

Of the Garden of Paradise
[this carpet] is token and counterpart;
Heaven's glory brought more night:
An assurance and a prophecy...

27 James, Islamic Art, p. 57.

28 Schuyler V. R. Cammann, Symbolic Meanings in Oriental Rug Patterns, Textile Museum Journal 3, no. 3 (December, 1972): 8 and 14. Cammann has investigated symbolic aspects of oriental carpets in a series of articles; e.g., Cosmic Symbolism on Carpets from the Sanguszeko Group, [in:] Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East, ed. Peter Chelkowski, New York: New York University, 1974, pp. 181-208; Religious Symbolism in Persian Art, History of Religious 15, no. 3 (February, 1976): 193-208; Some Symbolic Meanings in Caucasian Rugs Designs, Paper read at the Annual Conference of International Rug Societies (Washington, D. C.: The Textile Museum, November 7, 1975), 9 pp.; and The Systematic Study of Oriental Rugs: Techniques and Patterns, Journal of the American Oriental Society 95 (1975): 248-260.

29 E.g., M. I. Bih'āzīn, Qālī-yi Irān, [in:] Naqsh-i Pārand, Tīhrān: Nīl, 1956, p. 56; and the carpetweaver and her carpet in Shahīd Sālīs' motion picture Tabī'at-i Bijān [Still Life].

Brian SPOONER

FESENJAN AND KASHK:
CULTURE AND METACULTURE

I

The term "popular culture"¹ or "folk culture" presupposes a dichotomy. In anthropology - which of all the academic disciplines is the most concerned with the study of culture - this dichotomy has been rendered analytically explicit by the use of the terms "great tradition" and "little tradition" (Redfield 1956: 41ff.; cf. also von Grunebaum 1955). The terminology was developed so late, because it is only relatively recently that anthropology has come to take its subject matter from complex societies with long literary and historical traditions where the distinction is relevant.

At the out set must be stressed that such a distinction derives from the difference in medium of transmission (the great tradition is to a significant extent literary, while the little tradition is non-literary) and is valid only as an analytical device. Any exclusive application of the terms to empirical phenomena leads inevitably to difficulty and controversy. Among the factors which underlie such difficulty, two should be noted here. Firstly, since the great tradition is by definition literary and historical and the little tradition is non-literary and ahistorical, the latter has always had to be recorded through the medium of the former. This observation might appear to imply that the spread of literacy must lead to the eclipse of the folk tradition.

This may not be entirely true. But the spread of literacy does lead to a qualitative change in the little tradition which at its extreme may be characterized as the difference between "folk" and "pop". It is worth noting here that Iranian pop culture, which is outside the scope of this essay, remains almost totally neglected, though it now forms probably as significant a component of the whole of Iranian culture as folk culture (or those traits that we have conventionally distinguished as such) has always formed.

Secondly, though one is historical and the other is ahistorical, neither "tradition" has a clear unitary history or origin. The great tradition derives from Islam on the one hand and the non-Islamic Iranian literary tradition on the other. Both of these derive further back from a range of "southwest Asian" cultural traditions, some of which were brought together into the Iranian tradition (around the core of concepts which the Iranians themselves introduced into the region), of which the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi is the prime literary exemplar, while others came in through the Islamic tradition. The folk tradition derives from the same range of sources and represents different selections from them in different localities. The folk tradition varies locally because it is not consciously rationalized and standardized.

If we view this dichotomy from within the total culture the great and little traditions appear as a complementary but opposed pair of concepts or categories, each defined in relation to the other, reminiscent of numerous similar pairs, each of which has connotations and implications far beyond the immediate meaning of the terms. A recent hypothesis premises that thought proceeds on the basis of such "binary oppositions", which surface in different guises in different cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1967, chapter 2; cf. Leach 1970, chapter 2). Without bothering here with the question of the psychological validity of the hypothesis, it is easy to think of similar conceptual oppositions on the same and other levels of cultural reality. An example which readily comes to mind is *ābādi* versus *biyābān* which connotes the conceptual opposition between settlement, or in fact any form of im-

provement of the natural environment from a large city to a single cultivated field, and unmodified wilderness. The same opposition may be expressed slightly differently, as for example between city and *compagne*, or between settled agriculture and nomadic pastoralism, or, at a further remove, between the *qālī* made on a vertical loom financed from a large town and the *qālīcheh* made on a horizontal loom in a nomad's tent or a small village.

