

Badr az-Zīn et six contes algériens rapportés par Aouda conteuse de L'Ouarsenis, édité par MICHELINE GALLEY. Paris, Armand Colin, 1971. pp. 287 (Classiques Africains, 11)

This is the eleventh volume in the collection 'African Classics' which, according to the publisher's information, has been created 'to give to oral and written African literature the recognition it merits'. Originally presented in 1969 as a doctoral thesis at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (Paris) – Sixieme Section, this work contains seven fairy tales collected by Mme Galley at Algiers in the course of a stay of about four years, from January 1963 to November, 1966. Her informant, Aouda, hailed from Oued Fodda, in the mountainous region of l'Ouarsenis, situated to the east of Algiers.

Dr. Galley, the editor of these Algerian tales, is well-known in University and other circles in Malta, having stayed here for varying periods since her first visit to the island in December, 1968. She has taken an active interest in Maltese folklore and contributed some studies on the subject in local and foreign journals, i.e. *L'Imnarja à Malte* (in 'Littérature Orale Arabo-Berbère – Quatrieme Bulletin de Liaison, 1970); *A Mediterranean Hero and Universality and Specificity of Folktales* (in 'Journal of Maltese Studies', No. 7, 1971.)

The publication under review should interest Maltese scholars, both because of the comparative material provided by the texts of the Algerian tales and because of Mme Galley's scientific approach to the work. One is struck by some of her conclusions and statements, which could be applied with equal truth to Maltese folk-tale studies. For example, on p. 13 (foot-note 2) we read that in the early Algerian collections either the subject-matter of the tales was tampered with for literary effect or for moral purposes, or else the text was reduced to a mere summary of the story. Mme Galley also mentions the decline in the art of Algerian storytelling (p. 14) and the initial reticence of her informant Aouda before she accepted to tell her repertoire of tales to preserve her people's cultural heritage (p. 15) – which brings back recollections of the present reviewer's own experience when he started to collect Maltese folklore material during the last War. The editor has also taken great pains to respect the texts in their original integrity (p. 16) and, in her translation, she has deliberately avoided being too literary and tried not to take too much liberty with the text (p. 19).

There is no doubt that the search for motifs peculiar to the Mediterranean tale or to an Islamic context (p. 21), coupled with useful notes enriched with comparative material aimed at identifying such specifically Mediterranean motifs, amply illustrate the advantage of the socio-cultural approach to the study of folk-tales. One looks forward to the day when the material yielded by the Maltese tales would be subjected to a similar process, based on the Aarne-Thompson classification as adapted for Sicilian and Turkish folk-tales, in order to obtain optimum results.

Regarding the use of set formulas to introduce the successive stages of the story (p. 18) one often comes across such a phrase as *jum fost l-oħrajn* in M. tales, corresponding to the Algerian equivalent of 'un jour parmi les jours'. The Maltese story-teller also employs, as part of his technique, the use of the final phrase of a sentence as the opening phrase of the succeeding sentence or paragraph (p. 18) – various examples may be found in my *Stejjer ta' Niesna* (1967).

As to the tales themselves, there are striking similarities – sometimes very close ones, too – between Algerian motifs and their Maltese counterparts. In the H.R. story, the disguise motif (pp. 79, 115) which Mme Galley rightly links up with Sicilian *Il Tignoso* and the Turkish *Keloghlan*, is matched by that of *Balmies* in one of Fr. Magri's tales. The quest for 'some lion's milk in a mosquito's skin' (p. 22) recalls the task set by the blind king to his three sons-in-law to get him a bottleful of milk from the beast *id-dajna* (cp. It. *daino*, Sic. *addaniu*, Prov. *daina*) in Fr. Magri's tale of *The Nether World*. In M.S. we see the tale developing on closely parallel lines with the Maltese story of the golden apple and the seven-headed serpent given by Magri and others, while (a) the egg-life (p. 125) and the pastureland (pp. 127-9) motifs appear in the tale *Ġosolina* (cf. my *Stejjer ta' Niesna*, pp. 22-24). The grateful bird motif, complete with the calf-morcel detail (pp. 139-141) figures in Magri's *The Nether World*, which also fits in neatly under type 301 Aa. Th, quoted in the Commentary on p. 50. In F.M. (pp. 155-157) we have the substitution of the daughter for the son in the basic motif of Magri's tale *The Old Man Shut up in the Cave*, where the old man advises his son how to fulfil the three almost impossible tasks set by the king. The basil episode (pp. 161-3), together with that of the honey-filled doll in the next tale R.S. (pp. 197-199) is the theme of a single tale in Malta as given by Bonelli in 1897 (in *Supplementi Periodici all'Archivio Glottologico Italiano*, Quarta Dispensa, Torino, p. 94) under the title *The Sultan's Son and the Baker's Daughter*. The witty exchange between the Prince and the girl as she is

