



پښتونستان ښار علمي او مطالعاتي مرکز
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Traduction Resumee des Articles Persans en Langues etrangeres.

Documents pour l'étude de la répartition de quelques traits culturels dans le Zagros central (2).

Âlâçix and Kûme, the Felt Tents of Âzərbayân.

Folksongs from Boir Ahmad, Southwest Iran.

The Symbolism of Leadership among the Qâderi Dervishes of Iranian Kurdistan.

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A Glimpse at the Activities of the Center for Iranian Anthropology (Autumn 1975 – Winter 1977).

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

Extramarital affairs are as strongly disapproved of as are premarital ones, and there are the vivid memories of the very few cases that scandalized one or the other community at times and always seem to have ended in disaster for the lovers. Catastrophies of this kind are not mentioned in the songs, nor are co-wives or divorces. This, again, is concordant to the factual rarity of either of these phenomena in Boir Ahmad.

The world of the songs is the world of young people. Hunting, war, love, being drafted, not being able to find a wife, not being allowed to marry, are the joys and grievances of young men. Not even the mourning songs have anything to say about religion, old age, the wisdom of a long life, the merits of having brought up a family in honor, or whatever else one might expect praised in a society that, so we think, delegates so much importance and power to the older generation, and whose religion demands of children to weep for their parents and show them respect and submission. In the few songs where they do occur, old people are either made fun of, like the old man who plays with his young wife, or even cursed, like the nosy old woman who spies on the lovers.

..... piremerd bacei sava
tei gol verise.

..... babbling old man
get up from the girl's side!

..... kei didi das piremerd
ser nāfe duar.

..... did you see the old man's hand
on the girl's navel ?

Piremerd rish kuzali
dendune kanda,
niteri busesh koni
bedesh va banda.

You shoddy-bearded old man,
with a toothless mouth.
You can't kiss her anyway
give her to me !

It is the exciting dream life of adolescents that is sung about, and even the young men of the mourning songs have their rifles in hand and the sweet smell of mountain , flowers in the hair.

Quite fittingly, in one song, a young pregnant woman is being cheered in her labour pains:
"Insha'allah it will be a son. He will grow up and have a rifle and a beautiful bride!"

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Ar bexâi yâdom koni
men bâghe taxtom,
Shou kelas ruz mene hasb
marize saxtom.

If you want to remember me
in my beautiful garden:
At night I am at school, during
the day in a jail. I am very sick.

Yâr veico monde dellom
haf mâh na tei ton
ya ve karxune qandom
ya ve kuweitom.

Dear, my heart stayed here.
For seven months I am not with you.
I am either at the sugar factory,
or in Kuwait.

The self-image that emerges in the songs is one of daring hunters and brave warriors who are euphorically attached to the mountains. This is the dominant theme in the songs together with the beauty of women, and love. Accordingly, to be a Boir Ahmadi is to be either a man or a beautiful "flower". There is no doubt that the world of the songs is the male world, regardless of who is singing – i.e., even a woman sings of rifles, hunt, and the beautiful eyes of a girl – and that it is also a dream world. Rifles, partridges, and the free life in the mountains are a man's dream based on only a dim possibility for realization, and sustained by the success of a few privileged who live in this ideal. Similarly, the dream of the romantic love affair with a beautiful girl is a man's phantasy that is rarely ever realized. Courtship, although not forbidden, discouraged, or frowned upon between fiancées in Boir Ahmad, is far from the passionate, sensuous affair described in the songs. And although touching romances like Leila and Majnun's are known and appreciated, love involvements against parental approval or across boundaries set by economic standing or family loyalty are openly disapproved of, if they ever do occur. Elopements

are a scandal and almost unheard of, and most marriages are arranged, with the explicit hope, however, that the two parties involved will become at least friends and loyal partners if not romantic lovers. The picture again is a little different for men, especially a rich man of good standing who can afford to choose at least a second or third wife free of any consideration other than his fancy for the beauty of a particular woman. To be a girl-watcher, however, is as strongly disapproved of for a man as a provocative display of charms is for a woman. The "korr kâ"tie" is cursed in one of the songs as is the hip-swinging girl that confuses all the men in her camp.

