

EUROPEAN FOLKTALES. Edited by Laurits Bødker, Christina Hole, G. D'Aronco. Published for the Council of Europe. Rosenkilde and Bagger, Copenhagen, 1963, pp. xxiii + 223.

EUROPEAN FOLK BALLADS. Edited by Erich Seeman, Dag Strombach and Bergt R. Jonsson. Published for the Council of Europe. Rosenkilde and Bagger. Copenhagen, 1967, pp. xxxii + 248.

THESE are the first two volumes in a series dealing with different genres of European folklore sponsored by the Council of Europe through the agency of its Council for Cultural Cooperation. The third volume dealing with folk-drama will be edited by Prof. Schmidt, Director, Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde, Wien.

The volume on *European Folktales* is the result of collaboration between fil.lic. Laurits Bødker, director of the Nordisk Institut for Folke-digting, who provided texts from the non-Latin countries, wrote the introduction and the annotations, and prepared the Ms for the press, Miss Christina Hole, editor of *Folklore*, Oxford, who provided the material from England and was responsible for the stylistic revision of the whole volume before going to press, and Prof. Gianfranco D'Aronco, of the University of Padua, who collected the material from the Romance countries. A tentative type-list was originally sent to specialists in the various contributing countries, and after discussion the final selection of the texts and the supervision of the translations into English was also entrusted to them.

In his masterly introduction L. Bødker deals with the folktale as a literary genre which has been known in Europe for at least 2500 years. By reference to Homer and other 'classic' literature he shows how, even in those distant ages, there existed tales which, in spite of wars, boundaries and linguistic barriers, easily migrated from one country to another among the older civilisations around the Eastern Mediterranean. Certain common traits and motifs in the heritage of European folk-narrative are discussed, as well as the close connection between the Greek myths and European tales. The Christian legends about the lives of saints and holy men, which were subsequently coloured by oral tradition and shown as waging a successful war against the devil, and the other religious genre known as *exempla*, which were developed into a narrative art by migrant preachers in the 13th and 14th centuries, come in for their share of attention, together with the Italian *novella*, which represents the highest degree of literary perfection reached by the folktale. Though much progress has been achieved in the study of the folktale, especially as a result of the scholarly approach brought about by the Grimm brothers, (1812), L. Bødker concludes that the work has not yet thrown full light 'on the origin and the paths of diffusion of the various tales', and that

'the public interest in oral tradition has suffered an unmistakeable decline. The folktale as a fine art does not seem capable of surviving in modern civilisation ...'.

The annotations to each tale include the Aa.Th. tale-type number, the source (Ms., archive reference or published volume) from which the tale is taken, date of collection and the collector's and informant's names.

*European Folktales* contains a selection of 55 stories from 20 different countries. We read in the Preface that the editors had agreed that 'as far as possible such texts only were to be brought together as were hitherto unprinted, or at any rate only printed in more or less inaccessible publications'. At a conference held during the International Congress for Folk-tale Research in Kiel and Copenhagen in August, 1959, it had been agreed that the selection should be made mainly from member countries of the Council of Europe or countries having acceded to the European Cultural Convention. However, such grouping in terms of political nationality turns out to be rather irrelevant and misleading since political and linguistic-cultural borders so often do not coincide with each other. In the volume under review, in fact, this approach to the subject has cut across the cultural unity formed by the folktale and, as Stewart S. Sanderson points out in *Folklore* (1966, p.151), has resulted in some serious omissions, e.g. the vast Slavic areas of Europe. To this extent, therefore, the volume does not live up to the claim implied by its title, namely, to present this genre under the aspect of Europe as a cultural whole.

By this political criterion Malta was naturally excluded from the field of selection, as she only became a member country of the Council of Europe in April, 1965, following the attainment of independence in 1964. And yet, for centuries it had been known that by religion and culture Malta formed part of Europe. At least two of the editors presumably were aware of the existence of the 'more or less inaccessible publications' containing German translations of the Maltese material, for such publications<sup>1</sup> had been indicated in the present reviewer's paper on *The Study of Maltese Folktales* read at the Kiel Congress.

