A Shylock in Sinai: A Middle Eastern contribution to Shakespearean folklore
[AT300, AT890]

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I. Introduction
The purpose of the present paper\(^1\) is to publish an Arabic folktale of the Sinaitic Bedouins which contains a flesh-bond story similar to Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, together with some folkloric annotations for the purpose of a future study on the semiotic structure of the flesh-bond motif from the viewpoint of contrastive, not comparative, folklore, adopting the method developed in the field of the linguistic typology and language universals.

It is a well-known fact that some of Shakespeare’s works are constituted of folkloric motifs, though it is still a matter of controversy whether Shakespeare himself directly heard any folktales and adapted them for plays with his literary genius, or whether they came to his knowledge through written sources\(^2\). The latter possibility, which is a prevalent view among Shakespearean scholars engaged in source study, has led them to identify probable written folkloric sources, or strictly speaking, written sources containing folklorically-inspired literary stories, of Shakespeare’s works. But only a few of them, most of whom are not orthodox Shakespearean scholars but those interested in the psychological or semiotic study of folktales, have found out genuine folktales similar to Shakespeare’s tales, having a disregard of the question whether the folktale concerned is Shakespeare’s direct source or not, and have made a stimulative contribution to Shakespearean scholarship from a broad perspective of folkloric study\(^3\). One excellent example of this approach is Alan Dundes’ study of *King Lear*\(^4\), in which a psychoanalytic study on the theme of the daughter’s love for her father was made in relation to the story of *Cinderella*.

*The Merchant of Venice*, whose Middle Eastern folkloric version I will present

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\(^1\) The study is part of the result of my fieldwork for the research project, *Comparative Study of Traditional Market Networks in the Islamic Countries*, under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Education in Japan.

\(^2\) For the general information of Shakespeare’s sources, see Bullough (1957-65), and also Simrock (1831).

\(^3\) A useful reference work for the study on folklore in Shakespeare is Ph. Kolin’s deliberate bibliography (1976).

below, is one of the most successful Shakespeare’s plays, at least in finding literary written sources\(^5\). The source-finding branch of Shakespearean scholarship holds in common the opinion that the play is constituted of the amalgam of two main stories from different sources, that is, the casket story and the pound of flesh story (with two secondary stories placed among them, that is, the elopement story of Jessica and Lorenzo, and the story associated with the ring between Portia and Bassanio), and that most of the plot comes from the story of Giannetto, the first story of the fourth day of a collection of novelle called *Il Pecorone* (“The Simpleton”)\(^6\), which, as tradition says, was written by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino in Italian at the end of fourteenth century and was first printed at Milan in 1558. In this story are found not only the flesh-bond plot associated with a Jewish usurer and most of the original plot of wooing, including the ring episode, but also such details as the name of “Belmonte” as the locale. But it doesn’t contain caskets, instead of which the plot of wooing adopts the condition that the suitor must stay awake all night long or lose the desired lady. In addition, the elopement story corresponds no plot in the Italian source.

The casket story, which had been widely circulated at that time, comes, most likely, from the anonymous *Gesta Romanorum*\(^7\), which is a huge collection of stories compiled on the continent in the fourteenth century. The story of elopement may well be indebted to Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, and no less likely, to the fourteenth Novella of Msuccino di Salerno written towards the end of fifteenth century. Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Marlowe’s play, which was still being successfully played at the Rose Playhouse by the Admiral’s Men during the period of the composition of *The Merchant of Venice*, also consists in his strong inclination to write a play in which a Jew plays an important role, to the extent that the character of Shakespeare’s Shylock reflects that of Marlowe’s Barabas not only in Shakespeare’s psychology itself, but also in that of his audience at that time.