To discuss a girl's or woman's beauty is quite an impossible thing to do for any man, even her own father, brother or husband. Not only would modesty and good manners be violated, but also the evil eye invited to strike. Yet, in the songs all these emotions, the admiration and the sweet feelings of romance, the attraction and all the sensuous phantasies pass uncensored and without offending or harming anyone. No evil, it seems, has power over a girl or a rifle praised in a song, not even when in fact it is sung for a particular person whose name is mentioned. Security and social approval go so far that a husband, who otherwise in public acts quite neutrally to his beautiful wife, can express his feelings about her without repercussions in a song, as for example, one of the Boir Ahmad Khans did about 15 years ago when he married a well known local beautiful girl and composed several songs for her that now are famous all over Boir Ahmad:

Do solfeinat mes mâri
xofte bar ganj.
Be zire pirehânet
benhofte nâranj.

Your two braids are like snakes,
sleeping on treasure.
Under your shirt
are two oranges hidden.

worry to get any poetic feelings about a field of wheat and cornflowers, and the cool mountain springs lose their appeal once they are channelled in irrigation ditches and water a potato field. This sentiment is expressed freely and readily, and complaints about the misery of toiling the soil, waiting for rain etc., only to have to pay tributes or taxes with one's meager harvest, accompany all agricultural activities. In only one song farmwork is praised, and this is in Farsi and not a local creation, and only once a mill is mentioned, to illustrate the owner's wealth. Similarly, herding is regarded as hard work and rather boring and lonesome. Accordingly, it is avoided when possible, i.e. whoever can afford to hire a shepherd, whoever can delegate herding to a younger brother or a son, will do so. Milking and dairywork is women's work and as such of low esteem, and, although to have and maintain herds is considered very desirable and actually the main means of livelihood for most Boir Ahmadis, the appeal is economical rather than emotional. In one song a young man describes his poverty by stating that he cares for a herd of cows and lambs, i.e. he is in such a bad position that he has to hire himself out to do this work or else at least cannot afford to pay somebody to do it for him. Otherwise, herds are mentioned once to state a man's wealth, and in some mourning songs the tent, the herds, and the migration are symbolically used to convey somebody's death.

Shou ve dine gelle gâ
 ruz ve dine mandal.
 Duar go shi nikonom
 korr dase vardar.

At night after the cows,
 in the day after the lambs.
 The girl said I won't marry,
 boy, take your hands off.

Buhun gol nakonin
 celbandesh tamume.
 Tangetireshe bekoinin
 oure dar asamune.

Don't let the girl's tent come down.
 The 40 ropes are fastened,
 all tighten firmly.
 Clouds are in the sky.

Mâle zir hunâ nahâ
 varcid mâle bâlâ

The camp in the warm quarter was ready,
 but she packed for the camp in the mountains

Also, orchards and gardens are rarely mentioned in songs. However, these are relatively new in Boir Ahmad and only few villages have any. But given the fact that Boir Ahmad is a forest area and trees are a familiar sight and a popular topic of discussions, it is amazing that very little attention is given to them in the songs. The last and most recent economic sphere, on the other hand, is already well represented in the songs: seasonal wage labor outside the tribal area. Given the relative isolation of Boir Ahmad, a surprising number of songs (26) mention the outside world: towns around the tribal area, like Behbahan, but also faraway places like Tehran ("Bibi Aghdas is famous in Tehran") or Basra ("Her breasts are beautiful like the lemons of Basra"), not to mention Kuwait, the gold country for many young men in Boir Ahmad who dream of going there and coming back rich one day ("...the watch on his wrist is from Kuwait"). But also the sugar factory in Yasuj, the administrative center for northern Boir Ahmad, is sung about, as is the pickup truck of the Agricultural Coop. Specially touching is the lament of a young man attending school in town, but in general songs of misery and home-sickness are rare. There is a sequence of songs about a local Khan's longing for his beloved Boir Ahmad while he is imprisoned, but otherwise songs do not convey negative attitudes about the outside world. However, as mobility outside the tribal area increases with economic developments within the tribal area, it remains to be seen whether different attitudes about the outside will be reflected in the songs.

Ye dasom bernou bi
yekish pishtou bi.
Ratom bâlei serre gol
ta gol ve xou bi.

I had a rifle in one hand,
a pistol in the other.
I went to the girl,
but she was asleep.

