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PIR-E ZAN

PIR-E ZAN, a calendar-related legend about an Old Woman who personifies winter. Besides Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, the legend is widespread all over southern Europe and the Balkans (from Portugal to Bulgaria), as well as in Turkey, Arab Near East, and North Africa (from Morocco to Egypt). With some modifications, its traces are also preserved in the Alps and in the British Isles (van Gennep, 1/III/1, pp. 250-55; Shaineanu, pp. 107-27; Mikov, pp. 77-78; d'Herbelot, p. 69; Galand-Pernot; Basset, pp. 151-53).

Versions of this legend, collected in Europe and North Africa, are all constructed on a common pattern, composed of a limited number of repetitive elements. The legend concerns the time when the season changes from winter to spring—mainly at the turn of February-March and less frequently at the turn of January-February or March-April (often including the intercalary days)—which is characterized by a sudden but short-lived return of cold weather. Besides the Old Woman or her functional counterpart, other heroes of the stories usually include two brothers, personifying the two neighboring months, and possibly some animals (a goat, a calf, a herd of sheep, a bird, etc.). The constant motif of the story is the boasting, or derision, or disregard on the part of the hero towards the departing winter or one of its months, and the revenge of the offended party. Revenge usually takes the form of freezing to death the offender or his/her children, flocks, etc. The heroes' mocking, boasting, abuse, etc. may take the form of a short poem or a rhymed saying. Another common element of the story involves the passing month asking to borrow a number of days or a bit of cold weather from his brother, the month

to come, in order to execute his vengeance. Sometimes the borrowing motif serves as an explanation of the origin of the intercalary days. In some versions of the legend, the Old Woman becomes transformed into a stone, rock, or mountain.

Similar tales are widespread in the Persian cultural area and combine elements which originate from two different groups of sources: the first is the Arabic legend about the tribe of ʿĀd, known from the written tradition (in particular, the Qurʾān 7:65-72; 11:50-60; 26:123-40; 41:13-16; 54:18-20; 69:4-7; cf. Ṭabari, I/1, pp. 231 ff.; Buhl, p. 169.), which is connected with the Syrian calendar. The second group includes orally transmitted popular beliefs, rooted in local cults of nature, which are attached either to Zoroastrian or to traditional rural time-reckoning systems.

The legend of the Old Woman is mentioned by Abu Reyḥān Biruni in the context of the Syrian (or "Roman", as he terms it) calendar (Biruni, 1923, pp. 254-56; Idem, 1983, pp. 262-64; Idem, 1954-56, I, p. 270; Masʿudi, III, pp. 410-11; Ebn Qotayba, 1956, p. 130; Qazvini, 1849, p. 77; Idem, 1982, p. 75). Of the seven days of the Old Woman, believed to be a period of bitter cold towards the end of winter, the first three days occur at the end of the month of Šobāṭ (February-March) and the remaining four days in the beginning of Āḏār (March-April). In the leap years, the division is reversed (four days in Šobāṭ and three days in Āḏār), because the intercalary day is added at the end of Šobāṭ. These days are called "the days of the Old Woman" (Ar. *ayyām al-ʿajuz*), "the Old Woman's cold" (Ar. *bard al-ʿajuz*; cf. Dehḵodā, entries "Bard al-'Ajuz", Vol. X, pp. 851-2, and "'Ajuz", Vol. XXXIV, p. 117.), or "the days of the Blue-eyed" (Ar. *ayyām al-šahlā*), allegedly in memory of an old woman who survived when the whole tribe of ʿĀd died of unexpected cold weather.

Other versions of the legend tell of an old woman who took off her winter clothes when the weather became warm and then froze to death when the freezes returned. Another tells of a prophetess who foretold severe frost in spring, but was ignored by her tribesmen, who sheared their sheep and thereby allowed them to freeze to death. Thus, the Old Woman's days are considered unlucky (*naḥs*; Biruni, 1923, p. 255; Idem, 1983, p. 263). Each of the days has its own name and an appropriately corresponding type of weather, the last of which, called *Moṭfi al-jamr* (the Extinguisher of Glowing Embers) in Arabic, is the coldest.

A similar legend is noted by Biruni under the date of the 15th of Rimažd (once

the first month of spring) of the Khwarazmian calendar. In Khwārazm (see CHORASMIA), this night was called "the Mina's night," in memory of a queen called Mina who froze to death after having taken off her warm cloths too early in spring (Biruni, 1923, p. 236).

