

# Oral Narration in Iranian Cultures

Edited by  
Maryam Nourzaei, Carina Jahani and Agnes Korn



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Gegründet von Georges Redard, herausgegeben von Agnes Korn

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WIESBADEN 2022

DR. LUDWIG REICHERT VERLAG

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# A Study of the Trials and Tribulations of the Balochi Epic Hero Mir Chakar Rind and the Sindhi Epic Hero Chanesar, with References to the Iranian Epic Traditions

Sabir Badalkhan

## Background story of the trials of Mir Chakar Rind<sup>1</sup>

The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries are considered to be the heroic age of Balochistan and the golden age of Balochi literature. It was during this period that the Baloch country was united in a loose confederacy extending from the borders of Sindh and Punjab in the east to the eastern confines of Kirman and Hormuzgan in the west (cf. Baluch 1965: 50). No written records are available about the structure and form of this confederation, but the oral epic tradition amply records that it was a semi-autonomous alliance of tribes and regional rulers with Sibi as the seat of power. Heretofore, Makran had been the centre of Baloch power and the seat of local rulers. With the migration of the Rinds, the Lasharis, and their allied tribes from Makran to Sibi and Kacchi,<sup>2</sup> sometime around the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the seat of Baloch power shifted from Makran to Sibi in eastern Balochistan. Mir Shayhak Rind, and later his industrious son, Mir Chakar Rind, were the main protagonists of this conquest and unification of the Baloch country. According to local tradition, the name *Balochistan* came to be applied to this vast country about the same period.<sup>3</sup>

This confederacy was soon devastated by a war between the Rind and Lashari tribes supported by scores of other tribes. The tradition is that these tribes continued fighting each other for about 30 years. The real motives behind this decades-long conflict are not known, but the oral tradition records that it initially began over the issue of protecting the property of a Jatt<sup>4</sup> woman by the name of Gohar, who had taken refuge with Mir Chakar. She was a wealthy widow who, following the death of her husband, and afraid of being deprived of her wealth by her in-laws, or forced to marry one of them against her will, took refuge with

<sup>1</sup> Profound thanks are due to Prof. Julia Rubanovich, who read an earlier draft of this paper and made very valuable comments and suggestions. Needless to say, I am the only one responsible for any shortcomings and for opinions expressed here.

<sup>2</sup> No changes have been made in the transcription of widely known place names, while less known ones are transcribed following the local pronunciation.

<sup>3</sup> We are not sure when the name Balochistan was first introduced but there are records that by the 16th century the name was widely used locally and abroad (Firishta, trans. Briggs 1910, 4: 225; Reis, trans. Vambéry 1899: 16; 'Allāmi 1927, 2: 311, 337, n. 2; see also Badalkhan 2004b: 101, n. 8 for more references).

<sup>4</sup> The Jatt are said to be of Indian origin who are found settled in Balochistan since the earlier times. They were traditionally attached to Baloch tribes as their camel-drivers but this distinction is no more observed in much of Balochistan. A few decades back, the very name Jatt meant a cameleer (Bray 1913, I: 165), but not anymore. Now they are also engaged in land tilling and work as sharecroppers all over Balochistan, and in some areas, especially in some parts of Makran, they have also bought small patches of land and engage in small businesses. In Makran they are no more treated inferior socially though a Baloch with a tribal background will never give a woman of his family in marriage to a Jatt man (for more on the Jatt see Badalkhan 2005: 17–25; Bray 1913, I: 165; Baluch 1977: 165, n. 1; Swidler 1968: 18; Rao 1979, 1981, 1982, 1986; Nasir 1982: 195; Elfenbein 1987: 228; Le Strange 1873: 331).



Mir Gwahram, chief of the Lashari tribe. Gwahram asked her hand in marriage but she refused to accept him as a husband arguing that she had always considered and treated him like a brother and could not have him as a husband. Fearing reprisals from the tribesmen of Gwahram, she left his area without informing him and took refuge in the territory of Mir Chakar, chief of the Rind tribe. The Lasharis felt humiliated that a refugee widow had abandoned the place of their chief and taken refuge with another Baloch chief. This was probably the original bone of contention between the two most powerful Baloch tribes of those days. Some time later, a horse race between two youths of these tribes was arranged in Sibi with Rind arbitrators. According to the oral tradition, the race ended without a clear winner as both horses' riders reached the goal line neck to neck, but the Rind judges declared the Rind youth the winner and awarded him the prize. Enraged by this incident, and with the memory of Gohar's abandoning of the Lashari tribe and taking refuge with Mir Chakar in mind, the returning Lashari youths found a herd of Gohar's camels grazing in an open field. They killed a number of baby camels and maimed scores of others before leaving. This incident ignited a firestorm of revenge, the famous war of 30 years, which burnt down the very foundations of Baloch rule over Balochistan. In countless incidents, most of the able-bodied men from both sides, who were later joined by other tribes, were smitten by swords, and only women and children were left to bury and mourn their dead. Baloch tribesmen and non-tribal people found it hard to live in peace in Balochistan under the burning fire of revenge. People migrated *en masse* to Sindh and the Punjab to find a safe haven and begin a new life in a foreign land. Consequently, the Baloch were no longer in a position to defend their country from foreign invasion. According to tradition, the final and conclusive battle in this series of wars was fought at the defile of Nali<sup>5</sup> and almost eradicated both sides to the last fighting man. The forces of Mir Chakar suffered the worst, and the best of Mir Chakar's warriors, including several of his close family members and prominent figures of his tribe, were killed (Nasir 1979: 66). Sardar M. Khan Baluch, a prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century Baloch historian, writes of the devastation caused by the battle of Nali:

Seldom in Baluch history, did the flames of war burn with fiercer and ruinous rage. A fight where fire answered fire, sword surrounded sword, spear struck spear, force fought force, fury forced fury, might met might, and steed threatened steed in proud neighs. ... The entire fateful plain of Nali was crimsoned by the blood of the dead. Besides hundreds of the bravest and noblest Rinds, Chakar lost his brother Sohrāb, and his distinguished cousin Mīrhan, the sole spirit, the heart of Rind numbers. ... Both the Rinds and the Lāshāris lost the pith and marrow of their blood. Baluchistan and the Baluch race never lost so many nobles of so much worth [on any other occasion in the recorded history of the Baloch]<sup>6</sup> (Baluch 1977: 85).

<sup>5</sup> The Nali in question is located west of Gajan in Kacchi district in north-eastern Balochistan. The war at Nali was fought around the first or second decade of the sixteenth century (for more on the Nali war, see Baluch 1977: 83 ff.). The toponym *nali* (lit. a place where *nal*, a type of reed, is found in abundance) is common all over Balochistan. I personally know of several places in Makran with that name.

<sup>6</sup> Shāh Muhammad Marī, whose material comes from Eastern Balochistan, writes that more than 30,000 combatants took part at the battle of Nali (Marī 2009: 97). Almost all versions of this episode have it that seven hundred Rind youths of noble birth laid down their lives in this encounter, which was a major blow to Rind forces (Mayer 1901<sup>3</sup>: 30; Dames 1907, I: 8; Baluch 1977: 99; Nasir 1979: 74; Faqir Shād 2000/2016: 87; Marī 2009: 97). I believe that the number "seven" in this context should be taken as a large and unspecified number rather than 700 as a round number. As a matter of fact, the number seven, besides being a magic number, is often interpreted as an "unlimited number" in many cultures around the world (for the number seven in Iranian languages, see Shahbazi 2002).

Since writing was not known to the Baloch of those times, we lack written records attesting to the occurrence of these conflicts. However, the Baloch had developed a strong practice of composing oral poetry to record important events and to transfer them to future generations through a class of professional minstrels known as *pahlawān* in western and northern Balochistan (territories located west of the Jahlawān and Sarawān regions in central Balochistan) and Domb/Luri<sup>7</sup> in eastern Balochistan – Baloch territories situated east of the Kalat plateau extending up to the trans-Indus regions. Oral tradition has it that every tribe had its tribal poet(s) who composed poems recording important events of collective importance and then the tribal minstrels would memorize them and sing them in public and at family gatherings (Barker and Mengal 1969, II: 263–64). While the poets usually were Baloch of upper social background, minstrels came from the dependent social classes. Besides tribal poets, tribal/village chiefs also had their family poets who would accompany them on their routine tours recording important events in verse narratives, and this way the history would be preserved and passed on to coming generations.

According to the living minstrels<sup>8</sup> and elderly people, the epic tradition in Balochistan was lively and vibrant until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with *pahlawāns* able to engage audiences for several consecutive nights and rarely repeating an episode. With the arrival of transistor radios during the second half of the century, and as more and more people moved to larger towns, minstrelsy began to decline, with very few able to carry on the centuries-old tradition. As a result, a large part of the epic cycles was lost, and only a few episodes from some of these survived through word of mouth, passing from one generation to the next. One such example is the cycle on the Rind-Lasharī wars, of which only a few famous episodes have survived (see Baluch 1977; Badalkhan 1989; Faqīr Shād 2000/2016; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012; Dames 1907; Mayer 1900–1907; Marī 1970).

The epic under discussion here is the most popular one from the cycle of Rind-Lashar wars. At present, the longest version is, to the best of my knowledge, the one found in Faqīr Shād (2000/2016: 54–109), which comprises 1,161 verses. Another version with 806 verses is in Jahāndīde (1390/2011–2012: 158–228). Dames also gives some short versions, which he says he recorded in eastern Balochistan.<sup>9</sup> Kalmatī (2018) has discussed its contents in some detail, but not published the epic in full. All these versions, except for the one in Dames, show great conformity, with the exception of some minor verbal differences, dialectal variations, or the addition/omission of some lines here and there.

This epic is given different names by different performers, but the most common titles in Makran are *Ākar u Gwahrāmāy jangay šayr* (*šayr*<sup>10</sup> about the war between Chakar and

<sup>7</sup> The folk etymology of the term *pahlawān* for minstrel is that the term is a combination of the Persian/Parthian word *pahlaw* (“hero, athlete”) and the Balochi suffix *-wān* (“reader, singer”) (see Badalkhan 2019: 49–50, n. 1 for more on this). Domb and Luri, on the other hand, are a social class of professional musicians, singers, artists, artisans, ironsmiths, goldsmiths, etc. who have been attached to the Baloch since time immemorial and are believed to be akin to the Gypsy groups found in different parts of the world (see Badalkhan 2005 for more on the Lūrīs).

<sup>8</sup> All of my data come from fieldwork I carried out in Balochistan – both Pakistani and Iranian – during the late 1980s and early 1990s when I was doing research for my PhD on Baloch minstrelsy (see Badalkhan 1994).

<sup>9</sup> See Dames 1907, vol. II, poem no. IV for the text in Balochi and vol. I, pp. 5–9 for the English translation, and also Dames 1884, vol. II, pp. 457–93.

Gwahram), *Rind u Lāšāray jangay šayr* (*šayr* about the war between the Rind and the Lashar [tribes]), and *Gōharay hīrrānī šayr* (*šayr* about the baby camels of Gohar). The version discussed here comes from the recitation by *pahlawān* Saleh Mahmud Gorgej (d. 1992), who I recorded several times between 1989 and 1991 in Malir, Karachi.

Its date of composition is not known, but it is generally believed to go back to the times of Mir Chakar Rind in the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The convention is that tribal poets composed these episodes recounting major events/encounters and then tribal minstrels would memorize them and sing them in public, following the sequence of events and encounters. With the passage of time, successive minstrels would make a natural selection, singing the most famous and highly demanded episodes, while bypassing others. In the course of time, the more frequently sung episodes would survive, while the rest would be lost. As no attempt was ever made to put them in writing before the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when epic performance was already in decline, and most of the famous Baloch minstrels were dead, we possess these epic cycles only in fragments.

In almost all versions from Makran (both Iranian and Pakistani), Karachi and northern Balochistan, the name of the composer is given as Shoran (Badalkhan 1989; Barker and Mengal 1969, II: 273, 278, 287; Mengal 1989: 3; Nasīr 1976: 49; Kalmaṭī 2018: 83, 184), or Sholan (Faḡīr Shād 2000/2016: 109, and Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 228). The tradition is that Shoran was attached to Mir Chakar Rind as his court poet (Badalkhan 2013: 27, n. 43).