Tofangal pâk dah tire
moye mo ye tire.
I mardom zanam niden
igon fakire.

All the rifles have ten shots,
mine has only one.
The people don't give me a wife,
they say I am poor.

As to marriage itself, there are several songs about the bridechamber – usually sung at weddings – all cheerful, and praising the comfort of the room and the virtues of the bridegroom. Believing the songs, however, it is the bridegroom who has apprehensions about his married life, and especially the relationship with his wife's mother is depicted as potentially troublesome. The bride is promised help by her mother-in-law, is eagerly awaited by her husband's family, and can, if she is able to keep her husband's interest, rely on having him around to talk to and to console her when she is sick.

Umame pas xunetun
gush igeroftom.
Harfali deit vam zade
mo tash geroftom.

I came to the back of your house,
and listened.
The things your mother said about me,
incited me.

..... hame i takhsiral
pakine deite.

..... all that fighting
is your mother's fault.

Ar ixei mireit bexâd
gukelta beshka.
Sob zi men raxte xou
ou gol bepushka.

If you want your husband to like you,
swing your hips.
And early in the morning,
Sprinkle perfume in the bedding.

The Boir Ahmadi's environment is described in the songs with considerable enthusiasm and emotional attachment. The people identify themselves with the mountains and regard as unfortunate all those who have to live in the hot, foul-watered lowlands where empty deserts tire their eyes. To be a Boir Ahmadi is to be in the mountains, and to be in the mountains is to be strong and enduring and equal to the challenge of snow and daring encounters with bears and wolves on lonely hunts. In order to make a living in the mountains, one needs a good rifle (a "bernou"), and this rifle becomes, in the songs, the ultimate sign of bravery, manhood, skill and wealth. Undoubtedly, until some two decades ago, much of the people's meat came from game, and the mountains still have the fame of a game-rich paradise – a fame that is now unjustified as most of the wild animals are near extinction. Still, the hunting-myth lives on. The same is true for the rifles; since the last Khan was killed about 12 years ago, the population has been disarmed. But the few hunting rifles that do exist in the area are enough to keep the myth and emotions alive, even if only a few men can afford to keep one. The main economic activities of the Boir Ahmadis on the other hand – herding and agriculture – are almost not represented at all in the songs. Agricultural tasks are seen as heavy work, unlike hunting that, no matter how taxing and dangerous, always seems to have the aspect of a sport. Heavy work like plowing is not romantic in the people's eyes, the daily bread too much

It is your house.
Let us kiss and play,
that nobody knows about it.

ye goli mene mâle mun
tâze shokofte
Na dasom vash irase
na xosh iofte

A flowerbud in my camp,
has just opened.
Neither can my hand reach it
nor does it fall by itself.

Kam bio, kam kam berra
kam seil, kepar kon.
Nuzata dâme ve shi
kam xela sar kon.

Come seldom, and slowly go away,
don't look much at the branch hut.
We married off your finacée
don't be too upset.

Qavâmi ve kul capom
dahtir ve râsom.
Mo ke sarbaz doulatom
zan si ce xâsom?

A rifle on my left shoulder,
a rifle on my right
Now, that I am a soldier of the state,
What did I want a wife for?

Other than about a girl's beauty, not much is said about women. Of the 17 songs dealing with other aspects of femininity, two – both mourning songs – praise her industriousness, but most of the others are negative: a girl is reproached for her bitchiness, a young bride cries because she does not want to get married, a lusty widow is ridiculed. Most of the funniest songs fall in this category.

Serre koh seil ikonon
gelleye gol vadune.
Dashtakesh mile tâlâ

va sarsiresh katune.

From the mountain I see
the girl's herd ready to be milked.
Her milkpot is of gold
and the strainer of cotton.

Ashrafi kopa kopa
pil xorda xorda.
Mo četour shi konom
vei nime morda?

Goldcoins jingle (on my cap),
many little coins.
How shall I marry
this half dead one?

Bivezan gulom mazan
to pil nadâri.
Darvazei romesei
to dam nadâri.

Widow, don't trick me,
you have no money.
your doorway is broken,
you have no door.