There tends to be close reciprocity on one level between concepts which are opposed on another level. For example, the city depends economically on its hinterland; peasants and nomads exchange grain and dairy products.

The same oppositions have parallels on the linguistic plane. Given literacy, the speech of the city is rationalized as the standard literary language, while other forms of speech are dialects and generally not written. The written language, when spoken - especially publicly, tends to be pronounced differently, more formally, as, for instance, in the reading of the news on the radio or the recital of poetry.

Other oppositions are less obviously parallel; for example, the high value placed on chastity and modesty in women *versus* the concept of romantic love as it is found in Firdausi and the *Romances* (cf. the story of Bizhan and Manizheh). In the great tradition the bounds of sexual and romantic interest are strictly drawn by the law. The expression of romantic love is un-Islamic. It is nevertheless as common a feature of everyday life in Iran as elsewhere, especially in the villages and the tribes away from the strictures of self-conscious religiosity. Pre-Islamic Iranian stories of romantic love remained popular under Islam. Sufism, which like mystical movements in Christianity drew much strength from the folk tradition, made full use of them in its teachings. They were reinterpreted in Islamic Iranian literature, often in Sufistic guise (as in the *Khamseh* of Nizami), but the bounds of Islamic modesty were suddenly imposed by the male heroes as when Rostam demands marriage from Tahmineh's father before acquiescing in her nocturnal advances.

In the remainder of the first part of this brief essay I draw attention to a number of these conceptual oppositions in the hope that the consideration of some of the structural relationships in Iranian culture might lead to a better understanding of the culture itself. I then turn to the subject of Iranian cuisine, the careful study of which may allow us (I suggest - though not of course in the present article) by indicating some of its structural di-

<u>Hochkultur</u>	folk culture
great tradition	little tradition
literary	oral
historical	ahistorical
formal	informal
public	personal
city	<u>compagne</u>
settled life	nomadic life
agriculture	pastoralism
vertical loom weaving	horizontal loom weaving
<u>ābādi</u>	<u>biyābān</u>
exoteric	esoteric
Sunnism	Shi'ism
Shi'ism	Sufism
mosque	shrine
<u>namaz</u>	<u>nazr</u>
form	content
language	dialect
formal pronunciation	colloquial pronunciation
quantity meter	stress meter
classical literature	folk literature
miniature painting	folk art
sexual modesty and female chastity	romantic love and female equality
equality before the law (religious and secular)	hierarchy and intercession through chosen representatives to both the Shah and Imam

Table: Selected oppositions in the Iranian culture.

Each pair forms a relationship which is analagous to the relationship formed by each of the other pairs, and the relationships are dialectical, but neither column is a unit, nor is there any equivalence implied between items in the same column.

mensions to infer deductively or conceive intuitively the "meta-cultural postulates" of Iranian culture (cf. Bidney 1967: 168-169).

Since the overall intention at this stage is programmatic, I do no more than introduce a number of parameters, which taken together allow the tabulation of a preliminary and partial paradigm of Iranian culture (see Table)².

The cultural content which is transmitted via the literary medium of the great tradition is also literary and historical, formal and public, while the content that is transmitted via the oral medium of the little tradition is oral and ahistorical, informal and personal. There is a parallel opposition between exoteric and esoteric. In the realm of religion, for example, Islam is an exoteric faith, whose primary social symbol - the focal point of the settlement (ābādi) - is the mosque, where the faithful gather for public religious practice. The symbol of folk religion is the small shrine, which is typically located away from the main part of a settlement (in the biyābān), and is the scene of personal and individual religious practice³. In relative terms Sunnism is exoteric and Shi'ism esoteric, but in Persia Shi'ism itself captured the great tradition, and so became at least superficially exoteric. In the mosque religious practice is ritualized and, whatever the inner intent, takes the outward form of set prayers, which are ideally communal or corporate. In the shrine practice is informal and takes the form of personal vows - esoteric with relatively little attention to outward form.

Sufism is of course extremely well represented in Persian literature - far better than is Shi'ism, which has always been distrustful of it since they compete as barely compatible forms of esoteric religion. However, the literature carries not the logical and historical exposition of the doctrine of Sufism, but ambiguous representations of its esoteric concepts. Although such literature may be used in a Sufi gathering for religious effect, more generally its religious ideas are a vehicle for literary effect.