This epic basically centres on the thirty-year-long war between the Rind and the Lashari tribes that began with the killing of the camels of Gohar, the woman who had taken refuge with Mir Chakar Rind. The main hero of the epic is Mir Chakar Rind, who the poet extols as a symbol of Baloch honour. As a matter of fact, Mir Chakar is considered one of the most highly praised Baloch chiefs of all time and is still the subject of women’s lullabies and an ideal for Baloch of all ages. He is known as *Čākar-i Āzam* (“Chakar the Great”) and is credited with having united all the Baloch regions under a single umbrella and forming the first confederation of Baloch tribes. According to M. Sardar Khan Baluch, one of the highest authorities on the Balochi classical period and author of a biography of Mir Chakar, after succeeding his father to the throne of Balochistan in 1484 (Baluch 1977: 71), he

soon became the centre of all Baluch arms, aims, ambition and attraction, and ... the firm figure of the time for legend and tradition. ... The famous town of Sibi became an important centralizing force, for it set the standard in art, literature and chivalry. A brave warrior, a best swordsman, liberal minded in his views, a true friend of his people, he was undoubtedly, the beau-ideal of a celebrated feudal chief (Baluch 1977: 71–72).

He adds that Mir Chakar was treated as a “descended god”<sup>11</sup> by his people who considered him “the base and pillar of the race, the Orbit and author of Baluch code of honour, [and of] all Baluch traditions”. He united various tribes and families under one umbrella and conquered a vast territory, which he gave “the name of Baluchistan” (Baluch 1977: 77). No precise dates are available for his birth and death. Baluch puts the date of his birth in 1454

<sup>10</sup> The term *šayr* is presently used by the Baloch as a generic term for poetry, but traditionally it was reserved for narratives in verse.

(Baluch 1965: 116), while Marri Baloch calculates it to 1468 (Marri Baloch 1974: 175; also Shirazi 2001: 21).<sup>12</sup>

There is general agreement that he was born in Ashal in Kolwah, eastern Makran, where the remains of a fort, *Āšālay kalāt* (“the Fort of Ashal”), still mark the past glories of the place. The fort, his birthplace, is now completely abandoned except for sporadic visitors who stop to pay homage to the place that gave birth to the greatest Baloch of all time. His father, Mir Shayhak Rind, chief of a multitude of Baloch tribes, migrated from Kolwah to the Sibi and Kacchi regions in north-eastern Balochistan sometime around the late 15<sup>th</sup> century when he was still a young boy. The reasons for the migration are not known, but it is generally held that a prolonged drought may have forced the tribes to move further east and look for better resources for living.<sup>13</sup> It was here in Sibi that Mir Shayhak Rind installed his son, Mir Chakar Rind (r. 1487–1511), as the *Sardār-i Āzam* (“the great Chief”) of the Baloch around 1484 (Baluch 1965: 120–21) or in 1487 (Baluch 1958:39; Harrison 1981: 12). Soon after coming to power, he began expanding his rule to other Baloch regions which hitherto had been autonomous. He is credited with having established the first “Kingdom of Balochistan” with Sibi as its capital (Atarodi 2011: 16; Dames 1881: 136). In a short period of time, the Baloch confederacy, under his dynamic leadership, “stretched from west Kerman to western Sindh and from north southern Khorasan, southern Afghanistan and southern Punjab to the south from Bandar Abbas to Karachi” (Atarodi 2011: 16).<sup>14</sup> According to tradition, he bade farewell to Balochistan soon after his capital was captured by the Arghun Turks. The exact date of this migration is not known, and there are no written records to guide us in this regard. Baluch believes that this migration took place in 1511 (Baluch 1958: 39), while Marri Baloch (1974: 177) calculates it to 1496.<sup>15</sup>

There are several stories of miracles related to his birth. One of these tells that before he was born, his mother had a dream in which Canopus (*suhayl*) descended from the sky and sat on her right palm. She told this dream to her husband, who invited dream experts to interpret it. They said it was a prophecy of the birth of a son who would shine like Canopus in the sky and become the guide and leader of the Baloch for all time. According to another legend, his mother dreamed that the moon came out of her body and began shining in the

<sup>11</sup> There is general agreement among the elderly Baloch that he was endowed “with saintly virtues and mystic powers” (Shirazi 2001: 21), and that he “was a ‘godlike man’ (*Hudhāi mard*)”, and “could do things which the present generation is not capable of” (Dames 1881: 136). Many of my informants would affirm this, and often called him a *walī* (“saint, a friend of God”), who had knowledge of the hidden and mysterious things of the universe.

<sup>12</sup> Marri Baloch argues that Mir Chakar was alive at the time of Humayun’s recapture of the throne of Delhi in 1556 and that he died at the age of 88. On the basis of this, he maintains that he must have been born in or around 1468 (Marri Baloch 1974: 175).

<sup>13</sup> The valley of Kolwah, known as the granary of Makran, is vast and fertile, though dependent on rainfall. With regular seasonal rains, it could produce much grain to feed the whole of Balochistan at the time, but with frequent droughts, it would force its thin population to migrate to other places to escape starvation.

<sup>14</sup> See also Hasan 1976: 57; Harrison 1981: 12; Ahmad 1992: 41–42, fn. 89 on p. 61; Badalkhan 2000–2003: 33, n. 24; Ahmed and Baloch 2017: 3.

<sup>15</sup> It is generally held that the migration of Baloch into the Punjab was mainly caused by the invasion of Turks/Mughals during the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Shah Beg Arghun, son of Zunnun Beg Arghun, took Sibi for a second time in about 1511 and this occupation may have caused the mass migration of Baloch tribes towards Punjab under Mir Chakar Rind (Dames 1881: 136).

sky. She was frightened and told it to her husband the following morning. The dream was interpreted as meaning the couple would have a son who would shine in the world of the Baloch for all days to come (Khān 2013: 50).

Upon the birth of Mir Chakar, certain auspicious rites were performed by his father. A sword was placed under his pillow and his umbilical cord was tied around the ear of a swift steed that was made to gallop, in the belief that the boy would become “a selected swordsman and a rider of repute” (Baluch 1977: 116–17). According to the tradition, he was given his name on the sixth day after his birth and was called *Ākar* (lit. “slave, servant”).<sup>16</sup>

Like the date of his birth, the date of his death is disputed. In the absence of any written records,<sup>17</sup> different writers give different dates based on their personal calculations and sporadic mentions of him in contemporary chronicles. We read that he was alive in the 1540s, ruling over a vast region in lower Punjab with Satghara<sup>18</sup> as his seat.<sup>19</sup> Dames writes that in 1556 he assisted Humayun with the recapture of Delhi from the Afghan Suris<sup>20</sup> (Dames 1913: 651–52; Shirazi 2009). On the basis of this information, it might be possible that the date 1565, as calculated by several writers, is close to the actual date of his death.<sup>21</sup> Mir Chakar is buried in Satghara, and his mausoleum has been declared a national monument by the Department of Archaeology and National Heritage, Pakistan. A large festival is arranged at his mausoleum in March every year by Baloch organizations in Punjab, and it is attended by great numbers of Baloch from all over the country.

<sup>16</sup> The literal meaning of *ākar* is “servant” but when it is used as a personal name, it is taken in the sense of “servant of God” (cf. Balochi male names like *mayār* or *bāhōī*, both meaning “under the protection of” but in this case referring to God; or *gulām*, “servant” of God, etc.).

<sup>17</sup> Tate reports the existence of a manuscript entitled *Chākar-nāma* that related the life and deeds of Mir Chakar Rind, but says the book “was taken away by one of the custodians of Chakar’s tomb who had been deputed for the purpose” (Tate 1896: 12–13).

<sup>18</sup> Satghara is about 80 kilometres from Lahore and 40 kilometres from Harappa. It lies along the southern bank of the River Ravi (Shirazi 2001: 20).

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Qasim Firishta completed his *Tārīkh-e Fīrīšta*, a compendium of many historical accounts and narratives regarding local rulers and principalities, in 1606–1607. He reports on Mir Chakar Rind (in some manuscripts transcribed as *Mīr Jākar Zind*, مبر جاکر زند) and his arrival in Multan (Firishta, trans. Briggs 1910, 4: 229), writing that Mir Chakar first approached Mahmud Shah Langah, a local ruler (r. 1502–1524), but Malik Suhrab Dodai, another powerful Baloch tribal chief, prevented Mahmud Langah from receiving him in Multan. He then went to Jam Bayazid who graciously received him and gave him a large *jāgīr* (estate) in the district of Uchh (ibid.: 385). Another contemporary source, the *Tārīkh-i Shēr Shāhī*, also makes mention of Mir Chakar, calling him the ruler of Satghara (Sarwānī 1964, II: 140; see also Elliot and Dowson 1872, 4: 398). These sources report that he came to Multan with his two sons, Allahdad and Shahdad, from the direction of Sibi/Sivi (Qanungo 1965: 290).

<sup>20</sup> It is speculated that he did not accompany Humayun in person, as he was too old, but sent his son, Mir Shahdad, with a strong Baloch contingent numbering several thousand, to help the Mughal emperor recapture the Delhi throne. The emperor later rewarded him generously by conferring upon him a vast *jāgīr* (estate) including Shergarh in Okara district, and many horses and slaves (Wescoat and Wolschke-Bulmahn 1996: 49; Dames 1904: 45; Matheson 1997: 43).

<sup>21</sup> Baluch puts the date of his death between 1550 and 1555 (Baluch 1958: 39, 175; Baluch 1977: 73; cf. also Wescoat and Wolschke-Bulmahn 1996: 49; Shirazi 2001; Shirazi 2009; Hayat 2009; Batool 2012; Khan 2013: 233).

## The Trials of Mir Chakar Rind

The motif of the epic hero going through difficult trials before achieving his objectives is encountered in many epic traditions around the world. One of the classical examples is the story of Odysseus, who, on his way home from the Trojan war, faces innumerable obstacles and challenges before returning to his kingdom in Ithaca and being reunited with his wife Penelope and son Telemachus.<sup>22</sup> In Iranian epic traditions, we find several heroes going through a series of trials before achieving their goals. For example, in the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi, Rostam and Esfandiyar go through seven or eight trials, respectively, known as *haft khān*.<sup>23</sup> Rostam's son Faramarz also goes through a series of trials in which he fights demons, dragons, lions, rhinoceroses, a talking horned wolf and a giant bird (van Zutphen 2014: 4, 481–83).<sup>24</sup> In one of the longer versions of the *Barzūnāma*, Faramarz's son Jahanbakhsh also performs a series of seven trials (*haft khān*) (ibid.: 146, 128). Similarly, in the Sistani cycle of epics, the hero Shahriyar performs a nine-stage trial in which he fights elephants and wolves, kills a dragon, fights lions, passes through a landscape infested with insects, defeats demons, battles monkeys, fights Zangis and kills the demon Sagsar (Gazerani 2016: 139). However, due to lack of space, we limit ourselves to the trials of the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century Baloch epic hero Mir Chakar Rind and its parallels in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Sindhi epic, *Dodo-Chanesar*, making some passing references to the Iranian epic traditions.

We begin with the Balochi tradition. The hero's trials and tribulations are related in the epic on the Rind and Lashari wars fought during the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The epic narrates that after the defeat of Mir Chakar's forces at Nali, his father rebuked him for having caused the death of so many able men of his own tribe and of his allies. Reprimanded by his father, Mir Chakar decided then and there to go to Herat/Kandahar and ask the Turk<sup>25</sup> ruler there to assist him in taking revenge on Mir Gwahram Lashari and his allies. While Mir Chakar was on his way to Herat/Kandahar, the story continues, his rival, the Lashari Chief, consulted the elders of his tribe and of his allies who advised him to send bribes to the king of Kandahar imploring him to have Chakar killed. They sent valuable gifts to the king and also pledged perpetual obedience to him and his successors and the payment of yearly tributes to them. To get the hero killed, the king imposed various trials

<sup>22</sup> For a comparative study of the return and recognition motifs in the stories of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Baloch hero Shay Murid and the Greek epic hero Odysseus, see Badalkhan 2004a.