In Persian folklore, the legends about the Old Woman are attached to one of the transitory periods spanning two larger sections of winter: the Čār-čār (Šešla, Ahman-Bahman, etc.) days on the border of Čella-ye bozorg and Čella-ye kuček (see: ČELLA; Enjavi, I, pp. 4, 7-10; II, pp. 142, 146; Krasnowolska, 1998, pp. 49-53); a series of days at the junction of Čella-ye kuček and the month of Esfand (Enjavi, I, pp. 1, 7, 102, 124; II, pp. 9, 19; Aʿẓami, p. 102); or a part of Esfand, immediately before the Nowruz (Enjavi, I, pp. 2, 4, 5, 10, 47; II, p. 142). In the latter case, these days may correspond to those of the former *panja* (*panja-ye mostaraqa*, *andargāh*: five epagomenal days inserted between the end of the old and the beginning of the new year, see Taqizāda, pp. 70-80). Usually, this group of days bears the name of the Old Woman in a local form (*ʿajuz*, *ʿajuza*, *ʿajuk-bajuk*, *pir-e zan*, *nana pir-zan*, *pir-e šešla*, etc.). Names such as Dāyā, Dādā, Dā, Dā-pari, Dālu, Dāyāla ('mother', 'nourisher', etc.) can be found in Luristān and central Iran (Asadiān et al., pp. 210-11; Enjavi, I, p. 47; II, pp. 145, 147-48, 195).

In Tajikistan and Afghanistan, the Old Woman (*ojuza*, *ʿajuzak*, *kampir*, *kampirak*, *kur-māmā*, *pir-zāl*) most frequently rules the seven (or some other number of) days immediately before the Nowruz (Andreev, 1958, p. 331; Idem, 1925, pp. 174-75; Andreev and Pisarchik, p. 156; see also Snesarev, 1969, p. 194; Lentz, pp. 12-13). In the Panjšir valley (Afghanistan), the days of the Old Woman come in two series of ʿUjuza-yi kalon and ʿUjuza-yi ḵyrt (Great and Small ʿAjuza); one immediately precedes the Nowruz and the other occurs about a month earlier (Andreev, 1927a, p. 67; Lentz, pp. 13, 18). In places where *Ḥesāb-e mard* (time-reckoning according to the parts of the human body; see Krasnowolska, 1998, pp. 54-59) has been known, these days may immediately precede the entrance of the sun into the stage of the "heart," which corresponds to the vernal equinox (Mukhiddinov, p. 155; for other versions see Andreev, 1958, pp. 158, 165, 167; Idem, 1927b, p. 24).

Several mythological themes are connected with the Old Woman days. A group of tales, common in central and western Iran, follows the "Mediterranean" pattern: towards the end of winter, the Old Woman implores God—usually through a prophet or a saint (Musā, Solaymān, Hud, Moḥammad, ʿAli)—for some extra days of cold weather, so that her camels can conceive (a

local form of the "borrowing" motif). Her wish is fulfilled, and after several days of heavy snow and frost when the camels' rut occurs, the weather becomes mild again. Meanwhile, the woman dies in a snowstorm or freezes to death (Enjavi, I, pp. 3-4, 47, 125; II, pp. 140, 142; Aʿẓami, pp. 103-4). The motif of punishment for arrogance or disobedience is present in some renderings of the theme: the Old Woman abuses her benefactor or, breaking an interdiction, comes out of her shelter too early. In some variants of the story, one finds direct references to the legend of the ʿĀd (Enjavi I, pp. 3, 4; II, pp. 9, 10, 15, 19, 140, 142). Some elements of this tale, for example the motif of the Old Woman hiding from a snowstorm or frost in a cave, a chest, a hollow trunk of a tree, etc., are known in Tajikistan (Andreev, 1925, pp. 174-75; Idem, 1927b, pp. 23-24; Andreev and Pisarchik, pp. 156-57).

