

# A fool's story in a South Bashkardi sub-dialect text

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This contribution provides linguistic insights into a South Bashkardi oral text belonging to the international folktale type ATU 1696, and concerning the actions of a stupid man and the wiles of his wife. A tentative phonological transcription, an English translation and a glossary are provided, together with some elements of grammar.

## 1. Introduction

Bashkardi is spoken by approximately 40,000 people living in Bashāgerd, locally Bashkard, a hilly to mountainous region on the western end of Makrān morphotectonic unit, and an autonomous sub-province (*shahrestān*) of Hormozgān province, Iran.<sup>1</sup> In scholarly literature, the name Bashkardi is used for two distinct dialect groups, viz. North and South Bashkardi. These are locally known as Mārzigāl and Molkigāl respectively.

North Bashkardi is spread from roughly the south of Sardasht northwards, up to approximately the borders of Qal'è-ye Ganj sub-province of Kermān province, where Rudbāri dialects akin to North Bashkardi are found. South Bashkardi is found principally to the southeast of North Bashkardi, in the district of Gāfr and Pārmun and the immediately surrounding zones. Divergences between these two dialect groups are both structural, concerning historical phonology and morphology, and lexical. Furthermore, it is not known to what extent speakers of North and South Bashkardi are mutually intelligible to one another.<sup>2</sup>

The sub-dialect under study here represents the Bashkardi variety of Garu, a village of about 2,000 people lying approximately 40 km southeast of Mināb, outside Bashāgerd proper.<sup>3</sup> This is a South Bashkardi (or Molkigāl) linguistic island surrounded by Minābi

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<sup>1</sup> Bashāgerd (also Bashākard, Bashākerd) became an autonomous sub-province in 2008. It comprises three districts, namely Markazi, where Sardasht, the capital of the sub-province is located, Gohrān (also known as Angohrān), and Gāfr and Pārmun. Population and administrative data are published in the Statistical Centre of Iran 2013: 24, 68 (2011 census).

<sup>2</sup> Both North and South Bashkardi were tentatively classified as 'Southwest Iranian' in Skjærvø 1988: 846. They are to varying degrees part of the so-called Garmsiri continuum between Hormozgān and Kermān provinces. See the map in Figure 1, below, and Barbera 2023: 145–146.

<sup>3</sup> Garu is part of the rural agglomeration (*dehestān*) of the district (*bakhsh*) of Senderk, one of the four subdivisions of the sub-province (*shahrestān*) of Mināb; see the Statistical Centre of Iran 2013: 18, 28.

dialects and some other dialects like Senderki, which are geographically and linguistically proximate to North Bashkardi. An endonym for the South Bashkardi sub-dialect of Garu was locally given as Mišekārī, also as Mišekālī, probably connected to Bashkardi *mīšekāl* ‘archer, hunter’.<sup>4</sup>

There has been an increasing amount of research published on Bashkardi during the last few years. In particular, Agnes Korn, CNRS, Paris has taken up the difficult, but fascinating task of exploring Ilya Gershevitch’s unpublished Bashkardi materials housed at the Ancient India and Iran Trust in Cambridge.<sup>5</sup> In *Greeting a guest in Bashkardi* (Korn 2021a), a dialogue between a supposedly high ranking guest and his humble host, recorded in a North Bashkardi dialect ‘possibly in or near Rameshk’, is transcribed, morphologically glossed and translated into English, and it is provided with notes on grammar and the study of linguistic expressions and formulas relating to greeting traditions (Bashkardi *ahvāl*, Persian *ahvālporsi*), and hospitality situations. These are compared with similar situations occurring mainly in Balochistan. In *A Bashkardi version of the chain tale ATU 2034: The jackal retrieves his tail* (Korn 2021b), another text in a North Bashkardi dialect, from an unknown place of recording, is presented with a transcription and parallel literal English translation, including notes on the tale type. In both cases, transcriptions aim to be phonological, and they represent the successful result of reworking preliminary transcriptions of Gershevitch’s recordings on tape by the dialectologists Bakhtiar Seddiqi Nejad and Behrooz Barjasteh Delforooz, who also provided audio-translations into Persian.<sup>6</sup>

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According to a report by the National Geographic Organization of the Iranian Armed Forces 2004: 126, the population in Garu numbered 1,420 in the 1996 census, and the village is three centuries old. However, this does not necessarily mean that the ancestors of the current speakers settled in Garu exactly three centuries ago, coming from a South Bashkardi area, as they may have taken over from the previous local population later, when the village had been abandoned.

