

# **ORAL NARRATIVE IN AFGHANISTAN**

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The Individual in Tradition

Margaret A. Mills

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AFGHANISTAN



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Volume 2

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AFGHANISTAN

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MARGARET A. MILLS

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# **Oral Narrative in Afghanistan**

The Individual in Tradition

*Margaret A. Mills*

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## *Preface to the Garland Edition*

**G**arland Publishing undertakes a community service in publishing dissertations which, to some extent, would now count as period pieces. That is certainly the case for this work, at least from the viewpoint of theory and method. Nonetheless, data on Afghan oral traditions being sadly sparse, I hope it will be of some interest to readers, who are asked for their indulgence regarding the now out-of-date aspects of the study. We do not know what the oral performance world of post-war Afghanistan will be like. Surely priorities and rhetorics have been radically influenced by ten years of war, and the war's end is not, in late 1989, yet in sight. It may be apparent in the coming years that the world of oral fiction entertainments in Afghanistan has been as radically changed as has the world of narrative theory and ethnographic representation, in the last decade.

The woman who is the main focus of this study guarded her privacy carefully in the years that I knew her, though she was quite happy to help with my research and especially to share her verbal artistry with me. She preferred that her name not be used in this study, nor her picture published, and I have complied with that preference. I have begun a book project to publish and analyze her story repertoire in more complete form, together with a fuller presentation and analysis of her biography and personal experience narratives in connection with her fictional narrative and poetic activities. That study should see print in four or five years' time.

**—Margaret A. Mills**  
**University of Pennsylvania**  
**November 1989**





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*To my mother and father,  
for unfailing trust.*



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## الصوت نصف العلم

*"The voice is half the wisdom."*

*-apocryphal hadith*

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Many people have taught me, and to them I owe thanks, whatever misuse I have made of their ideas. To enumerate a few would slight the rest. I mention only three, whose gift of patient friendship has meant even more than their ideas and information: Aminollah Azhar, 'Madar Zaher', and first and last, Annemarie Schimmel.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Theoretical Background	Page 1
II.	Background to Performance	
	A. The Setting	20
	B. Collecting	31
	C. The People	33
III.	<u>Mār Čučeh</u> : Story Learning and Story Patterns	42
	A. <u>Mār Čučeh</u> <u>A</u> and <u>B</u> : Adī's Story	48
	B. <u>Mār Čučeh</u> <u>C</u> , <u>E</u> , and <u>F</u> : Mādar Zāher Revises	75
	C. <u>Mār Čučeh</u> <u>D</u> and <u>E</u> : Māhgol's Story	109
IV.	<u>The Tale of Mangy-Head</u>	140
V.	<u>Lion and Leopard</u> : Dispute to Fable	177
VI.	Conclusion	217
	APPENDIX: Folktales and Related Texts	231
	Text A	233
	Text B	255
	Text C	268
	Text D	283
	Text E	296
	Text F	310
	Text G	323
	Text H	347
	Text I	377
	Text J	412
	Text K	435
	Text L	445
	Text M	452
	Text N	458
	Text O	470
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	472



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## FIGURES AND DIAGRAMS

Figure I: Map of Afghanistan	Page 40
Figure II: Kinship Chart for Mādar Zāher and Adī	41
Figure III: Kinship Chart for Xairuddīn, Ġolām Nabī, and Mādar Zāher	194
Diagram I: Synopsis of Text <u>H</u>	145
II: Synopsis of Adī's <u>Afsāneh-e Garg</u> , Reconstructed	147
III: Synopsis of Text <u>I</u>	148
IV: Synopsis of Text <u>J</u>	150
V: Synopsis of Text <u>K</u>	151
VI: Synopsis of Texts <u>L</u> and <u>M</u>	188
VII: Dispute Synopsis	195





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## I. Theoretical Background

Since the turn of the century, folklorists' work on oral prose narrative has proceeded along two major lines, deriving respectively from historical philology and structural linguistics. The European scene was dominated, for the first half of the century, by the historical-geographical or Finnish school, which studied folktale texts as chains of detachable and to some extent interchangeable parts, designated 'motifs'.<sup>1</sup> The second line of inquiry, growing out of structural linguistics, attracted the interest of a variety of anthropologists and linguists. Structuralism is perhaps a misnomer for some of the branches which this line of inquiry has yielded,<sup>2</sup> but all the structuralist and formalist theories have in common their treatment of narrative texts as wholes, and their search for meanings in the interrelationships of elements within a text.<sup>3</sup>

Each of these analytic approaches, in its way, confronts the

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<sup>1</sup> The canonical reference works of the Finnish school are Aarne & Thompson, The Types of the Folktale (2nd recision, 1961), and Thompson's Motif Index of Folk-literature (Helsinki and Bloomington, IA, 1932-1936).

<sup>2</sup> Particularly in the last two decades, Russian formalist ideas have entered the thinking of many European 'structuralists', but the relationship of these two schools of thought exceeds the scope of the present discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Two case studies which illustrate the method of the most prolific of the structuralists, Claude Levi-Strauss, are "La Geste d'Asdiwal," Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences religieuses, Annual (1958-59), Paris, 1959, and "The Structural Study of Myth," Journal of American Folklore 68 (1955).

phenomenon of variants (story texts which are similar and whose geographical provenance suggests an historical relationship). The historical-geographical school has traditionally been concerned with mapping differences in a cycle of tales (e.g. the 'tale of the lost husband,' of which Text G, discussed below, is a variant), often with an eye to postulating an historical/geographical origin point for a given story, on the basis of the fact that differences between variants tend to be greater as time, distance and linguistic and cultural barriers intervene between them. Differences are generally mapped in terms of details of content, particularly in the choice of motifs (e.g. the tasks set for the hero(ine), which can range from the retrieval of various objects to the answering of certain questions, etc.), or, as in the Cinderella tale cycle, whether the main character is a male, a female, or twins, and whether the magical helper is a cow or other animal, or an anthropomorphic supernatural, etc.

Although the historical-geographic scholars are quite aware that in the narrative framework of causes and effects, tasks set for the hero or the like may take a number of different forms and still serve the same narrative purposes, and conversely, that the same incidents may serve different narrative purposes in different tales, their main interest in the problems of variation and transmission has been directed toward indexing these component parts, and has not addressed the relations between 'motifs' within a story. For this reason, the 'motif index' approach to folktale study is dismissed as atomistic by the structuralists.

