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Review of Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy, *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*

Dan Ben-Amos

*University of Pennsylvania, dbamos@sas.upenn.edu*

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Review of Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy, *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*

**Abstract**
The teaching and research in folklore at the Hebrew University in Israel, as in many American universities, preceded the formal establishment of a folklore department. Most of these activities were carried out by members of the Institute of Jewish Studies. The present collection of twelve essays represents, as it purports to do, the scholarly position of Jewish folk-literature at the Hebrew University, its subjects, problems, approaches and methods of research. Most of the contributors to this volume have written extensively in Hebrew, yet their publications in English are scanty. *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature* is designed to enable non-Hebrew reading scholars to become acquainted with their work. The articles deal with the folk-literature of three distincy historical periods—the talmudic-midrashic (second to fifth centuries), medieval, and modern—and are concerned with aesthetical, historical, literary, and cultural problems.

**Disciplines**
Cultural History | Folklore | Jewish Studies | Near and Middle Eastern Studies

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Herskovits' involvement with folklore was more direct than many perhaps realize today. He was president of the American Folklore Society in 1945 and was elected to the first group of Folklore Fellows. Herskovits always recognized the importance of folklore and made significant contributions to the field in terms of collections, theoretical discussions, and observations on field work. Despite its drawbacks by today's standards, \textit{Dahomean Narrative} remains one of the most comprehensive studies of prose narratives, including translated texts, comment on related verbal art forms, full cultural contexts, as well as a valuable survey of theorists, especially worthwhile for his evaluations of Freudian and Jungian analyses. Simpson comments on little beyond \textit{Dahomean Narrative} and Herskovits' other collections of "oral literature," but one can see anticipation of later scholars' emphasis on context and texture in addition to textual analysis. Herskovits also foresaw the importance of the study of speech behavior in general, especially in relation to the Afro-American "man of words." While Herskovits' insistence on the separation of "folk literature" is not today shared by many folklorists, his interest in all forms of expressive culture leads to basic research in ethnomusicology, material culture, aesthetics, and life style—all of value to the contemporary folklorist. Also of note are Herskovits' numerous contributions to fieldwork methodology. These include his early (1930's) use of field recorders and cine film, as well as comment on the "hypothetical situation" and other recommendations about fieldwork procedures.

Herskovits' total contribution was not limited to scholarly publications. His legacy must as well be reckoned in terms of his many competent students (who have themselves made significant contributions to the study of folklore—by anyone's definition) and his commitment to education and service beyond academia. While Herskovits' concern with the larger public may not be preserved in textbooks, his efforts on behalf of Africa and Afro-Americans were crucial and serve to remind all of us of our obligations outside the ivy-covered halls. After reading this book and being reminded of the scope and originality of Herskovits' work, one cannot help but wonder why he has not received even more attention for his accomplishments as scholar and humanist. Perhaps Herskovits would have understood because in his works he returns continually to what he termed "cultural imponderables." While this concept is hardly one of the type preferred by social "scientists," it nevertheless reflects that with which we must all cope, for indeed, the study of culture is frequently akin to trying to hold water in one's hands. To Simpson's credit, this basic concern of Herskovits, the humane study of humans, is reflected throughout this volume. Thus, we now have not only an excellent well-balanced primer on Herskovits, but a valuable reminder of the importance of his scholarship and those issues to which he called attention.

\textit{Drew University}

\textit{Madison, N. J.}

\textbf{Philip Peek}

\textbf{Folk Narrative: Problems in Study and Presentation}


The teaching and research in folklore at the Hebrew University in Israel, as in many
American universities, preceded the formal establishment of a folklore department. Most of these activities were carried out by members of the Institute of Jewish Studies. The present collection of twelve essays represents, as it purports to do, the scholarly position of Jewish folk-literature at the Hebrew University, its subjects, problems, approaches and methods of research. Most of the contributors to this volume have written extensively in Hebrew, yet their publications in English are scanty. Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature is designed to enable non-Hebrew reading scholars to become acquainted with their work. The articles deal with the folk-literature of three distinct historical periods—the talmudic-midrashic (second to fifth centuries), medieval, and modern—and are concerned with aesthetical, historical, literary, and cultural problems.

