

Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World

Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries

Edited by

Julia Rubanovich



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

Acknowledgments	IX
List of Illustrations	X
Notes on Transliteration and Abbreviations	XII
Notes on Contributors	XIII

Introduction: New Perspectives on Orality in Iranian Studies	1
<i>Julia Rubanovich</i>	

PART 1

Approaching Orality

1 Memory and Textuality in the Orality-Literacy Continuum	19
<i>Karl Reichl</i>	
2 Orality and Esotericism	
<i>Reflections on Modes of Transmission in Late Antiquity</i>	43
<i>Shaul Shaked</i>	

PART 2

Sacred Traditions and Oral History

3 Irano-Talmudica III	
<i>Giant Mythological Creatures in Transition from the Avesta to the Babylonian Talmud</i>	65
<i>Reuven Kiperwasser and Dan D.Y. Shapira</i>	
4 The Islamic Ascension Narrative in the Context of Conversion in Medieval Iran	
<i>An Apocalypse at the Intersection of Orality and Textuality</i>	93
<i>Maria E. Subtelny</i>	
5 The Motif of the Cave and the Funerary Narratives of Nāṣir-i Khusrau	130
<i>Jo-Ann Gross</i>	

PART 3

Iranian Epic Tradition

- 6 'The Ground Well Trodden But the Shah Not Found . . .'
*Orality and Textuality in the 'Book of Kings' and the Zoroastrian
Mythoeptic Tradition* 169
Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina
- 7 'The Book of the Black Demon,' or *Shabrang-nāma*, and the Black
Demon in Oral Tradition 191
Gabrielle R. van den Berg
- 8 Why So Many Stories? Untangling the Versions of Iskandar's Birth and
Upbringing 202
Julia Rubanovich
- 9 Some Comments on the Probable Sources of Ibn Ḥusām's *Khāvarān-
nāma* and the Oral Transmission of Epic Materials 241
Raya Shani
- 10 Professional Storytelling (*naqqālī*) in Qājār Iran 271
Ulrich Marzolph

PART 4

*Oral and Literary Traditions as Channels of Cultural
Transformation*

- 11 The Literary Use of Proverbs and Myths in Nāṣir-i Khusrau's
Dīvān 289
Mohsen Zakeri
- 12 Classical Poetry as Cultural Capital in the Proverbs of Jews from Iran
Transformations of Intertextuality 307
Galit Hasan-Rokem
- 13 *Gashtak*: Oral/Literary Intertextuality, Performance and Identity in
Contemporary Tajikistan 316
Margaret Mills and Ravshan Rahmoni

- 14 **The Tale of ‘The Old Woman on the Mountain’**
A Jewish Folktale from Afghanistan 342
Tsila Zan-Bar Tsur

PART 5

Performative Aspects of Orality in Visual Artefacts

- 15 **Aramaic Incantation Texts between Orality and Textuality** 365
Charles G. Häberl
- 16 **Between Demons and Kings**
The Art of Babylonian Incantation Bowls 400
Naama Vilozy
- 17 **Between Written Texts, Oral Performances and Mural Paintings**
Illustrated Scrolls in Pre-Islamic Central Asia 422
Frantz Grenet
- Index** 447

Professional Storytelling (*naqqāli*) in Qājār Iran

Ulrich Marzolph

Whatever the Qājār period is considered to have been in terms of political events, from the perspective of the discipline of folk narrative research it was a golden age of storytelling (Omidshafar and Omidshafar 1999; Marzolph 2001b).¹ Stories of all kinds were told in Iran since times of old and certainly are still told today,² but for no other period of Iranian history do we command such a wealth of information on professional storytelling, the storytellers and their stories as for the Qājār period. The art of professional storytelling in Iran relies on a long tradition, probably arching back as far as Parthian times (Boyce 1957). Several of the great narrative collections of world literature owe their genesis or at least their mediation into world literature to pre-Islamic and early Islamic Iran – such as *Kalīla va Dimna* (de Blois 1990), the *Sindbād-nāma*, and the *Thousand and One Nights* (Marzolph 2007). Besides contributing to the international dissemination of numerous narratives of ‘Oriental’ origin (Marzolph 2010), these collections prove that the art of narrating was held in high esteem in Iran as in various other Oriental cultures. In the Islamic period, fables and other didactic tales were employed to illustrate points of a moral, didactic or mystical intent in numerous works of Persian literature, such as – to name but the most famous – those by ‘Aṭṭār, Niẓāmī, Rūmī, and Sa’dī.³ The Iranian national epic, Firdausī’s *Shāh-nāma*, is a pivotal narrative of Iranian identity drawing on a wide array of stories that focus on mythical rulers and heroes.⁴ And finally, in addition to the stories told in works of elite or popular literature, folktales and fairy tales are still told orally today (Marzolph 1984; 1994a; 1994b).

1 Of particular interest is Floor 2005, to which the present essay is heavily indebted.

2 See, e.g., Page 1977; eadem 1979; Hanaway 1996; Ja’fariyān 1999; Yamamoto 2003: 20–28.

3 See, e.g., de Bruijn 1997; Boyle 1978; San’atī-niyā 1369/1990; Marzolph 1999b; idem 2004; Furūzānfar 1370/1991.

4 For a new prose rendition, see Davis 2007; among numerous studies on the epic, see especially Yarshater 1983; Marzolph 2002; Yamamoto 2003.

