

Traditional Balearic Folktales Associated with the Old Testament: Types and Structures

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ABSTRACT

A relatively large number of tales associated with the Old Testament can be found in compilations from the Balearic Islands. In particular, there are tales about the Creation or the creatures that inhabited the Earth. Stories of a zoological or botanical nature are the most prolific. There are occasional ideological links with the scriptures, and some episodes highlight certain characteristics and incorporate a moral message that goes beyond the explanatory function. Among the structural devices are: Positive creator / negative creator (result A positive / result B negative); Positive creator / mistake by assistant (result A positive / result B flawed); Infringement / punishment (moral purpose, behavioural guidelines are given); Trial / error or success (instrumental purpose, guidelines for action are given).

Most have an etiological component. Some highlight their explanatory function, with a moral message in the form of behavioural guidelines, while others have an instrumental purpose, offering practical guidelines. Some of these tales can be assigned an ATU number under miscellaneous type 773, which also ought to include the supposition that it was not only the devil who committed an error that led to the Creation, but also God's assistants. Thus the index would fit in better with many tales.

KEYWORDS

etiological legend, Old Testament, the creation of the world, positive creator, negative creator

RESUM

Hi ha força relats vinculats a l'Antic Testament en reculls de les Balears. Destaquen les narracions sobre la creació i els éssers que habiten la Terra. Les narracions de caràcter zoològic o botànic són les més abundants. La relació amb les Escriptures és puntual i ideològica, apareixen uns episodis determinats que impacten per les seves característiques i se'ls dota d'un contingut moral que va més enllà de l'explicatiu. Les estructures són: creador positiu / creador negatiu (resultat A positiu / resultat B negatiu); creador positiu / error de l'ajudant (resultat A positiu / resultat B defectuós); infracció / sanció (finalitat moral, vehicula una pauta de conducta); assaig / error o èxit (finalitat instrumental, vehicula una pauta d'acció).

La majoria tenen un contingut etiològic. En unes destaca la finalitat explicativa però amb contingut moral que s'explicita en pautes de conducta. En altres, la finalitat és instrumental i les pautes que dóna són d'ordre pràctic. A alguns d'aquests relats se'ls pot donar un nombre ATU, incloses en el tipus miscel·lani 773, el qual hauria d'incloure també el supòsit que la creació per equivocació no fos únicament obra del dimoni sinó també dels ajudants de Déu i així es podria ajustar de manera més adient a moltes narracions.

PARAULES CLAU

llegenda etiològica, antic testament, creació del món, creador positiu, creador negatiu

IN SEVERAL COLLECTIONS OF ORAL TALES compiled in the Balearic Islands between the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, there are some twenty stories that are directly related to the Old Testament, the Christian holy book. They can be found in the collections of Antoni M. Alcover (Mallorca), Francesc Camps i Mercadal (Minorca), Andreu Ferrer Ginard (Mallorca and Minorca) and Joan Castelló i Guasch (Ibiza and Formentera).

These tales take the form of etiological legends or stories that explain our origins and give reasons for certain creations or characteristics specific to human beings, animals or plants. They have few protagonists, who are generally of an archetypal nature typical of Western oral traditions: God and Jesus, Saint Peter, Moses, Noah, Solomon and the devil.

This paper aims to define the tale types (i.e. what type of legends they are) and identify the structural devices used and the main themes. Associations are also made with similar tales from different collections in the Catalan language and, whenever possible, mention is made of how they are catalogued. Lastly, we discuss what vision of the world they convey and whether they can be linked or not to Catholic doctrine.

1. Introduction¹

From a review of collections of oral tales published in the Balearic Islands, we were able to identify 29 that are directly related to the Old Testament by the themes that are developed and the characters on which they are based. If they are classified by theme, the result is as follows:²

ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, AND ADAM AND EVE:

“Com és que ses dones tenen més poc cervell que ets homos” [“How it is that women have a smaller brain than men”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 28-29) C-008

“Es cervell de ses dones” [“Women’s brains”] (Castelló 2004: 7-8) C-008

“Com és que hi ha pobres i rics en el món” [“How it is that there are rich and poor in the world”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 29-30) ATU 758

“Es pagesos i es senyors” [“Peasants and nobles”] (Castelló 2004: 10-11) NC

1. This article is one of the results of a research project into popular Catalan literature which has received funding from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness through an interuniversity I+D: FFI 2012-31808.

