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## ON ARABIC AND FOREIGN ELEMENTS IN ARABIC FOLK FAIRY-TALES

First of all, should be distinguished from one another: a) the Tales of the 1001 Nights, which should not be considered as properly folkloric texts, as they were undergoing standardization already in the Middle Ages and b) those folkloric texts, which have not been standardized. In Arabic folklore, it is natural, are evidenced the tales, conceived in the Arabic bosom itself, and also those, the fable and plot of which are brought in from other traditions (the so called walking motives are also to be taken into account). The fairy tales of foreign origin are adapted in Arabic oral literature: the names of characters, the terms, expressing social gradation etc. are Arabized. In the article are determined several formal markers, based on which it is possible to differentiate the fairy tales of properly Arabic origin and those of non-Arabic origin, and particularly, without analyzing of their fable and plot. The object of observation is the material, collected in Egypt by different researchers (including the article author) in different times.

**Key words:** Arabic, Folklore, Fairy-tales.

### Introduction

The purpose of the present article is to single out several formal markers, based on which, without analysis of their fable and plot is possible to differentiate the fairy tales of properly Arabic origin and those of non-Arabic origin. The analysis relies on the texts, recorded directly from the informants in Egypt in different times by the author or other researchers (See, for example, Aḥmad Amīn 1999; ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Rif’at 1994: 87–97; Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ 2003: 83–86; Ḥālid Abū l-Layl 2004: 119–121).

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First of all, it should be distinguished from one another: a) the most popular Arabic fairy tales – “1001 Nights” (and some others) and b) properly folkloric, non-standardized Arabic fairy tales.

The fairy tales of the “1001 Nights” only conventionally can be called folkloric, as they, first conceived in the oral literature (the 9<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> cc) already in the Middle Ages were undergoing standardization, “literaturification”. There is also the so-called dialect version of the “1001 Nights” (Published by Muḥsin Maḥdī in 1984, afterwards published in 1995 by Brill), which also might not be implied as purely dialectal.

The object of the analysis of this article is the product of the folk oral literature, which has not been an object of any standardization.

Cultural diffusion, being reflected in different fields of a language and people life, is seen in folklore too. In consequence, in Arabic non-standardized fairy tales can be distinguished two layers: of properly Arabic origin and of foreign origin (the walking motives also shall be taken into account).

The fairy tales of foreign origin are adapted in Egyptian oral literature. In particular, the characters’ personal names are replaced with Arabic ones: *sitt el-ḥusn* (Lady of Beauty), *šāṭir muḥammad* (Clever Muhammad), and similar names, characteristic for Arabic folklore); we can meet the terms, showing social gradation, which exist only in Arabic reality (*’omda* – village chief and similar), etc.

In this context, the issue of denoting of a monarch is noteworthy. As it is known, caliph in Arabic socium had quite a specific status; he was a supreme vicar (*ḥalīf* – Arab. “successor, deputy”, *ḥalīfa* – “supreme deputy”), “Allah’s shadow” on the earth, secular and religious authority at the same time. May be, that’s why in Arabic tradition they do not award the status of a caliph to any invented character. Caliphs are characters of a fairy tale, only if the fairy tale’s character is a “real”, historically known caliph (e.g. *Hārūn ar-Rašīd*). In the contemporary folkloric fairy tales, a caliph does not appear with the status of a monarch. We can meet sultan, or comparatively amorphous for folkloric tradition term *malik* “king”.

As for the topic of the article directly.

## 1. Exordium

The Arabic folkloric fairy tales differ from the standardized ones in the exordium. Particularly, the standardized fairy tales’ exordium, is represented in the following manner (see the “1001 Nights”):

*ḥukiya wa-llāhu 'a'lamu 'annahu fīmā maḍā min qadīmi z-zamāni wa-sālifi l-'aṣri wa-l-'awāni kāna... etc.*

“They say, and Allah is The Knowing, that a long time ago, in the time gone by there was...”<sup>1</sup>

Or in this manner:

*balaḡanī ... 'annahu...*

“It has reached to me (here can be included appeal to a second person) that...”, etc.