This ambivalent relationship of concept and medium is just one transformation of a particularly significant group of oppositions in the table: form and content. In the great tradition every mode of Iranian cultural expression proceeds with strict adherence to form. Artistic excellence is the differential and complementary excellence of form and content. Excellence of content without form passes unnoticed. Excellence of form without content may have somewhat more success. In the appreciation of a work of art equal weight is given to each aspect. For example, the sound of a poem, which is a product of a peculiar combination of the phonemic structure of the words and the chosen meter (which incidentally is always based on quantity, although the metre of folk poetry may be based on stress), and the semantic content are of equal significance in the analysis of the excellence of the poem. There is a similar relationship between design and color in painting and in carpets.

A closer consideration of this parameter may facilitate better understanding of two important problems in Western orientalism. Firstly, Persian classical poetry is notoriously difficult to translate into English, and few if any translations are allowed to be entirely satisfactory. Exegesis of Persian poetry in European languages is similarly rare, and seldom considered entirely successful. The reasons for this are of course partly to be sought in the fact that the European type of sophistication in literary criticism and the orientalist's knowledge of obscure languages have rarely been combined in one scholar, but a further less obvious factor lies in the nature of Persian classical poetry. The combination or integration of the external form of sound and meter and the esoteric and sufistic semantic content produces a complex medium of poetic expression, which defies both translation and exegesis in the existing language of scholarship. When the authority which understands cannot or does not explain, a mystique develops. In this case the mystique is intensified by the fact that Persians discuss their poetry in the language in which

it is written: they have not developed a metalanguage analagous to Western criticism. Having grown out of the philological study of languages, the implicit aim of the Western discipline of orientalism has always been to interpret to the West what the East wrote about itself. Since Persian poetry is structurally untranslatable, its exegesis in English must await the Iranian development of a suitable Persian metalanguage of criticism which would be translatable.

The emphasis on form may be related to the lack of interest in characterization in Iranian literature and the lack of perspective in Persian painting. The apparent grotesqueness of figurative representation, which is characteristic of Persian folk art, may derive from the relaxation of the structural and formal structures of the great tradition - the indiscipline of content without form. Lack of perspective in pictorial art may be analagous to the lack of plot development in Persian literature. The irrelevance of perspective may be a simple transformation of the synchronic nature of Persian artistic expression in general⁴.

There is reason to suspect that in the Hochkultur the form is more conservative than the content. In situations of culture contact which are noticeable in the literary and the artistic tradition the alien content appears to be assimilated into the Iranian structure or form. The Western iranisant, full of admiration for the unique Iranian sense of color and design, who walks into a middle class living room in Teheran for the first time and is horrified at what he sees as a clash of colors and inconsistencies of furnishing and taste, might consider for a moment that he is witnessing the pragmatic inclusion of foreign and easily available items (content) into a traditional and unconscious structure (form).

Finally, it must be noted that the relationship between each of the paired items represented in the table is dynamic and dialectical. Each is continually affected by the other. Only the relationship is constant. Further, each of the pairs must be seen in terms of their total context. For instance, the opposing values

pertaining to women and romantic love must be seen as functions of the particular society in its total ecological and historical context. Each relationship forms an integral part of the total cultural system.

II

Iranian cuisine may be similarly broken down into structural relationships and oppositions. "And, if we find these structures to be common to several spheres, we have the right to conclude that we have reached a significant knowledge of the unconscious attitudes of the society or societies under consideration" (Lévi-Strauss, 1967:86). Food constitutes a symbolic dimension to social interaction: from the selection of ingredients to the preparation and distribution of dishes, it constitutes a particular cultural model of social life - though one which is constrained by ecological and economic conditions (cf. Appadurai 1981). The following preliminary notes are offered with this metacultural significance clearly in mind.

