,
<i>sī sāl hamūdā ništaḡān</i>	I spent 30 years there, and
<i>panjāh o panč šeyr guštaḡān</i>	I composed 55 poems,
<i>dilmānagān šastiš kanān</i>	My intention is to make them 60 (i.e., before leaving Mecca).

After spending 30 years away, he returns to Sībī in the middle of an archery contest organized by the Rind nobles (Dames 1907:I, 56-57). Attracted by the contest, he asks for an arrow to test his arms in order to see if they retain their prior strength or if his wanderings have weakened them. The nobles do not recognize him but give him a bow and arrow amid mockings and jeers. He bends the bow but it cannot bear the power of his arms and breaks into pieces. They give him another one, which also breaks. After he breaks the third bow, they send someone to fetch the “iron bow” of Šey Murīd, which is made out of steel and is also called *jug* (“yoke”) due to its form and weight (Qizalbāš 1979:27).²⁰ Using this bow he shoots three arrows, passing each one through the end of the other.²¹ Since no man except Šey Murīd has ever been able to bend his “iron bow,” the Rind nobles begin to suspect his identity, which is soon confirmed when it becomes clear that he bears secret signs and marks known only to Hānī. The Rinds ask Mīr Čākar to divorce Hānī so that she may be married to Šey Murīd. Mīr Čākar does so and gives Hānī an immense quantity of gold and other bridal gifts when she is married to Šey Murīd. They spend a single

¹⁸ The number of poems composed at Mecca varies in different versions. In some variants he is said to have composed 77 poems (Badalkhan 1991:II, 149), while in others it is 55 poems (cf. Gamšād 1998:86; Baluch 1977:293; Nasīr 1976:128).

¹⁹ The word *čīḍ* in this line is not known to me. It is found only in M. Marī and Khān (1970, s.v.) where they give the Urdu translation meaning “a curling lock, tress, wreath of flowers tied upon hair” and so on (Dr. Šāh Mahmād Marī also confirmed this meaning). However, I have translated it here as rope because ropes are usually kept hanging at sacred trees and shrines, and people shake them in order to make their prayers heard.

²⁰ In some versions he breaks 18 common bows before his own bow is brought to him (cf. Gamšād 1998:86; Šād 2000:294).

²¹ Gamšād’s variant mentions his shooting seven shafts (1998:86).

night together. On the following day Murīd visits his father's camel herd, chooses a white she-camel, mounts her, and disappears from mortal eyes. He has become the immortal saint of the Baloch, and the common belief among the Baloch is that "until the living world, Šey Murīd remains immortal intoxicated in love" (*tā jahān ast, Šey Murīd mast*) (Nasīr 1976:135 and 1979a:34; Rzehak 1998:174; see also Al-Qādrī 1976:155-63; Š. Marī 1970:56).

Parallels in the *Odyssey*

The story-pattern of Šey Murīd's return and recognition has a number of points in common with that of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*.²² The following section discusses some of their shared features.

(1) Return and Recognition of the Hero

(1.1) Return of the Hero

Both the *Odyssey* and the story of Šey Murīd present the return of the hero in the same manner: both return to their homelands as beggars clad in rags and tattered clothes.²³ However, we read in the *Odyssey* that the goddess Athena disguises Odysseus as a mendicant in order to protect him from being recognized by Penelope's suitors, whom he intends to kill: "She [Athena] shielded him from prying eyes: the goddess did not want him recognized" (*Od.* 13.190-94).²⁴ And in Book 17 Homer further describes the state in

²² A story-pattern has been described as one of those "narrative patterns that, no matter how much the stories built around them may seem to vary, have great vitality and function as organizing elements in the composition and transmission of oral story texts" (A. B. Lord, quoted in Foley 1990:362, n. 7).

²³ The motif of the bridegroom, the husband, or the ex-fiancé returning home in humble disguise, such as that of a beggar, a pilgrim, or a minstrel, is found in many variations in world literature (cf. Page 1976:165). Reichl (1992:148) states that "the best-known example is of course the return of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*; other well-known examples are the romance of *King Horn*, the *bylina* of *Dobrynja and Aljoša*, and the various versions of the epic of *Alpamiš*" (see also Ping-Chiu 1997). Cf. Thompson 1955-58: Motif K1815.1 *Return home in humble disguise*, and K1817.1 *Disguise as beggar*.

²⁴ All quotations from the *Odyssey* have been taken from Allen Mandelbaum's verse translation (1991) unless otherwise stated.

which Odysseus leaves the farm and starts toward the town in the company of the swineherd (197-203):²⁵

He [Odysseus] flung his miserable sack,
in tatters, round his shoulders, with a strap.
Eumæus handed him the welcome staff.
So they went off together; . . .
Along the road to town, Eumæus led;
his master, dressed in rags, seemed but a sad
old beggar as he leaned upon his staff.

Murīd, on the other hand, has truly become a mendicant and lives the life of an ascetic. He returns to Sībī in shabby clothes with his hair hanging down to his waist; his once-curly moustache has grown so long that it is indistinguishable from his beard. In the company of a band of beggars he passes himself off as an anonymous mendicant begging for alms at the palace of Mīr Čākar Khān Rind. The poet recounts the episode as follows (Badalkhan 1991:I, 164; cf. Nasīr 1976:122):

<i>mīyyā kābulī dar kapt ant</i>	Beggars of Kābul came forward together,
<i>kačkol u asāiš zurt ant</i>	They took their begging bowls and staffs,
<i>dem pa Hānīey čār kullā</i>	[Went] toward the beautiful house of Hānī, they
<i>allāhe jat u oštātān</i>	Called the name of God and stood there [to receive alms].

The maidservant gives bowls filled with grain to each mendicant, but when she presents this food to Murīd, whose eyes are fixed upon lady Hānī and her stature, he counters (Nasīr 1976:125):

<i>bībī, man na zīrān dānān</i>	“Madam, I won’t accept grain,
<i>mīyāe nayān šām piṇḍen</i>	I am not a food-begging beggar,
<i>pamman pakkagen čunde biyār</i>	Bring a piece of baked bread for me,
<i>logāḍen sarey šodokān</i>	[A bowl full of] the water with which she (i.e., lady Hānī) has washed her head.”

(1.2) Recognition by a Maidservant

We are told that when Šey Murīd does not accept alms and keeps

²⁵ Cf. also 17.336-41.

fixing his eyes upon lady Hānī, the maidservant grows suspicious. She rebukes him and sends him away. When Hānī reprimands her, she defends herself by saying that this is not a common beggar, that he must be a cheater either from Kābul or from Sind:

<i>bībī, e mīyyāe na int dān</i>	“Madam, this is not a grain-begging
<i>piḍen</i>	ascetic,
<i>e Sind u Kābulī sarrāpe</i>	He must be a cheater either from Sind or
	from Kābul,
<i>e mīyyāh nazūrīt dānān</i>	This ascetic does not accept grain,
<i>čamme Hānguley durrān ant</i>	His eyes are fixed upon the earrings of
	flower-like Hānī,
<i>burzā misk-hawāren jiggā</i>	Upon her musk-scented bodice,
<i>jahlā mān gwar u dilbandān</i>	Down on her breasts and bosom.”

We find a parallel in the *Odyssey* when Eurycleia, the old and faithful nurse of Odysseus, recognizes her master when Penelope asks her to wash his feet. She says to Odysseus: “Though many strangers, / sore-tried, have landed here, I say that I / have never seen a man so like Odysseus / as you are—in your form, your voice, your feet” (19.378-81).

(1.3) *Encounter with Wife/Beloved and the Delay in Recognition*

In both traditions the hero encounters the wife or beloved. In the *Odyssey* Penelope decides to have a meeting with Odysseus in the hall, where she asks him for news of her husband, not realizing that the man in front of her is the one for whom she has been desperately waiting for almost twenty years. Penelope asks Eumæus, the swineherd, to bring her the stranger (17.508-11):

“Go, good Eumæus, bring the stranger here.
I want to greet him and to hear if
he has the news of brave Odysseus or has seen
my lord with his own eyes; he seems to be
a man who’s wandered far, to many lands.”

