# A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative:
The Persian Popular Romance *Ḥosein-e Kord*

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Background

  The theory of oral poetry in the field of Near Eastern literatures has mostly been applied to those areas in which fieldwork within the living tradition is possible. At the end of the twentieth century, the Arabian tradition of *sīra* (popular epic) still appears to be thriving (Lyons 1995; Reynolds 1995; Heath 1997). However, in other areas oral poetry and verbal art in general are under heavy pressure from modern developments. The Turkish bard, the *âshiq*, has in many cases been reduced to an element of folklorism, a picturesque embellishment of folklore meetings. The Persian art of *naqqâlî* (Page 1979; Omidsalar and Omidsalar 1999), which denotes the recitation of the popular romances, not necessarily the Iranian national epic, the *Shâh-nâma* ("Book of Kings"), is to all our present knowledge almost extinct. On the other hand, an analysis of the written material preserved often permits a fairly detailed assessment of the role and function of oral composition in nowadays obsolete oral poetry (see Zwettler 1978), and especially in oral narrative traditions.

  It is the aim of the present essay to contribute a sample from the Persian tradition area illustrating the techniques of oral composition and some of its implications. In order to achieve this, I present a detailed documentation and analysis of the formulaic inventory in one specific representative of Persian oral narrative tradition of the early nineteenth century. While keeping in mind the general approach of the theory of oral composition (Foley 1988), in the present context the term formula is used in a comparatively loose sense. Formulas here are understood to denote repeatedly employed verbal phrases evoking a specific meaning that is not necessarily obvious from the phrase's wording. In this sense, as will be documented below, simple formulas may constitute structural devices incorporating a relatively clearly defined function, such as separating time or space. Complex formulas tend to diminish in size, yet expand in implicit
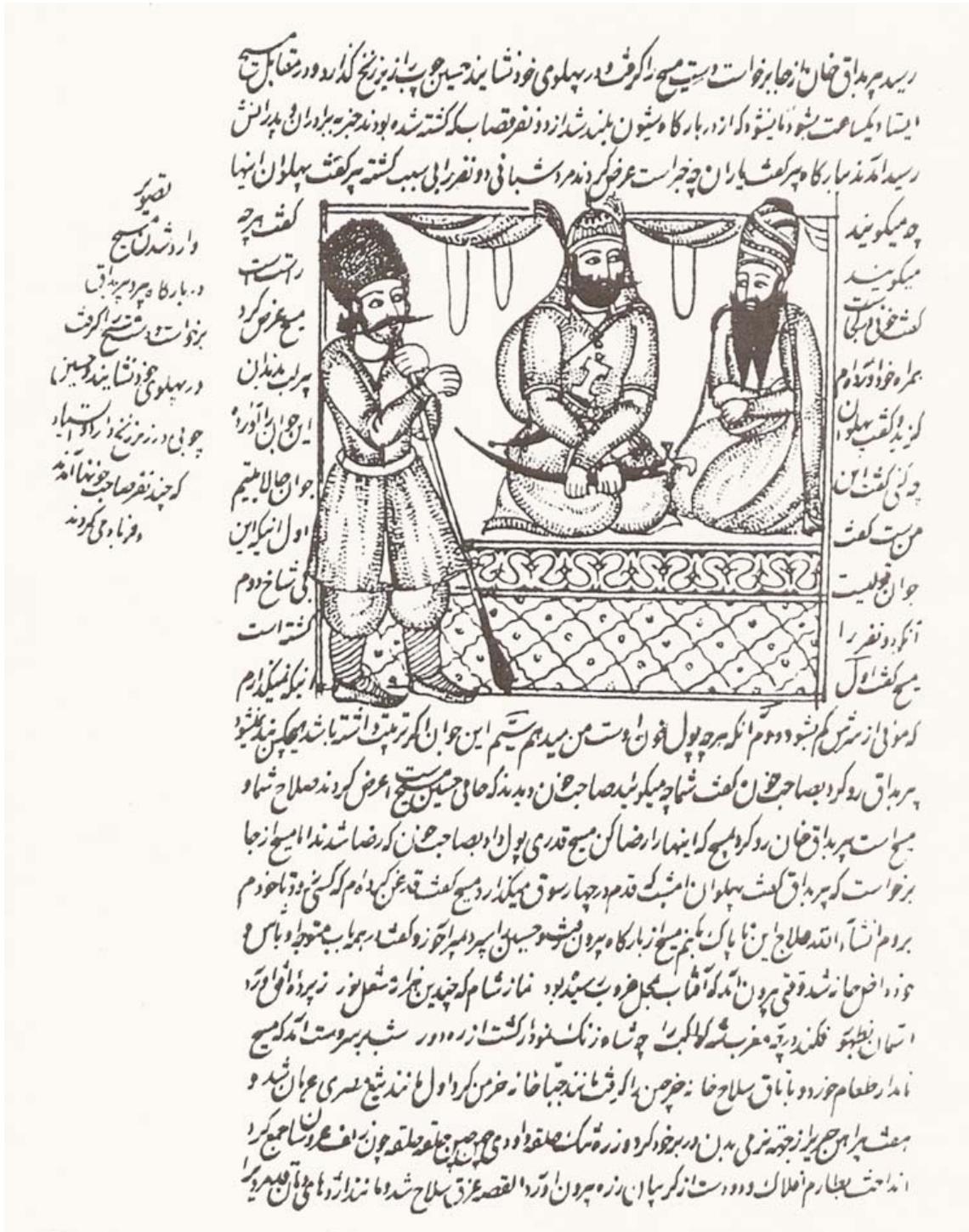
Editio princeps of 1265/1849, fol. 11 a: Ḥosein makes his first appearance. He still wears his original rural clothing and a felt hat. He leans on his wooden club, serving both as a weapon and a rest.

meaning: even a single word, if employed as a formula, may evoke an elaborate background of composite culturally defined notions.

