

STILO, DONALD L., transcription, translation, and annotation. *Vafsi Folk Tales: Twenty Four Tales in the Gurchani Dialect of Vafsi as Narrated by Ghazanfar Mahmudi and Mashdi Mahdi and Collected by Lawrence P. Elwell-Sutton*. Supplied with folklorist notes and edited by Ulrich Marzolph. Beiträge zur Iranistik Band 25. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2004. viii + 288 pages. Grammar notes, glossary, bibliography. Cloth €88.00; ISBN 3-89500-423-5. With two CDs.

This book is an important contribution to Iranian folklore and dialectology that contains twenty-four oral tales in Vafsi, a little-known unwritten northwestern Iranian language, with their English translations. The materials were collected in August 1958 in west-central Iran by the late Professor L. P. Elwell-Sutton, the distinguished British Iranist (1912–1984) who recorded the Vafsi texts and their Persian translations from two native speakers on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. Elwell-Sutton later transcribed and researched the materials, but they remained unpublished in his lifetime. It is due to the efforts of Dr. Ulrich Marzolph, one of the most outstanding contemporary experts on Middle Eastern folk literature, that these unique oral texts have now become available to us.¹

D. L. Stilo, an American expert on the Vafsi language, was engaged for the project through a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Stilo reworked and computerized Elwell-Sutton's original tape recordings and transcriptions and made a detailed linguistic analysis. As new fieldwork was not possible due to political circumstances, a Vafsi speaker was invited to Germany and consulted in order to achieve more accuracy in the transcription and interpretation of the materials.

The main body of the book is divided into four parts. The Introduction (1–23) contains a short summary of the Vafsi that is spoken in four villages in west central Iran, namely in Vafs, Chehreqān, Gurchān, and Fark. The language of the tale texts is defined as the Gurchani dialect of Vafsi. This part also contains information on the original storytellers and on the recording process. Two villagers, the sixteen-year-old Ghazanfar Mahmudi (speaker A) and the approximately sixty-year-old Mashdi Mahdi (speaker B) were narrating in Vafsi for about 228 minutes, and also gave an approximate and spontaneous translation in Persian. As the recording time ran approximately four hours each, they took turns narrating. The history of the project, methodology, and procedures concerning the corrections of Elwell-Sutton's original transcription and criteria regarding the translation of the texts are also discussed in this part.

At the core of the book lie the tale texts that are presented in Stilo's phonetic transcriptions alongside their English translations (26–197). They unmistakably belong to the typical stock of Middle Eastern tales and correspond with many internationally known types and motifs of folk tales. They include animal tales (nos. A6, A10), tales of magic (nos. A11, B8, B10, B 12), religious legends about the Prophet Moses (nos. B7, B9), and novella tales (no. B 11); a good deal of them feature well-known tricksters, such as the Mulla Nasreddin (nos. A1, A5, B4), the thin-bearded one (*köse*: no. B1), and the bald one (*kaçal*: no. A 9). There are also stories concerning fools (nos. A7, B3), the vileness of women (nos. A3, B2, B5), and formula tales (nos. A2, A4).

Annotations (199–222) consist of a great number of grammatical interpretations of the texts by Stilo and the learned concise folkloristic notes by Marzolph. These latter are of particular interest for the folklorist reader since they contain the classification of each tale text according to AARNE and THOMPSON (1964), MARZOLPH (1984), and THOMPSON (1955–1958), and also contain some additional bibliographical references.

Readers who would welcome further information concerning Iranian folktales and storytellers should consult the relevant articles of the late Elwell-Sutton himself, who published on these topics in various journals between the 1970s and the early 1980s.²

The Grammar Notes (223–44) include the morphology and syntax of Vafsi in a nutshell. (More detailed discussion is promised to come to light in Stilo's planned Grammar of Vafsi.) The Glossary (245–86) and a short Bibliography (287–88) conclude the book. Two compact discs of the audio recordings of the original Vafsi texts accompany the volume.

This careful study adds to our understanding of the linguistic diversity of Iran with its array of local languages, many of which exist only orally and have a dwindling number of speakers, and where Persian (i.e., Fārsī, itself a Southwestern Iranian language) functions as the language of administration, communication, and literacy.

Nevertheless, the insertion of a short summary on the major languages spoken in Iran in general and on the various members of Iranian language family in particular might have been helpful for the non-Iranist readers.

NOTES

1. Marzolph has done much to preserve the folkloristic legacy of Elwell-Sutton. He edited and supplied linguistical and folkloristic comments for the original texts of the tales of Mashdi Galin Khānum, an earlier collection of Elwell-Sutton from a gifted woman storyteller in Tehran, which is dated back to the years of the years 1943–1947 (MARZOLPH and AMIRHOSSEINI-NITHAMMER, eds. 1994; reviewed in this journal by MARKUS-TAKESHITA 1995).

2. For more references on Elwell-Sutton's works on Iranian folklore studies the bibliographical references in MARZOLPH (1984, 310) and in the edition of Mashdi Galin Khānum (MARZOLPH, AMIRHOSSEINI, NITHAMMER, AZAR 1994, vol. 1. 7) can be consulted.

REFERENCES CITED

AARNE, Antti, and Stith THOMPSON, ed. & trans.

1964 *The Types of the Folktale*. FFC 184. Helsinki. Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

MÁRKUS-TAKESHITA, Kinga

1995 Review of MARZOLPH and AMIRHOSSEINI-NITHAMMER, eds. *Asian Folklore Studies* 54: 353–55.

MARZOLPH, Ulrich

1984 *Typologie des persischen Volksmärchens*. Beirut Texts and Studien 31. Beirut-Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.

MARZOLPH, Ulrich, and Azar AMIRHOSSEINI-NITHAMMER, eds.

1994 *Die Erzählungen der Mašdi Galin Hānom*. *Gesammelt von L.P. Elwell-Sutton*. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag. 1994. 2 volumes (Vol. 1. Persian texts. Vol. 2. German companion volume with introduction and notes on narrators and the typology of the tales.)

THOMPSON, Stith

1955–1958 *Motif-index of Folk-Literature*. 6 volumes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kinga MÁRKUS-TAKESHITA
Sagamihara City
Kanagawa, Japan