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EGYPTIAN FOLK SONGS IN THE UNIQUE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE ST. PETERSBURG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

At the St. Petersburg University library there are unique manuscripts in which it is possible to find materials concerning the Egyptian dialect in the 16th, 17th, and 19th centuries. As we know, such materials are very rare. One of the manuscripts includes the famous Dictionary of the Egyptian dialect *Daf' al-isr 'an Kalām ahl Miṣr* by Yūsuf al-Mağribī (16th-17th century; Ms. O. 778). This work is "a unique work of world importance"¹: a facsimile of it was published in Moscow in 1968,² but a critical publication has been absent till now. The second manuscript represents a record of folk songs (*mawāwīl*) made by Antony MUKHLINSKY, or at his request, in Egypt in the first third of the 19th century (Ms. O. 896). The text was published in 1981.³ Another manuscript (Ms. O. 838), which contains special materials in the Egyptian dialect, was composed by Sheikh Muḥammad 'Ayyād aṭ-Ṭaṭāwī (1810-1861), professor at the St. Petersburg University and includes 42 poems — *mawwāls*. Some of them were written by Sheikh aṭ-Ṭaṭāwī himself, others are folk songs of that period (l. 172-181). The poems were published in his book *Traite de la langue Arabe vulgaire*.⁴ In some manuscripts there are folk songs by unknown authors of the 17th century, e.g. by Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥanafī and Abū Bakr ibn 'Oṭmān al-'Aḡamī (Ms. O. 125b, l. 90-93, 98, 100). All the above-mentioned manuscripts contain texts of folk songs and dialectal stanza verses of great interest for researchers of folklore.

The purpose of this article is to survey and study the Egyptian folk songs which have attracted collectors' attention and a desire to imitate them. A vast amount of material is to

¹ В. И. БЕЛЯЕВ & П. Г. БУЛГАКОВ, *Арабские рукописи собрания Ленинградского государственного университета. — Памяти академика И. Ю. Крачковского*. Ленинград 1958, pp. 26-27.

² Yūsuf ibn Zakarīyā al-Mağribī, *Daf' al-isr 'an Kalām ahl Miṣr* ("Удаление бремени с речи жителей Египта"). Факсимиле рукописи. Предисловие и указатели А. С. Аввада. Москва 1968.

³ а) О. Б. ФРОЛОВА, *Рукопись библиотеки восточного факультета ЛГУ "Mawawil"* ("Народные песни"). — *Письменные памятники Востока. Историко-филологические исследования*. 1974. Москва. 1981, pp. 110-136, 341-360;

б) О. Б. ФРОЛОВА, *Сборник египетских народных песен. — Вопросы филологии стран Азии и Африки*, I. Ленинград. 1971, pp. 125-132.

⁴ Scheikh Mouhammad Ayyad et-TANTAVY, *Traite de la langue arabe vulgaire*. Leipsic. 1848. 231+15 pp.

be found in the *mawāwīl* manuscript collection by Antony MUKHLINSKY. It was recorded in 1832-35 during his visit to Orient, or at his request. The manuscript was acquired by the St. Petersburg University library in 1879. For the most part the *mawwāl* and *dawr* it contains are love songs. It is still possible to hear variants of some of them in contemporary Egypt, e.g. the famous *dawr*:

ya banāt iskandarīya
mašyukum fi-l-farše ġīya
tilbisu-l-kašmīr bi-talli
*wi-š-šafāyif sukkarīya (ramal).*⁵

Translation:

Oh the girls of Alexandria
 Promenading in the boulevard is [your] hobby,
 Your clothes are made of cashmere and tulle,
 And your mouth is of sugar.

There is also a variation in this *dawr*: ‘*a-l-baḥre* = ‘at the sea’ instead of *fi-l-farše* = ‘in the boulevard’. At the same period this *dawr* was attested by the English scholar E. W. LANE.⁶ It is possible to find traces of this *dawr* in a new operetta by ‘Izzet al-Ḥarīrī “Wedding of ‘Adīla”⁷ and in some pictures by Egyptian painters, in those of Maḥmūd Sa‘īd (1897-1964), Muḥammad ‘Oweis and others.

