

TRACES OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY IN THE FOLK MUSIC AND ORAL LITERATURE OF BUSHEHR

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Abstract

This article examines parts of the oral literature and music of Bushehr, a port city in southern Iran. There is a song in Bushehr's music that uses words like *helleh* (he:lle) and *heliosa* (he:lijosa), that have no meaning for the people of Bushehr. This paper suggests that the origin of these words goes back to Greek mythology and that they are the remains of hymns or spells recited in praise of Helios and other ancient gods. To this end, in addition to qualitative and field research, extensive historical studies were carried out, focusing on the Hellenistic period after the conquest of Iran by Alexander the Great. I suggest that although the evolution of music in Bushehr was influenced by the military domination of Greece through acculturation, the cultural background of Bushehr was not ineffective in accepting this. As a result, assimilation occurred, and some mythical elements of Greece were localised in Bushehr.

Keywords

Oral literature, Folk music, Mythology, Bushehr, Iran, Helios

INTRODUCTION

Bushehr, with its multicultural background, is a port city in southern Iran and on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf. Historically and according to the studies conducted, this port has always been of economic and political importance since the second millennium BC. During this time, this city has experienced different religions and cultures as well as different ethnic groups.

Two important events in the 18th century changed the social texture of Bushehr and made Bushehr a cosmopolitan city and one of the most important commercial and political ports in the Persian Gulf. On one hand, Nader Shah Afshar (king of Iran, 1736–1747) selected Bushehr as a shipyard and base for the Iranian Navy in 1734 (Lockhart, 1938: 92), and on the other hand, the British Residency was established in Bushehr in 1763 (Wilson, 1928: 178). The establishment of the British residence in Bushehr (1763–1946) and the new commercial situation of Bushehr increased the importance of this port and prompted people of different ethnicities and religions to move to Bushehr. During this period, various ethnic groups from African regions as immigrants or slaves, Arab ethnic groups, Indians, Armenians, and Iranian nomads such as Lurs and Turks with various Islamic, Christian, and Jewish religious tendencies as well as Zoroastrians were attracted to this port and influenced the cultural community of Bushehr by their presence (Stern, 1854: 85). The traces of these cultures are reflected in the lives of the people of Bushehr in the form of music and other rituals. The instrumentation and repertoire of Bushehr's folk music are one of the cultural phenomena that reflect this cultural diversity very well.

This study attempts to demonstrate the connection between the music and culture of Bushehr and ancient Greek mythology. Considering the distance and cultural differences between East and West, the idea that traces of ancient Greek beliefs can be found in the music of today's Bushehr culture may seem far-fetched. Yet this article, based on field research and extensive historical studies, attempts to

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present examples in the field of Bushehr folk literature and folk music that is believed to have been influenced by the culture and beliefs of Greek mythology. So far, no study has been conducted in this field, and the only case in which the possibility of a connection between Bushehr and Greek music has been raised, according to some historical records and without mentioning any examples, is a short note by Mohsen Sharifian (2010).

Despite the multicultural background of Bushehr's music, which contains various elements of African, Arabic, and Indian musical culture, the present study suggests that signs of ancient Greek culture can also be found in this music. Taking a different approach, this article explores another aspect of cultural interactions between East and West in antiquity that has been overlooked. The results of this research in the field of music of Bushehr, the Persian Gulf, and even Iran are important for the following reasons:

- Until now, the songs and words studied in this article, although performed as part of Bushehr's folklore rituals, had no clear meaning to the people and no one knew where they came from.
- Before this article, no research had been done to demonstrate a connection between the music of Bushehr, or even Iran, and the mythological culture of ancient Greece, and no assumptions had been raised in this regard.