However, Odysseus invents false stories and hides his true identity from Penelope. There is a parallel in the legend of Šey Murīd: Hānī decides to interview one of the band of mendicants to learn whether they have seen Murīd at Mecca.²⁶ So she stops Murīd and asks him (Nasīr 1976:122-23;

²⁶ It is worth noting here that our poet relocates Murīd and his companions from the sea directly to the vicinity of Sībī (cf. Šād 2000:465-66; Nasīr 1976:121-22;

cf. Šād 2000:466; Badalkhan 1991:II, 170-71; Farīdī 1983:66):

<i>kāey ča Makka-ā darband-ā</i> ²⁷	“You come from the courtyard of Mecca,
<i>gal kan, daey manā ahwāle</i>	Speak, give me the news,
<i>mīyyāe na disten čošēn</i>	Have you not seen an ascetic?
<i>hančo ki taen warnāe</i>	A young one like you
<i>nāme Šey Murīd u teg int</i>	Who is called Šey Murīd, the swordsman?”

But, like Odysseus, Šey Murīd hides his true identity and responds to Hānī as follows (Nasīr 1976:123):²⁸

<i>bībī, daryā mān tahā begwāz</i>	“Madam, [the way] the sea is measureless
<i>int</i>	in the open,
<i>miyyā Makkah-ā sak bāz int</i>	[In the same way] ascetics in Mecca are too many,
<i>bale čošēn mard parādān nesten</i>	But no such man is there among them,
<i>ki nāme Šey Murīd u teg int</i>	Whose name is Šey Murīd, the swordsman.”

On another occasion, just before the trial of the bow, we learn that Hānī is the first to know of Murīd’s arrival though she does not disclose this to anyone. The poet delays public recognition of his return until the archery contest, since it is the main recognition test. Hānī recognizes Murīd on an outing with several of the Rind noblewomen. In an open field they see a band of six mendicants proceeding toward the town. She immediately

Badalkhan 1991:II, 169; Farīdī 1983:66), hundreds of kilometers inland, while Hānī seems to be watching the arrival of the ship from a sand dune in the outskirts of Sībī where she sees small boats bring passengers and goods from a vessel anchored on the open sea. I asked several bards how Hānī could have seen the boat bringing Murīd. Most became perplexed by my question because they had never asked themselves this before, but Sāleh Mahmad Gorgej told me that Mīr Čākar would often come to spend the summer in the area of Habb, west of Karachi, since Sībī becomes extremely hot. What may be worthy of notice here is that both Murīd and Odysseus return to their homelands by sea.

²⁷ *Makka-ā* should be *Makkahey* (i.e., of Mecca). The literal meaning of *darband* is “main entrance,” but this meaning does not seem to fit the usage on several occasions in this legend.

²⁸ It is surprising that Murīd, despite his reputation as an ascetic with a saintly demeanor, lies to Hānī about his identity. Clinton, discussing a similar case in the *Shāhnāme*, opines that “it is a common convention in heroic tales that heroes both lie and think themselves honest men” (2001:32; cf. also Clinton 1999:224).

perceives that Murīd is leading them (H. Marī 1987:162-63):

*ān šaš malangā sar khuṭā
aḡ ki hudā droḡo makhant
diwānayeṅ Šeh pa saren
gon čambawey čhandenayā*

*gon kofayey loḍdenayā
geštir gon loḍ u mallagān
kamtir gon šerī ṭilliḡān*

“There appeared six mendicants,
If God may not make me a liar,
The ‘mad’ Šey [Murīd] is leading them,
[I recognize him] by the movement of his
hands [while walking],
By the swaying of his shoulders,
[But] mostly from his walking style,
To a lesser extent, from his elegant
lion-like swaying.”

However, Hānī keeps the secret to herself and, pretending that she is not feeling well, asks her companions to turn back immediately. Later, when as a result of the archery contest a messenger is sent to Hānī to ask her about Murīd’s special marks, she seems to be unaware of Murīd’s arrival: she promises a huge reward to the messenger if the news of Murīd’s homecoming turns out to be true (see below).

(1.4) *Recognition Through the Trial of the Bow*

Both Murīd and Odysseus enter their home towns as archery contests are either in progress or about to begin. In the *Odyssey* nobles from Ithaca and the surrounding areas are gathered in the house of Odysseus, consuming his food and waiting for Penelope to conclude that her husband is dead and marry one of them. Penelope, tired of the suitors’ arrogance, organizes an archery contest, saying that she will marry the one who strings the mighty bow of Odysseus with the greatest ease and shoots a shaft through twelve axeheads. At this time Odysseus’s return is known only to his son, the old housemaid, and the swineherd. When Penelope fetches the bow for the archery contest, she weeps over it, remembering “her dear lord” before she brings it to the suitors (21.42-60).²⁹ She addresses the suitors as follows (21.73-76):

“Come, suitors, stand—for you can win your prize.
You see divine Odysseus’ mighty bow;
Whoever strings this bow with greatest ease

²⁹ We find that the presentation of bows, both in the *Odyssey* and the *Ramayana* (see below), is greatly elaborated. In Murīd’s case, the bringing of the bow is recounted in simple words because the poet needs to underscore that it has been treated carelessly in its master’s absence. However, when the poet wants to highlight how the hero weeps for the condition of his iron bow, the handling of the bow by Murīd is elaborated.

will be the man I follow.”

Many nobles try to bend the bow but to no avail. They have decided to suspend the competition until the following day when Odysseus begs them to let him test the power of his arms, saying “Do I possess / the force that once informed my supple limbs, / or am I weak from wandering and neglect?” (21.282-84). The nobles grow enraged, fearing that he might string the bow, and they ask the servant not to give it to him. But Penelope intervenes, observing that “it is neither honourable nor just to deny his due to any guest of Telemachus who has come to this house. If the stranger here has trust enough in his strength of arm to string the great bow of King Odysseus, do you think he is then to lead me home as bride? He himself—I am sure of it—has no such ambition in his heart” (21.311-16; Shewring 1980:261). Despite fervent protest by the suitors, Penelope orders that the bow should be given to Odysseus.

The swineherd then carries the bow to Odysseus (21.393-97, 405-13):

[Odysseus,] bow now in hand, intent upon
its sides, its every part: he turned it round
and round, again, again—afraid that when he,
master of the bow, was far from home,
worms might have worked their mischief on the horns.

...

Odysseus, now, had scanned the bow on every side; and just as one
expert in song and harping works with ease
when he is called upon to stretch a string
around new pegs and so at either end
makes fast the twisted gut—just so, Odysseus’
stringing of that great bow was effortless.
Then he took up the bow with his right hand,
he tried the string; it sang as clearly as
a swallow’s note.

After checking and caressing the bow (21.419-23),

Then . . . he laid that arrow on the bridge, then drew
the bowstring and notched shaft. His aim was true:
he shot clean through each axehead in that row;
not one was missed; through every socket hollow
the shaft had passed—the heavy, bronze-tipped arrow.

All the nobles were startled with this show of strength and recognized that he was Odysseus, for no other man could have strung the bow with such

ease and mastery.³⁰

In the case of Murīd, the Rind nobles are gathered for an archery contest just for sport, since it was a favorite pastime of the Chakarian age (cf. Baluch 1965:118). The poet relates that the Rind nobles notice the curiosity and interest of the leader of beggars (Murīd) in the archery contest and are startled (Badalkhan 1991:I, 86, 45):³¹

Rindān turāe aḍḍitag

The Rinds have organized a target-hitting
contest

Patihpūrey burjey sarā

At the tower of Patehpūr,³²

³⁰ Cf. the story of Rama bending Lord Shiva's bow and also the story of Alpamiš, the Turkic oral epic known to a great number of Turkic peoples from the Aegean to the Altai (Reichl 1992:160), where only Alpamiš is capable of handling of the bow of his grandfather Alpinbiy (*ibid.*:164). See also Thompson 1955-58: Motif 31.2, *Recognition by unique ability to bend bow*. The archery contest is also present in the South Slavic Muslim epic tradition. Mary P. Coote (1981:17) writes that "Beyrek competes in archery with the wedding guests on his return, displaying strength too great for any bow but his own." Similarly, in "Dobrynja and Vasilij Kazimirov," Dobrynja "wins the shooting contest by bending his own heroic bow that presumably only he can handle" (*idem*, emphasis added).