<sup>23</sup> See Khaleghi-Motlagh's *Shāhnāma* 1384/2005, 2: 21 ff. for Rostam's trials under the title of *Guftār andar haftkhān-i Rostam-i Zāl* ("narration of the seven trials/courses of Rostam son of Zal"), and vol. 5, pp. 221 ff. for Esfandiyar's seven trials under the title of *Dāstān-i haftkhān-i Isfandyār* ("narration of the seven trials/courses of Esfandiyar"). For more on the trials of the hero in the *Shāhnāma*, see Warner and Warner 1906, 2: 44 ff. for Rostam's trials, and 1901, 5: 119 ff. for Esfandiyar's trials; Fischer 2004: 96–98; Ferdowsi, trans. Davis 2006: 152–62; Davidson 1990: 120; Davidson 1994, chap. 9; Davidson 2012; Omidsalar 2001; Omidsalar 2011: 113–31 for Rostam's seven trials; Rahman 1974: 290 ff.; and Chaman Ara 2015: 246 for the *haft khāns* of Jahānbaxš, and pp. 257–59 for those of Rostam in the Kurdish *Shāhnāma*.

Ferdowsi calls these trials *haft khān*, which has generally been translated as "seven banquet-courses", "seven adventures", "seven trials", "the seven meals partaken", etc. (cf. Warner and Warner 1906, 2: 29; Rahman 1974: 290). The word *haft* means "seven" (cf. *apt* in Balochi and *epta* in Greek), and *khān* is a cloth spread out for a feast or a banquet course (cf. Balochi *wān*, which also means a "banquet course, special meal" but also a tray or a plate with special food served to guests at a feast or on special occasions).

<sup>24</sup> For more on the *haft khān* or seven trials of Faramarz, see van Zutphen 2014: 264–67 table 11.

<sup>25</sup> Mughals and Mongols are often called Turks by the Baloch.

upon Mir Chakar, during which he was made to confront a mad elephant, fight with a lion under the influence of alcohol and ride on a berserk stallion. However, Chakar emerged victorious from all these trials, and finally he caught the attention of king's mother, mother-in-law, and other women of the royal family. The king's mother reprimanded her son for making a worthy man like Chakar undergo such harsh trials, and urged him to give Chakar a mighty force to bring a full-scale massacre upon the Lasharis and their allies (cf. Baluch 1965: 172–73). Below we quote some relevant passages from the epic to show how these trials are recounted in the Balochi tradition. The poet narrates:

<i>Yakk mähē na ništaḡ lōḡā,</i>	He did not stay a single month at home, <sup>26</sup>
<i>ruksattē kuṭēn mahlūkā,</i>	Bade farewell to his people.
<i>piryādī pamē darbārā,</i>	He went to supplicate at the royal court,
<i>raptag bāḡčahēn Kandahārā,</i>	(Went) to Kandahar of gardens,
<i>ūdā mān Harībī šahrā,</i>	To the city of Herat over there, <sup>27</sup>
<i>Sultān Šāh Husaynay pārā,</i>	[And] to where Sultan Shah Husayn was living,
<i>gōn Turkān ništaḡ at bāhōfī,</i>	He stayed there with the Turks, as a refugee,
<i>grānēn laškarānān lōfī,</i>	Asking for mighty armies,
<i>pīllān gōn srapān siāhēnān,</i>	Dense rows of elephants,
<i>Zunnūī kahārēn pawjān,</i>	Zunnun's brutal forces, <sup>28</sup>
<i>Āzmān andar bīt mawjān,</i>	(So that) the sky would be invisible in the dense waves (of the army),
<i>čukčēnē bikant Lāšārā,</i>	And cause a massacre <sup>29</sup> upon the Lasharis,
<i>Nōdbandag gwanā Nōhānā.</i>	To Nodbandag <sup>30</sup> and the Nohans. <sup>31</sup>

(Badalkhan 1989; cf. also Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 92–93; Kalmatī 2018: 160–161; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 206–08 for variants of this episode).

The poet seems to recount that initially the king had agreed to assist Mir Chakar in taking revenge on his rivals. Upon this affirmation, Chakar sent a fast horseman to give the good news to his people back in Balochistan. The poem continues:

<i>Kullēn raptag ant Jōhānā</i>	They had all gathered at Johan <sup>32</sup>
<i>hālīš dātag mān dīwānā</i>	The news was brought to them [in assembly], that

<sup>26</sup> Some versions have it that he did not stay a single day at home and departed for Herat/Kandahar (Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 92; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 206). The version recorded by Dames from the Dera Ghazi Khan in the lower Punjab has he “would not stay for one noon at his home, but went forth to the populous town of Harēv (Herāt) and saw the Sultan Shah Husain” (Dames 1907, I: 8).

<sup>27</sup> Arīb, Arīp and Harīv are all dialectal variations of the Balochi name for Herat. Frye writes that the district of Herat was called Harēw (*hlyw*) in Middle Persian, and this name has survived from antiquity. He underlines that “the name should not be linguistically confused with Arya” (Frye 1993: 16, n. 3).

<sup>28</sup> Zunnun Baig Arghun was the governor of Kandahar province on behalf of Sultan Husayn Bayqara of Herat (reigned 1468–1507) (Dames 1884, II: 457; Baluch 1977: 133; Baluch 1965: 160). He came down the Bolan Pass for the second time in 1511 and occupied Sibi. He then proceeded to occupy Sindh and establishing himself there (Dames 1907, I: xxxviii; Firishta, trans. Briggs 1910, 4: 427, Persian text, p. 320; Elliot and Dowson 1967, I: 236).

<sup>29</sup> The Balochi term is *čukčēn* “genocide” (*čuk(k)* “children, offsprings”, and suffix *-čēn*, “elimination”).

<sup>30</sup> Nodbandag was also the name of the father of Mir Gwahram Lashari, but it is not clear whether the poet is referring to him or someone else with the same name.

<sup>31</sup> The Nohani tribe were allies of the Lasharis.

<sup>32</sup> A small fertile village by the name of Johan is located some 45 km southeast of Mastung. Along with Kalat, Mangochar and Mastung, Johan is said to be one of the best irrigated areas of the region (*The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 22, p. 100; for more on Johan, see *BDG*, vol. 6, 1907: 227–28). However, the word *jōhān* also means a “heap of harvest” ready for threshing. It is not clear whether the poet is talking about the place Johan or a threshing field.

*swārē atkag ča Bolānā* A horseman has come from the Bolan,<sup>33</sup>  
*mistāg giptagē Rindānā* Who has brought good news for the Rinds, that  
*gwaštag Kuljikīay Hānā* The Khilji Khan has said,<sup>34</sup>  
*bakšū Čākarā pojānā.* He will bestow armies on Chakar.

(Badalkhan 1989; cf. also Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 93; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 208 for variants of this episode.)

On receiving this news, Mir Gwahram gathered the elders of his tribe and of his allies to decide how to foil Mir Chakar's attempts to get military support from the Turks. They agreed that the Turks were greedy and the king would have Chakar killed if bribed generously. So they decided to send costly gifts to the king and ask him to eliminate Chakar. Here is how the poet recounts this episode:

*Gwahrām gwaštag gōn Nōhānā* Gwahram said to the Nohanis,  
*Turkā labdaēn mālwarēn* “Let us bribe the greedy Turk,  
*Čākar gār bibū mardwarēn* So that Chakar, the man-eater, is lost”.  
*yakk lakk ašrapīē dātag* A hundred thousand coins of gold, and  
*pañāh uštirē bār kurtag* Fifty camels loaded (with other gifts),  
*pa Ogānay dihay šaksātag* Were sent to the country of Afghans.<sup>35</sup>  
*hatt u kāgadē rāh dātag* They sent letters, asking him to  
*gār kan Čākarā gōn hīrrān)* Eliminate Chakar with (the story of)  
     baby camels,<sup>36</sup> so that  
*āsūdāg bibēn ča šīrrān* We may get rid of these trouble-makers,  
*kāēn par tāī gālīān* We will come to your court (lit. to your carpets),  
*ančō ki čangjanēn swālīān* Like the harp-playing mendicants,  
*sāl pa sāl daēn mālīān* We will pay you tribute year after year.

(Badalkhan 1989; cf. also Nasīr 1976: 48; Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 94–95; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 208–10; Kalmafi 2018: 161–62 for variants of this episode.)<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Bolan refers to the famous valley which connects the Kacchi plain with the Shal valley (present Quetta valley). It is an 89 km stretch along the Bolan river, which was then the only highway connecting the Indus valley with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that the king of Delhi in the Dodo–Chanesar epic is also a Khilji, Alauddin Khilji, one of the most powerful Khilji rulers of the Delhi Sultanate. He ruled from 1296 to 1316. The Khiljis were originally of Turkish origin, but had long lived in the steppelands of Afghanistan and were Iranized (R. Islam 1998: 272). However, the Khiljis are not known to have established any kingdom in Herat or Kandahar, which gives more support to the general belief that Chakar's going to Herat/Kandahar and taking refuge at the Khiljis is purely a poetic invention with no historical basis (see below for more on this).

<sup>35</sup> Both Faqīr Shād (2000/2016: 94) and Kalmafi (2018: 162) have it that Gwahram collected 100,000 maunds (*lakk man*) of golden coins (*ašrafī*), loaded them upon mules and sent them to the country of the Afghans, while Jahāndīde (1390/2011–2012: 208) gives 100 maunds (*sad man*) of golden coins. One should remember that a Balochi *man* fluctuates from place to place, weighing between two and half *sērs* (ca. two kg) to 15 *sērs* or between seven and 15 English pounds (Adamec 1988: 285, 341; Shāhwānī 1978: 359). Gul Khān Nasīr gives one million golden coins (*dah lakk ašrafī*) in Nasīr 1976:48, and 1,000 golden coins (*dah sad ašrafī*) in Nasīr 1979: 68.

<sup>36</sup> This refers to the baby camels of Gohar which were killed by the Lashari youths in the aftermath of the famous horse-race contest in which the Rind horseman was declared the winner by a jury of Rind elders. This was the immediate cause of the devastating war between the Rinds and the Lasharis. In the above verses, the poet narrates how the Lasharis bribed the king, asking him to get Mir Chakar killed by some stratagem so that the conflict over the baby camels of Gohar could come to an end.

<sup>37</sup> In one of the variants of *Dodo-Chanesar*, King Aladin (*sic*) initially refuses to invade Sindh at the request of Chanesar. When Dodo gets this news, he sends a letter to Chanesar with “a mule-load of treasure”, telling his brother to bribe the king with this treasure and bring him to Sindh so that they can face each other like men on the battlefield (Noorhusain 2011: 105). It should be noted that I have transcribed the name of the Khilji king as Aladin



When the king received the gifts and pledges of submission from Mir Gwahram and his allies, he changed his mind and decided not to assist Chakar any more. He sent a message of assurance to Mir Gwahram, promising that he would find ways to eliminate Mir Chakar:

<i>Šāhā kāgadē šaksātag</i>	The King sent a letter (to Gwahram),
<i>Gwahrāmay habar ē dātag</i>	Giving him this news;
<i>Šāhā dāt jawāb kastīā</i>	The King replied to him with determination (lit. with rage),
<i>Gwahrām to binind bastīā</i>	“Gwahram, stay in ease,
<i>man darwāzaq Arībī bastag</i>	I have closed the gates of Herat (for Chakar),
<i>āzmānā harē gar sarrūt</i>	If a donkey brays in the sky,
<i>Čākar bar padāy tarrūt</i>	Then Chakar may return (to his country)”.

(Badalkhan 1989; cf. also Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 95; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 210; Kalmafī 2018: 162–63).

The poet recounts that soon after this message, the king began thinking of some stratagem to get Chakar killed, though without staining his hands with Chakar’s blood. The poet narrates the king’s various attempts to achieve this goal. As the first attempt, he thought of a ferocious lion that he possessed.