The historical focus of this study is on the Hellenistic period, sometime after Alexander the Great's conquest of Iran, and it examines the influence of Greek mythology on Bushehr's music. One can also consider another aspect of this cultural influence, namely, the possibility of the presence of elements of Bushehr music in Greek folk music left over from the Hellenistic period. Due to the social connection that existed between Bushehr and parts of the Greek populated areas during this period (Boardman, Griffin & Murray, 1991), it seems that this cultural influence was two-sided. The similarity of the names of the Bushehri bagpipe called *ney-ambooneh*² and the Greek bagpipe called *tasambouna*, on one hand, and the fact that it is said that the historical evidence for the Greek bagpipe dates from the Hellenistic period (Tsantanis, 2011), on the other, strengthen the possibility that the Greek bagpipe is of Iranian origin. The appearance and musical similarity of Iranian (*neyanban*), Turkish (*tulum*), and then Greek bagpipes (*tasambouna*) suggest these interactions. The evidence such as the physical similarities in the style of playing and even the similarity of the percussion instrument accompanying the Greek bagpipes to the similar instrument in Bushehr can be considered as further reasons for this cultural transfer from Bushehr to Greece at that time. *Tasambouna* is played with a double-sided drum called *tumpaki*, and in Bushehr, the drummer accompanying the *ney-ambooneh*³ is sometimes called *tumpaki*, that is, the one who plays a kind of percussion instrument called *tompak* or *tombak*⁴.

A fundamental challenge for research of this kind is the lack of sufficient sources for this period, even on a larger scale, i.e., for the historical studies on Iran. Nevertheless, the available evidence, together with the arguments and interpretations discussed in this article, seem appropriate for an initial exploratory conclusion. Parts of Bushehr's music are a clear example of intangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is a cultural phenomenon that contains signs of ancient cultures that still exist among people but sometimes with different functions. These signs can be found in different layers of cultural phenomena in the music of Bushehr, which could be studied with qualitative research method. Therefore, an attempt is made to conclude the relationship between existing cultural phenomena and ancient rituals by examining the concepts and symbols in a historical study. However, the musical rituals in Bushehr, like other examples in the world, have undergone many changes during the social, religious, ethnic, and political changes in the different periods of history.

The method of this research is based on qualitative and historical textual data research, which follows the ethnographic method in terms of data collection and interpretation. The qualitative data are mainly the result of observations and verbal data collected by the author during his presence in Bushehr for more than 30 years as a researcher, musician, and director of the Leymer Folk Music and Dance Group of Bushehr⁵. The study of music in this research is from the perspective of examining the role

² Ney is a synonym for pipe in English and *anban* or *ambooneh* means bag.

³ This instrument is known as *neyanban* in Persian and is called *ney-ambooneh* in the local dialect of Bushehr.

⁴ Extensive research has been conducted on this, which is reflected in the author's doctoral thesis.

⁵ www.Leymer.com, last visited 11th August, 2022.

of musical phenomenon in the traditional society of Bushehr in terms of function and ethnic beliefs, which is the musical anthropology approach of this research.

BUSHEHR'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Due to the Mesopotamian civilizations, the Persian Gulf can be considered one of the first seas where mankind learned seafaring. Some research shows that about 10,000 years before Christ, different branches of humanity such as the Dravidians lived in the Makran and Baloch areas, the Semites and Hamites lived in the south of the Persian Gulf, and the Proto-Elmites lived in the upper part of the Persian Gulf from Susa to Bushehr (Wilson, 1928: 25).

According to a brick found in Bushehr with the inscription Shutruk-Nahhunte (1000–1200 BC), the Bushehr peninsula was part of the Elamite civilization when Susa was its centre (Edwards, Hammond, & Sollberger, 1975: 485). The Bushehr peninsula, called Liyan by the Elamites, can be considered one of the most important spiritual centres of this ancient culture as the temple of one of the most important Elamite deities, Kiririsha, the goddess of the sea and the divine mother, as well as the other temples of gods Inshushinak, Khumban, and Pakhakhutep were located on this peninsula, which is why Kiririsha was also called the Lady of Liyan (Edwards, Hammond, & Sollberger, 1975: 390).

Throughout history and due to political and social evolutions, the Bushehr peninsula has been known by various names. These include names such as Liyan, Mesambria, Antioch in Persis, Rishehr, Abu-Shahr, Bushire, and Bushehr. Arrian (146/160 AD) is the first European historian to refer to Bushehr as Mesambria. This Greek historian describes Alexander the Great's invasion of Iran and reports that the Greek fleet under the command of an officer named Nearchos docked in what is now Bushehr and named it Mesambria (Vincent, 1797: 363).

The cultural changes in Bushehr, like the developments after the 18th century, were sometimes caused by the migration of different individuals or ethnic groups, resulting in an amalgamation of the cultural states of the society, and sometimes acculturation was due to a political conquest, where one cultural system was replaced by another. The historical period considered in this study refers to the time of the fall of the Achaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great, during which Alexander and his successors ruled Iran and the surrounding territories for about 150 years. As a result of the political and military defeat of the Iranians and the influx and settlement of many Greeks in various parts of Iran, the cultural domination of the Greeks in Iran began. Bushehr culture was also influenced by this event and underwent changes, some of which are described in this article.

