



*Journée d'études internationale  
« Orature et narration au monde iranophone »*

*Paris - Uppsala International Workshop  
"Oral literature and Story telling in the Iranophone world"*

*19 mai 2017  
Inalco – Maison de la Recherche  
2 rue de Lille – 75007 PARIS  
Salons d'Honneur*

## Organisation :

**Johnny Cheung**, Chaire d'Excellence USPC à l'INaLCO, UMR 7528 Mondes iranien et indien, chercheur actuel de la littérature religieuse des Yézidis kurdophones & des contes populaires des Lori-Bakhtiaris.

**Maryam Nourzaei**, doctorante à l'Université d'Uppsala, *Institutionen för Lingvistik och Filologi*, chercheuse de la langue et contes populaires des Balochis.

## Comité scientifique / *Scientific committee* :

Mme **Carina Jahani**, professeure à l'Université d'Uppsala, *Institutionen för Lingvistik och Filologi*, études iraniennes (Suède).

M. **Bo Utas**, professeur à l'Université d'Uppsala, *Institutionen för Lingvistik och Filologi*, études iraniennes et persanes (Suède).

Mme **Agnes Korn**, chargée de recherche habilitée, études iraniennes, CNRS, Paris.

Le monde iranophone s'étend de l'Anatolie et du Caucase à l'Asie Centrale et à l'Asie méridionale. Les locuteurs des différentes langues iraniennes y ont développé des traditions anciennes de narration et d'oralité, qui sont largement méconnues en dehors du champ des spécialistes de chacune des langues (wakhi, ossète, kurde, balochi, persan, lori-bakhtiâri ou koumzâri).

L'objectif de cette manifestation inaugurale est de favoriser et d'encourager des échanges entre les spécialistes des différentes langues et cultures de l'aire iranienne. Certains aspects méthodologiques et théoriques seront discutés. Pour cette rencontre à Paris nous accorderons une attention particulière à la survie de la narration à l'époque contemporaine.

La journée d'études est co-organisée par l'Inalco à Paris et par le Département de linguistique et de philologie de l'Université d'Uppsala (Suède). Un atelier similaire sera organisé l'année prochaine à Uppsala.

*The Iranophone world consists of an area that straddles Anatolia, the Caucasus, the Iranian plateau and Central Asia where speakers of Iranian languages have settled. Their long tradition of story telling and orality has been mostly unknown, outside the confines of the narrow specialisms of the individual languages, such as Wakhi, Ossetic, Kurdish, Balochi, Persian, Lori-Bakhtiari, or Kumzari. This is the first of a series of workshops that seek to foster mutual understanding and observe the communalities, in the field of Iranian studies. The theoretical approaches and applied methods will also be addressed. For the inaugural workshop in Paris, we shall pay special attention to the survival of the story telling tradition among Iranian speakers in modernity. Do their ancient stories - their themes, motifs, religious contents etc. - passed on orally from one generation to another, still have a place in contemporary society ?*

*This workshop is the first of a series of annual workshops that will take place, in alternation, at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco) in Paris and Institutionen för Lingvistik och Filologi (Dept. of Linguistics and Philology) of Uppsala University.*

# Programme

## Ouverture: 10h15

### Session 1 : 10h30

#### *Introduction*

M. **Ulrich Marzolph**, professeur à l'Université de Göttingue (Allemagne), Seminar für Arabistik / Islamwissenschaft, Akademie der Wissenschaften. Il est le dirigeant actuel du projet "The Orient Within Us: Narratives from the Muslim World in European Oral Tradition" (financé par la *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*).

Intervention inaugurale: « Oral literature and Story telling in the Iranophone world ».

M. **Tamir Salbiev**, chercheur sénior au Centre Scientifique de Vladicaucase (Académie des sciences de Russie). Titre de l'intervention: « Canonisation as a problem for interpretation: the case of the Nartic epic ».

#### *Déjeuner: 12h30*

### Session 2 : 13h30

Mme **Beate Reinhold**, chercheuse de la linguistique culturelle et cognitive à l'Université d'Ludwig-Maximilians (LMU), Institute of General and Typological Linguistics, Munich (Allemagne).