watering the basil plant runs as follows:

- Prince: "Sliema għalik, ħakket il-kemmun"
(*Peace to you, cumin flower*)
- Girl: "Sliema għalik, sagra kuruna!"
(*Peace to you, sacred crown*)
- Prince: "Issaqqiha u tbaqqiha
U ma tafx kemm-il werqa fiha"
(*You water and sprinkle it*)
(*Yet you don't know how many leaves it has*)
- Girl: "Bin is-sultan Boqari,
Li taf taqra u tikteb,
Kemm-il kewkba fih
Is-Sema l-għali?"
(*O son of the king Boqari*
You can read and write,
How many stars are there
In the high heaven?)

In his *Saggi del Folklore dell'Isola di Malta* (1895) Bonelli gives a variant of this exchange, starting with the words *Angla Bella* and writes: '*La formoletta Angla Bella corre a solo, staccata dal noto motivo del reuzzo che motteggia la giovane inaffiante il vaso di basilico, e ne é motteggiato alla volta sua con allusioni spiritose; onde che nascono parecchi intercalari nel corso di una novellina molto graziosa. Questa formoletta si ripete anche a solo in Sicilia e partecipa al gruppo di formole simili prese da leggende e da fiabe dove si e dove no cadute in dimenticanza*' (p. 5). Further on (p. 10) Bonelli suggests that this rhyme forms part of the well-known story of 'Maïoranelle'. One must note, however, that the M. tale given by Bonelli incorporates the motif of the honey-filled image (doll) representing the bride in one and the same tale, so that here we have a fusion of the two groups of tale-types mentioned by Eberhard-Borataw and referred to by Mme Galley on p. 180.

One may add that the basil plant has a symbolic significance in Maltese tradition, i.e. (a) as a measuring rod of life itself in the concept represented by the saying *it-tfal bħall-ħabaq* 'children are like basil plants', i.e. one moment they are full of life and energy, and the next moment they are gravely ill and almost lifeless; (b) placed on the window-sills of Maltese homes, it used to announce that there was a marriage-

able girl in the house – cf. Mme Galley's reference (p. 177) to a related motif in Sermini's story; and (c) it is a symbol of love in the motif of the dead lover's head buried in a pot of basil – cf. the Boccaccio story – surviving in a quatrain studied by J.J. Cremona in "Lehen il-Malti" (Nos. 109-110, March-April, 1940).

In F.S. the *ghoula* (M. ghula) who sleeps with her eyes wide open and is awake when her eyes are closed (p. 213) is matched by a similar motif in Magri's tales *The Wise Woman's Son brings the Singing Bird*, *The Maltese Samson* and *The Seven Inhabited Citrons*. There are many other motifs one could mention – some of them may be easily identified, as far as animal motifs are concerned, by reference to the present reviewer's section 'Animal Motifs in Folk-Literature' in *Ethno-Linguistic Aspects of Animals in Malta* (offprint from 'Journal of Maltese Studies' No. 4, 1967).

It will be seen that a careful perusal of this work is not only a source of pleasure but a clear pointer to the wealth of comparative material that is to be found in the folklore of North Africa.

A French translation faces the original Arabic text, page for page, followed by richly documented annotations and comments on each tale. A section devoted to *Remarques dialectogiques*, a phonetic transcription of the tale *Rayons de soleil*, five pages of bibliography, a glossary, an index and a list of illustrations round off the scholarly apparatus provided for the benefit of the reader.

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