Jewish-Near Eastern Numskull Tales: an Attempt at Interpretation

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0. Introduction

The wise men of Gotham wandered to many corners of the globe. They settled in Jewish Chelm (Poland), in German Schildau, in English Gotham (Nottingham), Classic Greek Abdera (Thracia), in Muslim and Indian villages; they reached American shores and found a home as far as China (Eberhard 1937: 289–90) and the islands of Oceania (see Luomala 1966). This wide distribution of numskull tales in very diverse cultures makes them a subject meriting more attention from the folklore scholar than they receive today.

Presently, a small corpus of numskull tales from a certain culture will be examined from different viewpoints. The narrative structure of the tales will be discussed, the way numskulls think, their relation to human society, and the spatial and temporal framework of the tales. The corpus of tales is supposed to represent a whole in which the single units—the texts— complement each other all together making up the whole picture of the various qualities discussed.

The corpus of tales is taken from Jewish-Near Eastern culture[1]. The Jewish society in the Near East has almost ceased to exist by now, due to the immigration of most of the Jews from these countries to Israel where they became a part of modern Israeli society. The original society was a traditional, preindustrial community, living mostly in towns as a lower middle class consisting of peddlars, artisans and merchants. While few exceptions, the poverty was great, the rich ones having just enough to eat. The legal position of the Jews in Muslim society was traditionally one of second-rate citizens. While most men were literate in the Hebrew language (which was not spoken but used for ritual purposes only), most women were illiterate. The language spoken was in general the vernacular of the co-residing Muslims and Christians. (For an excellent ethnography of one such community see Brauer 1934).

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1. The tales analyzed here have been recorded in Israel by the Israel Folktale Archives (IFA), Ethnological Museum and Folklore Archives, Haifa, from new immigrants in the years 1957–1968. For a description of the Archives and their holdings see Jason 1965, Noy 1961, 1962, 1967, Noy and Schnitzler 1967, 1968. Most of the texts have been noted down manually in Hebrew by volunteer unskilled collectors. In the Appendix are given in full the texts used in this study. In the case several versions of a tale have been recorded, which do not add information, only one version has been translated and analyzed in the present paper.

The Muslim culture, in the midst of which the Jews lived, has in common with the Jewish traditional culture the secular aspects. Among these aspects a great part of oral literature is the common heritage of all the ethno-religious groups living side by side in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This common culture shows a surprising basic unity which overrides local diversities throughout the huge territory from the Atlantic to the shores of the Indian Ocean and is an heir to the Hellinistic culture, on the territory of which it flourishes (see Grunebaum 1955).

Like many other cultural elements, oral literature is found to be uniform in form and content, all over the territory of predominantly Muslem culture. This uniformity allows one to treat as one unit items from all corners of the Muslim world.—The present author has proceeded in such a manner; the tales that will be discussed in this paper are taken from a wide range of countries, but are treated as a uniform corpus. (See in Jason 1965 comparative tables of tale repertoires from several Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Countries and note the similarity between them and their dissimilarity to European tale repertoires).

A. Aarne devoted a whole chapter of his Index (1910) to numskull tales, numbers 1200–1349. An examination of the tales included in the second revision of the Index (Aarne-Thompson 1961) showed that not all of the tale plots included can be considered of the same kind. Many of them are not numskull tales, and on the other hand, there are numskull tales scattered in other chapters of the Index. For the present purpose only the tales about a person who harms himself through his own improper acts have been chosen and not tales about persons cheated by a more clever person. The cheated person was obviously less bright than the cheater, but he remains in the confines of normal human behaviour, numskulls, however, as will be shown, deviate from this normal human behaviour.

Three worlds will be distinguished here: (a) the *real* world, the social and physical universe according to Western scientific conceptions; (b) the *normal* world, i.e., the universe as known and perceived by members of the narrating society (in the present case, for instance, for a Jew in traditional Yemon the world of spirits was existing, i.e., part of his normal universe, while America, automobiles or checking accounts were unknown, i.e., not a part of his normal universe); (c) the world in the tale, in the present case the *numskull* world. Every genre of oral liter-

ature has its own world. Presently, a description of the num-
skull world as depicted in the corpus of the tales used (see the
texts in Appendix) will be attempted.