While storytelling thus can rightfully be considered a traditional constituent of Iranian culture, it goes without saying that all kinds of storytelling have developed and changed under the influence of contemporary conditions. Whereas more specialized discussions of *naqqāli* have been published,⁵ my aim in the following is to sketch the major characteristics of this traditional Persian form of verbal art as described in the contemporary testimonies of European travellers to Iran.

The Persian art of *naqqāli* is posited somewhere in between the various strands of oral and (written) literary tradition, thus constituting the ideal subject for considerations on orality and textuality in the Iranian world (Page 1977; Floor 2005: 82–106; Yamamoto 2010). *Naqqāli*, a term that I take in the following as a general denomination for professional storytelling, is the verbal art of telling stories of a historical nature, whether relating to events that actually did happen or those that learned or popular tradition would imagine to have happened. As in the field of Oriental historiography in general, *naqqāli* rather than representing a faithful and ‘authentic’ depiction, relies on plausibility and likeliness to construct and present an appealing image of how things might have been. *Naqqāli* is an oral performance that is presented by a professional storyteller, the *naqqāl*, and that takes place in a public or semi-public context. The texts performed in *naqqāli* usually relate to heroic adventures of secular as well as religious heroes. While being performed orally, *naqqāli* to a certain extent relies on sources laid down in writing that include both manuscript and printed versions of the performed text. The specific genre of manuscript texts related to their work is the *ṭūmār*, a text that is best described as a booklet constituting a mnemonic aid for the storyteller’s performance (Maḥjūb 1381–82/2003b: 1099–1113; Yamamoto 2003: 29–52). Storytellers might retell a more or less fixed narrative, whether in prose or verse or, at times, in prose interspersed with verbatim quotations in poetry as taken from the original source (cf. Gaillard 1987: 99–100; Rubanovich 2006). The more the storytellers would deviate from their source text, the more they would employ techniques of oral composition. In particular, they would apply a large set of narrative formulas structuring the text as well as describing certain repetitive events, such as sunsets or scenes of combat.⁶

While the techniques of oral composition have not been studied for an actual oral performance, with the exception of Kumiko Yamamoto’s attempt (Yamamoto 2003), they are prominently visible in the published versions of

5 See, e.g., Page 1977; eadem 1979; Maḥjūb 1381–82/2003a; idem 1381–82/2003b: 1079–99.

6 See, e.g., Gaillard 1987: 85–97; Yamamoto 2003: 34–42; Rubanovich 2012: 666–71.

the more recent romances (*dāstāns*) that in their wording and structure are closely related to oral performance (Rubanovich 2012: 660–75). To mention but one example in some detail, the romance of Ḥusayn-i Kurd, whose published text (Afshār and Afshārī 1385/2006) has most probably been compiled shortly before the Qājār period, has been studied as a ‘treasury of formulaic narrative’ (Marzolph 1999a). The story of Ḥusayn-i Kurd is a romance of chivalry focusing on the actions of its eponymous hero, a valiant Kurdish shepherd and warrior who is portrayed as living (and loving) during the reign of Safavid emperor Shāh ‘Abbās. The romance, a relatively short prose text, is a rich source for formulas that can usually be attributed to one of two kinds. General formulas would structure the text by summing up the previous events – such as the fairly unspecific *al-qiṣṣa...* (‘in short...’) or by introducing a change of perspective and thus of protagonist, action, and scenery. The previous scene is closed before the narrative turns to a different scene with a formula such as *ammā chand kalīma az... bishnau* (‘now listen to some words about...’) or *inhā-rā dāshta bāsh, chand kalīma az... bishnau* (‘leave them [here] and listen to some words about...’). This type of interior formula has also been richly documented from the oral performance of Mashdi Galin Khānum, the only Persian storyteller whose repertoire has been documented with some degree of comprehensiveness (Marzolph 1994a: 25–26). Besides the general formulas structuring the text, the romance of Ḥusayn-i Kurd abounds in formulas that condense a complex action into a few words. Examples of this kind are the formulaic expressions *ātaṣh raushan namūdan* (lit., ‘to light a fire’) that serves as the stereotype expression of destruction, and *rīsh-u sabīl tarāshīdan* (lit., ‘to shave [the vanquished opponent’s] beard and mustache’), implying victory and subsequent dominance exerted by humiliation. In particular, the hero’s preparation for any of the numerous battles and scenes of single combat are described by a stereotype chain of actions including the donning of armor, the beating of the battle drum, the opponents mutually addressing each other as well as bragging about the prowess, and finally the actual armed clash (Marzolph 1999: 293–94).