<sup>4</sup> The word *mīškāl*, a variant form of *mīšekāl* ‘archer, hunter’, is incidentally found in the text (§ 7). Some members of the community deny any connection between this term and the language name (and ethnonym), considering them to be only homophonous. Others hold that Mišekār/lī is the name by which they refer to most Molvigāl dialects. Gershevitch 1964: 25–26 also makes reference to “the North Baškardi and Baluči word for ‘archer’, *mīšekāl*, which as the name of a certain Southern Baškardi-speaking tribe is indifferently pronounced with final *-l* or *-r*”.

<sup>5</sup> In 1956, I. Gershevitch (1914–2001) travelled extensively through Bashāgerd, documenting different North and South dialects for the first time. He also recorded music and some local customs. See Gershevitch’s 1959 informative travel report. In spite of the apparent richness of his field documentation and findings, Gershevitch only published exiguous linguistic information on Bashkardi; it would suffice to compare the index of some 250 Bashkardi words and morphemes prepared by N. Sims-Williams in Gershevitch 1985: 298–299 (a collection of articles that brings together almost all published references to Bashkardi). See Korn 2015 for a rapid description of Gershevitch’s bequest in Cambridge, and for some details on arrangements for its exploitation.

<sup>6</sup> Gershevitch left no notes or transcriptions concerning the first text (Korn 2021a: 322 fn. ii). As to the other text, the transcription by Gershevitch was consulted along with his vocabulary cards only when the process of reworking was almost concluded (Korn 2021b: 369).

The text in the present article was collected on 15 July 2008 from Bejār Mirshekāri, a speaker from Garu, aged 42 at the time of recording.<sup>7</sup> On that occasion, B. Mirshekāri came to visit me at the Sadaf Hotel in Mināb, where I was staying during my fieldtrip. After recording the folktale by means of a Marantz PMD671 audio recorder and an Audio-Technica AT 825 microphone in a truly unsuitable situation for the telling of a folktale — since the audience was just me and I didn't understand most of what was being told me —, B. Mirshekāri helped me comprehend the contents of the text and its grammatical structures, using Persian and partly also Minābi. A similar situation was repeated during the other meetings in which I recorded other tales from him. I had met B. Mirshekāri together with his brother, Ali, at the end of October of 2002 after a quick linguistic survey in Senderk, on the northwestern border of Bashāgerd. While returning to Mināb after the survey, I stopped at a grocery store in Garu for refreshment. The owner of the grocery store was Ali Mirshekāri. It was a big surprise for me to discover that both brothers spoke a dialect that was recognisably structurally and lexically different from the dialects of Mināb and Senderk, as well as from some North Bashkardi dialects I was trying to familiarize myself with at that time. Of course I always carried with me a copy of Professor P. O. Skjærvø's rare article on Bashkardi, published in the *Encyclopædia Iranica* (Skjærvø 1988), thanks to which I could identify the dialect of Garu as a South Bashkardi dialect as I took notes on the basic vocabulary. Then I promised myself to return to Garu soon. However, that was possible only in 2008, and fieldwork at this time was again rather quick.

Recently, Mahmoud Mahmoudi, a young teacher from Garu and former student of Persian at the Tarbiat Moallem University in Bandar Abbās, has helped me clarify some obscure points in this text, as well as in some other texts via WhatsApp. Since technical problems had made B. Mirshekāri's recording often unclear, M. Mahmoudi recorded his own reading of the text and sent it to me in January 2022. There are only few divergences between the two versions at hand, both in the pronunciation of some items and as regards morphology. Such divergences are reported in the notes to the transcription. The phonologically transcribed text remains, however, essentially that by B. Mirshekāri. Almost parallel to the presentation of this article, a text belonging to tale type ATU 315A also by B. Mirshekāri was analysed in *The cannibal sister: Linguistic annotation of a South Bashkardi folktale* (Barbera 2023). It was similarly transcribed, translated and glossed, with remarks on grammar and folktale typology.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ethnolinguistic information on B. Mirshekāri can be summarized as follows. Ethnicity: Bashkardi, Bandari, Iranian. Languages: South Bashkardi (Molkigāl-Miškāri), from birth; spoken fluently as first language; language of ethnic identification; used at home, in the neighbourhood, with friends and other members of the same ethnic group. Second language: Persian; with exposure at school, at work, through the mass media; spoken with members of different ethnic groups and with outsiders.