2. C-XXX is the number of type C of the RondCat database that catalogues Catalan folktales with no ATU type. ATU indicates the number according to Uther (2004) and NC is for types that have not been catalogued.

“Negres, mulatos i grocs” [“Blacks, mulattos and the yellow skinned”] (Castelló 2004: 13-14) NC

“S’homo i sa dona” [“Men and women”] (Castelló 2004: 16-20) NC

“Es llombrígol” [“The belly button”] (Castelló 2004: 21-23) NC

“Sa vida de s’home” [“The life of man”] (Castelló 2004: 33-37) ATU 173

“Sa primera casa” [“The first home”] (Camps 2007: 7-8) NC

ABOUT THE CREATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS:

“De com el Bon Jesús criava el món, i el dimoni...” [“How Jesus created the world and the devil...”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 25-27) ATU 773

“Com és que ses beies en picar se moren” [“How it is that bees die when they sting”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 24-25) C-037

“Es fibló de s’abeia” [“A bee’s sting”] (Castelló 2004: 30-32) C-037

“Com és que ses beies no van casi mai a ses argelagues...” [“How it is that bees hardly ever go to the spiny broom”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 25)

“Com és que ets ametlers floreixen primer” [“How it is that almond trees bloom first”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 35-36) C-020

“S’argelaga” [“The spiny broom”] (Castelló 2004: 24-26) ATU 773

“Lo que digué Noè com hagué escorxat es gat...” [“What Noah said after sleeping off too much drink”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 33-34) NC

“Per què els abarzers aferren de cada cap?” [“Why do blackberries root from both ends?”] (Ferrer 2009: 301) NC

“Per què hi ha figueres que fan dos esplets...?” [“Why do some fig trees have two harvests?”] (Ferrer 2009: 302) C-042

“Com s’introduí es podar sa vinya” [“How pruning vines was introduced”] (Camps 2007: 8) NC

ABOUT NOAH AND THE FLOOD:

“De com Noè feia l’Arca” [“How Noah made the Ark”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 31-32) NC

“L’Arca de Noè tapada de neu” [“Noah’s Ark covered in snow”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 28-29) NC

“Com és que mai plou fort de grec” [“How is it that it never rains hard with a northeast wind?”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 32-33) C-081

“De com Déu allargà cent anys la vida a Noè...” [“How God lengthened Noah’s life by 100 years”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 34-35) NC

*“Lo que digué Noè com hagué escorxat es gat...” [“What Noah said after sleeping off too much drink”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 33-34) NC

*“Per què els abarzers aferren de cada cap?” [“Why do blackberries root from both ends?”] (Ferrer 2009: 301) NC

*“Per què hi ha figueres que fan dos esplets...?” [“Why do some fig trees have two harvests?”] (Ferrer 2009: 302) C-042

*“Com s’introduí es podar sa vinya” [“How pruning vines was introduced”]
(Camps 2007: 8) NC

ABOUT THE TOWER OF BABEL:

“Sa torre de Babilònia” [“The Tower of Babylon”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 35) NC

ABOUT DAVID, SAMSON AND SOLOMON:

“Es tres dons que demanà el Rei David a Déu” [“The three gifts that King David asked of God”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 36-37) ATU 830C

“Lo que succeí a Sansó com li hagueren taiats es cabéis” [“What happened to Samson because his hair had been cut”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 37) NC

“Com acabà Sansó” [“How Samson ended up”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 37-38) NC

“Un consei del rei Salomó” [“King Solomon’s Advice”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 38) NC

“Es pas del Rei Salomó” [“The step by King Solomon”] (Alcover 1936-1972: 39-40)
ATU 217