Non-religious (‘secular’) epic *naqqālī* in today’s Iran is almost exclusively restricted to the performance of episodes from Firdausī’s *Shāh-nāma*. The present situation is, however, not representative of the historical range of works performed, since the propagation of *naqqālī* as exclusively constituting *shāh-nāma-kh’ānī* was only enforced by the Pahlavi regime sometime around 1930, as a further step towards emphasizing national (Iranian) identity in contrast to religious (Shi’ite) identity (Omidshar and Omidshar 1999: 332–33). Historically, *naqqālī* would encompass other epics amplifying Iranian history

beyond the events depicted in the *Shāh-nāma*, such as the *Garshāsp-nāma*, the *Farāmarz-nāma*, the *Barzū-nāma*, the *Rustam-nāma* and some other.⁷ In addition, it would deal with a wide array of epic romances such as various versions of the Alexander Romance, the *Iskandar-nāmas*,⁸ or that of his Islamicized equivalent Ḥamza (ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib), the *Rumūz-i Ḥamza*.⁹ The romance of *Amīr Arsalān*, probably one of the internationally best-known works of *naqqālī* today, was created by Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s (r. 1848–96) storyteller (*naqqāl-bāshī*) Naqīb al-Mamālik (d. 1891); its text was written down by the ruler’s daughter Fakhr al-Daula who listened to the storyteller’s oral (and presumably spontaneous) performance from behind a curtain (Maḥjūb 1345/1966; Gelpke 1965; see also Hanaway 1985). Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, notably, is known for his avid attachment to fantastic stories, above all the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the manuscript of this work’s Persian translation illustrated at his orders by the studio of the renowned artist Ṣanī‘ al-Mulk is – as art historians unanimously agree – the last outstanding specimen of the art of the book in Iran (Marzolph 2007: 231).

Contrasting with non-religious epic *naqqālī*, the genre of religious storytelling relates to early Islamic, and particular early Shi‘ite history, predominantly the legendary adventures of ‘Alī and the tragic experience (*muṣibat*) of Ḥusayn and his followers at Karbalā.¹⁰ This branch is closely connected to the dramatic performance known as *ta‘ziya*. It is often denoted as *rauḍa-kh‘ānī*, a term originally relating to the performance of Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī Vā‘iz-i Kāshifī’s ninth/fifteenth-century religious epic *Rauḍat al-shuhadā’* (‘The Garden of the Martyrs’). This work, the content of which is of pivotal importance for Shi‘ite identity, was succeeded by numerous works of a similar nature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most important of which are *Asrār al-shahādāt* (‘The Secrets of Martyrdom’) by Sarbāz Burūjirdī, *Ḥamla-yi ḥaydarīyya* (‘The Lion’s [viz ‘Alī’s] Attack’) by Mullā Bamun-‘Alī, and *Ṭūfān al-bukā’* (‘The Deluge of Tears’) by Jauharī (see Marzolph 2001a: 25–26; Būdhārī 2011).

7 For a concise presentation of stories, once included in the traditional *naqqālī* repertoire, see Yamamoto 2003: 25–28, esp. Tables 2 and 3. For the ‘secondary’ epics, see now Van Zutphen 2014. [On the *Barzū-nāma*, see Gabrielle R. van den Berg’s article in this volume.]

8 Afshār 1343/1964; Dhakāvātī Qarāguzlū 1383/2004; see also Hanaway 1970; Southgate 1978; Yamanaka 2002; Gaillard 2005: 9–87.

9 See, e.g., Marzolph 1990; Hanaway 2003; Sabri 2014.

10 Elwell-Sutton 1979; Floor 2005: 124–212; see also Newid 2006: 94–128; Chelkowski 2010. [For a specimen of early religious epics, see Raya Shani’s article in this volume.]

Professional storytellers would often accompany their performance by *parda-dāri*.¹¹ In presenting large scale images (*parda*) related to the captivating stories they told, they would add a visual experience (Flaskerud 2010), a phenomenon that is roughly comparable to the performance of the European ballad-monger or Bänkelsänger. A particular Iranian art-form arising from this practice is the so-called *naqqāshī-yi qahva-khāna* ('coffee-house painting'), denoting large paintings on canvas that are somewhat reminiscent of Western naive art (Sayf 1369/1990). Historically, these paintings would most often depict a conglomerate of the tragedy of Karbalā'. The depiction of scenes from the *Shāh-nāma* appears to be a fairly recent phenomenon. Storytellers performing in the streets or other open spaces, such as the bazaar (*ma'raka-gīri*), might also present additional attractions such as a tame monkey or a serpent kept in a box.

Until well after the middle of the twentieth century, *naqqāli* continued to be a living, though fading, tradition, and even just before the revolution of 1978/79 I was able to tape part of a storyteller's performance who entertained his audience in the open space of the newly constructed bazaar at Kirmān. The story he told dealt with the tragic death of Abū al-Faḍl, Ḥusayn's standard bearer at Karbalā', who was brutally mutilated by the enemies when attempting to fetch water for his thirsty men. One of the last conscious eye-witness accounts of the once vibrant profession is given by Danish scholar Arthur Christensen. In 1924, Christensen wrote about the storyteller as an almost extinct species who twenty or thirty years earlier, i.e., at the turn of the twentieth century, could still be seen arranging himself at the side of a street,

where he would attach to the wall colourful hideous images of men, devils and giants, and princesses held captive in the tower of a castle. A crowd of passers-by would stop and sit down encircling him listening to the most fantastic adventures. When the storyteller started, he would present his tales rapidly and with vivid expression, pointing with his staff to those images that illustrated the situation he was just narrating. And when he reached the most captivating point of his tale, he would pause and circulate a plate to collect some coins (Christensen 1958: 283–85).¹²

11 See Floor 2005: 85, 119, 125, 146; for modern performers of religious stories, see Ardalān 1386/2007.

12 Unless otherwise stated, the translation is mine.

Already the oldest Persian romance of chivalry preserved, the sixth/twelfth-century *Samak-i Ayyār*, documents the fact that storytellers would interrupt their performance to ask for blessings or material compensation for their effort (Khānlarī 1364/1985: 66–67; Gaillard 1987: 165–66; Omidsalar and Omidsalar 1999: 336–37; Rubanovich 2012: 670–71; Zenhari 2014: 43–44.).