Aggadic narratives, like folktales, have often been regarded as lacking artistic-literary merit. Jonah Fraenkel and Zipporah Kagan set out to correct this impression. In his essay "Bible Verses Quoted in Tales of the Sages" (pp. 80–99), Jonah Fraenkel seeks to reveal "the high artistic level" (p. 80) of midrashic tales by examining the use and literary purpose of biblical quotations by the rabbis. He contends that rather than being accidental, "the quotations from the Bible become an intrinsic part of the structure of the stories" (p. 80). Fraenkel convincingly demonstrates the validity of his thesis by analyzing three separate aggadic narratives. However, in his zeal to advocate the literary merit of midrashic tales, he has gone one step too far. The selection or establishment of an adequate text becomes a crucial point in this literary-philological close reading of the stories. Fraenkel has chosen a method which inevitably leads to circularity in literary aesthetic analysis. He has selected texts which he considers to be "the best from literary and artistic aspects," as he points out in one case (p. 94, note 40). That is to say, these are the versions that correspond most closely to his own artistic values. Thus, the aesthetics of biblical quotation is surely that of Fraenkel, and just possibly also that of post-biblical Jewish narrators. In order to avoid this pitfall of circularity it is necessary to refrain from any value judgments in the selection of texts and to examine the entire range of possibilities in the literary art of postbiblical storytellers. Then we could establish the boundaries of use of particular narrative devices, such as biblical quotations.

Like Fraenkel, Zipporah Kagan attempts to demonstrate the literary merits of midrashic tales, albeit her approach differs. In her essay "Divergent Tendencies and Their Literary Moulding in the Aggadah" (pp. 151–170), she analyzes five different versions of a biographical tale about Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, a Jewish sage of the first and second centuries. Kagan's basic assumption is that the "Aggadah is literature and should be treated as such" (p. 151). Hence she examines these tales in terms which literary critics often apply to novels and short stories, such as characterization of personalities, motivation, plot development, and meanings. In particular, she employs some of the concepts Max Lüthi formulated in his writing about European narratives. Accordingly, Kagan distinguishes two generic groups among the texts of the same tale; the first tend to be realistic, the second fabulous. Following her literary analysis she makes some historical suggestions, proposing the chronological priority of the realistic versions. However, if we are to treat the Aggadah, and legends and folklore in general, as literature, it is no longer possible to assume automatically that fictive elements in tales represent secondary developments.

A different literary-historical problem is explored by Joseph Heinemann in his article "The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim—A Form-Critical Study" (pp. 100–112). The proem is a distinct genre of the Aggadah, conventionally thought to serve as an intro-
duction to the main sermon delivered by the preacher at the synagogue. However, this assumption is ridden with unresolved puzzles which students of the Aggadah preferred to circumvent rather than disturb the status quo of the proem. Heinemann challenges this basic assumption and, by using careful literary analysis of the rhetorical elements in the proem, he convincingly demonstrates that it was not an introduction to another sermon. Rather "the proems were originally sermons delivered before the scriptural lesson itself," and "the proem and the reading following upon it were conceived as one organic entity" (p. 109). In the second part of his article, Heinemann examines the evolution of the proem form within the structure of the synagogue service. He concludes that there is evidence for its beginnings in the first and second centuries. However, the proem achieved popularity and reached formal development only at the end of the second century and later.

A second group of essays about the Aggadah deals with historical problems. The Aggadah has often served as a source for the reconstruction of historical events and social life in the postbiblical period. Yet its reliability is hardly more adequate than that of orally told legends. The corroboration of events and customs by other, preferably non-Jewish, sources yields support to the testimony of aggadic tradition, but still does not provide an absolute confirmation of their historicity. Moshe David Herr addresses himself to the problem of the Aggadah as an historical source in his essay "The Historical Significance of the Dialogues between Jewish Sages and Roman Dignitaries" (pp. 123–150). Aggadic books abound with descriptions and alleged verbal renditions of such dialogues, ranging in topics from philosophy to religion to politics; often names of Jewish rabbis and Roman dignitaries are specified. In spite of the apparent accuracy in historical reporting, Herr concludes that these dialogues represent a literary genre rather than valid testimony; yet there is some likelihood that these types of encounters—though not the specific reported incidents—could have taken place in the reality of the Roman rule in Palestine. This essay is of particular interest to historical folklorists, as it provides the broader literary context of Jewish narrative tradition which included the type of stories that later become, according to Walter Anderson, Types 922, "The Shepherd Substituting for the Priest Answers the King’s Questions" (The King and the Abbot) and 924A "Discussion between Priest and Jew Carried on by Symbols."

A further dent in the historical reliability of aggadic narratives is made by Shmuel Safrai in his essay "Tales of the Sages in the Palestinian Tradition and the Babylonian Talmud" (pp. 209–232). In fact, his intended purpose is to find the historical core of aggadic tales, but in the process he points out the many layers of legend and fiction that are wrapped around them. In order to penetrate them, Safrai examines the tales in the light of relevant historical developments in Jewish law and the chronology of events. He also compares their renditions in the two Talmuds. He finds that on the one hand, moral incidents have higher historical likelihood than biographical stories about the rabbis; on the other hand, the Babylonian and the Palestinian traditions respectively have consistent patterns of telling stories about prominent personalities: the first connects them in family ties, whereas the second only points out similarities in outlook and ideas.

