



Центр "Петербургское Востоковедение"
St.Petersburg Centre for Oriental Studies

ПЕТЕРБУРГСКОЕ ВОСТОКОВЕДЕНИЕ

St.Petersburg Journal of Oriental Studies

**выпуск 4
volume 4**

**Центр
"Петербургское Востоковедение"**

**Санкт-Петербург
1993**

Notes on the Ōrmuġ people

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The Ōrmuġs (Ōrmæġs) (or Barakġ, as they call themselves) are a small group of people living in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Ōrmuġs call their original language Bargistā or Bargastā. There are different views on the affiliation of the language of the Ōrmuġs to the Western or Eastern Iranian group. According to Morgenstierne, one of the main authorities on the linguistics of Afghanistan, the Ōrmuġ language, alongside with the Parachġ language¹, are the last remnants of the South-East group of Iranian languages, which is an intermediate group of languages situated between the Western and Eastern groups and stretching from Kurdish, in a narrow belt towards the East (Morgenstierne, 1929, p. 30, p. 36). The Ōrmuġ language sometimes agrees with (or, according to Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson, 1921, p. 124), is the nearest relative of) Māzandarānġ, the North-West dialects of Persian and the Kurdish language (Morgenstierne, 1929, p. 28). There is clear evidence of influence of the Dardic languages belonging to the Indic group of Indo-Iranian languages (Grierson, 1921, p. 124). The language consists of two distinct dialects: the Ōrmuġġ of Kaniguram (Waziristan) and the Ōrmuġġ of Baraki-i-Barak (Logar). The Kaniguram form is the more archaic. The original language of the Ōrmuġs is preserved only in Kaniguram and some villages in the Logar valley (south of Kabul). In other Logar villages the Ōrmuġs speak Pashto or Persian, in the Peshawar district they speak only Pashto (Grierson, 1921, p. 123; Morgenstierne, 1964, v. I, p. 310). The Ōrmuġġ language itself possesses a great number of Pashto loan-words (Morgenstierne, 1964, v. I, p. 313). Ōrmuġġ is not a written language, except for few songs it possesses no literature. There is a tradition among the Ōrmuġs that their language was invented by their ancestor Mġr Yġsuf in order to separate them from the Pashtuns (Leech, 1838, p. 728). According to another tradition the Ōrmuġġ language was invented by "a very old and learned man 'Umar Labān(?) (Umar Laban

¹ *The Parachġ language* is closely related to Ōrmuġġ. In 1926 Parachġ was spoken in the Hindukush valley of Shutul, North-East of Charikar, in Ghujulan, in Nijran and in Pachaghan. According to the tradition, Panjshir, a valley near Kabul, was formerly populated by the Parachġs (Morgenstierne, 1929, p.18).

in Rose's spelling) some 400 years ago² (Rose, 1914 p. 483).

For the first time in history the Ōrmuŕs were mentioned by Bābur in his famous Memoirs. There they are called Bereki. It is noteworthy that despite the confusing Afghan tradition Bbur distinguishes "the Bereki people" and their language which is also called Bereki from the Tajiks and the Afghans and their languages (Bābur, 1921, v. I, p. 224). Another medieval source which provides some information on the Ōrmuŕ people is Ḥāl-nāmah-i-Pīr-i-Rawḫān by 'Alī Muḥammad Mukhliṣ (Mukhliṣ, 1986). The Ḥāl-nāmah is a Persian treatise of the XVIIth century describing the life-story of the most famous Ōrmuŕ Bāyazīd Anṣārī (1521-5?-1581?), the founder of the Rawshani movement, as well as the Rawshani activities after his death.

There are two discrepant legendary views on the origin of the Ōrmuŕs. According to the more popular version they came from Yemen in the time of Maḥmud of Ghaznī. They helped him in conquering India and in return were granted Kaniguram by the sultan (Leech, 1838, p. 728). All the Ōrmuŕ people descended from two brothers Mīr-i-Barak and Mīr-i-Barakat, who led them from Yemen. The above-mentioned Mīr Yūsuf was the son of Mīr-i-Barakat (Morgenstierne, 1964, p. 311). Another tradition says that they are descended from the Kurds (Elphinstone, 1839, v. I, p. 411). At an unknown time they came from Iran and settled in the Logar valley, and later advanced to Kaniguram (Grierson, 1921, p. 123).