There is an admirable collection of quotes relating to *naqqālī* in Iran from the publications of Western travellers or residents in Iran as compiled in Juliet Radhayrapetian's survey of Iranian folk narrative (Radhayrapetian 1990) and Willem Floor's book on the history of theater in Iran (Floor 2005). For the Qājār period, these quotes range chronologically from John Malcolm (1769–1833), who last visited Iran in 1810, to Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962), who described her experience of a storyteller in Iṣfahān in 1925. Malcolm's account in his *History of Persia* deserves to be quoted extensively, as it mentions some of the important characteristics of the traditional *naqqāl*:

... The Persians, though passionately fond of public exhibition, have none that merit the name of theatrical entertainments: but, though strangers to the regular drama, the frames of their stories are often dramatic; and those whose occupation is to tell them, sometimes display so extraordinary a skill, and such varied powers, that we can hardly believe, while we look upon their altered countenances, and listen to their changed tones, that it is the same person, who at one moment relates, in his natural voice, a plain narrative, then speaks in the hoarse and angry tone of offended authority, and next subdues the passions he had excited by the softest sounds of feminine tenderness. But the art of relating stories is, in Persia, attended both with profit and reputation. Great numbers attempt it, but few succeed. It requires considerable talent, and great study. None can arrive at eminence in this line except men of cultivated taste and retentive memory. They must not only be acquainted with the best ancient and modern stories, but be able to vary them by the relation of new incidents, which they have heard or invented. They must also recollect the finest passages of the most popular poets, that they may aid the impression of their narrative by appropriate quotation ... (Malcolm 1820: II, 552–54 *apud* Floor 2005: 92–93).

This quote bespeaks the typical mixture of fascination and cultural arrogance indicative of the contemporary attitude towards Iran (and Orientals in general) that had been in vogue ever since French scholar of Oriental studies Antoine Galland (1646–1715) had introduced 'Oriental' storytelling to the Western

public with his adapted translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* in 1704. Nevertheless, Malcolm gives due credit to the storyteller's professional capacity that is constituted by a combination of natural talent and acquired skill. Even more explicitly, in his *Sketches of Persia*, he states that 'there is no country in the world where more value is placed upon such talents [implying the recitation of poetry and the telling of tales]; he who possesses them in an eminent degree is as certain of fortune and fame as the first doctors in Europe' (Malcolm 1827: 1, 176).

The ambivalent foreign approach to indigenous storytellers is also evident in an essay published by British consul Douglas Craven Phillot (1860–1930) at the beginning of the twentieth century (Phillot 1906). While Phillot conceived both the stories and their tellers as alien, his appreciation ranged between the (implicit) admiration for a living oral tradition, the knowledge of which would help to understand (and in extension: to govern) the people concerned, and an (outspoken) discontent for moral standards and modes of behaviour (or, in this case, performance) that he conceived as incongruous with his own and, hence, as inferior. Discussing the storyteller's actual performance, Phillot admired the stories as being 'highly dramatic' and 'often adorned by fine quotations from [the] most esteemed writers,' but warned his readers that they 'generally contain many passages that are, according to European ideas, indecent or immoral' (Phillot 1906: 375). And while Phillot admitted 'great fluency and rapidity' to the storytellers' performance, he immediately went on to criticize them for not being able to 'dictate slowly: if interrupted they miss the point and become incoherent: Hence the same story has to be repeated many times before the recorder can accurately fill in all the numerous blanks that occur after a first narration' (*ibid.*).

Most of the professional storytellers in the Qājār period were dervishes; in particular they belonged to the Khāksar dervishes and their affiliated off-shoot of 'Ajam dervishes. As Eugène Aubin (1875–1919) observed in 1907:

The 'Ajam dervish Hoseyn is the *nakkal* [...]; he is currently touring the neighboring villages that he amuses with his engaging stories, before edifying them with a short sermon about the martyred Imams. [...] His apprentice dervish Darab [...] was studying with his *morshed* [i.e., his master] Qashqul Ali Shah of Golpaygan and timidly tried his hand at the art. His master has not yet taught him how to detail the episodes, contained in a certain famous book; his memory classes the tales by category: virtue recompensed, vice punished, vengeance, marriage, death (Aubin 1908: 307–308 *apud* Floor 2005: 94).

