



CROYANCES ET COUTUMES PERSANES

CROYANCES ET COUTUMES PERSANES, by the French orientalist Henri Massé (q.v., b. Lunéville, France, 2 March 1886, d. Paris, 9 November 1969), published in 1938, one of the most comprehensive and reliable texts on general Persian folklore in a Western language. Massé believed that the rapid modernization of Persia was bound to lead to the disappearance of popular beliefs and prevalent customs from the countryside (I, p. 13). Early in the 1920s he therefore embarked on a research trip, in order to collect data on Persian folklore. His informants were almost exclusively Muslims; Zoroastrians, Armenians, and Jews were deliberately excluded (I, p. 16). It is ironic that, despite his concern for the rural tradition that was supposedly endangered by the encroachment of rapid urban change, he finished by compiling one of the best existing collections of the urban folklore of Persia, from Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, and other cities. Indeed, he admitted that the rural folklore of Persia, the original focus of his project, is the weakest part of his work (I, p. 15).

A group of native Persians, including such important scholars as [Moḥammad-Taqī Malek-al-Šo‘arā’ Bahār](#), [‘Alī-Akbar Dehḵodā](#), Sa‘īd Nafīsī, and Šādeq Hedāyat, were among those who helped Massé with his research. In addition, he obtained information from a group of Persian women, whom he acknowledged in general terms but did not name, in deference to the social attitudes prevailing in Persia in the 1920s. The classification and arrangement of the



data are in accordance with the system established by Arnold van Gennep.

The work was published under the title *Croyances et coutumes persanes suivies de contes et chansons populaires* (Les littératures populaires de toutes les nations, N.S. 4, Paris, 1938), in two volumes of nine chapters each, comprising a total of 539 pages; a bibliography is included (I, pp. 19-29). The chapters in volume I treat pregnancy, childbirth, and childhood; marriage; death and funeral rites; periodic ceremonies; folk meteorology; animals; plants; water; and divination. The chapters in volume II, which are numbered continuously with those in volume I, treat signs and omens; magical procedures; folk medicine; supernatural beings; buildings and monuments; legends pertaining to aspects of nature; games; folktales; and folk poetry or folk songs.

In chapter 17, on folktales, Massé translated (with some omissions) the texts of thirteen of the fourteen tales contained in Ḥosayn Kūhī Kermānī's important collection of rural folktales, published three years earlier. It should be noted that in the 1333 Š./1954 edition of Kūhī Kermānī's work the number of tales had been increased to fifteen (Radhayrapetian, p. 150). Tale number 10 in Kūhī Kermānī's original collection, which Massé did not include in his chapter, is actually a legend, which he summarized in chapter 14, in a section dealing with castles and demons or angels (II, p. 377). In the chapter devoted to folk poetry, or folk songs, Massé included a translation of Hedāyat's important work *Owsāna*.

Massé's book is one of the most valuable pieces of Western scholarship on the general subject of Persian folklore. Unlike other, comparable volumes (e.g., Lorimer; Elwell-Sutton; Christensen), it is not merely a collection of folktales but addresses itself to a general discussion of Persian folklore. *Croyances et coutumes persanes* was translated into English, under the title *Persian Beliefs and Customs*, by C. A. Messner (Human Relations Area Files 7, New Haven, Conn., 1954); this translation includes a detailed analytical index (pp. v-xi), absent in the French original. Massé's introduction was translated into Persian by Raḥīm Baḡdādī ("Aqā'ed wa sonan-e Īrānīān-e qadīm be enzemām-e dāstānhā wa tarānahā-ye 'āmīāna," *Waḥīd* 3/8, 1346 Š./1967, pp. 689-94).



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- (Mahmoud Omidsalar)