

# POPULAR NARRATIVES IN ĠALĀLODDIN RUMI'S *MASNAVI*

Ulrich Marzolph

*Akademie der Wissenschaften, Göttingen*

When Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall in 1851 presented his "Bericht über den zu Kairo i.J. 1251 (1835) in sechs Foliobänden erschienenen türkischen Commentar des Mesnewi Dschelaleddin Rumi's"<sup>1</sup> to the Austrian Academy of Sciences at Vienna, the scientific occupation with matters of Persian literature was still in its very beginnings. Thus his report only in the introductory pages contains a presentation of the said commentary; in its major portion, it supplies a listing of the 668 read headings given in the commentary together with short outlines of the passages concerned and occasionally full translations of the relevant tales. By doing so, it constitutes the first and almost complete table of contents of the *Masnavi* and until the publication of Reynold A. Nicholson's magnificent translation<sup>2</sup> was frequently quoted by Western scholars not having command of the original author's native language.

Hammer-Purgstall's report represents the first substantial introduction to a general Western public of a work which nowadays is unanimously appraised as one of the world's most significant mystical poems. Some cautious first translations from the *Masnavi* had been published as early as 1811 by Valentin von Hussard in the Vienna magazine *Fund-*

---

<sup>1</sup> Published in: *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 7. Wien 1851, 626-640, 641-656, 693-707, 728-743, 762-777, 785-805, 818-833; also published in *Zwei Abhandlungen zur Mystik und Magie des Islams von Josef Hammer-Purgstall*, edited by Annemarie Schimmel. Wien 1974, 21-119 (followed by a concordance to Nicholson's edition, 121-137).

<sup>2</sup> *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*. Edited from the oldest manuscripts available: with critical notes, translation, & commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson. Vols. 2, 4, 6. London 1926, 1930, 1934 (*E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series*. New Series IV. 2, 4, 6); references are to the reprint London 1977.

*gruben des Oriens*<sup>3</sup>, the "first scholarly orientalist journal in [the] German language"<sup>4</sup>. Hammer himself (whose name was extended to Hammer-Purgstall only in 1835)<sup>5</sup> in his *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens*, published in Vienna in 1818, in addition to reprinting parts of von Hussard's translation, had duly acknowledged the talent of the world's greatest mystical poet by presenting an abundant selection of poems from Rumi's *Divān-e Šams-e Tabrizi*<sup>6</sup>. From these beginnings up to the present day, Rumi has remained a favourite object of study for orientalists in East and West alike, culminating in the recent books of Annemarie Schimmel's<sup>7</sup>. However, any occupation with Rumi's poetry has mostly concentrated on matters of style, language and poetical imagery<sup>8</sup>. Though Rumi's employment of specific narrative materials to illustrate his ideas had been noted from the beginning, a comparative discussion of the sources and later versions of these tales has not attracted major attention. Most authors dealing with Rumi content themselves with a general reference to the method of 'illustrating mystical ideas by way of tales' as being a common trait of Sufi literature<sup>9</sup>. Some

---

<sup>3</sup> "Mesnevi. Des Chodscha Mevlana Dschelaleddin Mohammed Sohn Mohammeds geböhren zu Balch gestorben zu Konia (Iconium)". In: *Fundgruben des Oriens* 2 (1811) 162-164, 3 (1813) 339-347, 4 (1814) 89-92, 5 (1816) 99-101, 6 (1818) 188-213.

<sup>4</sup> Schimmel, A.: *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddīn Rūmī*. London/The Hague 1980<sup>2</sup>, 388.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann, B.: "Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph Freiherr von". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 6 (1990) 427-430.

<sup>6</sup> *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens, mit einer Blütenlese aus zweyhundert persischen Dichtern*. Wien 1818, 166-198.

<sup>7</sup> Schimmel, A.: *Die Bildersprache Dschelaleddin Rumis*. Walldorf 1949; ead. (see fn. 4); ead.: *Rumi. Ich bin Wind und du bist Feuer. Leben und Werk des großen Mystikers*. Köln 1986<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. the publications by Zarrinkub, 'Abdolhosein: *Serr-e nei* 1-2. Teheran 1364/1975; id.: *Bahr dar kuze*. Teheran 1366/1987.