Charles James Wills (1842–1912) remarked in his *Sketches of Modern Persian Life* in 1886, that some of these dervishes have ‘real genius, marvellous memories, and the art of the ventriloquist and mimic at command’ (Wills 1886: 95). Sir Arnold Wilson (1894–1940), who published his *Letters and Diary of a Young Political Officer 1907–1914*, was almost moved to tears by the two-hour performance that a blind storyteller gave of the story of Rustam and Suhrāb: ‘Speaking nearly in the dark as we sat around the small charcoal fire he relied entirely on modulations of his voice to give dramatic effect to the successive speeches of the boy Sohrab and his father Rustam’ (Wilson 1942: 63 *apud* Radhayrapetian 2005: 149). Around 1909, Benjamin Moore witnessed a dervish in Isfahan, ‘telling tales beside a tea-house below. His audience is smoking, seated on their heels on platforms with low railings, placed in rows along the walls and beside the conduit running round the square. . . . He recites with a dramatic and highly inflected voice, and a profusion of gesture not unworthy of an actor’ (Moore 1915: 287 *apud* Floor 2005: 95). And James Silk Buckingham (1786–1855) described his encounter with a ‘professed story-teller’ on the Maydān-i Naqsh-i Jahān in Iṣfahān in 1828, around whom a ‘party of nearly three hundred people had collected’ (Buckingham 1829: 203 *apud* Floor 2005: 96). He was, says Buckingham:

disclaiming with all the dignity and warmth of the most eloquent and finished orator. We halted here without a murmur from any of our party, as they seemed to enjoy this species of exhibition as much as Englishmen would do the pleasures of the drama. It might itself, indeed, be called a dramatic representation; for although but one person appeared on the stage, there were as great a variety of characters personated by this one, as appears in any of our best plays. [. . .] He breathed forth the haughty fury of the conquering warrior; trembled in the supplicating tone of the captive; allured by the female voice of love and desire; and dictated in the firmer strain of remonstrance and reproach (*ibid.*: 96–97).

Still in 1925, Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962) described a dervish in Iṣfahān who

was sitting on the ground telling a story to the crowd; they sat around him in a circle with lips parted and eyes popping nearly out of their heads as the holy man worked himself into a state of frenzy over the exploits of his hero. [. . .] He seemed indeed wild and inspired, as though he had been spinning his tale for the last five hundred years and was only now working up to the climax (Sackville-West 1926: 110, 155 *apud* Floor 2005: 98).

Without presuming an unbroken permanence of tradition or adhering to a nostalgic lament of times gone by, the above quotes suggest that professional storytelling in Qājār Iran was more or less what it had been at least since early in the Safavid period. Storytellers still appear to have followed the rules of their profession as laid down in the eleventh/seventeenth century by authors such as ‘Abd al-Nabī Fakhr al-Zamānī in his *Ṭarāz al-akhbār* (‘The Proper Manners of Recitation’), a manual focusing on the performance of the *Rumūz-i Ḥamza* (Mahjūb 1381–82/2003b: 1084–93; Shafī‘ī Kadkanī 1381/2002). Even earlier, Vā‘iz-i Kāshifī in his ninth/fifteenth-century *Futuvvat-nāma-yi sulṭānī* (‘The Royal Book of Chivalry’) had outlined the following eight rules for storytelling:

... First, if he is a beginner, the storyteller must have studied the tale that he wants to tell with a master; and if he is experienced, he must have practiced it beforehand, so that he may not get stuck in telling it. Second, he must begin with eloquence, speak in an exciting manner, and not be plain or boring in his discourse. Third, one must know what kind of narration is fitting for what kind of assembly, and how much to simplify, and so on. The storyteller should narrate more of what his audience likes. Fourth, one should occasionally embellish one’s prose by verse. However, one should be careful not to bore people with it [...]. Fifth, one should not utter impossible statements, nor should one hyperbolize lest he should appear silly to the audience. Sixth, one should not make sarcastic or critical remarks lest he become an object of dislike. Seventh, one should not demand payment forcefully, nor should one pester the audience for it. Eighth, one must neither stop too soon, nor go on too late; but must always keep to the path of moderation (*apud* Omidsalar and Omidsalar 1999: 335).

However widespread and popular the profession of *naqqāl* might have been in Qājār Iran, one should probably not succumb to the ‘romantic fancy’ that epic tales were narrated in every coffeehouse by professional storytellers. In fact, even though early in the twentieth century Eugène Aubin still estimated some 5,000 to 10,000 dervishes engaged in various forms of oral tradition, including *naqqālī* (*apud* Floor 2005: 94), American scholar Mary Ellen Page in her fieldwork conducted in Iran in 1974–75 managed to locate only four professional storytellers in Shīrāz (Page 1979: 196). She was able to profit from the detailed information supplied by two of them, both of whom were born towards the end of the Qājār period. The first, ‘Alī Thanākhān, was a man in his mid-sixties, who had worked as a storyteller for about thirty years; and the second,

Ḥabīb-Allāh Īzadkhāstī, was in his mid-fifties and had been a storyteller for about twenty years. The data Page gained from these two informants were later corroborated and amplified by Japanese researcher Kumiko Yamamoto, who in the late 1980s studied with *murshid* Valī-Allāh Turābī, one of the last professional storytellers, who was still practicing in 2008 and who meanwhile has actually gained international renown (Yamamoto 2003, esp. pp. 23–28).

The work published by these scholars and others (see Oliaei 2010) leaves no doubt that *naqqālī* was a serious profession. It could be practised by men of every trade, but its full capacity was only acquired through a lasting apprenticeship requiring detailed instruction by an experienced storyteller. The technical aspects of the profession and its performance not only entailed learning from oral tradition but also implied the use of written material that, once memorized, supplied a mental frame to the tale embellished by the storyteller in oral performance. This written material had usually been laid down in manuscript *tūmārs*. It is probably to be regarded as the major innovation of *naqqālī* during the Qājār period that printed books were introduced to the profession. This new development affected tradition in various ways. On the one hand, it worked towards the permanence of oral performance in print, as it can be discerned in the lithographed copies of the *Iskandar-nāma* and the *Rumūz-i Ḥamza* that made the originally oral performance available to a large audience of readers. On the other hand, it furthered a growing dependence of the *naqqāl* on the printed text, above all the readily available numerous Indian and Iranian printings of Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*.