The folkloric (non-standardized) fairy tales have different exordia. Such exordia are templates, sometimes they can vary a little:

**Exordium I**, the most common one

Short variation:

*kān (yā) mā kān*

“Happened whatever happened”.

Long variation (is confirmed with some transformations):

*kān yā mā kān yā sa'ad yā akrām wlā yiṭib əl-ḥadis illa bi-zikr ən-nabī 'alē ṣ-ṣalāt w-(w-afḍal) əs-salām*

“Happened whatever happened, you the happy nobles, and the story would not be good without mentioning of the Prophet, prayers on him and the peace” (On the formal structure of the Arabic (Egyptian) folkloric fairy tales see: Nino Ejibadze 2013: 39–49).

The expected replica to this phrase is repetition of the last words:

*'alē ṣ-ṣalāt w-(w-afḍal w-afḍal) əs-salām!*

“(Let it be) prayers on him and the (best) peace!”

It is natural that the short variation of the exordium does not require any replica, as it does not contain the reference to the Prophet.

The above mentioned exordium sometimes has also a continuation in a form of a dialogue. Namely, to the above mentioned text is added the following:

- *kamān ṣallu 'a-n-nabī!* (“Pray more for the Prophet!”)
- *ṣalla 'a-n-nabī!* (“Prayer for the Prophet!”)
- *kamān waḥḥadu l-lā(h)!* (“Profess ones more Allah!”)
- *waḥid al-lā(h)!* “Allah is one!” (Aḥmad Amīn 1999: 230).

<sup>1</sup> Here is worthy to note the abundance of practically synonymous words, meaning “time, epoch”, by which is achieved a certain artistic effect.

**Exordium II**, word-combination of dialogue type:

- *ṣalla ‘a-n-nabī!* “Pray for the Prophet!”
- *‘alē s-salām w-afdāl ṣ-ṣalāt!* “Peace on him and the best prayers!”.

**Exordium III:**

- *naggāk allā(h)* “Let Allah save you!”
- *naggāk allā(h)!* (See: ‘Abd al-‘Azīz raf‘at 1994: 87).

**Exordium IV**, rhymed (See: Aḥmad Amīn 1999: 229):

<i>daḥalt min ‘āfa li-‘āfa</i>	“I went from a district to a district,
<i>la’ēt mganni b-ziffa</i>	I saw a singer in the wedding,
<i>la’ēt ḥabībi mittakī</i>	I saw my sweetheart, resting her elbow
<i>‘ala maḥadda fustu’i</i>	On a salad pillow,
<i>‘āl-li ḥudi l-mafatīḥ wa-sbi’i</i>	He told me, take the keys and lead me
<i>aḥadt əl-mafatīḥ w-sibi’t</i>	I took the keys and I lead him,
<i>la’ēt ṣabbēya labbēya</i>	I saw a pretty girl
<i>zayy š-šams mḍawwēya</i>	With a face, light like the sun
<i>mittakēya ‘ala miḥaddit ḥrir ṭarrḥya</i>	She was resting her elbow on a soft silk pillow
<i>wlaw kām bētna ‘urayyib</i>	If our house were closer
<i>kunt gibtilku ṣoḥm zubayib</i>	I would bring you a plate of raisins,
<i>taklu lamma tṣallu ‘a-l-ḥabīb</i>	You would eat them while dreaming about your sweetheart”.

The replica of the listener of this text is:

*alfə ṣalāt ‘alēy!* “Thousand prayers on him (Prophet)!”

**Exordium V:** This exordium does not belong to “common” ones, as it starts a specific fairy tale. These are the fairy tales of a type, which do not have a real fable, but they are represented as a certain chain of events (often – rhymed), and they make a certain riddle. Only one exordium of this type is known to me (for the fairy tale proper see: Aḥmad Amīn 1999: 229):

*aḥattak ḥaddūta* “I told you a fairy tale  
*bi-z-zīt maltūta*, Mixed with oil.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Here we have wordplay: on one hand, “bi-z-zīt maltūta” means “mixed with, made with oil”, and on the other hand, means “chatted”, “senseless hubble-bubble”.