³¹ In some versions it is Šey Murīd himself who asks for a bow and arrow (cf. Nasīr 1976:129; Baluch 1977:280, 294; H. Marī 1987:163; Sābir 1978:91). In other versions one of the Rind nobles proposes giving a bow and arrow to "the leader of the mendicants" (cf. Badalkhan 1991:I, 45 where Hasan Maulānag makes this proposition). Yet in some other versions it is Mīr Čākar Rind who suggests giving the leader of the beggars a bow and arrow upon seeing his extreme interest and curiosity in the archery contest (cf. Baluch 1977:281-82, 294).

The archery episode is present, as far as I know, only in eastern versions of the epic (cf. Dames 1907:I, 57; H. Marī 1987:148-49, 163; Badalkhan 1991, recorded in Dera Bugti and among Marī informants in Quetta; Baluch 1977:280-82, 293-95; Sābir 1978:89-95). It is also recorded in Gul Khān Nasīr (1976:128-31), who has not given the provenance of the material collected by him. It is reported too in Rzehak (1998:170-71), who quotes the episode from a MS. by Abdulrahmān Pahwāl from Afghani Balochistan. It cannot be said with any certainty from which part of the Baloch land Pahwāl has collected his material, but the close verbal similarity with Nasīr's versions makes me suppose that he might have taken the information from Nasīr.

³² In the majority of versions the archery contest takes place "behind the palace of Mīr Čākar" (*Mīr Čākarey koṭey bunā*, cf. Nasīr 1976:128; Baluch 1977:280, 293), but in the above quoted version, which I recorded in Dera Bugti in 1991, the archery contest is organized at Mīr Čākar's fort at Patihpūr. The oral tradition recounts that Mīr Čākar had four forts in the area of Sībī: one in Sībī, one in Sorān, one in Patehpūr (a few kilometers to the south of Gandāwa [Baluch 1965:160]), and one in Gidar (a few kilometers west of Bhāg [H. Marī 1987:143]).

<i>Rind m̄an turāyā lev at ant</i>	Rinds were busy with the game of target-hitting.
<i>atkā pakīrī wallare</i>	There came a band of beggars,
<i>gwaštā pakīrey mastirā</i>	Said the leader of the beggars:
<i>yakke bidait ta manā</i>	“Give [a bow] also to me,
<i>man dī diley zangan kušān</i>	I, too, will remove [lit. kill] the rust of my heart.”

At first the Rind nobles treat him with a certain amount of disrespect on account of his shabby appearance, laughing at him and asking how a mendicant clad in tattered clothes could bend a bow and hit a target (Nasīr 1976:129; Rzehak 1998:170-71):³³

<i>awwalī-iš dāt int par maland</i>	They gave him the first [bow] to make fun of him,
<i>pruštā kamān bītā kaland</i>	[But when he stretched it] it broke into pieces and became useless,
<i>duhmī-iš dāt int par hunar</i>	They gave him the second [bow] with more contemplation,
<i>pruštā kamān-ey band u sar</i>	[But as he stretched it] its head and cords broke into pieces,
<i>sihmī-iš dāt int pa gumān</i>	They gave him the third [bow] with suspicion,
<i>sey ṭukkur at pešā kamān</i>	[But when he stretched it, it broke into pieces as] it was already in three pieces. ³⁴

When the Rind nobles see the beggar’s extraordinary strength and his skill at handling a bow they decide to retrieve for him “Murīd Khān’s bow.” The epic tells us that this famous weapon had been tossed in a pen for sheep and goats after the “master of the iron bow” had departed and it had no owner to care for it. Because of its weight and toughness, it was useless in the hands of anyone else. When it is turned over to him, Šey Murīd caresses

³³ Cf. also H. Marī 1987:163 and Badalkhan 1991:85, where there are only verbal changes in the description of this episode. In most of the versions the episode of archery contest is recounted with minor verbal changes, but, since we are more concerned here with the story than the textual analysis of the epic, we do not analyze variations among different versions (for details on textual variations in Balochi epic poetry, see Badalkhan 1994: part III and 2002a).

³⁴ In some versions Murīd is said to have broken 18 bows before he is brought his own (cf. Baluch 1977:294; Gamšād 1998:86; Sābir 1978:91), but the majority record three bows (cf. H. Marī 1987:148).

and kisses it, gently touching the strings as if they belonged to a sacred instrument; he scrutinizes every inch (Mayer 1900-07:III, 18). The poet describes the presentation of the bow and his reaction upon seeing its pitiful condition (Badalkhan 1991:I, 45-46; cf. Sābir 1978:93-95):

<i>Byārey Murīd Khāney juḡā</i>	[The nobles said:] “bring the ‘yoke’ of Murīd Khān.” ³⁵
<i>“ārtiš manī lôhen kamān lôhen kamān gon jābawā ohey manī lôhen kamān ākhir ki be wāḡa u be bānukey</i>	“They brought me my iron bow, ³⁶ The iron bow with the quiver, Ah, to my iron bow, Definitely you are without a master or a mistress,
<i>čer-i tagirdān kaptagey sar manjagān gassentayān</i>	You are thrown under mats, Your heads [i.e., both ends] are consumed by <i>manjahs</i> ³⁷
<i>čakkā šanikkān drikkiṭhā</i>	Baby-goats have played [lit. jumped] upon you,
<i>sarhoš šanikkān čarṭayān</i>	Your adorning flowers are plucked by baby-goats, ³⁸
<i>band čorawān resentayān</i>	Your bands have been disbanded by children,
<i>nambān u nodān misentayān drāh morčag u zangān jaṭhā diṭhā kamān mān kāhalā mawžen dilā akkīr kuṭhā čammān juḡī jehar kutā greta man u gretā dilā goḡaw trakhoken trīnziṭhān</i>	Mist and clouds have moistened you, You are fully covered by stains and rust. I saw my bow in these conditions, My yearning heart bewailed, My eyes shed tears like a monsoon cloud, Wept me and wept my heart. When the obstinate round tears splashed [enough] from my eyes, ³⁹

³⁵ Murīd’s bow is called *lôhen kamān* (“iron-bow”) as well as *juḡ* (“yoke”).

³⁶ The word *lôh* is probably a contraction of *lôhā*, “iron” in Hindi and Urdu (cf. *Ferozsons Urdu-English Dictionary*, Lahore, n.d.: s.v.), thus *lôhen* “of iron.” *Lôh* also means a plank of wood, but I believe that here it refers to iron and not to something else (cf. *lohī*, “iron kettle”). *Lawhen kamān* has also been translated as “iron bow” in Dames 1907:57; Baluch 1977:275 ff.; and Rzehak 1998:170.

³⁷ *Manjah* is a raised wooden platform usually used for piling up mattresses, quilts, and the like.

³⁸ In the majority of cases Baloch youths adorn their musical instruments and arms with artificial flowers made of bunches of threads and the like.

³⁹ My sincere thanks are due to Dr. Shah Mahmud Marī from Quetta for suggesting the translation of this line: *goḡaw* (round [tears]), *trakhok* (agitated, restless,

<i>jahlā barotān dāštayon</i>	I placed it below my moustache [i.e., upon the lips to kiss it],
<i>dān habbaṛā zyārat kuṭhā</i>	I venerated [lit. performed pilgrimage to] it seven times,
<i>khonḍān bīt u jīg kuṭhā</i>	I sat on my knees and strung it,
<i>ersāzat u man sāz kuṭhā.</i>	It was out of tune, and I tuned it.” ⁴⁰

Then, as a master archer, he rolls up his beggar’s mantle, bends the bow with great skill, and shoots three arrows from it passing one from the hole left by the previous one (cf. Sābir 1978:93). The poet describes the sequence as follows (Badalkhan 1991:I, 46; cf. Dames 1907:I, 57):

<i>say tīr ham relā jaṭhā</i>	“I shot three shafts one following the other, ⁴¹
<i>tīrā hawā tīrā jaṭhā</i>	The shaft hit [the end of] the shaft,
<i>Rindey nišān borentayon</i>	I smashed the target of the Rinds,
<i>Rindān hamedā šakk kuṭhā</i>	The Rinds began to suspect here.”

The suspicion of the Rinds that this beggar is in fact Šey Murīd is stated thus (cf. Nasīr 1976:130; Dames 1907:I, 57):

obstinate), *trīnzay* (to splash). Cf. Penelope’s tears when she fetches Odysseus’ bow (*Od.* 21.55-56).

