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B I S M I L L A

This Soqotran folklore tale was recorded from Sa'ad al-Keshri, a citizen of Qalansiya, the second town of Soqatra, while he was studying in At-Tiwahi (Aden) in 1979-80. The tape-recorded text was then transcribed by me with Sa'ad's kind help. The text is presented as it was told orally - with some repetitions and slips in the narrator's speech. [Ed. note: Part Two of this tale is continued in the Winter, 2007, issue.]

Bismilla

1) kana ʔru mutsaḥibi

there were two friends

2) ʔaharo ʔoy yom, 'omor ʔot,

(they) went one day, one (of them) said:

3) 'omor: yo qaqa! 'al 'a-k na'a l-iṭohiro?

(he) said: O, brother! Don't you want now to go?

4) l-itmaššiy^vo l-ḥa, l-iṭohiro l-ḥa

to take a walk here, to go here

5) kar de ḥadib d-ḥa diš^v bi digdege?

up to this place that (is) here on this plain?

6) 'omor: 'ik! ʔaharo.

(he) said: (I) want. (they two) went.

7) min 'al yi'ado ha, 'omor toṭ ...

when (they two) were going here, the one said ... (1)

8) gedaḥ raḥ

the wind has come.

9) 'omor toṭ ... 'isra' ḥadib ... 'omor: bismilla!

the one said... (2) the place disappeared. (he) said: *bismilla!*

10) 'omor: tinqana' mo-k niye!

(he) said: your mind went mad!

11) ta'amir "bismilla" - diya' "bismilla"

you says: *bismilla!* bad is *bismilla!*

12) la-'eder mo-k 'alla 'ed!

Alla save your life!

13) 'omor: "bismilla" diye!

(he) said: *bismilla* is good!

14) 'omor: la', diya' "bismilla"!

(he) said: no, bad is *bismilla!*

15) 'omor: b-inhem 'inhi 'indark

(he) said: what do you stake for me

16) keremo diye "bismilla"?

when *bismilla* is good?

17) 'omor: 'erimmo ('enimmo) diya' "bismilla"

(he) said: if *bismilla* is bad

18) 'indark ha-k: raqaḥ min-e 'eni,

I stake for you: (you will) take out my two eyes,

19) wa tigešel min-e hidi,

and break my two arms,

20) wa tigešel min-e šir'on!

and break my legs!

21) 'omor: wa het?

(he) said: and you?

22) 'omor: wa ho, 'erimmo diye "bismilla" -

(he) said: and I, if good (is) *bismilla*,

23) 'endark ha-k min-e b-'eyni,

(will) stake from me to you my two eyes,

24) wa min-e b-yidi, wa min-e b-šir'on!

and my two arms, and my legs!

25) ṭaheyro, 'ado, min 'al yi'ado -

(they two) went, walked. when have been walking

26) kseyo ṭoṭ di... gin(n)

(they two) met one... Jinn.

27) ginn ye 'amer: diya' "bismilla"!

the Jinn says (3): bad (is) *bismilla*! (4)

28) 'amero: 'e ginn!.. 'amero: 'e šuḥar!

(they two) said: O, Jinn... (5) O, man!

29) šī ḥa le-ḥa , šinidirki ḥa:

there is something with us, we two have bet:

30) d-yo qaqa ye 'omer: diye "bismilla"!

my brother says: good (is) *bismilla*!

31) wa ho 'a 'amer: dyah "bismilla"!

and I say: bad (is) *bismilla*!

32) ginn 'omar: "bismilla" di'!

the Jinn said: *bismilla* (is) bad!

33) diya' "bismilla"!

bad (is) *bismilla*!

34) 'omar: diya' "bismilla"?

(he) said: (is) *bismilla* bad?

35) 'omar: diya' "bismilla"!

(he) said: bad (is) *bismilla*!

- 36) ʔahar, ʔomar: naʔa qaqa
 (he) went, (he) said: now, brother,
- 37) ʔik (h)a-k tzaʔa th-o l-ḥa-na diš ʔegara d-buk
 I want you to take me now to this tree (that is) there
- 38) diš ɖot d-buk
 this doom-tree (6) (that is) there
- 39) wa tigešel min-e širʔon, wa raqaḥ min-e ʔeyni!
 and to break my legs, and to take out my two eyes.
- 40) ʔomar: hey! zaʔe-š l-ḥa-ne ʔegara.
 (he) said: hey, (he) took him up to the tree
- 41) wa fone, dunya fone tinaffed d-si ʔindar.
 and once upon a time, people once upon a time fulfilled their promise.
- 42) ʔal ʔad yišober yhi.
 he didn't stay waiting.
- 43) ʔirqaḥ ma-y ʔeyni, wa gišel ma-y hidi,
 (he) took out his two eyes and broke his two arms,
- 44) wa gišel mo-y širhon -
 and broke his legs -
- 45) ʔeqal (h)-iy buk naʔa.
 abandoned him there now.