2. Contextualizing the material

The above legends were published in four different collections that contained material compiled between the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in Mallorca, Minorca and Ibiza. In the few more modern collections that exist, no stories of these characteristics can be found. In all cases, the published versions were not directly transcribed from oral sources; instead they were rewritten by the person compiling the tales. As for the sources of the tales, Alcover (Mallorca) and Ferrer (Mallorca and Minorca) indicate the name of the person, but this is not the case with Castelló (Ibiza) or Camps (Minorca). Antoni M. Alcover’s sources include Alcover himself, since he used to listen to these short stories as a child, together with his mother, brother, father, sister-in-law, niece and other people associated with his family through work or because they were friends or neighbours. Only in one case is the source a priest, but he was told the tale by his family not by the Church. Ferrer includes a tale collected orally from a 92-year-old man during an outing to gather folklore material (Mallorca: *Es Capdellà*, 1927) and another by Master Joan Gomila (Minorca: *Migjorn Gran*, 1913). Male and female sources can be found indistinctly in equal numbers. Most of Alcover’s informants – as is typical in his *Aplec de rondalles mallorquines* (*Collection of Mallorcan Folktales*) – come from eastern Mallorca. From the scanty information about the sources, we can infer that the tales were typically told in domestic circles and recounted also to children (among other people). They formed part of country people’s oral heritage: a kind of parallel, festive Bible.

Of the 29 tales, only 6 are catalogued in the ATU folktale index and 7 are preceded by the letter C, indicating that this material is found in Catalan corpora but not in the ATU index. Consequently 13 stories are catalogued and 16 are not. This means that we have no record of their featuring in any other catalogue in Catalan-speaking areas or elsewhere. This is quite a high percentage, although it

is typical of tales such as these because they are hard to catalogue and are rarely taken into much account by folklore experts or compilers of folktales.

The 6 tales with an ATU number are catalogued as animal tales (ATU 173 and ATU 217) or religious tales (ATU 758, two versions of 773 and ATU 830C). With the exception of ATU 773 – which describes a contest between God and the devil about the Creation (and there are numerous tales of this kind, particularly among those compiled by Joan Amades, published in the first edition of the book *Rondallística* in 1950) – the other four types are only documented in the Balearic Islands and not in other Catalan-speaking areas.

3. Links with the Bible

Of the 29 tales that were analysed, 9 are about the Creation of the world and humanity, 9 about the Creation and the characteristics of animals and plants, 8 about Noah, the Ark and the Flood,³ 1 about the Tower of Babel and 5 about important male figures of the Old Testament: Samson, David and Solomon. Consequently, most of the tales refer to a series of core themes associated with the Book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible. Let us remember that Genesis includes the story of the Creation of the world and humanity by God, the fall of man brought about by Adam and Eve, the story of the Flood, the construction of the Tower of Babel, the call of Abraham, and the Israelite exodus from Egypt.

Most of the material that was analysed consists of stories on the theme of the Creation, particularly those compiled by Castelló in his book *Rondaies eivissenques de quan el Bon Jesús anava pel món*, first published in Palma in 1974. It contains a total of 23 stories, 8 of which concern the subject of this paper. Indeed, this is the only collection of oral tales from a Catalan-speaking area that is entirely devoted to etiological tales or religious folktales.

As for the subject of the Creation, none of the tales talks about the creation of the world in itself. Instead they concentrate on the creation of humanity, an explanation of supposed characteristics of men and women, and the defining features of some animals and plants, particularly bees and vines. They generally elaborate on minor details that are not developed in *Genesis* and they explain certain zoological or botanical characteristics that might be regarded as unique, taking an etiological or mythical approach. Within these tales, it is important to highlight the frequency with which the flood, Noah and the ark feature, possibly because this is one of the most appealing chapters of the Old Testament in terms of the story. It is an episode that is easy to recreate in the imagination, given all the different components: nature gone wild, the struggle to survive, the presence of animals, the repopulation of the Earth, vines, wine and drunkenness, the main character's longevity and his direct links with God. An explanatory account is also given of the Tower of Babel and the ensuing confusion of tongues, answering the eternal question of why there are so many languages in the world.

Lastly, five tales feature three biblical characters who are not from Genesis but from later books. Samson appears in the Bible in the Book of Judges. Samson's main characteristic is his almost superhuman strength and his epic, heroic

3. It is important to take into account that three tales are included in two sections – the characteristics of plants and Noah – since they are related to the subject of plant characteristics but their main protagonist is Noah.

fight against the Philistines. This is demonstrated by such incredible feats confronting a lion, defeating an army with the most rudimentary of weapons, or his demolishing a huge building with the strength of his arms. Samson's hair is the source of his strength and he is only defeated when he is betrayed and deprived of it. With his superhuman strength, Samson is a clear precedent for numerous heroes in folktales of a magical or supernatural nature. The main protagonist of another tale is David, king of Israel, whose story is narrated in the Book of Samuel and Book of Psalms, which is attributed to him. Traditionally he is presented as a fair, brave, resolute, sensitive, passionate king who is also prone to the temptations of the flesh. Lastly, Solomon, David's son, is no doubt the most commonly found biblical king in oral literature. In Christianity, his name is synonymous with wisdom and fairness. He is presented as a just, intelligent king and he is said to have governed Israel for many years. He is considered to be the author of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Proverbs and the Song of Songs. Solomon is traditionally noted for his wealth, organizational capacity, wisdom and fondness for women. These last two characteristics – his wisdom and sensuality – are the aspects that are most strongly emphasized in oral literature about Solomon.