Cuisine is defined here as everything concerned with what people eat and how they eat it. Though conditioned by non-cultural factors (that is, the availability of particular foods), it conforms to an abstract structure: dishes must be prepared and served in certain ways. A certain range of edible items is available to a society from its natural and social habitat, from the natural environment and from trade. From among these available items a culturally determined selection constitutes the range of ingredients of the cuisine. The list is finite (at any given time) and all the items may be listed. Some of them may be cited in their natural form, others in the form of concoctions. A certain number taken together from the core of basic ingredients. In Iranian cuisine this core includes abghureh (unripe-grape vinegar), robb-i anār (concentrated pomegranate juice), raughan-i gusfand (ghee or clarified butter, made from yoghurt). Each ingredient is used in particular ways, and in particular combinations. These

uses and combinations follow rules which constitute the structure of the cuisine. This cultural construct in turn affects the society through its nutritional properties.

Iranian cuisine is a highly sophisticated cultural tradition with a long history, which bears comparison with the cuisines of China and France. Like that of China it is synchronic (see above on art and literature), in that there is not time dimension in its serving, and no division into courses. All dishes may be served at once, instead of one after another as in French cuisine (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1967:86). The structure of Iranian cuisine is essentially part of the great tradition, and therefore displays conscious historical continuity, though the ingredients may vary according to the natural environment and changes in the trade network. Moreover, the haute cuisine which displays the structure best, is practised by the elite who live mostly in cities and the larger towns, though they may maintain estates in the country. Cuisine in the little tradition is much closer to the ecological influences, and further from the structural considerations. The peasant's diet is basically simple. But when he has guests, he entertains according to the structure of the great tradition, insofar as he understands it and is able.

The main Iranian meals are eaten at midday and after sunset, and are not structurally distinguished⁵. The structure of what is eaten on particular occasions, in particular parts of Iran, in particular households, has a range of referents. These are of several types, including 1) regional, 2) ecological or economic: the availability of ingredients; 3) social: ethnic, religious, occupational, class - all criteria of social identity, and 4) personal preference. Ingredients and dishes are both grouped into categories. The main types of dish include: āsh (thick soups), nan (different types of bread), chelau, dami, kateh (plain rice cooked in various ways), polau (rice mixed with other ingredients), khoresh (sauce to go with rice), kabāb (roast), sabzi (greenstuff, vegetables), shirini (confectionery, dessert, candy), halvā (particular concocted des-

serts and sweet dishes), morabbā (preserves), torshi (pickles), ā'il (nuts and dried fruits), kuku (thick omelet dishes), miveh (fruit). Almost all dishes fall within one or another of these categories. Only three of them include uncooked foods. Three of the terms are of Arabic origin. One of these deserves especial mention: kabāb. Kabāb is particularly characteristic of the cuisine of nomads. This is not surprising when we consider that nomads are particularly close to their natural environment, and roasting is perhaps the simplest form of cooking. However, kabab also has an especially high value in the haute cuisine - though it is never an integral part of a larger meal: it is brought on separately, wrapped in bread, and must be eaten immediately, for it must be eaten hot. Alternatively, with chelau it forms the whole meal, or part of a diachronic European style meal in a restaurant. Either way it does not fit into the synchronic structure of Iranian cuisine, even though it is rated highly. It may seem surprising that a nomadic dish should have such high value in the cuisine of the great tradition. However, there is at least one important parallel. One of the most important ingredients of the cuisine is ghee (clarified butter), which historically has been the major contribution of the nomadic sector to the total economy. Given the traditional opposition on all cultural planes between agriculture and nomadism, the city and the wilderness, in Iranian culture, it is noteworthy that the city was dependent historically on the nomads for one of its most basic foods. It is less remarkable, however, if we consider all the other aspects of the relationship between agriculture and pastoralism (cf. Spooner 1973).

Many ingredients also have medicinal uses, or particular significance in medicinal contexts. Still further edibles, which may not be considered ingredients in the cuisine, are acquired or gathered and eaten for medicinal purposes and the perception of them is conditioned by the underlying structure. It is in this context in particular that the distinction between hot and cold

foods is important. All ingredients are categorized as either hot or cold, but the categorization varies geographically both within and beyond the Iranian cultural area, and some may be categorized as neutral. Attempts to explain hot and cold in food classifications have generally foundered on this geographical variation. The structural approach suggested here offers more satisfying results.

Another aspect is ritual or religious. Certain dishes, particularly halvā and āsh, are prepared mainly for distribution as charity or in token of vows (nazr). Others are associated particularly with weddings, naming ceremonies, wakes, eftār (breaking the fast at the end of Ramāzān). There are also secular ritual and ceremonial foods. Nauruz is never complete without the presence of certain foods, not all of which are included in the traditional display known as haft sin. Further, certain foods - among which a classic example is fesenjān (a khoresh of game fowl, robb-i anār and crushed walnuts) are suitable for guests; others - especially any of which kashk (hard, chalky balls of dehydrated, defatted milk solids provides the central ingredient) should never be served to guests.