Another common scenario is the freezing death of the Old Woman's son(s) or husband who, deceived by the warm weather, sets out for the mountains and perishes in a blizzard (Enjavi, I, pp. 5, 11; II, pp. 8, 9, 145-46, 151; Asadiān et al., p. 213). Stories of this type may concern a whole tribe smitten by a snow storm, for example the Kurdish tribe Šeqqāq whose story closely follows the ʿĀd pattern, or an animal, as in the Kurdish tale of *Gisaki be le mes* about a copper-colored goatling which came out for pasture too early in the spring and died from the cold (Ayyubiān, pp. 195-96). The mutual killing of the Old Woman's two competing sons called Ahman and Bahman (or Čella-ye Bozorg and Čella-ye Kuček) can be the other variant of the tale. Sometimes, after a quarrel or fight, the sons simply disappear one after another, because the period of their domination is over. An instance of exceptionally cold weather from the Ahman-Bahman days, spanning the two Čella periods, is explained as being a consequence of the brothers' competition to destroy the world. The motif of boasting, often in the form of a short poem or a fixed formula, is frequently attached to the contest. In particular, the younger and harsher of the two brothers declares his intention to annihilate the whole world, but is unable to carry out his threat because the period of his rule is too short (Enjavi, I, pp. 2-3, 6, 46, 125-26; II, pp. 8, 43, 114, 141, 145-46, 151; Asadiān et al., pp. 211-12; Ayyubiān, p. 194; Aʿẓami, 102-3; Rakhimov, 1957, p. 75; Kislyakov and Pisarchik, 1966, p. 185). In Central Asia and Afghanistan, where the Zoroastrian month names are not in regular use, the compound term Ahman-Dahman for two neighboring sections of winter is nevertheless common (Andreev, 1925, p. 174; Kisliakov and Pisarchik, 1970, pp. 173-74; Dzhakhonov, 1985, p. 88). Another frequent element appearing in stories of this type is the motif of the Old Woman's mourning over her sons and her suicide after their

death.

Still another narrative pattern usually casts the Old Woman's Son, the Hunter's Son, the Kurdish Boy (*pesar-e pir-e zan*, *pesar-e ṣayyād*, *pesar-e kordi*, *Kordak*, *Kord-ʿAli*, *Kordoğlu*), etc. as its hero. In these versions, the hero is suddenly overtaken by a snowstorm in the mountains or steppe. After several days of struggling with the elements (variants include: hiding in a cave, in a hole dug in the snow, under a boulder, etc.) the boy approaches death, but survives due to action attributed to himself or his mother: in order to keep warm he carries a heavy stone or rolls it up and down a hill, or he himself rolls down and climbs up a hill until the earth becomes warm, the snow melts, and the weather changes (Enjavi, I, pp. 7-9; II, pp. 8, 11, 18, 20, 42, 46, 146). If the mother acts as the boy's rescuer, she makes a big fire on the roof of her house, burns an object (e.g. her spinning-wheel), throws a burning object (a firebrand, a broom, etc.) up to the sky, pours some hot soup or boiling water on the snow, or, out of sorrow, throws herself from the roof. The heat produced in this way enables the earth to "take a breath." As a result, the storm calms, the snow melts, and the boy finds his way home. The tale includes a sort of forecast: the weather in the coming year is said to depend upon the place in which the Old Woman or the thrown object falls (Enjavi I, pp. 6-10, 102; II, pp. 140, 146; Asadiān et al., p. 211; Aʿẓami, p. 93).

Calendar legends, common in Afghanistan and Iran, which are based on a scheme of "never meeting" and are connected chiefly with the Nowruz period, also belong to the Old Woman cycle. In this group of stories, ʿAjuza—in Afghanistan also named ʿAjuzak, Kampirak, Bibi Nowruzi, Ḵāla Nowruzi, etc. (though, in this case, not necessarily old)—is awaiting her husband or beloved (the Old Man, the Hunter, ʿAmu Nowruz, Nowruz-ʿAli, etc.), who is supposed to visit her once a year. She prepares fervently for the meeting, but, while he is approaching, she falls asleep and misses his visit. This scenario is repeated each year, so that the two are said to never meet. In a number of such stories the woman is replaced by a spring flower, while the man is a personification of the winter (Hackin and Kohzad, pp. 60-62; Šoʿur, pp. 431-32; Ḡeštelay, pp. 116-17; Enjavi, I, pp. 6, 9, 11; II, p. 114; Aʿẓami, p. 93; Honari, p. 64; Hedāyat, pp. 302-3; Eilers, II/1, pp. 183-84; II/2, p. 432; Ayyubiān, p. 195). This group of stories may also end with a weather forecast.