What remains of the Qājār profession of *naqqālī* in our present days is but a faint memory of the once flourishing verbal art. The modern media, changing ways of life, and various political agendas have contributed each in their own right to the almost complete disappearance of active *naqqālī*. In recent years, conscious efforts have been undertaken in Iran to revive the traditional coffee-house as a place for social gatherings, now – in contrast to previous custom when the audiences were purely male – for the whole family, women and children included (Bulūkbāshī 1375/1996). The advertising brochure for the traditional 'tea-house' Azeri, reconstructed and reopened for business in November 1993, mentions the 'tea-house' as an Iranian 'socio-cultural institution' that 'has an outstanding role in preserving the ancient ethnic, national and religious culture of the Iranians'. As part of the folkloristic agenda including an interior decoration of dervish utensils and coffee-house paintings, this tea-house, whose reconstruction was officially supported by the Anthropology Division of the Cultural Research Bureau (*daftar-i pazhūhishhā-yi mardum-shināsī*), used to offer short nocturnal performances of professional storytellers. Given the traditional perspective of present-day cultural politics in Iran, it appears

to be a matter of time until the first state-subsidized courses in *naqqālī* will be offered to the younger generation.

As a final point, I will mention a new dimension of *naqqālī* in contemporary Iran. While the art of *naqqālī* used to be an exclusively male domain, since several years now Iran has known the first female performer (see, e.g., Vāṣifī and Mu‘tamidī 2007). Fāṭima Ḥusaynī-zād, an Iranian student of museology born in 1976, has studied the art of *naqqālī* with famous masters all over Iran, particularly with *murshid* Valī-Allāh Turābī, for many years. She has taken her stage name of Gurd-āfarīd from a character of Firdausī’s *Shāh-nāma*: the female warrior Gurd-āfarīd who, disguised as a man, challenged Suhrāb when he was attacking the White Fortress (*dizh-i sipīd*). Though facing a number of difficulties in practising her profession, this modern Gurd-āfarīd is well known in today’s Iran and beyond. She has performed on numerous occasions and meanwhile has also acquired international acclaim. Gurd-āfarīd is motivated by a strong urge to preserve *naqqālī* as a traditional form of verbal art, an urge that has also led her to educate young Iranians – both male and female – to appreciate the art of *naqqālī* as part of their national heritage.¹³ Her career is just one of the fascinating recent developments in the practical appreciation of *naqqālī* in present-day Iran and under circumstances that, to say the least, have not been favorable to preserving this part of the national heritage. To what extent the younger generation will approve of the traditional art of *naqqālī* and thus contribute to its lasting existence is a question only time can answer.

Bibliography

- Āfarīda, Hādī. 1387/2008. *Naql-i Gurd-āfarīd* [promotional video, 35 minutes].
- Afshār, Īraj, ed. 1343/1964. *Iskandar-nāma. Rivāyat-i Kālistinis-i durūghīn*. Majmū‘a-yi mutūn-i fārsī 17. Tehran: Bungāh-i tarjuma va nashr-i kitāb.
- , and Mihrān Afshārī, eds. 1385/2006. *Qiṣṣa-yi Ḥusayn-i Kurd-i Shabistarī*. Tehran: Nashr-i chashma.
- Ardalān, Ḥamid-Riḍā. 1386/2007. *Murshidān-i parda-kh‘ān-i Īrān*. Tehran: Farhangīstān-i hunar. 30 vols.
- Aubin, Eugène. 1908. *La Perse d’aujourd’hui*. Paris.
- Boyce, Mary. 1957. ‘The Parthian *gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition.’ *JRAS*, pp. 10–45.