Titre de l'intervention: « When Talk is Gold: The Wakhi Folktale Tradition in frameworks of oral and written transmission »

M. **Johnny Cheung**, Chaire d'Excellence USPC à l'Inalco, UMR 7528 Mondes iranien et indien.

Titre de l'intervention: « On the oral tradition of the sacred hymns (*Qewls*) of the Yezidi community ».

**Sima Zolfaghari**, doctorante à l'Université de Leyde, Leiden University Centre of Linguistics (Pays-Bas).

Titre de l'intervention: « *The Bakhtiari oral traditions* »

#### *Pause-café: 15h15*

### Session 3 : 15h30

Mme **Maryam Nourzaei** (& Carina Jahani), doctorante à l'Université d'Uppsala, *Institutionen för Lingvistik och Filologi*, (Suède), in collaboration with Prof. Carina Jahani.

Titre de l'intervention: « State of the orality and storytelling in three Balochi dialects in Iran ».

M. **Sabir Badalkhan**, professeur à l'Université de Naples « L'Orientale », *Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo* (Italie).

Titre de l'intervention: « The Trials of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Epic Hero Mir Chakar Rind in Balochi Tradition with reference to other Traditions of the Region ».

Mme **Christina van der Wal - Anonby**, chercheuse indépendante, Bamberg (Allemagne), soutenue d'une thèse, intitulée "A Grammar of Kumzari: A Mixed Perso-Arabian Language of Oman" (2015).

Titre de l'intervention: « The Poetics Gap: Rhetoric in Everyday Folklore ».

**Session 4 : 17h** Discussion & conclusion

## Abstracts / Résumés

### *Oral Literature & Storytelling in the Iranophone World*

Ulrich Marzolph, Göttingue

The study of oral literature and storytelling in the Iranophone world is a vast field. First, the geographical area concerned is large, encompassing above all Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, as well as specific regions in the neighbouring countries. Second, in linguistic terms, the field concerns a considerable variety of Iranian languages, in addition to the current varieties of modern Persian and Kurdish including a fair amount of smaller and local languages, many of which are heavily understudied. And third, the field of oral literature and storytelling is subject to constant and sometimes rapid change, particularly in the modern world. Considering this backdrop, any attempt to outline and discuss the field in a short presentation can only highlight some of the more pertinent issues. Although my own field of expertise relates to the popular literature and folktale tradition of Persian-speaking communities in modern Iran, my considerations will consider issues relevant for other geographical and/or linguistic areas.

First and foremost, documentation remains the most pressing necessity of the day. Living conditions in large parts of the Iranophone world are rapidly changing, and a reliable and detailed documentation of past and present “folklore” corresponding to the state of the art is an indispensable prerequisite for its serious study. At all rates, this documentation should not, as it often was in the past, be restricted to textual issues but rather be as “thick” as circumstances allow, for the simple reason that “folklore” gains its meaning in context. Convincing as this basic request may sound, it is not easy to put to practice, as folkloristic research in the countries concerned often meets with serious administrative obstacles. Second, a comparative perspective is much needed. The Iranophone world is a hybrid that has at all times been subject to a variety of influences from neighbouring cultures, mainly from India, Central Asia, and the Arabic world. And third, any study of modern “folklore” needs to consider its historical becoming, including factors of conscious propagation and political interference in a field that in contrast to living reality is nostalgically regarded as having remained stable and unchanged for centuries.

Drawing on my personal experience of the past thirty years, my presentation is to discuss the above-mentioned issues, including inherent difficulties and future desiderata.

### *The Poetics Gap: Rhetoric in Everyday Folklore*

Christina van der Wal - Anonby, Bamberg

Kumzari, a mixed Arabian-Iranian language of Oman and Iran, is not widely written. Instead, the language has a vivid body of oral literature used in diverse social contexts. Kumzari employs morphological and syntactic parallelism, an evidential system to mark information source, poetry embedded in various narrative speech genres, a dedicated verb form for unexpected happenings, formulae to signal the beginning, progression, and end of a folktale, and many other poetic features.

These are not embellishments for the sake of style but are inherent components of the language.