In conclusion, it can be said that there are strong sporadic, clearly ideological links between the Holy Scriptures and the material that we analyse. That is, in popular tradition, certain episodes, archetypal characters and highly entertaining events with close links to listeners' everyday lives are selected and highlighted, and they are adapted to add a moral lesson or a naturally observable one. On occasion, they have a stronger etiological component, while others have an underlying comic spirit or function as examples, such as when Solomon is made to look ridiculous for his excessive fondness for young women. On all occasions, there is a certain anachronism and confusion of eras and characters.

4. The tales. Structural devices and functionalities

The Bible is a strong thematic base. It is not a single book but a vast, complex series of narrative and lyric tales built on cultural pillars whose origins date back to far distant times and a broad geographical area, embracing philosophical, spiritual and literary aspects. The material in the Bible became known to people through Christianization and it pervades all areas of human life. It also has a sacred significance for most of the population, since it is considered to be "the word of God" and so it is infused with authority. More especially, it is taught in church when biblical texts are read aloud during religious services, in sermons by priests, through monasteries and through the visual and emotional impact that religious images have (many of which, as is the case of altarpieces, often have a strong narrative element).

At the same time, because Old Testament stories – which are rooted in the oral traditions of ancient Asian cultures – were listened to over and over again in religious services day after day and year after year, they came to form part of the stories that were told by their listeners, using oral narrative devices characteristic of folktales, legends, explanatory or exemplary tales, fables etc. These were devices that had also been present in their origins and in their creation, with which their listeners were highly familiar. This process was a continual one. Oral narration did not modify the Holy Scriptures, given their sacred written nature,

although they were subject to variation through translation and interpretation. However, listeners came to re-recount them orally in versions that were shaped in accordance with believers' perceptions. Thus some episodes of the Bible came to form part of oral literature, undergoing changes, becoming spinoffs, or being shortened or lengthened in a unique style worthy of study.

What are these episodes? If we start out with the material compiled in the Balearic Islands – which serves as a good example because it is a Mediterranean culture isolated from the rest of the Mediterranean, since it is an island in the middle of the sea, and yet receptive, for the same reason, to the most diverse influences –, we can see that they are the episodes that might have the strongest impact on people's minds due to the significance of the event that is recounted (the Creation, the flood, the Tower of Babel) or the human aspect (Noah's predilection for wine, Absalom's desire for revenge, Samson's weak character that contrasts with his physical strength, King David's pride, Solomon's sensuality). The episodes have an epic component with all the attraction that this provides and also human appeal in that they act as a mirror for social and individual behaviour.

This literary material (the characters, situations and plots) is adapted to incorporate narrative devices common to all oral literature and there is a perfect symbiosis between the substance (what is told) and the form (how it is told with particular narrative mechanisms) so that the tale is assimilated, re-told and survives as part of our oral traditions. That is, it becomes highly functional in a society determined by everything that serves to transmit information. When the 29 tales are examined, it becomes evident that there is a wide variety of structural narrative devices used in the different stories relating to the Old Testament.

4.1 *Etiological tales. Structural devices*

Of the many definitions or approaches to the concept of etiological tales, we will take that of the academic Marlène Albert-Llorca (1991: 21), who defines them as tales structured in three parts in which a lasting phenomenon can be inferred from a single real or supposed past event. They are structured as follows:

1. The staging and presentation of the object and characters involved in the process.
2. An explanation of the cause that led to the creation or acquisition of its/ their characteristics.
3. The tale's justification or empirical validation in the context of today's reality. The conclusion tends to be a rhetorical device that "confirms" the truth of the tale.

