

The ‘Seven Sages’ in Comparative Folk Narrative Research

Contact

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Abstract The present contribution considers the ‘Seven Sages’ from the perspective of comparative folk narrative research. It surveys the history of how the tales embedded in versions of the ‘Seven Sages’ were assessed in Victor CHAUVIN’s ‘Bibliographie’, Stith THOMPSON’s ‘Motif-Index’, and in the international tale-type index compiled by Antti AARNE as revised by THOMPSON and Hans-Jörg UTHER. Whereas the Latin denominations for the tales embedded in versions of the ‘Seven Sages’ that are often employed in research derive from and mainly relate to European tradition, the concept of tale types widens the discussion to assess the tales in international tradition, thus documenting their long-lasting impact, whether as part of the ‘Seven Sages’ or as independently performed narratives.

Keywords Folk Narrative Research; Motifs; Tale Types; Terminology

From the perspective of the discipline of comparative folk narrative research, the ‘Seven Sages’ is one of several prominent frame-tale collections of Middle Eastern origin.¹ Like the other influential compilations, particularly the Arabic ‘Kalila wa-Dimna’ and ‘Alf layla wa-layla’ (‘The Thousand and One Nights’), the ‘Seven Sages’ is constituted

1 Marzolph [forthcoming].

by a specific frame tale that embeds other tales of varying length that, in their turn, relate more or less directly to and serve as arguments for a solution to the dilemma presented in the collection's frame tale; in this case, the frame tale is about a young man being defended by a group of (seven, ten, forty) sages/viziers (or defending himself) against the charge of sexual transgression towards a woman attached to his superior, often the ruler's wife or favourite concubine. Like 'Kalila wa-Dimna', the 'Seven Sages' was introduced to the European literatures in the Latin Middle Ages and, for several centuries, inspired numerous translations and adaptations in the European vernacular languages. Quite unlike 'Kalila wa-Dimna', however, the corpus of tales embedded in the 'Seven Sages' experienced a decisive change, as only a small fraction of the tales contained in the collection's old Eastern versions was taken up in the Western versions; instead, the tales included in the latter versions derive from a variety of sources and vary considerably between the different versions. This feature makes the 'Seven Sages' a particularly challenging candidate for comparative research in literature and popular narratives.

Still today, the 'Analytical Bibliography', originally published in 1984 by Hans R. RUNTE, J. Keith WIKELEY, and Anthony J. FARRELL, serves as a useful first introduction into the narrative universe of 'The Seven Sages of Rome'.² Previously housed by the 'Society of the Seven Sages', the 'Bibliography' currently remains available in a considerably expanded version on the internet, last revised in 2014. RUNTE, the driving force of the currently more or less defunct Society, died in April 2019, and the intellectual legacy laid out in the 'Bibliography' is unlikely to undergo another thorough revision soon. The present contribution aims to add a folklorist perspective to the bibliographical assessment of the 'Seven Sages' tradition with a particular focus on the tales contained in the numerous versions of the work's Eastern and Western branches. My perspective is that of a scholar of historical and comparative folk narrative research, a field of folkloristics to which I have contributed both as a long-term member (1986–2015) of the editorial committee of the 'Enzyklopädie des Märchens' and in my own publications on the narrative culture of the Muslim world.

For a folklorist perspective, Bea LUNDT's entry on the 'Seven Sages' in the 'EM', published in the encyclopaedia's second fascicle of vol. 12, offers a convenient starting point.³ The fascicle was published in 2006, and the most recent work it mentions, Detlef ROTH's study of the textual transmission of the mediaeval 'Historia septem sapientum', dates from 2004.⁴ Historically, the comparative dimension of the 'Seven Sages' has been explored in considerable detail since the 19th century

² Runte, Wikeley, and Farrell 1984.

³ Lundt 2007.