Structuralism emphasizes the relationship of component parts to each other.<sup>1</sup> Simply put, the structuralist sees traditional narrative as

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that Levi-Strauss himself does not indulge in comparative techniques which are in fact atomistic, almost Fraserian, at

a limited set of conceptual categories, variously combined and opposed in a series of interactions which comprises a narrative. The basic interactional pattern proposed by Levi-Strauss is dialectical. The thought process of myth and other traditional narratives, as Levi-Strauss describes it, consists of postulating pairs of opposing categories, based on perceived natural phenomena (light-dark, wet-dry, male-female, up-down, etc.), which are variously combined in the personages and locales of stories, such that 'mediations' are effected between them: that is, combinations of categories or encounters or alliances between forces. Structural analysts see each narrative as a series of transactions, proceeding toward a final transaction which offers a possible resolution of conflicts between opposing ideas.

As might be imagined, category identification in structural analysis and the description of narratives as series of repeated transactions are generalizing processes which can lead to extreme reductionism.<sup>1</sup> It becomes unimportant whether a supernatural adversary is a cannibal spirit on the Northwest coast of America or a flying horse in Central Asia. The basis for the choice of particular objects to stand for conceptual categories is not of primary interest for structuralists: the objects are significant only as they reveal the categories. Thus the features chosen by historical-geographical folklorists to distinguish variants may be insigni-

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(footnote continued)

times. See E. Leach, Claude Levi-Strauss (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1970), for a succinct criticism of Levi-Strauss's general methodology.

<sup>1</sup> For an extremely reduced, but interesting analytical model, see Alan Dundes' The Morphology of American Indian Folktales, Folklore Fellows Communications #195, Helsinki, 1964. This work also attempts a rapprochement between structuralist and Russian formalist theory.

ficant from a structuralist point of view. Nonetheless, the choice of creatures, objects and personages to fill structural roles in folktale is to a high degree culturally determined. A difference in objects or creatures chosen may be as indicative of cultural differences as the design of a water pot, and may, like the design of the pot, imply major differences in social organization and technology. The structuralists' effort, and especially that of Levi-Strauss, has in recent years been directed toward describing universal, not culturally specific, aspects of narrative, and to that degree sacrifices particular cultural meanings in favor of these general configurations.

Thus the battle lines are drawn between the lumpers and the splitters, but because the methodologies and goals of the two schools really have no common ground, there has been virtually no fruitful dialogue between the camps. One thing the two do share, however, is a willingness to treat narrative texts as related if they share very general features of content and if their geographical provenance is somewhat contiguous. Once a relationship between texts is assumed on general linguistic or contentual grounds, the structuralists proceed to work out parallels in structure, and the historical-geographical people itemize differences in content. Neither school has been particularly at pains to find and work with narrative texts which have a known relationship to each other, in terms of actual steps of transmission through known individual narrators. Relations of transmission are simply assumed to exist between narratives which share some features and do not share others.

Although the assumptions made about the historical relations of narrative texts by both schools are not extravagant (and are rendered safer by

their vagueness), each addresses the phenomenon of variation in folktale without much attention to the actual mechanics of how variants arise in transmission. This lack of attention is perhaps more surprising in the case of the Finnish school, whose main activity has been to inventory and map variants, but it is no less limiting to the structuralists, who have everything to say about the 'grammar' and 'syntax' of narrative, but (to extend their own linguistic analogy) relatively little to say about diction or the lexicon without which no 'language' is of much use for communication.

The following chapters discuss stories in a series of variants whose relationship, in terms of transmission, is known. Mār Čūčeh and Afsāneh-e Garg were stories which one informant taught to another. I recorded performances by both the teacher and the learner, and in the case of Mār Čūčeh, I was able to record the 'teaching' performance, at which the learner first heard the story from her teacher. The differences in the stories are significant, both from the structuralist and from the historical-geographical points of view. From the historical-geographical viewpoint, the 'distance' between these stories is minimal: it is a single step in the perennial transmission process, and therefore provides a baseline for measuring the differences between variants whose 'distance' from each other, in terms of transmission, can only be hypothesized, such as those catalogued in Aarne and Thompson's Types of the Folktale. In a normally active oral tradition, storytellers and story learners hear near 'variants' of the same tale all the time. What do they make of their differences? Do they perceive stories to be related in the way that diffusionist folklorists do? Do they perceive analogies between 'motifs' or

episodes in different stories? What part do these analogues play in their remembrance of stories? Do storytellers assimilate, conflating similar episodes, or do they distinguish analogous episodes as separate entities, and if so, on what basis?

From the structuralist viewpoint, the omission of an episode, or the substitution of one set of events for another, such as occurs in Mār Čūceh and Afsāneh-e Garg, will alter the 'meaning' of the tale, if the conceptual categories presented by the tale are altered thereby. Is the variation observable in normal transmission significant at the structural level, or is it merely the substitution of conceptually equivalent objects, personages and events for each other? Is there evidence in the transmission events discussed below, that storytellers recognize or use 'structural' patterns to organize their storytelling? The structuralists assert that the 'grammar' they seek to describe is not just descriptive, but generative as well, that is, that it is used by people to formulate narratives. Is this assertion verifiable in the transmission process here documented? If structural analysis elucidates meaning (as it is supposed to do), then changes in structure, where they occur, signal changes in meaning. What does the structuralist concept of 'meaning' have to do with the changes that arise in transmission?

The main issue of the discussions which follow is whether the distinctions and constructions which the two main schools of folk narrative study make are useful in understanding the process of generation and transmission of traditional narrative, as exemplified in two instances of story learning, and in the instance of a story which a traditional narrator described as her own new composition (Šīr o Palang, Texts L and M). For

the most part, observations are confined to the contents and structure of the narratives themselves. Where other information was supplied spontaneously, as in audience remarks, etc., recourse is made to the evaluations and opinions of people familiar with the tradition, to help understand the transmission process. In recording these performances, the author intentionally pursued a policy of non-intrusion, and the limits of this field strategy will also be discussed in the concluding remarks.

#### b) Analytic Methodology

It is assumed that certain analogous episodes, or 'motifs' as they are designated by the historical-geographical school, will be intuitively obvious to the reader of the texts here discussed. (The concept of the motif was and is somewhat indeterminate, leaving one with the impression that the methods used by the Finnish school to isolate 'motifs' are, in the main, intuitive, anyway.) Examples of such analogues are the 'magic wedding' in texts A through B, or the 'Horse of Forty Colts' and 'Tree of Bells/Tree of Forty Voices' episodes in texts H, I and K. For all the discussion of 'motifs' over the last seventy years, the narrative unit so designated remains vague, and the idea of 'the same motif' is even harder to pin down. I have in fact avoided using the term 'motif', using instead the term 'episode' to describe a series of actions in which a problem or goal is set, actions result and some resolution is reached with regard to the problem or goal. Within an episode, component actions or events may also be seen to have analogues in other episodes. Individual characters, objects, events and actions, as well as whole episodes, have been given the status of motifs in the parlance of the Finnish school, if they can



be seen to occur independently from story to story within tradition.<sup>1</sup> I have not yet devised a satisfactory, universally applicable unit of narrative (nor has anyone else that I know of), and so I resort to common-sense terminology, with some trepidation.<sup>2</sup>

Some explanation is due for the type of structural analysis employed in the discussions which follow to elucidate the relations of events within single narratives. In essence, the process is simple. One describes, as completely as possible, the conceptual categories used to define the physical setting and characters of each tale. As Olrik observed in the early part of this century, the delineation of character proceeds by oppositions: "This very basic opposition is a major rule of epic composition: young and old, large and small, man and monster, good and evil." (Olrik, 1965:135). The polarities used, and the roles of the dramatis personae in folktale (which are always defined with reference to the main character) comprise a very limited set. In general, the characters by and large do not undergo development in their dramatic role: they are either a priori allies or adversaries of the main character, or they are personages to be won over to the main character's side by successful performance of prescribed tasks and tests.