Dr.A. Cremona in his study *Le Relazioni Etnografiche del folklore narrativo e leggendario delle isole di Malta* ('Maltese Folklore Review', 1962-66) has drawn interesting parallels between the Maltese tales, mainly those collected by Fr.E. Magri (1899-1905)<sup>2</sup>, and those of other

<sup>1</sup> H. STUMME, *Maltesische Märchen, Gedichte und Rätsel in Deutscher Übersetzung* (Leipzig, 1904) and B. ILG, *Maltesische Märchen und Schwänke* (2 vols, Leipzig, 1906).

<sup>2</sup> The references to Fr. Magri's Maltese tales appearing in this paragraph follow the enumeration given in my study *A Linguistic Analysis of Fr. Magri's Folk-Tales* ('Journal of Maltese Studies', No. 1, 1961, pp. 82-94).

European countries, in particular Sicilian and Italian tales. The inclusion of some Maltese material in the volume under review would have demonstrated further how close the Maltese tales are to the main stream of European folk-narrative. A few examples will suffice to show the range of comparison. *The Silly Boy* (ATT 1696 + 1685), from Sweden, like the Turkish *Stories from Nasreddin Hodja* (ATT 1592B), recalls the stories of the Maltese *Ġaban* (Stumme Nos. 15-16, Ilg Nos. 91-97), especially the first Hodja anecdote about the borrowing of a cauldron, with which cf. No. 17 in my collection<sup>3</sup>. Also from Sweden *The Giant's Treasure* (ATT 328 + 1121) has various motifs in common with Magri's *A Girl destroys a Giantess* (No. XIV(xi)) and Ilg's *The Female Cannibal* (No. 42). The Norwegian story of *Strong Peter and his Men* (ATT 301B\*) finds an echo in the exploits of Peter 'Lagrimanti' (Son of Tears) in Magri's *The Eighth Son delivers the Sultan's Daughter from the Dragon* (No. XI) and Ilg's *The Dragon and the Strong Lad* (No. 23). The motif of the life-egg in the Icelandic *Story of Prince Hlini* (ATT 317A\*) forms a vital link in the Maltese plot of *Balmies* (Magri No. XIV) and of *Ġosolina* collected by the present reviewer (G.C.P. No. 9). From Denmark *King Wivern* (ATT 433 B) links up with the Maltese tale of *The Sun and the Moon* (Stumme No. 2, Ilg No. 9, G.C.P. No. 3) as well as with *The Vile Mother-in-Law* (ATT 707) from Greece. *The Dragon* from Spain (ATT 300), complete with the motif of the dragon-tongue proof, runs parallel with Magri's *The Water Monster* (No. X (i)) and Ilg's *The King's Daughter and the Dragon* (No. 16). In *The Three Oranges* (ATT 408), from Italy, we find a combination of the main type version in Magri's *The Seven Inhabited Citrons* (No. XIII) and Ilg's *The Seven Twisted Things* (No. 15), with the motif of Death instructing a poor man how to pose as a successful doctor in order to become rich, which occurs in my story *The Tale of Death* (G.C.P. No. 21). The Italian story *The Serpent Son* (ATT 425 F + 621) recurs as Ilg's *The Snake* (No. 46) while the Greek version of *Dame Cat: or the Wedding Patron* (ATT 545 B) appears as Stumme's *The Cat* (No. 3). Finally, the Turkish tale of *The Head Falconer* (ATT 513 A) immediately recalls the tasks set to the younger son at the instigation of his brothers in Magri's story *The Tree* (No. XV(xii)).