⁴ Roth 2004.

by international scholars such as Domenico COMPARETTI, Marcus LANDAU, William Alexander CLOUSTON, Killis CAMPBELL, and others.⁵ The most comprehensive survey was presented in Belgian bibliographer Victor CHAUVIN's reference work, 'Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatif aux arabes publiés dans l'Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1885'. The 'Bibliographie's eighth volume, originally published in 1904, is exclusively devoted to 'Syntipas', the title of the Greek version that serves as CHAUVIN's umbrella term for all of the work's Western and Eastern versions.⁶ Despite its comprehensive range of references, CHAUVIN's 'Bibliographie' has never been seriously taken into account by scholars of literature studying the 'Seven Sages', with the notable exception of Japanese researcher Masami NISHIMURA.⁷

At first listing the relevant publications of the work's Syriac, Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and (in an appendix and a supplement) Western versions, the bulk of the 'Bibliographie's eighth volume consists of summaries of the tales these versions contain. It is this section, surveying a total of 254 tales (of which nos. 92–183, i.e. ninety-two items, refer to the Turkish version, 'The Forty Viziers', probably compiled in the 14th century) that paved the way for the folklorist assessment of the 'Seven Sages'. Many of the tales listed by CHAUVIN were referenced in American folklorist Stith THOMPSON's 'Motif-Index of Folk-Literature' (1955–1958)⁸ as well as his second and considerably enlarged revision of 'The Types of the Folktale' (Aarne-Thompson-Index: AT; 1961).⁹ THOMPSON's 'Motif-Index' lists narrative motifs, pragmatically (and somewhat ambiguously) defined as the smallest identifiable units of narrative tradition. Useful as it is to survey the international dissemination of specific motifs, such as the motif of the forbidden chamber appearing in the 'Seven Sages' tale 'Curiositas',¹⁰ it is of little use for understanding the genetic relations of complex tales and will be disregarded in the following. 'The Types of the Folktale' lists full-fledged tale types as the ideal abstraction of any given tale. Methodologically, tale types are constituted by a more or less clearly defined sequence of motifs, some of which are optional. Tale types may correspond closely to an actually performed tale, but more often, orally performed tales are versions of the tale type that they would be classified as, with varying structure, episodes, or motifs. Moreover, as narrators perform tales and not tale types, narratives recorded from oral tradition often combine elements that have been analysed as belonging to different tale types. Whereas older research adhered to the notion of originality and

5 Comparetti 1869; Landau 1884; Clouston 1884; Campbell 1907.

6 Chauvin 1904.

7 Nishimura 2001; see Runte 2014, nos. 71–2007.

8 Thompson 1955–1958.

9 Aarne and Thompson 1961.

10 Thompson 1955–1958, vol. 2, p. 526; Chauvin 1904, pp. 47 f., no. 15.

purity and tended to regard the result of such a process of creative combination as a ‘contamination’,¹¹ for unbiased modern research, these tales result from the narrator’s creativity and flexibility and the factual variability that orally performed tales express. ‘The Types of the Folktale’ is the standard reference work of comparative folk narrative research. Originally compiled by Finnish folklorist Antti AARNE, it is currently available in a third revision prepared by an editorial staff headed by German folklorist Hans-Jörg UThER, now titled ‘The Types of International Folktales’ (Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index: ATU).¹²

Concordant with the general focus of CHAUVIN’s ‘Bibliographie’ on works of Arabic literature, the survey of tales contained in the various versions of the ‘Seven Sages’ begins with an assessment of the Arabic version, ‘The Seven Viziers’. CHAUVIN’s textual reference is CLOUSTON’s slightly adapted reprint of the English translation of ‘The Seven Viziers’ that English orientalist scholar Jonathan SCOTT provided in 1800 “from a fragment of an Arabic Ms. of the *Thousand and One Nights*”;¹³ this manuscript has recently been identified as currently being preserved in the Edinburgh University Library.¹⁴ Most of the embedded tales are contained with some variation in the standard editions and translations of ‘The Thousand and One Nights’ as listed in ‘The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia’.¹⁵