<sup>9</sup> Comments of this kind can be found in the most varied sources such as Tholuck, F.A.G.: *Blüthensammlung aus der Morgenländischen Mystik*. Berlin 1825, 54; Christensen,

notable exceptions to this rule have to be mentioned: Hellmut Ritter in his *magnum opus* on Faridoddin ʿAṭṭār<sup>10</sup>, one of Rumi's predecessors, ever so often touches on parallels to ʿAṭṭār's tales in Rumi's *Maṣnavi* and above all supplies exhaustive enumerations of other versions in the Islamic literatures, including occasional references to Western literature of folkloristic relevance; it is very much to be regretted that in the field of folk narrative research even such distinguished scholars as Haim Schwarzbaum had not been aware of this eminent publication<sup>11</sup>. Arthur John Arberry in 1961 and 1963 published two volumes of translations<sup>12</sup> comprising altogether 200 tales from the *Maṣnavi* rendered in prose versions; his comparative notes, however, seldom exceed those already given in Nicholson's commentary. Moreover, though he knew of and mentioned Badīʿozzamān Foruzānfar's extensive compilation on the sources of the *Maṣnavi*'s tales and parables published already in 1954 he apparently did not have the opportunity to quote from it. Foruzānfar's publication<sup>13</sup>, the result of almost 25 years of study, quotes parallels to 264 of Rumi's tales from earlier Arabic and Persian literature mostly giving the text of the quoted versions in full. Without coming up to Western scientific standard, it nevertheless constitutes a most valuable contribution on the sources inspiring Rumi's tales. Apart from these major studies and a limited number of negligible presentations<sup>14</sup>

---

A.: *Persische Märchen*. Düsseldorf/Köln 1958, 279; Schimmel, A.: *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, N.C. 1975, 316.

<sup>10</sup> *Das Meer der Seele*. Leiden 1955, 1978<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> It is not quoted in either one of Schwarzbaum's two major publications: *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore*. Berlin 1968; *The Mishlé Shuʿalim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiab ha-Nakdan*. Kiron 1979.

<sup>12</sup> *Tales from the Masnavi*. London 1961; *More Tales from the Masnavi*. London 1963.

<sup>13</sup> *Ma'āhez-e qeṣas va tamsilāt-e Maṣnavi*. Teheran 1347/1958<sup>2</sup>, 1370/1991<sup>4</sup>; cf. the review by H. Ritter in: *Oriens* 8 (1955) 356-358.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Ğaloliddin Rumi. *Hikoyahoi xalqii Masnavi*. Dušanbe 1963; Başıri, ʿAli Akbar: *Dāstānbā-ye «Masnavi»*. Širāz 1343/1964; Yousofi, Gh. H.: "Mawlavī as Storyteller". In: Chelkowski, P. J. (ed.): *The Scholar and the Saint. Studies in Commemoration of*

mostly dealing with the sources of single tales<sup>15</sup>, it seems that an early judgement given by Germany's poetical genius Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, characterizing Rumi's method and his way of handling the materials as simply "abstruse"<sup>16</sup>, still today is valid for the approach of the major part of studies towards the contents of the *Maṣnavi*.

However, an application of the methodical inventory of comparative folk narrative research to the narrative materials contained in Rumi's *Maṣnavi* leads to a different appreciation. In order to permit a poignant conclusion, the present study is restricted to the roughly ten percent out of the *Maṣnavi*'s total of more than 300 tales corresponding with international narrative types and motifs as outlined by the indexes of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson<sup>17</sup>. The selection given supplies the basic stock for a demonstration of the various origins Rumi drew his material from, as well as an evaluation of the *Maṣnavi*'s mediating role in passing on traditional narratives in Iran and the neighbouring countries influenced by Persian literature.

A substantial amount of the tales under consideration are dealing with animal protagonists. These fables and animal tales can be traced to a twofold origin, namely Indian and Greek tradition. To begin with, I

*Abū'l-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī*. New York 1975, 287-306; Baykal, Ö.: "Animal Tales in the Mathnawī of Mevlānā Jalālu'd-Dīn Rūmī". In: *Erdem* 1 (1985) 615-620.

