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## Oral Literature Documented to Preserve Jordan's National Heritage in Jerash

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### Abstract

The goal of this research is to look into how well documented oral literature is in Jerash province, Jordan. Bridging worlds posed two major questions: what traditions, narratives, and family activities reflect cultural values and historical changes across generations in Jerash, and how rituals and material practices in families might indicate the dynamic interaction between cultural continuity and change. A personal interview was intended to be administered to a representative sample of elders in Jerash city, with the population of concern (PoC) representing the 50+ age range (=16.8%). Given the enormity of the undertaking, a significantly smaller sample of PoC—mostly dwelling in both urban and semi-rural areas—was chosen (N. 73). Based on the two questions, the interview consisted of ten inquiries. The oral literature of Jerash was discovered to be in need of documentation and efficient classification; there were too many stories to tell and write down. The study aims to improve understanding of Jordanian oral literature in small places such as Jerash, emphasizing its importance in preserving cultural legacy against societal change. The Ministry of Tourism and the Antiquity Sites in Jerash city could be collaborated with for fruitful partnerships to promote Jordanian culture.

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### 1. Introduction

Oral literature, or orature, is a form of literature that is spoken or sung rather than written, even though many instances of oral literature have been recorded. Hence, it is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of a nation. The concept of 'folklore' refers to a common understanding. It also discusses the visual qualities present in popular culture pieces. Anthropologists have given various explanations for oral literature or folk literature, thus there is no universally accepted definition (Eugenio, 2007) <sup>[6]</sup>. A broad description characterizes it as literary work passed down orally and lacking a defined format. It includes stories, legends, and historical events passed down verbally through generations. Oral literature often plays a central role in culture, operating in ways that are commonly associated with literature. Auger (2010) <sup>[2]</sup> points out that it remains widespread in both academic and popular writing (Hawamdeh, Mansour, Rabea & Banat, 2024).

Scholars encounter difficulties in classifying the different genres of oral literature because of the cultural shifts in the contemporary digital era. Knowledgeable societies may uphold an oral tradition - especially within familial or casual social gatherings such as bedtime tales (Kipchumba, 2016) <sup>[8]</sup>. Orature, or oral literature, is knowledge passed down through oral communication, thriving in lively communities because of its reliance on spoken language. In point of fact, when communal elements decrease, verbal communication becomes outdated and disappears. Individuals need to be present in a constantly changing social setting; they need to exist in society (Roscoe, 1977, p. 9) <sup>[12]</sup>. This suggests that a society without its own written language is in need for devising methods for safeguarding oral communication, even if only for a limited time. We generally view all kinds of verbal artistic expressions as belonging to the collective classification of folklore.

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In Arabic, the phrase *al-Adab al-Darij* pertains to general knowledge that includes a broad understanding of traditional literature. This term, also known as *Tirath al-Sha'abi*, highlights the use of local language in these works. In a similar spirit, connecting different worlds aids in recording spoken stories to safeguard Jordan's cultural heritage in Jerash province; it is to celebrate and preserve Jordan's unique stories and customs through engaging, accessible platforms. Jerash province in Jordan is known for its wealth of oral stories that should be documented in writing. This concept pertains to the culture that contrasts with formal culture; it has a broad scope and reach. In literature, the term oral literature is significantly more effective. Arabic literature has been focused on using different forms of traditional poetry. Now, considering the issue, an effort was made to address the two key questions:

1. What traditions, narratives and family activities reflect the cultural values and historical changes across generations in Jerash city?
2. How could rituals and material practices in families reveal the dynamic interaction between culture continuity and change?

## 2. Related Literature

Oral literature, or orature, is a lively genre distinguished by its communication through spoken or sung performances instead of written forms. Although many parts of this valuable tradition have been documented, its true spirit is found in the dynamic exchange between storyteller and listeners. Oral literature plays a crucial role in culture, functioning similarly to written literature as stated by Damiana in 2015. This study concentrated on the restricted documentation and examination of the oral literature of Jerash Province. This project will try to bridge the gap by surveying oral literature genres in Jerash, analyzing how modernization affects traditional storytelling, and studying the importance of oral literature in safeguarding local history and identity (Abdul Muttalib, Hawamdeh, Al-Yousuf & Mansour, 2024). By expanding on the work of scholars such as Sulayman and El-Shamy, the current gaps in related research can be filled in to a big extent.

