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COLLECTANEA

FOLKLORE AND FAIRY-TALE MOTIFS IN EARLY ARABIC LITERATURE *

FROM the abundance of unused and more or less undiscussed material surviving in the commentaries of the Arabic philologists to their collections of ancient Arabic poetry this paper proposes to discuss one subject which so far has not yet been investigated systematically. It is the field of Arabic Folklore and Fairy-tale motifs. The Arabian antiquaries in their explanations to verses which they thought might prove difficult to the ordinary hearer or reader have preserved material which otherwise might have been lost. In accordance with their general style such folkloristic motifs are woven into the narrative and have to be detached from the context in which they stand. Thus, for instance, the commentary to the *Naqâ'id* of Jarîr and al-Ferazdaq,[1] although its bulk is concerned mainly with the history of the *aiyâm al-'arab*,[2] offers a number of such motifs, some of which will form the subject of this paper. Thus, too, the *Kitâb al-Aghânî*[3] and the *Amthâl al-'arab*[4] yield many a

* Paper read at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, at New York, N.Y., April 26-28, 1940.

[1] *The Naqâ'iḍ of Jarîr and al-Farazdaq*, ed. by A. A. Bevan, Leiden, 1905-12, 3 vols.

[2] This expression, literally "days of the Arabs," denotes the raids and battles between the Arabic tribes in the period before the rise of Islâm.

[3] This work, by Abu-l-Faraj al-Iṣfahânî (died A.D. 967), is mainly devoted to the biographies of Arabic poets of pre-Islamic and Islamic times; it is, in addition, one of the most important sources regarding Arabic cultural life.

[4] Arabian proverbs, collected by al-Maidânî and al-Mufaḍḍal aḍ-Ḍabbî. A Latin translation of the former's collection was made by G. Freytag, *Arabum Proverbia*, Bonn, 1838-43, 4 vols.

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fairy-tale motif, and it would be desirable if a systematic search and registration could be undertaken. The stories of the Arabian Nights, too, as is obvious, contain numerous motifs of that kind; but I wish to leave them aside here, for *alf laila wa-laila* have been studied at various times and their relationships to other than Arabic literary culture have been investigated and established.[5]

Many of the fairy-tale motifs found in the commentary to the *Naqâ'id* are an intrinsic part of the *aiyâm* narrative. As such some of them have been discussed by Werner Caskel in his very interesting essay on the 'Aiyâm al-'Arab, Studien zur Altarabischen Epik.'[6] Within the framework of his article these traits are merely treated as characteristic of the technique of the *aiyâm* style; but they are representative, in the Arabic cultural cycle, of motifs which may be found in many other cultures, too. To mention a few of the motifs Caskel discussed in his essay: He speaks of the warning the tribe receives of the approaching enemy by dreams; he draws attention to the use of "langage figuré," that is, information sent by means of symbols which have to be interpreted by the receiver of the message who alone is able to understand their meaning; Caskel also makes mention of the miraculous circumstances which accompanied the birth of the hero of an *aiyâm*-tale.[7] These

[5] Cf. Enno Littmann's translation, Leipzig, (Inselverlag), 1921-28, and his essay "Zur Entstehung und Geschichte von Tausendundeiner Nacht" in the sixth volume. A bibliography of works dealing with *Alf laila wa-laila* was prepared by V. Chauvin in *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes*, Liège, 1900-1903, vols, 4-7. On the sources for the tales of the Arabian nights cf. also J. Horovitz, "The origins of the 'Arabian Nights'," in *Islamic Culture*, vol. i, Hyderabad, 1927. For another study on the parallels to Arabic fairy-tale motifs cf. Oskar Rescher, "Zum islamischen Folklore," pp. 382-7, and "Ueber Scharfsinnsproben und verwandte Motive im orientalischen Folklore," pp. 389-95, in *Der Islam*, vol. xiv, Berlin-Leipsic, 1925. Another Bibliography, of studies on fairy-tales, may be found in Georg Jacob, *Märchen und Traum*, Hannover, 1923.