46) *gedaḥ 'esfar bi-lilhe, gedaḥ me-san 'esfar...*

there came birds at night, came some birds.

47) *me-san di 'ad ṣ̌i kuketen.*

some of them are - doves.

48) *'omero ʔoy 'esfiro, 'omero: 'aḥ qaqa!*

one (f.) bird said, (she) said: o, sister!

49) *l-'am 'ino na'a ʔoṭ 'uwher*

if there is now one blind

50) *wa ze'e di'r diṣ̌ min ṣ̌egara d-ḥa,*

and (he) took blood of this tree that (is) here

51) *'omar ta d-hi b-'eyni - yiṭorif d-hi 'eyni!*

and made so to his two eyes - his two eyes will be cured.

52) *'omero ʔoy: 'aḥ qaqa! l-'am 'ino ʔoṭ*

the one (f.) said: o, sister! if there is one

53) *giṣ̌el mo-y hed wa 'omer d-ye di hed,*

his arm has been broken - and made to his arm (7)

54) *'omer (h)-is ḥa l-ḥa-ne di ḥoyhi*

made to it (f.) now this earth now

55) *l-ḥa-na diṣ̌ ṣ̌egara d-ḥa -*

of this tree that (is) here -

56) tširaqaḥ he-y d-i hed!

his arm will be corrected (will go out)!

57) 'omero ʔoy: qaqa! l-'am 'ino ʔoḥ gišel śir'on

the one (f.) said: sister! if there (is) one his legs (are) broken

58) wa qoḍof diš min šegara d-ḥa,

and broke off from this tree that (is) here

59) wa 'irqaḥ mo-s di'r - 'omar d-i d śir'on -

and the blood went out from it - made it to his legs -

60) tširaqaḥ (tšaqaḥ) ha-y d-hi śir'on!

his legs will be corrected (will go out)!

61) 'ima' šuḥar.

the man heard.

62) loḥ 'ima' šuḥar, 'amor te-n'a.

when the man heard, made so now (immediately).

63) 'amor d-hi 'eyni, 'amor te d-ḥoyhi, 'amor...

made to his two eyes (8), made with earth , made...

64) 'am qadom.

until saw.

65) 'amor te d-hi di hidi,

made so to his two arms

66) 'amor hi l-ḥa-ne ḥoyhi d-šegara,

he made this now earth of the tree

67) wa 'amor mo-s ...

and (he) made from it ...

68) wa šito mo-s toy, wa qodof šegara,

and felt a smell from it and broke off (from) the tree

69) 'amor h-i šir'on.

(he) made to himself legs.

70) wa šiqah te d-hi šir'on wa d-hi 'eyni.

and so were his legs and his two eyes corrected (went out).

71) w-ošbah yi'aber d-i b 'eyni,

and (he) became seeing by [could see out of] his two eyes,

72) wa yu'ud d-hi b šir'on ,

and going by his legs,

73) wa yiti d-hi b hidi.

and eating by his two arms.

74) 'am tsabah - šhalef,

when it become morning - (he) left.

75) *śise* (kise?) d-i qaqa, d-i saḥab di d-fona

(he) found his brother (friend), that friend that (was) that time.

76) kse-s (š) toy be 'obher min 'al ye 'amer:

(he) found him near a well saying:

77) 'igib riyho, ṭimik.

I want (some) water, I have a thirst [am thirsty].

78) ṭime, wa biśi miśiyo d-'omar bi-s riyho.

he had a thirst, but there (was) no pail wich is made water by it.

79) 'omar: qaqa, het na'a?!

(he) said: brother, (it is) you now?

80) 'omar: qaqa! 'ifol ta qhon?

(he) said: brother, how it was?

81) mon d-'irqaḥ ha-k d-et 'eyni?

who corrected (made out) you your two eyes?

82) mon d-kole ha-k d-et śir'on wa d-et hidi?

who cured you your legs and your two arms?

83) 'omar: ho, 'ilḥamdulilla!

(he) said: I, 'il-hamdu-lilla!

84) 'al ta 'amer fona "bismilla" diya'?!

havn't you been saying that time *bismilla* (is) bad?!