*ḥalaft mākilha* I swore not to eat  
*ḥatta yīgi tāgirha* Till its merchant comes”.

As for the fairy tales of foreign origin, they

- a) Either start immediately with the main text, without exordium: “The sultan died and left a son”, “Silsila resembled to her mother”, etc.,
- b) Or start with the standardized version of the exordium (See the fairy tales of the “1001 Nights”) ”In ancient time, in the time gone by...” etc. We may deem that the first word (*ḥukiya...*) is removed from the text, as the verb is in the passive form (the internal passive in the verbs in the dialects is cancelled).

In other words, the fairy tales of foreign origin does not have added the exordium like the folkloric ones. Thus, the first formal marker for differentiating of the fairy tales of Arabic and non-Arabic origin is exordium.

## 2. Magic numbers

“Three” (“3”) in many traditions is a magic number, but the Arabic tradition does not recognize it as a magic one. If in a tale there is “three brothers,” “The sultan had three sons”, if something important happened during the third attempt, there are three magic things, – the fairy tale is of foreign origin.<sup>3</sup> At such place in an Arabic fairy tale we meet, e.g., two children, something important happens during the fourth attempt, etc.

## 3. End of the Fairy Tale

The following indicator is the end of the fairy tale.

In Egyptian tradition we meet different versions of the fairy tale ending:

**Ending I**, short version:

*‘āš fi-t-tabīt wa-n-nabāt*  
 “He lived without trouble and in wealth”

<sup>3</sup> In Egyptian tradition there are the numbers, which have good or bad secondary meaning (e.g., 24 has a positive semantics, 60 – negative), but we’ll not touch upon the given issue additionally, in details about this see Ejibadze 2012: 111–117.

Long version (we meet it where the main heroes are a couple):

*‘āšu fi-t-tabāt wa-n-nabāt w-ḥallafu wlād/ṣubyān wa-banāt*  
 “They lived without trouble and in wealth and got sons and daughters”.

**Ending II**, short version:

*tūta tūta firḡit əl-ḥaddūta*  
 “Tuta, tuta, the story is finished”.

Long version:

*tūta tūta firḡit əl-ḥaddūta* “Tuta, tuta, the story is finished”  
*ḥelwa walla maltūta* Good or chatted idle?  
*w-in kānit ḥelwa* If it was good  
*‘alēk ḡenwa* Then sing for us (now you owe us a song)  
*w-in kānit maltūta* And if chatted (idle)  
*iḥka lnā ḥaddūta* Tell us a fairy tale” (Açmad Amin 1999: 229).

**Ending III**, combined, the synthetic version of the endings I and II:

*āšu fi-t-tabāt wa-n-nabāt* “They lived without trouble and in wealth  
*w-ḥallafu ṣubyān /wlād wa-banāt* And got sons and daughters,  
*wa tūta tūta firḡit əl-ḥaddūta* And Tuta, Tuta, the story is finished”.

As for the fairy tales with foreign origin they, based on my observations,

- a) Either are ending directly with the text: e.g., ...*itwakkal ‘-al-lā* “He relied on Allah” (i.e. went his way);
- b) Or to them are added the short ending versions: *wa tūta tūta firḡit əl-ḥaddūta*, or *āšu fi-t-tabāt wa-n-nabāt w-ḥallafu ṣubyān/wlād wa-banāt*.

With more long versions of ending is marked the Arabic folklore proper.

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### Summary

From the above-evidenced material it is seen that the Arabic (Egyptian) folkloric fairy tales at the exordium and the ending have such word combinations, which imply

- a) Verbal participation of a listener too (by mentioning Allah or the Prophet). and/or
- b) Circularity, co-participation in narration (when now anybody other has to start the narration).

In the fairy tales of foreign origin such contact with the listener is not provided for. Accordingly, if at the start or the ending of a fairy tale the verbal participation of a listener is implied, the fairy tale can be deemed of Arabic origin. Though this condition can be considered only as auxiliary, the main markers here are the set expressions and passages, which in Arabic (Egyptian) folklore represent the fairy tale exordia and endings.