The most common structural device used in these tales is a positive creator versus a negative one, where God and the devil create different animals and plants. The ATU index includes them in a fairly general way in the section on religious folktales, considering them to be part of a miscellaneous type classified as number 773 (*Contest of Creation between God and the Devil*). The best example of this type in Balearic literature is a legend published by Alcover with a long and equally expressive title: "De com el Bon Jesús criava el món, i el dimoni hi volgué posar sa ditada" ("How Jesus created the world and the devil wanted to

leave his mark on it”). This describes the aforementioned contest and establishes a series of contrasting pairs of animals and plants: pigs/hedgehogs; sheep/goats, vines/blackberries, slugs/snails, apple trees/apples of Sodom. Given that he cites different sources, Alcover probably combines different oral information from separate sources into one single story. This was a typical practice in his process of “restoring” and rewriting oral tales. The other example of this type, collected in Ibiza and published under the title “S’argelaga” [“The Spiny Broom”] (Castelló: 24-26) concerns a single pair of contrasting plants: the Spanish broom and spiny broom.

One variation of this type is a tale on the dual theme of the Creation and a mistake. In this case, the positive creator creates something but his assistant makes a mistake in carrying out his instructions. This assistant might be Saint Peter or an angel or another being. It is not God’s fault that the creatures are “flawed” but that of his assistants due to their inefficiency. Thus the idea of God’s perfection is conserved. This is the case of a tale that explains why women have a smaller brain than men (Alcover, § 4: 28-29 and Castelló: 7-8) or why some people have white hair, others have black hair and others have blond hair (Castelló: 30-32). Given their nature, this type of tale is often a vehicle for transmitting ideological beliefs (misogynous or racist ones in the examples mentioned) by giving us to understand that any divergence from the original model is what we might call a “manufacturing” defect.

4.2 Function

A. ETIOLOGICAL TALES WITH A MORAL MESSAGE

On occasion, etiological tales serve as a framework or excuse for a moral message or state of affairs that is normally clarified at the end of the tale. These tales are usually based on the dual concept of infringement and punishment. Generally, an animal behaves in a reprehensible way and so is punished by being given a negative physiological characteristic. Thus bees ask to be able to kill when they sting so as to protect the beneficial products that they make, but they are granted just the opposite wish: when they sting, their barbed stinger cannot be removed and they die. They are punished for being over ambitious. Similarly, the tale entitled “Com és que ses beies no van casi mai a ses argelagues...” (“How it is that bees hardly ever go to the spiny broom”) (Alcover § 2: 25) transmits the idea that we should not confide in external appearances but in inner characteristics.

An etiological tale with a moral message based on the idea of infringement and punishment is used to explain the existence of different languages, the result of a punishment. Human pride in wishing to build a tower that reaches the sky, the Tower of Babel, evokes a furious response from God in the form of a confusion of tongues that makes it impossible for the work to continue (Alcover § II: 35).

The plot of ATU 758 revolves around the same two concepts. Eve lies to God by telling him that she only has 12 children when in reality she has 24. God shares out the world’s riches among the 12 that she presents to him. When she confesses that she has 12 more, the riches have already been shared out and this is why there are rich and poor people in the world. Lying to God has terrible consequences that humans have to put up with forever (Alcover §4: 28-29 i). Something similar occurs in another instructive story (catalogued as C-042) in which God or Jesus

ask their interlocutor (Noah or Saint Peter) what fruit he prefers. So as not to give the impression that he likes drinking, Noah or Saint Peter says figs instead of grapes. God then makes the fig tree bear fruit twice a year instead of the vine, which his interlocutor would have preferred, given his fondness for wine. The same happens in the story “Per què els abarzers aferren de cada cap?” [“Why do blackberries root from each end?”] (Ferrer, 301 and under another title in Alcover § 9: 33-34), in which Noah has divine powers and wishes the vine to take root at both ends. His children mistakenly believe that he wants to curse it and so they present him with a blackberry branch. In all cases, lying, particularly to a superior, has undesired consequences. Thus in addition to a more or less evident etiological explanation, there is also a powerful moral lesson.