[6] In *Islamica*, vol. iii, supplement, pp. 1 ss., Leipsic, 1931.

[7] Cf. Caskel, *loc. cit.*, p. 26. In *Ḥamâsa*, p. 4, lines 14 ss., the story is told of a girl who was saved from being buried alive by her father.

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motifs, however, have been developed by the narrator in order to adorn the *aiyâm* narrative; they belong to the "common style" of the *aiyâm al-'arab*; they are, in this connection, a literary form rather than genuine folktale.

We find, however, in the commentary to the *Naqâ'id* several self-contained romances and narratives which are not an intrinsic part of the *aiyâm*-story but are told only as an explanation of an otherwise unintelligible or half-forgotten reference in the verse of the *Naqâ'id* text. In such narratives we can discover details which are features common to fairy-tales throughout the world in one form or another. There is first of all the "humourous" tale of the Arabian simpleton [8]: Mu'riḍ was known as stupid—thus runs the story—and many stories were told about his stupidity. Once his brothers when starting for a raid left him behind charging him with the care of their womenfolk and children. Hardly had they left the camp when he herded all the women and children together, threw them into a large and deep pit and put a flat stone as a cover upon it. Then he joined his brothers. When they learned what he had done they hastened back in order to save the unhappy women and children, arriving only in the nick of time, for some of them had already died, others were exhausted and starving. Another time Mu'riḍ was ordered to graze the milk camels of his family. Instead of leading them to good pasture where they could find plenty of food he led them into sandy desert where there was no vegetation. After some time he quenched his thirst with their milk, and then wanted to sleep. In order not to lose the camels he tied them to an acacia-tree with strong roots. When he awoke the she-camels and their young fills were strangled. The last and worst of his exploits ended in bloodshed. He fell in love with a girl and asked her brother for her hand, but was refused. He then sought out the youth while he was away from the camp, killed him, and buried him on a hill under stones.

Later she was taken in marriage by a man who wanted to have as his wife an outstanding woman who alone would suit him. For parallels, cf. Antti Aarne, FF. Communic. 25, p. 61, No. 930-34, "Schicksalsmärchen."

[8] *Naqâ'iḍ*, pp. 489 ss.

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But whenever he met some one near the place of his crime he said to him : " Do you see blood on these stones? " This roused the suspicion of the murdered youth's relatives and after searching there they found his body. His mother thrust a lance at Mu'riḍ but failed to kill him. His stupidity became a by-word.

Stories of simpletons are widespread in fairy-tale literature. Mostly, however, their stupidity is mixed with shrewdness, if not wisdom, and very often brings good luck to the fool who even may gain great fame and also sometimes the favour of the king and the hand of his daughter.[9] There is the well-known cycle of the simpleton Till Eulenspiegel,[10] whose tomfoolery is not only harmless but even lovable, and often arises from taking orders literally. He usually has the laughers on his side and never does any one any real harm. In the first two of the Arabic fool's acts there is a faint echo of the characteristic feature of these stories, that of carrying out the letter of an order, not its spirit ; but all the three stories have an inherent cruelty usually missing in tales of that kind in other circles, and they are entirely lacking in the good-humouredness of their counterparts. We are also reminded of the foolish deeds of the citizens of the fools' city Schilda,[11] but again these stories are full of good humour and harmless stupidity.

The second of our stories comes from the Banû Tamîm-cycle. Five tribes of the B. Mâlik b. Ḥanẓala (or the B. Ḥanẓala b. Mâlik as others say) were united in a tribal league called the

[9] Cf. *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, Neu bearbeitet von J. Bolte und G. Polívka, Leipsic, 1913-18, 3 vols., vol. i, pp. 311 ss., No. 32, pp. 485 ss., No. 54a ; vol. ii, pp. 440 ss., No. 104 ; cf. also vol. i, pp. 335 ss., No. 34.