After having talked about the possible direct sources of *The Merchant of Venice*, we are now in a position to talk about its indirect sources, or more strictly, the folktales similar in motif or type to *The Merchant of Venice*, whose two main stories, the casket story and the flesh-bond story, correspond to L211 and AT890 respectively\(^8\). We shall, hereafter, feel no reluctance to confine our

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8) Types of folktale are based on A. Aarne & S. Thompson (1961\(^2\)). Motifs of folktale are based on S. Thompson (1955-58\(^2\)).
discussion to the folktales similar to the flesh-bond story, which is of our most concerns. First of all, we must look for the original form of the flesh-bond\(^9\). In the West, the motif or notion of the flesh-bond for the payment of debt can date back to the legal statements found in the ancient Roman Laws of the Twelve Tables (written in 451 or 450 B.C.), according to which, when a debtor doesn’t pay back his debt, creditors could, under certain circumstances, divide the body of the debtor among themselves or sell him as slave\(^10\). Some historical fact which was legally based on this law may well have given an imaginative momentum to further such relevant tales as found in the *Cursor Mundi*, whose English version dates from the end of the thirteenth century and in which a Jew is a creditor. In the East, ancient Persia and India know, as religious tales, the story of the bond for human flesh in its rudimentary form\(^11\). In Talmudic Jewish literature, a parallel motif can be found\(^12\).

Turning our eyes to the contemporary folkloric literature, we can find many similar folktales, which, according to Schamschula (1984) and Lixfeld’s article (1984) in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, can be classified as below (some additions are made to the lists found in them, especially concerning Middle Eastern and East Asian literature, and also classical or medieval stories based on folktale are also included in the list below for the convenience of comparativists)\(^13\):

**Europe:**
- England: *Cursor Mundi* (13 C.) cf. Morris (1871, 1877); Harley Ms.7322 (ca. 1320) cf. Halliwell (1850); Munday (1580); Gernutus the Jew of Venice (16 C.?) cf. Percy (1765); Jordan (1664); The Northern Lord and Cruel Jew (19 C.) cf. Child (1864);
- Scotland: The Chest (1859) cf. Campbell (1890);
- Ireland: Syne (1969);
- France: Iohannis de Alte Silva (13 C.) cf. Oesterley (1873); Corrozet (1556) cf. Wenger (1929); Silvain (1596) cf. Bullough (1961);
- German: Kaiser Karls Recht (1493) cf. Bergmann (1845); Epitome Historiarum (1576) cf. Büttner; Jakob Rosefeldts Moschus (1599) cf. Bolte

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\(^10\) There remains no record that this law was ever enforced. Some scholars insist that the original scene of *The Merchant of Venice* was set in the second decade of the fourth century A.D., under the law of the Twelve Tables. See Brown ibid. p. xxviii.


\(^12\) Schamschula ibid. p. 282. Weiss (1888\(^2\)) pp. 1–10.

\(^13\) In the following list, a relevant title with the date of its composition or record, if available, appears first, and next comes a name of its author or book. For details of each title, see Bibliography-B. I am very thankful to Prof. Kamioka Koji, ILCAA, and Prof. Takashina Yoshiyuki, Osaka Univ. of Foreign Studies, for their lending me relevant Persian and Jewish materials respectively. My understanding of Persian materials is indebted to Prof. Haneda Koichi, my colleague. My thanks go to him.
(1886); Meissner (1884);
Hungary: Ein Zigeunershyllock (1948) cf. Lüders (1956);
Italy: Madonna Lionessa (14 C.) cf. Gargioli (1866); Il Pecorone (14 C.); Leti
(1693) cf. ibid. (1721);
Denmark: Histoire om den dyrekjöbe Isabella (17 C.) cf. Schlauch (1931);
Iceland: Die Edda (13 C.) cf. Simrock (1876); Sagan af Ambrósio og
Rósamundu (18 C.) cf. Schlauch (1931); Saga af Marsileius og Rósamun-
du (1885) cf. Schlauch (1931);
Jugoslavia: Popović(1922); Um hundert Drachmen Fleisch (1914) cf. Krauss;
Eine Drachme Zunge (1847) cf. Leo (1886);
Greece: Konstantinou (1975a, 1975b);
Latin America:
Chile: La blanca cebolla or White Onion (1951) cf. Pino Saavedra (1961, 1967)
Middle East and North Africa:
Egypt: Muhemedi und seine Ankläger (1938) cf. Staerk (1938);
Morocco: Le marchant et le juif (1949) cf. Laoust (1949); Noy (1965);
Palestine: Wer eine Tochter aus gutem Hause nimmt, vermehrt sein Gut
(1911) cf. Schmidt et al. (1930);
Yemen: Die Portia von Soqotra (1899) cf. Müller (1902); Die Portia von Zafar
(1907) cf. Müller (1907); Die Portia von Gischin (1909) cf. Müller (1909);
Noy (1963) cf. Yemenite Jews;
Iran: Decourdemanche (17 C.) cf. ibid. (1904); Johnson et al. (1793); Gladwin
(1801); Malcom (1828); Ein ereignisreicher Prozeß (1869) cf. Leszcynski
(1918); Dieulafoy (1885); The Kazi of Emessa (1892) cf. Clouston (1892);
Kuka (1894); One gram more, one gram less (1966) cf. Sabar (1982); My
donkey has no tail by nature (1973) cf. Anjavi (1973);
Turkey: El ferež baad es-şidde (14-15 C.) cf. Vambéry (1901); Mekke mollasi
(1945) cf. Eberhard et al. (1953);
Afganistan: Lebedev (1955);
Africa: Velten (1898);
South Asia:
India: Eastwick (1857) cf. The story can date back to 14 C.;
East Asia:
China: Seki (1979);
Korea: A Lump of Flesh (1930) cf. Son (1966); Seki (1979);
Japan: A cut-rate life. cf. Seki (1979);
Schamschula (1984) classified the folktales, such as listed above, into six
groups in accordance with the role which Motif J1161.2 plays in the main story