B. ETIOLOGICAL TALES WITH AN INSTRUMENTAL PURPOSE

Some tales that we would not hesitate to classify as etiological are based on a structural device that might be described as trial and error and, rather than a moral lesson, they tend to make an observation or convey an instrumental piece of advice, generally related to the observation of nature or meteorology or agriculture. Their function or final objective is almost the same as that of a proverb on the subject of weather or agriculture, providing guidelines for action on the basis of observation of a natural phenomenon. But whilst proverbs do it in a highly synthetic way and formal devices like rhyme, rhythm, parallelisms and reiteration are used to help people remember them and integrate them into their cultural knowledge, these tales act in just the opposite way. Their success lies in the attraction of the tale itself, the detailed explanation, memorization of the plot, the protagonists’ evocative appeal, or the plasticity of the scenes described. This is the case of the story “De com Noè feia l’Arca” (“How Noah built the Ark”), where we are told that the wood must be cut when the moon is at a certain stage so as to prevent it from getting woodworm. Noah complains that the wood for the Ark is full of woodworm and that he will never be able to finish it. Then the following dialogue takes place:

“Listen,” said Jesus, “Don’t you look what you’re doing when you cut wood?”

“I cut what I need and good night to you!” said Noah.

“Why don’t you cut it according to the moon?” said Jesus.

“What do you mean according to the moon?” said Noah.

“I mean wood from deciduous trees must be cut when the moon is old, and wood from evergreen ones when it is new!” said Jesus.

“I don’t care what moon it is,” said Noah.

“That’s why the wood gets woodworm,” said Jesus. “If you don’t cut it as I told you, it will always get woodworm and you’ll never finish the Ark. So much effort for nothing!”

Noah cut the wood as Jesus had said and he never saw any woodworm again. He finished the Ark to perfection and everyone who fitted in escaped from the Flood.

And so to prevent wood from getting woodworm:

If it is from deciduous trees, cut it during an old moon; if it is from evergreen ones, cut it during a new moon (Alcover § 6: 31-32).

By chance Noah also “discovered” that vines should be pruned when a hungry ass ate the shoots and the following year they grew more vigorously (Camps: 8). And, by some sort of patriarchal invocation, he made the almond tree the first tree to bloom when it was still in the midst of winter (Alcover § 12: 35-36). The observation “it never rains hard when a northeast wind blows” that underlies the proverb “Qui és nat ni naixerà, / ploure fort de grec no veurà” (“He who is born and shall be born, / shall never see hard rain with a northeast wind”) was also given narrative form in an etiological tale (Alcover § 8: 32-33) that serves to indicate that we should have no fear of heavy rain when the wind blows from the northeast. It somehow signifies that God believed the Flood’s consequences to have been excessive and, to prevent a reoccurrence, decided that it would never rain heavily with a northeast wind. Likewise, the following proverb expresses the notion that if it starts raining when the wind is from the northeast, then the wind will shift to the east: “Northeast winds move it, east winds bring rain”, as the DCVB indicates:

It is said that, on the occasion of the flood, the rain was accompanied by a northeast wind. Because this wind brought the flood, God decreed that it would never rain heavily again with that wind. This is why rain accompanied by a northeast wind is light and, if it does rain heavily, the wind will shift to the north or east. Hence the saying: “He who is born and shall be born, shall never see hard rain with a northeast wind”. In contrast, another saying says: “Northeast wind, rain in the gutter.”

An instrumental piece of advice can also be found in the tale “Un consell del rei Salomó” (“King Solomon’s advice”) (Alcover, § 16: 38), in which a peasant, desperate because his land produces very little, asks the king for advice. He is told: “Plant oats on fallow land”. That is, plant oats on land that has been left to rest for a year or more. The peasant follows the king’s advice with excellent results. In a footnote Alcover states that this advice is very popular among Mallorcan peasants and that it is also reflected by the saying: “He who has fallow land will have bread” or “Good fallow land guarantees a good harvest”. In the story, the king is clearly a wise counsellor and the epitome of wisdom. Another explanatory tale recounts how the ark remained on top of a mountain covered in snow forever so that it would not be the object of worship or a source of relics (“L’Arca de Noè tapada de neu” [“Noah’s Ark covered in snow”] § 7: 32). It explains why some parts jut out from the top of Mount Ararat during the thaw and also why no relic of the vessel has been conserved.