[10] Is said to have died in 1350 in Mölln in Holstein (Germany), where his tomb is still shown. A High-German edition of his exploits appeared in 1515 in Strasbourg, and they have been told and re-told ever since, see e.g., Simrock's *Ein kurzweilig Lesen von Till Eulenspiegel, nach den ältesten Quellen*, Frankfurt a.M., 1878. Cf. also Charles De Coster, *La Légende de Till Uylenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak*, 1867. For parallels, cf. Antti Aarne, *Verzeichnis d. Märchentypen*, FF. Comm. 3, pp. 46 ss., Nos. 1200-1330.

[11] See " Die Schildbürger," in Simrock's Volksbücherei.

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Barâjim, i.e. the fingerlinks. The following story refers to them: [12] Ḍâbi' a man of the Barâjim borrowed a dog from a man of the B. Nahshal b. Dârim, with which he used to hunt gazelles, wild cows, and hyenas. After some time they envied him his dog (or, as the text of the version in Ibn Qutaiba's *Shi'r wa-shu'arâ'* has it: they wanted to have their dog back) and they came to Ḍâbi' in order to get it. Ḍâbi', however, had told his wife; Prepare a meal for them, mixing the meat of gazelles, wild cows, and hyenas. If they can tell the one from the other, eating the one and leaving the other aside, they will leave *your* dog with you *tarakū kalbaki laki*, if they will eat everything without discrimination they will take away their dog. They ate everything and took their dog with them. Ḍâbi' composed a sharp satirical poem against them in which he derided their mother which caused them to appeal for help to 'Uthmân b. 'Affân. He sent for Ḍâbi' and said to him: You are the most wicked of all Arabs, and if the Prophet were alive, Allâh would send down a Qur'ân verse about you.

In this story there seem to be two fairy-tale motifs. The one is concerned with the test of discrimination which is a very common feature in fairy-tales. It also occurs frequently in Arabic tales, as Caskel has shown in his essay.[13] Attention must also be paid to the fact that the meat of the hyena is not commonly eaten by the Arabs.[14] The other is still more interesting. Why is it that *meat* was used for that test? I suppose that this tale belongs to the group represented by the German fairy-tale

[12] *Naqâ'iḍ*, pp. 219, lines 8 ss., where also the parallel versions are listed.

[13] Caskel, *loc. cit.*, pp. 31 ss.; sell also Rescher, *loc. cit.* [Eating as a test of discrimination: M. Gaster, *Exempla of the Rabbis*, No. 257—T.H.G.]

[14] G. Jacob, in his *Altarabisches Beduinenleben*, Berlin, 1897, does not list the meat of the hyena among the food mentioned in ancient Arabic poetry. The fact that the Rwala Bedouins think the meat of the young hyena "appetizing," may be the exception rather than the rule, cp. A. Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, New York, 1928, p. 20; see also Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, London, 1926, vol. i, p. 327.

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of the "*Machandelbaum*"[15]: The little sister is killed by her mother, cooked, without his knowing it, by her brother, and eaten by her father. The bones are buried under the *Machandeltree*. The dead girl is then changed into a bird which is sitting on the tree telling the story. Another group related to this one is that of the singing bone[16] which tells the story of a murder. That there must be some tale-telling connected with the Arabic story seems to be evident from one of the verses of the satire (verse 6)[17]: "You are a dog trained for hunting of what you see; you can hear, you can find out *what is hidden underneath the carpet*." I think it possible that our story represents a weakened stratum of a tale like that of the "Machandeltree" or the "singing bone" group.[18]

The old theme of frustrated love, of the man who served for his beloved girl and is deceived by her father, is also represented in ancient Arabic literature. Abu-l-Bilâd[19] was too poor to pay the dowry to Salmà's father; therefore he offered him to serve for her by herding his camels. This offer was accepted; but when, after some time, Abu-l-Bilâd came to ask for his reward, he learned that her father had given her in marriage to another man. Unlike the Biblical counterpart, where there is a happy end to the story, this Arabic lover killed his beloved and then wandered about in the country finding no rest anywhere. In this feature we can detect another similarity to a Biblical tale although in a definite Arabic garb.