About one third of the songs that have love as their main theme, also mention other things that are of high value: mountains and hunt, rifles, wealth and horses as a sign of wealth. Over and over again, mountaingrass, snow and cool springs, and the thrill of a hunt with a valuable rifle is linked with a phantasy about a beautiful woman to an image of masculine enjoyment. Poverty and misery, on the other hand, are expressed with a bad rifle, and a poor man is also deprived of a wife.

Va xoda ixâsemi.
se ci helâli.
Asbe xub, tofange xub
ye tie kâli.

Three things I want from God:
A good horse, a good rifle,
and a pair of nice eyes.

that on your foot burned me.
The tatoo in the valley on your breast,
made me lose my soul.

Gukelet barfamabâre
Sinat javiledun

Your hips are like a hill of snow.
Your breasts a meadow of mountain flowers

Qorbune dâret berram
i dâre tâke.
Mâmâyelet zir jumat
mei jofte xâge.

I would sacrifice myself for your tall body.
Your breasts under your shirt,
are like a couple of eggs.

There is no equivalent admiration and enthusiasm for the beauty of boys or men. Only 3 songs let a girl praise the looks of her lover, and in all three cases she sings about him being a horseman and having a fine suit and a wristwatch. The charm of a man lies more in what he does and stands for, than in what he looks like. This becomes clear from a number of songs that directly or indirectly tell us about the masculine ideal type: skilled hunter, brave in fight, rich and esteemed, at home in the mountains and in the council. Only twice a personal detail is given: in a mourning song a young man is described as having hair with the fragrance of mountain grass, and in another song a girl laments the fate that gave her a dark-skinned husband.

To look at beautiful girls is not always becoming, according to the songs: their beauty makes one sick, kill, burn and roast, blind, destroys the liver, and makes one restless. In only about 6 instances beauty has a positive power: it brings a man back to life. But even when the admiration leads to an act (kissing, ambushing, playing with her, for example), conflicts do arise. Bashfulness might stand between lovers, they might have missed a chance, love is not reciprocated, one is too poor to think about girls in earnest, and to keep people knowing

about one's feelings is mentioned about 10 times.

Hunei gol ve bâlâye
bâdesh va zire.
Ve dasi guk eshkena
ta korr bemire.

The girl's house is uphill,
her thoughts are below.
She swings her hips on purpose
to make the boy die.

Dig pasin ser gardane
vash kerdom varxord.
louelsha qarat kerdom
mamesha das bord.

Last night on the mountainpass,
I met her.
I raided her lips
and stole her breasts.

Das kerdom men kerredun
kerre derârom.
Tarkemâr dasma zade
pit iarârom.

I put my hand into the buttersack,
to take butter out.
A snake bit my hand
and I writhe with pain.

Ru be ru seilom nako
mardom shek eibun.
Va borget heshar bekon
xom yeparr eibum.

Don't look me in the face,
the people will get suspicious
Give a sign with your eyebrows
and I'll go to some hidden place

Bio berrim xune xomun
xune xotune,
Bus konim bâzi konim
ta kess noune.

Come let us go to my house.

as the occasions at which they can be sung get fewer. So, for example, over only the last 10 years, pounding of rice – cooperative women's work – has been made obsolete by the introduction of motor-driven mills, and thus rice-pounding songs ("hoima") are a thing of the past.

Other songs are those that do not accompany a particular activity, but are simply meant to be listened to. Still there are different occasions for which one or the other is appropriate, like wedding songs or mourning songs.

The text for each song usually consists of 2 lines, each measuring between 8 and 16 syllables. Each line conveys a separate message or image and often the pair does not make sense together except for the rhyme. Thus, there are in fact many lines that can be combined because they do rhyme, and some of them are rather popular and used frequently.

The composing of texts and melodies is a living art and, it seems, one of only a few creative means of expression for the Boir Ahmadi. Often new texts are composed with strong local connotations or for particular occasions or people. Most of these songs remain local, but some spread through the area and become widely known and used, as one that sings of the beauty of the wife of one of the local khans. Sometimes poets are known (of the just mentioned song it was the khan himself), but usually they are forgotten and their songs become public property. People say that formerly most songs were indeed composed for particular people ("malum"), but recently texts shifted more to anonymity ("nāmalum").