<sup>8</sup> Field materials from my rapid trip in Garu in 2008 and subsequent findings were archived at ELAR-Endangered Languages Archives, London (now Berlin); see Barbera 2015. ELAR's identification marks for the present text is: molkigal-barbera-0389 B1, bundle name 'Silly man', molki\_texts001.pdf/molki\_texts001.WAW. I have recently taken up some material from this investigation in order to publish more in-depth information on the grammar, vocabulary and texts collected, in a work entitled *Language and folk literature in the Bashkardi borderlands* (Barbera forthcoming).

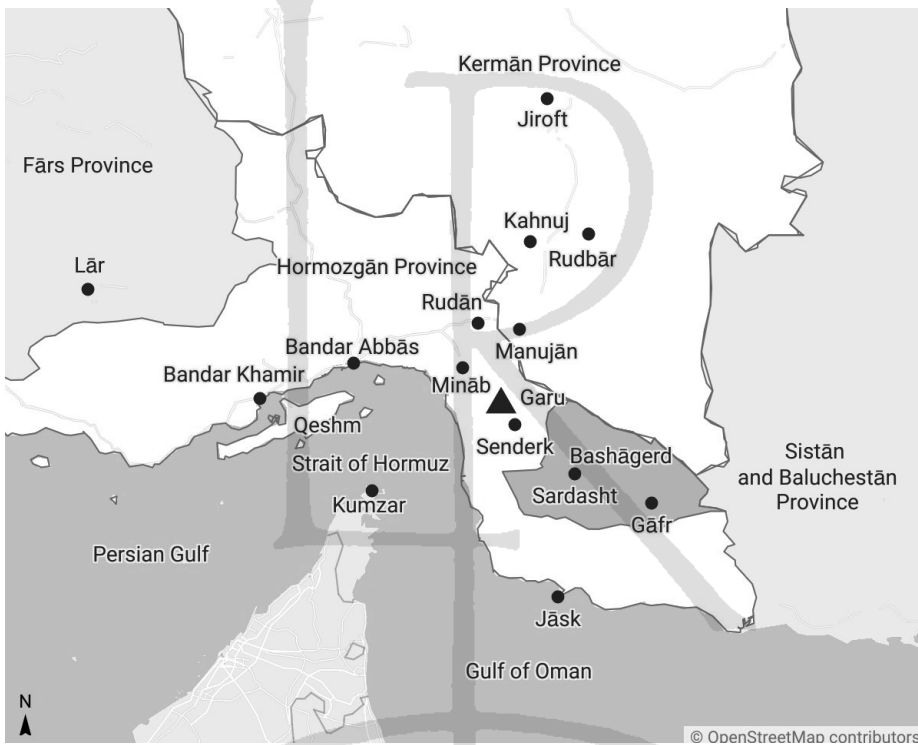


Figure 1. Map of the main locations in the Garmsiri dialect continuum (excepting Balochi-speaking Jāsk, and Kumzār) (made with Datawrapper)

## 2. Text

### 2.1. Content

The following tale belongs to the tales of so-called literal fools, and principally to the miscellaneous type ATU 1696 ‘What should I have said (done)?’ (Uther 2004: 2.382–383). In it, a fool commits a chain of senseless mistakes as he struggles with serious communication difficulties, due to which he always finds himself saying something that is misunderstood or doing something inappropriate. Accordingly, he is punished with blows.<sup>9</sup> In the Bashkardi version, the character who starts the story is the wife of the fool, in place of his mother as in other Iranian or international versions. In particular, the wife, failing to make her fool man go to work, finds a scheme to teach him a lesson.