A very interesting story is told by Ibn Ḥabîb in his *kitâb*

[15] See *Anm. zu d. Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. i, pp. 412 ss., No. 47. Cf. also Antti Aarne, FF. Commun. 25, Hanina, 1918, p. 45, No. 720, p. 49, No. 780.

[16] *Ibidem*, vol. i, pp. 260 ss., No. 28. [17] *Naqâ'iḍ*, p. 220, line 2.

[18] Mr. Th. H. Gaster kindly draws my attention to the following story from Ceylon: "A jealous and morose husband, doubting the fidelity of his wife, killed her infant son and had him cooked, and on her return from an absence, set him before her. She unwittingly partook of the dish but soon discovered that it was the body of her child, by a finger which she found therein. In a frenzy, she fled to the forest, and was transported into a *ulania*, or devil-bird, whose appalling shrieks represent the agonized cries of the bereaved mother." (*Folk-Lore*, 1887, 352-3.)

[19] *Naqâ'iḍ*, pp. 434 ss.

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al-Muḥabbar,[20] in his chapter on the ruthless men of Islamic times. Qurrân b. Yassâr al-Faq'asî after having committed several criminal acts was forced to flee into the mountains and to live there, nourishing himself with the game he killed and drinking the water of the rivers. One day he met a panther. Qurrân drew his sword to kill it; the panther showed his teeth and fled. But when Qurrân withdrew, the panther followed him. Thus the game was repeated until Qurrân understood that the animal wanted him to follow it. He did so and was led to a place where he found a gazelle which the panther had only half-killed. Qurrân killed it, cooked its meat, and gave some of it to the panther, helping himself to the rest. From that day on Qurrân and the panther remained together, hunting together and sharing their spoil with each other. I think I hardly need to mention the names of Androkles and the Lion—this legend will have occurred instantaneously to each of you. Only, in this tale, instead of the meek and gentle Greek-Christian slave we have before us an Arabic brigand, almost an outlaw, fitting into the setting of the ungentle world of the Arabs.

The association of man and animal, again, is a frequent fairy-tale motif. Usually the animal seeks human companionship[21] because it is an enchanted human being who can be redeemed only by human kindness and love. No trace of this idea is found in the Arabic legend, however. When we compare the character of these Arabic stories of a fairy-tale character with Indo-European fairy-tales, we are struck by the comparative ungentleness and cruelty of the former. Their composition, too, does not show that oneness which we find in European fairy-tales—mixed with genuine fairy-tale motifs are features of *aiyâm* character, or of other Arabic literary types.

Yet another fairy-tale motif which so far seems to have escaped notice may be found in Arabic Literature. In an emergency, or

[20] British Museum, Oriental MS. 2807, fol. $78b_{15}$-$79a_{9}$.

[21] *Anm. zu d. Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. i, pp. 1 ss., No. 1; pp. 75 ss., No. 11; vol. iii, pp. 259 s., No. 161. See also M. Gaster, *Ma'aseh Book*, Philadelphia, 1934, vol. i, pp. 252 ss.: A bear protects a man who refuses to violate the Sabbath. Cf. also Antti Aarne, FF. Communication 25, Hanina 1918, pp. 26 ss.

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when the battle seemed to take an evil turn, an Arabic leader would offer the hand of his daughter to any one who would come to his rescue.[22] Whereas in the non-Arabic parallels the successful helper usually is of an inferior social class—he may be a tailor or a cobbler—the hero in the Arabic stories does not seem to be inferior to the girl's social standing.