Alexander's successors established a vast empire that stretched from the Aegean Sea to the Persian Gulf and beyond. This empire was named after its founder, Seleucus I Seleucid. The Greeks tried to introduce their religion to the Iranians by founding Greek cities (Daryae, 2012: 158). The Seleucids established about 70 cities in the style of Greek cities in their new empire. In the Persian Gulf, the Seleucids founded several cities due to their special geographical location and trade, including cities such as Antioch in Persis, Failaka, and Charax Spasinu (Esmaili, 2017: 12. In Persian). They founded at least nine ports on the shores of the Persian Gulf, including Antioch in Persis, today's Bushehr, which replaced one of the ancient cities of Elam (Ghirshman, 1954: 225).

THE APPEARANCE OF THE SUN GOD HELIOS IN THE SONGS OF BUSHEHR

According to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, Antioch in Persis was founded during the reign of Antiochus I (Tarn & Sherwin-White, 2015), and this source, like Ghirshman, assumes that the site is in or around Bushehr. Antiochus I, who had a Greek father and an Iranian mother, tried to unite the Greeks with the Iranians and make Greek culture acceptable to the Iranians (Porada, 2007: 255). During this period, the Greek gods were introduced alongside the Persian gods and sometimes took their stead. For example, a temple was built in Persepolis, and Greek inscriptions introduced Zeus Megistos in place of Hormizd, Apollo, and Helios for Mithra, Artemis, and Queen Athena for Anahit (Herzfeld, 1935: 45).

On Mount Nimrud in Asia Minor, there are figures depicting Antiochus I next to the Greek and Iranian gods of Mithras-Helios (Figure 1). On one of these relief stones, the figure of this combined god is dressed entirely in Persian clothing, while rays shine from the tall Parthian hat and the face and hairstyle are Greek (Ayatollahi, 2003: 111). Around this time, some inhabitants of the ancient

Greek city of Magnesia in western Asia Minor came to Antioch in Persis and founded a colony, Boardman, Griffin, and Murray (1991: 370). The city of Antioch in Persis is the same as Bushehr in modern times (Walbank, 1993: 135). An inscription indicates that during the reign of Antiochus I, there was correspondence between Bushehr (Antioch in Persis) and Magnesia about the establishment of some festivals in honour of Artemis Leukophryene (Tuplin, 2007: 229). An article on the festival of Artemis Leukophryene in Magnesia states that delegations (theoroi) from Magnesia were sent with the Greek Koine from Sicily to Antioch in Persia on the Persian Gulf to announce the new festival (Hammerschmied, 2018). Artemis Leukophryene is a Greek goddess who had a temple in Magnesia (Strabo, 1928). Bushehr was so important to the Seleucids that Antiochus III had a residency in this city (Tuplin, 2007: 229) and coins were also minted in this city in the second century BC (Cohen, 2013: 213). All this shows the special economic and commercial position as well as the cultural and religious importance of Bushehr in the Seleucid period.

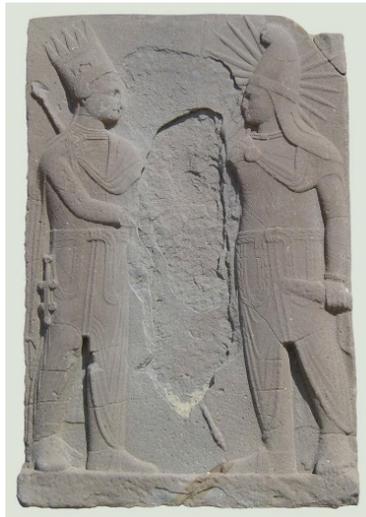


Figure 1: Antiochus I and Mithras-Helios from Mount Nimrud, Photo by Herman Brijder.⁶

