Introduction

In 2000, during a fieldwork in Iranian Baluchistan, I spent a fort-night in Gwašt (Gosht). Gwašt is an oasis-settlement on the road from Wašt (Khash) to Sarawan and is well known of its madrassa. The dwellers of this oasis are of Baluchi Gamshadzai and Hosseinbor tribes, the latter being a matrilineal clan of the former. The Gamshadzai sardar, cAlim-khan, resides in Gwašt, though that is not the traditional location of the sardar clan. My purpose was to gather linguistic and anthropological materials, so I had several informants mainly from the senior males. Among them was Jan-Mahmad, a 72 years old Hosseinbor Baluch. He was a perfect storyteller, and I recorded several folk-stories from him. This story of Mir Hamza, the Forefather of the Baluches, is not only interesting from the linguistic point of view, but also is of certain value as a folkloric piece. The ethnic name Baluch, which has not yet a convincing and well-established etymology, can be ascribed to all those who speak Baluchi and consider it as their mother tongue. As far as not only the genuine Baluches claim the term to be their ethnynym, the boundaries of the capacity of this ethnic name are quite obscure. In this regard, it could be stated that the Baluch entity incorporates many other ethnic units, which played a considerable role as at the dawn, as well during the centuries of the formation of this people. The oral cycle of Mir Hamza indicates a starting point of the legendary history of the Baluches, bearing a significant identity credit for all of them no matter where they inhabit and what ethnic background they have.

In the Daptar Sha'ır, the so-called “Ballads of Genealogies”, of the Baluches we read: “… We are followers of cAlî, firm in faith

---

1 The fieldwork was carried out from March to May, 2000 in Iranian Baluchistan, mainly in the region of Sarhadd.

and honour through the grace of the holy Prophet, Lord of the Earth. We are the offspring of Mir Hamza, victory rests with God’s shrine. We arise from Halab and engage in battle with Yazid in Karbalá and Bompur, and we march to the towns of Sístan...”.3 This is, of course, merely an imaginary statement; at least it cannot be applied to the Iranian core of this people. As B. Spooner notes, there could be two possible interpretations. First is the immense desire of the tribal societies in the Muslim world to legitimise their “own Islam”, and the second, that the Baluch indigenous identity could have been assimilated by the waves of the Arab penetration into the eastern parts of Kerman region.4 Anyway, the first interpretation does not deny the second, especially when considered, that the assimilation by the Arabs could be more natural among the ordinary people, while the efforts to trace back their ancestry to the Prophet in terms of legitimisation of power and rule have been and now are maintained strongly by the chiefs and the ruling elite.5 To this regard Dames writes: “...The traditional narrative, as far as it possesses any value, may be said to commence with the sojourn in Sístan. Before that the legend simply asserts that the Baloches were descended from Mir Hamza, the Prophet’s uncle, and from a Pari, and that they took part in the wars of ‘Ali’s sons against Yazid and fought at Kerbela. This is merely the introduction, the descent from some Muhammadan notable or from someone mentioned in the Qur’án, which is considered necessary to every respectable Musalman race, just as the Kalhoras of Sindh and the Dáüdpotras of Baháwalpur claim descent from ‘Abbás, and the sons of Hindus converted to Muhammadanism are called Sheikh, and blossom into Qureshí of the purest blood ...”.6

Coming back to the folk aspect, it’s noteworthy that the motif of the marriage between Mir Hamza and a Pari is widespread in the Near-Eastern folklore. It is told, when leaving Aleppo, Mir Hamza on his way to Sistan, one day swimming in a stream, met the paris who suddenly appeared and started to swim too.

---

5 See on this issue my forthcoming paper in Iran and the Caucasus, 8/1, 2004.
6 M. L. Dames, The Baloch Race: 34.