14) See Note 15 below.
or in relation to other sub-stories\(^{15}\).

Group 1: the flesh-bond is the only theme on which the whole story is built. Someone borrows money on the flesh-bond condition. A clever judge (sometimes his wife in disguise as a man) passes a well-known sentence.

Group 2: the flesh-bond is made for the purpose of paying bridial money. Someone borrows money for marriage. After that, similar events happen.

Group 3: the flesh-bond is made for the purpose of paying money for something necessary, such as a ship, treasure, etc., in order to get to the desired woman and pass a night with her. If he stays awake all night, he can marry her.

Group 4: the flesh-bond is made for the purpose of buying a woman. Some versions are modified with the secondary themes, such as a faithful wife and her lover, or a bet on the wife’s chastity.

Group 5: the flesh-bond appears as one episode in a series of many strange or clever judgment, usually not involving the wooing.

Group 6: the notion of credit doesn’t appear. Instead, a piece of human flesh is required as a fine, as a compensation for the loss in business, as a bet, as a result of misunderstanding, or as a regular article for sale.

II. Folkloric text

From November, 1990 to January, 1991 (for about three months), I had a chance to make a linguistic fieldwork in the Sinai Peninsula, especially in the vicinity of al-Ṭur, the administrative city of the Province of Southern Sinai, and Wâdi el-Feyrân, which is situated near St. Catherine Monastery\(^{16}\). In this research, I collected linguistic materials of the Arabic Bedouin dialect spoken by the Jibâli tribe, including some 20 folktales\(^{17}\), most of which are very interesting not only to Arabists, but also to folklorists in general and those interested in the folkloric connection between the West and the East in particular, partly because of the paucity of linguistic and folkloric materials of this area\(^{18}\), and partly because of the unique status of the Jibâli tribe in history. This is why, before

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\(^{16}\) Cf. Note 1 above. My special thanks are due to Prof. Kawatoko Mutsuo, the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan, for his accommodating me with their equipments in al-Ṭur and Cairo.

\(^{17}\) A linguistic study of the Jibâli dialect, together with its basic vocabulary and folkloric texts, will be published in our series of Studia Culturee Islamicae.

\(^{18}\) Actually, there is no linguistic study on the Arabic dialects in Sinai, except some passing remarks in Blanc (1970). Some anthropological, ethnographic, or archeological works are available. Recently, two Israeli scholars, C. Bailey and F. Stewart, vigorously published their studies, though not linguistic, based on their fieldwork during the time under Israel occupation. See Bibliography-A. For the bibliographical information about the Sinaiic studies, see Mawsû’a Sinâ”t, esp. pp. 385–416.
presenting the folk tale of our most concern here in this paper, I will make a brief sketch of the history of the Jibali tribe\(^\text{19}\).