This manuscript includes a very famous *mawwāl*:

‘āšiq ra ‘ā mubtalā qāl lū-nta rāyih fēn
iḥki-š-šagā qiṣṣetuh bikyū sawā-l-itnēn
wāḥid kewāh il-hawā wāḥid kewāh il-bēn
rāḥū li-qādī-l-hawā-l-itnēn sawā yibkū
*bikyū-t-talāta sawā qālū ḥabibnā fēn (bašīt).*⁸

Translation:

The lover saw a sufferer and said to him: "Where are you going?
 Tell me about your sorrow [and] its story". They cried together:
 One of them was burned in love, the other one was
 suffering because of separation.
 They walked together crying to the Judge of Love
 And all three of them cried saying: "Where is our beloved?"

Variations of this very popular *mawwāl* were attested by E. W. LANE,⁹ by M. ‘A. at-Ṭaṇṭāwī,¹⁰ and by Muḥammad Fahmī ‘Abd al-Laṭīf¹¹: the difference is only in the

⁵ Ms. O. 896 in St. Petersburg University library; FROLOVA, op. cit. a), pp. 114, 122, 345.

⁶ E. W. LANE, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, written in Egypt during the years 1833-34 and 35. Vol. 2. London. 1836, pp. 85-86.

⁷ ‘Izzet al-Ḥarīrī, Farah ‘Adīla. — *Anā ‘āyīš*. Al-Qāhira 1967, pp. 131-161.

⁸ Ms. O. 896; FROLOVA, op. cit. a), pp. 117, 125, 352.

⁹ LANE, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 91.

¹⁰ at-Ṭaṇṭāwī, op. cit., pp. 176-177; N 2.

second stanza (*beit*), where *qa‘ad qara qişşetuh* and *wuquf qara qişşehuh* replace *iḥki-š-şagā qişşetuh*. In the *mawwāl* the Judge of Love (*qādī-l-hawā*) is also present, a very famous character in Arabic lyric poetry. Synonymous to *qādī-l-hawā*, Arabic songs also speak of *qādī-l-ğarām*, *qādī-l-ḥubb*¹² and so on.

The folklore poems and folk songs have the same genres as classical Arabic poetry: they are *fahr* (ode), *riṭā‘* (elegy), *ḥamriyyāt* (wine odes) and others. For example, the wine ode in the *mawāwīl* manuscript is represented by a well-known *dawr*:

qum bi-nā yā ḥille niskar
taḥte ḍill el-yāsemīn[e]
niqtif-el-ḥoḥ min ‘ala-mmuh
we-l-‘awāzil ġāfilīn[e] (ramal).¹³

Translation:

Let us, [my] friend, drink [wine]
 in the shade of the jasmine.
 Let us pick peaches off the tree,
 when rivals are careless.

Variations of this *dawr* were attested by E. W. LANE,¹⁴ Aḥmad Ruşdı Şāliḥ,¹⁵ and Muḥammad Ḥamdī al-Ālātī al-Būlāqī.¹⁶ According to poetic metre the last words in the second and fourth stanza (*beit*) of this *dawr* must be “*yāsemīnē*” and “*ğāfilīnē*”. Confirmation is found in the variations recorded by Aḥmad Ruşdı Şāliḥ:

قوم بنا يا خلى نسكر تحت ضل الياسمينه
 نقطف الخوخ من على امه والعوازل نايمينا¹⁷

It is here necessary to note that in Arabic folk poetry a special pronunciation is used in some cases owing to metre and rhythm: for example, the word “*yāsmīn*” may be pronounced “*yāsemīn*” or “*yāsemīnē*”. Without taking this phenomenon into consideration some inexactitudes occur in scientific transcriptions of the songs. For instance, in Serafin FANJUL's record one can see:

yā badr ṭāli‘ g:amāl-ak ḥayyar il-‘āşī‘in
şarabu ku ‘ūs il maḥabba w-aşbaḥū tāyhīn
Faraḥū bi-‘urb-ak w-lākin mina d-dalāl şākīn.¹⁸

¹¹ Muḥammad Fahmī ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, *Alwān min al-fann aš-ša‘bī*. Al-Qāhira 1964, p. 63.

¹² E. SACHAU, *Arabische Volkslieder aus Mesopotamien*. Berlin 1889, p. 45.

¹³ Ms. O. 896; FROLOVA, op. cit. a), pp. 114, 122, 345.

¹⁴ LANE, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁵ Aḥmad Ruşdı Şāliḥ, *Al-Adab aš-ša‘bī*. Al-Qāhira s.a., p. 237.

¹⁶ Muḥammad Ḥamdī al-Būlāqī, *Mufriḥ al-gīn al-laṭīf wa şuwar maşāḥīr ar-raqqāşīn*. Ġazza 1904, p. 29.

¹⁷ Aḥmad Ruşdı Şāliḥ, op. cit., p. 237.