Bandia (2015)<sup>[4]</sup> investigated the relationship between orality and translation. The very act of speaking involves the translating of thought into audible words or speech. The survival of such thought can be made possible by oral transmission, recording or writing, which are all interfaces largely depending on an act of translation across language or media. Orality was found to continue to enjoy a growing interest as a concept underpinning research in many disciplines, including translation studies. It featured in pre-modernist traditions, modernist representations of the past, and postmodernist expressions of artistry such as audiovisual media. Its conceptualization could also vary according to certain goals or preoccupations of a particular discipline. In fact, historians and anthropologists conceptualized orality as the medium of expression and discourse of non-literate cultures, while colonialists and Christian missionaries explored orality as a means to understanding so-called

primitive or heathen societies for proselytism and civilization. As an aspect preserved in spoken form, oral literature was stressed by Nnyagu (2017)<sup>[9]</sup> to be highly valued mainly because of its own didactic nature. To some people, oral literature or orature is only but a mirage because what is not written down cannot, in any way, be regarded as literature. The researcher argued that this as an illusion and, thus, he made it vivid that anything written down was first conceived and probably rendered orally. He viewed oral literature as an indispensable aspect of literature. In this paper, various forms of oral literature were chronicled, stating their areas of overlap and difference as well as their various needs and uses. Both poetic and dramatic forms were performed in various occasions and the audiences were not only entertained, they also tended to forget their sorrows. Oral literature is believed to be very important and should be preserved rather than allowed to go into extinction.

Focusing upon the structural patterns of an oral form of literature, Gill (2017)<sup>[7]</sup> also stressed that oral literature is the verbal form that has preceded the written one and passed on from one person to another through the word of mouth. He argued that the younger generations could introduce variations in its patterns, content, forms and they might make a few additions and deletions. But unlike the written form of literature, all these changes were found to be anonymous, i.e. they did not belong to any one author. The study also examined the various folk stories, myths, legends, songs that had become very popular among the people and, with time, their importance had not faded. As a matter of fact, oral literature is the repository of artistic expression in society and is a channel to find balance, harmony and beauty in the world. The need to encapsulate the traditional knowledge, beliefs and values is to be emphasized.

From a social or societal perspective, Egwemi & Salifu (2021)<sup>[5]</sup> stressed that immoral behaviors like corruption and indiscipline are major obstacles of any nation's development. However, the fact that oral literature plays important roles in the pre-colonial Nigeria's society cannot be easily disputed. It has served as a viable tool for promoting social consciousness. The study intended to evaluate the potential of oral literature in controlling the avalanches of immoral and burning social issues such as corruption, cybercrime and kidnapping as confronting the development of the country. Therefore, it used a descriptive research methodology to examine the aforementioned issues. Oral literature was revealed to be used to address the contemporary Nigerian social problems. The study finally recommends that oral literature be given serious attention as one of the feasible approaches to enhance moral values among Nigerians for sustainable national development.

Likewise, Ohia (2024)<sup>[11]</sup> examined oral literature as a creative work of art that portends high merit, having the use of imagination in preliterate societies and adopting drama, prose and poetry orally, using performance as its hallmark. It thrives on the use of oral data and focuses on the moral values or oral literature in the society using Ogba as a spring board. The study's population consisted of ten towns in Ogba. The

framework used was Dell Hyme's ethno-poetics because the works of oral literature relate to the society, and oral literature was concluded to serve to against all odds; communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs and appreciation of life. The folktales in Ogba for instance, serve similar purposes through their rendition or performance. Through the stories, the younger generation in Ogba is familiarised with the customs, traditions, and rituals prevalent in the society.

Bakar (2024) <sup>[3]</sup> examined oral tradition as a heritage property and folk literature as preserved in today's society. This tradition needs to be implemented, especially when the world community is facing an era of globalization. The documentation of oral tradition is not an easy process due to constraints in collecting relevant materials. There are procedures that need to be implemented so that inherited oral traditions are not lost. It is well known that oral tradition is conveyed to the audience by oral speakers known as storytellers. There are versions of oral traditions to pass down from one generation to another for entertaining and indirectly educating. The study of folk literature does not only require the content of the material but also the form, language,

structure, or any other element. In due course, this study attempted to identify the documentation of oral tradition, and produce a report on the same.

### 3. Methodology

For the theoretical population, it was all the people in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, focusing on the elder generation. As Jerash city was the geographic territory of this study (=250,940), the population of concern (PoC) represented the age group of 50+ (=16.8%). As a huge task to carry out, a much lesser sample of the PoC—basically to reside in both urban and semi-rural areas—was chosen for the purpose of this study to be 73 people (see Table 1 for the frequencies and percentages of the chosen samples). (*See also Figure 1 for the respondents' demographic variables as stated in this study's research instrument.*) Chosen for such reasons as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time and/or easy accessibility, the personal sample was intended to prove a reliable representative of the whole PoC in the form of a convenience or opportunity sample.