Linguists doing field research throughout Iran and across the Middle East have encountered rhetorically-ordered everyday speech in oral societies. Recorded from natural language data, their findings are striking: complex poetic structures are integrated in many types of discourse. Numbered patterns of speech, structural lexical repetition, and discourse markers used to organise texts demonstrate that speakers of unwritten languages are highly attuned to the rhythm of their words. The language of poetry in such societies is not at odds with ordinary language.

Drawing on analysis of Kumzari and data from other Iranian language communities, this paper will discuss the ways that the structured speech of oral societies has been overlooked in grammatical descriptions in favour of traditional categories. Details of rhetorical structures in folklore will illustrate the richness of poetic features and compare their literary roles to their use in everyday discourse. This paper will further explore the prospects of language in oral societies where a 'stage' of widespread literacy is skipped and technologically-moderated orality is becoming the norm.

***The Trials of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Epic Hero Mir Chakar Rind in Balochi Tradition with reference to other Traditions of the Region***

Sabir Badalkhan, Naples

Fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are considered to be the heroic age of Balochistan and the golden age of Balochi literature. It was during this period that the Baloch country was united under a loose confederacy extending from the borders of Sindh and the Punjab on the east to the eastern fringes of Kirman on the west. The dynamic ruler of this period was Mir Chakar Rind who ruled from his capital in Sibi in eastern Balochistan. However, the Baloch rule was soon devastated by a fratricidal war fought between the Rind and Lashar tribes and their allies. The conflict continued for about 30 years until much of their able men were killed. The legend is that in one of the last battles Mir Chakar's forces were routed out and he lost the best of his remaining men. He decided to visit the Turk governor of Kanadahaar and ask him for help. While Mir Chakar was on his way to Kandahar, his rival chief sent bribes to the Governor asking him to get him killed. The Governor puts him under different trials during which Mir Chakar kills a mad elephant with a single blow, tames a stallion and rides him upon several camouflaged wells, kills a lion, and at last catches the attention of Governor's womenfolk who convince him to assist him.

This paper attempts to make a study of the trials of Mir Chakar Rind with reference to that of Rostam in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi and of the hero of the Sindhi epic of Dodo-Chanesar.

***On the oral tradition of the sacred hymns (Qewls) of the Yezidi community***

Johnny Cheung, Paris

One of the important oral traditions in the Iranian-speaking world that has come to the attention of Western scholars only in the past 40 years, consists of a repertoire of sacred hymns, *Qewls*, that are performed by members of the Yezidis. The Yezidi minority is a largely Kurdish-speaking, ethnoreligious community from the Middle East. Despite the fact that this endogamous and non-

Muslim community was frequently mentioned by European and American missionaries, travellers and scholars from the 18th century onward, their enigmatic customs and beliefs became a matter of curiosity and speculation, especially in the absence of any tangible, indigenous written literature. Their beliefs were thought to be found in two books, the *Kitab il-Cilwa* 'Book of Revelation' and *Meshef Reş* 'Black Book', which turned out to be late 19th century forgeries, possibly compiled by a Christian author on the basis of some authentic material. Outsiders were largely unaware that, in fact, the religious tenets, history and cosmology of the Yezidis were usually transmitted orally, by professional *Qewl* singers and members of the higher classes of society. Writing and reading were traditionally discouraged for the great majority of the community. It was only in the 1970's that educated members of the Yezidi groups living in northern Iraq and in Soviet Armenia began publishing these *Qewls* in order to preserve their heritage for posterity.

Also on the basis of the first results of my research project, I shall give an outline of the major, religious themes and historical accounts of the important personages mentioned in the *Qewls* and their relevance for the modern Yezidis, especially in the diaspora.

***State of the orality and storytelling in three Balochi dialects in Iran***  
Maryam Nourzaei et Carina Jahani, Uppsala

This paper concentrates on the present state of the orality and storytelling in three Balochi dialects Coastal (CoB), Koroshi (KoB) and Sistani (SiB), spoken in Iran. These three dialects demonstrate somewhat different states of orality and storytelling.