An Afghan popular tradition claims that the Orakzai, Afridi, Mangal, Waziri, Khattak and Khogiani tribes of the Pashtuns are of Ōrmuŕ origin (Bellew, 1862, p. 63; Afzal Khān, 1893, p. 222; Eng. tr., pp. 185-186). Bellew even derives the Afghan ruling tribe of Barakzai³ belonging to the Durrani union from the Baraki. Obviously it is a very artificial association. The Afghan tradition says that the Ōrmuŕs constitute a separate tribe within the Afghan/Pashtun nation. They are considered to be the descendants of a certain Ūrmaŕ, an adopted son of Sharkhbūn, grandson of Qays 'Abd al-Rashīd, a legendary ancestor of all Pashtuns (Ibbetson, 1883 p. 205; Morgenstierne, 1961, p. 223).

Some British Indian authors following the Afghan tradition and perhaps being confused by the discrepancy in the ethnic name Ōrmuŕ/Baraki even wrote about two different peoples. Thus, Rose distinguishes Barik (Barakki), "a clan of Pathans claiming Arab descent" (Rose, 1914, v. II, p. 66) and Ūrmar (Urmur or Ormur), a non-Afghan tribe of the unknown origin, classified as a section⁴ of the Mahsud Wazirs (Rose, 1914,

² The book where this tradition was referred to was published in 1914.

³ *The Barakzai dynasty* ruled over Afghanistan from 1826 until 1973.

⁴ Perhaps at that time the Ōrmuŕs of Waziristan were included into the Mahsud tribe as a *ham* -

v. III, p. 483). Rose also states that the birth-place of the Mahsud Wazirs is said to be Kaniguram which is inhabited chiefly by the Ōrmuŕs (Rose, 1914, v. III, p. 501). Raverty, on the opposite, considers the Ōrmuŕs as a Pashtun tribe and Barakī as a "Tajik people speaking a language of their own" (Raverty, 1888, p. 679).

In the first part of the XIXth century the number of the Ōrmuŕs was about eight thousand families (Elphinstone, 1839, v. I, p. 411). In Kaniguram⁵ there were 2000 families in 1838 (Leech, 1838, p. 728) and some 3000 families in the first part of the XXth century (Caroe, 1964, p. 23). In 1921 there were 400-500 houses in Kaniguram (Grierson, 1921, p. 123). At the end of the XIXth century the number of the Ōrmuŕs in the Panjab province was 3737 families: 34 families in the Derah Ismail Khan District, 340 in the Bannu District, 3187 in the Peshawar District, 176 in the Kohat District (Ibbetson, 1883, p. 206). According to 1981 Census of Pakistan the number of people in Kaniguram area is 12. 239⁶ (Census, 1981, p. 92). The number of the Ōrmuŕs inside Afghanistan was and is unknown⁷.

All scholarly accounts agree that the territories of the Ōrmuŕs were once extensive (Elphinstone, 1839, v. I, p. 411) and even Kabul belonged to their domain (Morgenstierne, 1929, p. 36), but later they fell under the Pashtun domination. Barak-i-Barak in the Logar valley is considered as their original home. The Ōrmuŕs were known as good soldiers. They lived mainly on trade (the Ōrmuŕs are described as merchants in the Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District (p. 66)) and travelled widely⁸. As a result, a few Ōrmuŕ villages were founded in the Peshawar valley (Grierson, 1921, p. 123). Besides the above-mentioned Ōrmuŕ villages in the Logar valley, and in the Peshawar valley (they are the following: Ormur Bala, Ormur Miyana and Ormur Payin, about ten miles south-east of Peshawar (Caroe, 1964, p. 23)) and also Kaniguram (Waziristan), Bellew also writes about some Ōrmuŕ settlements in Kunduz, Buthhak and on the Hindukush, in the Bamian and

šāyah (vassal) section.

⁵ *Kaniguram* (or Kani [Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District, p.66]) is a town in the heart of Mahsud Waziristan in the upper Baddar Valley (on the Takki Zam river [S.A.]) at an elevation of nearly 7000 feet (Caroe, 1964, p.200).

⁶ In the Census table "Selected Population Statistics of Individual Rural Localities, South Waziristan Agency" these people are described as "Sayad-Umars (but Urmars in 1961 Census) of Kanigurra I, II and III". Kanigurra I - 5.233 (5.2 people in household); Kanigurra II - 6.397 (6.4 people in household); Kanigurra III - 609 (4.1 people in household) (Census, 1981, p.92)>.