1.   The narrative structure of numskull tales.

    1.1   The model.   The following description of numskull
tales is made according to the principles set for narrative struc-
ture analysis of folk tales by V. Propp (1928) as developed by
H. Jason (1967).   Two basic analytical units are postulated: the
tale role and its action, the *function*.   The model that has been
built, the *move*, consists of two tale roles, *hero* and *donor*, and
of three functions:

              Tale role   Function
    1. Donor/tester   —puts Hero to test
    2. Hero   —responds to test
    3. Donor/rewarder—rewards Hero

    On a very general level, numskull tales would be built ac-
cording to the following model:

    Move A
        1. A Problem   —poses itself to the numskulls
        2. Numskulls/ —try to solve the Problem (unsuccessful)
            the numskull
            leader
        3. The Problem—does not let itself to be solved and hurts the
                        numskulls.

Tale roles: Hero — numskulls and their leader
              Donor — the Problem

    Move B
        1. A Stranger   —appears and proposes to solve the problem
        2. The numskulls—accept the help of the stranger
        3. The Stranger —solves the problem.

Tale roles: Hero — numskulls
              Donor — the Stranger.
This is a very general scheme and most of the texts are much
more complex having several interconnected moves, some of them
with parts embedded and deleted.   Not all of the tales in the
corpus have both kinds of moves in their model.   Texts IFA 807,
IFA 1012 *a,b,c,d,* IFA 2176, IFA 7857 *a,b,* consist of moves of
kind 'A' only (this move may be repeated).   The problem of the

numskulls is not solved and they end up by hurting themselves. All the other tales are built according to more complex models.

A detailed discussion of the narrative structure of all the texts would exceed the frame of the present paper, so the analysis of a single text will have to suffice:[2]

> "Several *Ahdam* with their wives and children entered a tavern. They drank a little, chewed *kat*.[3]

Move A-1

1. They wanted to read. They saw a saddle hanging on the wall.
2. They took the saddle down:—'Read!'—'No, no, you should read!'— They said to each other.[4]
3. One took a stick, pointed to the letters[5] and started to read:— 'Mohammed...'—, —'Be he blessed'—they answered him. They started to read obscene words.

Move A-2

1. A child starts to cry.
2. His mother gives him the breast—but instead of putting his mouth to the breast, she puts his behind [to the breast].—'Come, drink, drink!'—
3. And the child cries—his head is behind his mother.

Move B

1. A soldier enters. He sees what is going on. He gives a beating to the "reader":—'What is this!? Are you laughing at Mohammed?' —He gives a beating to the woman:—'How are you nursing the the baby!? To his behind!?'
2. 'Excuse me, my lord, really'—asked the woman,—'I did not pay attention, really!'—
[3. The soldier solved the problem by teaching the *Ahdam* how to

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2. In the example a simplified version of the structure is given. In a full analysis the tale will be found to contain five interconnected moves, with deletions and embeddings. As we are not dealing here specifically with structural analysis, these complexities are unnecessary for the discussion.

3. *Kat* (Arabic)—*catha edulis Forskól*—, a herb having intoxicating qualities. It grows and is used in East Africa and Yemen.

4. *Hadem*, pl. *Ahdam* (Arabic) are untouchables in Yemen, leading a Gypsy-like life. They are Muslims. In real life they are illiterate and are here in the tale mistaking the saddle to be the holy Kuran. See Grohmann 1922–1933: I:96–101.

5. In ritual reading of the Bible in the synagogue a staff in the form of a hand is used to point out the parts to be read.

behave.]

The *ahdam* left and went their way (text IFA 806)."

Tale roles:

Move A–2	Move A–2	Move B
Hero—*ahdam*	Hero—mother	Hero—*Ahdam*, mother
Donor—saddle	Donor—child	Donor—soldier

The donors saddle and the child pose challenges for the numskulls (*ahdam*): The challenge of reading and of nursing. The numskulls do not succeed in meeting these challenges: they do not succeed in reading and their child does not get fed. The stranger—the soldier—solves the problems: he explains that the saddle is not a Kouran and teaches the right way to nurse a baby.

This is a whole tale. Such are also texts IFA 802, IFA 807, IFA 848, IFA 1181, IFA 1188, IFA 2176, IFA 5464. Other tales in the corpus consist of a chain of episodes, each of which is in itself a whole tale which will be told by itself on another occasion. The episodes can change place inside the chain; new episodes can be added and old ones dropped (see texts IFA 1624 and IFA 4548 for two chains build around the same idea but with different episodes). The connection between the episodes is mechanical in that at least one actor is playing through all the episodes. There is no other connection between the episodes. So, for instance, Dada succeeds in raising seven daughters in episode IFA 1012 *a*, but is not able to look after her grandchild in episode *d*; in episode *b* she has dairy products from her own household, but in episode *e* she does not know how to look after domestic animals. In episodes in which Dada knows how to look after children and domestic animals, she commits other kinds of numskull acts (for a discussion on the aspect isolation of episodes see Lüthi 1960).