In elucidating the fact that CHAUVIN’s publication paved the way for the folklorist assessment of the ‘Seven Sages’, it is useful to recall that it was not THOMPSON’s intention to classify each and every tale of the ‘Seven Sages’ tradition, let alone those of other similar compilations of Middle Eastern tradition such as ‘Kalila wa-Dimna’ or ‘The Thousand and One Nights’. In other words, THOMPSON never intended to document the general impact of tales of the ‘Seven Sages’ in popular oral tradition. Instead, he referenced the ‘Seven Sages’ as a likely historical precursor to the tales that were his prime concern, i.e. tales that later circulated in 19th- and 20th-century oral tradition. In compiling a numerical index of ‘The Types of the Folk-Tale of Europe, West Asia, and the Lands Settled by These Peoples’,¹⁶ THOMPSON primarily focused on tales that had comparatively frequently been recorded from oral tradition in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries; in his words, tales “found in several countries.”¹⁷ As THOMPSON

11 Shojaei Kawan 1996.

12 Uther 2004.

13 Clouston 1884, p. 125.

14 Akel 2016, p. 82, no. AR 18 Angleterre Edinburgh University Library Or. 169.

15 Marzolph and Leeuwen 2004; the tales can best be accessed through the Concordance of Quoted Texts in vol. 2, pp. 757–759, nos. 181–208. See also the Comparative Table of the Tales in Eastern Texts in Clouston 1884, after p. xvi.

16 Aarne and Thompson 1961, p. 7.

17 Ibid.

was well aware of the fact that many of the tales modern folklorists recorded as 'folk tales' had ancient roots or analogues in literature, he would include references to literary works and compilations of tales as deemed suitable, and his main reference for tales associated with the 'Seven Sages' was the comprehensive survey in CHAUVIN's 'Bibliographie'. Although RUNTE and his collaborators in the 'Analytical Bibliography' originally listed THOMPSON's 'Motif-Index' as well as other prominent folklorist reference works, such as THOMPSON's second revision of 'The Types of the Folktale' (1961) and even the first volume of the German 'Enzyklopädie des Märchens', published by German scholar of Germanic studies Kurt RANKE and a team of prominent German-language scholars of folk narratives and popular literature in 1977, the potential of these folklorist reference works was never put to practice, as detailed references to specific entries were never added in the 'Bibliography's' revisions.¹⁸

Considering the wide international dissemination of the 'Seven Sages' tradition, the work's constitutive frame tale as well as the numerous tales embedded in its different versions are not only a matter of concern for national, comparative, and world literatures. Many of the tales in the various versions of the 'Seven Sages', in addition to being read in their literary versions, were also told and retold independently in oral performance, thus contributing to the stock of internationally documented narratives, conventionally called 'folk tales', whose origin, dissemination, and variation scholars of comparative folk narrative research study. The prevalent neglect of the folkloric dimension of those tales by scholars of literature is, to some extent, probably due to the differing terminology and, particularly, the nomenclature used in the different disciplines. Whereas modern scholars of literature tend to refer to tales of the 'Seven Sages' tradition with the Latin denominations that had originally been introduced by German scholar Karl GOEDEKE,¹⁹ folklorists would refer to the tales by tale-type number. Each method of reference offers a clear and unambiguous meaning to scholars of the related discipline while largely remaining enigmatic to scholars of the other discipline. Both methods of reference are grounded in specific historical circumstances. The Latin denominations for the tales are derived from the study of the influential mediaeval Latin 'Historia septem sapientum' and appear additionally justified by the historical use of Latin as a scholarly lingua franca in Western research. Even so, there is a certain ironic twist in the application of the Latin denominations used in Western and international research on the 'Seven Sages', as it overshadows the fact that both the frame-tale collection and many of the tales contained in its multiple versions originate from the Muslim Middle East. The use of Latin

¹⁸ Runte 1984, p. 179, no. 796; p. 179, no. 794; p. 182, no. 810.

¹⁹ Goedeke 1866.

titles for the tales thus implicitly continues the historically wide-spread cultural arrogance that gave rise to the notion of Orientalism, implying the disrespect, denigration, and colonial exploitation of the Eastern cultures to whom international tradition owes most of the tales. In referring to this critique, I do not intend to advocate the abandonment of the Latin titles. After all, they offer a commonly agreed nomenclature for the unambiguous identification of specific tales in international research, and particularly research in the Western languages. But even so, literary scholars of the ‘Seven Sages’ are well advised at least to take notice of the folklorist classification as an equally efficient way of referring to the popular dimension of many of the tales. The following table (Tab. 1) documents this feature by presenting the equivalent denominations to the tales of the Eastern branch of the ‘Seven Sages’ as listed by CHAUVIN.