The narratives are often ancillary to the Aggadah exegetical aspect—the midrash, as Roger le Seaut points out in his 1971 essay in Interpretation, "Apropos a Definition of Midrash." Two essays in this volume are devoted to this mode of biblical interpretation. Benjamin Uffenheimer discusses "The Consecration of Isaiah in Rabbinic Exege-
He finds three approaches in the rabbinical interpretations of chapter VI of the book of Isaiah. The first attempts to conceive of the prophet's vision in terms of the actual conditions and events of the biblical period, the second, represented by a single homily, describes the prophet in a rational state of mind detached from the marvelous circumstances given in the scripture, and the third expounds on the biblical text in mystical terms.

The second essay that deals with biblical exegesis is "The Homiletic Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," by Ephraim E. Urbach (pp. 247-275). On the basis of the aggadic books alone, it is impossible to discern the historical development of the three exegetical modes of the Song of Songs: the historical-allegorical, mystical, and eschatological. Therefore, Urbach turns to the writings of the Church Father Origen (third century) who employed historical and mystical exegesis, obviously influenced by Jewish interpretations. Origen does not only offer possible dates to the exegetical approaches to Canticles, but also enables us to explain some rabbinical exegesis as reactions against Christian homiletical interpretations.

In medieval times and later, the biblical exegesis of talmudic and midrashic rabbis became subject to allegorical interpretations. A case study of such an historical development in Jewish tradition is the article by Jacob Elbaum, "Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague and his Attitude to the Aggadah" (pp. 28-47). This rabbi, known popularly as the Maharal of Prague (1512-1609), himself became a subject of legend as the maker of the Golem of Prague, a powerful man artificially created and enacted by kabbalistic rites. In contrast to the views of the medieval Jewish philosopher and theologian Maimonides (1135-1204) and the Jewish-Italian scholar and physician Azariah Ben Moses dei Rossi (c.1511-c. 1578), the Maharal viewed the Aggadah not as poetry full of images and conceits, but as allegory. The exegetical interpretations of the Bible contained profound meanings with mystical, historical, and eschatological implications which are not apparent in a literal reading of the text.

While Elbaum examines the attitude toward the Aggadah within the context of Jewish culture, David Flusser and Joseph Dan discuss traditional narratives in their relations to parallels in European Christian books. In a careful thematic description, "Palaea Historica—An Unknown Source of Biblical Legends" (pp. 48-79), Flusser examines a ninth-century Byzantine book, comparing it to similar medieval Jewish retellings of the biblical story, and to Jewish narrative traditions. At least in one case he finds that the Palaea Historica preserves a more authentic version of a Jewish legend than is available in extant Jewish sources. Although the Greek text of Palaea Historica was published in 1893, hardly any students of Jewish folklore have paid attention to this important source; Louis Ginzburg did not refer to it in his Legends of the Jews.

Joseph Dan explores parallels in Jewish and Christian medieval writings in his article "Rabbi Judah the Pious and Caesarius of Heisterbach: Common Motifs in their Stories" (pp. 18-27). Rabbi Judah the Pious of Rogensburg (c. 1150-1217) was a leader of German Jewry, while Caesarius of Heisterbach (c. 1180-c. 1240) was a prior at a monastery. Both wrote books about ethical and religious conduct in which they interspersed their teaching and preaching with tales about various subjects. Initially, in a fashion of literary historians, Dan searches for a common literary source from which both writers could have possibly borrowed their themes. But as he is unable to identify such a source, Dan reaches the conclusion that a folklorist would have had as an a priori
assumption, namely, that the tales and superstitions in the respective books belong to the realm of popular beliefs shared by Jews and Christians alike in the Middle Ages.

While the papers on medieval narratives emphasize the intercultural relationships of Jewish folklore, the articles on folklore in modern society examine tales and songs as they appear within Jewish culture. In fact, Dov Noy's essay "The JewishVersions of the 'Animal Languages' Folktale (AT 670)—A Typological-Structural Study" (pp. 171-208), is an attempt to establish the Jewish form of this narrative type. There are three aspects to this paper: the substantive examination of texts which are extant in Jewish aggadic books and in oral tradition only recently recorded; the theoretical elaborations on von Sydow's concept of oicotype; and the attempted synthesis between the historic-geographic and the structural methods in folktale research. Noy is able to demonstrate the persistence of a particular form of tale type 670 which is typical to Jewish tradition, deviating at several points from the versions which are common in other cultures. Noy explains these deviations from the standard version (see Kenneth Ketner's "What Is a Story?" forthcoming in Folklore) by three "oicotype-laws" which he formulates on the basis of interview and textual evidence: (a) major changes occur at the beginning and at the end of the tales, (b) the purpose of the variations is to arouse ethnic pride in the audience, and (c) adaptation of the tale to Jewish tradition employs linguistic audial word association. However, these are not "laws" properly speaking. It would be better to conceive of them as rhetorical strategies of narrators, as they serve primarily to capture the audience's attention. Noy also demonstrates that the changes that the narrators introduce at the beginning of the narrative contribute to a higher correspondence of this tale type with the structure of the folktale that Propp has formulated. However in his synthesis between narrative type and structure Noy equates certain motifs with distinct functions. While the establishment of a correspondence between individual motifs and functions is certainly possible, in principle both are units of two radically different analytical systems and the accidental correlation between them serves a very limited purpose. Nevertheless this attempted synthesis commands attention, in particular, in view of the recent work of Lubomír Doležel (Poetics, 1972) in which he proposes a theoretical framework for the relationship between motifs and motifemes.