The word *Jibali*\(^\text{20}\) is an adjective form derived from the noun *jibal* "mountains" (singular form *jabal*), and originally means "people in the mountain(s)", that is, the people or tribe of Mt. Moses. In fact, the history of the Jibali tribe is deeply related to that of the Monastery of St. Catherine, which is situated on Mt. Moses in Southern Sinai, Egypt. It is recorded in the Chronicle of Eutychius, Patriarch of Alexandria in the ninth century\(^\text{21}\), that when the Byzantine emperor Justinian (527-566 A.D.) built the Monastery, he settled by it some 200 families brought from the northern shore of Anatolia and from Alexandria in order to serve and protect the monks of St. Catherine. One document preserved in the library of the Monastery says that Justinian “sent for one hundred men with their women and children from the land of the Wallachians (*bilad al-Aflakh*) and sent them to Theodosius, the ruler of Egypt, who added one hundred men with their women and children from Egypt, and sent them to Sinai.”\(^\text{22}\) The people of the Jibali tribe are the offspring of these families, who originally lived as serf in the present district of Bosnia (the southwestern part of Yugoslavia), Wallachia (the southern part of Rumania), and Alexandria (Egypt). Now also, the servants of the Monastery consist of the Jibali tribe, but some members of the tribe live independently of the Monastery in such places as the city of al-Tur, the administrative city of the Province of Southern Sinai. They are mostly engaged in agriculture, or sometimes, in commercial activities. It is worth noting here that they proudly see themselves as Greeks or at least the descendants of Greeks\(^\text{23}\), and interestingly enough, at the same time, they have a strong inclination toward the ethnic identity as the Arab in its more original sense, that is, the bedouins.

The people of the Jibali tribe are today Muslims. But, at the time of their settlement, they embraced Christianity, and their conversion to Islam was a comparatively recent affair, with the result that they still now retain some of their old Christian beliefs. For example, they celebrate the feast of the Prophet Moses on the mountain peak, and believe in the Prophet Aaron, the Christian St. Georgius (George) and, of course, St. Catherine.

It is not clear what language they were speaking when they settled in Sinai. Still less is it clear when they began to speak Arabic. Based on a little fragmentary

\(^{19}\) For the history of the Sinai Peninsula, Shuqayr (1916), and especially for the dating of the arrival of bedouins, see Bailey (1985, 1991). cf. Stewart (1991a).

\(^{20}\) The name of the tribe is sometimes written as *Jabali*, *Jbal*, *Jebeli*, or sometimes with a tāʾ marbūṭa marker, as *(i)jabilīyye* etc.

\(^{21}\) cf. Papaioannou (no date) p. 8, 44.


\(^{23}\) Their legend concerning their origin was translated into Japanese in my forthcoming essay. It will be published with Arabic texts in my forthcoming study of the Jibali dialect.
historical knowledge about the linguistic situation around the sixth century\(^{24}\), we can tentatively say that as for the people who came from Bosnia and Wallachia, their original language was a dialect of Greek, or less possibly, a dialect of Latin, and as for the people who came from Alexandria, their language was a dialect of Coptic, or more possibly, they were bilinguals of Coptic and Greek. Whatever language they spoke before their acquisition of Arabic, they must have had enough knowledge to communicate in Greek with the monks in the Monastery, who spoke Greek at that time, and still speak it, at least among them. As for the second question, we have no information. Allowed to make rash inferences from the circumstances in which they lived and their tasks, such as the procurement of daily needs and foods from the Arabic-speaking tribes in their neighborhood or the Arabic-speaking merchants in al-Ţūr, we can tentatively say that they learned to speak Arabic in a very short time after their settlement in Sinai, and that their first Arabic was a pidgin(-like) Arabic which was used only or mainly for the purpose of buying, and became a linguistically full-fledged mother tongue as spoken in the present time through the process of creolization and decroelization. This hypothesis on the origin of the Arabic dialect spoken by the Jibăli tribe can be substantiated by the linguistic features found in the present Jibăli dialect which are assumed to be typical of the pidginized and creolized language\(^{25}\).