The Story of Ḥosein the Kurd

The text to be analyzed is the Persian narrative known as *Dâstân-e Ḥosein-e Kord* ("The Story of Ḥosein the Kurd"—henceforth quoted as *HK*, in contrast to its protagonist Ḥosein).   *HK* belongs to the Persian literary genre of popular romance (*dâstân-e 'âmmiyâne*), which is rooted in pre-Islamic times, but remained popular well into the twentieth century (Hanaway 1970, 1971, 1974, 1978).   Persian popular romances form a specific amalgamate of constituents originating from the Greek, Indo-Persian, and Arabic narrative traditions.   When Iran was conquered by Alexander the Great at the end of the third century BCE, the area had long been dominated by cultures of Indo-Iranian origin.   Then it became part of the Hellenistic sphere of influence, and a number of Persian parallels to classical Greek narratives might date from this period (see Rundgren 1970-71).   Arabic influence dates from the seventh century onwards, when Persia was islamicized, and Persian culture, as well as language, were for some time close to extinction.   Any attempt to delineate the exact proportion contributed by each of those traditions is presumptuous, and certainly there is a large amount of overlap between the different categories of narrative elements.   In broad terms, there is some probability that a portion of the Greek contribution consisted of romance and fantasy, while the Persian tradition stressed the tragic, and the Arabian tradition the chivalric (though chivalry formed an important constituent of the pre-Islamic Persian ideal of *javânmardi*; see Zakeri 1995).   Besides numerous other representatives of various length, famous prose examples of the genre of popular romance include the Persian version of the so-called *Pseudo-Callisthenes*, the *Eskandar-nâme* ("Book of Alexander"; see Southgate 1978).   The *Ḥamze-nâme* ("Book of Ḥamza"), which in many respects might be regarded as an islamicized match of the Alexander-romance, focuses on the prophet Mohammed's paternal uncle Ḥamza ibn 'Abdalmuṭṭalib (Pritchett 1991).   Most of the romances of this genre tell of Persian heroes, such as the trickster Samak (*Samak-e 'ayyâr*; see Gaillard 1987), or of pre-Islamic Persian kings, such as in the *Dârab-nâme* or the *Bahrâm-nâme*.   The genre of popular romance was thriving in Ṣafavid times (1501-1732), and Moghul rulers such as the famous emperor Akbar (ruled 1556-1605) are known to have had a special liking for this kind of literature.   The genre celebrated a vigorous revival in

the Qajar period (1779-1924), when the introduction of printing contributed to the preservation and spread of a number of romances previously restricted to oral tradition.

The earliest known copy of the popular romance *HK* is a manuscript—in fact its unique manuscript—dating from the Islamic year 1255 (March 17, 1839 to March 4, 1840). It is preserved in the Institute of Asian languages at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow (see Shcheglova 1975, no. 1635). Though the analysis of the manuscript might contribute important further details, it appears safe to assume on linguistic and compositional grounds that the transposition of the narrative from oral to written has not taken place much earlier than the compilation of the Moscow manuscript. Two arguments serve to strengthen this hypothesis. First, no other manuscript of *HK*, whether previous or posterior, is documented (see Monzavi 1972: 3678, no. 39976). Second, *HK* shows an unusually large, in fact overwhelming density of narrative formulas acting in various functions. In this way, as is argued below, the phrasing of the text itself mirrors the contextual circumstances and needs of oral performance such as organizing a plot, constructing powerful images, and, most intricately, condensing complex associations into the nutshell of a single term.

The reign of the Qâjâr dynasty in Iran corresponds to the introduction of printing to Iran, both in lithography and in movable type (Floor 1991; Shcheglova 1979). Soon after the compilation of the Moscow manuscript, a rich tradition in the publication of popular narratives begins. Some of those narratives, such as the popular romance *Salim-e Javâheri*, "The Jeweler Salim" (Marzolph 1994b), are comparatively faithful renderings of original texts that can be traced as far back as the Ṣafavid dynasty. Others appear to be modeled or invented according to contemporary taste, which obviously had a fondness for fantastic, chivalrous, and romantic narrative. *HK* belongs to the chivalrous category. It contains only a negligible amount of fantastic elements, and the few romantic or erotic episodes tend to stay in the background. A first lithographed edition, including a total of 120 illustrations, was published in 1265/1848-49. This is comparatively early considering the fact that the first-ever Persian lithographed book containing illustrations (Marzolph 2000:235), a rendering of the famous Oriental love story of Leilâ and Majnun (Pellat e.a. 1986), had been published only a few years earlier. Since then, various editions of *HK* have been issued, molding the romance into one of the most successful evergreens of the "chapbook" genre (Marzolph 1994a, no. XXVI). Episodes from *HK* have been documented from mid-twentieth century oral tradition (Amini 1960:206-9, no. 30), and

until the late 1970s booklet versions were still present in the repertoire of small book stalls, itinerant booksellers, and sidewalk peddlers in Iran. Whether or not its recent disappearance from the book market is related to the many changes in moral guidelines resulting from the Iranian revolution of 1979 remains to be discussed in a wider context (see Marzolph 1994d). Besides obvious ideological implications, one would have to consider many other aspects in the development of contemporary societal values. Thus, even though the official Iranian policy aims at warding off what is conceived as the detrimental influence of Western culture, modern reading habits and modes of communication in general have not been left unaffected. Yet still, towards the very end of the twentieth century, *HK* in an (albeit marginal) publication is hailed as an entertaining and pleasant, indeed a charming narrative, one that is said to preserve the liveliness of oral performance from its original rural context ('Anâṣori 1993, 1995).