⁴⁰ The version in Baluch records the event as follows: “Said the mighty (Mir) Čākar, / Bring the iron-bow (lit. yoke) of Murīd, / Give it to the mendicant, / Put it next to the mendicant, / He had it brought and cleaned it up, / He had it brought and adjusted it, / I saw it and my heart wept, / ... / Tears flew from my eyes, / My lone head deplored, / My iron-bow spoke to me, / “My master of kingly demeanour, / Of kingly and beautiful manners and appearance, / Arrows are not fit for you, / They are fallen in crust and rust, / They were thrown under stands for utensils and mattresses, / From the sky they were damped by clouds”; / I put in order my tattered clothes of beggary, / For seven times I paid homage to it (as if it was a sacred holy book or shrine), / I kissed its head and put it (as a sign of respect and veneration) against my eyes, / It was out of tune and I tuned it (i.e., adjusted and tightened the string), / It was unstrung and I strung it, / Arrows followed the dust of arrows, / I shot three arrows to the target (consisting of a piece of rug), / Each arrow hit the target” (1977:280-82 for the Balochi text and pp. 294-95 for the English translation. I have made minor modifications in Baluch’s translation where I felt they were necessary).

⁴¹ In the version given in Sābir (1978:95) he shoots seven shafts, “each one passing through the hole left by the first one” (Dr. Š. M. Marī’s recitation of this episode also mentioned seven shafts; this version probably comes from the Marī area).

ā Šey Murīd int pulguden [Surely] he is Šey Murīd of flowery
clothes,
čamm-suhr u ašik dilbaren, The red-eyed, heart-capturing lover,⁴²
lawhen kamān-ey wāja int The master of the “iron bow.”

(1.5) *Recognition by Scar*

Both of our heroes have special signs by which they are finally identified. Our legend recounts that after the trial of the bow the Rind nobles stop Murīd and a servant is sent to ask Hānī for Murīd’s distinguishing signs and marks, which she would know because they had played together as children. Hānī responds to the servant’s question as follows (Badalkhan 1991:I, 47):

Hāno ki ham čošā gušit Hānī responds in this way:
mā ki kasānā leyv kuθa “When we used to play in childhood,
mā našk o nišāni e kuθa We left these marks and signs,
ṭikke mān čappen zānsaren A sign on the upper left thigh,
mey manguli-ā rand kuθa My bracelet had left that sign;
yakke mān burwānā paden Another one is behind the eyebrow.”⁴³

And she adds:

gind ki našk o nišān “See if the signs and marks correspond,
gwāhenagān
ta man Rinden janān meṛ khanān Then I will congregate the Rind women,
bandān sarīā garḍinā I will tie my head-scarf round my neck,⁴⁴

⁴² The adjective “red-eyed” is generally used for brave young men in the bloom of youth because of their formidable appearance. However, “red-eyed” is also used for those lovers who lay awake either in the company of their beloveds, waiting for them, or suffering in their absence.

⁴³ Cf. Nasīr 1976:132. In another recording, which I also made in Dera Bugti in 1991 (Badalkhan 1991:II, 47), Hānī replies to the messenger as follows:

mā ki kasānā leyv kuθa When we used to play in the childhood,
našk o nišāni mā hame kuθa We left the following marks and signs,
mundrī man zānā šer šuθā My ring penetrated down his thigh (and left a scar),
(while, on another occasion)
daste kazāhī dranziθā I suddenly spread (lit. scattered) my hand, and
ṭikke gwarey burwānāyā Left a scar above his eyebrow.

⁴⁴ To tie the head-scarf round the neck is a symbol of supplication. In Baloch society if a woman interferes in a rivalry, enmity, or even in the middle of an armed

<i>bīngīe zirān littirā</i>	Like a dog I will take [in my mouth] the slipper, ⁴⁵
<i>key zānt Murīdā ber dayān</i>	Who knows, I may succeed in bringing back Murīd,
<i>Hānī o miskānī Murīd</i>	[So that] Hānī may join the musk-perfumed Murīd.”

When the Rinds check the signs, Šey Murīd is recognized. Mīr Čākar responds thus to Murīd’s return (Badalkhan 1991:I, 48; cf. Nasīr 1976:128-34):

<i>Čākar ki ham čošā gušit</i>	Now Čākar said as follows:
<i>“mā naškān Murīd pedāwaren</i>	“Murīd is recognized [lit. evident] through the signs,
<i>byā nind u Šeyhey gwarā</i>	Come, [O Hānī,] and sit next to Šey Murīd,
<i>Hāno Murīd bakšen tarā;”</i>	Hānī, Murīd is bestowed to you;”
<i>Hāno u birrānī Murīd</i>	Hānī and Murīd of the wilderness;
<i>Hāno ki daste šuhār</i>	When Hānī stretched her hand [toward Murīd],
<i>gipte mān rāsten čambawā</i>	He held her with his right hand,
<i>mān sand u bandān er kuten.</i>	And entered into her body and spirit. ⁴⁶

A scar also serves as evidence of the hero’s identity in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus is recognized by the scar left by the white tusk of a boar on his leg just above the knee. He is first recognized by his old and faithful nurse, Eurycleia, when she washes his feet (19.361-507) and later when Odysseus discloses his identity to the swineherd and the cowherd just before the beginning of the archery contest in his hall (21.205-25). However, in both cases the recognition is kept secret because the poet is determined to make the archery contest the main proof of identity, and all other recognition signs should occur after that (it is exactly the same in the legend of Murīd as we have just seen). After the archery contest when Odysseus’s father does not recognize him initially, the old man asks Odysseus to give him an irrefutable sign of his identity. Odysseus tells him: “First mark this scar; /

conflict between two rival groups, the men are bound by honor to stop fighting and settle the matter peacefully.

⁴⁵ Meaning to downgrade her status to that of a dog begging him to stay with her and not depart anymore.

⁴⁶ Meaning that the touch of Murīd’s hand was so strong that she felt it throughout her body and soul.

you see the wound inflicted by a boar, / the one whose white tusks gored me on Parnassus” (24.331-33).

(1.6) *The Bath*

The hero’s bath and donning of new clothes is another common theme present in both legends. Murīd’s bath occurs at his marriage to Hānī, when she calls her people to bathe him and dress him in new clothes. The poet recounts (Badalkhan 1993:III, 36; cf. Šād 2000:505, from a recording of Mullā Kamālān [cf. Farīdī 1983:71]):

<i>atkā Murīd diwānahan</i>	“Murīd, the mad, came,
<i>man nazzīk gwarey</i>	I [Hānī] slipped into his nearness,
<i>šīmmoštagān</i>	
<i>dast u gulāešon kutag</i>	I took his hand and embraced him,
<i>pešānion drūt dātag at</i>	I kissed his forehead,
<i>byā O Murīd diwānahan</i>	[I told him,] come, O Murīd, the mad
	one,
<i>mey dawr nīn pa dubāra</i>	Our epoch has returned once again;
<i>atkaḡān</i>	
...	...
<i>twāron pamā halkā jatag</i>	I gave a call to the town’s [folk],
<i>pa nākog u trīgī pussagān</i>	[I called] the offspring of [my] uncles and
	aunts, ⁴⁷
<i>byā it šumā yalā jānšod kan it</i>	You come and bathe the companion,
<i>atkā pa sīrī šādihān</i>	He has come for the merriments of
	weddings,
<i>šeren yalā jānšod kan it</i>	Bathe the lion-like companion,
<i>sīrī libāsān pir kan it.</i>	Dress him in wedding clothes;
<i>man mahramen jāhe šutān</i>	I went to a private place,
<i>misk u zabād man mentagān</i>	I soaked musk and <i>zabād</i> [a strong, musky
	perfume],
<i>šiptān pame man mahparān</i>	I rubbed them on my tresses,
<i>bānorīey šarren libās</i>	[I took out] the beautiful bridal clothes,
<i>man pa murāde pir kutān</i>	I put them on with a great desire, [I went
	to him and]
<i>man hančo gulāešon kutag</i>	I embraced him with great eagerness.”

The theme of bathing, anointing, and donning new clothes is also present in the *Odyssey*, where it occurs seven times, but here we shall quote

⁴⁷ In some versions she is said to have called the servants (*twāron pa kārdārān jata*; Badalkhan MS 1993:III, 107).

only the episode in Book 23, which takes place soon after the trial of the bow and the killing of the suitors.⁴⁸ The poem states (23.150-60, 163-64):

. . . Eurynomē, the housewife, bathed
in his own halls the resolute Odysseus,
then smoothed his body down with oil and cast
a tunic round his back. That done, Athena,
the gray-eyed goddess, made him more robust
and taller, and she gave him thicker hair,
which flowed down from his head in curls and clusters
that seemed much like the hyacinth in flower.