1.2   The actors. The actors play in tale roles. In numskull tales there are three main kinds of actors:

(a)   the numskull population which faces a problem
(b)   an individual numskull (sometimes a leader) who tries to solve the problem
(c)   a stranger who comes from the normal world and solves the numskull's problem, or shows by his own behaviour that the numskull's behaviour is non-normal.

The actors are distributed in the tale roles as follows:

(a)   hero: the numskull population (or an individual numskull) who

has to face a problem;
(b) donor:
  (1) a problem (it may be a human actor who poses the problem, an object, an action or a circumstance)
  (2) the individual numskull who tries unsuccessfully to solve the problem
  (3) the stranger who succeeds in solving the problem.

Not all the actors play in every text. In simpler texts the stranger does not appear (texts IFA 807, IFA 1012 a–d, IFA 2176, IFA 7857 a, b). In another group of texts the numskull population does not appear and the same numskull individual faces the problem and tries to solve it, i.e., he plays in two tale roles (texts IFA 848, IFA 1181, IFA 1624 a, IFA 4548 a). In a third group of tales, the numskull leader who tries to solve the problem is missing (text IFA 1588 b).

The numskull population: What is the social identity of the numskull population? We see peasants, shepherds, untouchables (Yemenite *ahdam*); monks—members of a social class the image of which is negative in the eyes of the narrating society; women—the social position of which is lower than the men's in the society we are dealing with, and once, a child; inhabitants of a provincial town (Chelm in Poland and Homs in Syria) or of a backward region (Kurdistan), Arabs—members of an ethnic group despised by the narrating society. All of these actors are in some way of an inferior social status[6]. Thus, in general, the numskull population is symbolized by groups of low social status, even by groups standing on the margins of society (such as untouchables).

The individual numskull who tries to solve the problem of his fellow-numskulls is sometimes in a leadership social position in his society; the wise man of the community, an army commander, the assembly of the townspeople (texts IFA 807, IFA 7857 b, IFA 2176, IFA 7857 a).

The individual problem solver may be a member of the numskull family which has to face the problem (texts IFA 802, IFA 806 b, IFA 1012 b–e), or an anonymous member of the company (texts IFA 806 a, IFA 1188, IFA 1588 a, IFA 5464). In the cases where the numskull population is absent, the same indivi-

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6. Sources in the Appendix: IFA 1012, IFA 1624: peasants; IFA 1188: shepherds; IFA 802, IFA 806, IFA 807: untouchables (Yemenite *Ahdam*); IFA 2176: Chelm in Poland; IFA 1588: Kurdistan; IFA 5464: Arabs; IFA 17: monks; IFA 1624, IFA 4548: women; IFA 806: a child; IFA 7857: Homs in Syria.

dual faces the problem and tries to solve it, i.e., the same actor plays in two tale roles (texts IFA 848, IFA 1181, IFA 1624 *a*, IFA 4548 *a*).

The more interesting of these figures of unsuccessful solvers of the problem is the social leader. On first consideration the figure of the stupid social leader looks like a satirical picture made after the social leader in the narrator's normal society. Below another possible interpretation will be considered by confronting the numskull leader with the personage of the stranger. The stranger who comes from the normal world stands in opposition to the numskull leader; he is external to numskull society, and has no status in it. In the normal world, however, the stranger has a definite social status, a status so low, that he stands sometimes on the fringes of society. He is a poor vagabond, half beggar, half petty thief, an anonymous soldier, an occasional worker who wanders around alone without a family, an inhabitant of a quarter of poor seasonal workers in which a family which is able to have its meals every day is considered rich[7]. The fact that he is of low social status and often on the margins of society (as a vagabond is) puts the stranger into opposition with the numskull leader who is both of highest social status and in the very centre of society. The low social status of the stranger from the normal world who overcomes even the highest socially positioned numskull puts the numskull society as a whole socially below human society.