#### Chakar kills the lion

<i>Ā rōčān na gwast čandē rōč</i>	Not even a few days had passed from that day,
<i>kāsīd atkag ant pa algār</i>	When a messenger came rushing to Chakar, (saying)
<i>Čākar Šāh tarā lōtāī</i>	“Chakar, the King summons you,
<i>par to halhatē<sup>38</sup> bakšāī</i>	He will bestow upon you a robe of honour,
<i>Šāhā zahrkinēn šērē ast</i>	The king has a fierce lion, and
<i>gōn to zrahburēn tēgē ast</i>	You have a sharp cutting sword, <sup>40</sup>
<i>čakkās u bičār naršērā</i>	Go and try it on the lion, and
<i>āzmūdāg bikan watī bīrā</i>	Test your sword”.
<i>Sardārā jawāb gardēntag</i>	The Chief responded:
<i>ē imrōzē gwazīt pa wārī</i>	“It is a passing world, [it] will pass under any conditions,
<i>čār rōčī ragāmē gwārī</i>	It is a temporary trouble, [it] will pass”. <sup>41</sup>
<i>suhb u rōšinēn rōč bīttag</i>	When the sun rose in the morning,
<i>Čākar pa numāzā raptag</i>	Chakar went to offer his prayers,
<i>šērpānā watī šēr bōtkag</i>	The lion-keeper <sup>42</sup> freed the lion,
<i>šērārā šarāb wārēntag</i>	The lion was given liquor, <sup>43</sup> and
<i>dēm pa Čākaray rāh dātag</i>	Sent toward the Chief,
<i>čīngur Čākar u čāngur šēr</i>	On this side was Chakar, on that side was the lion,
<i>mān atk ant nawāb u naršēr</i>	The lord and the male-lion faced each other,
<i>čōšē šāntag at šīrāzī</i>	He swung his sword of Shiraz with such force, that
<i>šērē mān du kappā kurtag</i>	The lion was cut into two pieces. <sup>44</sup>
<i>Mīr pa mangihān oštātag</i>	The Chief stood with pride,
<i>dastē pa barōtān muštāg</i>	He patted his moustache with his hands,
<i>dēm pa sāhibay diwwān raptag</i>	And went to the assembly of the chief (the king),
<i>Turkī laškarā bīmm zurtag</i>	The Turk army was terrified,
<i>Sardār gōn maṛāyān atkag</i>	The Chief came with pride,
<i>mahlūnka mubārak dātag.<sup>39</sup></i>	The people congratulated him.

when using the information from Noorhusain, and as Alauddin when using other sources. As a matter of fact, Alauddin would be the more appropriate transcription of the name.

<sup>38</sup> *Khal’at* (Perso-Ar.) “a dress; a robe of honour”.

<sup>39</sup> Badalkhan 1989; cf. also Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 95–96; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 210–14; Nasīr 1976: 49–50; Kalmafī 2018: 163–64; Dames 1907, II: 10 and Maṛī 2009: 158 for other versions of this episode.

The motif of the killing of lion(s) is also present in the trials of Rostam and Esfandiyar in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma*. However, in the former it is his stallion Rakhsh who kills the lion while Rostam is asleep (Khaleghi-Motlagh's *Šāhnāmeḥ* 1369/1990, 2: 22–23; Warner and Warner 1906, 2: 44–46; cf. also Omidsalar 2001: 262; Omidsalar 2011: 116, 126), and in the latter it is the hero himself who kills two lions (Khaleghi-Motlagh's *Shāhnāma* 1375/1997, 5: 229–32; Warner and Warner 1910, 5: 124–25).

The killing of lion(s) is also present in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma* and in Nizami's *Haft Paykar* in the narration of how Bahram Gur, the Sasanian king who ruled from 420 to 438 CE, went through the ordeal of fighting two lions before succeeding his father on the throne of Persia. The story has it that after the murder of Bahram's father, Yazdegerd I, the nobles installed Khosrow of the Sasanian royalty as the new king. When Bahram got the news, he gathered an army and marched to the capital to claim the throne. The nobles decided to place the royal crown on the imperial throne between two savage lions. Whoever retrieved it by killing the beasts would be acknowledged as the new king. Khosrow refused to go through the ordeal, making an excuse of his old age, but Bahram accepted the challenge. He killed both lions with his ox-head mace, placed the crown on his head, sat on the throne and thus became the rightful successor to his father and the new king of Persia (Khaleghi-Motlagh's *Shāhnāma*, 1384/2005, 6: 404–11; Niẓāmī of Ganja 1924, 1: 71–74; cf. also Klíma 1989).

#### Chakar kills the wild elephant

When the king saw that his plans to get Chakar killed by the lion had failed, he thought of getting him killed by his ferocious elephant. Once again, Chakar emerged victorious and the king's plans failed. The poet narrates:

<p><i>Ā rōčān nagwast rōčān čār</i>  <i>kāsīd atkaḡ ant pa algār</i>  <i>Čākar Šāh tarārā lōtūt</i>  <i>par to halhatē bakšāūt</i>  <i>Šāhā mardkušēn pīllē ast</i>  <i>gōn to goharēn tēgē ast</i>  <i>čakkās u bičār narpīllā</i>  <i>āzmūt u bičār watī rīllā</i>  <i>Čākar čō jawāb gardēntaḡ</i>  <i>imrōzē gwazūt pa wārī</i>  <i>čār rōčī ragāmē gwārīt.</i>  <i>Suḥb u rōšinēn rōč būttāḡ</i>  <i>āptābā watī āp kurtāḡ</i>  <i>sardār pa numāzā raptāḡ</i></p>	<p>Not even a few days had passed from that day,<sup>45</sup> when  Messengers came rushing to the Chief, saying:  “Chakar, the king asks for you,  He will give you a robe of honour,  The king has a man-devouring elephant, and  With you is a sharp sword (lit. pearl-studded sword),  Test and try the male elephant,  See and check your stature”.  Chakar replied as follows:  “This is a passing world, [it] will pass even in sufferings,  A temporary problem will pass”.  When morning came with the brightening sun,  Chakar filled an earthen jug with water, and  Sardar went out to perform his prayers,</p>
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<sup>40</sup> The poet here uses the term *zrahburēn tēḡ*, which means a “a sword that cuts mail armour”. Cf. classical Persian *zīrah*, “mail armour; iron armour made with rings”.

<sup>41</sup> Lit. “it is a seasonal rain, [it] will pass in a few days”.

<sup>42</sup> The man in charge of the lion.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Noorhusain 2011: 106–07, where the lion and lioness are also given wine to make them more ferocious and destructive.

<sup>44</sup> For this episode in the eastern Balochi version, see Dames 1907, poem no. IV.

<sup>45</sup> Lit. not even “four days” had passed from that day.

<i>pīlpānā watī pīll bōtkag</i>	The elephant-groom let the elephant free,
<i>pīllārā śarāb wārēntag</i>	The elephant was given liquor, and
<i>dēm pa Čākaray rāh dātag</i>	Driven towards Chakar,
<i>čingo Čākar u čāngo pīll</i>	To this side was Chakar,
	and to the other side was the elephant,
<i>mān atkant nawāb u narpīll</i>	The lord and the male elephant came face to face,
<i>čōnā śāntagē āptābuk</i>	He dashed the jug (against the elephant) with such force that
<i>pīllē kuštāg at ā jāhā</i>	The elephant was killed instantly,
<i>mājgē dranzitag čō āpā</i>	Its brain shattered like water.
<i>Čākar pa kahēbē raptāg</i>	Chakar proceeded on his way with glory,
<i>mahlūnkā tamāmā dīstag</i>	All the people saw him,
<i>Sardārā mubārak kurt ant.</i> <sup>46</sup>	They all congratulated the Chief. <sup>47</sup>

The killing of a ferocious elephant is also present in the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi, where the young boy Rostam shows his heroism by killing the immense and furious white elephant of his father, which had broken loose and threatened the lives of the people. This occurs after the episode in which Sam comes to see his grandson Rostam. After Sam has left, Rostam joins a drinking party at his father's court. Once the party is finished, everyone retires to bed. During the night, Zal's white elephant breaks its fetters and runs frantically in the streets. Rostam hears the desperate shouts of the people, grabs his grandfather's mace and runs to confront the beast. Zal's men try to hold him back, fearing that he might be hurt by the elephant and Zal will punish them for having let him go out. But Rostam gives one of them a hard blow to the head and the others escape. He reaches the elephant and strikes him in the head with the mace so hard that the beast falls down dead from the single blow. Rostam then returns to his bed as if nothing had happened at all (Khaleghi-Motlagh's *Shāhnāma* 1366/1988, 1: 275–77; Warner and Warner, 1905, I: 327–29; Ferdowsi, trans. Levy 2011: 48–49; van Zutphen 2014: 97). However, Rostam's extraordinary heroic deed is not included in the list of his *haft khāns* in the *Shāhnāma* (for Rostam's *haft khāns*, see above note 23). This act of heroism also marks a rite of passage for Rostam, in which he proves that he is no longer a boy but a grown-up man who can face any challenge without the support of any other person.

#### Chakar tames the unbroken stallion

When the king saw that his second attempt had also failed, he thought of another means to complete his mission. This time he thought of his stallion, which was still wild and untamed. It was so strong that forty men were needed to hold its bridle and another eighty to take it to the water channel.<sup>48</sup> The poet narrates:

<sup>46</sup> Badalkhan 1989; cf. also Faqīr Shād 2000: 96–97; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 212–14; Kalmatī 2018: 165–66; Nasīr 1976: 52 for western Balochi variants, and Dames 1907, II: 9 and Marī 2009: 157–58 for eastern Balochi variants of this episode.

<sup>47</sup> In Dames' versions, Mīr Chakar's confrontation with the elephant is narrated somewhat differently. There, he is asked by king Hamāu (whom the poet is probably confusing with the Mughal King Humayun of India), "if a man be alone, empty-handed, without his weapons, what means of escape has he?" Chakar responds that "hand and heart make their own following; there will be no lack of weapons!" They take his weapons away from him and loose a savage elephant upon him. The elephant comes charging at him. Chakar finds a bitch lying in the roadway. He seizes the dog by the leg and dashes it against the elephant's trunk. The elephant turns back ashamed (Dames 1907, I: 8; 1881: 136; cf. also Duke 1883: 124; Marī 2009: 157–58).