Table 1 | Latin denominations and tale types of the tales of the Eastern branch of the ‘Seven Sages’

Chauvin, vol. 8	Latin name	ATU tale-type no. and title
Tales in the Arabic version (‘The Seven Viziers’ in ‘The Thousand and One Nights’)		
33 f., no. 1	[[frame tale]	875D*: ‘The Prince’s Seven Wise Teachers’
35, no. 2	‘Leo’	cf. 983: ‘The Dishes of the Same Flavour’
35 f., no. 3	‘Avis’	1422: ‘Parrot Reports Wife’s Adultery’
36 f., no. 4	‘Lavator’	
37, no. 5	‘Seductor’	
38, no. 6	‘Panēs’	
38 f., no. 7	‘Gladius’	1419D: ‘The Lovers as Pursuer and Fugitive’
40 f., no. 8B	‘Striges’	cf. 817*: ‘Devil Leaves at Mention of God’s Name’
41 f., no. 9	‘Mel’	2036: ‘A Drop of Honey Causes Chain of Accidents’
42, no. 10	‘Zuchara’	
43 f., no. 11	‘Fons’	681: ‘Relativity of Time’
44, no. 12	‘Balneator’ = ‘Senescalculus I’	
45 f., no. 13	‘Canicula’ = ‘Catula I’	1515: ‘The Weeping Bitch’
46 f., no. 14	‘Imago’	cf. 883A: ‘The Slandered Maiden’

Table 1 | (continued)

Chauvin, vol. 8	Latin name	ATU tale-type no. and title
47f., no. 15	'Curiositas'	
48f., no. 16	'Capsa'	
49f., no. 17	'Vaticinium'	
50f., no. 18	'4 Amatores'	1730: 'The Entrapped Suitors'
51-53, no. 19	'Nomina'	750A: 'The Three Wishes'
53, no. 20	'Innocua'	
53f., no. 21	'Turtures'	
54-56, no. 22	'Amazona'	519: 'The Strong Woman as Bride (Brunhilde)'
57f., no. 23	'Pallium'	1378: 'The Marked Coat in the Wife's Room'
59, no. 24	'Annulus II'	1426: 'The Wife Kept in a Box'
59f., no. 25	'Lac Venenatum'	
60-62, no. 26	'Senex Caecus'	978: 'The Youth in the Land of Cheaters'
62f., no. 27	'Puer 3 Annorum'	
63f., no. 28	'Puer 5 Annorum'	1591: 'The Three Joint Depositors'
64f., no. 29	'Vulpes'	
Additional tales in the Syriac version ('Sindban')		
66, no. 30	'Aper'	
66f., no. 31	'Canis'	178A: 'The Innocent Dog'
67, no. 32	'Simia'	cf. 103C*: 'An Old Donkey Meets the Bear'; cf. 177: 'The Thief and the Tiger'
68, no. 33	'Elephantinus'	
Additional tales in the Greek version ('Syntipas')		
69, no. 34	'Ingenia'	1381A: 'The Husband Discredited by Absurd Truth'; 1381B: 'The Sausage Rain'
70, no. 35	'Fatum'	

Table 1 | (continued)

Chauvin, vol. 8	Latin name	ATU tale-type no. and title
Additional tales in the Hebrew version ('Sindabar')		
71, no. 36	'Absalon'	
71, no. 37	'Juvenis Femina'	
72, no. 38	'Amatores'	1536B: 'The Three Hunchback Brothers Drowned'
Additional tales in the old Persian ('Sinbād-nāme') and Turkish versions		
73, no. 39	'Vulpes et Simia'	
73, no. 40	'Camelus'	
74, no. 41	'Elephantus'	
74, no. 42	'Rex simiarum'	
75, no. 43	'Socer'/'Annuli'	
75, no. 44	'Mater negligens'	
76, no. 45	'4 Liberatores'	653: 'The Four Skillful Brothers'
77, no. 46	'Upupa'	
77, no. 47	'Capilli'	

