

COLLECTING PALESTINIAN FOLKLORE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

A. B. Kamenetskaia

*Saint-Petersburg State University,
7-9 Universitetskaya Embankment, St Petersburg, Russia, 199034,
a.kamenetskaya@spbu.ru*

This article traces the historical trajectory of scholarly endeavors to document Palestinian folklore, from early 20th-century initiatives to modern anthologies. It explores the motivations behind these efforts, the linguistic and geographical nuances involved, and the evolving aims of cultural preservation. The analysis highlights the resilience and vitality of Palestinian heritage as reflected in these anthologies, serving as poignant reminders of a timeless narrative of identity.

Keywords: Palestinian folklore; cultural heritage; Palestinian dialects; *al-fusha*; linguistic choices; cultural preservation.

КОЛЛЕКЦИОНИРОВАНИЕ ПАЛЕСТИНСКОГО ФОЛЬКЛОРА: КРАТКИЙ ОБЗОР

А. Б. Каменецкая

В статье прослеживается историческая траектория научных усилий по документированию палестинского фольклора, начиная с инициатив нач. XX в. и до современных антологий. В работе исследуются мотивы, стоящие за этими усилиями, языковые и географические особенности, а также меняющиеся цели сохранения культуры. Анализ подчеркивает устойчивость и жизнеспособность палестинского наследия, отраженного в антологиях, которые служат трогательными напоминаниями о вечной нарративе об идентичности.

Ключевые слова: палестинский фольклор; культурное наследие; палестинские диалекты; аль-фусха; языковой выбор; сохранение культурного наследия.

Interest in Palestinian cultural heritage has deep roots, tracing back to the early 20th century when the first endeavors to document Palestinian folklore were made. The scholarly pursuit evolved over the century, culminating in modern anthologies that stand as testament to the enduring legacy of Palestinian culture.

Scholarly attempts to collect samples of Palestinian folklore and describe the way of life of Palestinian Arabs date back to early 20th century. Those early endeavors were undertaken by Christian theologians and clergy. They were deeply interested in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Land and Biblical languages, and that interest encompassed the contemporary population of Palestine.

Among them was J. E. Hanauer, a photographer, ethnographer and Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. In his collections "Tales Told in Palestine" (1903) and "Folklore of the Holy Land: Moslem, Christian and Jewish" (1907), Hanauer attempts to depict tales, historical anecdotes and common beliefs with the aim to "furnish the serious student with information with reference to the way in which the people of Palestine look at things" (Hanauer 1903: 14). Nevertheless, he smooths away the sayings and episodes which seemed outrageous to him. In terms of linguistics, Hanauer published the translation of the tales but preserved the names in their vernacular forms. In the introduction to his 1907 anthology, a publisher mentions that this collection of Palestinian tales is the largest so far. It is noteworthy, that in his second anthology, Hanauer mentioned the geography of the tales; they were collected in the villages between Bethel and Hebron. The author of the review concludes that there was a pressing need for more works of this kind that would collect the folktales of the Arab population before the school education eradicates the oral tradition.

Like Hanauer, H. Schmidt and P. K. Kahle published a collection of Palestinian tales "Volkserzählungen aus Palästina, gesammelt bei den Bauern von Bir-Zet und in Verbindung mit Dschirius Jusif in Jerusalem" (Folktales from Palestine Collected among the Peasants of Bir-Zet and, together with Girius Yusif in Jerusalem) in 1918. P. K. Kahle was an orientalist and a pastor in Cairo. Together with H. Schmidt, he published an anthology with an introduction to the art of Palestinian folktales, an outline of grammar, and an index of stories, proper names, themes/motives and words. The 64 stories are divided into nine groups according to their subjects and contribute significantly to the comparative folklore studies and dialectology.

Ethnologist H. Stephan was another one to publish a collection of Palestinian folktales "Palestinian animal stories and fables" (1923). The tales were collected in Jerusalem and Arṭās and were given in English translation with some words and rhymed lines in Arabic (Shachmon 2017: 76). Later, the tales from the same village were collected by G. M. Crowfoot and L. Baldensperger and published in the collection "Arab folk stories from Artas" (Id.).

Another scientific inquiry in Palestinian folklore is the work of a Dominican priest and a Semitic epigraphist A. Jaussen. In his "Le cheikh Sa'ad ad-Din et les jinn à Naplouse" (Sheikh Sa'ad ad-Din and jinns in Nablus) (1923), "Le coq et la pluie dans la tradition palestinienne" (The rooster and the rain in Palestinian tradition) (1924) and "Coutumes palestiniennes" (Palestinian customs) (1927), Jaussen describes traditions, beliefs and folklore of Palestinians.

The collections published in the Arab world are quite different in nature and emerged at a later point in time. Unlike the anthologies of the "Westerners", they are written in Arabic script and usually have the aim not to study but to preserve the national heritage. They form a special literary genre called *al-turāṭ*, 'the heritage'.