<p> <i>Šāhā mān dilā sōj kurtag</i>  <i>ā rōčān na gwast čandē rōč</i>  <i>kāsīd atkag ant algārī</i>  <i>Šāhā gōn tarā kārē ast</i>  <i>tāī nāmē uškutag sardārī</i>  <i>Šāh mardwārēn naryānē dārī</i>  <i>bakšittē tarā pa swārī</i>  <i>čārā dāštag ant singārī</i>  <i>dahā dāštag ant zēnkōdā</i>  <i>čillā dāštag ant zinčēn wāg</i>  <i>gōn kassā na bitt sajj u zāg</i>  <i>bastag mān hawaylī lāpā</i>  <i>aštādē barant pa āpā.</i>  <i>Nākām bittag at sardārā</i>  <i>šērēn Čākaray mardwārā</i>  <i>Čākar padā jawāb gardēntag</i>  <i>imōrzē gwazī pa wārī</i>  <i>čār rōčī ragāmē gwārī.</i>  <i>Suhb u rōšinēn rōč bittag</i>  <i>Čākar nīn rahādāg bittag</i>  <i>dēm pa sāhibay naryānā</i>  <i>gōn dastay mundrikān mallānā</i>  <i>say bar pātihāē wantag</i>  <i>pādē pa rakābān dātag</i>  <i>mallay dōrawān burz bittag</i>  <i>apt maydān pīrīgē tātkag</i>  <i>kōrčātānī saray sirrēntag</i>  <i>rōč ča šapjatān jahl bittag</i>  <i>dēm pa bārgahī āōrtag</i>  <i>Sardār mihtirī ēr kaptag</i>  <i>trundēn bōr jalōkaš bittag</i>  <i>dunyāyā tamāmā dīstāg.<sup>49</sup></i> </p>	<p> The King counselled to himself,  Many days had not passed from that day,  When messengers came rushing (to Mir Chakar), (saying)  “The King has business with you,  He has heard of your chiefly name,  The King has a man-devouring stallion,  He bestows it to you for a ride,  Four persons hold its bridles (lit. trappings),  Ten persons hold its saddle horn,  Forty hold its strong reins;  But still, it can not be saddled,  It is tied at the courtyard of the mansion,  Eighty persons take him to water”.  The Chief was without an option,  The lion-like Chakar, the great warrior,<sup>50</sup>  Responded as such,  It is a passing world, [it] will pass even in hard conditions,  It is a passing cloud, [it] will pour down and pass”.  When the sun rose in the morning,  Chakar proceeded,  Toward the stallion of the lord,  Walking elegantly with his fingers adorned with rings,  He recited <i>fātiha</i><sup>51</sup> three times<sup>52</sup>  He put his feet on the stirrups, and  Alighted upon the saddle of the sturdy horse,  He made him run on seven plains,  Made him jump over blind wells<sup>53</sup>,  When the sun came to setting down,<sup>54</sup>  He brought him back to the royal audience,  The Chief dismounted like a lord,  The wild horse had become exhausted,  The whole world saw it. </p>
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<sup>48</sup> The Eastern Balochi version “Seven men held the stallion’s bridle, and seven more saddled him” (Dames 1907: 8). Nasir (1976: 51) has “four held his front legs / Eight his hind limbs / Seven held his saddle cords / Still it can not be controlled and saddled” (my translation). The versions in Faqīd Šād (2000/2016: 98) and Kalmaṭī (2018: 167) are identical, saying “Four held its bridles / Forty held its saddle cords / Sixty held its strong reins / (Still) it can not be saddled and put in headgear” (English translation is mine). Jahāndīdeh 1390/2011–2012: 214 has “Forty have held his thick reins ... He is kept in the stable / Seventy take him to [the] water (channel)”.

<sup>49</sup> Badalkhan 1989. For more on this episode see Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 98–99; Jahāndīdeh 1390/2011–2012: 214–16; Kalmaṭī 2018: 167–68; Nasir 1976: 50–51 for western Balochi versions, and Dames 1907, II: 10–11; Marī 2009:157 for eastern Balochi versions.

<sup>50</sup> The Balochi text uses the epithet *mardwār*, “man-eater”, for Mir Chakar here and in many other places in this epic.

<sup>51</sup> *Fātiha* is the first chapter of the Holy Quran. Among other occasions, it is recited for the dead as well as when one feels that death is imminent.

<sup>52</sup> Dames’ version has it that Chakar whispered to the horse, saying “Thou art the offspring of Duldul (Ali’s horse) and I am Chakur, son of Shaihak; thou hast strength and I have skill” (Dames 1907, I: 8; cf. also Marī 2009: 157). In Eastern Balochi versions, the poet seems to make the point that since Chakar was a god-like man, the stallion understood his whisper and became docile. Similar motifs have also been recorded in a wide range of Mongolian epics where a hero speaks to a horse in a friendly manner and it becomes docile (Heissig 1990: 460). Chanesar, hero of the Sindhi epic discussed below, also communicates with his horse and so does Rostam in the *Shāhnāma*.

<sup>53</sup> In this case *kōrčāt* (lit. “blind well”) means a deep well whose opening is concealed so that one does not realize it is there. The word *kōrčāt* also means a “deep dry well”.

<sup>54</sup> Lit. “up on the horizon, the length of a sword from the earth”.

Thus Chakar had brought the wild horse under control, tamed it and rode it on plains and uneven lands before bringing it back to the royal court with people watching him from all sides. The king was then obliged to keep his word and give the horse to Mir Chakar as his mount (Marī 2009: 157).

We also find a parallel of the taming of a wild horse in the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi where Rostam, as a young boy, is asked to choose a horse as his mount. Rostam goes to his father's herdsmen and asks them to show him a suitable horse. The herdsmen drive herds of horses from Zabolestan and Kabul before him so that he can choose himself. But each time Rostam stops a horse and presses down on it, the horse's back sinks beneath his strength and its belly touches the ground. Finally, he sees a grey mare with a chest like that of a lion and a foal running behind her. He asks a herdsman about the mare and her stallion foal. The herdsman tells him that the foal already belongs to a person. Rostam tells him that it does not bear trace of any brand. The herdsman tells him that although it does not bear any brand it is known as "Rostam's Rakhsh". The herdsman also tells him that many nobles in the past have chosen it but whenever its mother sees a horseman's lariat, she attacks him like a lioness and forbids him from catching it. Then Rostam hurls his lariat and catches the horse. Its mother comes forward like a raging lioness but Rostam roars like a lion and the mare stops. She then runs back and joins the herd leaving Rakhsh with Rostam. "If you are Rostam", the old herdsman says, "then the horse has been waiting for you". Rostam saddles it and takes it away. The intelligent and sturdy stallion then becomes his faithful companion on his epic journeys, helping him fight lions, demons and dragons and face many other challenges (Ferdowsi, trans. Davis 2006: 132–33; Ferdowsi, trans. Levy 2011: 50–52).

The women of the royal chamber intervene in favour of Mir Chakar

The final ordeal of taming the wild horse was also witnessed by the ladies of the royal chamber from their balconies. They enquired about this valorous man who was being put to several hard trials but always emerged victorious. They were informed that he was Mir Chakar, son of Mir Shayhak, a ruler of the Baloch for many generations. They were also told that the king had received bribes from his rivals to get him killed, and that he was trying to eliminate him by one or another pretext. Upon hearing this, the king's mother called her son and rebuked him for behaving in such a lowly manner toward a noble man like Mir Chakar:

<i>čārit gwātgiray niārīān</i>	The ladies saw this from their balconies,
<i>sultānay jan u wassīgān</i>	The wife and the mother-in-law of the king,
<i>kārī nokarān jiddīgān</i>	The hereditary servants <sup>55</sup> as well.
<i>gwaštāg mādarā gōn šāhā</i>	Said mother to the king:
<i>gwaštē, ohay pa tāi hānīā</i>	"Ah, to your lordship,
<i>bēzār pa tāi jwānīā</i>	Alas, for your youthfulness,
<i>ohay pa tāi Turkīā</i>	Shame on you for calling yourself a Turk, <sup>56</sup>
<i>bēzār pa tāi čukkīā</i>	I have no need of a son like you,
<i>ē mard Čākaray Šayhakk int</i>	This man is Chakar son of Shayhak,
<i>Rinday tēgzanēn sālōnk int</i>	The swordsman groom of the Rinds,

<sup>55</sup> Hereditary servants are servants who have been in the service of a family for many generations. The word *jiddi* means "ancestral, hereditary", etc.

<sup>56</sup> I.e., "you bring shame on the name of Turks".

<i>apt puštā Balōčay hān int</i>	Chief of the Baloch for seven generations, <sup>57</sup>
<i>gumrāh u dilēr u jwān int</i>	He is defiant, brave and young,
<i>aspān bēlagāmā tāčitt</i>	He rides on horses without a bridle,
<i>tāzī kurragān bēzēnā</i>	Slender colts with no saddles,
<i>mastēn lērawān bēgwamsā</i>	Lusty camels without a rein, <sup>58</sup>
<i>mātzātēn kawānṭ bērahtā</i>	Young male camels without a saddle, <sup>59</sup>
<i>watsiādēn janān bēlabbā</i>	He takes women (in marriage) from his kin without paying a dowry,
<i>pīllān gōn awal šahmātā</i>	(Kills) elephants with a single blow,
<i>šērān gōn watī zrahzīrā</i>	Lions with his gilded sword;
<i>daay to laškarān grānēnān</i>	Give him a formidable army,
<i>Turkī hambalān pullēnān</i>	Flower-like Turk companions,
<i>Zunnūī kahārēn pojān</i>	Zunnun’s cruel troops, with
<i>pīllān gōn srapān siāhēnān</i>	Dense rows of elephants,
<i>āzmān andar būtt gōn mojān</i>	So that the sky may become invisible in the waves (of the army),
<i>čukčēnē bikant Lāšārā</i>	Let him bring a massacre <sup>60</sup> upon the Lasharis,
<i>Nōkbandag gwanā Nōhānā</i>	To Nodbandag and his Nohani (allies). <sup>61</sup>

(Badalkhan 1989; see also Nasīr 1976: 53; Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 99-101; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 216–218; Kalmaṭī 2018: 170–171 for other variants of this episode.)

After being reprimanded by his mother, the king realized his mistakes and decided to assist Chakar with a formidable army so that he could get revenge on his enemies. The king himself decided to lead the army. After some preparations, he marched to Sibi and Kacchi. When they got to the Bolan Pass, people saw that Mir Chakar was marching toward Sibi and Kacchi along with the king and a mighty army, they rushed to inform Gwahram. Gwahram’s mother advised him to send the women and children to a safe place in some distant mountains, but Gwahram decided to face the invading army where he was. The invaders soon arrived in the Kacchi plains and gave a devastating blow to the Lasharis and their allies, killing every last man in the field. A large number of Lashari women were made prisoner. The poet underlines that, although Chakar and Gwahram were arch-enemies who fought each other for about 30 years, the former could not allow Baloch women to be kept by the Afghans as prisoners. So, he paid a huge ransom to the Turks and had the Lashari women released.<sup>62</sup> The poet narrates thus:

<i>Čukčēnē kut ant Gwahrāmay</i>	They brought a massacre upon [the people of] Gwahram,
<i>tūppānāy hamē rōč gwastag</i>	The day of that destructive storm passed,

<sup>57</sup> “Seven generations” in such cases means many generations, and not necessarily “seven” in number (see above note 6 for the use of “seven”).

<sup>58</sup> The poet uses here the word *gwams*, which means a camel’s nose peg. Actually, two pegs are fixed through both nostrils of an adult camel and a string is attached to one of them, with which the camel is controlled and guided.

<sup>59</sup> *Kawānṭ* is a young male camel whose mother has just given birth to a second baby camel.

<sup>60</sup> The word used here in Balochi is *čukčēn*, literally “genocide” (see note 29).

<sup>61</sup> The version in Dames has it that a herdsman took the news to the mother of the Turk. She said to her son that Chakar “is the head chief of the Rinds, and he has come to you for help. Now give him mighty armies, Zunū’s numerous troops, or else, for the sake of Mir Chakar, I will break my thirty years’ seclusion, and throw my red veil behind my back”. The next day the king dispatched a mighty army with Chakar to eliminate his rivals (Dames 1907, I: 9).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. also Dames 1881: 136; 1884, II: 471, and see Noorhusain 2011: 145 for a parallel episode from the Dodo-Chanesar epic (for which see below).

<i>kōṭē mān Kōṭarīā bastag</i>	He (Chakar) built a fort at Kotri,
<i>kōṭay sarbirā wat ništāg</i>	He sat in that fort;
<i>apsad Kaččīay trunden bōr</i>	Seven hundred well-bred strong mares of Kacchi
<i>dāt ant gōn gwar u gwarbandān</i>	Were given with saddles and bridles (to the Turks), and
<i>bandī mōkit ant Lāšāray</i>	The Lashari prisoners were ransomed.

(Badalkhan 1989; see also Faqīr Shād 2000/2016: 108; Jahāndīde 1390/2011–2012: 226; Kalmafī 2018: 181 for other variants of this episode.)