It is a contradiction characteristic of popular tradition that *HK*, while its text was codified in a published version at a comparatively recent date, at the same time constitutes virtually the only popular romance whose plot is not linked to the realm of fantasy. On the contrary, Ḥosein's adventures are unambiguously localized in terms of period and region. The editor of a children's edition of part of the tale (Ḥaṣuri 1965) even went so far as to state that, in terms of historical fidelity, *HK* did not contain the slightest mistake. The action takes place at the time of the Ṣafavid ruler Shâh 'Abbâs, who ascended to the throne at the age of thirty in 1587 and reigned until 1628. The beginning of Shâh 'Abbâs's reign supplies the *terminus post quem* for the narrative's plot; the *terminus ante quem* is constituted by the second monarch mentioned, the Moghul emperor Jalâladdin Akbar, who ruled between 1556 and 1605. Since Ḥosein meets both rulers within a comparatively short period of time, the action obviously is meant to take place within the two decades framed by the years 1587 and 1605. Though the story starts by relating an incident that takes place in the Central Asian town of Balkh, the main localities mentioned in the further course of action are situated in either Iran or India: the northwestern Iranian town of Tabriz, where Ḥosein enters the plot shortly after the introductory passages; Mashhad in the eastern Persian province of Khorâsân; the Ṣafavid capital of Eṣfahân in the southwest of Iran; the Indian city of Ḥeidarâbâd; and Jahânâbâd, the capital of Akbar's empire.

In order to appreciate the function of formulas in *HK*, at least a short introduction to the content of the popular romance is necessary. *HK*'s plot is simple, yet in many ways highly revealing. The tale begins by recalling the fact that the governor of Tabriz, a subject of the Ṣafavid Shâh 'Abbâs, had attacked and devastated Balkh. The governor of Balkh then

turns for help to the emperor (named Khân-e jahân, "The Master of the world") in Khaṭâ, "Mongolia." The Mongol emperor sends two warriors, each with a small number of troops, in order to kindle unrest in Tabriz and Eṣfahân, eventually aiming to overthrow Ṣhâh Abbâs. Babrâz-Khân, one of the two Mongol warriors, travels to Tabriz, where he robs the mint, kills a number of innocent people, and starts to terrorize the town. While the governor and his warriors prove unable to counter his activities, Ḥosein suddenly arrives and offers his service. Ḥosein possesses an almost superhuman strength, yet is completely uneducated in warfare as well as in social behavior. From his introduction into the plot, Ḥosein dominates the action. He defeats Babrâz-Khân after a series of single combats, goes on to take revenge for one of his friends who had been treated cruelly by the governor of Mashhad, and finally travels to the capital of Eṣfahân. There he saves the uncautious ruler (who walks about the city at night in disguise) from being taken prisoner by the second band of Mongol warriors. After a series of battles Ḥosein kills them and enjoys a few moments of relaxation and leisure admiring a young male dancer and, shortly after, practicing sexual love with a female singer. When Ṣhâh 'Abbâs aims at recruiting Ḥosein for his own troops, the latter refuses. In order to prove his independence, he instead proposes to acquire seven years' financial tribute from the Moghul emperor Akbar. He travels to India and after a large number of adventures, challenges, and misfortunes finally gains Akbar's acceptance and, in fact, admiration. After a whole year in Akbar's service, Ḥosein travels home. The story comes to an open end shortly after his successful arrival back in Eṣfahân.

The basic plot is rooted in and mirrors the historical rivalry between the Central Asian Özbeks and the Persian Kïzïlbash, who belonged to different ethnic and religious fractions (sunnite Özbeks, shi'ite Persians). As for composition, the plot is embellished with a substantial array of repetitions, counteractions, digressions, and other details. While the action at times appears highly repetitive, Ḥosein undergoes a certain process of maturation. He is strong, fearless, and valiant from the very beginning when, in an uncontrolled outburst of anger, he kills several butchers who tried to take the sheep he intended to offer to the governor. Yet on the other hand Ḥosein at various instances is unaware of danger, captured, overcome, and close to being killed—only to resurface later, stronger than ever before. Ḥosein matures in terms of martial training, yet in terms of social sensitivity he stays unrefined throughout his life. His sole true concern is his own independence, and only when forced by inevitable necessity does he acknowledge the superiority of his masters. His education in the martial arts eventually molds him into an almost invincible hero. Yet

Editio princeps, fol. 28 b: Ḥosein, now dressed up as a warrior, enjoys drinking while watching the performance of a female dancer.

his pursuit of predominantly individual welfare also makes him vulnerable, and his few emotional encounters with females, one of them ending in the utmost dramatics, constitute no more than distracting side-episodes that do not lead to strengthening his social ties.

In accordance with the plot, *HK* is full of trickery and fighting, threats and boasting, attacks and defeats, cruelty and cursing. However, it is difficult to discern individual characters within the highly repetitive action. It may be noted that, in addition to other important characteristics, one essential ingredient of other Persian popular romances is almost completely lacking. Often, as in the widely known *Hamze-nâme*, the hero character is split in two: the pure and indisputably positive hero goes for outright confrontation. He does the fighting, he falls in love, he is the one who is captured and tortured. Yet he often possesses an alter ego, the *'ayyâr*, who within the romance is a character both tricky and nasty. The *'ayyâr* is meant to and actually compelled to do all those things the hero is not allowed to perform: he dresses up in female clothes in order to deceive the enemy, drugs, kidnaps, and blackmails the enemy, and in general perpetrates all kinds of acts that even under the conditions of warfare may be regarded as morally questionable. Yet he does so only in order to assist the hero in reaching their common ultimate goal, which is to vanquish the enemy, the equivalent of subduing the evil.