The evidence for the manifestations of Greek mythology in and around Bushehr is not limited to the cases mentioned above. Another ancient case that points to the cultural presence of the Greeks in Bushehr is a Greek marble statue (Figure 2) discovered in one of the villages around Borazjan in Bushehr province (Rahbar, 1999. In Persian), which is said to be the statue of the Greek god Pan and Marsyas (Ebrahimi, 2012: 237. In Persian). The statue depicts a person with an animal figure playing a pan flute, while two other types of flutes are placed in front of it (Sharifian, 2014: 117). Also worth mentioning are the Greek temples on Kharg Island, 34 miles northwest of Bushehr port. On the island, there are traces of temples of Greek and Roman gods mentioned in some sources. These include the temple of Neptune (Nourbakhsh, 1983: 403. In Persian), the Roman god of the sea, and the temple of Apollo (Baker & Smith, 2009: 195), the Greek and Roman god of dance and music. Roman Ghirshman also reports the discovery of the remains of the Greek sea god Poseidon on this island (Nourbakhsh, 1983: 404. In Persian).



Figure 2: The Greek marble statue, discovered in Bushehr province. (Sharifian, 2014)

⁶ <https://empiresoffaiith.com/2017/05/03/mithra-in-commagene-some-sort-of-mix-up/> , last accessed: 9th January, 2023. All depictions were conducted with permission of the publishers if not metnioned otherwise.

In view of the above, it seems that Bushehr, like other parts of the Seleucid Empire, was familiar with the manifestations of Greek mythological ideas, and this possibility may even be considered much more serious and effective because of the particular position of this city described. One of these gods is Helios, of whom it has already been mentioned how he was combined by Antiochus I with the Persian god Mithras and manifested on a bas-relief on Mount Nimrud. Mount Nimrud in Asia Minor is a region from which many people migrated to Bushehr and influenced Bushehr and its culture with their presence and Greek culture. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the Greek god Helios received as much attention in Bushehr as he did in Asia Minor or elsewhere under Greek influence, with the difference that in Bushehr he has been depicted in song instead of bas-relief and remains to date. This song is one of the songs from *yazleh*, a kind of musical ritual of Bushehr music.

YAZLEH (JAZLƏ-نیزله) HELIOSA (HE:LIJOSA-هلیوسا)⁷

<i>Helleh heliosa</i>	/	<i>Helalyous heliosa</i>
he:lɛ he:lijosa	/	he:laljos he:lijosa
هلیوسا هلیوسا	/	هله هلیوسا

In Bushehr music, there is a form of chanting accompanied by movements called *yazleh*. One of these *yazleh* in Bushehr is *heliosa*, but before describing this *yazleh*, it is helpful to give an overview of the *yazleh* in Bushehr.

Yazleh (Figure 3) is a musical ritual derived from the music of the sailors, performed in Bushehr in both mourning and joy with some differences, accompanied by movement and a kind of dance. *Yazleh* is an opportunity for men, especially sailors, to show their masculine spirit by performing epic poetry and stick dancing, while women accompany them with performing ‘*kel*’⁸ (ke:l-کل). *Yazleh* poems often reflect social issues or themes related to the lives of seafarers, which are expressed in the words of *yazleh* (S. Beladi, 2021: 351. In Persian).⁹



Figure 3: Performance of *yazleh* by Leymer Folk Music and Dance Group of Bushehr, photo by courtesy of Ramtin Balef.

Despite the many similarities between the *yazleh* and African music, there are many reasons why the *yazleh* was originally a ritual for worship and then its function was changed. In terms of mythology and symbols, there are reasons why *yazleh* can be associated with the cults of Mehr in ancient Iran. According to linguistic research, the word *yazleh* is *yaz-ra* and derives from the Avestan word *yaz* or the Old Persian *yazd*, which means worship and refers to cultic festivals (A. Beladi, 2011: 301. In Persian). Many dances and movement forms in Bushehr, including *yazleh*, are danced in a circle. Rhythmic circular movements around a tree or a fire are one of the oldest forms of human ritual movement (Abu Mahboob, 2007. In Persian). The people who believed in the sun god also organized their worship in rhythmic circular movements (Beaucorps, 1994: 86). In the eyes of the sun

⁷ The phonetic transcription of the words is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

⁸ *Kel* is a kind of sound that women use to express their joyful or mournful feelings. They hold one of their hands over their mouth and use the highest pitch of their voice to produce a word that sounds like *kelelel*, which can be extended further by adding any number of *le* syllables.