Although the Balochi epic tradition and oral accounts maintain that Mir Chakar did ask the ruler of Kandahar/Herat<sup>63</sup> to assist him in annihilating Mir Gwahram Lashari and his allied tribes, it is still not clear whether he visited Herat/Kandahar himself or sent an emissary to represent him. In some episodes, it is mentioned that he sent his nephew, Mir Bibagr Rind, while in the present version it is he himself who goes to Herat/Kandahar.<sup>64</sup> In any case, once the Afghan army had uprooted the Lasharis, Mir Chakar realized that now they were fixing their eyes upon the Sibi and Kacchi plains. He then decided to beat them back (cf. Baluch 1958: 37). Only after he realized that they were too numerous and well equipped to be defeated, did he bid farewell to Balochistan and, by way of the present-day Mari<sup>65</sup> country, migrate to the Punjab.<sup>66</sup> According to the tradition, Chakar was chased by the Arghun Turks,<sup>67</sup> and at one point, when they were very close to capturing him and his followers, which included entire families with women, children and elderly people, he prayed for the divine help. Being a godlike man, his prayers were immediately heard and the many buffaloes/cows following them turned into boulders blocking the passage through the defile, and thus the Turks were forced to retreat. The place where this supposedly happened is still known as *Chākar tank/tang* (“Chakar’s Defile”) (Matheson 1997: 9–10; cf. also Oliver 1890: 32; Duke 1883: 124; Baluch 1965: 178).<sup>68</sup>

### The Sindhi epic *Dodo-Chanesar*

We find parallels of similar trials in some variants of the Sindhi epic *Dodo-Chanesar*, the story of two brothers who contested the throne of Sindh which was left vacant after the death of their grandfather. Not much is known about the author and dates of composition of this epic. It was transmitted orally by a class of folk singers called *faqīr* (lit. a wandering mendicant, beggar, one who leads a holy life, etc.) as well as *sughars* (skilled narrators)

<sup>63</sup> Balochi oral tradition mixes up both the cities as if they were the same.

<sup>64</sup> Baluch (1965: 172) writes that Mir Chakar himself went to Herat and was accompanied by his nephew, Mir Bivragh (Bibagr of western Balochi dialects). Nasīr writes that Mir Chakar personally went to Sultan Shah Husayn in Herat and stayed with the king for six years before being granted military assistance (Nasīr 1976: 49). However, these writers follow different variants of the epic, where it is narrated that Mir Chakar went to Herat or Kandahar. However, there is no evidence that he went to Kandahar or Herat himself.

<sup>65</sup> I prefer to spell the tribal name “Mari”, the way it is pronounced by the local people, and not “Marri”, the most common English transcription, used by local and foreign writers since the British times.

<sup>66</sup> The exact date of this migration is not known, as we lack written records of these events, but it is generally held that it took place around 1512 (Marī 2009: 161; 182; cf. also Baluch 1965: 178; Dames 1907, 1: xxxviii).

<sup>67</sup> They are alternatively called Mughal or Turk here. The older generation of Baloch from Makran still refer to them as a single people, *Turk-o-Mughal* (Turko-Mughal).

<sup>68</sup> The *Baluchistan District Gazetteer*’s volume on Sibi records that the boulders at the Čākar Tank/Tang “are traditionally supposed to be the buffaloes belonging to the Baloch hero Mīr Chākar Khān, which were changed into stone at his prayer and obstructed the passage of the Turkoman horse (*sic*), who were pursuing him” (BDG, 1907, 3: 12–13; for a different version of this episode see also Marī 2009: 156, 161–162).

(Noorhusain 2011: 43). Dr. N. A. Baloch collected 49 versions of the epic during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which he then compiled into two volumes in the original Sindhi language (cited in *ibid.*: 30). Later, Noorhusain compiled a short version from the collection of N. A. Baloch and translated it into English. Noorhusain maintains that the epic “has been popular since the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE and is being sung since 18<sup>th</sup> century CE to the present time” (*ibid.*: 18). He speculates that the epic was probably composed during the Soomro period (*ibid.*).<sup>69</sup> However, N. A. Baloch, who assembled the original collections and interviewed his informants, writes that no available version can be dated earlier than the 17<sup>th</sup> century (quoted in *ibid.*: 30).

Like the vast majority of epics around the world, *Dodo-Chanesar* is not “the poetic composition of a single poet or a versifier but arose in antiquity like a folktale and became popular” in due course (*ibid.*: 16). It is in prosimetrum,<sup>70</sup> and while the verse part is sung or chanted, the narrative part is recited. Unlike the Balochi epic, which is expected to have a fixed text and not to be changed by the performer in its contents and wordings,<sup>71</sup> the Sindhi one does not have a fixed text. It is improvised in each performance and embellished according to the abilities of individual performers. Some professional bards embellish it considerably and can prolong it for three or more consecutive nights (*ibid.*: 18).

This epic recounts that when Bhungar,<sup>72</sup> the grandfather of Dodo and Chanesar, the two main characters of the epic, died, the chieftains gathered to decide who should succeed him on the throne. Chanesar was the eldest grandson, but because he and his younger sister Bhagi<sup>73</sup> had a low-caste mother of Gujjar ironsmith background, the chieftains considered him unfit to assume the throne. Therefore, they decided to install Dodo, the younger brother, as the new king. Chanesar was upset about this decision, since the custom was that the eldest son would succeed the father, or in this case the grandfather, on the throne. However, the chieftains were adamant that the country was to have a high-bred ruler and would not accept the son of an ironsmith mother on the throne. Realizing that there was no hope of finding support among the chieftains, Chanesar decided to “go out somewhere, and return after Dodo has tied the turban and the community chiefs have departed” (*ibid.*: 69). So, he left for the forest on the excuse of a hunt. When Dodo was brought this news, he thought that since his elder brother was alive, even if the chieftains decided to tie the turban around his head, he would surrender it to Chanesar in the presence of the community elders

<sup>69</sup> Soomro, also written as Soomra, Sumro/Sumra, is the name of a tribe which established a dynasty in lower Sindh (now in Pakistan) and ruled for about three centuries between 11<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>70</sup> In some recordings it is said to be in rhymed couplets (Aziz Ahmad 1969: 123).

<sup>71</sup> For memorization versus improvisation in Balochi *šayr* (narrative in verse) genre, see Badalkhan 2002.

<sup>72</sup> According to Ajwani (1960: 25), Bhungar ruled over Sindh during the last decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Different versions of the epic have different traditions about the father and grandfather of the siblings. In some, Bhungar was their father (cf. Kincaid 1922: 131; Burton 1851: 125–26; Ajwani 1960: 25) while in the present one he was their grandfather. This one gives the name of their father as Dodo II (also called Nahro), who was the only son of Bhungar Rai (king Bhungar). Dodo had two wives. The first wife was from a Gujjar family of ironsmiths. She first gave birth to a girl named Bhagi and then to a boy named Chanesar. His second wife was from his own family, the Soomros. Nahro Dodo died fighting the Gujjar and Tomaar/Tanwar tribes while his second wife was pregnant. She gave birth to a son who his grandfather named “Dodo” to preserve the memory of his slain son. This Dodo, known as Dodo III, is the protagonist of the present epic (Noorhusain 2011: 23).

<sup>73</sup> In some variants, Bhagi is represented as the real sister of Dodo, born to the same Soomro wife of Bhungar (Kincaid 1922: 131; Ajwani 1960: 25), and thus a stepsister of Chanesar.



so that they could not have any objection in the future. He left the assembly and wrote a letter to Chanesar supplicating him to return. The bard narrates that when Chanesar got the letter, he opened and read it and exclaimed:

Praise be to our dad, whose son you're,  
 Bless the mother who gave birth to you,  
 Hazrat Shah Gilani is your guide in perplexity,  
 May it always be safe from adverse winds,  
 You'll never have to face any untoward vicissitude,  
 Now you're my brother n' also dad,  
 Now what can the community do to me! (ibid.: 70)

Saying so, Chanesar immediately mounted his horse and rode back to Wigahkot. When he got there, to his dismay, he found nobody come forward to receive him. Only Dodo came forward and held the reins of his horse as a gesture of submission and respect for his elder brother. Then Dodo accompanied him to the court. He sent a bard to bring the turban of 50 turns<sup>74</sup> so that he could tie it around the head of his elder brother. The turban was brought, and Dodo himself came forward to tie the first turn around the head of Chanesar.

However, Chanesar stopped him, thinking that since the nobles had decided in favour of Dodo, he probably should not take it from him. He left the assembly and went to his mother to seek her opinion on whether or not to accept it.<sup>75</sup> The bard narrates how before Chanesar left, Dodo tried to persuade him to not miss an opportunity which might not present itself again, but with no success. Here is how Dodo made his point:

Chanesar, you're now as wise as burning coals,  
 Hot anvils have scorched you,  
 Children, going out to play, don't ask their mothers,  
 One who dismounts a throne won't ever remount it,  
 Time is now, else you'll be wringing your hands. (ibid.: 72)

However, Chanesar did not listen and went to consult his mother. When his mother saw him coming without the turban she got upset and started lamenting: "My God, he's lost what was won!" Similarly, his wife, Maryam, also came out angry and spoke to him in the following words: "Men seek men's advice, women that of women. You should've come wearing the turban after consulting a man. But you didn't tie the turban. What do you want now?" (ibid.: 74). To her mother-in-law she said: "Aunty, have a poati<sup>76</sup> dyed for my husband to wear! Had he been a man, he would've come wearing the turban. He's a woman like us, fit for a chuni;<sup>77</sup> should work in cool shades now. Have a spinning wheel made for him to spin yarn" (ibid.).

Maryam's taunting words inflamed his heart and mind and he responded to her:

<sup>74</sup> In the ceremony of tying a turban on the head of a newly elected tribal chief among the Sindhi and Baloch tribes, it is customary that all heads of sub-tribes and sections who approve the nomination of the new chief make a turn of the turban around the head of the newly elected chief. This demonstrates that the chief and his clan are actively participating in the installation of the new chief and recognize him as the head of the whole tribe.

<sup>75</sup> Ajwani (1960: 26) gives these details somewhat differently.

<sup>76</sup> A sheet of cloth worn by women to cover their heads and breasts.

<sup>77</sup> *Chuni* is also a sheet of cloth used by women to cover their heads.

Maryam, don't blame me,  
 You've hurt me to the core,  
 I'm to lodge my complaint at Delhi with Aladin,  
 To have my brother hung on spears,  
 To see his blood with my own eyes,  
 To have Soomros' Sindh laid to waste,  
 To fling realms into grief n' mourning. (ibid.: 75)

After Chanesar left the court, the chieftains convinced Dodo that because his elder brother would not accept even the lordship of Sindh without seeking the permission of his mother, he was not fit to become the ruler of Sindh. Saying so, they tied the turban around Dodo's head amid much jubilation and merrymaking. When Chanesar got the news that the community elders had tied the turban around Dodo's head in his absence, he was enraged and decided to approach the Sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khilji (r. 1296–1316 CE), and seek his assistance to depose Dodo and claim the throne. So, with the fire of revenge on his head and the sense of humiliation that he had felt in front of his people in his thoughts, he set out for Delhi without delay.

When Dodo realized that all his reconciliatory attempts to convince Chanesar to stay with him and live like an elder brother and a father had failed, he sent seven sturdy Soomro brothers to bring him back, either politely or by force. The bard narrates:

The seven Soomro brothers, all young n' sturdy,  
 Untied their greyhounds n' rode their horses,  
 Asked every watchman, "Where's Chanesar Rai?"  
 "There he is, Chanesar Soomro, brother of Dodo",  
 "We've come in the name of God with humble solicitation,  
 We're on a mission sanctified by the holy name of Mustafa,  
 Do not turn us back empty handed,  
 One who honours a deputation of brothers is never faulted". (ibid.: 78)

Chanesar refused to go with them so they decided to take him by force. They were armed, and Chanesar was unarmed. They all attacked him with their unsheathed swords but Chanesar was faster and hit them all so hard that they fell to the ground and died instantly. When the news of the killing of the seven Soomro brothers was brought to Dodo, he decided to go to his brother personally and beg him not to go to Delhi. So, he went to him in person and implored him to cancel his journey to Delhi: "The turban that I have worn will not be removed. I've paid fine of wearing it by betrothing my daughter to your son. [...] come and run the government yourself" (ibid.: 79). But even then, Chanesar was unmoved and departed for Delhi.