<sup>15</sup> Browne, E. G.: "A parallel to the story in the Mathnawī of Jalālu'd-Dīn Rūmī, of the Jewish king who persecuted the Christians". In: *Islamica* 2 (1926) 129-134; Monaqqeh: "Tafsir-e yek hekāyat az Maṣnavi". In: *Bāḥtar* 2 (1313-14/1934-35) 703-706; Hillelson, S.: "The source of a story in the Mathnawī". In: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1937) 474-477; Mortazā, M.: "Tahlil-e yeki az tamsilāt-e Maṣnavi". In: *Nāṣriyeye Dānešcade-ye adabiyāt-e Tebriz* 10 (1337/1958) 133-164, 293-315; Kappler, C.: "Le dialogue d'Iblīs et de Mo'āwiye dans le daftar II du Maṣnavi de Mowlavi, beys 2604-2792. Une alchimie du cœur". In: *Studia Islamica* 16 (1987) 45-99.

<sup>16</sup> *Goethes Werke*. Weimar ed. vol. 7: *Noten und Abhandlungen zum besseren Verständnis des West-östlichen Divans*. Weimar 1888, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Aarne, A. and Thompson, S.: *The Types of the Folktale. Second Revision*. Helsinki 1961, 1973<sup>3</sup> (quoted as AaTh); Thompson, S.: *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* 1-6. Copenhagen 1955-1958<sup>2</sup> (quoted as Mot.).

should like to discuss the fable of the tame bear who killed the fly on his master's head, quoted in the second book of the *Mašnavi* (2, 1932)<sup>18</sup>. The text given here is the one in the recently published vol. 2 of *Tamšil va mašal*<sup>19</sup> the collection of 'proverbs and their stories', based on materials collected within the past 20 years, which was originally begun by the Persian folklorist Sayyed Abolqāsem Anḡavī Širāzī<sup>20</sup>.

In the old times there was a peasant who owned a garden. He had become friends with a bear. One day he had retired worn out and exhausted to the side of an irrigation channel. He was sleeping in the shade of a tree in the garden and had charged his friend, namely the said bear who was always together with him, not to allow the flies disturb him, so that he might be able to sleep awhile and refresh. According to the man's order, the bear took place near his head and did not allow the flies and gnats sting him. After some time an obtrusive fly appeared which did not leave, however much the bear would drive it away with his paw. He tried to drive it away with a handkerchief or a piece of wood or some grass, but he did not succeed, and after a moment the fly came back and settled on the man's face. By this the bear got extremely annoyed; he finally grabbed the man's axe and smashed it firmly and with all his

---

<sup>18</sup> Here and at following instances the references are to the first lines of the stories discussed only; the numbers quoted refer to book and verse respectively of Nicholson's edition; this is at present available in an Iranian reprint, edited by Našrollāh Purḡavādī. vol. 1-4 (4: indexes). Teheran 1363/1984. Due to limitations of space the references for the tales discussed or mentioned had to be restricted to items of specific relevance. For a more recent discussion see also Marzolph, U.: *Arabia ridens. Die humoristische Kurzprosa der frühen adab-Literatur im internationalen Traditionsgeflecht*. Vols. 1-2. Frankfurt am Main 1992, especially vol. 1, 98-101.

<sup>19</sup> Vakiliyān, Aḡmad: *Tamšil va mašal* 2. Teheran 1366/1987, 113-114.

<sup>20</sup> Anḡavī Širāzī, Abolqāsem: *Tamšil va mašal* 1. Teheran 1352/1973, 2537/1978<sup>2</sup>; see also Marzolph, U.: "Seyyid Abolqāsem Anḡavī Širāzī (1921-1993) und das iranische Volkskundearchiv". In: *Fabula* 35 (1994) 118-124.

strength on the fly. The stroke of the axe of course went together with the splitting of the man's head and his death.

This version of the story was collected from the oral (?) of Šāhande Seifi-zāde, a 23-year old worker from Marand in the western Iranian Province of Āzarbāiğān-e šarqi, in 1351/1972. Although no clear identifications are given, it seems as if the printed version in modern Persian is but a translation of a version originally told in Azeri Turkish. Even if this question cannot be clarified, the text certifies to the popularity of the tale in modern Iranian popular tradition, where it is said to have given rise to the proverbial expression *dusti-ye hers* (or: *dusti-ye hāle-ye herse*; "the bear's friendship"), characterizing a fool's friendship as being well meant but doing evil service<sup>21</sup>.