⁹ Performance of *Heliosa yazleh* by Leymer Folk Music and Dance Group of Bushehr accessible via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLMI4ZTqqT8>, last visited 11th August, 2022.

worshippers, the circle represents the pursuit of wholeness and perfection (Jun, 1999: 365), and since Mehr (sun) worship was one of the ancient religions of Iran and the Liyan Peninsula (Bushehr) (Sabzi, Hatami and Raigani, 2017. In Persian), this feature of yazleh can be considered in this study.

Yazlah and many other parts of Bushehr's music such as sailors' songs are rhythm-based music. Rhythm-based music here means music in which the rhythm is felt more strongly than a melody. In this music, the emulation of the drumbeats is produced by the singing. This emulation appears in the form of words and is reproduced by collective chanting. The melody of the words consists of a few basic tones that are the same as the tones of the drum, and these tones usually form the main motif of the song. The melodic words, which imitate the rhythm and the drum sounds, serve as an alternative to the sounds of the drum. The phrasing of the music and the words is done according to the rhythmic pattern in short parts and is repeated in a cycle. In this music, which is sometimes played without drums, accents and all the features of the rhythm appear in the words and a musical expression. Each musical phrase consists of two parts in a singing period performed following an ostinato pattern. The collective singing part is fixed, and the soloist's part is performed in each period with a relatively constant melody and a different word. *Yazleh* is accompanied by a kind of dance in the form of harmonic and rhythmic jumps and the bending and straightening of the people involved in the ceremony. These movements have their roots in the rituals of the seafarers and the work of the native sailors on the ships. One of the most important features of *yazleh* is the special way in which the participants in this ritual clap their hands, which is called *shap* (شاپ - شاپ). This type of clapping is sometimes performed in a polyrhythmic manner called *shap-e riz* (شاپ ریز - شاپ ریز). *Yazleh* has different songs with different rhythms and tempos, and each song is known with the part that is repeated by singing together. The bold role of rhythm and the elementary and repetitive motifs that lead to a kind of trance are reasons for the religious and mystical origin of this kind of Bushehr music.

In *Heliosa yazleh*, as in other *yazlehs*, there is the main phrase that is divided between the main singer and the group. The other phrases are the same, except that the singer's part changes in terms of words. The fixed part repeated by the group is *Helalyous heliosa*. The part of the singer is *Helleh heliosa*, which is replaced by other words during the performance of the *yazleh*.

The alternative term has various social themes or subjects related to maritime life. For example, the other singer's parts are like these: *bis-e jahazen sad baghal* and *ghooloo siya baloy dekal*; the translation is: the base line of the ship is a hundred fathoms, *Ghooloo-siyah* (*Ghooloo* is a name and *siyah* means black) is on the mast.

The main phrase, *Helleh heliosa /Helalyous heliosa*, has no special meaning for the people of Bushehr, and some people think that these words are just sounds without any particular meaning. But after what has been suggested so far about the Greek god Helios and the cultural influence of this belief in Iran in Hellenic times, perhaps the meaning of one of the words of this song (*heliosa*) has now become clear.

It should also be considered that the idea of praising Helios at Bushehr may have been reinforced at Bushehr because of the maritime connections through Egypt. Various sources indicate that Helios was known to both the Egyptians and the Jews. This influence is not independent of the influence of Greek thought in the Hellenistic period. This is clear from the Syriac or Greek source (Leicht, 1999), the papyrus, and the spells and prayers of Jacob (Horst & Newman, 2008: 217). In these hymns and spells, Helios is praised (Betz, 1986). These prayers represent a combination of religious elements from Egypt, Babylon, and Greece (Horst & Newman, 2008: 222). One of the possibilities explored in this study is the transfer of the mentioned manner of worship to the Bushehr culture and the presence of its remnants in some rituals related to the sea.

HELLEH, THE OTHER QUESTIONABLE WORD IN YAZLEH HELIOSA

Another word that appears in this *yazleh* besides *heliosa* is *helleh* (he:lle). *Heleh* (with one L, he:lɛ) in Persian literature means to be attentive and alert. In Bushehr, *heleh* is used either in the local dialect or in the work songs and sea shanties with the same meaning and sometimes in the sense of encouragement, but it seems that the pronunciation and semantic use of this word change in different situations. This word is sometimes pronounced with two Ls, for example, *helleh* in *heliosa yazleh*,

and sometimes like sea shanties, *neymeh*¹⁰ (ne:imɛ) in the local dialect, pronounced *heleh* (he:lɛ) or *haile* (he:ilɛ).