**Table 1:** Frequency and percentage of the research sample

Variable	Options	N	%
Age	50-64	52	71.2
	65+	21	28.8
Gender	Male	47	64.4
	Female	26	35.6
Qualification	Educated	59	80.8
	Uneducated	14	19.2
Former/Current Job(s)	Civil	36	49.3
	Military	37	50.7
Social Group	Villagers	41	56.2
	Others	32	43.8
Know Heritage?	Yes	62	84.9
	No	11	10.1

The questionnaire for the present study was created using a simple structure that included four stages: planning, designing, validating, and piloting, as described by Churchill & Brown. Beforehand, the literature was first reviewed to pinpoint any worries, challenges, solutions, and problems regarding the documentation of oral literature to preserve the Jordanian national heritage in Jerash province for bridging worlds. Each specific inquiry in the present investigation led to five additional inquiries. It was decided that a self-administered personal interview would be utilized as the instrument for this research (see Figure 2 and Appendix 1). Demonstrating care for both the content and design and

obtaining the best response rates, the inquiries were organized in a fitting sequence:

1. A screening question is used to determine if respondents should proceed with the interview,
2. A simple question to pique respondents' interest in the survey-based research,
3. A medial question to persuade respondents to complete the interview appropriately,
4. A tough, demanding question to encourage people to react freely and reduce pressure, and
5. A final screening question to encourage respondents to complete the self-administered interview.



**Fig 1:** Main questions and inquiries in the instrument

In the validation stage, the research measurements were sent to three experts in the same field for validation. They assessed the questions and gave their opinion on the suitability of the items for addressing the documentation of oral literature to protect Jordanian national heritage in Jerash province to connect different worlds. Moreover, to validate the importance of researching the topic, a preliminary study was carried out by giving the same tool to individuals who resembled the selected sample but were not part of it. In the end, Excel was employed for analyzing the data sets, while SPSS was used as needed. Visualizations were also generated to depict a brief overview of the examined data tables for showing such statistical measures as frequencies and percentages for the subject responses, graphs for providing visual representations of the information obtained in the form of pie and bar ones, and figures for reflecting the perceptions of the given reality and revealing the characteristics of the impact.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Traditions, Narratives, and Family Activities

*What traditions, narratives and family activities reflect cultural values and historical changes across generations in Jerash city?*

Jordanian culture is based on Arabic and Islamic components. Jordan is located at the junction of the ancient world's three continents, which gives it geographic and population variety. Notable characteristics of Jordanian culture include traditional music and attire, as well as an interest in sports. Jordan is largely an Islamic country, therefore one can learn about its ideals through direct connection with its people. Dealing with the *first* inquiry as stated in this study's research instrument regarding the societal and/or historical background(s) the Jordanian family names have come from, the most popular surnames in this Middle-eastern country have Arabic origins, chiefly because of Jordan's historical and cultural influences (see also Table 2 for further

responses). Many of these surnames of Jordan are based on geographical areas, occupations, or even real names and,

according to most respondents, they reflect either a Bedouin heritage or any linkage to specific tribes.

**Table 2:** Inquiries raised on Jordan's traditions and family activities

Sr.	Inquiry	Basic Response	Further Note(s)
2	What were your parents and grandparents doing, and what were they used to wear, and how did they use to treat others?	When it comes to attire, Jordan is more laid-back than its neighbors. Nevertheless, compared with many Western nations, the clothing regulations in this nation	...are still seen as stringent. Since the majority of the population is Muslim, it is essential to adhere to the local dress code.
3	Does your family or your area have any special quotes or expressions that only they have been using?	In Jordan, you will instantly come across as more personable and amiable if you try a simple Arabic phrase. Residents will make you	...feel much more welcome than they did when they notice that you have made an effort to learn the local language.
4	What are the traditions and rituals for marriage and engagement (songs, expressions, words and clothes)?	In Jordan, marriages can only be performed between Muslims and Christians. Muslim men are allowed to wed non-Muslim women	...while Muslim women are not allowed to wed non-Muslim men. For Muslim men, polygamy is acceptable.