<sup>1</sup> Stith Thompson, The Folktale (1946:415): "A motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition." Thompson further describes motifs as falling into three classes: actors, objects, and "single incidents," the last comprising "the great majority of motifs." (p. 416).

<sup>2</sup> Recently, linguists working in the field of semiotics have turned seriously to the task of defining narrative units, Hendricks (1973b) and Mathiot (1972) being two. Their analytic method excises all descriptive material, leaving only 'action' constructions (subj. + v.i. or subj. + v.t. + obj.) and thus discards a great volume of information pertinent to the transmission process, for much variation occurs at the level of description, some of it important for the identification of conceptual categories.

Likewise the geographical categories of folktale are an extremely limited set; there is 1) the home, where the main character has a recognized, established relationship to other characters, or 2) foreign territory, in which human social rules apply, but the main character's identity and social role are at first undefined, or 3) the other world, where the social and physical rules of human life as defined by the storyteller's society are suspended or inverted in various ways.<sup>1</sup>

Characters are defined by their belonging to one of the three geographical domains, by their age, their sex, their cleverness or stupidity, their physical weakness or strength, their human or non-human form, and by their status as allies or adversaries of the main character. Within a category such as 'malign male supernatural,' there may be further distinctions, such as 'dragon/*ālv/jinn*', on the basis of human or non-human form, and so on. Each character, drawn up from an inventory of qualities which can be arrayed as sets of contrast pairs or complements, also has a characteristic repertoire of behavior. A story may or may not employ all the permutations of even the above limited set of terms. For a simple narrative, all that is needed is two adversaries (any type) and a contested issue or prize. From the point of view of variation in transmission, I will try to show, for each story performance discussed, which conceptual categories are used, in which combinations, and in particular, which combinations pertain to allies to the main character, and which to adversaries. Though often cast in a fantasy realm, all folktales concern power relation-

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection it should be stressed that the fantasies of a culture derive from its real social forms, therefore the folklorist must be familiar with a society's view of 'normal' existence, social, technological, and physical, to understand the relationship of its fantastic creations to its general conceptual system.

ships and alliance patterns among anthropomorphically conceived personages; they are essentially imaginative statements about real or potential social problems and possibilities. The omission, substitution or reordering of interactions between characters is a frequent phenomenon in transmission, and in successive performances of one story by a single narrator. The effect of these changes on thematic structure, on the progressive presentation of conceptual categories, is a major concern of the textual analysis which follows.

Besides the generic, classificatory nature of character description in traditional storytelling, the other feature of oral style which strikes (and often disappoints) the literate listener is its highly repetitive manner of presentation. Oral presentation is of necessity highly repetitive. Major and minor series of events are presented more than once, so that the audience can comprehend and remember the overall flow of events. The repetition patterns in the Herātī stories here translated (as in other traditional narrative) are of three major types:

a) Verbal repetitions. These include repetitive phrasings, such as "He told her, anyway. He told her, and (then) morning came." (G.93-94), or "The came and came and came," (G.61, and ubiquitous elsewhere in journey themes). The former example is a 'stall' in that such a repeated phrase allows the storyteller a moment to organize the next sequence of events. Bruce Rosenberg (1975:76ff.) developed this term to describe the chaining of phrases in black American folk preaching, which is identical to the phenomenon here described. He emphasizes the utility of the mannerism to the speaker, allowing him to compose the next utterance without interrupting the flow of speech. Equally important in narrative is the

mnemonic aid such repetition gives to listeners who might be learning the story, as a 'rehearsal' technique.<sup>1</sup> The second type a verbal repetition, "They came and came and came" and the like, though it may also serve as a stall, has another more immediate effect of the audience, emphasizing distance, elapsed time, or intense activity.

Another aspect of Dari style, which accounts for some repetitive patterns, is difficult to render in English translation because it is caused by the inherent ambiguity of the single pronoun *u* (g/), which is replaced in translation by he, she and it. In addition, /*ũ*/ in colloquial speech replaces *ān*, 'that'. Ambiguities are generated in the narrative which would not arise in English, an example being the question of whether Mār Čūčeh lay down beside the vizier or his wife, (A.143), an ambiguity which in part facilitates later changes in the story (see discussion pp.

below). In speech, this ambiguity is partly resolved by stress, ('she went this way, and he went that way'), and partly by context. Many references remain unclear, so that verbal repetitions arise in which the speaker is simply clarifying pronominal reference (e.g. "His heart burned. Xasteh Xomār's heart burned.", G.93).

A third type of verbal repetition frequent in the stories here translated, and in traditional prose narrative from many traditions,<sup>2</sup> is the fixed phrase formula, not to be confused with the 'formula' which is the basic compositional unit of oral improvisational verse. Fixed phrase

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Tedlock describes the same verbal technique in Zuni (1972:119ff). There is reason to consider it universal in oral narrative. Its presence in other narrative utterances besides folktale is observable from, e.g., Text N. See pp. 180-181 below.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Basgöz (1975) or Boratav (1963).

formulas in the narratives discussed below occur at important transition points in the narrative. Rhymes, often short nonsense narratives in themselves, called by my informants /būd-nabūd/, "there was and was not's", open the folktale by transporting the listeners from a real into a fantastic world. The opening formulas of texts G and I are examples of Mādar Zāher's standard /būd-nabūd/ rhyme. The opening lines describe the real world of fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing plants. Succeeding verses describe a fanciful scene in which various vermin perform household chores, and a journey to a 'real' village (my informants told me that there actually is a village called *Hauz-e Palās*, 'Cotton Mat Pond', south of Herat), to a fictional person's home (Mulla 'Abbās), to an unlikely entertainment which is comically inadequate by local standards of hospitality (anti-clerical sentiment surfaces here), followed by a set of events whose causal relations are progressively more tenuous (a wall falls down, a water jar on the back of the speaker's donkey is broken, and a cow gives birth) and a final plea that the chain of events should end. Several such playful narratives may be strung together, each more fantastic than the last. A common final verse for the series is "And this evening the turn to tell lies is at my feet." The rhyme ends, and the story begins, "There was and was not . . ." Opening formulas locate *afšaneh* or fictional folktales firmly in the realm of fantasy. Other narrative genres have different opening formulas, which also establish truth values.

