

THE DRESS OF STARS, OF SEA AND OF EARTH
(AT 510B) – AN ANALYSIS OF
THE MALTESE CINDERELLA MARCHEN
WITHIN THE
MEDITERRANEAN TRADITION AREA*

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510B. THE DRESS OF STARS, OF SEA AND OF EARTH

I. MOTIFS

1. Menial heroine as servant at prince's palace.
2. Prince attends ball and would not take her along.
3. She dances with him in beautiful dresses; he falls madly in love with her and gives her a beautiful ring.
4. On the fourth day prince is taken ill because of his love's disappearance.
5. Heroine is discovered through his ring which she bakes in prince's macaroons.
6. Prince marries heroine.

II. VERSIONS

(a) GUDJA and GOZO: Magri no. 8; (b) (VALLETTA): Stumme no. 13; (c) Ilg no. 1.

III. VARIANTS

Version (a) develops into Type 707, 'The Sun and the Moon'.

1. Heroine's nickname is 'Germuda' ('Sooty') (a¹), 'Germuda Żemuda' ('Wrinkled Sooty') (b) or 'Ċaqlemfusa' or 'Ċiklemfusa' (b, c) – she makes herself look smutted and ugly (a). She is an old man's youngest daughter (a), a scarecrow (b) or a tiny rotund girl living in a five-penny tiny pot (c).

*For a relevant introduction to the system adopted here, see Mifsud-Chircop, George, 'The Three Stolen Princesses (AT 301) – A Maltese Märchen,' *Journal of Maltese Studies*, No. 13, Malta, 1979, 67ff.

¹Similarly at Bormla and Żejtun: see Magri, E., S.J., *Hrejjef Missirijietna I Moghdija taz-Zmien* No. 15, p. 16.

The versions enjoy different introductory motif-complexes.

Father bequeathes to youngest of three daughters, a beauty, a chestnut, a nut and an almond to keep in safety till needed (a).

On sighting scarecrow on tree, prince out hunting, stuffs her in his pocket, and shows her to his mother; latter tells him to kick her down in the cellar, in spite of heroine's announcement she would one day marry a prince (b).

Destitute and tiny rotund girl goes to look for work as shoe-polisher at king's palace; prince allows her to reside in palace, entrusting her with the polishing of his shoes, washing plates and scrubbing floors (c).

2. Prince is a truly handsome young man (a). The three balls are held on consecutive days (a, b) or at spaced intervals and prince receives invitation to attend (c).

Mockery and derision at the hands of prince: while polishing his shoes (c) on the days ball is to be held (b), he teases heroine for her ugliness (b, c), dirt and size (c). Prince by himself (b, c) or mother and prince (a) attend(s) grandiose (a, c) balls and would not take heroine with him (a, b, c) because of her physical appearance (b, c).

Heroine's reaction: missing (a); apparently indifferent: 'I couldn't care less!' (M. 'Ma jimpoltanix!' [sic]) (b); nagging: prince losing patience throws a large loaf, a knife and a boot at her head (c).

3. Heroine possesses chestnut, walnut and almond (a), walnut, almond and hazelnut (b); heroine cracks two walnuts: one for first ball and another when whole truth comes to light; or walnut, chestnut, hazelnut and almond (c).

For first ball she cracks chestnut (a) or walnut (b, c) out of which sally forth midnight-blue starry dress (a, b), precious jewellery (a) and fine horse-driven carriage with driver (a) or carriage and four (b) or carriage and sea-coloured dress with fish and wave designs (c).

For second ball heroine cracks walnut (a), almond (b) or chestnut (c) out of which sally forth carriage and four (b) and sea-coloured dress designed with fish (a, b) or carriage and midnight-blue starry ball-dress with the sun and the moon as ornaments (c).

For third ball she cracks almond (a) or hazelnut (b, c) out of which sallies forth fancy dress with earth and its flowers (a), carriage and four and fancy dress with countryside and its greenery (b) or carriage and fancy ball-dress having beautiful landscape as well as flowers, trees and leaves (c).

Prince has eyes for heroine (b, c). On catching sight of her entering ballroom he tells himself: 'Oh! din xebba sabiħa! Magħħa niżfen!' ('Ah! 'tis a really beautiful maiden! She'll be my partner!') (b) or 'tis the Queen of Ball-room Dancing; with her I must dance!' (c). He falls so much in love with her that he presents her a beautiful ring (a) or diamond (b, c) on every night of dancing (a), on the second night (b) or on the third (c).