CoB is rather conservative with respect to preserving oral narration, both prose and poetry. Oral prose consists of fairy tales, stories of the lives of the prophets and their companions, and other stories told for entertainment and moral edification. There is at least one proficient storyteller, either male or female, in every village. There are no social class restrictions for telling stories in this society, but it is mostly *lūḏīs*, old women, and Afro-Baloch who are considered professional and expert storytellers. In addition, every region has a hereditary professional singer known as *pahlawān* (singer of heroic deeds). *Pahlawāns* recite both old and new poems, epic poems, and historical poems.

There are different occasions and events for narrating and performing. During the winter times, during the Islamic festivals etc. Orally transmitted songs are performed for instance, on the occasion of a baby's birth (*sepat*), a circumcision ceremony (*hālō* and *lādō*), or a wedding ceremony (*nāzēnk*) etc.

In contrast to CoB, the tradition of orality is not particularly prominent in the Korosh community. It seems that the poetic tradition is no longer being preserved in this community. However, the oral prose tradition exists and consists of fairy tales and other stories, which are told for entertainment and moral edification. The tradition of telling stories in Koroshi is only preserved by a few elderly people. In Korosh families who live far from the city, isolated from other Koroshi speakers, the oral tradition is restricted to the father or the grandmother occasionally telling stories to their children and grandchildren, while community story nights for adults are no longer arranged.

Oral prose in SiB consists of fairy tales, stories of the lives of the prophets and their companions, and other stories told for entertainment and moral edification. Like in KoB, storytelling is mainly limited to a few elderly people in SiB. In contrast to CoB, no *pahlawān* remains in Iranian Sistan. Oral narration, both prose and poetry, among the Baloch people in the Sistan area almost totally been forgotten during recent years among the younger generation. However, among the older generation, the tradition is alive for poetry more than for prose.

The paper concludes that CoB, demonstrates orality as a living art from the cradle to the grave. KoB preserves only the prose tradition, and the language of narration has shifted from Koroshi to Qaşqā'i or Persian. SiB has shifted from oral style to written style. Storytelling has almost been forgotten in this society; the prose tradition is only preserved by the elderly people.

There are no social class restrictions for telling stories in the Balochi dialects being studied. However, only in areas where CoB is spoken are there still professional and expert storytellers in addition to the aged people in the village. In a majority of cases, *lūdīs*, old women, and Afro-Baloch are considered professional storytellers in this society. The role of the audience is highly important only in CoB. The audience uses certain formulaic phrases for praising and encouraging the storytellers, which is unique to this dialect.

***When Talk is Gold: The Wakhi Folktale Tradition in frameworks of oral and written transmission***

Beate Reinhold, Munich

The Wakhi-speaking people in Central Asia, internationally divided since long ago, are traditionally living in the high mountainous areas near the borders of Pakistan, China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In the respective national contexts, living in rural settlements still prevails, but migration, transnationality and the impact of media have also formed part of most of the groups' social reality for centuries. The traditional framework in which folktales were displayed as an almost daily part of mutual entertainment is therefore no longer necessarily given everywhere. Living conditions in regional and national contexts may differ considerably, and intra- as well as intergroup social incline is evident in many cases.

Despite people's changing environment, and even for many of those who have left the village for good, the respective valley of origin is still regarded as the spiritual home. One common link to this is the shared memory of oral tradition.

Wakhi people from all places of origin honour the oral traditions. This can be observed in daily discourse, in live performances and as well in the discussions in various platforms of social media. Folktales, displayed from a rich scale of themes, form an important part of this cultural heritage.

In the scientific and folkloristic literature on Eastern Iranian languages, compilations of Wakhi folktales can also be found - first written down by foreign researchers and visitors, then, since the late 20th century, also by Wakhi speakers themselves. Today, with changing living conditions of the Wakhi people even in rural settings, many speakers feel that oral tradition should not only be conserved in written form, but also live on through the continuity of oral transmission. Despite being valued as an asset that in the view of many Wakhi-speakers requires protection, this goal is not easy to achieve.

After a comprehensive description of Wakhi folktales' corpus in literature, the original settings of display and development of the orally transmitted Wakhi folktale will be described and discussed in terms of its potentials for the cultural continuity of various Wakhi communities today.