In conclusion I should like to mention one more instance, drawn again from the *Naqâ'id* commentary, which, however, is not a fairy-tale, but represents old folklore. In a verse of al-Farazdaq against Jarîr a woman is mocked at because she had to milk the herds.[23] In explanation the commentary says that in the *Ǧâǧi-liya* (i.e. the time of Ignorance, before Islâm) women were not allowed to milk. The commentary quotes a proverb which is also found in Freytag's *Proverbia* [24]: "My little son is milking, but I am pressing his hands." [25] That means in reality she is the one who does the milking although she makes believe that the young man does it. The commentary explains that that is done to avoid shame, telling a story in support of that assertion. This rational explanation, however, does not appear satisfactory. What is behind this prohibition? Wellhausen in his *Die Ehe bei den alten Arabern* [26] says quite casually: "For women were not allowed to milk," without any further explanation. But I think the real reason for that strange taboo is to be sought in an ancient milk rite which was to be performed by men only. Indeed, Wellhausen in his *Reste altarabischen Heidentums* [27] speaks of such a rite in which young boys offered libations of

[22] *Naqâ'iḍ*, p. 674, line 6; Ibn al-Athîr, *al-Kâmil fi-t-Ta'rîkh*, ed. Tornberg, Leiden, 1851-76, vol. i, p. 400, lines 15 ss. Cf. *Anm. zu d. Kinder- und Hausm.*, vol. i, pp. 148 ss., No. 20. For the sociological implications of this offer cf. the author's *Women in the aiyâm al-'arba*, London, 1935, pp. 73 s.

[23] *Naqâ'iḍ*, p. 332, lines 8 ss.

[24] Vol. iii, p. 907, No. 20.

[25] *Yaḥlubu bunaiyya wa-ashuddu 'alâ yadaihi.*

[26] In *Göttinger Gelehrte Nachrichten*, 1893, p. 445.

[27] *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, 3. Heft, Berlin, 1887 (first edition), pp. 13 s. For milk as libation, cf. also Geldner, "Die Zoroastrische Religion," in Bertholet, *Religionsgeschichtliches Lesebuch*, i (2nd ed.), p. 24, note 144; see also *ibidem*, p. 27, notes 164 and 165.

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milk to the Idol Wadd. The custom that men have to do the milking seems to be of great antiquity. Thus on the frieze of the temple of al-'Ubaid [28] a milking scene is represented in which men are doing the milking while others are occupied with the preparation of butter.

I have chosen the stories here presented because they have not yet been discussed and because they are representative of many others which are more familiar. Such stories are, for instance, that of Imra' al-Qais's death from the poisoned shirt,[29] Ṭarafa's Urias-letter,[30] and the story of the king's daughter who is kept in an inaccessible castle and nevertheless manages to receive her lover.[31] For each of these tales we are able to find parallels in non-Arabic literature, and it is a task well worth undertaking to trace their sources and list the parallels to fairy-tale motifs in early Arabic literature.

I. LICHTENSTAEDTER

SOME FRESH LIGHT ON THE MIRACLE OF THE INSTANTANEOUS HARVEST

THE charming legend which goes by this name tells the following story: During the Flight into Egypt, the Holy Family passed by a field where a farmer was sowing his seed. The Virgin begged him to tell Herod's men, if they should come that way and ask whether he had seen them, that he did indeed notice them going by when he was sowing the field. The Family passed on, and the seed miraculously sprang up and ripened, so that when the pursuers came up shortly afterwards the farmer was already reaping the harvest. He was able to say quite truthfully just what he had been told to, and Herod's soldiers turned back again, since clearly it must have been many weeks ago that the fugitives went that way.

[28] Cf. Gadd, *History and Monuments of Ur*, London, 1929, pp. 56 s. and plate XV.

[29] See Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, London, 1907, p. 104.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 108.

[31] Perron, *Femmes Arabes avant et depuis l'Islamisme*, Paris, 1858, pp. 64 ss.

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