Many of the sea shanties in Bushehr and the Persian Gulf have religious and supplicatory themes, and in many of them, *heleh* is used before the holy names such as Allah (God in Islam) and Ali (the first Imam of the Shiites). The tone of the expression *heleh* in these cases is like *haile* (he:ilɛ) and is reminiscent of the Hail Mary in Christianity, which was used in a similar way for Helios¹¹. There are many words in sailor songs that have no clear meaning, including the word Yamal (jæ:mæ:l- يا مالم). Mohamed Al-Morbati believes that Yamal is composed of the two words Yam and El, and Yam means sea and El means god in the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia; on the other hand, Yam himself is the Semitic god of the seas and the son of the king of the gods El (2013 In Arabic). Therefore, the term Yamal refers to the god of the sea. In sailor songs, *heleh* is also used before Yamal. According to the papyrus versions in which the praise of Helios is listed in Egypt and Hebrew (Horst & Newman, 2008: VIII), it can therefore be assumed that *heleh* is used before words like Allah, Yamal, and Heliosa is derived from the Hebrew Hallel, which served to glorify these holy names. Hallel (hæli'l) is a Jewish liturgical term read in synagogues on festive occasions and means praise in Hebrew. Another term in which this word is used to praise God can be related to Hallelujah (Gaur et al., 2007). The result is that according to the evidence presented, *Heleh* is usually used before sacred names, and its use before Heliosa is also a reason to show that Heliosa comes from a sacred name and can be assumed to be the same Greek Helios.

Some examples of *heleh* in Bushehr Sea shanties (*neymeh*):

Instance No. 1

Solo chant: *Heleh ya Ali jan*
he:lɛ jæ: æli: dʒɔ:n

Crew's chant: *Heleh mal*
he:lɛ mæ:l

Instance No. 2

Solo chant: *Haile o ya Allah*
he:ilɛ o jæ:llah

Crew's chant: *Yamal*
jæ:mæ:l

Instance No. 3

Solo chant: *Haileh, haileh heleh*
he:ilɛ he:ilɛ he:lɛ

Crew's chant: *Heleh mal*
he:lɛ mæ:l

Instance No. 4

Solo chant: *Heleh yallah*
he:ilɛ jæ:llah

Crew's chant: *Hey yallah*
he:j jæ:llah

ASSIMILATIONS OF HELLE, THE MYTHICAL CHARACTER OF GREECE IN THE ORAL LITERATURE OF BUSHEHR

In the oral literature of Bushehr, there is a folktale called *Korreh-e owr o baad* (korre je or o bød – كَرِهْهُ اَوْرِ اَبَاد), which seems to contain many elements of the Greek myth of Helle. In Greek mythology, Phrixos and Helle are the descendants of Nephele, the cloud nymph, and Athamas, the king of Boeotia. Later, Athamas married Ino, the daughter of Cadmus, with whom he also had two children. Helle and her brother were hated by their stepmother, so Ino devised a plan to get rid of them. She ordered the women to roast the seeds before planting them so that they would not germinate. Athamas sent men to Delphi to ask the oracle why, but Ino bribed the men, who said that the oracle wanted Phrixus to be sacrificed to end the famine. However, shortly before the sacrifice, Nephele sent a golden ram that could fly to save Phrixos and Helle. On the journey, Helle looked down behind the ram, lost her balance, and fell into a sea that was named the Hellespont (Sea of Helle) after her (Robin, 2003: 377). The Hellespont is the ancient name for the Dardanelles (Chisholm, 1910–1922: 246). In the Bushehri story, *Korreh-e owr o baad* is an animal that looks like a horse, but it flies and can talk. This mysterious animal belongs to Hassan, the son of the King of the Orient, and Hassan loves it very much. In this story, Hassan's stepmother plots revenge to kill the king of Hassan's flying horse. She feigns illness and bribes the doctor to tell the king that the only way to cure his wife is to eat soup

¹⁰ *Neymeh* is a term used for the concept of sea shanties or work songs. Among the Arabs of the Persian Gulf, it is also called *nehmeh*.