Passing on to the second volume, *European Folk Ballads*, we find that from the very beginning two of the editors, Prof. Strombach, of Uppsala, and Prof. Seeman, formerly Director of Deutsches Volksliedarchiv in Freiburg, agreed to adopt a different set of criteria in the selection of the texts. The ballads are presented in their original language, together with

<sup>3</sup> G. CASSAR PULLICINO (G.C.P.), *Stejjer ta' Niesna* (Stories of our People). Malta, 1967, pp. xii + 75.

a metrical translation into English and, departing from the principle of fixed political boundary followed in the volume of folktales, the editors were guided by the fact that 'since to a great extent European balladry forms a unity, it would not be treated with regard to political boundaries but had to be considered under the aspect of Europe as a cultural whole'.

In this anthology there are annotations at the beginning of each category of ballads, and, in respect of each ballad version or variant there are references to the source (archive or published volume), country of origin, language of text and a statement whether the text is accompanied with a melody or not. The music is printed as a separate section at the end of the book.

The introduction to this volume consists of a scholarly study by Professor Seeman, who died in May 1966 when the editorial work was almost finished. Highlights of this study are

(i) his division of Europe into seven ballad provinces i.e.

(a) Scandinavia, (b) Great Britain, The U.S.A. and Canada, (c) the German ballad province, (d) the Romance countries and regions (Roumania excepted), (e) the Balkan peninsula, (f) the West Slavonic region, Ukraine and White Russia, Lithuania, and (g) Greater Russia; and

(ii) his grouping of the folk ballads into categories, i.e.

(a) ballads of supernatural beings, (b) ballads of witchcraft and magic, (c) novellistic ballads, (d) religious ballads, and (e) ballads about animals. Professor Seeman also deals authoritatively with the form, the themes, the authors, the formations and the date of origin of the ballad as a genre.

Twenty six countries are represented in *European Folk Ballads* by 28 languages. Professor Strombach says in the Preface that Malta could not be represented 'as it proved impossible to find any original ballad texts'. Admittedly, the geographical distribution of the ballad in Europe is unequal and the occurrence of the genre south of Italy is not something that one could take for granted considering that, as Professor Seeman says, 'only modern intensive research has been able to show that the ballad in Italy is not wholly confined to the northern parts of the country where Germanic influence is apparent' (p. xiii). Nevertheless, some ballad development, however small or slow, there has been in Malta. The published material is indeed scanty, being limited to studies of only one ballad *The Maid of Mosta* – a theme with a historical background in Moorish sea-piracy providing, as it were, an unsuspected link in the chain of the development of the Slovenian ballad *Lepa Vida* mentioned in the introduction (p. xxxi).

First published by L. Bonelli in 1895, the Mosta ballad engaged the

attention of scholars in the 1930's, when E. Rossi's '*Scibilia Nobili' e la leggenda maltese della sposa della Mosta*' ('Lares', 1932) gave rise to A. Cremona's rejoinder *Is the Maid of Mosta a Myth?* (Malta, 1934), followed by R. Corso's *La Canzone della Sposa rapita dai pirati barbareschi* ('La Rivista d'Oriente', Napoli, 1935). Had the Maltese material been available to the editors, the Mosta composition could have been included under *The Rescued Maiden* – Ballad No. 10 in this volume. The Maltese story turns basically on the rescue of a girl from slavery, the main motif being that the ties of love are even stronger than those of parental kinship when it comes to making a money sacrifice.

Apart from this, however, there is little else that could have been known to the editors without their seeking the help of local scholars. Ballad composition, dating back at least to the 16th century, is still a living folk-art in Malta, and there has been a considerable output published in pamphlet form during the last century or so – all of it in Maltese and therefore largely inaccessible to foreign scholars.

These remarks of course do not – and are not intended to minimise in any way the excellence of the production of the two volumes, or their usefulness as anthologies of European folk-material which provide interesting reading both to the scholar and to the general reader.

It is hoped that, besides carrying on with the publication of such anthologies in the present series, the Council of Europe will also encourage the collection and editing of the folk-tales and ballads of lesser known countries that, in spite of their small size, might have some vital contribution to make to the comprehensive study of European folk-culture.

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