The tale is classified in the international type-index as AaTh 163 A\*: 'The Bear Chases away the Flies'. Quoting it as an example for tales in the *Maṣnavi* drawn from Indian sources, a first comment should concentrate on the earlier literary versions before returning to contemporary oral variants. It has been pointed out by previous research<sup>22</sup> that tales extremely similar to the one quoted above already appear in ancient Indian literature such as the Buddhist *Makasa-Jātaka* (no. 44) and *Rohiṇi-Jātaka* (no. 45). Even if these Indian versions cannot be dated exactly, in any case they are nearer in content to Rumi's tale than similar fables from Greek tradition, such as the one of the scaldhead and the fly, documented in Phedre's collection (5,3). The tale's popularity in subsequent centuries in the Near East most probably is not only due to its quotation by Rumi: Foruzānfar<sup>23</sup> has pointed out and rendered in full a lengthy adaptation of the tale figuring in *Farā'ed as-solūk*, a compilation finished in 610/1213, being considerably older than the *Maṣnavi*

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Dehhodā, 'Ali Akbar: *Amsāl va hekam* 2. Teheran [1352/1973], 837-838; Borqa'ī, Yaḥyā: *Kaveš dar amsāl va hekam-e fārsi*. Teheran 1351/1972, 261-264.

<sup>22</sup> Wesselski, A.: *Der Hodscha Nasreddin* 1. Weimar 1911, 272, no. 280; Schwarzbaum 1968 (see fn. 11) 362-363; Uther, H.-J.: "Fliege auf des Richters Nase". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 4 (1984) 1284-1290.

<sup>23</sup> Foruzānfar (see fn. 13) 62-65.

strength on the fly. The stroke of the axe of course went together with the splitting of the man's head and his death.

This version of the story was collected from the oral (?) of Šāhande Seifi-zāde, a 23-year old worker from Marand in the western Iranian Province of Āzarbāiğān-e šarqi, in 1351/1972. Although no clear identifications are given, it seems as if the printed version in modern Persian is but a translation of a version originally told in Azeri Turkish. Even if this question cannot be clarified, the text certifies to the popularity of the tale in modern Iranian popular tradition, where it is said to have given rise to the proverbial expression *dusti-ye hers* (or: *dusti-ye hāle-ye herse*; "the bear's friendship"), characterizing a fool's friendship as being well meant but doing evil service<sup>21</sup>.

The tale is classified in the international type-index as AaTh 163 A\*: 'The Bear Chases away the Flies'. Quoting it as an example for tales in the *Mašnavi* drawn from Indian sources, a first comment should concentrate on the earlier literary versions before returning to contemporary oral variants. It has been pointed out by previous research<sup>22</sup> that tales extremely similar to the one quoted above already appear in ancient Indian literature such as the Buddhist *Makasa-Jātaka* (no. 44) and *Rohini-Jātaka* (no. 45). Even if these Indian versions cannot be dated exactly, in any case they are nearer in content to Rumi's tale than similar fables from Greek tradition, such as the one of the scaldhead and the fly, documented in Phedre's collection (5,3). The tale's popularity in subsequent centuries in the Near East most probably is not only due to its quotation by Rumi: Foruzānfar<sup>23</sup> has pointed out and rendered in full a lengthy adaptation of the tale figuring in *Farā'ed as-solūk*, a compilation finished in 610/1213, being considerably older than the *Mašnavi*

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Dehḥodā, 'Ali Akbar: *Aṃṣāl va hekam* 2. Teheran [1352/1973], 837-838; Borqa'ī, Yaḥyā: *Kaveši dar aṃṣāl va hekam-e fārsi*. Teheran 1351/1972, 261-264.

<sup>22</sup> Wesselski, A.: *Der Hodscha Nasreddin* 1. Weimar 1911, 272, no. 280; Schwarzbaum 1968 (see fn. 11) 362-363; Uther, H.-J.: "Fliege auf des Richters Nase". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 4 (1984) 1284-1290.