¹⁸ Serafin FANJUL, *El-mawwal egipcio*. Madrid 1976, p. 105.

Translation:

Oh the full rising moon! Your beauty confused lovers,
They drank from the cup of love and became errant,
They are glad to see you, but complain of [your] coquetry.

But the poetic rules require another transcription, and perhaps a skillful folk singer performs it like this:

*Yā badre ṭāliʿ gamāl-ak ḥayyar il-ʿāšiqīn
Širbū kuʿūs il-maḥabba-w-ašbaḥū tāyhīn
Firḥū bi-qurb-ak we lākin mi-d-dalāl šākīn (bašīt).*

In some cases the poetic rules help us to correct the texts of songs. For instance, in the *mawwāl* attested by Simon JARGI:

*Mā te ʿlam ʾasīr el-galbe mašḡūf beka,*¹⁹

in which presumably there is a mistake: the word "anā" is omitted, and the correct text must be:

Mā ti ʿlam-an-ʾasīr el-qalbe mašḡūf bak (bašīt).

Translation:

And you know (I am) a prisoner of the heart infatuated by you.

Such a phenomenon is very close to the situation existing in Europe where folk songs are usually composed in a super-dialectal "literary" language.²⁰

The Arabic songs attested in the *mawāwīl* manuscript are well known both among the native inhabitants and European poets and scholars. The great Russian poet Alexander PUSHKIN made an apposite remark when he said that the Moors, the Spanish Arabs, had inspired European poetry with the "ecstasy and tenderness of love, an attachment for the miraculous and the magnificent eloquence of the East".²¹ One of the *mawwāls* from our manuscript attracted his attention. He had acquainted himself with such *mawwāls* from the French book by Yussuf AGUB and versified it. Here is one of them:

*qāmet fa qult uq ʿudī qālet mašībak bān
fa qulte kāfūr badā min baʿde miske kān
qālet šadaqte we lākin fātak-il-ʿirfān
il-miske li-l-ʿurse we-l-kāfūre li-l-akfān (bašīt).*²²

¹⁹ Simon JARGI, *La poesie populaire traditionnelle chantée au Proche-Orient Arabe. Le textes*. Paris 1970, pp. 312-313.

²⁰ А. В. ДЕСНИЦКАЯ, *Наддиалектные формы устной речи и их роль в истории языка*. Ленинград 1970, p. 34.

²¹ А. С. ПУШКИН, *О поэзии классической и романтической*. — *Полное собрание сочинений*, 11. Москва 1949, p. 37.

²² Ms. O. 896. FROLOVA, op. cit. a), pp. 116, 124, 350.

Translation:

She got up. I said: "Sit down". She said: "Grey hair has appeared on your [head]".

I said: "Camphor showed up where musk had been."

She said: "You are right, but don't you know,
That musk is for weddings and camphor is for the shroud."

PUSHKIN's versification is as follows:

От меня вечер Леила
Равнодушно уходила.
Я сказал: "Постой! Куда?"
А она мне возразила:
"Голова твоя седа."
Я насмешнице нескромной
Отвечал: "Всему пора!
То, что было мускус темный,
Стало нынче камфора."
Но Леила неудачным
Посмеялася речам
И сказала: "Знаешь сам,
Сладок мускус новобрачным,
Камфора годна гробам."²³

Some Russian travellers heard the songs which were included in the *mawāwīl* manuscript. For instance, Abraham Norov, minister of religious affairs in Russia, visited Egypt in 1834-35 and heard a *mawwāl* which is found in the *mawāwīl* manuscript and opens with the following words:

"*Magrūh ḥudūnī 'alā-ṭ-ṭubbā wi dūrū bī'* (baṣīt).²⁴

Translation:

"I am wounded, take me and carry me to the doctors."

Egyptian people of all strata of the society are very fond of such songs. They compose *mawwāls* and sing them with pleasure.

Yūsuf al-Mağribī in the 17th century and Sheikh Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī in the 19th century wrote a great deal of them. Yūsuf al-Mağribī (d. 1611) was a master in composing *mawwāls* with a homonymous rhyme, when the same word was used with different meanings. The homonymous rhyme is very frequent in folk songs. In the *mawāwīl* manuscript it occurs frequently. For example:

²³ А. С. ПУШКИН, Полное собрание сочинений, 3. Москва 1949, pp. 440, 1274.

²⁴ Ms. O. 896. FROLOVA, op. cit. a), pp. 117, 125, 352; А. Норов, Путешествие по Египту и Нубии в 1834-1835 г., 1. St. Petersburg 1840, p. 60.