- 85) **diye "bismilla"!**
 good (is) *bismilla*!
- 86) **'omar: qetnaḥ 'enhi di-ho hidi wa di-ho śir'on.**
 returned to me my two arms and my legs
- 87) **'omar: mon d-kole ha-k?**
 (he) said: who cured (they) for you?
- 88) **'omar: 'al 'oḍola' ha-k!**
 (he) said: I will not tell you!
- 89) **'omar: 'el-ḥaṣel - diye "bismilla"!**
 (he) said: the result (8) (is) *bismilla* (is) good!
- 90) **'omar: heyya!**
 (he) said: let it be.
- 91) **'omar: w-al 'ak ta'd (h)i-ki d-riyho,**
 (he) said: and don't (you) want to go upon water for us (du.),
- 92) **kor diye "bismilla"?**
 if *bismilla* (is) good?
- 93) **'omar: 'a'od (h)i-ki d-riyho.**
 (he) said: I (will) go upon water for us (du.)!
- 94) **ṭahar, qufod b-qeyd,**

(he) went, came down by a cord.

95) **qufod bi qeyd yi'amer (h)i-hi riho.**

(he) came down by a cord to make for them (du.) (some) water.

96) **qufod b-qeyd...**

(he) came down by a cord ...

97) **'am ye'arah d-geme, 'omar: bismilla!**

when (he) comes down, (he) said *bismilla!*

98) **'omar: hayye! ta'omer "bismilla"!? -**

(he) said: hey, (you) say *bismilla!*?

99) **tiqofod d-geme!**

(you) are coming down!

100) **'ebhad he-y , 'af yiṭoreb d-'ebher,**

(he) waited for him, until (he) gets down into the well,

101) **yella, qoṣ 'e-y qeyd.**

hey, (he) cut his cord.

102) **qoṣ qeyd d-iz'em ṣuḥar buk na'a.**

(he) cut the cord (which) the man was sitting on it there now.

NOTES:

- (1) and (2) the right order of events should be as follows: “when (they two) were going here, the wind came, the place disappeared, the one said, (he) said: *bismilla!*”
- (2) and (4) and (5) the story-teller is in a hurry: the two men didn’t know that the man they met is a **Jinn**. He was “a man” for them.
- (6) in Arabic
- (7) “**hed**” (sg.) is an arm in Qalansian and North Western dialects of Soqotri. In Hadebo it is “**ed**”.
- (8) The informant made a plot mistake: it should be *a blood of the tree* not *the earth of it be made to the eyes*.

FREE TRANSLATION

Bismilla

There were two friends. One day one of them said: “Hey, brother! Do you want (us) to go for a walk?! To that place on this plain?!” “Yes, I do”, this friend said. They went. When they went the strong wind came and the whole place disappeared.

“*Bismilla!*” said the one. “What do you say?!” asked his friend, “Your mind went mad! *Bismilla* is bad! Alla save your life!”

“*Bismilla* is good!” the first friend said. “No. It’s bad!” the second said, “what will you stake when *bismilla* is good ?” “If *bismilla* is bad you will take off my eyes, and break my arms and my legs,” the friend said. And you?” “And I too, if *bismilla* is good, will give you my eyes, and my arms, and my legs to do the same,” the other friend said.

They went walking and met a man who really was a Ginn. “Hey, man!” they said to him, “there is a dispute between us. One of us says: *bismilla* is good and the other said it is bad...”

“The Ginn said: “*Bismilla* is bad! Bad!” “Bad?” they asked one more time. “Yes, bad!” the Ginn said again.

“Now,” the first friend said, “I want you to take me to that doom-tree there and take off my eyes, break my arms and legs!” That time the people kept their promises.

“Yes,” the second friend said. They went to that tree and there he took off his friend’s eyes, broke his friend’s arms and legs, left him there and went away.

In the night there came dove-birds. The first of them said: “O, sisters! If there was a blind man and take a little blood of this tree – his eyes will recover.” The second said: “O, sisters! If there was one with broken arm and make the earth from around this tree to his arm – his arm will recover.” And the third said: “O, sisters! If there was one with broken leg and make a little blood (1) of this tree to his leg – his leg will recover.”

The man heard all this and made as the birds said. He put his arms to the earth at the foot of the tree and they returned as they had been. He broke the bark of the tree and made its blood to

his eyes – and they returned to see. Then he made its blood (1) to his broken legs – and his legs returned to walk in full health.

In the morning he went away but soon he met his friend which he called “brother” sitting by the well. He was thirsty but there was no leather pail to take some water from it. “Brother, it is you now?!” he asked. “How could it be? Who returned you your eyes, and your arms, and your legs?”

“I would not tell you,” the first friend said. “The result is – *bismilla* is good!” “ Hey, I am thirsty,” the second friend said, “would you like to get down to take for us some water from the well when *bismilla* is good?!” “Yes, I would,” the first friend said. He came down by the cord to the bottom of the well and said: “*Bismilla!*”

“Yes, do you say *bismilla* !?” his friend said. He saw his friend is at the botton of the well – and cut the cord...

Notes:

(1) From the formal logic the “blood” of the tree should be for eyes and the “bark” (or something els relating to the tree) for legs. Although in the original text the “blood” is for treating the both.