Of the altogether forty-seven tales CHAUVIN lists for the older Eastern versions of the 'Seven Sages', a mere twenty (excluding the frame tale) correspond to international tale types; moreover, some of these correspondences are only comparatively vague approximations. This assessment certainly limits the overall application of the tale-type classification for the whole of the 'Seven Sages' tradition, let alone the potential of a general substitution of Latin titles by tale-type numbers. At the same time, the tale-type numbers open up windows into the wider historical origin and international dissemination of the respective tales, several of which originated independently from the collection and were only integrated into the 'Seven Sages' at a later stage. In addition, the question is what the tale-type number implies. First and foremost, it informs users that THOMPSON, who integrated the data amassed by CHAUVIN into the system of tale-type classification, only regarded a limited number of tales embedded in the multiple versions of the 'Seven Sages' as relevant for international oral tradition. Although the majority of tales of the 'Seven Sages' tradition are contained in more than one written version and often occur in versions written in different languages, this feature does not necessarily bespeak their popularity in oral

tradition. A given tale might be suitably embedded in the collection where the tale's message would serve as an argument for its narrator; devoid of the context, many tales risk becoming meaningless or even banal, thus precluding their attractiveness in oral storytelling. Moreover, oral narrators would usually perform single tales from the 'Seven Sages' rather than the complex frame tale with its numerous embedded tales. Consequently, THOMPSON disregarded tales whose occurrence is restricted to the written tradition of the 'Seven Sages' only, regardless of this tradition's international scope, as well as tales not documented from oral tradition. Second, one needs to exercise great care not to take the classifications for CHAUVIN's listing at face value. After all, a tale type represents an abstract ideal concept whose feasibility and applicability need to be scrutinised in order to be asserted, modified, or rejected. Some correspondences, such as those for 'Canicula'/ATU 1515, 'Nomina'/ATU 750A, or 'Senex Caecus'/ATU 978, are so close as to constitute direct equations, whereas other correspondences are fairly vague. Essentially, each and every tale (and tale type) has its own varied history and deserves to be studied in its own right. Useful as the tale-type classification for CHAUVIN's data is, it may only serve as a first approximation and needs to be diligently scrutinised against the complete body of presently available data. Once the reliability of the suggested classification has been reviewed, the comparative data presented not only allow us to study a given tale's position in a tradition that often spans written and oral tellings over a period of more than a thousand years but also open the gateway to the creativity of international storytellers as one of the most fascinating aspects of the folklorist approach. Rather than simply cite a given tale type, non-folklorists are advised to refer to the encyclopedic assessment of all major internationally distributed tale types as provided by the relevant entries in the 'Enzyklopädie des Märchens' that can conveniently be identified by way of the concordance supplied in the entry 'Erzähltypen' (narrative tale types).²⁰ In order to demonstrate the points just mentioned, I would like to discuss a few tales in some more detail.

The first tale of CHAUVIN's listing has been classified as ATU 983: 'The Dishes of the Same Flavour'.²¹ In that tale, a man of note, often a married man, is attracted to a particular woman. As the woman wants to prevent him from transgressing the limitations of decent behaviour when the man visits her, she serves him a variety of dishes that all look different but taste the same. By doing so, she aims to make the man understand that, essentially, all women are the same, and that he should be content with the one woman he is married to, i.e. his wife. In the version embedded in the 'Seven Viziers', the tale constitutes a mere motif in the framework of a

²⁰ Erzähltypen.

²¹ Detailed references to the following discussion of tale types are supplied in the referenced sources. For the present tale, see Moser-Rath 1984; Uther 2004, vol. 1, pp. 614, 517; Marzolph 2020, pp. 255–260.