Within the narrative proper, fixed phrase formulas serve to indicate time passing, as in Mādar Zāher's prosaic "Some days and some while passed." More rarely in the Herātī stories I collected, a more elaborated rhymed formula for the passage of time was used. Major scene shifts are also

indicated by fixed phrase formulas. Mādar Zāher's "Let that be and take up this" is commonly used by other narrators as well.

Closing formulas, like opening formulas, are highly elaborated in many of the stories I collected. Particularly where the story ends in a wedding, the wedding formula goes directly into a distancing formula, which emphasizes the discontinuity between the world of the narrative and that of the storyteller's audience:

After that he went back to the vizier's house, with  
the vizier's wife, and for seven days and nights they hit  
the stick with the drum, and the drum with the stick, and

They gave the Hindus raw food, and the Muslims cooked,

And I didn't get one little burnt scrap from the  
bottom of the pot.

(C.179-181)

A simpler, detachable distancing formula, which may close stories which do not end in weddings or be appended to those which do, is simply, "And they stayed on that side of the stream, and I (we) on this," or its paraphrases, which was used by many of the storytellers who performed for me (e.g. Mādar Zāher, L.72).

The opening and closing formulas, which seem to be more developed and more commonly used in *afsāneh* than those used for internal transitions, are particular to the *afsāneh* genre, which is characterized by storytellers and audience alike as 'lies', and the formulas serve to emphasize the radical separation of the world of *afsāneh* from real life. The formulas commonly used for 'book' romances, both in print and in performance, provide a slightly different form of 'bracketing' for that genre, and sacred narrative uses still other forms of invocation. These elaborated

speech elements in Dari prose narrative may be a key to indigenous genre classification, for different types of utterance are marked in different ways. Unfortunately, my collecting of genres of narrative performance other than *afsāneh* and 'book' romances was not systematic enough to provide an inventory of the different types of invocation used, or their full implications for genre definition.

b) Planning/execution/recapitulation scenes constitute the second major class of repetitive structure in Afghan oral narrative. Very often a character announces a plan or gives directions for a series of actions which are then carried out (e.g. the magic wedding, G.42-44). After the completion of a series of actions, there is often an opportunity for one or another of the characters to recapitulate, briefly or at length, the events which have gone before. Recapitulations frequently occur as components of recognition scenes, in which a character establishes his or her identity or legitimacy by demonstrating a knowledge of certain events. Recapitulations often occur at a structural point immediately before the final resolution of the story's major problem, the 'frame' episode. They may also appear at the conclusion of an episode within the story, and act as a preliminary to the next episode. The human bride's speech to Xasteh Xomār immediately after their wedding (G.50) is an example of the latter case, which serves to emphasize both the girl's loyalty to her family, and her sisters' callousness. Her husband's approval of her conduct (G.51) implies a negative judgment on her elder sisters, who assume the role of adversaries in the next section of the story (G.52-103).

c) Series of analogous events, or reiterative episodes, are the third major class of repetitive structure. These include the three

sisters' responses to their father (G.23,30,39), or the five tasks which Xasteh Xomār's mother sets for the heroine (G.153,165,174,180), with their related causes and effects. Although these events seem very similar, even redundant in their contribution to the plot, they contain minimal differences which distinguish them in the minds of storyteller and audience. Their order of presentation is often hierarchical (in difficulty of accomplishment, or as in the heroine's tasks in Xasteh Xomār, in the degree of overt magical content), so that the succession of similar events creates an intensification of drama. This emphatic effect was recognized by many early students of oral traditional style, including Olrik (1965:133). Olrik, like others, however, was preoccupied with the similarities of episodes, not with their distinguishing features.<sup>1</sup> For the type of analysis undertaken here, the distinguishing features of similar episodes are of primary interest, because they define the conceptual relations between the events, which in turn may give significance to their order of presentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. Dorson, "Oral Styles of American Folk Narrators, Folklore: Selected Essays, pp. 112-13: "No doubt this division [of the folktale 'The Master Thief'] into similar episodes, characteristic of Märchen, assists in the considerable feat of memorization; the narrator need keep firmly in mind only the six objects stolen." Dorson does not consider the distinctions between the objects, or their possible membership in a related class. Nor does he consider their contribution to story structure, apart from emphasis. Likewise Propp (1968:74-75) devotes only a brief comment to reiterative patterns of a single variety, which he calls 'trebling', but as Hendricks (1975:284) has pointed out, he treats such repetitious events like modifiers in a sentence, which can be excised without destroying sentence structure. The same criticism can be levelled at Propp's consideration of "transformations," the substitution of analogous events or personages from tale to tale (Propp, 1972). No consideration is given to nuances of meaning developed through multiple episodes, except as regards the emphatic power of repetition. A more illuminating approach to thematic repetition within a tale is presented by D.M. Segal (1972), despite a somewhat cumbersome notation system.



Their distinguishing features articulate different conceptual possibilities whose conjunctions and disjunctions may vary from performance to performance, either by changes in the order of occurrence or by omission or substitution of episodes. Related episodes establish the range of dramatic interaction for one or more characters, through different responses to a related set of problems. I refer to series of analogous events within a single narrative as reiterative patterns, because they define the possibilities of one character or problem from several different perspectives. Among the repetitive features of narrative, they alone are at once semantically, syntactically and mnemonically significant. Repetitive phrasing, described above, is a device for pacing narration, for rehearsal by speaker or audience, or for emphasis.<sup>1</sup> Recapitulations may serve the same three purposes, may give the speaker a more extended 'breather' from narrative composition, and may also be so located as to emphasize certain deeds and relationships over others (an important semantic function at times: see Šīr o Palang discussion, pp. 181-82, below), but it is the reiterative patterns which permit the orderly exposition of conceptual categories which is the heart of a story's meaning.