*yāllī-l-laẓā fōq ḥudūdak wi-n-na ʿīm fī fik
anā wa ḥaqq il-gamāl muḡram ṣabāba fik
wi muz ra ʿānī-t-tabīb qāl li-l-ḥabīb gafīk
maskīne yāllī rumīt min saḥme ʿalḥāzūh
izzeye nōmak wi saḥm il-muqlatēn gā fik (baṣīt).²⁵*

Translation:

Oh you whose cheeks are aflame and whose mouth is blissful,
I swear by beauty that I am passionately in love with you.
The doctor said: "Your lover keeps away from you,
poor you — you are only a mark for the arrows of his eyes.
You cannot sleep for the arrows have pierced you."

Among *mawwāls* by Yūsuf al-Maḡribī we find the following piece:

*Ḥusnu-l-ḥabīb šāqanī wi-š-šawqu qad sāquh
qabbaltu riḡluḥ mīna-l-ašwāqi bal sāquh
wi lā ʿimī fīḥ mu ʿaḥḥar dāma fī sāquh
maḥqūre maḡrūbe man qad šāhaduḥ sāquh (baṣīt).²⁶*

Translation:

The beauty of my beloved attracted me, and passion led me to him.
I kissed his feet because of love, or rather his ankle.
And he who blamed me was late, because of him, it took him long
to drag his feet.
Miserable and broken are the feet of him who has seen him
(i.e. he who was charmed by him).

Among the *mawwāls* by Sheikh aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī we may note:

*fī ḥāṭirī min limāk il-ḥelwi šurbaṭ rāḥ
yā man izā qulti-luḥ marrat-ta ʿālā rāḥ
waṣlak wi ʿatfak ʿalaynā aḥsan il-afrāḥ
nidrin ʿalaya-n simiḥ bi-l-waṣli maḥbūbī
laqabbil-il-ḥadde minnuḥ wi-l-qadam wi-r-rāḥ.²⁷*

Translation:

My desire is to drink wine from your beautiful mouth,
Oh you who are going away, when I say to him once "come",
Meeting with you and your benevolence to us are the best joys.
I promise, if my beloved allows me the date
I shall kiss his cheek, his feet and his palm (hand).

In this *mawwāl* the word *rāḥ* has the meanings 'wine', 'go away', and 'palm' or 'hand'. Apart from folk songs in the Egyptian dialect, Sheikh aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī has written

²⁵ Ms. O. 896. FROLOVA, op. cit. a), pp. 115, 123, 347.

²⁶ Yūsuf al-Maḡribī, op. cit., l. 46b.

²⁷ aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī, op. cit., p. 192.

poems in literary Arabic, among which there are odes dedicated to events in the life of the Russian Tsar's Court. Sheikh aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī was Professor of Arabic at St. Petersburg University. Among his disciples was the famous Finnish scholar Georg August WALLIN (1811-1852) who brought the first examples of Bedouin folk-poetry to Europe.

In the poems and folk songs by Sheikh aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī one can see the reflection of his thoughts about life, his experience of social existence, his philosophic generalizations and aphorisms. Here is one such *mawwāl* by him:

*ad-dahru kulluh 'ibar li-l- 'āqil il-fakkār
hukmun 'alaynā wi šaḥṭaṭnā burūr wi-bḥār
šabrun 'alā dahrina lammen yikūn ḡaddār
halbatte mā yašṭaliḥ wi-t'ūd lammetnā
wyīḡū-l-ḥabāyib yihnūnā wi nimlā-d-dār*²⁸

Translation:

In destiny there are lessons for the clever and the wise.
The sentence on us is our separation across lands and seas.
Have patience with destiny, when he is perfidious,
Perhaps he will reform and our friends will return.
Our beloved will come, give us happiness and gladness will fill our home.

Records of folk songs by Arabian scholars, as well as their imitations, testify that such songs are also very popular among educated people. The poets and scholars understand that the overwhelming majority of listeners will welcome such works with enthusiasm and delight. Many Arabic poets of the 20th century maintain the folksong traditions of their motherland: among them there are Aḥmad Rāmī, Mursī Gamīl 'Azīz, Ismā'īl Ḥabrūk, Ma'mūn aš-Šināwī and others.²⁹ As for modern European scholars, they follow Sheikh aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī's scientific innovation in studies of Arabic folklore, too.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

²⁹ FROLOVA, op. cit. b), pp. 131-132.

