Children Born from Eggs: African Magic Tales - Texts and Discussions.
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This is a rich, multidimensional, and authoritatively crafted work. It constitutes volume 9 of a series labeled *Afrika erzählt* (Africa narrates) undertaken by the author and published by Köppe. Also, it is the first volume in English.

Clearly, the author has commanding knowledge of both the texts (language) of the tales themselves as well as the sociocultural and the physical contexts within which they are narrated.

According to the preface, she started collecting Namibian folklore some fifty years earlier (in 1960), when she lived with her family at Hardap, and she has experienced lifelong affection for the culture and the "women and men" who live by its codes and traditions. The focus of the present volume is on the traditions of the Nama-speaking peoples of Namibia as seen in relation to the general African lore, particularly that of their neighbors. Nama is a language spoken only by 200,000 persons spread over a vast area. Yet, an extraordinary amount of collected tales exists. The earliest specimens were noted down in 1779, while precise texts became available as early as the 1860s.

The author's main aim is to contribute to the debate over whether tales labeled "Märchen" in German exist in Africa at all (7, 299). The category of folktales treated is tapered further to "the magic tale in a narrow sense" represented by the tales indexed in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) tale-type classification under the numbers 300-750. Considering that people have expressed many pros and cons in this debate during the last fifty years, Schmidt declares her intention to defend her claim: "Yes, there are!" Consequently, emphasis is placed on a comparison with European Zaubemärchen (magic folk tale). As a matter of research procedure, Schmidt states: "In order to come to a better evaluation I exclude in this study the international tale types which in most cases have been introduced during the last centuries from Asia and Europe.... Here I represent and discuss only old African traditions" (7).

Beside the preface (7-9), the study is divided into four major segments: I (11-163) is a collection of seventy-one fresh tale texts; II (164-213) constitutes what is commonly termed "annotations," where the author presents the informants, identifies the tale's major themes and motifs, and comments on certain facets of the text's contents (she labels the latter aspect "Distribution of the Individual Tales"); III (214-315) may be described as analytical studies offering bird's eye views of the magic tales of the Nama-speaking peoples; it explores their "character" (or, perhaps, persona) and their relationship to African folklore in general. Major themes treated in this third segment include: "The Life-Threatening Forces of the Otherworld"; man-eater ("Khoe-ôreb"), and monsters: "Animals as Ogre" which include the Elephant, the Big Snake, the Jackal, and the Lion. Another major theme treated describes "The Heroes and Heroines of the Tales" (234-257). While under the title "Structure and Style" (257-266), general morphological aspects of the tales are treated. Basic theoretical postulates such as Axel Orlik's "laws" and Vladimir Propp's syntagmatic schema are applied and their relevance demonstrated.

Under the imprecise title "The Various Forms of Nama/Damara Magic Tales" (276-281), Schmidt discusses the "relation" of the magic tale to select genres/fields: "Legend and Folk Belief," "Myths," "Realistic Tales," and "Animal Tales."

Nama/Damara magic tales are compared to three spheres of narrative traditions within the context of the same broadly defined genre (or narrative category). Two of these are African: "Corresponding Tales of the Bushmen (San)" (282-291) and "Corresponding Tales of the Neighbouring Bantu-speaking Peoples" (291-299); a third comparative category receiving considerable emphasis deals with "The Relation of African Magic Tales to Western Magic Tales" (299-315). In this comparative vein Schmidt assigned tale-type and motif numbers to African data according to Aarne-Thompson-Uther's *The Types of International Folktales*, and Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index*. New carefully worded motifs relate African data to their counterparts in Thompson's *Motif-Index*, but no new numbers are assigned to the additions.

The Achilles' heel in this remarkable work is the partial view of the African continent and its culture history, especially with reference to dichotomous division into below-and-above the Sahara -- a problem that in the reviewer's view characterizes this field of study in general. Implicit in Schmidt's overall research design is the view that folktales found in the northern tier of Africa are not genuinely "African" but recent borrowings from either "Asia" or "Europe" (7 ff.). The northernmost point from which a tale collection was considered is modern Chad.

The role of such pivotal civilizations as Egypt's and Abyssinia's (Ethiopia's) in the development of narrative traditions in the continent is absent. Even when exploring the presumed antiquity of certain tales, Africa's ancient civilizations with indisputable recorded narrative traditions receive no consideration. Thus, influence of transformations in landscapes (e.g., marshlands becoming desert) and movements of human groups (e.g., the Bantu trek southward) (El-Shamy 2003a) are not accounted for in the quest for a tale's age. In a section titled "Ancient African Magic Tales and '*Zaubermärchen*,'" Schmidt declares: "I suppose that the African tales represent an older layer of magic tales.... Contacts between the folklore of the continents must already have taken place at a very early time" (313).

She elaborates further by citing assumed ancient Greek and Roman predecessors (313-314): Polyphemus (for ATU 1137), and Romulus for "The Wolf and the Kids" (ATU 123). She also argues that certain international tale-types in Africa such as the "variants of The Kind and the Unkind Girls [ATU 480] are not loans from Western sources but have to be regarded as very ancient African traditions...that existed side by side with the Western traditions since time immemorial" (311).

A more inclusive perspective of the African Continent could have placed within Schmidt's scope recent data relevant to the issue of the antiquity of certain folktales in Africa. (See El-Shamy 1980, 1984, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2003a, 2003b). In his review of El-Shamy's *Folktales of Egypt*, Daniel Crowley noted that the distributional aspect of the work showed that the Sahara was more of a highway than a barrier (Crowley 1981). Objective examinations of African materials lead to compatible findings. For example, Schmidt explains the "Differences between African and Western Magic Tales" as follows: "The Western tales of this type frequently are staged in royal castles and use plenty of gold and silver equipment. This is missing in Africa because in the olden days there were no castles and gold and silver were not symbols of riches" (300). She also notes that "the young Western hero crowns his career by a marriage with a princess...the African hero saves his sister from dark forces and succeeds in taking her home" (300).

Similarly, El-Shamy had explained the differences between non-African and sub-Saharan African renditions of AT 310, "The Maiden in the Tower. Rapunzel" as follows: "These African renditions lack the salient motif cluster of the tower...and its companion motif of the girl's hair as ladder.... The nature of traditional sub-Saharan material culture and the physical qualities of most of its original inhabitants make the appearance in cultural expressions of a tall stone or brick

tower and long, silky hair unlikely. Consequently the present type indexes do not report type 310 from any part of Africa. However, type 312, The Giant Killer and His Dogs (actually type 312A, The Brother Rescues His Sister from the Tiger), and 313, The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight, are cited" (El-Shamy 1980, 253).

Also, Schmidt's tale-type KH (i.e., Khoisan) 901, "The heroine was deserted by other berry-gathering women and became the victim of an otherworld being," corresponds to El-Shamy's new tale-type 327J§, "Girl Abandoned by Jealous Playmates (or by her Sisters). She falls into the power of an ogre." Companion new motifs for this plot are: K2297.3.1§, "Treacherous (jealous) playmates abandon girl in wilderness"; S1.1§, "Girl's pleading for help cruelly ignored by all relatives" (1999, 2004). Considering both sets of data from above and below the Sahara together would have lent more support to the findings about each.

Schmidt declares that studies of African magic tales "should focus on the illumination of the character of tales, too. This will show that the correspondences of African magic tales with international lore are greater than have been supposed to be until now" (315).

"Amen!" to that sobering call. And one may add that old established theories should not be held as eternal truths, but must be reevaluated in light of new evidence, especially when that evidence is verifiable.

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