**« *Canonisation* » as a problem for interpretation :  
*the case of the Nartic epic***

Tamerlan Salbiev, Vladicaucase

1. It was in 1946 when the so-called "Synthetic" version of Ossetian Nart sagas was published for the first time. This volume appeared as the result of the efforts of a specially created state committee, summarizing the works of dozens of collectors and researchers of the Ossetian epic tradition, which



started in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was at that time that the scholar Andreas Sjoegren developed an Ossetic writing system, which provided the recording of oral folklore. This event was truly a milestone in the cultural history of the Ossetian people of modern times. On the one hand, the imprinted book decreased the size of the epics approximately seven times compared to the Archival Funds. On the other hand, the members of the committee had to overcome different kinds of logical inconsistencies and contradictions of this oral tradition, as well as discrepancies in the dialectal variants. Yet today, seventy years later, it is a necessity to work out an up-to-date theoretical understanding of the principles that underpin the transition of the oral to the written form, together with their cultural consequences.

2. It is well known that for any folklore tradition a written form, by definition, is a secondary and an artificial one. That is why the losses that accompany such a fixation are inevitable. Thus it is necessary to distinguish between at least two basic steps of such a fixation. The first stage of recording is usually pursuing the goals of preservation and academic study. The second stage of fixing is the inclusion of folklore monuments in emerging literary tradition and, more broadly, in the culture of modern times. Yet of utmost importance seems to be the fact that fixing legends marks the transition from a fragmented perception of the epic to an integrated and internally unified epic lore. Unlike the narrator's opportunities limited to certain repertoire, the drafters of the "Synthetic" version had the chance to observe all the preserved monuments in their entirety. They would then reconstruct a non-existent one on the basis of the tradition itself, which would ultimately lead to the creation of the elusive *Urtext* (the literary equivalent of the linguistic concept of *Uriranisch*) and subsequently serve as a kind of "canonical text" to the community. In this case, it is necessary to clarify the role and place the epic tradition had in the traditional culture. Thus, the content of the epics or its semantic core becomes the main question that needs to be solved.

In addition, we can distinguish several main general approaches, which will also be discussed in this talk:

- a literary one (the stories are treated as heroic "novels" or "poems")
- a (quasi-)religious one (the stories serve as a "holy book").
- an esoteric one (the stories would unlock some sort of mystical knowledge).
- a socio-historical one (the stories reflect the social customs of an ancient society).

### *The Bakhtiari oral traditions*

Sima Zolfaghari, Leiden

Bakhtiari refers to both the language and the people who historically are the inhabitants of a region of approximately 75,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Southwest Iran on both sides of the Zagros mountain range. Their territory used to be called, *χak-e bæχtiari* 'The Bakhtiari ground' or The Bakhtiari Country as depicted in the maps of some early western travelers or explorers of Iran, such as Sawyer (1890) and Layard (1846), among others.

At present, however, the majority of Bakhtiaris live in cities, towns and villages in five administrative provinces: Khuzestān; Kohgiluyeh-o Boyer-Ahmad; Esfahān; Chahār Mahāl-o Bakhtiāri and Lorestān. Bakhtiaris belong to the Twelver Shi'ite sect of Islam. According to Ethnologue, Bakhtiari was spoken by around 1 Million speakers in 2001, of which 35% were monolinguals. One third or one quarter of this one Million population, according to different sources, still follow the nomadic life style of their ancestors, migrating twice a year across the central Zagros mountain range in search of fresh pastures

for their herds of sheep and goats and also to escape the unbearable climatic extremes of their winter and summer campsites.

This centuries-old seasonal migration has left its mark on Bakhtiari language and culture, as is the case with other nomadic communities residing on the periphery of Zagros mountain range. Nomads express their aspirations and feelings of joy, lamentation, hope, love and despair using all the natural elements that have been surrounding them through the passage of the time.

In this talk, first, a brief review of the existing sources on Bakhtiari oral tradition will be presented. In the second part, the nature of Bakhtiari sayings or proverbs and different genres of songs will be introduced. These songs are used by Bakhtiaris to recite their memories, to express their heroic past and to soothe their pains and desires resulting from their daily struggles and hardships of a nomadic life. These include: *gagrive* ‘mourning songs’; *dovalali* ‘wedding songs’; *bærziyæri* ‘farming songs’; *sæyadi* ‘hunting songs’ and most importantly, their special manner of reciting the Shahname.