Motifs can be identified as follows:

1. A wife asks her fool husband the exact amounts of salt that are suitable for cooking bread in a pot he had bought. 2. The man goes to the shop where he had bought the pot;

<sup>9</sup> Marzolph 1984: 243–245 outlines versions and motifs found in several sources from Iran. For an analysis of this tale type, including reference to the psychology of this character, see Lox 2014.

the shopkeeper tells him the exact amounts of salt and also tells him to repeat 'one and a half fistfuls' as a refrain, so he would not forget that. 3. The man repeats the refrain over and over; he encounters some people harvesting, who take his words as an ill omen and beat him; they tell him to repeat, instead, 'from a hundred to a thousand'. 4. The man repeats the refrain; approaching a funeral procession, the people in the procession take his words as an ill omen, and they beat him; then they tell him he has to move on walking and crying instead. 5. The man walks and cries and, by doing so, he drives away the birds a hunter is about to shoot; then the hunter beats him and tells him to go away crawling on all fours. 6. The man crawls on all fours and, by doing so, he scares the donkeys of a caravan, which spill their load; then the caravan drivers beat him and tell him to move on standing up straight. 7. The man arrives back home but, standing up straight, he is unable to stoop when coming in through the low doorway of the hut, so his wife beats him. It is understood at the end that it is better to go to work.

## 2.2. Transcription and translation<sup>10</sup>

1. Yow zen=o mūš=ō hešat-en.<sup>11</sup> Yow gūše=ō nešxat-en. Ba:d e yow moddat=ō,<sup>12</sup> ī šū=e, mūš kār h=a-n-kert. Zen=e har če a-dərūh=e rū kār kī,<sup>13</sup> ye kār h=a-n-kert. Ba:d vot be xāter=ō ke [zen=e<sup>14</sup>] šū=e rū kār kī,<sup>15</sup> yow re nūn-an hat-en sur, yow re nūn-an hat-en šīrīn.<sup>16</sup> Ba:d bāmard bīt nārāhat. Dərūh=e, 'To beyče ahtīn kār a-ken?' Ba:d zen=e dərūh=e, 'Men a-n-dūn-īn, to res=ō ke mañjal t=argoč, ī keyl<sup>17</sup>=et ba men na-dūx, ī keyl=e če kadr=e ke men če kad xū der ī vārt-an eykan-īn tā peym e-kan-īn ba to j-ūx<sup>18</sup>'.

<sup>10</sup> Note that BM refers to Behjār Mirshekāri's comments during the playback phase of the recording and the annotation process; MM refers to Mahmoud Mahmoudi's reading and comments. Note also that the hyphens separate morphemes, while the equals signs mark clitic boundaries, as is customary in glossing. Grammatical bound and clitic morphemes are to be looked for in the grammatical outline. I am grateful to Frank Browning, Jahanbakhsh Looragi Pour and Clelia Salzano for helping me improve the translation of the Bashkardi text.

<sup>11</sup> See Korn 2020 for some notes on Bashkardi introductory formulas in oral storytelling. Such formulas (also found in folktales in other dialects of the area) differ from the typical and famous formula found in Persian contexts, i.e. *yeki bud, yeki nabud* 'once there was, once there was not'. As in this case, there is simply an existential verb introducing the characters.

<sup>12</sup> South Bashkardi indefinite clitic particles =ō and =ū are free variants. BM uses =ō predominantly, while, on the contrary, in most of his reading MM has =ū.

<sup>13</sup> MM: e-kī.

<sup>14</sup> Error. Deleted during annotation.

<sup>15</sup> MM: e-kī.

<sup>16</sup> BM also provides the following variant wording, which he considers to be a better rendition as compared to the one recorded in the audio file: *yow re nūn-an h=a-kert sur, yow re nūn-an h=a-kert šīrīn*, i.e. literally 'one day she was making the bread salty, one day she was making the bread sweet'.

<sup>17</sup> The word *keyl* refers to the exact amounts of an ingredient to add to a recipe in proportion to the capacity of a container. In this case the implied amounts are those of salt.

<sup>18</sup> South Bashkardi makes a strict distinction between the verb 'to eat', i.e. *jūt*, and the verb 'to drink', i.e. *xūrt*, unlike North Bashkardi, Persian and most West Iranian languages, where cognates of Persian *xordan* are largely attested in both meanings (but especially as 'to eat').