<sup>23</sup> Foruzānfar (see fn. 13) 62-65.

and probably constituting the intermediary that Rumi relied upon. Furthermore, the tale is rendered in the 15th century in Ḥosein Vā'ez Kāšefi's *Anvār-e Soheili*; a version depending hereupon was orally transmitted to E. G. Browne while travelling in Iran at the beginning of the 20th century<sup>24</sup>. Meanwhile, in the European tradition the adaptation in Jean de La Fontaines collection (8,10) made the tale a favourite subject of fabulists, resulting in such widely read versions as the German one created by Johannes Hagedorn in the early 18th century<sup>25</sup>. Most likely La Fontaines collection and the versions deriving from it are to be credited with the popularity of the tale in contemporary Western oral tradition, where it is documented in Ukrainian, White Russian, Latvian, Estonian, Frisian, and German versions<sup>26</sup>. Near Eastern versions other than the one mentioned have been collected in Urdu<sup>27</sup>, Tāḡik<sup>28</sup>, and Turkish<sup>29</sup>, the latter version originating from the province of Kars, directly neighbouring the Iranian territory of Āzerbāijān.

Additional tales of Indian origin figuring in the *Masnavi* might be touched upon more rapidly, such as AaTh 92: 'The Lion Dives for His own Reflection' (1,900); AaTh 1317: 'The Blind Men and the Elephant' (3,1259)<sup>30</sup>; AaTh 92 A: 'Hare as Ambassador of the Moon' (3,2738);

---

<sup>24</sup> Chauvin, V.: *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes* 2. Liège & Leipzig 1897, 118, no. 99; Browne, E. G.: *A Year Amongst the Persians*. Cambridge 1927, 198-199.

<sup>25</sup> Hagedorn, J.: *Sämmtliche Poetische Werke* 2. Hamburg 1757 (reprint Berlin 1968), 36-38: 'Der Bär und der Liebhaber seines Gartens'.

<sup>26</sup> For these informations and some of the following I am very much indebted to the archives of the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, Göttingen.

<sup>27</sup> Kljagina-Kondrateva, M. I. and V. L. Kraseninnikov: *Indijskie skazki*. Moscow 1958, 73-74.

<sup>28</sup> *Svod tadžikskogo fol'klora* 1. ed. I. Levin, Dž. Rabiev and M. Javic. Moscow 1981, 161 (T 075).

<sup>29</sup> Eberhard, W. and P. N. Boratav: *Typen türkischer Volksmärchen*. Wiesbaden 1953, 53, no. 38.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Uther, H.-J.: *Behinderte in populären Erzählungen*. Berlin & New York 1981, 79, fn. 96; Gramlich, R.: *Muḥammad al-Gazzālī's Lehre von den Stufen zur Gottesliebe*.



AaTh 246: 'The Fishermen and the Three Fishes of Different Intelligence' (4,2202); AaTh 150: 'The Three Teachings of the Bird' (4, 2245)<sup>31</sup>; AaTh 52: 'The Ass without a Heart' (5,2326)<sup>32</sup>; AaTh 80 A\*: 'Who Gets the Beehive' (6,2457). In most of these instances the collection of *Kalila wa-Dimna* was the source inspiring Rumi's tales, the title even being quoted by him.

By no means all fables and animal tales in the *Maṣnavi* are derived from Indian sources. At least two fables can be proved to be taken from the Greek tradition linked with the name of Esopé. As an example I shall quote a Tāgik version<sup>33</sup> of a tale rendered in the sixth book of the *Maṣnavi* (6,2632), listed as AaTh 278: 'Rat and Frog Tie Paws Together to Cross Marsh'. The Tāgik version has been collected in 1961 from Xomid Azizov in Ġalġut, a village east of Dušanbe.

One day a mouse and a frog became friends. After they had become friends, they went together to a sunny place and talked to each other. They said: "Now, after having become such friends, what shall we do?" The mouse said to the frog: "Friend, I shall go into the house of the old woman and fetch a string. We shall pull this string and attach it to our feet. Each time we shall want to see each other, we shall pull the string; coming together we shall talk to each other at this sunny place. After our conversation you will dive into your pond and I shall go into my hole.