In *HK*, though the hero often has a helper, in most instances he himself acts as the *'ayyâr*. This becomes most obvious when the hero is depicted as using a typical *'ayyâr*'s equipment (all of which are denoted by the adjective *'ayyâri*), such as the *parde* (cloth), *sham'che* (candle), *panche* (a small cup-like instrument used while intoxicating the enemy), *kolâh* (hat), and so on. Moreover, quite the contrary of stereotyping the hero as exclusively "good", warriors of both sides—the "good" and the "bad" guys—curse grossly, both introduce themselves by preposterous bragging, both subsequently rob the mint of the towns they terrorize, both humiliate their victims, and both enjoy leisure by getting drunk immediately after their retreat from action. And while it may be generally acknowledged that protagonists and other characters in popular literature tend to be leveled, their psychological shallowness in *HK* is emphasized by the use of formulaic characterization. Psychological depth in terms of an individual characterization is clearly not the romance's aim; even though the romance is localized in a discernible historical context, its role does not lie in presenting and immortalizing any specific hero. Although individualized by name, Ḥosein remains a stereotype framed by the expectations a warrior must confront. Moreover, via this course of action Ḥosein is developed as a formulaic stereotype, a personified formula moving within the contextual

web of all kinds of formulas that pervade the tale, organizing its structure and evoking meaning beyond the verbatim message of the word.

Formulaic Phraseology

Several distinct types of formulas within *HK* can be discerned: (1) general formulas structuring the flow of the narrative, (2) formulaic expressions of certain facts, actions, emotions, or qualities, and (3) formulaic condensations of complex backgrounds into single terms. The following is a sorted analytical survey of the most common formulas employed in *HK*. For reasons of availability the referenced edition is not the *editio princeps*, but a popular print published in the late 1950s in Teheran by the *Sherkat-e nesbi-ye kânun-e ketâb* (see Marzolph 1994a:no. 52). This particular version, which compared to the *editio princeps* is slightly shortened at the end, contains some 43,000 words. References to the text include both page and line numbers. If it has proved more convenient, I have counted lineation from the bottom: thus, 18/-3 designates the third line from the bottom on page 18. The original Persian text is accompanied by a translation and, if necessary, explanatory notes.

1. General formulas
1.1. Introductory formula
ammâ râviyân-e akhbâr va nâqelân-e âṯâr va ṭuṭiyân-e shekar-shekan shirin goftâr [. . .] bedin gune revâyat namude'and ke . . . ("The tellers of tales and the transmitters of stories and the sugar-breaking sweet-talking parrots [. . .] have narrated in this way that . . ."; 2/-9). This formula is a common introduction to popular romance and is in fact employed in many other manuscript and printed texts. It is composed in *saj'*, a simple rhymed prose (relying on the rhyme of *akhbâr, âṯâr, goftâr*). The parrot (*ṭuṭi*) in Persian texts is commonly alluded to as an animal capable of human speach. It figures most prominently in the *Ṭuṭi-nâme* ("Book of the Parrot"), the Persian version of the Indian *Śukasaptati* ("Seventy Tales of a Parrot"; see Marzolph 1979).

1.2. Formulas within the narrative
Interior formulas reveal their oral origin by addressing the audience directly. Except for the very common and unspecific *al-qeṣṣe* . . . ("In short, . . ."; 9/17, 10/14, 18/13, 20/8, 24/7, etc.; altogether 24 occurrences), these formulas most often refer to a change of perspective and thus of protagonist, action, and scenery. Persian narrators prefer to close a specific

scene before starting to portray other scenes, so they rarely work with several folders of parallel scenes at a time: when person X's action has been exhausted, he or she is literally left (the formula says: *dâshte bâsh*, "leave him"), the relevant narrative folder is closed, and person Y's folder is opened (*az . . . be-shnou,* "hear about . . ."). Narrative flashbacks, analytical remarks, and interrelated parallel descriptions rarely occur. The relevant formulas documented by *HK* comprise the following:

> *ammâ chand kaleme az ... be-shnou* ("now you will hear some words about ..."; 2/-1, 12/14, 14/1, 16/14, 18/6, 18/18, 21/13, etc.; 22 occurrences total)
>
> *tâ be dâstân-e u be-resim chand kaleme az ... be-shnou* ("until we shall eventually reach his story, you will hear some words about ..."; 7/15, 8/4)
>
> *inhâ-râ dâshte bâsh, chand kaleme az ... be-shnou* ("leave them [here], and hear some words about ..."; 40/17)
>
> *chand kaleme 'arż konam az ...*("I will mention some words about ..."; 41/9)
>
> *inhâ-râ dâste bâsh, ammâ ...*("leave them [there], but as for ..."; 44/2, 43/19, 56/14, 73/11, 88/3, 93/8, etc.; 25 occurrences total)
>
> *ammâ az ... be-shnou* ("as for ..., hear [the following]"; 60/20, 61/13, 86/5, 90/3, 91/7; 12 occurrences total)