*There was a man and a woman. They had been sitting [quietly] in a corner [for a while]. After a while [they had a problem:] the husband, the man, wouldn't go to work. Whatever [words] his wife spoke to get him to go to work, he wouldn't go to work. Then, to make her husband go to work, she came up [with a scheme]: one day she put too much salt in the bread, then the next day she made it too sweet.<sup>19</sup> Then the man became upset. "Why are you doing so?" he demanded. "I don't know", the woman then answered. "The day you got me the pot, you didn't give me the exact amounts [of salt, you haven't told me] what the exact amounts [of salt] are, [to tell me] how much salt (or how much sugar) to put in the flour and to cook for the way you [like to] eat [it]"*

2. Ba:d bāmard dərūh=e, 'Men, xo, hālā ke to be-dərūh-ū keyl=e če kadr=e, men sahgāh a-re-īn<sup>20</sup> ba hamārd ke argoč=om, jost<sup>21</sup> bāmard a-kan-īn ke keyl=e če kadr=e'. Ba:d bāmard sar gerūt,<sup>22</sup> vot ba hamā jeyn=ō ke ī manjal h=argočat, hamā lagan<sup>23</sup> h=argočat. Ba:d vot kaš bāmard, jost=e kert. Dərūh=e, 'To ī manjal=et ke ba men čan vaxt piš adūx če kadr=e keyl=e ke xū eykan-en<sup>24</sup>?' Ā bāmard zat=e xanda, dərūh=e, 'Vallāh! Keyl hamā kes=ō ke peym a-kī bāad dūn-et če kadr rīs-et xū dāxel=e'. *The man then said, "Alright. Since you're asking the exact amounts [of salt], early [tomorrow] morning I'll go [back] to the place where I bought [it and] I will ask the man the exact amounts [of salt]". Then the man set off and went back there, where he had bought this pot, [where] he had bought that metal container. Then he came to the man's shop and asked him. He said, "The pot you sold me a while back what are the exact amounts so they can put the salt [rightly] in [it]?" The man laughed out loud and said, "By God! The person who cooks ought to know the exact amounts, [that is] how much salt one should pour into it"*
3. Ba:d bāmard, ye ke ey sar n-īvot,<sup>25</sup> dərūh=e, 'Ī keyl=e yow moč=o nīm=e'. Ba:d bāmard, šū=e dāzan, dərūh=e, 'Vallāh! Men, xo, yād=om a-rū!' Ba:d dərūh=e, 'Ya:nī, to bes 'yow moč=o nīm', hamahtē<sup>26</sup> ra!' Bāmard hamahtē a-dərūh=e 'Yow moč=o nīm, yow moč=o nīm', a-rowt tā yow jeyn=ō rasent, gandom=eš derow a-kert, gandom=eš a-berint, xarman=eš kerxat, a-kūbent=eš,<sup>27</sup> ba:d bād=eš a-dūt.

<sup>19</sup> Literally, 'one day the breads were salty, one day the breads were sweet'

<sup>20</sup> MM: *a-ra-īn*.

<sup>21</sup> The meaning 'to ask' of *jost kert*, North Bashkardi *jost/jostpā kerdən*, with respect to the meaning 'to search, seek', or 'to find' in the correlated Persian verbs *jost, jostoju* (or *josteju*) *kardan*, or *jostan* is peculiar to the wider research area and to Balochi. On the other hand, the Bashkardi verbs for 'to search, seek', corresponding to Persian *jostoju kardan*, etc. are quite peculiar, viz. North Bashkardi *šūhāz kerdən*, South Bashkardi *šūyāz kert*.

<sup>22</sup> BM: Persian 'sar gereft, rāh oftād'.

<sup>23</sup> Persian *lagan* is a basin for washing clothes. Locally, it is also used for placing other stuff, such as dates by sellers at markets. Here it is used to simply point to any metal container, also as a reflection of the inability of the troubled man (or the teller caught up in the narrative of the situation) to find the right words.

<sup>24</sup> MM: *eykan-īn* (1s).

<sup>25</sup> BM: Persian 'velbokon nabud'.

<sup>26</sup> This is also pronounced by BM as *hamahtī* in a few occurrences (§§ 7, 8, 9); MM has exclusively *hamahtī*.

<sup>27</sup> *kūbent* (PRS *kūb-*) 'to beat, pound', Persian *kubidan*. Also, more frequently, South Bashkardi *kotint*, North Bashkardi *kotiden*.