The fifth item to inquire about in the study was about the celebrations in Jerash city. Exploring the vibrant cultural scene of Jordan, the residents of Jerash observe numerous holidays and festivals that highlight their customs and heritage. They take place year-round and encompass a variety of events, from religious observances (e.g. Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Mawlid al-Nabi or Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, Laylat al-Qadr or Night of Decree, and Isra and Mi'raj) to festive gatherings (e.g. Eid al-Istiqlal or the Independence Day, Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts), while consistently emphasizing Jordanian culture. In Jordan, Christians also observe public holidays on December 26th, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday, with Easter celebrated by all denominations following the Orthodox calendar. In Jordan, holidays and festivals tend to be adaptable. It is typical for the government to move the date of a holiday to another day—usually to extend the weekend.

#### 4.2. Rituals and Material Practices in Families

*How could rituals and material practices in families reveal*

*the dynamic interaction between culture continuity and change?*

From religious festivals to historical rituals, there are numerous Jordanian traditions to uncover. Jordanian traditions distinguish this Middle-eastern country, and they are one of the primary reasons why visitors cannot wait to return. To get the most authentic Jordanian experience, tourists should be informed of the country's varied traditions. As the *first* inquiry raised in the research instrument concerns some of a respondent's own childhood memories (e.g. games, special songs, crafts, things to remember), several things were told. The most common response was that Jerash is home to some of the best glassblowers who continue to produce amazing glass pieces in regionally distinctive designs (see also Table 3 for further responses). Crafts like ceramics, jewelry, embroidery, carpets, and traditional costumes were also emphasized. The respondents also focused on the stories of family, honor, love, and death as frequently told in their popular songs.

**Table 3:** Inquiries raised on the Jordanian family rituals and practices

Sr.	Inquiry	Basic Response	Further Note(s)
2	What is the traditional food and drink or any traditional meal(s) in your geographic area in the past?	The majority of Jordan's eateries are modest. There are some great eateries, but you have to look for them. From straightforward bowls of hummus or labneh	...to more complex mini-mains of fried chicken liver or wings, good Arabic restaurants may offer thirty different options for mezze.
3	Did you have any laws or regulations for solving problems and/or disputes between people?	The established principles and regulations that existed before Islam was formed are reflected in the systems of Bedouin customary law. It is especially crucial to	...comprehend Bedouin customary law since it coexists alongside the state legal system to regulate the majority of Bedouin disputes.
4	Have there been any periodic meetings between families or tribes or one geographic region?	For the 'Ashira', the historic institution of the guest house serves as a symbol of integration for fostering political identification,	Madafa had a significant impact on Jordanians' social, political, and economic lives.

The final question posed in the instrument pertained to the historical occurrences impacting the families and the entire community in Jordan broadly and Jerash city specifically (including any passionate themes or songs, etc.). Over the last 40 years, Jordan has faced significant challenges (including corruption, insufficient government services, worsening living conditions, poverty and unemployment) that have imposed a heavy socio-economic burden, particularly on middle- and lower-class citizens, who make up the majority of the population. In reality, grievances have been increasing regarding Jordan's socio-economic and political issues, such as elevated public debt, a considerable current account

deficit, a large influx of refugees caused by various regional crises and a difficult environment to conduct trade and attract foreign investments. Enhancing the present conditions could not only create motivations for formalizing enterprises but also serve as a driver for economic development in Jordan.

#### 5. Conclusions

This project aims at protecting a crucial part of Jordanian national heritage to highlight its lasting significance in comprehending Jerash's complex cultural identity. It sought to create important links between the knowledge, beliefs, and creative works in Jerash's spoken stories and modern viewers,

promoting a feeling of cultural unity and respect. This level of accessibility is crucial for preserving cultural heritage, since it enables upcoming generations, in Jordan and worldwide, to value and acquire knowledge from the wisdom, humor, and traditions included in these linguistic treasures. In this vein, this study aims to document Jerash's oral literature, preserving, analyzing, and connecting it to modern audiences, with a durable repository of these customs. Through rigorous analysis of the collected narratives, songs, and poems, the project unravels their layers of meaning, symbolism, and cultural values for the good of the future generations. The following points are stressed:

1. Surnames in Jordan help highlight the social organization within the Jordanian society (e.g. Jerash city).
2. Bedouin customary law has many faces and dimensions (e.g. bloodshed incidents and women-related issues).
3. The term 'madafa' refers to an institution to carry the core of values, and the place where they are put in action, building on a democratic principle.
4. Proverbs are special metaphoric expressions that highly need special strategies and techniques in translation.
5. Lexically, words that have multiple meanings present

countless challenges and difficulties to online translation.