Thus decided, they talked with each other for some days. One day, however, the mouse had come to the sunny place and was sunbathing when a hawk came down from the air, from the sky, grabbed the mouse and took it up into the sky. The frog was pulled after the mouse, out of the pond and into the sky. Afterwards the

---

Wiesbaden 1984, 31-32 (A 29).

<sup>31</sup> Marzolph, U.: "Lehren: Die drei L. des Vogels". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 8, 2-3 (1995) (in print).

<sup>32</sup> Barag, L. G.: "Eselherzfabel". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 4 (1984) 442-445.

<sup>33</sup> *Svod tadžikskogo fol'klora* (see fn. 28) 245 (T 280).

string broke, the frog got loose, fell onto the ground and said: "Cursed be the father of that one who gets friends with somebody of another kind!"

This tale is abundantly documented in medieval Latin fable collections as well as those of the 16th century onwards in the various Western national literatures, for which the recently published catalogue of German fables indicates more than 100 references<sup>34</sup>. But there is a distinct difference between the Esopic fable and the version as given above, corresponding in content with the one quoted by Rumi. In the Esopic tradition, usually the mouse seeks the aid of the frog in order to cross a river. When tied together the frog perfidiously tries to drown the mouse. The mouse however struggles valiantly until finally an eagle carries both of them away and devours them. Thus, Rumi in this case has only picked up the general frame and altered the course of the story considerably. The individual traits introduced by him allow all the better to identify the close relation of the (four) existing Tāḡik variants with Rumi's version, from which they are obviously derived. The oral versions again have altered the end of the story: Whereas in the *Maṣnavi* the frog caught by the raven is compelled to admit that "this is the fit punishment for that one who, like persons devoid of honour, consorts with a rascal" (6,2949), both published Tāḡik versions<sup>35</sup> let the string break and set him free, leaving the frog to ponder upon his wrong behaviour in safety. Two more Oriental versions of this tale have been collected: A Punjabi version clearly being derived from the *Maṣnavi*<sup>36</sup>; and an Indonesian version keeping in accordance with the Esopic tradition, most likely having been introduced to Indonesia by European tra-

---

<sup>34</sup> Dicke, G. and K. Grubmüller: *Die Fabeln des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*. München 1987, 185-191, no. 167.

<sup>35</sup> *Svod tadžikskogo fol'klora* (see fn. 28) 232 (T 229), 245 (T 280); further variants include T 110, T 330 (not published).

<sup>36</sup> Sheikh-Dilthey, H.: *Märchen aus dem Pandschab*. Düsseldorf & Köln 1976, 152, no. 46.

vellers or colonialists<sup>37</sup>. Apart from one other fable apparently derived directly from Esopic tradition, AaTh 214\*: 'The Ass Envy the Horse in Fine Trappings' (5,2361)<sup>38</sup>, there is at least one instance of a Greek fable passed on to Rumi by way of intermediary instances in Arabic literature, such as the 10th century *Nat̄r ad-durr̄*; the fable concerned is the internationally documented tale-type AaTh 51: 'The Lion's Share' quoted in the first book of the *Maṣnavi* (1,3013)<sup>39</sup>.

Arabic literature, besides serving as an intermediary for tales of Indian or Greek origin, has contributed a substantial amount of Rumi's narrative repertoire in its own right. In contrast to the tales of Indian and Greek origin mostly being classified as fables, the tales derived from Arabic literature almost exclusively belong to jocular categories. The example quoted here is the source of a story in the second book of the *Maṣnavi* (2,3176), classified as AaTh 1242 B: 'Balancing the Mealsack'.

Once a hermit came passing, carrying on his neck a stick with two baskets fastened to its ends that almost smashed him [because of their weight], one of them containing wheat, the other dirt. Somebody said to him: What is that? He replied: I counterbalanced the wheat with this dirt because it made me bend over to one side. Somebody took the basket of dirt, turned it about and filled the wheat in two [equal] halves into the baskets, saying: Now carry it. He carried it and, when finding it light in weight, exclaimed: How clever you are!

This is the version given in the 'Uyūn al-ahbār ("Sources of stories") of the 9th century Arabic author Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/ 889)<sup>40</sup>. There is another instance of this tale in Arabic literature prior to the *Maṣnavi* in al-Ḥuṣrī's (d. 413/1022) *Ġam' al-ġawāhir* ("Collecting of the Jewels"),

<sup>37</sup> Vries, J. de: *Volksverhalen uit Oost-Indie* 1. Zutphen 1925, 220, no. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Köhler, I.: "Esel und Pferd". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 4 (1984) 435-440.