. . . .

When he came from the bath and reached the hall,
his form was like the form of the immortals.

(1.7) *Recognition by a Parent*

In his 1960 study of the Greek and South Slavic return-songs, Lord maintains that the recognition of the returning hero by his parent “is a well-established element in the general story of return” and the “recognition by a parent is a necessary element in the story and a regularly recurring part of the theme of recognitions” (177).⁴⁹ In the same way we find recognition by a parent for both Murīd and Odysseus taking place after the accomplishment of the archery contest. In the case of Murīd, tradition has it that his father’s blindness results from his grief at Murīd’s absence and the lack of news about him.⁵⁰ However, despite his blindness he recognizes his son from the hissing sound of the shafts shot from his “iron bow.” The poet recounts this moment in Murīd’s voice (Badalkhan 1991:I, 46; cf. Nasīr 1976:131; Sābir 1978:138; and Rzehak 1998:171):

gwaštā manī pīren pitā

Said my aged father:

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the bath theme in the *Odyssey*, see Foley 1990:248-57.

⁴⁹ Lord observes that the order of recognition in South Slavic epics supports the placement of recognition by the parent after that by the wife: “There seems then to be reason to believe that the singer of the *Odyssey* was following a common practice in the order of recognitions in respect to that of wife, parent” (1960:178).

⁵⁰ We are also told that his mother is alive, but she is not discussed much in the legend (cf. Sābir 1978:95 where the poem mentions that both the parents heard the hissing sound of the arrows and knew that they were Murīd’s shafts shot from his “iron bow”).

<i>tīrānān marčī hinžagen</i>	“Arrows are hissing today [due to the force of their propulsion],
<i>čammān manīān rošinen</i>	A new light has come into my eyes,
<i>e Šey Murīd-ey gonḍal ant</i>	These are [surely] the shafts of Šey Murīd,
<i>lawhen jugā darkaptag ant</i>	They have been shot from his iron-yoke [i.e., the bow].”

We find the same parallel in the Greek epic when Odysseus goes to visit his father at the farm outside of town (24.225-32):

But he
did find his father there; he saw Laertes:
alone, he spaded soil around a sapling;
his clothes were miserable, filthy, patched;
to shield his shins from scratches, he had wrapped
two greaves of stitched cowhide and, on his hands,
wore gloves to fend off thorns; a goatskin cap
was on his head. He held his sadness fast.

However, Odysseus, despite having put on his splendid armor before leaving the palace, is not recognized by his father. Lord notes that “when he accosts his father, Odysseus pretends that he has just arrived in the island and inquires if he is really in Ithaca and if that old man knows anything about a friend of his named Odysseus” (1960:179). Lord calls this delay tactic “a multiform of the recognition theme by another multiform of the theme” (*idem*)—because Laertes is not blind an alternative form of delayed recognition is played out here (he opines that the only alternative to this recognition scene would have been one in which Laertes was blind; *ibid.*:178). Odysseus then reveals his identity to his father and they embrace.

(2) The Recounting of Sufferings

After countless sufferings both Odysseus and Murīd return home, the former in the twentieth year, the latter after 30 years. During the long period of absence both have endured all types of hardships, sufferings, and miseries. In Book 7 Odysseus describes his sufferings to Alkinoos, saying, “If you know men / who have endured much suffering, you can see / me as one of them. And I could tell / of more trials and griefs the god have willed” (211-14).⁵¹ Similarly, Murīd describes his sufferings to the band of his

⁵¹ Marincola (1997:9) argues that “this suffering, like his exploration, enables Odysseus to be the most experienced and knowing of men. It is precisely because the

fellow mendicants who ask him why he suffers so much that he neither sleeps himself nor allows others to sleep because of his moans and groans. He replies thus:⁵²

<i>gamzadī bāre man čame hijrā</i>	“I have heavy burdens of grief
<i>giptagān</i>	from this separation,
<i>ney jarīš zúrānt ney du-dantāniš</i>	[They are so heavy that] neither young
<i>čist kanān</i>	nor mature camels can carry them,
<i>leđahiš čātren pa diley nākāme</i>	Only full grown camels may carry them
<i>barān</i>	with desperate hearts,
<i>āhinī palkān gon manī bālādā</i>	They are like iron slabs fixed to my body,
<i>juđān</i>	
<i>teyl u zamzillān bir manī</i>	Like fetters and chains fallen around my
<i>guṭṭā kaptagān</i>	neck.”

(3) Departure to the Unknown World

After Hānī is married to Murīd they spend a single night together, but Murīd does not allow her to come near him. On the following day Hānī tells the people that Murīd no longer cares for her and that he has become indifferent toward her. Murīd for his part explains to Hānī that when he was capable of having a wife and desired to remain in the company of the Rinds they did not give him the opportunity, but now he is no longer in a position to have a wife. The poet recounts (Nasīr 1976:133):

<i>Hānī nīn pakkāron na int</i>	“Now Hānī is no more needed by me.
<i>roče ki pakkār at manā</i>	The day when I needed her,
<i>Rindān manā Hānī na dāt</i>	The Rinds did not give Hānī to me,
<i>brātān manā brāt na kurt</i>	Brothers [i.e., tribesmen] did not call me
	their brother,
<i>mān meṛawān gwānkon na jat</i>	They did not call me in their assemblies.”

Murīd concludes (Nasīr 1976:134):

<i>bāndā hudā roče bikant</i>	“God may bring a day tomorrow,
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gods have placed such troubles upon him that he grows in knowledge, as he learns from suffering.” It is the same in the case of Murīd, who achieves the highest status of sainthood during his lifetime and becomes immortal without experiencing the bitter taste of death (see below).

⁵² The text has been transcribed from the singing of Nūrmahmad Nūral, cassette vol. 45, recorded for Fāzul Recording Company, Dera Dubai (n.d., 1980s?) (cf. Gamšād 1998:85; Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 321-22; Nasīr 1979a:35; Sābir 1978:137-39).

<i>kārān jare jammāz bān</i>	I will bring a young she-camel and, riding on it,
<i>jahlā ki yā bālā rawān</i>	I will go either west or east.”

On the following day he selects a white she-camel from his father's herd, says goodbye to the people, mounts the camel, and disappears, never to return as a mortal.⁵³ He and his camel are believed to be immortal, and they are still seen wandering in deserts providing help to needy persons and guiding lost travelers. Baloch commonly believe that *tā jahān ast, Šey Murīd mast* (“Until the living world, Šey Murīd lives intoxicated [in divine love]”) (Nasīr 1976:135; 1979a:34; Rzehak 1998:174; see also Al-Qādri 1976:155-63).

A departure to an unknown world is also present in the *Odyssey*. Lord observes (1960:182-83, emphasis added) that

Odysseus not only went on further travels but that those further travels were somehow connected with the other world from which he had just come. Everything in oral tradition points to the conclusion that at this moment in the story of Odysseus' return there should be departure from Penelope and another visit to that strange world from which the hero had been rescued or released.

(4) The Hero as Poet

Another parallel between Odysseus and Šey Murīd worth mentioning is that both are famed poets. We learn that “Odysseus is not only a great liar and raconteur, but a true bard who composes originally (as contrasted with the rhapsode who recites songs composed by others)” (Friedrich 1997:310). Murīd, for his part, is considered to be one of the greatest poets in Balochi (cf. G. F. Baloč n.d.:20), and some later poets claimed that they received inspiration and benediction from him (cf. M. K. Marī 1991:90-91). One of the poems attributed to him records him saying: *aptād u apt dāgon kutag, / aptād u apt šeyron jatag, / mān Makkahey ganjen darā* (“I have branded my body at 77 points, / and composed 77 poems, / at the affluent place of Mecca”; Badalkhan 1991:II, 149).⁵⁴

⁵³ Nasīr 1976:134; cf. Rzehak 1998:172; Š. Marī 1970:56. In some traditions Hānī also rode with him and both disappeared from mortal eyes (cf. Qizalbāš 1979:28; Al-Qādri 1976:158; Farīdī 1983:71-72), but the majority of the Baloch believe that Hānī did not accompany him (cf. Š. Marī 1970:57, n. 2).

