



A Wedding "Law-Suit" in Harar (Ethiopia)

Wolf Leslau

The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 63, No. 249. (Jul. - Sep., 1950), pp. 363-365.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8715%28195007%2F09%2963%3A249%3C363%3AAW%22IH%28%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B>

The Journal of American Folklore is currently published by American Folklore Society.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/folk.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Molhers soas & Dauters in thousauds they afoud did cry
For msrky & forgiveuss unto the Lord that rul s on high

When they were leaving Ireland& partaking the hOme they land so dea
Little did their r elations think tht ehis sad news they were doom'd to dea
Their neighbours friends & parents who oftc ntimes for them did pray
They are now comsnm'd in fire in Chfcago all in America

Those whO eecaped this dreadful doom they claim our pity too
To see tem runiug from the fire shouting alas what shall we do
The Methe s with their childreu it was heartrendiag for to hear
The screams of them were terifying the hardest heart would shed a tear

As they sufferd this nest au nl death we hope their souls in heaven may dwell
Lhe paina & torture they went through I'm sure no mortal toug can tell
Thei loving friends in Ireland will weep for them for many a day,
With broken hearts lamentiug their loes by fire in America

Now there hos been a aoble c ll through the world every where
Te raise upon subscriptioa fOr the surviveing sufferers there
And in every part let eadh feeling he rt come forward with their mite
For to assist thoiø poor distrc s'd may God proteet them day & night

So aow to end those feeling lines I hope you'all will lend your aid
Andfreely extend y ur charity to those pODr suffering people God has sav'd
And may you r c ive he rewward that has been promised upon the great adonu ing day
And for those poor Christians tbat lost their lives let young and old now for them pray

At the head of the sheet is a crude cut representing Moses receiving the Ten Com-
mandments. The illustration has no connection whatever with the text; why is it
there? Perhaps those who read these rhymed antecedents of the tabloid extra felt
that without a picture they weren't getting their ha'penny's worth. At the foot of the
sheet is a line, only partly legible, identifying the printer. Apparently he thought well
enough of his handiwork to wish to be known to its readers.

I am indebted to Miss Kay Van Deurs of New York City for a copy of Cronan's
ballad.

DAN G. HOFFMAN

*Temple University,
Philadelphia*

A WEDDING "LAW-SUIT" IN HARAR (ETHIOPIA):—A wedding in the city of Harar
lasts for several days.¹ Every night the boys and girls gather either in the house of
the bride or of the bridegroom and pass the evening singing songs. The boys sing
duets and the girls respond in chorus.²

From time to time the song is interrupted by the "wedding law-suit," described
below and called *seranta*.³ In this "law-suit" the boy singers interrupt their song and
accuse a chosen person of the gathering of having laughed while the young people
played and amused themselves. The accused defends himself and the accuser and

¹ The inhabitants of Harar are Moslems.

² For a collection of wedding songs see my "Chansons Harari" in *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*,
6 (1947), 130-60.

³ Abstract from *sera* "in the name of."

accused both must provide warrantors⁴ who pledge gifts. The trial starts. Each party brings witnesses and their testimony will decide on who wins the case. The loser or his warrantor has to bring the required amount of pitchers of drinks. If he cannot afford to give the required amount he entertains the attendants for permission to bring the half of the amount. The attendants grant him this favor and all of them share the drinks brought by the loser. This was the ultimate purpose of the "law-suit."

The text of the "law-suit" is formal and was given to me as follows.

A = accuser, B = accused.