The mnemonic value of reiterative patterns is more problematical than that of repetitive phrasing and recapitulation, however. The meaning of a story, as conveyed by the relations of its events and especially by the final configuration of ideas with which its action resolves, is hardly rigid. The communicative value of stories lies in their fictional, symbolic manipulation of shared human concepts and experiences. A symbol

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dorson, op. cit., p. 116; Dorson describes the use of repetition in brief anecdotes to "emphasize the salient points" in rapid-fire narration.

is distinguished from a sign by its metaphorical status, a disjunctive relationship with its referent which permits multiple interpretations. The indeterminacy of reference in stories is enhanced by the flexibility with which events, taken as symbols of human realities, are juxtaposed. In this regard, the semantic potential of the order of a story's events is in competition with its mnemonic function, for semantic power depends on flexibility of formulation and interpretation, whereas mnemonic utility depends on a stable pattern of associations.<sup>1</sup>

Mnemonic mechanisms are generally treated as conscious, intellectual activities (oral rehearsal and associative tricks of the 'one is a bun, two is a shoe' variety being prominent in psychologists' writings on the subject as well as the classical works on practical mnemonics<sup>2</sup>). The applications of psychological research on mnemonics to the learning of narrative are limited, because experimental tasks for testing serial memory have usually involved the learning of groups of related or unrelated items (numbers, words) in arbitrary order. In fact, a standard technique for remembering a random series is to construct a narrative to which the items to be remembered are attached by associations. One reviews the narrative to recall the items in their proper order. Thus narrative structuring aids memorization, rather than the reverse. In fact, reformulating or 'reconstructing' in recall, an activity which

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lee Drummond's excellent critique of the static (because synchronic) nature of structural analysis (1977:842-46). I am wholly in agreement with his critique of the negative effect of separating narrative structure from narrative process, although I did not learn of his work on Arawak myth and cultural syncretism in time to incorporate his thinking into my own methodology.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bartlett (1932:50), Norman (1969:68).

experimenters on memory often try to filter out of experimental results, is of primary interest to the student of oral narrative. Bartlett, in his early experiments on the learning of narrative texts, remarked on his subjects' "constant effort to get the maximum possible of meaning into the material presented," (1932:84), which resulted in substantial reformulation of the Northwest Coast Indian tales they were asked to learn and recall, for which they lacked a frame of reference (such as shared concepts of the supernatural, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

Although narrative reformulation, with particular relevance for perceived meaning, is more dramatically evident in performance situations when the narrator is assimilating foreign material (either narrative material or real experiential data; cf. Drummond, 1977), it is a constant process in any active oral tradition. Only the most recent work on comparative mythology and other traditional performance forms has examined the connection between structure, process and meaning in any detail.<sup>2</sup>

The three tales (Mār Čūčeh, Afsāneh-e Garg, and Šīr o Palang) discussed below illustrate different aspects of the reformulation process in performance, but in one respect, they all lend themselves to a type of observation rarely made in oral narrative analysis. The individual texts here translated represent performances which occurred in a known temporal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Norman (1969:138): "Experts in tasks often appear to have a better memory of what happened than other people...for the expert not only knows what he should concentrate attention on, but he also knows the basic constraints on the situations."

<sup>2</sup> On narrative structure and process, A.B. Lord's Singer of Tales (1960) was well ahead of the current attention to these issues. Other helpful contributions have since been made, some addressing the question of meaning more directly than does the Singer of Tales. Cf. Baumann (1975), Ben-Amos (1971), Da Matta (1971), Goldstein (1967), Hymes (1971).

order and relationship to each other. Most narrative texts studied as variants of one 'tale' or 'tale type' are of diverse provenance, often collected decades apart from informants whose interrelationships, if any, are difficult to trace. In the case of Mār Čučeh, the first two performances constitute learning occasions, on which performers in subsequent recordings learned the tale. The reformulations represented by texts C through E were recorded from the two story learners soon after they heard the story for the first time, and again several months later. Šīr o Palang provides an example of a newly composed tale in the traditional mode, for which the real events instigating its formulation are also known and can be compared to the tale itself. The advantage of working with a series of narrative performances with known relationships to each other, in studying reformulation and transmission, should be obvious. One avoids the aspect of indeterminacy which is present in all comparisons of texts whose precise historical relations are unknown. Other types of indeterminacy remain, which are harder to resolve (see Garg discussion, pp. 220 f. below), but the narratives discussed here nonetheless provide an opportunity to observe the flexibility of tale structure (and meaning) at the minimal level of a single transmission step, and to study composition and reformulation as the creative activities of a single narrator, from one performance to the next. Ultimately, I am attempting through structural analysis to map and understand narrative process, for to be truly illuminating structural analysis must be made to reveal process; otherwise it remains a mere descriptive model, and not a generative one.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dell Hymes (1975:72): ". . . the validity of structural analysis radically depends on interpretation of the praxis of those whose structure it is, and on self-awareness of the praxis of those who comprehend that structure."

## II. Background to Performance

### A. The Setting

The city of Herat dominates, as it has for more than 2500 years, the fertile Hari Rud (Herat River) valley in western Afghanistan. Flowing out of the western extremity of the Hindu Kush (Paropamisus Range), the Hari Rud waters a wide, populous valley running east and west from the mountains to the present Iran-Afghanistan boundary, where it turns sharply northward. The border parallels the river northward to its intersection with the Afghan-Soviet border, and the river continues northward until it ends in an outwash plain at Tejin, west of Merv, in the Turkmen S.S.R.

Herat first appears in written documents in the Avesta (Vendidad), and in Old Persian as Haraiva. Arrian referred to the city as Artakoana and described it as the royal city of the people of Aria at the time of Alexander. The city was for centuries the dividing point of the two great east-west caravan routes, where the southern branch, leading to the Indian subcontinent, and the northern branch, the great Chinese Silk Road through Central Asia, came together in a single westerly route. Intermittently an independent political entity and a tributary of other cities, Herat has also been a seat of imperial power, most notably in the last 100 years of the Timurid dynasty founded by Timur (Tamarlane), from 1407 to 1506. Under Shah Rukh, the grandson of Timur (reigned 1407-1447), and his heirs, Timurid Herat was a center of arts, architecture and learning, a city of palaces, gardens, schools and thriving bazaars, despite a history of royal

parricide and fratricide (Sykes, 1940, Vol. I:267-272; Malleson, 1880: 40-42).

Over the centuries, Herat was dominated by various powers centered to the east and west, but repeatedly survived military siege and destruction to rebuild as a center of commerce, as well as the urban center of a rich agricultural area. By the eighteenth century, the decline of the overland trade route between Europe and Asia had seriously undermined the city's economic base, but throughout the nineteenth century Herat remained the focus of English, Russian, Persian and Afghan political designs, in the so-called 'Great Game' for the control of Central Asia and the sub-continent. Independent for varying periods in the last century, the city last came under Persian domination in 1856, only to be taken by the Afghan Amir Dost Mohammed in May, 1863. The old Amir died 13 days after his victory at Herat, and his newly consolidated Afghanistan dissolved in fratricidal struggles among his numerous heirs (Alder, 1975).