The belief that, on the ʿAjuza days, the Earth takes a breath (Pers. *nafas zadan-* or *nafas kešidan-e zamin*; Tajik: *taf-i zamin*), or that the soil becomes warm from the inside while the air is still cold, or that the water gets warm, etc., is

common throughout the Iranian world (Enjavi, I, pp. 1, 8, 9, 102; II, pp. 8, 16, 18-20, 139, 142-46, 150, 196; Asadiān et al., pp. 213-14; Andreev, 1958, 331-32; Mukhiddinov, 1984, p. 155; Kislyakov and Pisarchik, 1966, p. 185). It seems to be connected with the idea of the *jamarāt* (burning coals) days, that is, the 7th, the 14th, and the 21st of Šobāṭ, which precede the ʿAjuz days in the Syrian calendar (Biruni, 1923, pp. 253-54; Idem, 1983, p. 262; Masʿudi, p. 410; Qazvini, 1849, p. 77; Idem, 1982, p. 75).

Numerous calendar tales and proverbs explain different kinds of weather (not only on the Old Woman's days, but all year round) by way of her various activities. Thus, hail-stones are imagined to be the beads of her torn necklace, snow is said to come from her ripped pillow, rain to fall when she washes her clothes, wind to arise as she is swinging, and thunder to sound when she is churning butter, turning her quern-stones, or riding her horse. In some places in Tajikistan, mushrooms are believed to be the lice shaken out of her clothes (Enjavi, I, pp. 2, 5, 10-11, 125; II, pp. 145, 147; Asadiān et al., p. 212; ʿAbdali, pp. 200-1; ʿEmādi, p. 604; Dupree, p. 99; Andreev, 1925, pp. 172-73; Braginskiĭ, p. 93; Andreev and Polovtsev, p. 35).

In Central Asia and Afghanistan, ʿAjuz (ʿAjuzak, Kampirak) is mainly, though not exclusively, imagined as a witch: one-eyed or blind, crooked, and ill-tempered. She is believed to kidnap and feast upon children, and her cold winds may do harm to livestock and crops. This is why some taboos, especially concerning children, are in force during her days (Andreev and Pisarchik, pp. 156-57; Andreev, 1925, pp. 175-76; Idem, 1927b, p. 24; Lentz, p. 18; Dupree, p. 99).

Some traces of the Old Woman's function as a female weather and crop deity survive in different parts of the Iranian world. In the Pamirs (Vāḵān, Iškāšim, Rošān), the Old Woman (Kampir, Kampirak), represented by a mummer or effigy, plays a role in agricultural rites connected with sowing in spring and harvesting in autumn. Offerings are made to her in order to secure good crops (Mukhiddinov, 1986, pp. 84-85; Idem, 1975, p. 97, n. 13; Idem, 1973, p. 104; Andreev, 1953-58, II, p. 82; see also Andreev and Polovtsev, pp. 24-25; Andreev and Pisarchik, p. 104; Rozenfel'd, p. 116; Snesarev, pp. 194-95; Gryunberg and Steblin-Kamenskiĭ, pp. 163, 166). Offerings to the Old Woman (Dāyāla, ʿAjuza) are known in western Iran as well (Asadiān, pp. 210-11; Enjavi, II, p. 18). Among pastoral Lur tribes they are made during the autumn pastoral festival of Tulteken.

The personality of Iranian ʿAjuza is complex, and her legendary cycle combines elements of various characters and origins. The Old Woman personifies a devastating aspect of the winter or a part of it, but, at the same time, she herself may be represented as winter's victim, or as somebody who brings about its end, possibly through the sacrifice of her children, or through her own death. Moreover, especially in eastern Iran, the Old Woman has kept some features of a goddess of nature: she is believed to rule the weather and to influence the year's crops. In these capacities she may be both dangerous and benevolent. Besides, her names, i.e. Dāyā, Dāyāla (mother, nourisher, foster-mother), etc., indicate that one of her original functions in western Iran may have been as a goddess of fertility. The legends of the "Kurdish Boy" sort portray her as something close to a Demeter-type mother who mourns for a cyclically dying and resurrecting young god. Popular beliefs at hand reveal some traces of a forgotten mythology of a Great Goddess, subsequently transformed into a sinister and somewhat grotesque Old Woman.

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