

SOLOMON'S JUDGMENT, MAHOSADHA, AND THE HOEI-KAN-LI

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Owing largely to the pioneering research of two German scholars,¹ orientalists and folklorists have long been aware that many of the incidents narrated in the Old Testament are not necessarily of Hebrew provenience but may easily have come from other sources, a hypothesis strengthened by the existence of numerous parallels and analogues in other cultures. One of the most frequently encountered is, of course, the theme of a world calamity (deluge) sent as a punishment for the wickedness of mankind. Others which may be cited are Abraham's entertaining angels unawares (cf. the story of Baucis and Philemon), Joseph's being wrongfully accused by Potiphar's wife (paralleled by the Egyptian tale of Anfu and Batu, the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, and others),² the contrast between Jacob and Esau (cf. Gilgamesh and Enkidu), and the tradition of a Tree of Life in Paradise (cf. H. Bergema, *De Boom des Levens in Schrift en Historie*, Hilversum, 1938; Uno Holmberg-Harva, "Der Baum des Lebens," *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, series B, XVI, 1922-1923).

Of particular interest is the account (I Kings IV) of the Judgment of Solomon.³ It will be recalled that the real mother of the child wins it back through the maternal love displayed in her being willing to see it go to another rather than be harmed. A similar story appears in the Buddhist *Mahosadha Jātaka*,⁴ in

1. Hugo Gressman, in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XXX (1910), 1-34; Hermann Gunkel, *Das Märchen im Alten Testament* (Tübingen, 1917).

2. See J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus* (London and New York, 1921), II, 146 n. Cf. the story told in Sura XII of the *Koran*, in which Kitfeer is the Arabic equivalent of Potiphar and Zuleika is his wife.

3. This is J 1171.1—*Solomon's judgment: the divided child* in Thompson, *Motif-Index*. It belongs to Type 653.

4. The story forms a part of the *Ummaga Jātaka*.

which the wise boy Mahosadha decides the dispute of two women over a child by testing their motherly love. It can be summarized as follows:

A woman takes her child to the tank of the future Buddha to bathe it. Having done so, she begins to wash herself. A Yakshiṇī in the form of a woman asks if she may nurse the child. Given permission, she carries it away. The mother catches her and a quarrel ensues.

Hearing the noise, the future Buddha intervenes, and they agree to abide by his decision. He draws a line on the ground, orders the Yakshiṇī to take the child's arms and the mother its legs, and says, "The child shall be hers who drags him over the line." Seeing how the child suffers at being pulled, the mother releases her hold and stands there weeping. The future Buddha gives her the child, forces the Yakshiṇī to reveal her identity, and sends her away with a stern rebuke.⁵

Most scholars are of the opinion that the Hebrew is the original,⁶ but some have defended the originality of the Indian version, known also in China, where it forms the plot of a drama

5. Fausböll, No. 546.

6. See M. Winternitz, *Some Problems of Indian Literature* (Calcutta, 1925); Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth Stories*, Introd., xiv; H. G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse between India and the Western World from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Rome* (Cambridge, 1916).

For additional analogues, see J. G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament* (London, 1918), II, 570; Reinhold Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften* (Weimar, 1898-1900), I, 531; Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes publiés dans l'Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1885* (Liège, 1892-1905), VI, 63, No. 231; Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst* (Berlin, 1924); Johannes Bolte and Georg Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (Leipzig, 1913-1930); H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1883, 1893); N. M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, being C. H. Tawney's translation of Somadeva's *Katha Sarit Sagara* (London, 1923 ff.); Killis Campbell, *The Seven Sages of Rome* (Boston, 1907); W. A. Clouston, *Popular Tales and Fictions* (Edinburgh and London, 1887); G. L. Kittredge, *Arthur and Gorlagon*, Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, VIII (Boston, 1903); J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece* (London, 1898); Theodor Benfey *Pantschatantra: Fünf Bücher indischer Fabeln, Märchen, und Erzählungen*; Goebel, *Jüdische Motive im märchenhaften Erzählungsgut* (Gleitwitz, 1932), p. 21 ff.

The story is fairly widespread in oral tradition: Alanson Skinner and John V. Satterlee, "Folklore of the Menomini Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, XIII (1915),

*Hoei-lan-ki, or The Circle of Chalk.*⁷

Some departures from the original have been made both in the German and the English translations. The Chinese text lacks a Tong and an Emperor. Hi-tang is a prostitute whom Ma wishes to marry; however, her mother, who lives upon Hi-tang's earnings, demands a hundred ounces of silver for her. In the first act we learn that Hi-tang now has a child of five and that Mrs. Ma, self-confessed mistress of Chow, has proposed to him the poisoning of her husband, to which he readily assents. The ne'er-do-well brother of Hi-tang, Chang-ling, returns from his wanderings to beg a livelihood from his rich brother-in-law. Hi-tang receives him with insults and blows but, on the instruction of Mrs. Ma, gives him some clothing. Mrs. Ma now reveals to Ma the gift of robes and head ornament and accuses Hi-tang of having a lover. Ma then beats Hi-tang. Shortly after, Mrs. Ma puts poison in his soup, he dies and is buried without ceremony, and Mrs. Ma accuses Hi-tang of the murder. In the snow-scene, Hi-tang, in the custody of two gendarmes, meets her brother, now an officer of the law. She begs his help but is repulsed. Finally, however, he is convinced of her innocence and buys her wine at an inn. Chow is overheard to remark to Mrs. Ma that he has arranged with the gendarmes for Hi-tang to be killed on the way. Chang-ling tries to arrest Chow and Mrs. Ma, but they are warned by the gendarmes and escape. The last act takes place