On his way to Delhi, Chanesar faced a number of trials and tribulations, and only after passing all of them did he come to Delhi, where he succeeded in convincing the king to give him assistance to invade Sindh. Among the trials that the hero Chanesar went through before succeeding in his mission were the killing of a lion, the capturing of a wild ass, and the further killing of a cannibal, a berserk camel, a demon, and finally the wild elephant of the king.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> If we count the killing of the seven Soomro brothers as the first trial, Chanesar also completes his seven courses of trials, just like the *haft khān* (seven trials) of the Iranian epic tradition.

## Chanesar kills the lion

The bard narrates that while passing through the country of Abdul Abro, Chanesar found fresh manure and fresh cattle pens, but no trace of humans or cattle around. He first thought that there might be a shortage of water and grain and nobody lived there, but then he heard a buffalo herder grazing his buffaloes some distance away, playing a reed-pipe. He went to him and asked why there was not even a single person or head of cattle in sight in such a vast open country. The cattleman told him that there was a lion who would come down from the hills, devour men and cattle, and run away. It was because of the lion that the plain was abandoned by men and their animals. Chanesar first asked him for some milk, which the herdsman did by giving him a buffalo to milk and drink. Once Chanesar drunk enough milk, he asked the herdsman to show him the place where the lion would hide during the daytime. The herdsman took him there. When he arrived, he challenged the lion to come out and face his death.

Lion came roaring like thunderstorm,  
Struck out with his head  
In powerful soar aimed at the other's head,  
Who would've died but for the steel helmet,  
Which suffered the impact n' broke into pieces,  
As the lion landed, he raised his paw to hit again,  
But mighty told him, "No, brother, no.  
You've had your turn, now it's mine."  
Remembering Hazrat Shah, mighty hit out,  
His hands clenched in a fist,  
A single blow smashed the lion's brain,  
As the carnivore fell unconscious,  
Mighty placed his foot firmly on the carcass  
N' tore all its limbs apart one after the other. (ibid.: 84)

As only the cattleman was around, he alone saw Chanesar kill the lion. He came to him and told him that the king had announced a handsome reward for whoever killed the animal. "Come with me, I'll get you your reward", he said to him. But Chanesar declined to go with him and advised him to go to the king himself and get the reward by saying that he had killed the lion. The cattleman took the ears and tail of the lion and went to the king while Chanesar proceeded on with his journey.<sup>79</sup>

## Chanesar kills the cannibal

The bard narrates that on his way to Delhi Chanesar came to a four-way intersection. Two of the roads lead to Delhi. The shorter one was haunted by a cannibal, while the longer one was without peril. The travellers used to take the longer one to avoid encountering the cannibal, but Chanesar decided to take the shorter one.<sup>80</sup> On the way, he encountered the

<sup>79</sup> In other versions of the *Dodo-Chanesar* epic, the episode of the killing of lion(s) is given differently. In some variants, it takes place after all the other trials (see below for more on this).

<sup>80</sup> Like Chanesar, Rostam is confronted with a choice between a shorter route and a longer one while he is on his way to Mazandaran to rescue Kay Kavus. The shorter road is infested by *dīws*, lions and other perils while the longer one has fewer challenges. Zal tells him to take the shorter road and show his prowess in facing the dangers.

cannibal and they had a competition to see who was strongest. Chanesar killed the cannibal by deceit.<sup>81</sup> He told the cannibal that he will place his hands on his head and the cannibal should squeeze him. If the cannibal succeeds in killing him, he should eat him. If not, then it will be Chanesar's turn. The cannibal agreed and squeezed him with all his strength, but with no success, as Chanesar was wearing his armour hidden under his clothes. When the cannibal realized this, he reminded him that the condition was to fight unarmed. He asked him to take off his armour and let him squeeze again, but Chanesar responded that the cannibal's turn is done, and it is his turn. He hugs and squeezes him so hard that

Cannibal's ribs broke, his spine snapped,  
He crooked, his croak came out in speech,  
'You cheat, you've killed by deceit, without warning,  
You're Dodo Soomro or a real brother of Dodo'. (ibid.: 88)

#### Chanesar kills a mad camel

Then he came to face a mad camel. The bard goes on to recount:

A herd of Aladin's she-camels is grazing in a pen,  
Camel-man standing at the pen shouts,  
"Run to find safety, else, horse rider, you'd be killed."  
"Run," camel-man warned him, "crazy camel is on the rampage."  
Chanesar halted his horse and asked, "What are you saying?"  
"I'm saying that if the camel smells you, you and your horse would both die." (ibid).

But Chanesar stood firm. When the camel came close to him, he hit it with his stick<sup>82</sup> on the hump with such force that the camel fell to the ground with a great thud. He then picked up his stick and hit it again so hard that he cut it into two pieces "as if a sword had bisected raw thread" (ibid.: 89).

#### Chanesar kills the Demon

The next trial was his killing of a demon. The bard recounts that when Chanesar reached Delhi, he found out that the town was infested by a demon that came every night and devoured a person from a different house in turn. The night when Chanesar arrived it was to be the only son of a widow. Chanesar went to the widow's house and asked her to let him in and give him some water and food. Initially the widow refused, but when Chanesar told her that he would offer himself to the demon instead of her son, she let him in.

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He follows it, and along the way he performs his famous *haft khāns*, "seven trials" (see Khaleghi-Motlagh's *Shāhnāma*, 1384/2005, 2: 19 ff.; Warner and Warner 1906, 2: 43 ff.).

<sup>81</sup> Davis writes that "the first qualification for a trickster hero is that he must gain significant victories by trickery, rather than simply by a direct trial of strength or by military confrontation, and that he must save himself from death or other disasters in the same way" (Davis 1999: 235). This is also true in the case of Chanesar, who kills the cannibal with trickery and deceit.

<sup>82</sup> Chanesar's stick is a magic one. He cut it from a tree under which he was resting. Two birds perching on a branch were talking to each other, saying that if Chanesar cuts a stick from that tree and takes it, he will succeed in his mission. The stick will help him defeat all dangers and challenges, they told each other. Chanesar overheard them, cut a stick of ten *sērs* (20 lbs / 9 kg) from a branch of the tree, and took it with him (pp. 85–86). It is with this stick that he completes some of his feats.

Early that evening, Aladin's soldiers came to take the widow's son to the place where they tied the demon's victims. They entered the house and asked the widow to give them her son to be taken for the demon. The widow went to call Chanesar to go with the soldiers, but found him sleeping soundly and snoring. She did her best to wake him up, but with no success. She then started shouting at him, calling him a false person and saying he was not a true Soomro.

You're a false from a false land, you made false promises,  
You've put Soomros' Sindh to shame, Dodo Rai must know. (ibid.: 92)

Hearing this, Chanesar got upset that even in far-away lands people had Dodo on their lips but nobody talks about him. He rose with such a jerk that the cot he was sleeping on broke into pieces. The soldiers were frightened and ran away to Aladin and told him that the demon who was destroying Delhi was staying with the widow. But Aladin assured them that the demon who ate humans would not stay with humans, and ordered them to return to the widow and get her son for the demon. They went back to the widow and asked for her son, but Chanesar told them that he would go with them in the place of her son. They took him to the spot and tied him securely to a steel post. When they had left and the gates were closed behind them, Chanesar exerted all his strength, pulled out the steel post, and broke all the chains, link by link. He fixed his sword in the ground and reclined against it. The demon came in the middle of the night to eat his victim but found no one tied to the steel post where the people used to tie his victims. He looked around and spotted Chanesar reclining against his sword that was fixed to the ground. The bard recounts:

Demon came at midnight like thunderstorm,  
Soomro sent his shield spinning at the demon,  
Its fierce impact, slashes of his cutlass n' piercing of his spear  
Killed the demon, whose lifeless body he pushed back with his palm;  
Thus fell on ground with a clap of thunder the one,  
Whom the whole hill country feared. (ibid.: 93-94)

Chanesar left the demon dead with blood gushing out of its body. It was still deep in the night. At one point he came to the house of one of Aladin's nobles by the name of Nazar Baig. The house had high walls with thick gates guarded by fifty young men, for fear of the demon. He asked them to let him in, but they refused. Nazar Baig inquired from inside who the person was. The guards told him that it was the demon. He directed them to be vigilant and not let him in. Upon hearing this, Chanesar placed his shield on his head and

Mighty hit the gate with his two palms so violently  
that its four posts broke,  
Thus he put an end to fondling of the lakh-worth,<sup>83</sup>  
Their pride in it slackened,  
Some ran n' hid themselves under carpets,  
Some found sanctuary in horse stalls,  
Fifty guards in innermost recesses,  
They neither coughed or gasped, nor inhaled heavily,  
Aladin's noble went n' hid himself in a secret room. (ibid.: 95)

<sup>83</sup> *Lakh* is a unit in the Indo-Pakistani numbering system with a value of one hundred thousand.

Chanesar entered the house but found no one there. He shouted that there was no need to be afraid of him as he was a Soomro from Sindh and not a danger to anyone. Nazar Baig came out and asked him if he had killed the demon. He said yes. Nazar Baig then asked him if he had any proof of that. Chanesar showed him the demon's ears and tail.

The following morning, when the sun was beginning to rise up, the gatekeeper came to unlock the city gate, but then he noticed the demon outside, so he relocked it quickly. As he did so, the *gāhīs* (a low caste of grass growers/reapers) of King Aladin arrived there to go out to work. They asked the gatekeeper to unlock the gate, but he refused, telling them that the demon was still outside. They looked out through the cracks in the gate and saw that the demon was lying there dead. They snatched the keys from the gatekeeper, opened the gate and rushed out. Some of them stained their sickles with the blood of the demon, while others bathed in the pool of blood and rushed to the king, telling him that they had killed the demon. The king thought about how so many chiefs and soldiers with much weaponry had not been able to kill the demon, while these poor and lowly *gāhīs* have killed him with their sickles. They must be richly rewarded. He stopped the salaries and privileges of the former and rewarded the latter with many gifts and privileges (ibid.: 96).

#### Chanesar kills the Elephant

The bard goes on to recount that not much time had passed from the killing of the demon when one day, while Chanesar was taking a bath, a mad elephant appeared, crushing everything in its way and causing panic all around. People started fleeing from the scene to save their lives. The elephant driver shouted at Chanesar to run away and save his life:

Standing in the open you have rubbed  
Fuller's earth on your body off a dish,  
Now the crazed elephant is on the rampage,  
Run or you will definitely die, blockhead.  
"You still have time to run, else the elephant will kill you". (ibid.: 97)

But Chanesar was not someone to run away from danger. He would fight dangers and face challenges. He looked the elephant in the eyes, and addressed the elephant driver:

Standing in the open I've rubbed on my body  
Fuller's earth off a dish,  
Blockhead is your grandfather, your father,  
I'm equal of that elephant,  
If I die by elephant's trunk,  
I will be honoured by my people. (ibid.: 97-98)

Saying so, he hit the elephant with the dish containing fuller's earth so hard that the lower half of its trunk was cut off. He hit it a second time with his stick. It went through the elephant, which fell to the ground and died instantly. The elephant driver ran to the king and informed him that a man had killed the elephant with only a dish and a stick:

The blockhead stood in the open rubbing his body with  
Fuller's earth off a dish, which and a stick he flung  
In quick succession at the elephant, killing it instantly. (ibid.: 98)

Aladin was surprised by the news and asked how an elephant could be killed with a dish and a stick? He was told that the *gāhīs* had killed a demon with grass-reaping sickles in the same way that this stranger now had killed the elephant with a dish and a stick. Aladin asked for the man to be brought to him. Chanesar was taken to him. After a brief introduction, Chanesar told him about the purpose of his visit. He told the king that his younger brother had deprived him of the throne which as the elder brother was rightly his, and that Dodo had detained their sister, the promised wife of King Aladin. He invented a story that their dying father had wished for Aladin to marry his daughter to make a strong bond between the Soomros and the Khiljis, but Dodo refused to give her in marriage to Aladin. “When I broached the matter, Doda got annoyed, seized my turban, and detained your betrothed”, he told the King (ibid.: 99).<sup>84</sup>

#### Aladin orders the invasion of Sindh

On hearing Chanesar’s plea, King Aladin ordered that a strong army be assembled to invade Sindh, depose Dodo, and install Chanesar on the throne. He ordered that five thousand troops be sent to do the job. When Chanesar heard this, he told the king that five thousand would not be enough even to fight himself alone, so how could they face the Soomros? At least five hundred thousand needed to be sent to defeat the forces of Dodo. Hearing this, Aladin lost interest in him, and Chanesar had to wait fourteen years to persuade him. One version is that after all of his attempts to convince Aladin to give him adequate military assistance failed, he captured two lions and freed them in Aladin’s garden. The king ordered his courtiers to drive them away or kill them, but when no one came forward to do the job, he asked them to bring Chanesar to him. When Chanesar was presented to him, he asked him if he could take on the task. Chanesar agreed, on the sole condition that the King would invade Sindh with an adequate army. The King agreed and Chanesar killed the lions (ibid.: 106–107). Finally, Aladin marched on the capital of Sindh with a gigantic army described as follows:

Six baskets<sup>85</sup> of Iraqi horses, eighteen lakh camels,  
 Fifteen lakh with the king himself, their plumes high,  
 Thirty thousand leisurely moving elephants,  
 Nine baskets each of ten lakh foot soldiers,  
 Nine hundred kettle drums n’ eight hundred war drums on beat,  
 Thirteen hundred pot-tinners to whiten bright,  
 Fourteen hundred cobblers to stitch and mend rends,  
 Fifteen hundred masseurs for goodly massage,  
 Sixteen hundred soldiers to attend during rest,  
 Seventeen hundred sardars<sup>86</sup> to mount watches,  
 Eighteen hundred Balkhi camels to carry loads,  
 Nineteen hundred mud-workers to dig wells.