⁵⁴ In some other versions he claims to have composed 55 poems at Mecca (cf. Baluch 1977:279, 293; Nasīr 1976:128). Several informants in Makrān told me of

(5) A Further Note

It should be added here that the two characters differ significantly and that the reasons behind their wanderings and the returns to their homelands also differ greatly. One of the main differences between Odysseus and Šey Murīd is that the former “is a survivor who fights his way home to take up life again where it should be taken up after a war: among one’s own people, surrounded by the possessions one has fought for, and solaced by the wife who is one’s partner and whom one struggled to win” (Kirk 1980:xix). Murīd, on the other hand, has lost everything: his madly beloved betrothed from childhood who is now married to Mīr Čākar Rind, the ruler of Balochistan and the venerated chief of the mighty Rind tribe; his place at the court; and his life of a noble Baloch in the court as well as in the society. He has abandoned his personal and social life, and is returning home after having taken refuge in the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina on the other side of the Arabian Gulf for 30 years.⁵⁵

(6) Hānī versus Penelope

(6.1) Loyalty

Before concluding this discussion I would like to add here that there is some similarity between the characters of Penelope and Hānī as well: both are icons of loyalty and devotion. As Kirk (1980:vii) observes, Penelope

has had for years to hold out against the arrogant and violent importunity of a whole crowd of unwanted suitors, princelings from Ithaca and the surrounding regions who have crowded into the palace and are trying to force her to give up her husband for dead and marry one of themselves. Her only defence is stratagem (like the web that she weaves by day and undoes secretly each night).

Although Hānī is married to Mīr Čākar, it is firmly believed by the Baloch in general that she remained chaste. M. Sardar Khan Baluch, one of the

persons who knew all 77 of his poems, but because none of these people remained alive I could not verify it. The 16 poems concerning the romance of Murīd and Hānī in Šād (2000:440-511) is so far the largest collection available to us.

⁵⁵ Cf. the *Rāmāyana*, in which Rama is banished for 14 years to live in the jungle as a devotee clad in a robe of bark (Mackenzie 1971:386).

great authorities on the Chakarian age and the author of Mīr Čākar's biography (1965), contends (1977:248) that

throughout her days with Chākar, she kept her temple unsexed and her fair mind unshaken towards Sheh Murīd. Heavens always maintained fixed the walls of her dear love and honour, and from head to foot she remained marble-constant and had nothing of woman in her. She held her honour higher than her ease, and never yielded to Chākar her bluest veins to kiss. She never loved Chākar, married his royalty, was wife to his place, but disliked his person Chākar wedded her but not bedded, and at the same time, he never reproached her, for she was so delicate of rebukes that words were strokes and strokes death to her.

Yet the poem records that when the Rinds succeed in convincing Mīr Čākar to divorce Hānī so that both the lovers may finally be united, Murīd refuses to take Hānī as a wife. When Hānī begs him to stay Murīd upbraids her, saying that when he needed her, her heart did not desire him because she was happy as the wife of Mīr Čākar. Hānī then tries to prove her faithfulness to Murīd:⁵⁶

*Hānī jawāb gardent padā
O Šey Murīd dīwānahen
ā zāl ki mardān giptag ant
čer čādirān kinzentag ant
rāsten gware borentagān*

guḍā bačč u janikkiš artag ant

*O Murīd, ko ant manī bačč u
janikk?*

Hānī replied to him then:

“O Šey Murīd, the mad one,
Those women who are married to men,
They are moved under the [bed-]sheets
Their tough breasts are loosened [by their
husbands],

Then they have given birth to boys and
girls,

O Murīd, where are my sons and
daughters?”

(6.2) *The Presence of Soothsayers*

In both cases soothsayers are present to deliver omens about the return of the absent hero. Both Hānī and Penelope lived with the sole hope of either seeing the one they loved the most or embracing death in chastity and remaining loyal to him. We learn that both turn to prophets for the news of their loved ones. Hānī calls for the soothsayer (Rzehak 1998:162):

⁵⁶ Badalkhan MS 1993:III, 33-35. The text was transcribed from Mullā Kamālān's performance of the epic, but for the sake of brevity I have omitted repetitions and comments on the part of the singer as well as those of the audience present in the recording.

<i>byāten bimā ye pālgirā</i>	[She] came to the soothsayer [and said]:
<i>ballī manī māsi manī</i>	“My grandmother, my aged aunt, ⁵⁷
<i>pāle bkan Šaygān šuta</i>	Make an omen, dear Šey has gone.”
<i>pālgīr ki pāle kurtaten</i>	The soothsayer made an omen:
<i>Šaygān šuta bi Makkawā</i>	“Dear Šey has gone to Mecca,
<i>apt sālā mnindīt ā Makkawā</i>	He will stay seven years in Mecca,
<i>bāz-um ki ā kayt bi padā</i>	Then he will return and come here.”

The soothsayer in the *Odyssey* makes a somewhat similar prophecy to Penelope about the return of Odysseus (17.151-59):

And now she [Penelope] heard
 from Theoclymenus, the godlike augur:
 “Odysseus’ honored wife, . . .
 hear what I have to say; this is the truth—
 I tell you everything—all is revealed.
 May Zeus, the god of gods, now be my witness,
 and, too, the cordial board and hearth of lord
 Odysseus, where I am a guest: I say—
 he’s here already in his own dear land.”

(6.3) *The Promise of High Reward*

The high reward for the news of the return of the long-awaited hero is also common to both legends. When Hānī is asked how she would compensate the bearer of news about Šey Murīd, she responds (Badalkhan MS 1993:III, 105; cf. Nasīr 1976:124 and 1979a:39-40; Sābir 1978:133):⁵⁸

<i>gwašte pa diley armānā,</i>	She said it with the highest desire of her heart:
<i>“durrāne dayān jāḍenān</i>	“I will give him the pair of the earrings, ⁵⁹
<i>kandīgān kawānṭ-bāhenān</i>	The necklace, with the value of a young camel,

⁵⁷ Both *ballī* and *māsi* are respectful terms to address aged women, but I have translated them here as “grandmother” and “aunt,” respectively, since *māsi* is also used for one’s maternal aunt in some eastern dialects of Balochi (cf. Elfenbein 1990:II, s.v.).

⁵⁸ A gift (*mistāgī*) is bestowed upon a person who brings good news, especially in response to the birth of a child, the arrival of a close relative from a long journey, or recovery from a long illness and return from the treatment journey.

⁵⁹ *Durr* simply means “gold,” but here it is a metonym for a pair of heavy earrings worn by Baloch women.

<i>ponzey pulluk o grānzīgān</i>	The nose rings and nostril rings,
<i>dastey sangahān Sībīey</i>	The bracelets of Sībī made,
<i>pādey mār-saren pādīnkān</i>	Serpent-headed anklets of my feet,
<i>kull gon sī hazārī ganjān</i>	Home with the treasure of thirty-thousand worth, ⁶⁰
<i>Čakar gon silāh o sanjān</i>	Čakar with his arms and harnesses [i.e. the riding horse and its harnesses],
<i>bačč gon gwānzagā šāgenā</i>	Son with the cradle of the <i>šāg</i> wood, ⁶¹
<i>jān gon jāmagā narmenā</i>	My body with its soft gown, ⁶²
<i>ḍillā gon baloči weysā</i>	My stature with its Balochi costumes, ⁶³
<i>angāt sar manī kurbān int.”</i>	Above all, my head is sacrificed to him [i.e., to the person who brings me the news of Šey Murīd].

We find a similar episode in the *Odyssey*, where Penelope promises Theoclymenus, “the godlike augur,” that if his prophecy turns true and her husband Odysseus returns she will give him many gifts: “I would your words might be fulfilled. My guest, / you’d see my kindness then—so many gifts / that any man you met would say you’re blessed” (17.163-65). In Book 19 (309-11) the same reward is promised again to Odysseus, who presents himself before Penelope in the garb of a beggar and, in reply to Penelope’s inquiries, tells her that Odysseus “will return within the year—just when, at old moon’s end, the new begins” (19.306-07).

Conclusion

Returning briefly to the absence, return, and recognition of the heroes

⁶⁰ A house with things worth 30,000 means a house full of riches.