13 See the promotional video directed by Hādī Āfarīda (Āfarīda 1387/2008).

- Boyle, John Andrew. 1978. 'Popular Literature and Folklore in 'Attār's Mathnavīs.' In *Colloquio italo-iraniano sul poeta mistico Fariduddin 'Attār*. Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, pp. 57–70.
- Buckingham, James Sil. 1829. *Travels in Assyria, Media and Persia*. London.
- Būdharī, 'Alī. 2011. *Chihil Ṭūfān. Barrasī-yi taṣāvir-i chāp-i sangī-yi Ṭūfān al-bukā' fī maqātil al-shuhadā'*. Tehran: Kitābkhāna, Mūza va Markaz-i asnād-i Majlis-i shūrā-yi islāmī.
- Bulūkbāshī, 'Alī. 1375/1996. *Qahva-khānahā-yi Īrān*. Tehran: Daftar-i pazhūhishhā-yi farhangī.
- Chelkowski, Peter. 2010. 'Kāshefi's *Rowzat al-shohadā'*: The Karbalā Narrative as Underpinning of Popular Religious Culture and Literature.' In *A History of Persian Literature*. Gen. ed. Ehsan Yarshater. Vol. XVIII: *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages. Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik*. Companion Volume II to *A History of Persian Literature*. Ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Ulrich Marzolph. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 258–77.
- Christensen, Arthur. 1958. *Persische Märchen*. Düsseldorf and Köln: Diederichs.
- Davis, Dick, trans. 2007. Ferdowsi, Abolqasem. *Shahnameh. The Persian Book of Kings*. Foreword by Azar Nafisi. New York: Penguin.
- De Blois, François. 1990. *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalilah wa Dimnah*. Prize Publication Fund 23. London: The Royal Asiatic Society.
- De Bruijn, J.T.P. 1990. 'Die persische Volksliteratur im Mittelalter und ihr Verhältnis zur klassischen Literatur.' In *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*. Vol. 5: *Orientalisches Mittelalter*. Ed. Wolfhart von Heinrichs. Wiesbaden: Aula-Verlag, pp. 465–74.
- . 1997. *Persian Sufi Poetry. An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.
- Dhakāvātī Qarāguzlū, 'Alī-Riḏā, ed. 1383/2004. *Iskandar va 'ayyārān. Talkhīš az Kulliyāt-i haft-jildī-yi Iskandar-nāma-yi naqqālī-yi Manūchīhr-Khān Ḥakīm*. Tehran: Nay.
- Elwell-Sutton, Laurence Paul. 1979. 'The Literary Sources of *Ta'ziye*.' In *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*. Ed. Peter J. Chelkowski. New York: New York UP, pp. 167–81.
- Flaskerud, Ingvild. 2010. *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism*. London: Continuum.
- Floor, Willem. 2005. *The History of Theater in Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage Publishers.
- Furūzānfar, Badī'uzzamān. 1370/1991. *Ma'ākhez-i qīšaṣ va-tamthilāt-i Mathnavī*. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr.
- Gaillard, Marina. 1987. *Le Livre de Samak-e 'Ayyār. Structure et idéologie du roman persan médiéval*. Travaux de l'Institut d'études iraniennes de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle 12. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

- , trans. and annotated. 2005. *Alexandre le Grand en Iran. Le Dârâb Nâmeḥ d'Abu Tâher Tarsusi*. Persika 5. Paris: Éditions de Boccard.
- Gelpke, Rudolf, trans. 1965. Naqib al-Mamalek. *Liebe und Abenteuer des Amir Arsalan*. Zürich: Manesse.
- Hanaway, William L., Jr. 1970. *Persian Popular Romances before the Safavid Period*. Ph.D. dissertation. Columbia University.
- . 1985. 'Amir Arsalân.' *Elr* I, p. 958.
- . 1996. 'Dāstān-sarā'ī.' *Elr* VII, pp. 102–103.
- . 2003. 'Ḥamza-nāma. i. General.' *Elr* XI, p. 649.
- Ja'fariyān, Rasūl. 1999. *Qiṣṣa-kh'vānān dar tāriḫ-i Islām va Īrān*. Tehran: Dalil.
- Khānlarī, Parvīz Nātil. 1364/1985. *Shahr-i Samak. Tamaddun, farhang, ā'īna-yi 'ayyārī, lughāt, amthāl-u ḥikam*. Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi intishārāt-i āgāh.
- Mahjūb, Muḥammad Ja'far. 1345/1966. Naqib al-Mamālik, Muḥammad 'Alī. *Amir Arsalān*. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr.
- . 1381–82/2003a. 'Muṭāla'a dar dāstānhā-yi āmmiyyāna-yi fārsī.' In *Adabiyyāt-i āmmiyyāna-yi Īrān. Majmū'a-yi maqālāt dar-bāra-yi afsānahā va ādāb-u rusūm-i mardum-i Īrān*. Ed. Ḥasan Dhū al-Faqārī. Tehran: Nashr-i chashma, vol. 1, pp. 121–60.
- . 1381–82/2003b. 'Taḥavvul-i naqqālī va qiṣṣa-kh'vānī, tarbiyyat-i qiṣṣa-kh'vānān va ṭūmārḥā-yi naqqālī.' In *Adabiyyāt-i āmmiyyāna-yi Īrān. Majmū'a-yi maqālāt dar-bāra-yi afsānahā va ādāb-u rusūm-i mardum-i Īrān*. Ed. Ḥasan Dhū al-Faqārī. Tehran: Nashr-i chashma, vol. 11, pp. 1079–1113.
- Malcolm, John. 1820. *The History of Persia*. London. 2 vols.
- . 1827. *Sketches of Persia. From the journals of a traveller in the East*. London. 2 vols.
- Marzolph, Ulrich. 1984. *Typologie des persischen Volksmärchens*. Beirut Texte und Studien 31. Beirut: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft.
- . 1990. 'Hamza-Nāme.' *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*. Berlin: De Gruyter, vol. 6, cols. 430–436.
- . 1994a. *Die Erzählungen der Mashdi Galin Khānom*. Vol. 2: Begleitband. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- . 1994b. *Dāstānhā-ye širin. Fünfzig persische Volksbüchlein aus der zweiten Hälfte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*. Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 50,4. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- . 1999a. 'A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance *Hosein-e Kord*.' *Oral Tradition* 14/2, pp. 279–303.
- . 1999b. 'Nezāmi.' *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*. Berlin: De Gruyter, vol. 9, cols. 1434–1440.
- . 2001a. *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books*. Leiden: Brill.