This project seeks to enhance the comprehension of Jordanian oral literature in small cities like Jerash, highlighting its role in safeguarding cultural heritage amidst societal shifts. The concept of 'oral literature' highlights the close relationship between spoken and written language, showcasing artistic uses of human communication. Nevertheless, oral traditions contain aspects that go beyond language, like gestures, dance, and the dynamic between the storyteller and the listeners (Nwi-Akeeri, 2017). Recording or gathering the verbal folklore of a small city like Jerash in Jordan necessitates both patience and meticulous effort. Similarly, the rapid advancement and changes in either science or technology are predicted to help uphold the oral tradition (or folklore) without altering its special status and distinctiveness. As a promising idea, a partnership could be made with relevant authorities for creating meaningful opportunities to showcase Jordan's rich oral history and foster a deeper appreciation of its traditions among local and international audiences in the future.

Appendix

**Jerash University**

A Personal Interview to Apply to Citizens Residing in Jerash Province, Jordan, for the Purpose(s) of a Research Project Titled as:

**"Oral Literature Documented to Preserve Jordan's National Heritage in Jerash"**

توثيق الأدب الشفوي لغرض المحافظة على التراث الوطني الأردني في منطقة جرش

Age: ..... العمر:

Gender: ..... النوع:

Qualification: ..... المؤهل العلمي:

Former/Current Job(s): ..... العمل السابق/العال:

Social Group: ..... الطيف الإجتماعي:

Know What Heritage is? هو التراث الوطني? Please circle: 1 2 3 4 5

August, 2024

**Category 1:**

*How do traditions, narratives and family activities reflect cultural values and historical changes across generations?*

كيف تعكس التقاليد والشخص والممارسات العائلية وتنقل القيم الثقافية والتغيرات التاريخية عبر الأجيال؟

**Topic 1(a):**

From which background does your family's name come from and what is its origin and its history?	إلى أي خلفية يرجع اسم عائلتك وهل هناك قصص عن تاريخها أو أصولها؟
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**Topic 1(b):**

What were your parents and grandparents doing? What were they used to wear, and how did they use to treat others?	ماذا كان والدك وأجدادك يعملون وماذا كانوا يرتدون وكيف يتعاملون؟
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<b>Topic 1(c):</b>	
Does your family or your area have any special quotes or expressions that only they have been using?	هل لدى عائلتك أو منطقتك أي أقوال أو عبارات خاصة أو أمثال مشهورة؟
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<b>Topic 1(d):</b>	
What are the traditions and rituals for marriage and engagement (songs, expressions, words and clothes)?	ما تقاليد الخطوبة والزوج (أغان وأمثال ومصطلحات أو كلمات ولباس خاص؟)
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<b>Topic 1(e):</b>	
How did they use to celebrate holidays (what were the holidays, clothes, rituals, songs and food)?	كيف كنتم تحتفلون بالأعياد (ما هي الأعياد والملابس والعادات والأغاني والأطعمة؟)
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<b>الفئة الأولى: إنتهى</b>	

<b>Category 2:</b>	
<b>How do rituals and material practices in families reveal the dynamic interaction between culture continuity and change?</b>	
<b>كيف تكشف الروايات والحفوس والممارسات المادية عن التفاعل الديناميكي بين الاستمرارية الثقافية والتغيير؟</b>	
<b>Topic 2(a):</b>	
What are some of your own childhood memories (e.g. games, special songs and crafts)?	ما هي بعض ذكريات طفولتك (الالعاب مثلا وأغان خاصة وأعمال حرفية؟)
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<b>Topic 2(b):</b>	
What is the traditional food and drink or any traditional meal(s) in your geographic area in the past?	ما هو الطعام والشراب أو الوجبة التقليدية الخاصة بمنطقتكم فيما مضى؟
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

<b>Topic 2(c):</b>	
Did you have any laws or regulations for solving problems and/or disputes between people?	هل كان لديكم قانون أو نظام لحل القضايا والتراعات بين الناس؟
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<b>Topic 2(d):</b>	
Have there been any periodic meetings between families or tribes or one geographic region?	هل كان هناك لقاءات دورية بين العوائل أو العشيرة الواحدة أو المنطقة الواحدة؟
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<b>Topic 2(e):</b>	
How did the historical events affect your family and your community (enthusiastic songs and such like)?	كيف أثرت الأحداث التاريخية على عائلتك ومجتمعك (أغان حماسية أو أمثال؟)
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<b>الفئة الثانية: إنتهى</b>	

If any additional notes, comments or inquiries, please tell them!

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Kind regards,

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