⁷ According to Afghan guerrilla sources 206 people were killed and more than 1000 houses destroyed in the villages around Barak-i-Barak during the Soviet offensive in October 1987 (Urban, 1990, p.227).

⁸ According to the *Hālnāmah* the family of Bāyazīd Anšārī was engaged in caravan trading and had some property in Ghazni and "other parts" [of the country] (Mukhlīš, 1986, p.22). Bāyazīd Anšārī has been taken by his father to business trips from the very childhood (Mukhlīš, 1986, p.19). Later he became a successful horse-trader and travelled as far as India and Central Asia.

Ghorband districts (Bellew, 1891, p. 61). Morgenstierne, however, expresses doubts whether the people of these places preserved their original language (Morgenstierne, 1964, v. I, pp. 310-311). At the beginning of the XIXth century the Ōrmuġs of Barak-i-Barak and other villages in the Logar valley were subjects of the Kabul emirs while the Ōrmuġs of Kaniguram still preserved their independence (Leech, 1838, p. 728). According to the British gazetteers the Kaniguramis founded some settlements near the Indian city of Jalandar (in the Lahore province)⁹.

Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District provides the following information on the population of Jalandar: "The proprietors of the town lands, who are chiefly Afghans, Saiyads, Malik Rajputs, Rains and Khattris generally acquired their possessions by purchase". "Of the outlying *bastis* (suburbs [S. A.]) those of Shekh Ghuzan, Danishmandan, Bawakhel were founded by Muhammadan settlers from Kani or Kaniguram a little more than 2 1/2 centuries ago (the Gazetteer was published in 1883-84 [S. A.]). The earliest was Basti Danishmandan founded by merchants from Kani who purchased lands in the neighbourhood in A. D. 1609. Eight years later, Shekh Darvesh came from Kaniguram and bought the lands, on which he founded the town now known as Basti Shaikh. Basti Ghuzan was also founded in Shah-jahan's time by merchants from Kani who had originally settled in Jalandhar and afterwards in Basti Shaikh. Subsequently they purchased land from Lodi Afghans, Saiyads and Shakhs, and built a *bazar* of their own. The basti takes its name from the tribe to which they belonged, and has now more than 4500 inhabits. In 1620-21 Basti Bawa Khel was founded by some Afghans who also came from Kaniguram. It was originally called Babapur from an ancestor of the founders named Mir Baba"(Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District, 1884, p. 66).

The Imperial Gazetteer of India adds an important information that Basti Danishmandan and Basti Shaikh Darvesh (probably the Basti Shaikh of the Gazetteer of Jalandhar [S. A.]) were founded by Ansari Shaykhs in the XVIth century (The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, v. XIV, p. 231).

Both of the above-mentioned gazetteers state that people from

⁹ *Jalandar* (Jalandhar [Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District]; Jullundur [The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, v.XIV, p.231]) is a city in Panjab situated in the Doab (*dōāb* / *dūāb* (Persian) -in this context territory between two rivers [S.A.]) between the Bias and the Saltaj (also called Satlej [S.A.]) rivers (Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District, 1884, p.1). Since 1088, when Ibrāhīm Shāh Ghuri took the city it remained under the Muslim rule (however, the proportion of Muslims living in the Jalandar district in 1908 hardly exceeded 45% [The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, v.XIV, p.225]) being attached to the province of Lahore. However, it was always in the hands of more or less independent governors. During the Sayyid dynasty (1414-1451) it became the scene of numerous insurrectionary movements, especially of the long rebellion of the Kakar (Khakhar in the gazetteers) chief Jasrath(?). Jalandar also witnessed military activity when Humāyūn battled for his kingdom in the middle of the XVIth century (Gazetteer of the Jalandhar District, 1884, p.7; Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, p.223).

Kaniguram started to settle in Jalandar in the XVIth century, while according to the *Ḥāl-nāmah* Bāyazīd Anṣārī's grandfather Ḥājjī Abā Bakr was born in Jalandar (Mukhlīṣ, 1986, p. 3). Given the fact that his grandson was born in 1521-5(?) it seems possible to assume that the immigrants from Kaniguram arrived into Jalandar several decades earlier.

Apparently at the turn of the XXth century they no longer identified themselves as the *Ōrmuṣ*s because neither gazetteer describes these immigrants as the *Ōrmuṣ*s.