- . 2001b. 'Persian Popular Literature in the Qajar Period.' *Asian Folklore Studies* 40, pp. 215–36.
- . 2002. 'The Persian National Epic in Between Tradition and Ideology.' In *The Kalevala and the World's Traditional Epics*. Ed. Lauri Honko. Studia Fennica, Folkloristica 12. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp. 276–93.
- . 2004. 'Rumi.' *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*. Berlin: De Gruyter, vol. 11, cols. 987–904.
- . 2007. 'The Persian *Nights*: Links between the *Arabian Nights* and Iranian Culture.' In *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective*. Ed. Ulrich Marzolph. Detroit: Wayne State UP, pp. 221–43.
- . 2010. 'The Migration of Didactic Narratives across Religious Boundaries.' In *Didaktisches Erzählen. Formen literarischer Belehrung in Orient und Okzident*. Ed. Regula Forster and Romy Günthart. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, pp. 173–88.
- Moore, Benjamin Burges. 1915. *From Moscow to the Persian Gulf*. New York.
- Newid, Mehr Ali. 2006. *Der schiitische Islam in Bildern: Rituale und Heilige*. München: Avicenna.
- Oliaei, Shadi. 2010. *L'art du conteur dans les cafés traditionnels en Iran*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Omidisalar, Mahmoud, and Teresa Omidisalar. 1999. 'Narrating Epics in Iran.' In *Traditional Storytelling Today. An International Sourcebook*. Ed. Margaret Read MacDonald. Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn, pp. 326–40.
- Page, Mary Ellen. 1977. *Naqqali and Ferdowsi: Creativity in the Iranian National Tradition*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Pennsylvania.
- . 1979. 'Professional Storytelling in Iran: Transmission and Practice.' *Iranian Studies* 12, pp. 195–215.
- Phillot, Douglas Craven. 1906. 'Some Current Persian Tales, Collected in the South of Persia from Professional Story-Tellers.' *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1/18, pp. 375–412.
- Radhayrapetian, Juliet. 1990. *Iranian Folk Narrative. A Survey of Scholarship*. New York and London: Garland.
- Rubanovich, Julia. 2006. 'Aspects of Medieval Intertextuality: verse insertions in Persian prose *dāstāns*.' *JSAI* 32, pp. 247–68.
- . 2012. 'Orality in Medieval Persian Literature.' In *Medieval Oral Literature*. Ed. Karl Reichl. De Gruyter Lexikon. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 653–79.
- Sabri, Robabh. 2014. *Der Volksroman Romuz-e Ḥamze als Musterbeispiel der persischer Erzählkunst*. Ph.D. dissertation Göttingen 2011 [<http://hdl.handle.net/11858/00-1735-0000-0023-98F5-B>]
- Sackville-West, Vita. 1926. *Passenger to Teheran*. London.

- San'atī-niyā, Fāṭima. 1369/1990. *Ma'ākhiz-i qīṣaṣ va tamthilāt-i mathnavihā-yi 'Atṭār-i Naysābūrī*. Tehran: Zavvār.
- Sayf, Hādī. 1369/1990. *Naqqāshī-yi qahva-khāna*. Tehran: Mūza-yi Riḍā 'Abbāsī.
- Shafī'ī Kadkanī, Muḥammad-Riḍā. 1381/2002. 'Nigāh-ī ba-Ṭarāz al-akhbār.' *Nāma-yi Bahāristān* 3/5, pp. 109–22.
- Southgate, Mino S., trans. 1978. *Iskandarnamah. A Persian Medieval Alexander Romance*. Persian Heritage Series 31. New York: Columbia UP.
- Van Zutphen, Marjolijn. 2014. *Farāmarz, the Sistāni Hero: Texts and Traditions of the Farāmarznāme and the Persian Epic Cycle*. Studies in Persian Cultural History 6. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Vāṣifī, 'Alī-Riḍā, and Nāzanīn Mu'tamidī. 2007. 'Gord-āfarīd, the First Woman Storyteller' at: http://www.jadidonline.com/images/stories/flash_multimedia/gordafaridtestEng/gordafarid_high.html (June 6, 2014).
- Wills, Charles James. 1886. *Persia as It Is: Being Sketches of Modern Persian Life and Character*. London.
- Wilson, Arnold. 1942. *Persia: Letters and Diary of a Young Political Officer. 1907–1914*. London: Readers Union.
- Yamamoto, Kumiko. 2003. *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*. Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures. Supplements to the Journal of Arabic Literature 26. Leiden: Brill.
- . 2010. 'Naqqāli: Professional Iranian Storytelling.' In *A History of Persian Literature*. Gen. ed. Ehsan Yarshater. Vol. xviii: *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages. Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik*. Companion Volume II to *A History of Persian Literature*. Ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Ulrich Marzolph. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 240–57.
- Yamanaka, Yuriko. 2002. 'The *Eskandarnāme* of Manūchehr Khān Ḥakīm: a 19th century Persian popular romance on Alexander.' In *Iran: Questions et connaissances. Actes du IV^e Congrès Européen des Etudes Iraniennes organisé par la Societas Iranologica Europaea (6–10 September, 1999)*. Vol. 11: *Périodes médiévale et moderne*. Ed. Maria Szuppe. Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, pp. 181–89.
- Yarshater, Ehsan. 1983. 'Iranian National History.' In *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Vol. 3 (1): *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*. Ed. Ehsan Yarshater. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp. 359–477.
- Zenhari, Roxana. 2014. *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār*. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des islamischen Orients 42. Dortmund: Verlag für Orientkunde.