The British in India continued to maneuver for a strong Afghan occupation of Herat, as a counter to Russian expansion in Central Asia (Gregorian, 1969:125). Amir Abd ur-Rahman finally succeeded in consolidating the state of modern Afghanistan in the latter part of the nineteenth century, by a combination of political and military actions, and by an aggressive program which resettled segments of his own Mohammedzai Pashtun and other tribes in the fertile steppe lands north of the Hindu Kush. These areas were formerly populated by Turkic groups, but had been depopulated in the early 1800's due to the extreme political instability of the region (Malleson, 1880:140,155,157). By the time of his death in 1901, Abd ur-Rahman had once again consolidated Mohammedzai Pashtun control over

Qandahar and Herat, and had occupied what is now Afghan Turkestan as well (Gregorian, 1969:133). Herat's economic stagnation was not alleviated by the stabilized political situation, however (Gregorian 1969:197). In recent years it has shared the relative isolation and slow economic growth of the rest of the country.

Herat province in western Afghanistan ranks sixth in land area and seventh in population in the country. The city of Herat has an estimated population of 73,700 people in 1969,<sup>1</sup> ranking eighth in size in the country, against a total provincial population of 706,100. The province contains over 970 villages (Ministry, 1350/1972:3-4). According to the Afghan Ministry of Planning's figures, 10.4% of the population was urban, 89.6% rural. This compares with a national average of 15/85% (Ministry, 1350/1972:Chart #1). The total population of the country was estimated at 17,086,300 in 1349/1971, but more recent estimates have ranged from 12,000,000 (SUNY team figures, unpublished 1974 census), to 19,000,000.<sup>2</sup> A severe two-year drought in the early 1970's had an undetermined effect of fertility and population growth. The U.N. Demographic Yearbook for 1970 estimated Afghanistan's annual birth rate at 39/1000, death rate at 16/1000, for a net growth of 23/1000. By comparison, the average growth rate of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan was 33.5/1000 (Ministry, 1350/1972:8). The growth rate for Soviet Central Asia is also probably substantially higher.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the fact that in 1219 A.D., just prior to Genghis Khan's arrival, the city was estimated to have 144,000 occupied houses! (Malleon, 1880: 49).

<sup>2</sup> The politics of foreign aid are such that the Republican Government of Afghanistan refused to accept the low figure, which was based in part on air surveys.

Herat province supported 1,025,000 sheep (the primary meat source in Afghanistan) in 1968/1346, or 7.3% of the national total (Ministry, 1350/1972:23-24). The province contained 3,776,000 hectares of arable land of which 682,000 hectares were irrigated, and a total of 2,503,000 hectares were under active cultivation. Of this total, 1,524,000 hectares were planted in grain. Herat's arable land represents 5.9% of the country's total (Ministry, 1350/1972:14-15). There were 90,000 landowners in the province, and the average size of holding was 27.8 *jerib* (5.43 hectares), as compared with the national average of 18.1 *jerib* (3.53 hectares) per landowner. Relatively speaking, Herat's population is slightly more rural than that of the country as a whole, and individual land holdings are 150% larger than the national average. This latter figure does not necessarily imply a more prosperous small land-owning class, however, since yields per hectare vary greatly, depending on available water and the length of the growing season. Until the Land Reform Decree of 1975, certain individual landowners held several thousand-hectare parcels. The 1975 act set a maximum individual holding of 100-150 *jerib* (20-30 hectares), depending on water supply, but the effect of that legislation is uncertain. The new socialist regime which succeeded to the government in the past month (April, 1978) will doubtless attempt some type of land reform as well. The agricultural villages of the area are concentrated along the river and its tributary streams, from the mountains to the outwash plain in Soviet Turkmenistan. The outskirts of Herat City itself merge directly with surrounding villages, some of which are now on municipal power and transportation lines.

In 1974-76, the period of my stay in Afghanistan, commercial trans-



port in and around Herat City was predominantly by truck, bus, and horse-drawn cart. The number of motor taxis operating in and around the city was probably less than 200, and private cars were few. Small farmers brought their excess produce to market by donkey, camel (occasionally), or space rented on private trucks which plied regular routes between villages and the bazaars of Herat City or its 12 satellite county seats (11 *woluswālī*, one *aliqadārī*). Commodities not produced in the village (fabrics and clothing, tea, sugar, vegetable ghee and certain other foodstuffs, manufactured products) are purchased primarily in the bazaars of the city and county seats, market days being held at least twice a week.<sup>1</sup>

Besides the numerous economic links between the villages and the town and city markets, the economic life of Herat province is marked by a great degree of mobility among sharecroppers and agricultural workers. Reidar Grønhaug, conducting a study of village economics during 1971-72 in the early period of the two-year drought, found that

A striking feature of the average village in the Herat valley is the high and rapid turn-over in community membership. Only to a very limited extent is the little community here a 'cradle-to-the-grave arrangement,' . . . In a neighborhood of about twenty households, a third may have lived there two generations or more, another third a decade or two, the rest only a few years or less. Many households have come to the place in the past, stayed on for a couple of years, and then left. The villagers are living in tight complexes or blocks of residences, so that neighbours, living in the next room to each other, may, in many cases, not have seen each other before one, or both of them, arrived.

The most mobile people are agricultural workers and sharecroppers without land and oxen. Sharecroppers possessing one or two oxen are more stable, and if they also own a little land, they will belong to the old-timers of the place. Most villagers

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of an Afghan bazaar town, see P. Centlivres, Un bazar d'Asie Centrale, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1972.

are sharecroppers, tilling the land of a resident or an absentee landlord who frequently resides in the city of Herat. Some are sharecroppers who at the same time own a small piece of land, while a few are freeholders, utilizing mainly their own labour. At some stage in the household development, members of freeholder families will become sharecroppers themselves. In general, the statuses of worker, sharecropper, and freeholder, constitute stages in the development of the average peasant family over a generation or two. (Grønhaug, 1972:6-7)

The intra-provincial mobility of the agricultural labor force in the Herat River valley is augmented by the steady drain of migrant labor to Iran in the last decade or two, for urbanization and rapid growth in Iran have caused a perennial labor shortage, both on the land and in the cities, which peaks during the harvest season. During the summer of 1975, my research assistant, Aminullah Azhar, a Kabul university economics student, observed that over 60% of the adult male labor force from his home village of Taw Beryān (located about 8 miles east of Herat) had gone to Iran to work, leaving mostly old men and young boys to bring in the crops. People contemplated sending women into the fields, an extremity which the village hoped to avoid.<sup>1</sup> The proximity of Herat to Mashhad in Iran, with its direct links to other Iranian cities, has created an influx of capital in the form of wages brought home by migrant workers. Luxury items such as radios and fuel-saving pressure cookers are frequent booty from villagers' sojourns in Iran, where the daily wage (and basic commodity prices) range to ten times what they are in Afghan cities. Prices of local commodities such as meat and staple grains are rising in Herat, due to increasing exportation (including smuggling) to Iran.