397; P. Sebillot, *Les incidents des contes populaires de la Haute-Bretagne* (Vannes, 1892) = *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, VII, 411ff.; Roland B. Dixon, *Oceanic Mythology, The Mythology of All Races*, IX (Boston, 1916), p. 37 (here the child is actually cut in two); Elsie Clews Parsons, *Folk-Lore from the Cape Verde Islands*, *Memoirs of the American Folklore Society*, XV (New York, 1923), 348, n. 1.

Rawlinson suggests (p. 12) that the story may have reached India from Babylon at the time of the Captivity (595-538 B. C.).

7. This play comes from the repertory of the Chinese theatre called *Yüan-chü-po-cheng*, i.e. the Hundred Pieces composed under the Yüan, or princes of the family of Jenghiz Khan, who reigned in China from 1259 to 1368. Four of these plays were translated into French early in the nineteenth century. One of these translations was that of this particular play by Stanislas Julien, who gave it the title *Le Cercle de Craie*. It was published in London in 1832 by John Murray on behalf of the Oriental Translation Fund. This work later became the foundation used by Klabund (Alfred Henschke) for his German version *Der Kreidekreis*. I use here James Laver's English translation of the latter work.

in a superior court (but not the Emperor's), where, by a method similar to that employed by Solomon, the truth is discovered. Before resigning his position and making his home with his sister, Chang-ling, at Hi-tang's insistence, cuts the malefactors into a hundred and twenty pieces.

The dispute over ownership of the child arises from the fact that Mrs. Ma, who is childless, cannot inherit the property of her dead husband, though she is the head-wife. Accordingly, she claims to be the mother of Hi-tang's child. The more pertinent part of the trial scene follows:

EMPEROR. You were a flower-maiden?

Who were the visitors to the house among the willows?

(Hi-tang nods.)

HI-TANG. Mr. Ma took me out of the house on the first day I entered it.

EMPEROR. Had no one visited you before you came?

HI-TANG. A young lord visited me.

EMPEROR. Who was the young lord?

HI-TANG. If I should name his name he would believe that I wanted to lighten my fortune, to flatter him, to beg an alleviation of my pain, to ask for grace rather than for my right. I will not name his name. I ask for justice, nothing else.

EMPEROR. And love, would you not ask for love. when you yourself love?

HI-TANG. I love my child.

EMPEROR. The sworn testimonies of the witness in this case declare that the child to which you make claim is not your child.

(Hi-tang is silent.)

CHANG-LING. The witnesses say so falsely. They were bribed by the first wife.

MRS. MA. He lies.

EMPEROR. It is the function of the judge to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

CHANG-LING. The judge was corrupted like the witnesses.

CHU. He lies.

EMPEROR. The first wife of the Mandarin Ma is in the room—which is she?

(Mrs. Ma comes forward and kowtows.)

Woman, speak. Who is the mother of the child you carry in your arms?

MRS. MA. I am, your Majesty—

EMPEROR. Good!—Master of Ceremonies—

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Your Majesty.

EMPEROR. Take a piece of chalk, draw a circle here on the floor in front of my throne, and place the boy within it.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. It is performed.

EMPEROR. And now you two women, try to pull the boy out of the circle, both at the same time. One grasp him by the left arm, the other by the right. The true mother is she that has strength to pull the boy out of the circle.

Mrs. Ma pulls brutally at the child; the real mother releases her hold for fear of hurting him. The Emperor finds Mrs. Ma guilty of having stolen the child and, by forcing her to repeat her oath in the earlier court, of having poisoned her husband.

MRS. MA. I - swear - by - the - bones (stumbling) that she who is not the mother of child—poisoned Mr. Ma.⁸

The matter of punishment is left in the hands of Hi-tang, who dismisses Chu and Chow from their positions and gives Mrs. Ma her freedom, leaving her, as she says, to the punishment of her conscience.

Which of these three stories was the basis for the other two, or did each of them have an independent origin? Such questions are impossible to answer. The presence of the diagrams drawn in both the Indian and the Chinese versions would seem to indicate either a common source or an influence of the one upon the other. The *pulling* common to both in contrast to the threatened *cutting* of the Biblical account also suggests a close relationship. And the cultural contacts existing between India and China from very early times should not be overlooked. However, the whole problem of provenience must still remain in the realm of conjecture.

8. It is interesting to note that in the original oath the *wording* used by Mrs. Ma really constitutes a confession of her guilt, though the *punctuation* distorts the meaning. Hi-tang, however, understands the slip.

MRS. MA. I swear by the bones of my ancestors that she, who is not the mother of the child, removed her husband from her path with poison in order to obtain by fraud the child and the inheritance.

HI-TANG. (In terror.) She swears the truth!