Name of the speaker: Mabsūţa (Mrs), Age: 49.
Name of the recorder: Tetsuo Nishio.
Place: Wadi Village, near al-Ţūr, Southern Sinai, Egypt.
Date: 12, December, 1991.
Type of folktale: AT300, AT890
Motif of folktale: B11.7.1, B11.10, J1161.2, K1837, S263.3

English translation\(^{26}\):

*The People of Noble Deed and Noble Descent*\(^{27}\)

Once upon a time, there lived a man in the desert with his wife and his son. (He said to her,) “Don’t marry my son except when he makes a request to you personally. And say to him, ‘Your father’s words are that you should get married

\(^{24}\) For the general information on the linguistic situation, see Anawati (1975).

\(^{25}\) For Arabic pidgin and creole study, see Versteegh (1984); Nishio (1989).

\(^{26}\) Arabic text will be included in my forthcoming book. My special thanks are due to Prof. Christian Daniels, my colleague, who read my earlier English text of the folktale and corrected errors.

\(^{27}\) In Arabic, ʻahī il-ḥasāb win-nasāb. *hasāb* means “(esteemed) quality”, and also sometimes means “noble descent”. *nasāb* means “lineage”, which sometimes connotes the relationship by marriage (cf. nāšīb “kinsman by marriage”).
to only a woman belonging to the people of noble deed and noble descent.” The man died and left his son with his mother. After some time passed, the son requested marriage. Then, his mother told him of his father’s direction. He went to look for the people of noble deed and noble descent. The son stopped over at a tribe, when he found a wedding underway among them. This was evil wedding of the daughter of the chief of the tribe. The marriage of a daughter of one of them (=tribal members) with this tyrant monster was one of the customs of this tribe. This was because, if they refuse his marriage, he will keep back water from them for one year. When the son knew the story of this monster, he went in to see the bride without being noticed by any other people of the tribe. She said to him, “Get out of here before the monster comes to finish us off.” He said to her, “I am no more excellent than you, but I have a weapon which will exterminate his life.” After a while, the monster came in to see her. The son struck him with one stroke of the weapon, which destroyed his life. He was dead and was thrown down on the ground.

In the morning people found that the monster had been killed. The bride’s father said, “I will marry my daughter to the man who killed the monster.” Then, the son went to him, and said, “I am the one who killed the monster, but I don’t want marriage. I would rather know the people of noble deed and noble descent.” The chief said to him, “The people of noble deed and noble descent are in the town of al-Sa‘āda (=“the happiness”).”

The son went into the desert, searching for the town of al-Sa‘āda. At last, he arrived at the people of noble deed and noble descent. He said to the chief of people of noble deed and noble descent, “Marry me to your daughter, Sulta.” The chief replied to him, saying, “The bridal money for my daughter is forty camels loaded with gold.”

He went to look for forty camels in the desert. Then, he found them in the middle of mountains. He caught them, and took them to the merchant of gold. He said to the merchant, “For my sake, load gold onto these camels.” The merchant said to him, “Who is it that guarantees my right (to claim your

28) In Arabic, wahash, which literally means “a wild beast”.
29) As will be discussed below (see chap. III), this motif of the sacrifice for water supply is related to the legend of St. George as the dragon slayer. Some other customs of Sinaitic bedouins concerning water are recorded. According to Bailey (1982, p. 78.), for example, Um al-Ghayth, which means “the mother of rain”, is a wily (roughly equal to a saint), to whom the bedouins appeal when the winter rains are late in coming. First they make the mother in effigy by draping a white cloth over crossed stick decorated with colored tassels and embroidered strips. Next, they slaughter an animal and daub the doll with its blood. Then, the women carry it around the camp singing “You who drive rain forward, drive the rain to me.” For another ritual found among the tribes engaged in fishing along Sinaitic northern coast, see Bailey ibid. p. 77.
30) In Arabic, mahar, which is usually given by the groom to the bride’s father. For further details of the marriage customs of the Sinaitic bedouins, see Bailey (1974); Stewart (1991b) p. 110ff.
payment of debt?" The son said to him, "If I don’t return to pay back the gold to you after forty days, cut one rotl of my flesh."

The son took the camels loaded with gold, and returned to the people of noble deed and noble descent. He married the daughter of the chief of the people of noble deed and noble descent.