<sup>84</sup> Ajwani (1960: 27) records this as follows: “Father left behind nine lovely damsels / I was bringing them as tribute to you, but Dodo withheld my hand / My duty is to report, your privilege now to take action”.

<sup>85</sup> Another version of the epic says that Aladin’s army was so big that nine/ten baskets or thirteen hollow gourds would be filled with dust when it passed: “*Ten baskets with the Sultan, each basket numbered ten lakh*” (ibid.: 108, italics in the original). The measure of baskets for the number of horses refers to an empty basket being hung up when the cavalry is passing. When it is filled with the dust raised by the horses’ hooves, it is removed and another one is hung up. In this way, when the entire army has passed, nine baskets should be filled with dust (ibid.).

<sup>86</sup> Chiefs, heads.

Twenty hundred banias<sup>87</sup> to open shops on way,  
Everyone had this refrain on his tongue, “Dodo, Dodo”. (ibid.: 109)

Once the army was ready to march on Sindh, Chanesar wrote a letter to Dodo telling him:

Aladin is coming to invade Sindh  
With nine armies, each of ten lakhs,  
Many are from east n’ west, also from Iran,  
Turan n’ Turkestan, their swords glinting,  
And no end of brown n’ black chieftains,  
They’ll ask for the hand of Baaghi,  
If you gave her away as they want,  
You’ll live and reign in peace,  
Else they’ll shoot arrows singing through the fort. (ibid.)

The bard narrates that when Dodo received this letter, not knowing about its contents and the language used in it, he kissed and pressed it to his eyes, as it was a letter from his elder brother sent after such a long time. He was filled with so much joy and overcome by such emotions that he was unable to read it himself. He invited a scribe to read it for him. When the contents of the letter were read to him, he decided to defend his country and honour rather than surrendering to King Aladin. He did so, defending his country and people, and laid down his life in the battlefield.<sup>88</sup>

After killing Dodo and decimating his forces, Aladin entered the capital of Sindh but found it empty. He sent his soldiers to the women’s quarters to bring Bhagi for his harem, but no one was found in the female chambers. He was informed that before the war began, King Dodo had sent the royal women and their attendants to Jam Abro, the Samma ruler of Kutch, who promised to defend them with his life. The King sent a message to Jam Abro offering him the prosperous towns of Mathelo and Multan in exchange for the Soomro women, but Jam Abro refused. He told the messenger that he would never exchange the Soomro women for any material wealth of the world and disgrace his name in for all time to come (Ajwani 1960: 28). Aladin had no other option than to fight Abro and take the Soomro women by force. Abro fought bravely and laid down his life defending the honour of the refugee women.<sup>89</sup>

At this point King Aladin realized his mistake in waging war against Sindh, and thought to himself that since all the loss of human life and material was because of Chanesar, he should not be installed on the throne of Sindh. Instead, he decided to give the turban to the young son of Abro Samma, whose father had given his life and the lives of his people protecting the refugee Soomro women.<sup>90</sup> When Chanesar was informed of this decision, he

<sup>87</sup> A Hindu trader, merchant.

<sup>88</sup> Throughout the epic, the narrator depicts Dodo as a person of high values and of finest character because of his noble Soomro mother, while Chanesar’s character is shown as mean and mediocre, because he is the son of a low-caste mother with an ironsmith background.

<sup>89</sup> Different versions of the epic record different versions of the fate of the Soomro women. See, for example, Ajwani 1960: 28; Noorhusain 2011: 145; Harjani aka Daduzen 2018; Kincaid 1922: 139).

<sup>90</sup> Kincaid records this somewhat differently: When the king was informed that Abro had been killed, he sent some soldiers to cut off his head and bring it to him. They went there, but his appearance was so formidable that they were afraid to touch him and returned empty handed. The king sent them again. This time, Dungarrai, the little son



was overpowered by anger and began attacking the Khiljis in a kind of fit. He killed all of the Khilji warriors except for eight who were still standing when he was finally killed.<sup>91</sup>

After installing the young son of Abro Samma on the throne of Sindh, Aladin returned to Delhi with his eight surviving companions. At Mirpur Mathelo, a town in Sindh, he stopped at a well to quench his thirst. Some women were there to fetch water and they recognized him. They started saying to each other that Aladin had come with a mighty army to conquer Sindh, but was leaving with only eight surviving companions.<sup>92</sup> Aladin overheard these humiliating remarks. He thought to himself that if even these rural women did not spare him their most piercing comments, what would be the reaction of the people of Delhi once he got there. So, he decided to end his life then and there. He took nine pills out of his pocket and gave one to each of his soldiers. They swallowed them all together and breathed their last at that very spot. They were buried in a tomb still known as *Nanv-a Gorī Pīr* (“Nine pill saints”) (Noorhusain 2011: 147).

Before concluding the discussion of the trials in the epic of *Dodo-Chanesar*, it should be said that the details and times regarding the invasion of Sindh by Alauddin Khilji do not correspond to the historical records on Sindh. Furthermore, historians of Sindh have conflicting reports about the Soomro dynasty<sup>93</sup> and its successive rulers. Some sources mention three Doda rulers from the Soomro dynasty: ruler no. 3, Doda I son of Bhungar, who ruled for 24 years (1068–1092 CE); ruler no. 7, Doda II, who ruled for 14 years (1180–1194 CE); and ruler no. 16, Doda III, who ruled for 25 years (1332–1356 CE). The ruler no. 13 of the Soomro dynasty is named Chanesar, and ruled for 18 years (1282–1300 CE).<sup>94</sup> This Chanesar was succeeded by his son Bhungar who ruled for 15 years (1300–1350 CE).<sup>95</sup> It is evident from the above list that Chanesar and Doda were neither brothers nor contemporaries, and that the Delhi ruler Alauddin Khilji did not invade Sindh on the request of either of the two, as is claimed in this epic and maintained by some writers from Sindh (cf. Allana 1991: 7, 14). Keeping this in mind, we can state that the present epic is undoubtedly a masterpiece of oral literature but not a record of history (cf. also Asani 2003: 616).

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of Abro, who had been sleeping in his cot, awoke, took a toy sword, and guarded the dead body of his father. The soldiers did not have the heart to kill the child so they went back empty handed again. Then the king sent them a third time to bring the boy to him and then cut off the head of his father. When the boy was brought to the king, the king was so impressed by his courage that he made him the king of Sindh (Kincaid 1922: 140).

<sup>91</sup> The version in Harjani aka Daduzen has it that Chanesar decided to change from being an ally of Aladin Khilji to fighting against him when he realized that Aladin wanted to capture the Soomro women. He collected his people and attacked the armies of Aladin, killing thousands before he was killed (Harjani / Daduzen 2018, n. p.).

<sup>92</sup> Kincaid (1922: 140) writes of seven surviving companions of Alauddin. He has it that only Alauddin took the poisoned pill and died, while his seven companions remained there to guard his tomb. Their descendants, writes Kincaid, are still viewed as being the attendants of the tomb (ibid.).

<sup>93</sup> Some sources maintain that the Soomros ruled over Sindh for about three centuries (ca. 1050–1360) (Baloch 1998: 301). Sorley (1940/1966: 165) gives the dates of Soomro rule as 1025 to 1360, while Aziz Ahmad (1969: 123) has 1050 to 1351; cf. also Sorley (1940/1966: 261) who, on the authority of *Āṭm-i Akbarī*, writes that 36 Soomro princes ruled for five hundred years.

<sup>94</sup> Sorley writes of a Soomro king by the name of Chanesar who reigned in Lower Sindh for about 18 years in about 1228 (*sic*) (Sorley 1940/1966: 261).

<sup>95</sup> A. Islam 1998: 77; Fredumbeg 1902/1982: 36–37; Thaṭavī 1959: 119–21; Baloch 1998: 30. Not all early sources on Sindh agree with the names, sequence and times of the Soomro rulers of Sindh (for a comparison of different sources, see Thaṭavī 1959).

## Concluding Remarks

As is seen above, the similarities in the trials of the hero in the Sindhi and Balochi epic traditions is remarkable. We are not sure whether these have been directly borrowed from one or the other tradition or have come from a corpus of common myths and legends inherited by both from a shared oral tradition. This source could have been the Indo-Iranian mythology or the stories of the Iranian epic tradition.<sup>96</sup> We do know for sure that Mir Chakar was a historical personality, as were Chanesar and Dodo, his counterparts in these shared motifs of the trials, but we read that the latter two were neither brothers nor contemporaries as the present epic claims. Similarly, that Mir Chakar went to Herat or Kandahar in person is not supported by other traditions, except for the present epic. Thus, we can assume that these depictions of trials in both the Balochi and Sindhi traditions are more legends than historical events. However, we also know that the mindset of listeners in non-literate societies is not critical enough to question every single event or episode handed down to them through the oral tradition. It is sufficient for them that the names of some main characters are historical or semi-historical for them to take the rest for granted. To common listeners, these episodes really took place in the glorious past of their history. The listeners may or may not know about the existence of similar myths in each other's cultures, but it does not make much difference to them. The "audiences of heroic poetry", writes Bowra (1952: 508), "usually assume that it is a record of fact, and it certainly takes the place of history in societies which have no written annals". It "is believed to speak with authority about the past, and may even be used to settle disputes on such matters as land or ancestors" (ibid.). However, Bowra also underlines that the idea of truth differs from generation to generation, and that unlettered societies lack the concept of scientific history and historical records. "For them a story is sufficiently true if it gives the main outlines of events and preserves important names; it is not impaired by the poet's imaginative treatment of details. ... Such stories command respect because they are old, and men often assume that their ancestors knew more than they themselves do" (Bowra, 1952: 40; cf. also Kruk 2012: 45–46; Dorpmueller 2012: 1–3; Heath 1996: 149 ff., 283, n. 1; Heath 2012: 10 for similar observations on popular Arabic epic traditions).

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<sup>96</sup> Trials of the hero in Iranian epic tradition, such as in the case of Rostam, Esfandiyar, Faramarz and Shahryar, show that such motifs enjoyed a high degree of popularity in the entire region (cf. van Zutphen 2014: 128, 146). Some direct or indirect influence from the Iranian epic tradition is hence also a possibility. Furthermore, Rostam is one of the most popular characters in the region, and the majority of Baloch elders maintain that he was a Baloch from Sistan. Many Baloch elders narrate detailed stories about Rostam, his son Sohrab and his father Zal, as I have personally experienced in Balochistan.

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