longer tale involving other motifs that in research on the ‘Seven Sages’ is known as ‘Leo’ or ‘The Lion’s Trace’ and that is listed as tale type ATU 891B*: ‘The King’s Glove’. Similar to the previous tale, a powerful man here courts a chaste woman. As the woman makes him understand his morally questionable intention, the man departs, unintentionally leaving behind one of his belongings (such as a ring, his girdle, or a glove). The woman’s returning husband sees the object and guesses the unknown visitor’s identity. When the husband later alludes to the object in a veiled conversation with the visitor, the latter consoles him in equally veiled terms that, while the lion had certainly been present, he did not do any harm to his wife. The oldest known version of this tale, of which four different versions are included in various editions of ‘The Thousand and One Nights’, is attested in the anonymous 10th-century Arabic compilation ‘al-Maḥāsin wa-’l-’addād’ (‘The Good Side of Things and Their Opposites’), thus more or less contemporary with the earliest hypothetical Eastern version of the ‘Seven Sages’. Interestingly, the data available for tale type ATU 891B* document its dissemination in an area corresponding to the distribution of the Eastern versions of the ‘Seven Sages’.

One of the most widely known tales of the ‘Seven Sages’, documented in several hundred texts from written and oral tradition, is known as ‘Nomina’, corresponding to tale type ATU 750A: ‘The Three Wishes’.²² This tale’s oldest known version in a version of the ‘Seven Sages’ is contained in the Persian ‘Sendbād-nāme’ compiled by 12th-century author Zāhiri Samaraqandi. Samaraqandi’s version has an explicit sexual content that satirised the equally old as well as apparently ineradicable male fantasy that size matters. When his supernatural friend grants a pious man the capacity to fulfill three wishes in times of need, the man’s first thought is to request a tremendously large penis. As this organ proves to be highly impractical, he next asks to be relieved of his large penis and subsequently has to use his third wish to restore the original physical status. Old as this explicitly sexualised version is, the version in Arabic author Ibn Qutayba’s 9th-century ‘Uyūn al-akhbār’ (‘Quintessential Reports’) indicates that competing versions of ‘The Three Wishes’ existed already at an early stage. In Ibn Qutayba’s equally sexualised, albeit misogynist, version, it is the pious man’s wife who makes the first wish, requesting supreme beauty so as be ultimately desirable. The angry husband curses her to be turned into a pig, and the third wish again has to be spent on restoring the original status. It is particularly revealing to study how later tradition dealt with this tale’s inherent or explicit sexual tendency that was bound to conflict with the moral standards of later times. For instance, a large quantity of the texts documented from 19th- and early 20th-century tradition betrays the domesticating influence of the desexualised version first attested in French fairy-tale author Charles Perrault’s late 17th-century

²² See Uther 2004, vol. 1, pp. 397 f.; Chesnutt 2014; Marzolph 2020, pp. 147–153.

tale 'Les souhaits ridicules' that was further popularised by Madame le Prince de Beaumont's mid-18th-century 'Magasin des enfans' (1756/57). In this version, the man uses his first wish to request a large sausage – quite obviously, a sublimated expression for the explicit mention of the male sexual organ. Enraged about the waste of a precious wish for such a trivial item, the man's wife requests the sausage to stick to his nose – yet another allusion to the tale's previously outspoken sexual aspect. The third wish again has to be used to restore the original status. The tale's structure as well as its sexual allusions remain stable in most versions, since the essential message is the vanity and ultimate futility of human desire. Whereas most versions documented from 19th- and 20th-century oral tradition reproduce models closely related to the written tradition of the 'Seven Sages' type, the creative capacity of oral storytellers is documented in the 20th-century version narrated by Walter WINFREY as published in Richard DORSON's 'Negro Folktales in Michigan' (1956):

This was a cowboy, and he wanted to be a strong man. So he saddled his horse and went down the street riding along. A snake crossed the path before him, and he taken his gun out to shoot it. So the snake says, "Mr. Cowboy, don't shoot me, and I'll make you any deal that you want me to do." So the cowboy says: "All right. Make me three wishes." The snake tells him, "Go ahead and wish." So the cowboy says: "I wish I had muscles like Joe Louis. And I'd like to have features like Clark Gable." And he says, "I'd like to be as strong as this stud I'm riding."

So the snake says, "Okay, you go home, go to bed early, get up in the morning and see if you've got your wishes."