¹¹ Hail Mary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7JFSjEVDIs>, last visited 11th August, 2022

mad with *Korreh-e owr o baad*. *Korreh-e owr o baad* informs Hassan of this plan, in which it has been decided to kill *Korreh-e owr o baad* on the day Hassan goes to school. Hassan arrives on time and asks his father to let him ride it one last time, and the king agrees. After riding the beast, Hassan flies to the West and eventually marries the daughter of the Western king in a long story (Akbar Bushehri, 1990).

Korreh-e owr o baad means the child of the cloud and the wind (Korreh: child, Owr: Cloud, and Baad: wind). *Korreh-e owr o baad* is the child of the cloud and the wind, and on the other hand, Helle is the child of the goddess of the cloud, Nephele, and Athamas; Athamas was the son of Aeolus, the god of the wind (Greek Mythology, 2015). In other words, Helle, like *Korreh-e owr o baad*, is the child of cloud and wind. Another similarity, besides the shape of the story, is the flying animal in these stories, which in the story of Bushehr is the child of the cloud and wind and in Greek mythology is the animal sent to save the child of the cloud and wind.

The last point is the place where Helle falls, which then became known as the Sea of Helle. It is interesting to know that there is a river near Bushehr called Helleh (he:lle), which flows into the Persian Gulf, and this place is called Helleh shore or Helleh sea (Figure 4). All this evidence suggests that the Greek myth of Helle was localised in Bushehr.



Figure 4: Helleh or Heleh point near Bushehr on Google map. (Printed with permission).

DISCUSSION

The assimilation and penetration of Greek mythological ideas in Bushehr folk music can be studied from the point of view of social needs and similar cultural contexts. The culture of Mithraism and sun worship, which has long existed in Iran, India, and Egypt, was combined with Helios in Hellenic times and eventually influenced the cultural beliefs of Bushehr. Centuries before the Hellenes, in the time of the Elamites, Bushehr was called Liyan, meaning shining (Roebuck, 1818: 832), and the inhabitants of Bushehr were known as the inhabitants of the city of the shining sun, and this peninsula was known as a place of sun worship because of the rising and setting of the sun on the sea. Nahhunte was the name given to the sun god in Elamite times (Sabzi, Hatami and Raigani, 2017. In Persian). Shahar or Sahar was the goddess of dawn (before sunrise) who was worshipped in Mesopotamia. Sahar means dawn in Persian. Today, in Bushehr a ceremony is known as *dom dom sahari* (dom dom saehæri: دُم دُم سحرى) is performed at sunrise in the month of Ramadan. This ceremony is an Islamic hymn accompanied by a drum instrument called *dammam* (dæmmø:m دَمَام) (S. Beladi, 2021: 152. In Persian). The similarity of the name of this ceremony to the goddess Sahar and its performance at dawn, while intended to wake Muslims for fasting, seems to have its roots in pre-Islamic rituals of sun worship.

After the Elamites, sun worship continued throughout the Achaemenid period and beyond. The Aryans also worshipped the sun under the name *Mehr* even before Zoroaster emerged, and the worship of Mehr as one of the Iranian gods continued until later times (Zakerin, 2011: 24. In Persian). Many of the rituals at Bushehr that are still practiced today have symbols of the ancient sun-worship rites. Among the most important are the circular movements in mourning ceremonies, *yazleh*, and some of the joy dances of Bushehr. The religious rites of the sun worshippers in ancient Iran were also performed in a circle. The sun worshippers believed that the sun was at the centre of the universe and was a symbol of the intellect, heart, and eyes of the universe (Beaucorps, 1994: 88). Thus, in circular mass movements, the centre of the circle was the manifestation of the deity and they saw themselves as the stars around it. According to reports on the religious rites and rituals of the ancient

Iranians, they formed a circle and, after drinking wine, put themselves in a trance while praising Mithra (Abu Mahboob, 2007. In Persian).

These symbols are not limited to the circular movement in the Bushehr dances or religious rituals. Other signs that have a special meaning in the culture of the sun worshippers are the movements of the hands during the ceremony, pointing upward and downward, meaning sunset and sunrise. These movements are recognized in the sama dance (Figure 4) with the same meanings (Abu Mahboob, 2007. In Persian). The movement of the hands described above is also performed in the rites of praise to Helios.¹² Such movements can also be observed in the mourning ceremonies in Bushehr and yazleh (Figure 3), and it seems that this is a remnant of the same ancient belief, even if today it is the performance of Islamic religious ceremonies, or they are only performed out of habit. It can be concluded that the status of the sun as one of the gods was defined and respected by the people of ancient Bushehr, and Helios was accepted and praised in the same position.

