

ON TYPES OF SOMALI FOLK-TALES

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The Somalies call all genres of folk-lore prose either tales or fairy-tales, using the words *sheeko* or *shekaxariir* for the purpose. A successful effort to untangle this mass of folk-lore, tales was made by the famous investigator of Somali folk-lore Axmed Cartan Xaange. In his book "Sheekoxariirooyin soommaliyeed" ("Folktales from Somalia") he divided the material he had gathered (71 texts) into three categories: tales concerning the origin of the universe, adventure tales about supernatural beings and tales with moral-teaching. The correctness of such a "content"-related attitude does not give rise to doubt, though the classification seems somewhat insufficient. Investigation of samples of oral somali prose contained in my collection (200 texts, ready for publication in Russian translation) made it possible to broaden the above-mentioned scheme. In definitions traditional to world folk-lore it reads in general as follows:

1. (Myths) and mythological tales.
2. Aetiological tales.
3. Classical and heroic legends.
4. Animal tales.
5. Fairy tales.
6. Novellistic tales.

1. *Myths* tell about the origin of people and animals, heavenly bodies and phenomena, extraction of fire; origin of trades and so on. They are about gods and demi-gods — teachers of the first people (so-called "cultural heroes"). Unfortunately there are no myths in my collection, though evidently they do exist. *Mythological tales* in which the process of creation takes place without interference of divine forces, are thematically close to this genre. Such are, for example, "Daldaloole" ("The holy sky") and "Awrka Cir" ("The Heavenly Camel"). The first tale is about the "rising" of the sky (a motif, widely known in world folk-lore) the origin of stars and rain:

Two women pounded millet in mortars and pierced the sky with their pestles. This hurt the sky and it drifted away from the Earth. Sunbeams shine through the holes in the sky. People consider them stars. A cloud in the sky is a girl, carrying a bucket of water and the rain is the drops of the water spilling from the bucket. The second "cosmogonic" tale explains why one of the constellation of the Southern sky resembles a tailless camel. The tail came off when people mounted on each others' shoulders and the topmost man gripped it. The tale "Hyena's cows" tells a story about the way the people became cattle-breeders: The cows belonged to the Hyena, but a man took possession of the cattle by deceiving her. It's true that God in fact interferes her, but ordering people "to look after the cattle", he does it as if belatedly, "legalizing" the already committed act.

2. *Aetiological* tales resemble mythological ones. They explain peculiarities of individual animals, their habits and distinctive features. One of the most famous among them tells about how the Tortoise got her shell: She was presented with it by God, to protect a Tortoise from birds of prey. Another one tells why a hyena has short hind legs: they were shortened by Allah who answered the animals' complaint (they were afraid that the Hyena, who had won a running competition, would capture all the prey). It can also be mentioned that aetiology sometimes takes on an evidently hilarious form — as, for example, in a short tale about a Jackal, who changed his gait to walk like the Prophet, but started to walk even funnier than before as a result; or in a tale about a Crocodile, who lost his tongue: He lent his tongue to a Jackal and the latter failed to return it. In the end the comedy of the situation increases: the Crocodile — already without his tongue — makes a speech to threaten the deceiver.

3. A *legend* is an oral folk-tale become tradition. It is based on a marvel, fantastic image or phenomenon, perceived by the teller or the listener as something real. The cycle about Arraweelo, calling on the women to seize power, about her intellectual competitions with Odey-biiqey — the only normal man (all the rest were castrated) and about restoration of patriarchy after the Queen was killed by her grandson, can be attributed to legends.

Heroic legends tell about real people and events of the past. Having emerged from stories told by eye-witnesses, they gradually shift away from the factual basis, undergoing free poetic interpretation. Semblance to truth of heroic legends is achieved through introduction of a small quantity of "wonders" in the text. Such is, in

my opinion, a cycle about Wiil-Waal, a famous poet and chief, who lived in the end of the 18th — the beginning of the 19th centuries and was celebrated for his strength, courage and quick mind.

4. In *animal tales* actors are animals. These tales are especially full of comedy. One should distinguish animal tales and *tales about animals*. Animal tales are tales with figurative meaning. In them animal imply people. Allegory is their major feature. And tales about animals are about animals as such. The way of life and habits of animals are described in them (often in an amusing way). Such is, for example, the tale "Lion, Hyena and Jackal":

- Hyena, — asked the Lion, — What is it you like most of all to eat?

- I eat everything that doesn't eat me, — answered the Hyena.

- And what about you, Jackal?

- Juicy tail of sheep and a brisket, — he answered.

- And what do you like, Lion?

- Everything, but old women, — said the King of beasts. — My stomach doesn't digest them!

The dominating type of an animal tale is a tale about a trickster. In Somali folk-tales this role is reserved for a Jackal. A wide-spread motif is getting rid of rivals with the aim of taking over a herd. For example, in the tale "Jackal's intrigues" this cunning animal gradually gets rid of the Hyena, Ostrich, Hare and, at last, of the Lion himself (Who falls into the pit the Jackal dug for him and dies). Trickster's behaviour is often innocent and funny. For example, in one of the tales the Jackal steals a shoe from every possible pursuer, so they try but can't catch him, and they stop and begin to cry. Sometimes trickster's actions are cruel and with no obvious aims: the Jackal sends the Hyena to the people assuring her she would be paid in butter, if she helped build a fence. Naive Hyena is killed instead. But sometimes even a trickster himself puts his foot in his mouth. In the tale "Cock and Jackal" the Jackal running away from the Dog says to himself: "Wanted to have good food, but had almost become food myself. Traditionally the dummies in Somali animal tales are the Hyena and the Donkey.

5. *Fairy tales* make an interesting group of Somali tales. Their composition is often complicated. Their heroes are fantastic creatures: ogres, giants and werewolves, though the most extraordinary events happen in a real, well recognized world (when the giant Gannaje's father, for example, gave the last she-camel to his son and said: "Go away, I can't feed you any more", Gannaje set out for

the land of Wiil-Waal). In these tales Good triumphs over Evil (the kind giant Biriir Ina-Barqo kills the wicked Xabbad Ina-Kamas and gives water to the people) and bad deeds are punished (the man who had been saved from death by the Hyena-Werewolf (Qori-ismaris) and then betrayed her, died of hunger and thirst); wicked Suul — a man the height of a thumb — got rid of his relatives and took possession of a herd of cows, but drank too much milk and burst. Somali fairy-tales don't resemble classical models of tales with a definite number of characters and constructive elements (types of fairytale actions). Such elements as sending off a hero from home, bans and breaking them are rather widespread in Somali tales, but not obligatory.

6. Probably the major place in Somali oral folk-lore belongs to the so-called *novellistic tales*. These are the tales with a direct motivation of general meaning. Magic elements are either absent or play a secondary role. The cycle about the cowardly Cigaal Shidaad, wise Siyaad Dheryo-Dhoobe, generous Haragey, just Ina Sanweyne, roguish Yoonis Tuug can be noted. Many tales are based on allegory ("Raage Ugaas", "Huuryo and Kabcalaf", "Three robbers"). Plots about ugly but clever girls preferred to beautiful but silly ones, about stingy and generous people, about judges and trials are popular. A number of tales end with proverbs ("Geeddi Baabow", "Mujiir and Hyena", "Dhagaxtuur"). One-topic tales of the genre can be classified on the basis of binary oppositions of subject groups: Good-Evil, Straight-Crooked, Rich-Poor, etc.

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