This type of interior formula has also been richly documented from the oral performance of Mashdi Galin Khânom, the only (female) Persian storyteller whose repertoire has been collected with some degree of comprehensiveness. Collections from faithfully documented Persian oral narrative tradition are scarce (see Marzolph 1993:cols. 256-59), and thus Mashdi Galin's tales, comprising some 117 texts narrated in a consistent style, constitute a valuable corpus of comparative data. When her tales were recorded (in writing) by the British Persianist L. P. Elwell-Sutton in the mid-twentieth century in an induced setting, the narrator was in her seventies (Elwell-Sutton 1980). In the collector's presentation, she is portrayed as a gifted narrator and said to command a large repertoire of tales, so supposedly her narration relied on lifelong experience and practice. In the published tales preserved from her repertoire, the most common formula has been analyzed (see Marzolph 1994c:ii, 25f.) as variations of the abstract type *X dâshte bâsh/bezâr, biâ/borou (berim/berid) sar-e Y (az Y beshnou/begir)* ("Leave [sg.] X, come/go [sg. and pl.] to Y [hear about Y]"). When comparing the overall size of *HK* to the published repertoire of Mashdi Galin's tales, parallel formulas occur relatively more often in *HK*. Within a total of about 180,000 words of her published narratives, there are

Editio princeps, fol. 36 b: Ḥosein, during his passage to India, shoots some monsters.

fewer than 40 occurrences of the formula. *HK*, on the other hand, within its roughly 43,000 words, counts a total of more than 60 occurrences, raising the density of the formula's occurrence to more than six times that of Mashdi Galin's tales. This phenomenon does not cast the proposed oral origin of *HK* into doubt by comparison to the reliably documented orality of Mashdi Galin's tales. It is rather to be pointed out that a lengthy narration such as *HK* possesses a comparatively complicated structure. That is, it mentions a large number of protagonists and various strands of action that at times run separately or parallel, merging at specific moments. This relative complexity requires switching between different scenes of action more often than do the short and simply structured folktales Mashdi Galin narrated. From this perspective, the various degrees of formulaic density are linked to different narrative genres rather than to a hypothetical contrast between oral and written traditions.

1.2.1. Formulas structuring time

For the sake of completeness, mention must be made of the conventional formulas structuring time, above all those announcing the beginning of the night (9/17, 17/3, 22/12, 26/7, 31/11, 39/20, 58/9, 65/7, 86/11, 96/12) or the break of day (12/15, 16/14, 21/43, 28/18, 43/10, 45/12, 54/13, 55/8, 58/1, 85/13, 111/15, 116/8). These formulas, however, are not related to the focus of the present analysis. They rely on a long tradition in the narration of prose and poetry and originate mainly from literary conventions.

1.3. Final formula

HK's final formula *tâ bar-ham zanande-ye lezzât bar ishân be-tâkht* ("Until the one who destroys all pleasures came upon them"; 152/15), reminiscent of romantic tales of the *Arabian Nights* genre, represents the Islamic version of the "happily ever after" ending of many a European folktale. Yet, in contrast to fantasizing about eternal happiness—or at least happiness that goes beyond the limitations of narrated time—the Persian formula, in accordance with Islamic morality recalls the finiteness of human life and the vanity of wordly pleasures by pointing out God's supreme command and the inevitable subordination (the prime meaning of the Arabic word *islâm*) of humanity to God's will.

1.4. Proverbs

The use of proverbs (see Marzolph 1999:167-69) is not necessarily indicative of orality, but rather a matter of personal style. Again comparing *HK* with Mashdi Galin's tales, we find that the latter storyteller was well

versed in contemporary proverb lore (Marzolph 1994c:ii, 29f.). In contrast, the narrator of *HK* employs proverbs only very infrequently.   The three items extracted from the narration are:

> *shab qal'e-ye mard ast* ("Night is a man's castle"; 27/14)
> *al-va'de vafâ* ("Promises must be kept"; 143/19)
> *shotor didi? - jâ-ye pâyash-râ ham nadidam!* ("Did you see the camel?— I did not even see the place where it put its feet!"; 30/16)

While the first two proverbs are self-explanatory, the third one requires an exegesis. It relates to the internationally documented tale-type classified as AaTh 655 A: *The Strayed Camel and the Clever Deductions* (Aarne/Thompson 1973:231; Enjavi 1978:219-24; Ranke 1979; Marzolph 1992:ii, no. 416): While traveling on the road, several brothers deduce the exact characteristics of a certain stray camel from the signs they observe on their way; when they disclose their knowledge to the camel's owner who is looking for his property, he accuses them of having stolen the animal. In a figurative sense, the negation of having seen any of the proverbial camel's traces indicates the speaker's intention to avoid commitment in order not to get himself into trouble (cf. Haïm 1956:275f.).

2. Content formulas (formulaic expressions of certain facts, actions, emotions, or qualities)

A large variety of phrases in *HK* is related to specific aspects of content or action. The formulaic character of these phrases is revealed not only by their repetitiveness. Moreover, they are most often quoted in condensed or shortened versions that imply the repertoire of allusions to the complete versions mentioned previously in the text.