⁶¹ *Šāg* is a species of teak (*Grewia vestita*). It is a very valuable hardwood used to make musical instruments, ships, beds, cradles, and so on.

⁶² The famous minstrel Sāleh Mahmad Gorgej told me that, in his opinion, this verse was later added by minstrels, since Hānī would have never said that she would give her body in a soft gown in compensation to the one who brings the news of the arrival of Murīd (interview recorded in Malīr, Karachi, 1989). I am grateful to Ghulam Farooq Baloch and Beg Mahmad Baloch for arranging a number of encounters with Sāleh Mahmad Gorgej. Nasīr (1979a:40) records this line as *jāney jāmagā narmenā* (“the soft gown of my body”).

⁶³ The word *weys/ves* is not known to me but is found in Mayer (1975:36) with the meaning of “clothes.”

in both traditions, we find that Odysseus is recognized at home by a dog, a nurse, two farmhands, and his wife, in addition of course to the suitors. The dog recognizes him instinctively; the nurse knows him by the scar; he tells the farmhands who he is; and the suitors discover his identity as a result of the trial of the bow. His wife recognizes him by three different methods: (a) the trial of the bow, (b) the bath, and (c) the token of the bed (Lord 1960:169-70). Finally, he reveals himself to his father at his farm. Murīd, on the other hand, is first seen by Hānī, whose friends have brought her on an outing to the fields after years of self-seclusion.⁶⁴ However, she does not reveal the news of the possible arrival of Murīd to anyone and the people are unaware of his arrival in town. Later, after the trial of the bow, when a messenger goes to Hānī and asks her for the secret signs of Murīd, she seems to be, or at the least the poet gives us the impression that she is, unaware of Murīd's return. She promises that if the signs correspond and the mendicant really turns out to be Murīd, she will go to him supplicating him to stop. Here, we may suppose that the poet, following the traditional return and recognition story-pattern, has deliberately positioned the recognition of the hero by the wife/lover after the main trial, which is the trial of the bow. As such, in the cases of both Murīd and Odysseus the test of the bow is presented as the decisive recognition scene. Lord, discussing the *Odyssey*, explains that "here is a frustrated, a vestigial recognition scene brought about by accomplishing a feat of strength possible only to the returned hero" (1960:175).⁶⁵ Murīd's recognition by his father takes place at the end of this scene, who recognizes him by the hissing sound of his shafts shot from his "iron bow." So, here we have the threefold recognition of the returning hero completed: the recognition by the nobles, by the lover, and by the father. Thus we can say that our poet has faithfully followed "the traditional story-pattern" of the absence and return of the hero and his recognition upon arriving home.

⁶⁴ In some versions Hānī recognizes him, while in others she only suspects that the head of the beggar-band could be Murīd (*man dī gumānī bīttagān, ki dīwānagen Šey pa saren* [Badalkhan 1991:I, 45; Nasīr 1976:131]; "I suspected too, that the mad Šey Murīd is in the lead"). In some versions from Makrān she watches the ship coming from a distance from a sand dune on the seashore and sees passengers disembark onto the small boats that bring them to shore.

⁶⁵ Among other recognition motifs in return songs we may cite the South Slavic epic poetry, where the common recognition motif is that only the returned hero is able to successfully saddle and ride his horse: "a feat no one else has been able to accomplish" (Foley 1990:371).

How was this story-pattern transmitted? Are the parallel motifs in the Balochi epic and the *Odyssey* the result of direct contact between the Baloch and the Greeks thousands of years ago? Or could the composers of both legends have simply followed a traditional return theme inherited via a common Indo-European cultural heritage? Or are these coincidences only accidental?⁶⁶ It is beyond the scope of this study, as well as my capabilities, to forward any hypothesis in this regard, but we know for sure that the Greeks were present in Balochistan and the surrounding regions, directly or indirectly, for almost three centuries and that their cultural and economic contacts and influence lasted much longer than that. The presence of the Greeks in the area is reported to have lasted for about 1,000 years, “from the sixth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. . . . They travelled as explorers in the pay of the Persians and marched as soldiers in Alexander’s army, they came as wandering philosophers and seaborne traders, as artists and ambassadors, as administrators and princes. They found kingdoms and cities” (Woodcock 1966:13). The Greeks came as strangers, but “most stayed to take their places in Indian society. Their descendants became absorbed into its great hybrid race. Many accepted Indian religions” (*idem*).

The country of Balochistan first came into contact with the Greeks when Alexander the Great crossed it in 325 B.C.E. on his way from India to Iran.⁶⁷ Greek chroniclers record that the river Hab (Arabis of the Greeks) was the boundary, ethnologically and linguistically, between India and Gedrosia (cf. Tarn 1950:II, 250).⁶⁸ The Gedrosii were a free people “who agreed to surrender after holding a council to consider the subject” (McCrimdell 1969:262). Arrian records that when Alexander arrived at

⁶⁶ Lord observed that the “story patterns in oral tradition . . . have been in traditional epic in the Balkans and the Near East at least since Homeric times and very probably long before then” (1969:18-19). He considered it as “simply an older stratum of one and the same Indo-European oral tradition” (*ibid.*:19). See Kirk (1993:270) for a similar discussion of parallel motifs in the Homeric epics, *Gilgamesh*, and the Indian epic *Ramayana*. It has also been argued that “l’*Odyssee* renferme des épisodes dont l’origine orientale est incontestable” (Lévêque 1974:581).

⁶⁷ The Greek name for southern Balochistan was Gedrosia and it “designated the vast region which extended from the eastern borders of Karmania [the region of former Hormuz and present Bandar Abbas] to the Lower Indus” (McCrimdell 1971:187, n. 2).

⁶⁸ The inhabitants here were Oreitae, who were not Indians and had another language and set of laws, though some Indian customs (Tarn 1950:II, 250, n.6): “This people, a sept of the Gedrosii, who lived west and north of them, were Iranians, perhaps somewhat mixed; they are sometimes referred to in general terms as Gedrosians” (*ibid.*:251).

Rambacia, the largest village of the Oreitans, “he was impressed with the position, and felt that a city founded there would become great and prosperous” (1933:II.vi, 21.5).⁶⁹ Here Alexander established the first large city (Fraser 1996:178):

[H]e believed, as he believed of Alexandria in Egypt and Alexandria on the Jaxartes, [that it had] become great and prosperous. It was here, then, in the heat of Baluchistan that Alexander saw the main base for his coastal trade, and possibly also the strategic base for lasting control of northern Gedrosia and Arachosia, by way of the well-worn tracks over which caravans and armies have marched over the centuries, up the Porali valley to Kalāt in the Harboi Hills and Quetta, and through the Bolān and Khojak passes to Kandahar, the circle of his empire thus completed.

Here Alexander saw commercial and military purposes operating simultaneously, and the importance of this city was doubled as it was situated at the “Western Gate of India” (*idem*).⁷⁰

Alexander built a second Alexandria in Harmozia, which lies on the western extremities of Gedrosia.⁷¹ I believe that this second Alexandria is

⁶⁹ Probably located at the head of the plain of Las Bela, at the northern end of the estuary of the Porali river (Fraser 1996:178).

⁷⁰ The city is recorded in Stephanus’ list as the thirteenth Alexandria in Makarene beside which flows the river Maxates or the present-day Porali (cf. Tarn 1950:II, 249). This city was then the capital of eastern Gedrosia, and Tarn writes that from the eparchy name Makarene we can deduce that “the city was in existence in the Seleucid period; and it must have been existing in Parthian times” (*ibid.*:254-55). Alexander founded this city to “develop the spice trade” (*ibid.*:252), but Tarn believes that “probably his dominant motive throughout was to strengthen the remote parts of his empire with Greek cities and all that they implied as a mainspring of his policy of the fusion of races” (*ibid.*:247). Greek sources mention that although most of the country of Balochistan was as arid as in modern times, “it produced one of the things which all Greeks coveted—spices” (Tarn 1951:94). We read in later times that “ivory, ebony and the spices of the Himalayas and Gedrosia were the main exports from India during the Seleucid period” (Woodcock 1966:47-48). We also read that Alexander forbade the fish-eaters (of Gedrosia) to live on fish, which, according to Tarn (1951:260), must mean that “someone had sought to make these coasting voyages easier by trying to establish centres of agriculture along the dreary coast of the Mekran.”