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<sup>1</sup> Women normally work in the fields in rural Iran and in certain parts of Afghanistan (e.g. the Hazarajat, the central mountain area), but Heratis are proud of the fact that their women do not do agricultural field work.

The combined effect of these economic trends is to give Heratis an increasingly cosmopolitan world view, after the last two or three centuries of isolation. Village elders listen to Kabul Radio and world news broadcasts, and discuss Afghan and international political policy.<sup>1</sup> Young men think in terms of migratory labor and the economic advantages of mobility. Movement between city and village, and village and village, causes a constant mixing of Herat's numerous ethnic groups. As Grønhaug observed,

Even such a small neighbourhood [as the village] is heterogeneous in many ways. Most people speak Farsi, but one, two or more other languages may be present. Many persons are bilingual. People reckon themselves to belong to a series of 'tribal' categories - without any corporate organization, leadership or territory. In the little neighbourhood, 'Tadjik,' 'Afghan,' 'Timuri,' 'Taimenni,' 'Moghol,' 'Turkmen,' 'Jat,' or many other such categories, plus a multitude of sub-categories, may be represented; five or six different categories within a neighbourhood of twenty households is not rare. (1972:7)

In my limited experience, I found somewhat more village continuity and homogeneity than Grønhaug's description would lead one to expect, including a village which was characterized by its inhabitants as being entirely Turkish and settled by refugees from Merv in the early 1900's.<sup>2</sup> The more stable groups in many villages also seem to be more homogeneous, but mobility and inter-ethnic contact are universal in the Herat valley in recent years. In my collecting experience, this mobility and ethnic contact meant that the storytellers I met in villages were frequent visi-

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<sup>1</sup> I was questioned about Viet Nam by several village elders. Most assumed that Viet Nam shares a border with the U.S., or else we would not have fought them.

<sup>2</sup> Certain villages near Herat City seemed, in my limited experience, to approximate his description quite closely.

tors in the city, and many lived there for varying periods. I met Ğolām Nabī 'Bīnawā,' one of my finest informants, in his home village of Nevīn, an hour outside Herat, but later learned that he lived in Herat city, about 10 minutes from my own residence. His career exemplifies the economic possibilities of mobility: in young adulthood he ran a village oil mill that had belonged to his father, but later he moved to the city to operate a horse-taxi, as the oil mill had ceased to furnish his family a living. Himself of Tajik and Said descent (two Persian-speaking groups), he moved into a rented compound in the city, where his neighbours were a family of Turkoman rug weavers. The carpet-manufacturing industry of Herat was and is dominated by Turkomans, among whom the women are the traditional weavers. The Turkoman family agreed to take Ğolām Nabī's oldest daughter as an apprentice, and at age 16 she was a full-fledged rug weaver, weaving carpets of medium good quality in the Turkoman style, and had her younger sister and another neighbor girl as apprentices on her loom. Ğolām Nabī now has two daughters (his two eldest children) involved in the cash economy, from which traditional women of his ethnic group are generally excluded (with the exception of a few religious healers such as Mādar Zāher, whose circumstances are described below).

The cultural amalgam of Herat city and village life makes for a great deal of cross-fertilization in the oral tradition. Ethnic Turks and Pashtuns in Herat province often speak Persian as their first language, depending on their families' length of habitation in the area. Bilingualism is common even among those who did not learn Persian as their first language. Traditional narratives and songs are freely exchanged over joint projects such as rug-weaving (in these women's case) or travel and work on roads and irrigation projects, in the case of the men (cf. Baghban,

n.d.:7). Before the advent of the government cotton monopoly and the requirement that everyone grow open-hole cotton for sale to the government, the native cotton was a closed-hole variety, and parties were organized to clean the cotton for home spinning, social occasions which brought neighbors together over long winter evenings when storytelling was the common form of entertainment.

The government's policy of relocating men outside their native province for compulsory military service, a practice designed in part to break down ethnic and regional prejudices and forge a national consciousness, also facilitates the sharing of traditional entertainment forms. Ordinary soldiers, who have little or no schooling, are conscripted for two years; the educated, who serve as officers, for only one, a circumstance which further favors contact and exchange between traditional people. Since ordinary soldiers receive only room and board and a pittance for pocket money, even the 30-cent movie admission may be prohibitive, forcing the soldiers to fall back on the free, traditional, do-it-yourself entertainment forms of singing and storytelling. Men frequently cited military service (and boarding high schools, in the case of my few educated informants), when asked about the sources of their stories.

Storytelling in Herat is not currently a professional activity. Neither I nor Hafizullah Baghban could find a single person who earned a living telling stories, though some of our informants remembered older relatives who were attached to rich men's households and told stories as part of their duties (Baghban, n.d.:8). I paid informants with whom I worked on a regular basis, and several remarked that this was the first time anyone had given them money for stories, although others told me of relatives who had performed for personages such as Amir Abd ur-Rahman, or

for Kabul Radio music recording projects in former years (cf. text B.130). Although professional storytelling has been common in Iran, and has been reported from other parts of Afghanistan (Morgenstierne, 1975), it does not seem to have been the practice in Herat in recent years.

Respect for learning and literacy is deep and strong in the history of Herat and of Afghanistan in general. Afghans are keenly aware of their numerous native poets, scholars and philosophers, among whom are many of the giants of Persian and Indo-Persian learning and letters. Nonetheless, 90% of the population is probably functionally illiterate today (N.Y. Times, Apr. 28, 1978:A6). Despite government efforts at education reform (dating from the 1920's, and gaining momentum steadily since the early 60's), the free, compulsory public education mandated by law is unevenly available, especially in rural areas, and the education of women in particular is lagging. The literacy rate for women was recently estimated at 3%, but this is probably optimistic (N.Y. Times, Apr. 28, 1978:A6). Girls' schools in 1971 represented approximately 1/10-1/8 the number allotted for male students, at elementary and middle levels. The ratio of girls' to boys' middle and high schools fell significantly in the years 1962-71. In that period, ten new high schools were built for girls, bringing the total to 16, while 101 new schools were built for boys, for a total of 117. In the years between 1962 and 1971, the total number of students enrolled at all levels almost trebled (Ministry, 1350/1972:115, 116), however, and despite considerable recidivism, literacy is slowly gaining ground in both rural and urban areas. In 1971, it was estimated that 22.8% of school-age children (between ages 7 and 12) were enrolled in Herat province. Rural children (90% of the school-age population) first attend 3-year village schools, taught by village mullas, which teach literacy through rote recitation of