According to Elphinstone the *Ōrmuṣ*s closely resemble the Pashtuns in their manners (Elphinstone, 1839, v. I, p.411). Rose, however, supports a different view: "their [the *Ōrmuṣ*'s] marriage ceremonies, general rites and customary laws differ widely from those of the surrounding [Afghan] tribes" (Rose, 1914, v. III, p. 483).

There is a unique description of the *Ōrmuṣ*'s customs in the *Ḥāl-nāmah*: After three years of quarrelling with his family, 19 years old Bāyazīd Anṣārī decided to separate from his father 'Abdallah and demanded his own part from their common property. 'Abdallah was reluctant to divide the property and agreed only after long hesitation and persistent requests of some relatives and the town elders.

This juridical case connected with the joint possession of property by father and children, which can be divided by the sons' demand, is typical for Pashtun customary law¹⁰. Afzal Khān Khaṭṭak, the author of *Tārikh-i-Muraṣṣa'*, a voluminous treatise on the history of the Pashtuns, describes it in the following way: "The tradition is that at that time there was still this custom amongst the Pathans, when the sons reached manhood, to divide amongst themselves their parent's property, and give their parents also an equal share" (Afzal Khān, 1893, p. 209; Eng. tr., pp. 169-170). It is noteworthy that Afzal Khān (lived approximately 1661-63—1748 (Kushev, 1980, p. 64), a little more than one hundred years after Bāyazīd Anṣārī) described this custom as the ancient one which existed "at that time" of the legendary Pashtun ancestors. A well-known medieval Afghan Ḥanafī theologian Akhūnd Darwizah also provides some information on this custom in his book *Tazkirat al-Abrār wa-l-Ashrār*. In this treatise Akhūnd Darwizah writes about a Pashtun custom which contradicts shari'at, according to this custom grown up sons divide their parents property, but, as Darwizah contradicts Afzal Khān, parents are given not an equal share but a modest part sufficient only for their daily bread and a cost of funeral¹¹ (Darwizah,

¹⁰ It looks like a special form of *wēsh*, the Pashtun custom of periodical redistributions of land plots (*daftar*) among families within the clan and among various clans within the tribe. It is rather possible that the described custom is an archaic form of *wēsh* (given Afzal Khān's description of this custom as ancient) when family members were also considered for apportionment.

¹¹ This Darwizah's description was first noted by Romodin (Romodin, 1951, p.164) and later

p. 111).

It is also interesting that according to Tārīkh-i-Muraŕŕa' mothers were, presumably, not given a share of family property (Afzal Khān, 1893, p. 209; Eng. tr., p. 170). However Fāṭimah, 'Abdallah's wife, got her part without any trouble¹² (Mukhlīs, 1986, pp. 19-30).

It seems that the case was not under the jurisdiction of Muslim law because 'Abdallah, who was a Muslim *qāzī* himself, was urged by relatives and elders but not the Muslim authorities. The terms *sardār*(*ān*) and *kadkhudā*(*yān*) are used in the Hāl-nāmah in this context for the elders. In Persian *sardār* means "general", "governor of a province". In Pashto, however, this word, apart from "general", can also mean "chief" (Aslanov, 1966, p. 511; Raverty, 1987, p. 600). The same applies to the word *kadkhudā*, which in Persian signifies "magistrate", "alderman", but in Pashto means "chief of a clan" (Aslanov, 1966, p. 666). It is possible that Bāyazīd Anŕārī sought the help of tribal chiefs in the case since Islamic regulations did not apply. There is some vague evidence that the Ōrmuŕs had chiefs (Leech, 1838, p. 728). It is noteworthy that 'Abdallah being an *anŕār* and *qāzī* was forced to obey their exhortations. It may indicate a difference between the position of the Muslim clergy among the Pashtuns and among the Ōrmuŕs. Among the Pashtuns Muslim clerics living together with tribes are generally excluded from the tribal customary law and live in accordance with *sharī'at* law only. It seems that in the Ōrmuŕ society there was a different situation.