So the cowboy got up the next morning; he threw his bathrobe back; he says, "I got the muscles like Joe Louis." He looked in the mirror, and he says, "I got the features like Clark Gable." The he pulled his bathrobe back again and looks down. He says, "Well, I'll be durned; I forgot I was riding a mare."²³

Several aspects of this version betray its origin from the well-documented international tradition, including both the snake that is often mentioned as the magic animal granting the wishes and the sexual tendency of the man's wishes. Meanwhile, the storyteller changed the disillusioning end resulting from the competitive aspect of the older version into a burlesque turn of events that mark his text as a modern satirical comment on the age-old male fantasy. The sobering irony of the futility of vain

²³ Dorson 1956, p. 192.

wishes is further cynically expressed in a politically nuanced joke of which numerous versions with an essentially identical punch line circulate on the internet. This one is from a political article English journalist Simon HOGGART wrote for ‘The Guardian’:

There’s a joke about a man who gets three wishes. “I want to be royal, rich, and married to a beautiful woman,” he says.

Moments later he is in a four-poster bed. Next to him lies a gorgeous woman whose long blonde hair tumbles across the silk sheets. She stirs and nudges him: “Wake up, Franz Ferdinand, we have to tour Sarajevo today.”²⁴

Some versions of narratives originally documented in the ‘Seven Sages’ tradition developed a prominent life of their own, gradually overshadowing and even succeeding older tradition. A case in point is the tale ‘Canis’, corresponding to tale type ATU 178A: ‘The Innocent Dog’.²⁵ This is probably the most widely spread tale of the ‘Seven Sages’ tradition and one of the few tales contained in versions of both the Eastern and Western branches. The tale is essentially about a domesticated carnivorous animal, often a dog, that is rashly killed for wrongly being supposed to have killed the owner’s child, while in fact, the animal had only protected the child from an attacking snake. In addition to an old Greek version, this tale is known from ancient Indian tradition, from where it was communicated to the Arabic ‘Kalila wa-Dimna’. Following this work’s Greek translation, two main strands of tradition have been identified. One strand of tradition goes by way of the Hebrew ‘Mishle Sindebar’ compiled by Rabbi Joël in the middle of the 13th century, and the other one, whose exact trajectory remains somewhat oblique, already shows in the versified old French version ‘Les sept sages de Rome’ compiled in the middle of the 12th century. The versions that eventually became most popular in oral tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries, however, were adapted to local contexts to such an extent that even their origin from the tradition of the ‘Seven Sages’ has been challenged. One of those versions is the legend of the holy greyhound Guinefort, first referred to by the Dominican friar Étienne de Bourbon in the middle of the 13th century. Another one is the legend connected to Gelert, the favourite dog of the early 13th-century Welsh prince Llewellyn the Great that eventually gave rise to the name of the village Beddgelert, i.e. Gelert’s grave. The oldest written version of the legend is a poem by William Spencer, published in 1800, but visual evidence in the ‘Warwick Roll’ suggests that

²⁴ Hoggart 2003.

²⁵ See Schmitt 1990; Uther 2004, vol. 1, p. 122; Marzolph 2020, pp. 45–48.

the legend was already known towards the end of the 15th century. Versions such as these document the wide-ranging influence and adaptability of tales originally transmitted in the framework of the 'Seven Sages' tradition.

A final item to be discussed rapidly is the tale 'Fons', corresponding to tale type ATU 681: 'Relativity of Time'.²⁶ The tale of the 'Seven Sages' tradition focusses on a temporary change of sex from man to woman, and then back to man again. Not considered in the international tale type index, the temporary change of sex is listed in Hasan EL-SHAMY's 'Types of the Folktale in the Arab World' as tale type 705B§: 'Khurâfah's Experience'.²⁷ First documented in the collection of popular sayings and related narratives compiled by 9th-century Arabic author Mufaḍḍal ibn Salama, the tale is well-documented in Middle Eastern Muslim tradition, including Arabic, Persian, Pashto, Baloch, and Neo-Aramaic versions. The tale is contained in the old Syriac, Greek, Spanish, and Hebrew versions of the 'Seven Sages' as well as in the 'Seven Viziers' included in the comparatively recent Arabic manuscripts of 'The Thousand and One Nights'. Considering the relatively homogenous area of the tale's dissemination in the Muslim Middle East, it is startling to see that there is a cluster of tales in 15th-century Gaelic tradition where 'The Story of the Abbot of Druimenaig' describes a closely similar experience. Moreover, a similar story is also known from modern Gaelic tradition. Even a fairly recent study of the Gaelic tale posited its distribution as being limited to Ireland and Scotland, thus neglecting the tale's wide dissemination in Middle Eastern tradition.²⁸ Future research will have to discuss how the various strands of tradition might be connected. It appears tempting to hypothesise that the tradition of the 'Seven Sages' might offer the missing link.