2.1. Facts and actions

2.1.1. Destruction

HK is a narrative about war, combat, and conquest and thus, to some extent, about destruction. Its ultimate formula for destruction is *âtesh roushan namudan* ("to light a fire"). It occurs in short and lengthy versions, the most elaborate of which is *chenân âteshi roushan namud ke dudash cheshme-ye khorshid-râ tire-o târ namud* ("He lit such a fire that its smoke darkened the light of the sun"; 2/-4, 3/3, 3/6, 3/15, 3/21, 4/9, 13/13, 18/15, 36/4, 36/12, 42/19, 43/7, 55/5, etc.; altogether 27 occurrences). The hero himself is characterized as *âtesh-pâre* "spark," implying his capacity for kindling unrest and (alluding to the darkening of the sun's light) overthrowing existing systems of order. There is no discernible difference

between the mention of the formula as the description of a fact (such as in 18/15) or its use as a threat (such as in 13/13). Sometimes, and especially in several instances towards the end of the narrative, the formula is expanded by bragging . . . *ke dar dâstânhâ bâz guyand* (". . . so that it will be recounted in tales"; 13/14, 102/20, 122/9, 128/18, 139/5, 151/13). It may be suggested that this additional allegation was appended not to increase the original formula's meaning, but rather because the original formula had been employed so often that its power had faded and needed to be reinvigorated.

2.1.2. Humiliation

Both enemy and hero humiliate their opponents in peculiar ways when they have captured and tied them up (sometimes against a tree). The milder form is *sar tarâshi* (literally, "shaving of one's head"; 5/13, 16/1, 83/19, 93/6), implying the forced loss of the opponent's physical signs of reputation and dignity. The humiliation is made more explicit by variations of the formula *rish-o sabil tarâshidan* ("to shave [the opponent's] beard and mustache"; 2/-3, 3/6, 16/20, 18/9, 97/16, etc.; altogether 15 occurrences). Ultimate humiliation is expressed through expanding the action to *nâkhon gereftan* ("to extract [the opponent's] fingernails/toenails"; 14/21, 17/18, 57/14, 97/7, 98/11, 99/17, 122/17, 139/15, 145/21). For a modern reader of *HK*, this act of aggression most often appears as an unmotivated demonstration of power, such as when the protagonist states *bâyad rish-o sabil-e to-râ be-tarâsham* ("I *must* shave your beard and mustache"; 59/8), even after his opponent has confessed and divulged the hiding-place of his treasures. Less common is the brutal amputation of irreplaceable parts of the head, explicitly of the ear or nose (52/18, 95/8), a form of aggression that permanently stigmatizes the victim as a culprit. In a singular case, the opponent is further humiliated by dressing him up as a woman (*yek dast-e lebâs-e zanâne be-u pushânid*; 97/16). The latter is all the more fascinating, since in a different scene the hero's helper disguises himself by dressing up as a woman, even to the point of deliberately shaving off his beard and mustache (131/13).

2.1.3. Burglary and combat by duel

Burglary and combat by duel constitute the two most frequent activities of both hero and enemy. These activities start with highly codified preparations and consist of a number of stereotyped ingredients, such as donning armor, climbing over the city wall, and drugging the enemy in the case of burglary. Preparations for a duel likewise include donning armor and climbing over the city wall. The action then proceeds

by beating the drum in order to attract the guardian's attention and announce one's arrival. Normally, the guardian would address the attacking warrior, and the warriors would greet each other and introduce themselves, invite each other to begin combat, brag about their audacity, and then proceed to fight. The end of fighting (of armies) is likewise signaled in a formal way by the beating of the drum of retreat (*ṭabl-e bâz-gasht/morâje'at*; 111/11, 112/12, 112/14). The chain of stereotypical incidents comprises the following steps:

> donning armor (10/1, 22/19, 26/9, 27/8, 40/6, etc.; 35 occurrences total)
> climbing (over the city wall, onto a roof; 10/18, 14/15, 17/6, 22/21, 27/11, etc.; 24 occurrences total)
> drugging (11/21, 17/9, 57/11, 58/16, 58/19, 89/10, 96/22, 122/12, 132/3)
> beating the drum (14/10, 22/15, 27/4, 29/1, 33/8 etc.; 27 occurrences total)
> mutual address (175/3, 27/21, 29/15, 39/2, 40/3, etc.; 18 occurrences total)
> introduction (15/18, 17/16, 23/-3, 28/1, 39/3, etc.; 12 occurrences total)
> bragging (16/1, 50/10, 103/13, 128/12, 131/3)
> combat by duel/armed clash (16/3, 24/1, 28/8, 32/5, 39/4, etc.; 20 occurrences total)

Single constituents within this chain may also occur alone. They tend to be initially mentioned in elaborate versions, while later on they often shrink to a condensed image of only a few words. The working of this kind of formulaic expression can best be demonstrated by contrasting the different elaborate and formulaic versions of how the warriors don their armor. The first mention (10/1-12) comprises 12 lines of text, and in addition to several individualized descriptions comprises the full range of detailed stereotyped elements that later occur in shorter versions. When the bag of arms is emptied, the place looks "like an arms dealer's shop" (*mânande dokkân-e semsârí*); the hero first undresses "stark naked like an Egyptian sword-blade" (*mânande tigh-e meṣri*); he then puts on seven silk shirts (the number seven is a formulaic indicator of perfection) and proceeds to don the various pieces of armor, culminating in "a hidden dagger and a visible sword" (*khanjari makhfi va shamshiri âshkâr*). Later mentions of similar scenes vary in their details, and often give no more than a condensed allusion: *mostaghraq-e daryâ-ye âhan-o fulâd shodand* ("they got submerged in a sea of iron and steel"; 14/13); *gharq-e selâḥ shode* ("he drowned in arms"; 17/4); *az sar tâ pâ gharq-e âhan-o fulâd* ("from head to toe drowned in iron and steel"; 85/6). Yet the full range of details—and thus meaning—is available to the listeners by recalling the initially narrated illustrative version.