Among the earliest collections is “*Hikāyāt Lubnāniyya*” (Lebanese Folktales) (1961) by K. Al-Bustānī. Another one is “*Mawsū‘at al-fūklūr al-Falastīnī*” (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Folklore) (1977-1989) by N. Sirḥān. In these anthologies, the texts are rendered in *al-fuṣḥā*, but there are collections, where the authors preserve a vernacular variety of the language as a part of *al-turāṭ*. Such are “*Hikāyāt jānn min Banī Zayd*” (Jinni Tales from Bani Zayd) by ‘Abd-al-Laṭīf al-Bargūṭī (1979), ‘Umar al-Sārīsī’s “*Al-ḥikāya al-ša‘bīyya fī-l-muḡtama‘ al-Falastīnī: Dirāsa wa nuṣūṣ*” (The folktale in Palestinian Society: A study with Texts) (1980), and “*Al-ḥikāya al-ša‘bīyya fī-lmuḡtama‘ al-Falastīnī: Al-nuṣūṣ*” (The Folktale in Palestinian Society: The Texts) (1985), “*Ḥakāyā al-Ġalīl*” (Tales of Galilee) (2006) by A.J. Dakūr.

The anthology “*‘ūl yā tēr: nuṣūṣ wa-dirāsa fī-lḥikāyati šša‘bīyyati l-Falastīniyya*” (Speak, Bird, Speak Again: Texts and Analysis of Palestinian Folk Tales) stands out among the mentioned collections. It was published by a Palestinian academic and writer ‘Ibrāhīm Muhawwī and a Palestinian anthropologist Šarīf Kanā‘na in the years 1978-1980 (the latter had already had a significant collection of tales) and were published in English in 1989 by the University of California Press. In 1997 a French version published by UNESCO followed and in 2001 an Arabic version appeared published by the Institute for Palestinian Studies in Beirut. The collection includes 45 fairy tales told by women and men from the villages of Galilee, West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza and are divided into five groups according to their content: Individuals, Family, Society, Environment, and Universe. The texts included in the anthology are written in a dialect, in Palestinian dialects to be more precise. It makes the anthology not only a source to learn about the local dialects but an important evidence of how dialectal features can be reflected by means of Arabic orthography.

The anthology “Speak, Bird, Speak Again” belongs to the *al-turāṭ* collections. The fact that for the first publication in Berkeley the anthology was translated into English but afterwards was published in Arabic by the Institute for Palestinian Studies in Beirut shows that the language is considered by the authors an inseparable part of the cultural heritage. In the introduction, the authors indicate that the aim of their work was to “preserve the heritage of Palestinian people and to strengthen Palestinian cultural identity” (Muhawī, Kanaana, 2001: xxiv). Also, the publication in the Arabic language was important for the authors, since their aim was to introduce the Arabic-speaking students and scholars to the study of comparative folklore in their mother tongue. The aim to provide the material for linguistic research is mentioned as well, but the authors do not claim to be the experts in dialectology.

Clear understanding of the aims and the readership of the book is helpful when it comes to the linguistic choices of the authors. The introduction shows

that the aim was to preserve cultural heritage including vernacular dialects and to publish a folkloristic research in the mother tongue of Arabic-speaking scholars and students, who are considered the main readership of “Speak, Bird, Speak Again” by the authors. For all of these reasons, the publication in Arabic was vital for this anthology.

The choice to render the corpus in colloquial Arabic may be explained by the same reason. In this regard, the two anthologies by ‘Abd-al-Laṭīf al-Bargūṭī are representative. While the texts in “*Ḥikāyāt jānn min Banī Zayd*” (Jinni Tales from Bani Zayd) are rendered in the dialect, his collection of tales for children “*Kān yā mā kān, al-qīṣaṣ al-ša‘biyya*” (Once upon a Time: Folktales) is written in ‘*al-fuṣḥā al-mubassṣa al-maškūla*’ (vocalized simplified standard Arabic) to avoid misunderstanding which may occur due to the variety of Arabic dialects. In the same vein, “Speak, Bird, Speak Again” is rendered in the dialect to serve the two aims, namely to introduce the Arabic speaking audience to the Palestinian folktales and to preserve the national heritage of which the vernacular is an integral part.

From the early endeavors of Hanauer to the modern resurgence exemplified by “Speak, Bird, Speak Again”, Palestinian folklore studies have been a continuum of cultural preservation and identity assertion. Through linguistic choices and scholarly aims, these anthologies not only document tales but also serve as testaments to the enduring legacy of Palestinian culture. In embracing dialectal richness and linguistic inclusivity, these anthologies embody a profound assertion of Palestinian cultural identity, resonating across linguistic divides to celebrate a timeless narrative of resilience and heritage.

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