Heroine wants to leave hurriedly just before close of balls (a, b) for fear father would scold her (b).

Prince asks her her identity on the three nights of dancing (c); she replies evasively that she comes from the symbolical Loaf-, Knife- and Boot-lands (c) or replies elusively: 'Għatba fl-art u bieb fil-ħajt' ('A threshold on the ground and a door against the wall') (b).

He sends dozen men (b) or footmen (c) to follow her and discover her whereabouts (b, c); she makes off by throwing two bagfuls of coins, tobacco and pepper in their eyes (b) or (a rain of) golden coins contained in her slipper on the three nights (c) to have breathless (c) pursuers scramble after or struck blind, thus detaining them and making them lose her destination – the cellar (b) or a small low palace door (c).

On their first night prince sympathises with his men (b) or though getting angry with them he forgives them (c). On second night: motif missing (b) or he orders them out of his sight but gives them permission to remain in palace (c). On the third they complain of blindness to prince (b) or are discharged (c).

On heroine's disappearance, he takes to his bed on third night of ball (b) or on first, second and third night of ball (c). Mother encourages him not to lose heart (c).

4.-5. Heroine misses fourth night for she has no new dress to wear. In anger lovesick prince fails to attend on the fifth night (a) or his health rapidly deteriorates (c). Mother means not to miss the sixth night and persuades son to accompany her by promising him a meal of 'ravioli';² prince agrees on condition heroine would not touch them (a). He refuses to eat (b, c) and drink (c); in vain does mother cook for him some appetizing delicacies (c) but finally he agrees to taste macaroons (b, c).

²i.e. pockets of stuffed pasta or, as Stumme explains: '[sic] sind viereckige Stückchen aus trockenem Teig, – also eine Art Makkaroni. Der Malteser kann sie als seine Libelingsspeise bezeichnen und isst dann auch riesige Mengen von diesen gesottenen Stückchen, wobei als Zutat meist Parade säp felsauce figuriert.' (II 97).

Recognition food: mother kneads pastry for 'ravioli', but while she is called out heroine slips the prince's three rings in the three 'ravioli' (a). Cook takes pity on heroine after continuous pleading and crying for a piece of pastry (c) or she steals some from prince's mother (b) and makes four macaroons, slipping diamond ring in one of them (b, c).

Mother sends her to the bakery with macaroons and heroine instructs baker's wife to overbake mistress's cakes and bake hers well (b) or heroine herself bakes cakes in oven and places them on top of the cook's (c) so that prince shall have hers. Son and mother (a) or cook (c) bicker over cook (a, b, c) and heroine (a), mother (b) or cook (c) confesses truth.

6. As mother (b) or cook (c) look for her, heroine cracks walnut (b) or almond (c) out of which comes forth a splendid fiery-orange and iron-grey dress (c) and/or only presents herself to him (b, c).

Prince's exclamation on re-discovering her: 'Kif kont se toq-tołni bil-ghali tieghek!' ('You almost killed me pining for you!') (b) or 'I dare say I'd sooner have died' (c). She reminds him of her prophecy that she would one day marry a prince (b).

He marries her two days later (c) against mother's wish (a) or mother treats her as own daughter (c).

IV. EXTENSION

1. Heroine is a witch (see Magri M.Z. 15 p.61). As she reports for work, palace staff nearly bursts out laughing at her smallness (c).

2. When prince throws boot at her head, heroine weaps and cries out: 'I shan't see anymore!' (c).

V. NOTES

At 510B; Rooth *Cinderella Cycle*; BP II 45; Anderson *Novel-line* Nos. 90, 91; Lüthi 60ff.; Lacoste-Dujardin references to No. 27; Cremona 'Le relazioni etnografiche' *Maltese Folklore Review* I iii (1966) 249ff. – French (Delarue 510A, B), Massignon *Contes de l'Ouest* No. 9, Soupault No. 27; Spanish: Espinosa No. 105, cf. 111-112, Basque Webster 158ff.; Italian: D'Aranco *Fiabe* No. 16 (Tuscan 403a, 923e, i, l, m, cf. 510, Calabrian Fabi No. 202, Sicilian, Calvino No. 148, Venuti-Borruso p. 85, Gonzenbach No. 38); Corsican: Massignon Nos. 13, 22, 72; Greek: Dawkins *Modern Greek Folktales* 116ff., 256ff., Dawkins 45 *Stories* No. 14, Chian Argenti/Rose I 445ff.; Turkish: Eberhard/Boratav No. 189, cf. 60, 188, 244. – Literary Treatment: *Thousand and One Nights* IV 191ff.