<sup>39</sup> See Marzolph, U.: "Fabel, Dichtung. 7: Arabische Literatur". In: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 4 (1987) 208; cf. Schwarzbaum 1979 (see fn. 11) 286-289, no. 52.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Qutayba, 'Abdallāh b. Muslim: 'Uyūn al-ahbār 2. Cairo 1963<sup>2</sup>, 38.

almost identical in wording and clearly relying on the quoted version<sup>41</sup>. Rumi, by employing this tale as a "story illustrating the fertility of esoteric knowledge"<sup>42</sup>, altered its contents by changing the protagonist's position. In the *Mašnavi* a bedouin riding a camel with two saddlebags is advised by a philosopher. Before acting accordingly, the bedouin questions the philosopher on the value of his seemingly precious advice. When the philosopher admits not to own a single camel but running around naked and barefoot, the bedouin is quite content with his own foolishness, being on the other hand well provisioned. Oskar Mann in 1908/9 collected a Tājīk-version in Fārs clearly depending on the *Mašnavi* as shown by the fact that it also contains the expanded ending<sup>43</sup>. In addition to these versions there exists a limited number of Western variants, resulting in the tale's listing in the international type index; the versions quoted as references are a Wallonian text published in 1885<sup>44</sup> and two texts collected in the United States of America in the federal states of Arkansas and Missouri respectively<sup>45</sup>. It might be regarded as futile searching for a direct connection between the medieval Oriental versions and the modern Western ones; however, the sheer existence of the Oriental versions testifies to an origin of the tale dating back to times probably suggested by one of the American editors, who supposed it to be "hoary with age"<sup>46</sup> at the turn of the 20th century.

---

<sup>41</sup> al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī, Ibrāhīm b. 'Alī: *Ġam' al-ğawāhir fī l-mulah wan-nawādir*. ed. 'A. M. al-Biğawī. Cairo 1372/1953, 308.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholson in the *Mašnavi*-edition, vol. 7 (commentary) 350.

<sup>43</sup> Mann, O.: *Die Tājīk-Mundarten der Provinz Fārs (Kurdisch-Persische Forschungen* 1). Berlin 1909, 86-88. 43cf. Laport, G.: *Les Contes populaires wallons*. Helsinki 1932, 88.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Laport, G.: *Les Contes populaires wallons*. Helsinki 1932, 88, no. \*1205.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Baughman, E. W.: *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*. The Hague 1966, J 1874.2.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Randolph, V.: *The Devil's Pretty Daughter and Other Ozark Folk Tales*. New York 1955, 221.

Several other jocular tales in the *Maṣnavi* are taken from Arabic sources, such as Mot. X 121.1: 'The Squinteyed Son and the Bottle'<sup>47</sup> (1,327), Mot. J 2483: 'The House without Food and Drink' (2,3116)<sup>48</sup>, Mot. J 2317: 'Well Man Made to Believe He Is Sick' (3,1522)<sup>49</sup>, Mot. U 133.1: 'Tanner Prefers Smell of Dung to that of Perfume' (4,257)<sup>50</sup>, AaTh 1373: 'The Weighed Cat' (5,3409)<sup>51</sup>, Mot. J 1193.2: 'The Value of a Blow' (6,1293).