Helios was known in Egypt too. The maritime connection of the people of Bushehr with various regions, including Egypt, probably made the people of Bushehr more familiar with Helios, and his worship was incorporated into their religious beliefs, especially among the seafarers. The sea and seafaring and the dangers that have always surrounded sailors made it necessary for seafarers to rely on religious beliefs to achieve psychological security for themselves and their families. Seafarers still have certain religious beliefs and consider the ship a sacred place. Musical trance rituals to relieve mental anguish are still widespread among the natives and sailors of the Persian Gulf, such as Zar's séances. The sailors' work songs are full of prayers. Similarly, in ancient times, they sought refuge with the gods of the sea. Kiririsha was one of these gods who was worshipped in Bushehr in the second millennium BC as a divine mother and goddess of the sea (Edwards, Hammond & Sollberger, 1975: 390). This trend seems to have continued in the Hellenistic period, and Greek mythological beliefs helped them feel at peace and safe under the protection of the sea gods, which is why the temple of the sea god Poseidon on the island of Kharg near Bushehr is said to have been of particular interest to the sailors (Nourbakhsh, 1983: 405. In Persian). Helios is mentioned in ancient Egyptian documents as the ruler of the seas (Pachoumi, 2015: 402), and in another spell, the greatest Mithras is associated with Helios, who is called the holy king, the sailor who controls the tiller of the great god (Pachoumi, 2015: 393).



Figure 3: Left: pointing upward in yazleh performance. Figure 4: Right: pointing upward in sama dance by Aram Khalkhali.¹³

Another concern of the people in a region like Bushehr, which is considered a dry land with low rainfall, was low rains and the fear of famine. According to field research, this concern has always existed among the people of Bushehr, so much so that whenever there was a delay in the rain, people would ask for rain through a musical ritual called baar-baaruni (bar baru:ni – بار بارنی). Research has shown that the baar-baaruni ceremony itself contains symbols that point to the ancient roots of this ritual among the people of Bushehr (S. Beladi, 2021: 386. In Persian). This concern of the people is also mentioned in the Greek myth of the Helle. It is said that when the intrigue of the stepmother of the Helle resulted in the seeds not germinating, the king was asked to sacrifice his son to Zeus to get

¹² Liber Resh vel Helios (Sunrise), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJksCtnlMI0>, last visited 11th August, 2022.

¹³ Photos by Ramtin Balef open source from www.Leymer.info last visited 11th August, 2022.

rain (Ploetz, 1913: 46). The Helleh Sea near Bushehr and its namesake with the place where Helle fell into the sea from behind the golden ram is another sign of the attempt to localize Greek myths in the popular beliefs of the people of Bushehr during the Hellenistic period.

CONCLUSION

Bushehr music as a cultural phenomenon has emerged under different immigration and ethnic factors as well as different social beliefs. Some parts of this music that once played a functional role in people's lives or were practiced as a religious rite have lost their status with the change of religion or their practical position but persist in a new role as a tradition. An example of this is *yazleh heliosa*, which once seemed to be a religious ritual for sun worship but is now performed as part of Bushehr's entertainment and joy music, without many people knowing the meaning of its words or its main use in the past.

This article deals with a part of the neglected history of Bushehr and Iranian music during the Hellenic period that has not been covered before. The multicultural background of Bushehr's music, which was formed by the migration of different ethnic groups in the last centuries and which the author dealt with in his master's thesis (S. Beladi, 2020. In Persian), has been demonstrated in this article to be of longer duration and can be traced back to the Hellenistic period or earlier.

Many parts of Bushehr's music as intangible heritage encompass various cultures of different ethnic groups and religions from ancient times to the present. Qualitative and historical textual data research in this music help to become aware of the conditions that this music has faced and that have played a role in its development. It seems that although the evolution of Bushehr music in the Hellenistic period as acculturation was influenced by the political and military domination of Greece over Iran, the social reasons, attitudes, and way of life of the people of Bushehr at that time were not ineffective in the adoption of this culture and the penetration of the mythical beliefs of Greece into the worldview of the people of Bushehr. These new mythical beliefs seem to have met the spiritual needs of the people of Bushehr and did not contradict their earlier beliefs but rather overlapped with them.

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