There are some noteworthy reports on the religious rites of the Ōrmuŕs. Bellew describes them as fire-worshippers: "Once a week they congregated for worship, men and women together, and at the conclusion of their devotions the officiating priest extinguished the fire they worshipped¹³, and, at the same time, exclaimed "*Ō muŕ*", a term expressive of the act, for in Pukhtu "*ŕ*" means "fire", and "*muŕ*" (*mæŕ* S. A.) means "dead", "extinct" (Bellew, 1862, p. 63). It is obviously a Pashto popular etymology of the ethnic name. It is rather strange why an Ōrmuŕ priest supposedly have exclaimed "*ŕ mæŕ*" (the fire went out) in Pashto, and not Ōrmuŕī (**rūn gul shūk* [MacKenzie, 1992]). Morgenstierne, while rejecting Bellew's etymology of the word *ŕmuŕ* (he offers one of his own: *ŕmuŕ* is a Pashto form derived from **āya-mrt(y)a-*) agreed that the Ōrmuŕs may have been fire-worshippers till comparatively recent times because Ōrmuŕī is the only modern Iranian dialect which has preserved the ancient techni-

published by Reisner (Reisner, 1954, p.109).

¹² Thus, the Ōrmuŕs probably practised some form of *khūlah-wēsh* (apportionment of land to all family members disregarding their sex) rather than *band-wēsh* (apportionment of land to men only).

¹³ Zoroastrians, however, do not extinguish their fires during their religious ceremonies.

cal term of Zoroastrian theology for "studying", "reading"¹⁴ (Morgenstierne, 1964, v. I, pp. 311-312).

In this connection it is interesting to note that according to Leyden, the Rawshani movement, founded by a person with the Ōrmuŕ background was accused of "practising the abominations of the unchaste sect termed *Cheragh-kush* [*chirāgh-kush* S. A.] (Lamp-Extinguishers) (Leyden, 1810, p. 378).

It seems, that in general, practising of the *chirāgh-kush* ceremony was a standard orthodox accusation levelled at every sect all over the Middle East. For instance, the Shiite and Ismā'īlī Hazaras, the people of mixed Iranian-Turko-Mongol origin living in Central Afghanistan, were also accused by their Sunni neighbours of practising the infamous "lamp-extinguishing" ceremonies (Morgenstierne, 1964, p. 224). According to Ferdinand Klaus the Hazara people practised some rites allegedly connected with fire-worshipping. Klaus describes the rituals of "atesh-algho" (fire-leaping) months of the Hazara calendar which are believed to bring prosperity to the household and the ceremony of lighting a lamp in order to commemorate the dead. Muslim clergy considered these customs as remnants of Zoroastrism (Klaus, 1959, pp. 44-46). Followers of the 'Alī-Ilāhi (or Kākā'ī) sect among the Kurds and Gōrān of the Iran-Iraq border are also described as *chirāgh-sōndūrān* (MacKenzie, 1992). In Redhouse's Turkish-English Dictionary *chirāgh-puf* (Who blows out the light) is explained as "a certain sect reported to hold secret gatherings at which the lights are blown out, and all present give themselves to indiscriminate licentiousness" (Redhouse, 1890, p. 750). Persian dictionaries provide the same explanations (Lughat-nāmāh, 1969, vol. č, p. 137; Steingass, 1970, p. 389).

Surprisingly enough no Pashto dictionary has an article on *chirāgh-kush*. However Louis Dupree writes that the Sunni Afghans insult the Ismā'īlīs (especially in Hazarajat) by shouting "chirgh-kush" to them (Dupree, 1979, p. 680).

In spite of the accusations of practising fire-worshipping it is rather possible that the Ōrmuŕs were regarded as a group of people of some religious significance because all Ōrmuŕs were reported by Morgenstierne's native informant to be Sayyids (Morgenstierne, 1964, v. I, p. 311). Caroe also writes that many families among the Ōrmuŕs in Kaniguram call themselves Sayyid or Anṣār (Caroe, 1964, p. 201). In the Imperial Gazetteer of India the emigrants from Kaniguram living in Jalandar suburbs were also described as Anṣār (The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, v. XIV, p. 231). Perhaps in this case the terms "sayyid" and "anṣār" do not mean respecti-

¹⁴ However Ōrmuŕī is a non-written language, as it was mentioned above.

vely "a descendant of the prophet Muḥammad" and "the companion of the prophet Muḥammad" but signifies "a noble man". Perhaps these titles are adopted by the Ōrmuṯ just as the Pashtuns take the title Khān. However Bāyazīd Anṣārī was considered as a descendant of an Anṣār family and a list of his ancestors descending from Khwājah (Abū) Ayyūb Anṣārī¹⁵, a famous companion of the prophet Muḥammad is given in the Ḥāl-nāmah (Mukhlīṣ, 1986, pp. 2-3).

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¹⁵ For more information on Khwājah (Abū) Ayyūb Anṣārī see (Lévi-Provençal, 1961, pp.108-9).

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