the Qor'ān and religious texts in Persian (Smith et al., 1973:135-136). I questioned all my informants about their educational background, and found no one who, as a graduate only of the three-year village school, was functionally literate.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that Afghanistan is still overwhelmingly illiterate, the general population has had regular access to certain types of literature, through the public reading and preaching of its mullas and educated private citizens (Baghban, n.d.:9). Mullas and other literate people read both religious and secular works, including the classical Persian Shah-nameh of Ferdowsī (d. 1020) and mystical and didactic poetry (Jāmī is particularly popular in Herat, where that great 15th century mystic is buried). Also popular are prose storybooks, such as Hamzanāme, Tutīnameh, or Najmā Šīrāzī, whose topics range from religious pseudo-history and military adventures with human and supernatural adversaries, to purely fictional tales of romantic adventure. Illiterate storytellers often cite a literate friend or relative from whom they have learned certain stories. Mādar Zāher and Adī, the two women whose storytelling is discussed in the chapters which follow, each boasted a grandfather who was 'besyār molla', 'very well educated', and able to compose poetry as well as read books. Ğolām Nabī, the fine storyteller and improvisational poet mentioned above (p.27), first attracted my attention by his superb performance of Moğol Doxtar, a lengthy romance which does not presently exist in written form in Persian.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The literacy picture is complicated by the fact that there are those who can read, but do not consider themselves *bā savād*, 'lettered', because they do not write. I met several older men in this category, all products of the mosque schools.

<sup>2</sup>H. Baghban published a synopsis of the story in English in R. Dorson, Folktales Told around the World, 1975, pp.209-221.

He also told me a number of stories which he identified as coming from the 1001 Nights, which he said he had learned from a Persian edition of that work. Later he accompanied me on a book-buying expedition to the bazaar, where he identified a copy of 1001 Nights in Persian, which he believed to be identical with the one he had borrowed from a neighbor in Nevin village, from which he had learned his stories. He offered to record as much *ketābxāni* ('book-reading') as I cared to hear, from whatever book I chose, but I was never able to tear myself away from his oral storytelling to record his reading style. A substantial study of the connections between oral and literary narrative in Persian still needs to be done (cf. Baghban, n.d.:1), and could be done fairly readily from materials in my collection, or with a little supplementary field work. The present study was conceived as the first half of a study of oral/literary connections, and simply outgrew the time and space available. I hope to be able to pursue this line of inquiry in the near future.

#### B. Collecting

Oral narrative in Afghanistan is still, truly, an 'ocean of story,' in which various flora and fauna flourish, and in which the collector must learn to swim. My collection comprises 500 hours of tape, over 800 separate items from almost 100 informants, including songs and interviews as well as narrative items which vary in length from a minute or two to five hours. I do not pretend to have taken the range of Herati oral tradition, much less that of the whole of Afghanistan. In the study which follows, I have abandoned hope of presenting an overview, and instead have focused on aspects of the oral narrative process which can be observed in individual performances.



Intensive field recording of traditional material from a limited number of performers in a circumscribed geographical area, such as forms the basis for this study, is particularly suited to the study of performance, and still more, to the study of transmission process and repertoire formation. Yet despite one's best efforts at systematic collection, in the analytic stages every collector realizes and regrets a multitude of lacunae in the collection, and honesty demands that these lacunae be acknowledged. In my case, it seems obvious that the storytelling I recorded only partially resembles the normal storytelling event. A foreign woman with a tape recorder is hardly part of the normal storyteller's audience, and in many cases my tape recorder and I were the entire audience. This unusual circumstance directly affected the storytellers' performances. My understanding of the normal storytelling event and the processes of normal transmission is thus extrapolated from what informants have told me about storytelling as they experienced it, and from events at which I was present. Nonetheless, I could witness directly certain processes in performance which have general significance for the understanding of the form and style of prose narrative.

In the collecting process, I endeavored to question all my informants about their vital statistics (age, occupation, place of birth and residence history, education, marital status, number of children), and the sources of their stories. Apart from these questions, however, I intentionally exerted minimal influence on the performers, either in the selection or the performance of the material. I felt that the effect of my own foreignness could best be minimized by a non-intrusive style of collecting. I now wish that I had questioned or challenged various in-

formants more directly on certain topics, especially regarding the meaning they found in their stories. I hope I have been accurate in interpreting the implicit contents of the performances I witnessed, but I am confident that a native observer could have gleaned a good deal more from the same experiences.

### C. The People

To discuss oral narrative process, I have chosen two story-learning events and one instance of the composition of a new story, in hopes of describing some generative, creative aspects of variation in transmission. These recordings are the fruit of a personal friendship for which I shall be perpetually and wonderingly grateful. Every collector has his or her favorite informants, people whose skills and temperament make them particularly rewarding collaborators (cf. Asadowskij, 1926, or Dégh, 1969). In Mādar Zāher, however, I found a friend, a highly gifted woman whose total lack of formal education in no way inhibited her imaginative and resourceful participation in my work. A keen student of human nature, she had made it a point, over her husband's eight-year career as a Peace Corps cook, to meet and befriend his female employers and their friends. Her sensitivity to and patience with foreigners' needs and demands seemed unfailing. She was religiously conservative, yet endlessly curious about the values and beliefs of others. Toward the end of my stay in Herat, our candor had progressed to the point that she felt free to ask me my candid opinion on such subjects as the veil and my compatriots' sexual behavior and mores. Despite her strongly-held values, her interest in other people was based on a deep desire to understand their priorities and their ways of dealing with each other.

Mādar Zāher herself is unusually gifted in verbal arts, and has made unusual use of her gifts. She is an oral poet and a diviner, who diagnoses illnesses, locates lost people and objects, and prescribes religious charms to help people through various difficulties. Her clients are women, who come to her at home for diagnosis and advice, sometimes on behalf of their male relatives. Her eldest son, Zāher, who attends high school, writes the charms for her, out of a book of *ta'awīz* (charms and amulets) furnished to her by her religious patron, and she dispenses them to her clients. When I left Herat in 1976, Zāher had just received permission to dispense charms to male clients, under his mother's direction.

Mādar Zāher's diagnostic techniques include trance states induced by reciting with a *tasbīh* (rosary) or by inhaling the smoke of a burning paper charm (*dūdī*), during which she regularly speaks in tongues. I was present on two occasions when she entered such a trance state, once at the behest of three women clients, using a *tasbīh*, and on another occasion when she was preoccupied with questions about a dispute raging in her own family (described in Text N), using the smoke of a *dūdī*, recitation of the name of God (*Allāh*) and rhythmic bowing (*sejdeh*). On the latter occasion, when she abruptly returned to a normal state of consciousness after alternately reciting the name of God and speaking in tongues for over five minutes, she asked me whether I had understood what she said. I answered that I had heard a number of Persian words, but could not follow the whole of it. I asked her whether she understood it, and she said that she did not, "But you are a foreigner, and I thought you might know the language". When working with clients, she normally diagnoses their problems after returning to normal consciousness, with little or no direct reference to any of her trance-state utterances.