The only essay in this volume which is devoted to folk poetry is "La qṣida chez les juifs marocains" by Issachar Ben-Ami (pp. 1-17). The qṣida is a poetic genre of Moroccan Jews which is sung on diverse public gatherings, ranging from election campaigns to family occasions. The singers are semi-professionals who are able to respond to current public affairs and often combine topical subjects with themes taken from biblical or fantastic narratives. Among the texts that Ben-Ami summarizes or translates there are qṣidas about Hitler, the arrival of the American soldiers in Morocco, and political affairs in Israel, as well as songs about biblical characters such as Joseph and Hamman. In short, this is a vital and culturally viable poetic genre that transcends the cultural changes which the Moroccan Jews underwent.

In conclusion, this volume contains important studies on Aggadah and Jewish folk-literature. It represents the diversity of approaches and concerns of the members of the Hebrew University faculty. Although there was no intention on the part of the editors to provide the book with unifying themes, some do emerge. There is an increased awareness of the literary qualities of the Aggadah, even among those contributors who conduct historical research; there is a lack of nationalistic zeal and no attempt to present Jewish traditions in an alleged historical and cultural isolation; and finally, there is clear recog-
nition that folk narration and singing are not dying arts in Jewish communities but continue in spite of immigration and the uprooting of cultures.

University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dan Ben-Amos


This volume is a collection of the papers, or abstracts of the same, delivered at an international gathering of folk narrative (especially legend) researchers in Freiburg in the fall of 1972. The meeting was called because of the cancellation of the International Folk Narrative Congress scheduled for the preceding spring in New Delhi.

There are sixteen papers, fourteen of which are by European folktale researchers, and half of which have directly to do with the research effort underway at Freiburg: demonological legends. Lutz Röhrich, the convener of the meeting, opened the discussions with a Standortbestimmung on legend research, touching lightly on such divergent "problems" as terminology, genre, structure, cultural history, parapsychology, psychology, functionalism, and social history. The remaining fifteen papers are reports on new legend formations in the industrial environs of the USA (Dégh), historical documentation of demonological legends through Flagblätter (Brednich), structural-morphological legend research (Voigt), depth psychology in legend research (Isler), children's legends (Virtanen), and the Freiburg demonological legends research project (Röhrich). Monographic studies of individual legend cycles are offered on robbers (Top), Adriatic coastal demons (Bošković-Stulli), blacksmiths (Marold), Frau Perchta (Rumpf), the werewolf (Roek), witch riding (Hand), midwives as witches (Dömötör), and wildmen legends of Austria (Haiding). One report is offered on methods of cataloging demonological legends in Finland (Koivu).

The strengths of the collection are many. It is, for example, quite apparent that the interests of European legend researchers are diverse, in spite of (in this reviewer's opinion) their overwhelming cultural-historical view of folklore: "Sagen sind—wie auch andere Folklore—Kulturanzeigetaten" (p. 18). Areas considered peripheral at best and meaningless at worst by many folklorists in the recent past and by some still today are obviously being researched—areas such as contrastive structural-morphological studies, questions of communicative processes, inter-ethnic folklore manifestations, para-psychology, and popular culture. Unfortunately, much of this research is apparent only in the footnotes and not in the papers presented.

The weaknesses of the collection, unfortunately, are also many. The title, for example, is at best misleading. There are few "problems" reported on here, instead there are endless research reports on some of the best known European legend motifs: werewolves, witches, and wildmen. Terms which still implicitly suggest historical-geographical reconstructionism, such as Kontaminationen, Relikte, and Zersagungen are apparently still part of legend research in some areas. Cataloging systems, if we are to go by the one report presented, are still exclusively oriented toward type and motif, suggesting a lack of concern with research into the dynamics of storytelling as opposed to research centered around what is being told. It also seems that much of legend research in Europe...