

Preface

This volume presents a selection of papers from two workshops on oral traditions in Iranian languages. The first, “Journée d’études internationale « Orature et narration au monde iranophone » / Oral literature and Storytelling in the Iranophone world”, was held at INaLCO (Institut National des Langues et Cultures Orientales) in Paris in May 2017. The second took place in June 2018 at Uppsala University, Sweden, and was titled “Oral Narration in Iranian Cultures: A Conference in Honour of Professor Bo Utas on his 80th Birthday”.

The plans for this project date back to November 2016, when Maryam Nourzaei, Uppsala University, spent a month in Paris working toward finalising her PhD thesis. In discussions with Johnny Cheung, then member of the research unit Mondes iranien et indien, they discovered that they shared an interest in oral traditions in Iranian languages. They decided to organise workshops addressing this issue, with the aim of demonstrating the current state of research on oral traditions among different groups in the Iranian-speaking cultural sphere. Another objective was to encourage the exchange of ideas between researchers in different academic disciplines – such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, literature, religious studies and folklore studies – on methods and models applied to studies of oral traditions in Iranian languages and cultures.

Papers from these workshops are now gathered in this volume, which includes articles from a variety of perspectives and is organised in three parts. The first part comprises two articles introducing the subject. Bo Utas discusses the use of multiple languages and diverse registers and uses the example of his father’s native Estonian-Swedish village in Russia to develop parallels to the Iranian sphere. Ulrich Marzolph presents a survey of recent research on oral traditions in Iran and the challenges it currently faces.

The second part of the volume studies the interplay of written and oral patterns of text production and transmission connected to the *Shāhnāma* and its literary and narrative traditions. Carl Erixon examines some passages referring to the sun, moon and stars that, he argues, represent poetic formulae with close parallels in ancient Indo-European languages. Kumiko Yamamoto applies a model developed to study oral traits in written text to a version of the *Barzūnāma* found in an unpublished manuscript at the French national library (BnF), and Julia Rubanovich studies the perception and representation of written text in the *Iskandarnāma* and the *Dārābnāma*. Finally, Margaret Mills studies the relationship of oral narrative performances from different genres in Afghanistan to written Persian texts.

Oral traditions in lesser-studied Iranian languages are the topic of the third part. Sara Belelli undertakes a comparative study of several Southern Kurdish folk tales of the “Innocent Persecuted or Unfortunate Heroine” type. Sabir Badalkhan compares a section from the epic about the Baloch hero Mir Chakar to parallels in the *Shāhnāma* and the Sindhi epic tradition, where Rostam and Chanesar each undergo a very similar series of trials. The heroes from the Balochi epics are also reflected in popular sayings containing place names, as shown in the article by Moosa Mahmoudzahi.

From a more linguistic perspective, Carina Jahani and Jaroslava Obrtelová study to what extent clause-combining strategies in Balochi differ between oral and written narration. Maryam Nourzaei compares the extent to which oral traditions survive among the Baloch of Sistan, in the coastal area, and among the Koroshi in Fars. Erika Friedl's account of her research spanning several decades in a Luri community, and of how her long acquaintance with the local people influenced the way they tell their stories, concludes the book.

On a technical note, given the diverse approaches and academic traditions represented in this volume, we have chosen to leave matters such as the format of citations and bibliography, transcription of Persian, etc. up to the individual authors.

Acknowledgements

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We express our thanks to INaLCO (Institut National des Langues Orientales), Paris, for hosting the first workshop in the beautiful venue of the Salons d'Honneur (rue de Lille), and to the Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, for hosting the second workshop and funding the English proofreading of some of the articles. Our thanks also go to Christina van der Wal Anonby for her help in organising the second workshop and reviewing abstracts.

We are very grateful to the authors for contributing their papers published here, and for bearing with us throughout the editorial process, which turned out to take longer than expected. We also wish to thank the reviewers of the articles, and Christian Rammer for providing the maps.

Special thanks go to UMR 8041 Centre de recherche sur le monde iranien (successor to the research unit Mondes iranien et indien) for very generously financing the publication of this volume.

Finally, it is our honour to dedicate this book to Professor Emeritus Bo Utas on his 84th birthday and to wish him many more years of health and happiness.

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The editors