4.3 Other narrative material

The remaining tales associated with the Old Testament from Balearic folktale collections are more varied in nature. Only two are catalogued in the ATU index. On the one hand, there is a tale entitled “Es pas del rei Salomó” (“The step by King Solomon”). This coincides with ATU type 217, in the section of folktales about animals entitled *The Cat with the Candle*. In fact, the animals – two cats and a rat – are mere instruments for Solomon to demonstrate how strong human and animal instinct is. It is more an exercise in ingenuity than a folktale about animals, since it highlights Solomon’s skill at justifying his own inappropriate conduct. This type of tale is documented in 10th century Arabic literature in the context of classic debates on whether behaviour is more heavily influenced by education or instinct. This type of discussion can often be found in disputes between such traditional figures as the wise Solomon or his opponent Marcolf, who assumes the appearance of a wise fool or apparent fool capable of reasoning in a surprisingly original way. These disputes are common in Jewish medieval tradition.

Secondly, there is a story entitled “Es tres dons que demanà el Rei David a Déu” (“The three gifts King David asked of God”) (Alcover, § 13: 36-37). This tale is not catalogued in the RondCat, although it clearly coincides with ATU type 830C *If God Wills*. This is a miscellaneous type in the religious folktale category, based on a plot in which someone is deprived of some gifts they had been granted because they failed to say “God willing” or “if God wills” when they asked for them. It is a type that is extensively documented in Europe, Asia, Northern Africa and South America. In fact, it is an example of a tale with a moral message, showing how human pride is punished by God. In the version that we mentioned, King David asks God for three children:⁴ one who will be the wisest person in the world (Solomon), another who will be the strongest (Samson) and a third who will be the most handsome (Absalom), but he committed a sin of pride by not adding “*God willing*”. This lack of humility is punished by the tragic fate that awaits the three sons: Solomon lets his lust run away with him (“women make him lose his *kyrie eleison*”); Samson is betrayed, tortured and brings about his own death; and Absalom – who dares to confront his father – dies, hanging from his own hair, before going to hell. The popular Mallorcan tale does not coincide exactly with the biblical one, but it clearly highlights the paradigm or reference to the three sons as a model of wisdom, strength and beauty. None of these qualities is a sufficient guarantee of success, however, if we cannot count on God’s aid, and divine entreaties should always be made with humility.

We believe that the other two tales are simply versions in verse of the biblical texts. Stories §14 and §15 are popular re-creations of Samson’s tale, as contained in chapters 13 to 16 of the Book of Judges. Samson is an archetypal hero of incredible strength and a clear precedent for such classical heroes as Hercules or folktale heroes with magical or supernatural powers such as Joan de l’Ós. Widespread fascination for this epic figure, his feats, and his tragic story of love and hate clearly explain why Samson has lived on in people’s imaginations.

4. Remember that “David” means God’s beloved or God’s chosen one. This Old Testament king might therefore be said to have failed to take proper advantage of being God’s favourite.

5. Conclusions

1. A remarkable number of tales associated with the Old Testament can be found in compilations of Balearic oral literature. With the exception of the collection by Joan Amades, this figure is higher than any other collection of folktales from Catalan-speaking areas. What stands out particularly is the number of tales about the Creation or about characteristics of the creatures that inhabited the Earth.
2. Over half these tales are not catalogued in the ATU or in the specific Catalan catalogue.
3. Most of the tales are related to the Book of Genesis and only five have some sort of connection with other books from the Bible. As tends to occur throughout Europe, the tales combine to form a popular bible that has probably lost much of its original material. Zoological or botanical tales are the most prolific and well-developed.
4. Strong ideological connections with the Scriptures are only very sporadic. Some episodes make an impact because of their plot or for aesthetic reasons and they have a moral message that goes beyond their initial explanatory purpose.
5. The most commonly used structural devices are:

Positive creator / negative creator
(*result A positive / result B negative*)

Positive creator / mistake by assistant
(*result A positive / result B faulty*)

Infringement / punishment
(*moral purpose, gives behavioural guidelines*)

Trial / error or success
(*instrumental purpose, guidelines for action*)

6. Most have an etiological component. That is, they explain the reason for something or how an object or event came about. In some cases, the explanatory purpose is particularly evident although they also have an important moral message in the form of behavioural guidelines. In others, the purpose is clearly instrumental and the guidelines they give are practical ones, generally coinciding with proverbs, which provide similar information in a more summarized format.
7. Some of the tales can be given an ATU number in the religious folktales category, given that they coincide with miscellaneous type 773. We believe that this type should also include the supposition that, when creation is brought about through error, not only is the devil responsible – as indicated in the ATU index – but also God’s assistants (generally Saint Peter or an angel).

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