A: "In the name of the bridegroom, in the name of the bride, in the name of the young man; if there are left (others that I don't mention), forgive me. As to the *gärad*⁵ Aḥmad Addus, I ask for a verdict against him. When the young men played he laughed, indeed; I want you to inform yourself about it (for me)." *arūz sera, arūzīt sera, dārma sera; ziqāra ḥal gir, awfi ūsluñ. aḥmād addus gärad-be ḥaq ikäs-b-üh-a. k dārma yitfeqär-z-äl qada seḥaqa-wa; tilämdu-lu-ñ ikäsak.*⁶

B: "I am called" (that is, "I am ready to answer"). *tätärahku.*

A: "Because you did this you are guilty." *yukut z-äsiki-le bätül intak.*

B: "I am not guilty." *bätül-um altäñ.*

A: "I give ten pitchers." *assir gämbo isja. k*

B: "I accept (the bet)." *agäba.*

The attendants say: "Call for warrantors." *wäs tiruḥu.*

The accuser and the accused say: "So-and-So, be warrantor for me." *ḥebal, wäs kulleñ.*

The warrantors say: "I am" *kanku.*

The attendants say to the accused: "Account for your witnesses." *ragaḥa ḥelqi.*

B: "So-and-So, So-and-So, So-and-So." *ḥebal-wa, ḥebal-wa, ḥebal* (He chooses an odd number of witnesses.)

The witnesses stand in front of the attendants.

A (to the witness): "You know, and know for me (that is, testify for me). When the young people played, Aḥmad Addus laughed." *tuqāk-a uqleñ. dārma yitfeqärzal aḥmād addus zisäḥaqanät-le.*⁷

B (to the witness): "Against me, you don't know anything against me. When the young people played I did not laugh." *ambe-m atuqbäñ. dārma yitfeqär-z-al al-säḥaḳku-m.*

The witness say: "May (God) make me (a witness) who testifies the truth and be saved. Aḥmad Addus laughed (or did not laugh) when the young people played." *ḥaq ikib-ma yuč-z-al yūsäñ. aḥmād addus dārma yitfeqär-z-al saḥaqa* (or *al-saḥaqa-m*).

A (if the witness testified in his favor): "He testified for me." *än-le keba.*

B (if the witness testified in his favor): "He testified for me." *än-le keba.*

All the witnesses testify. The voices are counted. The winner then says to the loser: "Raise" (that is, the required amount). *ḥaf us.*

The loser says: "I raise" *ḥaf äsḳu.*

The companions of the bridegroom say to the warrantor of the loser: "Pay." *kafül.*

The warrantor then gives the amount of pitchers agreed upon. If the loser cannot afford to pay the whole amount he entertains the attendants to do him a favor and to

⁴ The warrantors play a great part in Ethiopian procedure.

⁵ Is a title.

⁶ The text is in the language of Harar called *adare*. It belongs to the Semitic languages of Ethiopia.

⁷ A substantivized verbal form.

require the half of the amount. He says: "I shall pay five pitchers, and consider it as sufficient" (literally "make it big for me"). *hammisti gämbo ikäflak-wa yiw agdirulu-ñ*.

One of the young men says: "We consider it as sufficient" (lit. "we make it big"). *agädärna leu*.

Another one seconds: "May it be so." *yäbordaḱ*.⁸

The loser says: "It is so." *borädäñ*.⁹ And he brings the five pitchers of drink which are distributed among the attendants.

WOLF LESLAU

*Asia Institute,
New York*

⁸ Literally "May it arrive to you."

⁹ Literally "It arrived to me."

JO STAFFORD PRIZE IN AMERICAN FOLKLORE

The Jo Stafford Prize in American Folklore for 1950 is open to bona fide students, undergraduate or graduate, enrolled in American universities at any time during the calendar year. The first prize of \$125 will be awarded to the student presenting the best collection of American folklore, gathered from primary sources, written up in publishable form, and submitted as a piece of original research. The second prize is \$75, and the third \$50. Theses and dissertations meeting the above requirements are eligible for consideration. Every manuscript must be accompanied by a letter setting forth when, where, and how the material was collected, together with a listing of the scholarly assistance—suggestions, bibliographical information, etc., etc.—supplied by others. Manuscripts must be typewritten on good quality paper, double-spaced. Winning entries become the property of the American Folklore Society; other manuscripts will be returned only if postage is included. Manuscripts must be in the hands of Dean Hector Lee, chairman of the committee selected to judge the contest, Chico State College, Chico, California, on or before January 15, 1951.