2.1.5. Disguise

Disguise is a frequently occuring action exercised by hero, helper, and enemy in order to investigate the state of affairs without being recognized; *bâ/be lebâs-e mobaddal/'avaż* (literally, "in changed clothes"; 8/10, 14/3, 16/15, 18/12, 20/1, etc.; 23 occurrences total). The exact nature of disguise is rarely mentioned, but female clothing is a possibility (see 88/4, 118/2, 131/13, 133/13).

2.2. Emotions
2.2.1. Cursing

Both hero and enemy in *HK* employ a wide range of denigrating verbal expressions. In accordance with the usual range of verbal aggression in the Persian language (see Noland and Warren 1981; Sprachman 1982, 1995), these expressions allude predominantly to illegitimate offspring (actual or figurative), filthiness, and lack of masculinity. The following list contains items employed by the narrative's characters as well as those employed by the narrator himself when characterizing the enemies:

> *gostavân* (meaning [and language] unclear; 3/1, 10/1, 15/1, 16/1, 34/2, etc.; 14 occurrences total)
> *harâmzâde* (literally, "born from illegitimate intercourse"; 16/3, 17/16, 53/11, 59/14, 81/13, etc.; 13 occurrences total)
> *valadoz-zenâ/zenâ-zâde* (literally, "child of/born from adultery"; 30/9, 58/22, 84/21)
> *nâ-pâk* ("unclean"; 11/20, 15/16, 18/15, 32/6, 38/16, 90/12, 93/2, 99/11)
> *sag* ("dog"; 40/6)
> *khabis̱* ("dirty"; 41/22)
> *bad-jens* ("of bad character, mean"; 42/1, 63/4)
> *namak be-ḥarâm* (literally, "untrue to salt [eaten together]," thus "faithless, evil"; 51/1)
> *nâ-mard* ("unmasculine man" [implying cowardice and impotence]; 68/14, 125/4, 139/11, 151/12)
> *zan-ṣefat* ("of female attitude"; 139/19)

2.2.2. Anger

Again in accordance with the predominant action, the main emotion expressed by all characters in *HK* is anger and wrath, whether originating from humiliation or aggressiveness. Anger finds expression in two hyperbolic phrases: *donyâ dar naẓaresh tire(-o târ) shode (gashte)* ("the world got dark before his view"; 4/5, 17/3, 18/9, 20/3, 93/15; the use of the adjective construction *tire(-o târ)* might be regarded as an allusion to the most frequent threat [see 2.1.1]). Contrary to Western imagery, biting one's lips does not signal astonishment (which in Persian is expressed by the

Edition of 1276/1860, fol. 1 a: cover page, illustrating Ḥosein as a shepherd in his original surroundings; the writing in the upper part of the picture characterizes him as *tahamtan-e dourān*, the "Hero of all ages."

symbol known as *angosht-e taḥayyor*, literally "the finger of bewilderment," namely the putting of the index finger to one's lips) but wrath:

> *labrâ be-dandân javid* ("he chewed his lips with his teeth"; 21/4, 33/9, 50/5, 52/22, 56/19, 58/6)
> *labrâ be-dandân gazide* ("he bit his lips with his teeth"; 25/19, 37/13, 41/18, 67/14, 95/4, 102/14, 110/3)

Sometimes, the degree of anger is intensified to a self-destructive degree:

> *... be-nou'i ke khun az u jâri shod* ("... in such a way that blood burst forth"; 4/6)
> *... ke khunâbe az dahanesh sarâzir shod* ("so that blood poured down from his mouth"; 9/21, 20/4, 20/18, 40/12, 54/21, 92/12)

2.2.3. Grief and mourning

Grief and mourning over the death of a beloved one are expressed by the tearing of one's shirt (*geribânhâ châk kard*: 6/1, 12/20, 58/2, 60/17, 101/13, etc.; 10 occurrences total).

2.3. Comparisons (employing *chun, mânand, mesl*)

HK is rich in comparisons employed to express certain actions, emotions, or qualities. These comparisons constitute powerful formulaic expressions, alluding to complex phenomena that themselves are not mentioned explicitly but are commonly accepted by and known to the members of the audience. Each of the comparisons is linked to a specific notion and thus usually appears within the relevant formulaic depictions. Examples include:

> speed: *mânand-e bâd-e ṣarṣar* ("like the ice-cold wind"; 3/9, 35/22, 75/10), *mânand-e barq-e lâme'* ("like the bright lightning"; 12/9, 14/1, 33/4, 33/10, 36/7, etc., 13 occurrences total), *mânand-e seilâb* ("like a flood"; 10/15, 99/5, 122/3)

> beauty: *qadi dâsht chun chenâr, saresh chu gombad-e dauwâr, chashm chu maq'ad-e kharus* ("his stature was like a cypress tree, his head like a round [literally, revolving] cupola, his eyes like a cock's anus [sharp]"; 4/14, 15/14, 21/9, 59/14, 76/16, 80/21)