By enumerating references to tales prior to Rumi's *Maṣnavi* as well as those posterior, it becomes obvious that Rumi's versions are just one link in a chain of tradition extending in time and space. In the cases discussed, Rumi modelled his tale after previously existing patterns inspired by Indian, Greek, Arabic or earlier Iranian tradition. On the other hand, he is to be regarded as the first documented instance of a number of tales which in later times have become part of the traditional stock of international folktale, such as Mot. J 1919.1: 'The Remodelled Stork' (2,323), AaTh 1716\*, 1965: 'Nonsense Story' (3,2609)<sup>52</sup>, AaTh 951 A\*, 951 C: 'The Disguised King Joins the Thieves' (6,2816)<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Marzolph, U.: "Der Schieler und die Flasche. Zur Rezeption einer arabischen Anekdote in der persischen mystischen Literatur". In: *Oriens* 32 (1990) 124-138.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Marzolph, U.: "Das Haus ohne Essen und Trinken. Arabische und persische Belege zu Mot. J 2483". In: *Fabula* 24 (1983) 215-222.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Chauvin (see fn. 24) 6 (1902) 138, no. 291; Marzolph, U.: *Typologie des persischen Volksmärchens*. Beirut 1984, 198 (1332 [b]); Ibn Qutayba (see fn. 39) 2,41.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Galmés de Fuentes, A.: "Un conte d'al-Ghazālī et le fabliau français Du vilain asnier". In: *Romance Philology* 39 (1985) 198-205; Tubach, F. C.: *Index Exemplorum*. Helsinki 1969, no. 3645; extensive discussion in Marzolph (see fn. 18) vol. 1, 173-180.

<sup>51</sup> Marzolph, U.: "König und Räuber". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 8,1 (1994) 167-171.

<sup>52</sup> Boratav, P. N.: "Gesellen: Die schadhaften G". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 5 (1987) 1147-1151.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Marzolph, U.: "Katze: Die gewogene K.". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 7 (1993) 1113-1117.

For almost half of the tales under consideration, contemporary oral versions have been collected, either in Iran or in those neighbouring regions that were at some time in the course of their history or still are directly subjected to Iranian cultural influence. In addition to the ones quoted already one might mention Mot. J 551.5: 'The Bald-headed Parrot' (1,247)<sup>54</sup>, AaTh 1698 I: 'Visiting the Sick' (1,3360), AaTh 1423: 'The Enchanted Pear Tree' (4,3544)<sup>55</sup>, AaTh 1525 D: 'Theft by Distracting Attention' (6,467), AaTh 1626: Dream Bread (6,2376), AaTh 1645: 'The Treasure at Home' (6,4206)<sup>56</sup>.

Thus the *Masnavi* in several instances constitutes one of the invaluable 'missing links' which the comparative researcher in folk narrative is constantly looking for. Without overestimating the *Masnavi*'s role, it might justly be stressed that it did have a considerable effect on the Oriental oral tradition in those countries that could appreciate its original language. Its everlasting popularity in Iran, documented by such instances as frequent quotations in modern schoolbooks<sup>57</sup>, most certainly accounts for a vivification of the dynamics of the Iranian oral tradition without which many nowadays cherished popular tales would never have managed to gain a new life by rising beyond the bonds of written literature.

---

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Christensen, A.: *Contes persans en langue populaire*. København 1918, 63-64, no. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Bratcher, J.T.: "Birnbäum: Der verzauberte B". In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 2 (1979) 417-421.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Haarmann, U.: "Der Schatz im Haupte des Götzen". In: *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift H. R. Roemer*. Beirut 1979, 198-229.

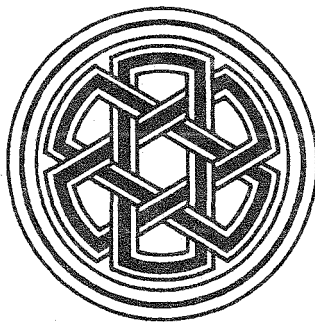
<sup>57</sup> Cf. e.g. *Ketāb-e Fārsi-ye dovvom-e dabestān*. Teheran 1343/1964, 136-137 (2,1932); *Fārsi. Čāhārom-e dabestān*. Teheran 1353/1974, 159-161 (1,1547); cf. also Āzar-Yazdi, M.: *Qeṣṣehā-ye ḥub barāye baččehā-ye ḥub*. 4: *Qeṣṣehā-ye bar-gozide az Mašnavi-ye Moulavi*. Teheran 1343/1964, 1349/1970<sup>4</sup>.

Proceedings of the 14th Congress  
of the Union Européenne  
des Arabisants et Islamisants

— Part One —

BUDAPEST, 29th August - 3rd September 1988

EDITED BY  
**A. FODOR**



EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY CHAIR FOR ARABIC STUDIES  
&  
CSOMA DE KÖRÖS SOCIETY SECTION OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

BUDAPEST, 1995