After the marriage, sixty days passed by, and he was at a loss, because he didn’t know from where he would bring the gold which he paid as bridal money for his bride. Then, he was compelled to go to the merchant of gold in order to fulfill his promise. He said to him, "Cut one rotl of my flesh." At that time, his wife got dressed in men’s wear, and went after him to the merchant. Before the merchant was going to cut one rotl of flesh, she said to him, "Don’t cut the body of the man." The merchant replied to her, saying, "This is my right. I will take it." Then, she said to him, "Take your right without any increase or any decrease (excess or lack). If it increases, I will cut your head. And if it decreases, I will cut your head, too." The merchant was perplexed, being afraid that his head will be cut. The merchant showed the son tolerance in the matter of the gold which he took. The son returned to his house. He said to the chief of the people of noble deed and noble descent, "I want to go back to my people." The chief gave his daughter a horse, and her husband a horse. He returned to his mother with his wife. He said to his mother, "Indeed, I have fulfilled my father’s direction, and I am married to the daughter of the people of noble deed and noble descent."

III. Folkloric annotations

This folktales mainly consists of two sub-stories classified as AT300, The Dragon Slayer, and AT890, A Pound of Flesh. A number of motifs also appear, including B11.7.1, "Dragon controls water supply"; B11.10, "Sacrifice of a

31) The number forty often appears in folktales. Among Sinaitic bedouins (maybe among Arabic bedouins generally), the number forty has the meaning of the duration of interdiction, and hence, has some magic power giving rise to beneficial phenomena, as observed in their customs; a new mother must wear gold for forty days as prophylactic against menstruating women. Another example of the number forty is a widespread cure for sundry physical maladies, which is called al-arba‘in, “the forty”, consisting of the juices and saps of forty species of plants mixed with olive oil and clarified butter. For further details, see Bailey ibid. p. 83.

32) A unit of weight, which, in contemporary usage, is roughly equal to 450g in Egypt, 3.2kg in Syria, 2.6kg in Beirut and Aleppo.

33) This is the motif of K1837 "Disguise of woman in man’s clothes". It is worth noting that, according to the legal system or traditional custom of Sinaitic bedouins, women are for all practical purposes excluded from appearing in a court. Her husband is equally unable to start proceedings. The person who can represent a woman in legal affairs is her guardian (in Arabic, waliyy), who is her closest living adult male agnate, usually her father [cf. Two individuals are agnates if they are descended in male line from a single male ancestor]. For further details, see Stewart ibid. p. 104. For more general information about bedouin legal system, Al-Hilw et al. (1989).
human being to dragon”; J1161.2, “Pound of flesh”; K1837, “Disguise of woman in man’s clothes”.

It is justified to say that the first sub-story is a Jibālī version of the legend-like folktale of Saint George (in Egypt and its surrounding Arabic-Speaking countries, pronounced as “Mar Girgis”, or more colloquially, as “Mari Girgis”) as the dragon slayer, which is recurrent among Christians both in Europe and Middle East, and is also known to Muslims\(^{34}\). The Jibālī version in question seems to reflect the former or old belief of the Jibālī people in Christianity, and their strong attachment for Saint George, which remains intact even after their conversion to Islam. One can go so far as to say unmistakably that this is a folkloric evidence for the original place of the Jibālī people as mentioned above\(^{35}\).

One of the typical stories about Mar Girgis as the dragon slayer which is recurrent in Egypt is recorded in El-Shamy (1980)\(^ {36}\). This story, as outlined below, is surprisingly similar to our Jibālī story, except the reason for his refusal to marry.

A huge serpent in the Nile required village people to give him a virgin maiden every year, or prevent water-supply. One year, the king’s only daughter was elected by lot as sacrifice to the serpent. On the appointed day, the daughter dressed in a bridal gown was going to be taken away by the serpent, when Mar Girgis appeared and asked her. She talked him of the matter. Then, the serpent appeared in front of them, and Mar Girgis struck him with the sword once, and killed the beast. Mar Girgis and the girl went into the town, carrying the serpent. People rejoiced. The king wanted to marry his daughter with Mar Girgis and to give him kingdom. Mar Girgis didn’t accept, because saints don’t marry, and don’t have worldly desires.