⁷¹ This Alexandria is also recorded under the name of Alexandria in Carmania (Tarn 1950:II, 239; Hansman 1973:582) as well as Alexandria Gulashkird (Tarn 1950:I, 109; Sykes 1915:I, 278). Hansman (1973:583) argues that “the Alexandria Carmania was built in Tepe Yahya, half way between Pura and Persopolis.” Pura of the Greeks was then the capital of whole of Gedrosia (Arrian 1933:II.vi, 24.1), and Alexander spent 60

more important to our present study because all Balochi oral legends lead us to the east of ancient Hormuz as the early homeland of the Rind and the Lāšār tribes, the main tribal and political forces at the time of our present legend.⁷² They are reported to have migrated east during the early Islamic period.⁷³ However, it could also be possible that some earlier migrations had taken place from east to west, though we lack any records, either in written or from oral recounts, of any westward migration of the Baloch.

Gedrosia, as the principal linking corridor of the West with India, occupied an important position, and Greek merchants continued sailing along the coast of Makrān to and from India for a long time after the break-up of Greek political power in the Orient.⁷⁴ In Menander's time (d. 150-145 B.C.E.) Barygaza (modern Broach in Gujarat, India) was the great port for the sea-trade between India and the West, and "ships from the Greek ports of India were following Nearchus' route along the Gedrosian coast to the Greek centre on the Gulf of Ormuz, whence the goods went by water to Seleuceia" (Tarn 1951:367). By the middle of the first century C.E. the Greek sea-trade to India reached its peak and we find statements such as one calling Barygaza "a port of Gedrosia" and another placing Patalene in Gedrosia (*ibid.*:260).⁷⁵ It is also important to emphasize that "the Greeks did not come

days traveling from Rambacia to Pura. Here he rested his army before proceeding to Carmania. The Balochi name for Pura was Pahra, which was changed to Irānšahr by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1930 (Hosseini 1984:79). It was the main cultural and political center of the Baloch ethnic group until the early fifteenth century and it was here that they found the first Baloch confederacy in the fourteenth century and named it Balochistan (Baloch 1983:188; see Breseeg 2001:108 for a detailed discussion).

⁷² Nasīr (1979a:67) believes that 44 Baloch tribes, under the leadership of Mīr Jalāl Khan, migrated from Jagīn in southern Iran and settled in Pahra, modern Iranshahr in western Makran. However, some other sources, basing their supposition on linguistic connections, assign "the original home of the Baluch to somewhere just east or southeast of the central Caspian region" (Elfenbein 1989:634; Sheehan 1994:48), but I am not sure how much credit we can give to origin myths and legends.

⁷³ For a detailed discussion of Baloch migrations and settlements, see Badalkhan forthcoming.

⁷⁴ See Badalkhan 2002b for a general discussion.

⁷⁵ We know for sure that neither Barygaza nor Patalene (the Indus delta country) ever made a part of Gedrosia, unless we agree with Hansman that "in Seleucid or even Indo-Bactrian times the jurisdiction of Gedrosia was considered to extend as far eastward as the Indus" (1973:568). However, these statements attest to the importance of Gedrosia

merely as transient sailors. . . . [T]hey set up their trading posts, establishing small settlements, and wandering far inland” (Woodcock 1966:142). As a result, within a generation or so after the death of Alexander, Greek civic life and traditional Greek culture had spread to some remote corners of the Indo-Iranian world (cf. Fraser 1996:181).

The anonymous author of *The Periplus*, who wrote during the first century C.E., found remains of the signs of the expedition of Alexander in India, especially in Barygaza, “such as ancient shrines, walls of forts and great wells” (Schoff 1974:39). He reports that ancient drachmae were current in Barygaza, “bearing inscriptions in Greek letters, and the devices of those who reigned after Alexander, Apollodotus and Menander” (1974:41-42). Similarly, Seneca is said to have attested that the Greek language was spoken in the Indus valley as late as the middle of the first century C.E. and that “it was employed upon coins of the conquering nations for many centuries later” (quoted in Bellew 1973:189; cf. Holdich 1910:21).

Tarn argues that “Egypt has at least taught us that whatever other works Greeks might take with them to foreign lands they would certainly take Homer and Euripides” (1951:382). Plutarch writes that by means of Alexander “Asia was civilised and Homer read there, and that *the children of Persians, Susians, and Gedrosians sang the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles*” (quoted in McCrindle 1971:177, n. 1, emphasis added; cf. Tarn 1950:II, 254). According to Tarn, this also implies a Greek *polis* in Gedrosia (1951:254-55) since “Greeks could not imagine a town without a theatre” (*ibid.*:322).⁷⁶ Tarn further explains that “Plutarch is referring specifically to Alexandria in Makarene, though he speaks of a later period than Alexander’s” (1950:II, 255). McCrindle cites Ael (*V. Hist. xii*, 48), saying that “not only the Indians, but the Kings of Persia have translated and sung the poems of Homer” (1971:177, n. 1).⁷⁷

Gedrosia was an independent satrapy undoubtedly lying beyond the

in those times—at least in terms of its geographical location and the sea-trade between Gedrosia and these cities (cf. Tarn 1950:II, 254).

⁷⁶ One thing seems to be sure: that “in Alexander’s day there was no such thing as a theatre in Iran, or anywhere east of Asia Minor, though there were plenty later on” (Tarn 1950, II:322).

⁷⁷ Arora is of the opinion that “the Indian epic *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* was probably seen by the Greeks as the Indian version of Homer, for the authors like Dio-Chrysostomos and Aelian mentioned the translation of Homer into the Indian languages” (1991:93).

limits of India proper (Smith 1904:98).⁷⁸ As “each satrapy contained a small nucleus of Greek officials for purposes of administration and revenue, and . . . the general of the satrapy, if a Greek, would dispose of a few troops” (Tarn 1951:258), we may assume that the inhabitants of the country of Balochistan had some sort of contact with the colonizers and each group would naturally influence the other in some way or another. This will bring us to suppose that some direct or indirect knowledge of Homeric epics had reached and survived among the inhabitants of present-day Balochistan. However, it is also possible that both traditions employed a return narrative-pattern inherited from a common Indo-European heritage.

A further word should be added about the historicity of the character of Murīd. While there is ample evidence that Hānī’s was a historical personality (we know of her tomb and her living quarters—her palace was built just opposite to the Sībī fort and the remaining walls are still shown by the local people to visitors), there is no such evidence for Šey Murīd. A number of Baloch scholars conjecture that the whole episode was constructed upon an already-existing oral tradition and that the name of Hānī was added by poets and minstrels of the Lāšāri tribe to defame Mīr Čākar Khān Rind, with whom they were at war.⁷⁹ Barker and Mengal share the view that “there is no historical corroboration for the story of Shay Murīd and Hānī, and the ascription of these events to the time of Mīr Čākar Rind appears to be apocryphal” (1969:II, 314). If this is the case, then we may suppose that the whole or a part of the narrative has been built upon a pre-existing story of the absence and return of a hero and that later poets and minstrels have added names of persons and places to create a new legend from a traditional structure. But it is not our intention to posit any thesis about the historicity of Murīd’s legend. The key issue is the remarkable parallelism in the return and recognition motifs in the legends of *Hero Šey Murīd* and Homer’s *Odyssey*.

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⁷⁸ Gedrosia’s name designates that it was a satrapy; Tarn observes that “the great satrapies almost always bore names ending in *-ia*” (1951:3).

⁷⁹ Gul Khān Nasīr, one of the leading authorities on Balochi oral traditions, believes that Murīd was a historical personality. Commenting on opinions questioning the historicity of the Murīd legend, he concludes that it is not easy to refute the legend of Hānī and Murīd (Nasīr 1976:96).

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⁸⁰ This article is the outcome of fruitful discussions with John Miles Foley at the Folklore Fellows' Summer School in Lammi, Finland in 1997. An earlier draft was presented at the International Conference on Traditions and Transitions in Melbourne, July 16-20, 2001. Some of the material presented here was drawn from field recordings I made during visits to Balochistan. Trips to Pakistan and Melbourne were partially funded by MURST (*Etnolinguistica ed etnostoria dell'area iranica*). Very sincere thanks are due to Prof. Adriano Rossi (Università di Napoli, l'Orientale) for all of his assistance.

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