Malta is one of the many countries where this type has been recorded. Von Sydow rightly comments that 'the Cinderella story, which is distributed all over Europe and far beyond its boundaries was even known in Ancient Egypt.'³ The Maltese versions belong to those areas, which according to Von Sydow's theory changed their original type and accepted the new form of the prince feast episode.⁴

This analysis should be an invaluable supplement to Rooth's excellent monograph *The Cinderella Cycle* (1951) which makes no mention of Malta, though Ilg's (1906) and Stumme's (1904) folktale collections are in German. Mention is made, however, of the Southern European tradition to which the Malta type is related.⁵ In this outline study reference is made to Rooth's work to place Malta's versions within the above framework.

Malta's Cinderella belongs to Rooth's Type B1. However, one must say that the introductory motif-complex, i.e. the death bed promise, deceased wife's ring marriage test, unnatural father and countertasks, are missing in the Maltese version, and consequently there is no concept of sin and guilt.

Regarding the internal structure of the story, Rooth comments:

... It is not a stepmother story ... The technical structure ... is such that it requires an introductory motif which explains why the girl goes out into the world in those heroine-stories in which the action happens at a place other than the home of the heroine ... In Type B [AT 510A] she is given the dresses by a supernatural helper, but in B1 she obtains them ... from her father. In this, too, B1 differs from B, in repudiating most of the irrational details, and making use of a more rational explanation instead.

Nor has the motif of token objects named, — i.e. the names of the three towns or countries the girl says she comes from — the character of a motif belonging to a chimerat, but is rather a kind of conundrum — a riddle which she leaves the prince to solve. This motif is more an ornamentation of the kind to appeal to the public, and has no logical function in the story. The motif is

³Cf. Rooth, Anna Birgitta, *The Cinderella Cycle*. Lund, 1951, 27.

⁴*Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁵See, for instance, the following: '... B1, with the motifs of the unnatural father, etc., together with the visit to the feast, has had its origin in the Southern European tradition, whence it has spread to the remaining parts of Europe' (*ibid.*, 121-122).

without consequence to the course of events, and tends to appeal to the listener.⁶

In Malta this motif is made up of a residual old element 'Boor-Land' in conjunction with a local formation of Loaf- and Knife-Lands, belonging perhaps to a somewhat late period.

With reference to the three dresses motif-complex (I 3), Rooth explains that it

must in all probability be ... associated with the elaborate design of textiles in mediaeval Southern Europe. This does not exclude the possibility that the 'pretty dresses' or the strict and formal description of the dresses ... may be an older motif. As the three visits to the feast and, consequently, the three dresses, seem to belong to Europe, and not to the Orient, it is more likely that the three 'cosmic' dresses have their origin in Europe where number three is prevalent.⁷

Regarding the throwing motif-complex (III 2), Rooth says that

... distribution of money or presents at the feast in the Oriental, South Eastern and Southern European traditions has developed into the throwing of money to the pursuers ... The money can be replaced by other things, as for instance sand or ashes...⁸

Heroine and prince meet obviously at the ball in the European tradition, reflecting the European custom of the free social intercourse of both sexes. The ball constitutes the central motif of the folktale and the pursuit follows as the natural motif instead of the chance motif in Oriental tradition.⁹ The threefold repetition of the heroine's visits supply the epic dimensions of the theme.

Finally, the heroine's nickname in versions (a) and (b) (III 1) is an obvious transfer from Rooth's Type B, through a direct influence from Italy, the development of the nickname being altogether European.¹⁰

⁶ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁹ For a discussion of the chance motif in Oriental Cinderella folktales, see Rooth, *op. cit.*, 75ff.

¹⁰ For the etymology of the words 'Germuda' and 'Germuda Žemuda', see Serracino-Inglott, Erin, *Il-Miklem Malti*, Vol. I p. 233, III 92; for 'Ċiklem-fusa', see Stumme, Hans, *Maltesische Sammlung*, pp. 115, 116.

ABBREVIATIONS

AT = Aarne/Thompson

BP = Bolte/Polívka

M = Maltese

MZ = *Kotba tal-Mogħdija taż Żmien* (Pastime Books)

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