As the 'Seven Sages' travelled to the West, most of the tales embedded in the Eastern versions were abandoned, and other tales from a variety of origins were introduced. Of these, so far only a few tales with a Latin title and a corresponding tale type have been identified (Tab. 2).

Table 2 | Additional Latin denominations and tale types of the tales of the Western branch of the 'Seven Sages'

Chauvin, vol. 8	Latin name	ATU tale-type no. and title
Tales in the Turkish version ('The Forty Viziers')		
130, no. 120	'Mitra'	1620: 'The Emperor's New Clothes'

²⁶ See Naithani 2004; Uther 2004, vol. 1, pp. 373 f.; Marzolph 2020, pp. 125–131.

²⁷ El-Shamy 2004, pp. 378 f.

²⁸ Hillers 1995.

Table 2 | (continued)

Chauvin, vol. 8	Latin name	ATU tale-type no. and title
Tales in the European versions previously not listed		
184f., no. 224	'Puteus'	1377: 'The Husband Locked Out'
185f., no. 225	'Gaza'	950: 'Rhampsinitus'
193, no. 233	'Inclusa'	1419E: 'Underground Passage to Lover's House'
193f., no. 234	'Vaticinium'	517: 'The Boy Who Understands the Language of Birds'
194-196, no. 235	'Amici'	516C: 'Amicus and Amelius'; 893: 'The Unreliable Friends'; 970: 'The Twining Branches'
197, no. 238	'Secretum'/'Pairius'	1381D*: 'Secret Senate'
199, no. 244	'Senex'	921B: 'Best Friend, Worst Enemy'; 981: 'Wisdom of Hidden Old Man Saves Kingdom'
200-203, no. 245	'Creditor'	890: 'A Pound of Flesh'
206-208, no. 248	'Cygni'	451: 'The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers'
210-213, no. 254	'Vidua'	1510: 'The Matron of Ephesus'

A comprehensive inventory in a Western language of the Latin titles for all tales ever embedded in any of the versions of the 'Seven Sages' together with short descriptive summaries of the respective tales equivalent to NISHIMURA's listing in Japanese²⁹ does not exist. In order to enable international research to harmonise the nomenclature of tales and to fathom the full extent of corresponding tale types and, thus, the folkloric dimension of the 'Seven Sages', the preparation of such an inventory constitutes an urgent desideratum.

The present discussion of a few prominent examples of tales from the 'Seven Sages' as documented from oral tradition aims to demonstrate the wide-ranging options the folklorist approach offers. The tale-type index as one of the most important reference works of comparative folk narrative research has often been critiqued for its positivist approach in lumping together a large variety of data of the most heterogenous origins. Although a tale type has an analytical dimension only insofar as it represents an abstraction, the tale-type classification remains useful as a pragmatic device to amass comparative data for any given tale of Indo-European tradition that enjoys a wider dissemination. The concept's

²⁹ Perry 2001; see Runte 2014, nos. 46-2001.

advantage, however, is not restricted to the application of numbers to sort and classify the available data. Offering access to the raw material, the classification is a gateway for the ensuing interpretation that enables researchers to identify relations between different versions of a given tale, to establish clusters and strands of tradition, and to marvel at the fascinating creativity of international storytellers. Historically, the written tradition of the 'Seven Sages' is primarily a phenomenon of learned or elite literature, but its impact is not restricted to these arenas. Quite to the contrary, the numerous creative retellings of the embedded tales in 19th- and 20th-century oral tradition document their lasting appeal for a considerable variety of international audiences. In revealing and demonstrating this dimension, the methodological approach of comparative folk narrative research is able to make a special contribution.

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