Since he was not leaving [him] in peace, the man then answered that [the pot] was for one and a half fistfuls [of salt]. The man, the woman's husband, then said, "By God! Come on, I will forget [it]!" Then he spelled out, "That is, say 'One and a half fistfuls' and go on like this!" "One and a half fistfuls, one and a half fistfuls"; the man kept saying over and over, as he walked on to a field [where workers] were harvesting the wheat, they were cutting and stacking [sheaves of] wheat and beating the sheaves and then letting the chaff blow away from the grain.

4. Ye hamahtē a-dərūh=e, 'Yow moč=o nīm, yow moč=o nīm', a-rowt. Ba:d yow dāzan=ō gōšdār bīt, 'Ah, bāmard be-dərūh=e<sup>28</sup> ke gandom-an šomah yow moč=o nīm gēšte ne-b-en!' Ba:d ba āan=e hālī kert, dərūh=e, 'Ba xo-y=an be-dərūh=e<sup>29</sup> ke gandom-an=ox yow moč=o nīm gēšte ne-b-en!' Ba:d gerūt=eš ba hamā ke 'Yow moč=o nīm=e!' [h=a-derūh<sup>30</sup>]=o zat=o zat=o zat=eš tā ivot.  
 "One and a half fistfuls, one and a half fistfuls"; he was saying over and over, [as] he kept going. Then a woman [in the field] caught his refrain,<sup>31</sup> "Oh, this man all he is saying [to us] is, 'May all your wheat be no more than one and a half fistfuls!'" Then she informed those [workers] and said, "[That one] is saying to us, 'May all your wheat be not more than one and a half fistfuls'". Then they took him, the one saying, "One and a half fistfuls", and beat, beat, beat him until he fell.
5. Dərūh=e, 'Pa, men či e-bes-īn?' 'Bes, 'sad ba hezār man,<sup>32</sup> sad ba hezār man, yānī sad ba hezār b-en!' Ba:d ye dərūh=e hamahtē, rowt. Rowt ba jelowte. Yow nafar=ō merxat, yow nafar=ō merxat, a-bert=eš tašyi=e janāza š=a-kert, a-bert=eš gūr h=e-kan-en, ru ravānī=eš<sup>33</sup> nūxat, a-bert=eš.  
 "Then, what can I say?" he asked [on his knees]. [They answered,] "Say, '[From] a hundred to a thousand maunds [of wheat], [from] a hundred to a thousand maunds, that is to say, may they become [from] a hundred to a thousand!'" Then he said [this] over and over and went on. He went further on. A person had died, a person had died, and they were taking him away, they were following the funeral procession, they were taking him away to bury him, they had placed him on a stretcher, they were taking him away [to the graveyard].
6. Ba:d ye hamahtē a-dərūh=e, 'Sad ba hezār, sad ba hezār!' Ba:d yow nafar-ō vāšint=e ke ye be-dərūh=e, 'Sad ba hezār tū mer-aht!' Ba āan=e hālī kert, daḡa vot-en, be ye-h=eš gerūt, zat=eš, xāvānt=o zat=o zat tā jāl ivot. Ba:d dərūh=e, 'Pa, men či e-kan-īn?' Dərūh=e, "To čāvūšī<sup>34</sup> e-ken=o ra!" Ba:d ye hamahtē kert=e čāvūšī=o rowt.

<sup>28</sup> MM: *be-dərūhent=e*. There are thus apparently three forms of the past stem of the verb 'to say', viz. *dərūh*, *dərūhent* (formed with *-ent* from the past stem, while this suffix is expected to form only past stems from present stems), and *dərūst*.

<sup>29</sup> MM: *be-dərūhent=e*.

<sup>30</sup> BM: added during annotation. MM: *h=a-dərūhent*.

<sup>31</sup> Literally, 'she caught his talk'.

<sup>32</sup> BM: Persian 'sad man beše be hezār man', i.e. 'may a hundred become a thousand maunds'. Persian *man* 'maund' is a unity of weight or capacity, whose value has undergone changes over time and by location. It equals 5 kg in Mināb; according to BM, in Garu it equals 3 kg, which is the average recorded in Iran.

<sup>33</sup> MM: *ravānū*.

<sup>34</sup> According to BM, *čāvūšī* means here something like 'to walk and act as someone insane who is chanting the appeal to prayer'. MM does not know the word and emends it into 'gavāšīr', giving, however, a