In Egypt and, to some extent, in other Middle Eastern countries, Mar Girgis (Saint George)’s legend cycle, with particular emphasis on his heroic role as the dragon slayer, is still very influential in the religious life of Christians. For example, his holiness coupled with his heroism gives rise to their strong belief in his miraculous power, which is used in a church ritual to exorcise evil spirits possessing the bodies of human beings. This religious practice is still seen to be performed during the annual mass service at the Mar Girgis church at Meer Damsees, a little town in the Nile Delta\(^ {37}\). Interestingly enough, many Muslims


\(^{35}\) In Europe, the account of Saint George, including his role as the dragon slayer, is very close to the Middle Eastern versions. Chronologically, the European Saint George cult appeared in medieval times, being transplanted by crusaders who had adopted the tradition during the stay in the Holy Land.

\(^{36}\) pp. 159–60.

\(^{37}\) cf. El-Shamy ibid. p. 159.
take part in this healing ritual.

The above discussion unmistakably shows that the first story-element of our Jibali folktale *The People of the Noble Deed and Noble Descent* is parallel in type to, or has a common origin with, the religious legend of Mar Girgis as the dragon slayer, particularly its version recurrent in the area adjacent to the Nile river. In fact, the essential element of both the stories, that is, the sacrifice of a human being (a girl) to water spirit (serpent, monster, dragon) in order to secure water supply, seems to antedate the advent of Christianity, and at least in Egypt, can date back to the time of ancient Egyptians. The earliest record of a sacred person slaying a serpent or a similar beast or monster which threatens particular people to destruct something important is found in their religious story about Apep or Apophis, a huge serpent living in the water of the Nun, or the celestial Nile, a chief enemy of Ra, the supreme deity of the sun god. Apep daily tried to obstruct the solar bark carrying Ra. The god Seth succeeded in slaying Apep, and delivered the whole mankind. We can find similar stories in which the more popular Horus plays a role of the slayer. Based on this religious belief, which may well have reflected the ancient Egyptians' life undeniably destined by the annual rise and fall of the Nile, they used to celebrate the annual rise of the Nile. This festival is called in Arabic ‘id waṣā‘ al-nil, which literally means “the festival of the Nile's fulfillment (of promise)”. According to the current practice, a wooden doll dressed in bridal clothes is thrown into the Nile in the hope of its annual rise. This wooden doll, which is called in Arabic ʿarūṣat al-nil “the Nile's bride”, seems to be a substitute for an actual human sacrifice which used to be made in the ancient similar ritual.

Now, we are in a position to talk about the second sub-story or the flesh-bond story from the viewpoint of the folktoric typology of AT890 and

40) This practice has almost declined since the completion of the Aswan High Dam, which constantly regulates the flow of water all the year round. According to Lane (1860 cf. pp. 490–94.), in Cairo the flood is complete, when it has reached 16 dhirā‘, usually in the first decade of the Coptic month of Mesore (about the midst of August), this was proclaimed everywhere in the town. For further details, see the article of “AL-NIL” of *Encyclopedia of Islam* (first edition), and Al-Manāwī (1966) pp. 158–65.
41) According to the historical information recorded by the Arabic historians, when the Arabs came into Egypt, this custom of the sacrifice of “the Nile's bride”, a richly apparelled young virgin, who was thrown into the Nile, was still in use. The oldest Arabic record found in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's *Taʾrikh Miṣr wa-l-Maghrib* [The History of Conquests of Egypt and North Africa] (cf. C. Torrey ed. 1922. New Haven. p. 150.) says that this custom was abolished by ʿAmr bn ʿAṣ. In later times, such a symbolic offering as mentioned above was still practiced on the Coptic ʿid al-salāḥ. Lane observed (ibid. p. 494.) that there was, near the dam of the canal of Cairo, a round pillar of earth which was called al-ʿarūṣa.
J1161.2. Suffice it to say, for the purpose of the present paper, that our story belongs to Group 2, to which Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* also belongs, and that, for the very reason, *Jibālī*’s folktales *The People of the Noble Deed and Noble Descent* will give us great help for a future semiotic study of the origin of Shylock among *dramatis personae*.

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