> equipment: *mânand-e dokkân-e semsâri* ("like an arms dealer's shop"; 10/2, 22/20, 27/9, see above 2.1.3)

nudity: *mânand-e tigh-e meṣri* ("like an Egyptian sword-blade"; 10/3, etc., see above 2.1.3)

agility in climbing: *mânand-e zolf-e 'arusân* ("like the curls of a newlywed couple"; 10/18, 26/11, 57/7), *mânand-e morgh-e sabokruḥ* ("like a merry bird"; 10/21, 22/22, 54/11), *kabutarvâr* ("like a pigeon"; 15/12, 67/17)

agility in descending: *mânand-e ajal-e mo'allaq* ("like sudden death"; 23/1, 29/8, 38/15, 99/7, 138/13)

wrath: *mânand-e ezhdehâ-ye damân* ("like a powerful dragon"; 14/6, 21/12, 26/12, 41/19, 67/20, 99/5), *mânand-e shir-e gorosne ke dar gale-ye rubâh oftâd* ("like a hungry lion that attacked a crowd of foxes"; 30/12, 34/7, 42/11, 116/21, 120/21), *mânand-e shir-e gorosne* ("like a hungry lion"; 83/15, 93/4, 95/7, 117/12, 130/11, 148/2), *mânand-e shir-e khashmnâk* ("like an angry lion"; 49/10, 60/5, 101/6), *mesl-e gorâz-e khashm-âlud* ("like an enraged wild boar"; 33/9, 103/14, 107/5), *mânand-e âtesh ke dar neiyestân oftad* ("like a fire that befell the reeds"; 34/7)

steadfastness: *mânand-e sad-e Eskandar* ("like Alexander's wall"; 27/7, 49/16)

death: *mânand-e qâleb-e panir do nim shod* ("like a piece of cheese he fell [literally, became] two halves"; 42/6, 93/2), *chun khiyâr-e tar be-do nim shod* ("like a pickled cucumber he fell [literally, became] two halves"; 42/6, 63/10, 66/1, 66/6, 103/15, 108/2, etc.)

fright: *mânand-e rubâh faryâd keshidand* ("they shouted for help like foxes"; 60/6)

escape: *mânand-e khers-e tir-khorde* ("like a wounded bear"; 56/18, 61/12)

multitude: *mânand-e mur-o malakh* ("like ants and grasshoppers"; 66/7, 87/4, 117/2, 145/8)

3. Formulaic condensations of complex backgrounds into single words

The most powerful formula in *HK* is at the same time the shortest one; it consists of the single word *tahamtan* ("hero"). This word is applied only once to a person other than Ḥosein, and notably before Ḥosein himself joins the action (4/3). From the moment he enters the scene, the narrative's one and only *tahamtan* is Ḥosein, and his increasing self-confidence is mirrored by the growingly elaborate descriptive passages of what a *tahamtan* he is. His qualifications, whether mentioned in the course of action or by Ḥosein himself in direct speech, are worded in *saj'* (rhymed

prose) as a mnemonic device: he is *tahamtan-e zamân/dourân* ("hero of the age"; 41/9), *yeke-tâz-e 'arṣe-ye meidân* ("the unique fighter on the battle-field"; 41/9), *div-e sefid-e Âẕarbâijân* ("the white demon of [the north-eastern province of] Âẕarbâijân"; 55/3). Moreover, Ḥosein's qualification as *tahamtan* links him to Iran's greatest hero, the legendary Rostam who was immortalized in the Persian national epic, Ferdousi's *Shâh-nâme*. Rostam is the ideal *tahamtan* of Persian epic narrative, and any hero qualified by the same term *tahamtan* automatically partakes in the whole network of notions and allusions linked to Rostam (see Soroudi 1980). As if to underline the equation between Rostam and Ḥosein, the latter even is qualified as *javâni meṣl-e Rostam-e dâstân* ("a youth like the Rostam of the stories"; 49/18). Notably, the narrator employs this qualification in a scene where Ḥosein confronts his former master in an act of aggressive disobedience, thus at the same time liberating himself from former allegiance and signaling his individuality by the expression of a martial act. Here Ḥosein at last becomes himself, and at the same time he becomes another incarnation of the ultimate *tahamtan*.

Conclusion

HK is but one representative of the large number of Persian popular romances known to exist, many of which are supposedly composed according to similar outlines. Though some were written down at a comparatively early stage, most Persian romances reflect a high degree of orality. They draw on a common pool of stereotypical characters, plots, and motifs. Above all, they profit from a significant density of formulaic elements that serve a multitude of functions: formulas contain complex references in a comparatively simple form, and in compositional practice serve as mnemonic devices in order to construct powerful images that help the audience understand a variety of underlying notions on a shared cultural platform. Analyzing the formulas of Persian popular narrative would probably appear more rewarding if beforehand we possessed a larger amount of reliable information on narrators, narrative settings, and contexts or performance. Unfortunately, though basic information about the activities of storytellers in historical times is available (see Hanaway 1996; Omidsalar and Omidsalar 1999), only one (professional) narrator of the Qâjâr-period is discernible in terms of his individual production: Mirzâ Moḥammad 'Ali Naqibolmamâlek, the chief storyteller of the emperor Nâṣeroddin (r. 1264-1313/1848-96). The emperor's daughter Ṭurân Âġâ Fakhroddoule wrote down the story of *Amir Arsalân* as Naqibolmamâlek

related it in order to help the monarch fall asleep (Hanaway 1985). The tale that resulted is undoubtedly a genuine product of oral composition and might, once analyzed, contribute to apprehending the mechanisms of this art form in the Persian professional context. Naqibolmamâlek's production is, however, not necessarily representative of oral composition in the Persian romances in general: his audience was small, well educated, of a high social rank, and powerful—to name only some circumstances by which this tale's narrative context would differ from other imaginable contexts of performance. In contrast to the royal atmosphere of Naqibolmamâlek's performance, folk tales and popular romances were narrated in public, on the market place or in the tea-house, to a mixed and uneducated audience. Setting and context would allow for and promote a large amount of improvisation and interaction between the narrator and the audience (Cejpek 1968:652-53). In this context, formulas such as the ones listed above would serve to strengthen the ties between narrator and listeners by having recourse to a common pool of culturally acknowledged basic notions. They would create appeal by filling the gaps for which words had not been used, while at the same time constituting the raw material used for composition.

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