The cuisine also changes. New ingredients are introduced and some are assimilated. Several ingredients which are presently used can only have been introduced during the last few hundred years or less. The tomato, which has been thoroughly assimilated as the "Frankish gage or plum" (gaujeh-i farangi) is stored in a paste form (robb) like the pomegranate, and serves commonly as the sour ingredient which is a structural necessity in many dishes.

A more surprising case of assimilation is that of tea. If it can be said to have replaced coffee, it is consumed more widely and in greater quantity. It is still possible in isolated villages to find old men who remember its introduction. Within much less than a hundred years it became both a dietary staple (consumed with plenty of sugar) and a focus of social intercourse. It usurped the place of coffee, but what had coffee replaced?

Vodka is a similar case, but since it falls within the traditional category of 'araq (distillations), it is not so difficult to explain. It would be useful if we could study earlier examples of dietary change. The accession of the Shari'a must have provided some examples. The suppression of wine is the most obvious. Though prohibition has never been totally successful, it nevertheless changed the structural position of wine among alcoholic beverages.

As new ingredients become available, some are assimilated more readily and more completely than others, and changes take place in the cuisine in step with cultural changes. Parallel with the rise of pop culture, there has arisen an Iranian pop cuisine, for example, the sāndvīj (sandwich). But the structure of the cuisine changes more slowly than the rate of changeover in ingredients, as does the structure of the culture. Nevertheless, the structure does change, and parallel with the change in structure there is change in cultural identity.

NOTES

¹ The occasion for assembling the notes for this brief essay was a symposium on popular culture in Iran, organized by Dr. Peter Chelkowski in 1972, to which Professor Machalski was also to have contributed.

² A selected bibliography is appended, which should serve as a basis for studies in both Iranian folk culture and Iranian cuisine. Apart from the words cited there is of course an abundance of sources in Persian, both published and unpublished. Examples of the most basic include the Divān of Bushāq, the Chahār Maqāleh by Nezāmi Samarqandi, Nirangestān by Sādeq Hedayat, Sharh-i Zendegāni-i Man by Abdollāh Mostaufi, 'Aqāyed va rosum-i 'āmmeh-i mardom-i Khorāsān, by Ebrāhīm Shokurzādeh, the Qābusnāme, and the Siya-satnāme.

³ However, the large city shrines, e.g. in Meshed and Qom, have been subsumed in the great tradition. The position of such "international" shrines throughout Islam has often been ambiguous.

When a shrine becomes so popular that a city grows up around it, it moves into the great tradition. Shi'ism similarly moved over to Hochkultur when it became the official religion.

⁴ It should be noted that much of what is written here of Iranian culture in relation to Western, could equally well be said of other cultures.

⁵ A brief description of the daily eating pattern may be read in Hekmat 1961.

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FUTUROLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE DRAMAS OF TAWFĪK AL-ḤAKĪM

Dramaturgy of T. al-Ḥakīm (born in 1898, Alexandria¹), one of the most distinguished writers of Egypt, is unconventional and varied in both its form and essence. Al-Ḥakīm is a writer of continual experiments, looking for new forms, conventions and better ways of expression of his ideas. Beside the social and political problems, culture and customs², the author in his meditation concerning Egypt and all the Arabic world, also includes the man and surrounding him reality, and also, looking ahead into a distant future, gives the reader a vision of problems of 21st century. Even at present he is trying to bring the reader reflect on the possible results of the rapid development of civilization with all its devices i. e., of the world nowadays called "science".

The weakest point of the 21st century (according to the writer's visions) would be the lack of harmony between the rapid development of material culture and the level of spiritual culture and morality. In order to show the reader this complex problem, al-Ḥakīm takes his inspiration from science-fiction as the modern form of a fair-tale, easy to percept and already firmly established, as a form, in the Arabic literature ("Tales of One and a Thousand Nights"). The contents of the dramas - a choice of dramaturgical conflicts and their development, gives the author the opportunity, as a pretext, to display the real social, political, moral and philosophical problems.