

A Turkish Lullaby

Translated by
A. L. and F. MACFIE

In 1980 Muammer Küçük, a teacher of literature at Konya Selçuk University, recorded a lullaby, sung to her by her mother (see ÇELEBİOĞLU 1982, 60-62). The lullaby, "Incili Bebek Ninnisi" ("lullaby of the baby with the string of pearls"),¹ was introduced by the following story:

Once upon a time the chieftain of a tribe, concerned that he had no grandchildren, informed his son that he wished him to marry the daughter of a neighboring chieftain. The young man readily agreed, and the wedding, which lasted for forty days and forty nights, was quickly arranged. For some years the couple remained childless; but then one day, as the young man sat under a pine tree, considering the problem, he heard a voice speaking, as in a dream. "Make a sacrifice," the voice said, "and you'll have a child." "If I have a child," the young man replied, "I shall willingly sacrifice three camels." Later he told his father of the dream, and when his father enquired where he would find the camels, he assured him that he would find not just three camels but three hundred, if need be. Shortly thereafter the young man's wife was delivered of a fine baby, and the young man set out to find the camels. Eventually he found three camels for sale in southern Anatolia, and purchased them. On his return he made arrangements for an expedition to a saint's tomb on Hacat Dağı, where the sacrifice was to take place. In due course they all set out, with the baby carried on one of the camels. But as they approached the saint's tomb the young man thought to himself, why should I sacrifice three camels, when I already have a child? Why don't I keep them, so that my child will have the use of them when

it grows up? When he told his wife of his decision, she begged him not to go back on his word. But he insisted, ordering the expedition to turn about. As they set out once again on the road, with the baby on the camel, a huge eagle suddenly swooped down and, seizing the child between its talons, carried it off. As the family watched with horror, other eagles gathered and tore the baby to pieces. The mother, driven mad by the sight of her baby being torn to pieces, threw herself on the ground and recited the following dirge:

Your mother left a-walking,
Your father left a-riding,
With all the tribe a-gawping,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

All in white lace I dressed you,
And on a camel placed you.
How oft have I caressed you!
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Above black eagles wheeling,
All of a sudden swooping,
My little baby stealing,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Above black eagles soaring,
A crown of pearls left lying,
Your stupid father snoring.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Above black eagles flying,
My little baby clutching,
And all the world a-spying,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Above black birds ascending,
My baby's flesh a-rending,
And all the world attending.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Did I not call you darling,
Take care of all your feeding,
Your every need providing.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

This was not of my choosing,
This was not of my making.
There can be no accusing.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Your face was white as cotton,
Your eyes were black as berries,
Your father's first begotten.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

In silken lace we wrapped you,
In a fine cradle laid you.
Oh, that we'd never got you!
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Half mad I am with rueing,
With weeping and with wailing,
My baby's my undoing.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

May God cleave the camel's foot,
Break the soaring eagle's wing,
Rot the pine tree from the root.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

May God melt the mountain snows,
Sweep away the high grasslands,
Set a blight on all that grows.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Seven years we prayed for you,
Promised sacrifice for you,
Climbed up Hacı Dağı for you.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

How they would have talked of you,
Had you grown up strong and true,
How they would have envied you.
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Over distant hills afar,
Yet black eagles can be seen.
God's curse be on Hacı Dağı!
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

NOTE

1. Turkish lullabies, like lullabies in other languages, frequently express the feelings of the mother, in particular her feelings of hope, fear, love, hate, bitterness, loneliness, homesickness, and grief. At the same time they occasionally incorporate a folk tale, fable, or legend. "Incili Bebek Ninnisi" clearly falls into this category, though it remains essentially a powerful expression of a mother's anxiety regarding the health and safety of her baby, her relationship with her husband, and her reputation with the tribe; and an expression of the bitterness and despair which the death of a baby would provoke.

REFERENCE CITED

- Çelebioğlu, Âmil
1982 *Türk ninniler hazinesi* [A treasury of Turkish lullabies]. Istanbul: Ülker Yayınevi.