With some exceptions (milking songs, lullabies, mourning songs), songs can be sung by either men or women, and often are performed by two singers alternatively. To stretch a song, refrains can be repeated several times, especially in work songs and dance songs, where the main purpose is to provide a rhythm. Verses are usually grouped by the singers according to themes, like, for example, love songs or those singing of rejected love, or of separation.

The singers stick to a mood for a while and explore a certain theme. These themes now are our concern.

The majority of the songs (about 600) has to do with the positive and negative aspects of love and male-female relationships. And most of these sing of the beauty of women. Sometimes symbols are used to describe beauty, but more often admiration is expressed very directly and frankly, centering on those features and parts that are less hidden by the colorful tribal costume which the women wear. Thus, a face is praised as resembling the moon; skin as red and white like blood and snow; eyebrows remind one of antlers of the wild goat; big, brown, sparkling eyes; laughing lips, white teeth, and tattoo marks on forehead and chin are admired. The slim, long neck can be glimpsed at through the thin short veil just like the heavy, reddish-brown braids. The body is summarily appreciated as slim and tall, legs are hidden in wide skirts, and only the ankles can be evaluated: slim, white, and tattooed is the ideal. Dress is evaluated too: the veil is commented upon, the gold coins on the cap, the wide, swishing skirts, and the expensive fabric of the shirt. In dress, however, the emphasis is more on wealth than on beauty. Altogether, the beauty ideal for a woman emerges very clearly in these songs:

Sirmei vou tiet nakon
bi sirmei kâle.
Har korri seilet ikone
haf sal belâle.

Don't put mascara on your eyes.
They are nice without it.
Every boy who looks at you
stutters for seven years.

Xalelet daset koshtom
pât bereshtom.
Kopa xal men dul sinat
ke juna poshtom.

The tattoo on your hand killed me,

Folksongs from Boir Ahmad, Southwest Iran.¹

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Boir Ahmad is a tribal region in Southwest Iran in the southernmost part of the Zagros range. The Boir Ahmadi speak a Lur dialect and subsist on a mixed economy of sheep and goat herding plus agriculture in various patterns of adaptation to the many ecological particularities of their mountainous home country. Some live in the black tent year round and migrate between summer and winter pastures, others stay part of the year in villages and only move out with their herds in spring and summer.

Up to the early 1960's the Boir Ahmadi were ill-famed for their daring robberies and for the resistance their Khan put up against the government's attempts to integrate the tribes and to carry out the land reform. Even now, after the bureaucratic governmental institutions have been firmly established, roads been built, and many contacts been established with the wider world, the tribespeople still have an air of wild, dangerous mountain dwellers in the eyes of many city people.

During an anthropological fieldwork in Boir Ahmad in 1969/71,⁽²⁾ the author was able to collect over 900 local songs, and in this article will attempt to analyse the texts of these songs in terms of the image the people reveal of themselves and their world, and also to compare this image with certain aspects of the culture and the "social reality" in which the people actually operate.⁽³⁾

A few general remarks about the songs may serve as a brief introduction. The local people

distinguish songs 1. by melody, 2. by the content of the text, and 3. by the occasion for which a song is appropriate. These categories often overlap, so that, for example, the same text can be sung to different melodies. (Exclusive texts have only 4 melodies: "sharva", "hoshtela", "lalo", and "yar-yār") The songs can be grouped into three categories according to the purpose they serve. Dance-songs: are highly rhythmical, often accompanied by hand clapping, and were used as dance music when musicians were rare and expensive and radio and records not yet widespread. However, dance-songs are still popular and new melodies and texts are continuously being composed. Work-songs: are also very rhythmical and have long repetitive sequences. They are used only for their particular purpose, like milking or rocking babies, and usually have texts that are not used with other melodies. The use of worksongs is declining

1. An earlier draft of this paper was read at the 8th Middle East Studies Association Meeting in Boston, Mass., Nov. 1974.
2. The research on which the paper is based was kindly supported by the Social Science Research Council and the Wenner-Gren-Foundation for Anthropological Research.
3. The Boir Ahmadi call all songs "beit" but distinguish many sub-categories by special terms. As the purpose of this article is quite different from a typological treatment of "beit," I will not go into any details here. The songs that I collected are exclusively from the people of Boir Ahmad themselves, not from records.