The situation is different when the story is set on the level of family relations and not on the level of the whole society, as in the above cases. In this case, the family splits into numskulls and normal people, either the numskull spouse and the normal spouse (texts IFA 848: normal wife; IFA 1624, IFA 4548: normal husband) or two generations, one numskull the other normal (text IFA 1012: normal daughter of numskull parents).

The role of the stranger represents the normal world in the tale. The stranger intrudes into the numskull world and shows as in a flash of light the non-normalcy of the numskull behavior. The stranger illuminates the numskull behavior, (a) by solving the problem of the numskulls (texts IFA 17, IFA 806 *b*, IFA 1588 *a, b,* IFA 5464), or (b) by his own behavior which shows the lack of normalcy in the numskull's behaviour (texts IFA 802, IFA 806 *a,* IFA 848, IFA 1012 *e,* IFA 1188, IFA 1624 *a,* IFA

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7. Sources: IFA 1188, IFA 1588: a vagabond; IFA 806: a soldier; IFA 5464: a Jew; IFA 848, IFA 1181: a thief; IFA 802: neighbours in a poor neighbourhood.

4548 a).

Finally, the role of the stranger in numskull tales has to be differentiated from the clever-thief-role in swindler tales of the same narrating society (listed mainly in the "clever man" chapter of Aarne and Thompson's 1961 Index, Nos. 1525 ff., but a number of them are listed in the second revised edition of the Index also in the chapter of numskull tales, such as Nos.: 1218*, 1296, 1305, 1313 ff. 1331, 1331 D*, 1341 ff.)   The clever thief cheats a less clever person in order to gain some small material gain or satisfaction while, on the contrary, the stranger does not cheat or hurt the numskulls.   In the case when he gains something as the result of his actions, the gain is an honestly earned reward for his services (such as in text IFA 1588 b).   The person cheated by the clever-thief exposes stupidity, but this stupidity remains in the limits of normal human behaviour.   The behaviour of the numskull, on the other hand, transcends this limit (for a discussion of Swindler Tales see Jason 1971 a).

2.   Actions of numskulls

Numskulls do not behave as normal people do.   Even the most foolish normal person, so long as he is sane, does not commit acts as described in numskull tales.   There are anecdotes about foolish people in oral literature too: such as the simpleton who believes anything he hears and is consequently cheated (tale plots Aarne-Thompson 1961, Nos.: 1313, 1528, 1529, 1530, 1531, 1535), the fool who mistakes one object for another (tale plots Nos.: 1314–1316, 1319*), the simple peasant in the great city and the townsman in the country (tale plots Nos.: 1337, 1338, 1339) the simpleton who takes everything literally (tale plots Nos.: 1693, 1696).   In contrast to these foolish acts, the dressing up of a "naked" tree (text IFA 1012 b), the holding of the assumption that one can steal the moon in a tub (text IFA 7857 a), or the not knowing of how a tall person can enter through a low door (text IFA 1588 a, IFA 5464)—all these numskull acts cannot take place in the normal world.   In this way we will not find in the normal world known to the narrator a country in which people would not know about swords or cats (texts IFA 17, IFA 1188).

The actions of the numskulls can be divided into two groups: (a) actions which imply lack of knowledge in basic attributes of objects and in basic technology, and (b) actions which reveal

that the performer lacks the ability of application of non-deductive rules of inference.

   2.1   Lack of knowledge in basic attributes of objects and in basic technology:

Objects are thought of as having qualities of living beings

   (tree is cold—IFA 1012 b; soil is thirsty—IFA 1012 c; laundry is cold—IFA 1624 a).

Animals are thought of as having human qualities

   (she-goat may talk, likes gossiping and clothes—IFA 4548 a; he-goat is wise, understands human speech and can talk, can carry out orders—IFA 848; a cat is thought to pray—IFA 17).

Lack of acquaintance with qualities of the human or animal body

   (people do not know which legs belong to their bodies—IFA 1588 b; it is not known that he separation of body and head causes death—IFA 1188; it is not known that an animal will die if a part of its body is cut off—IFA 1012 e; a cut off udder is believed to give milk—IFA 1012 e; it is not known that a person may drown in a pool of water—IFA 802, IFA 1012 a; the long beard of a he-goat is taken as a sign that the animal is wise—IFA 848).

False ideas about qualities of objects are held

   (it is thought that in the normal world stored grain multiplies by itself —IFA 802; the reflection of an object is mistaken for the object itself —IFA 7857 a; it is thought possible to take the moon out of the sky—IFA 7857 a).

Lack of knowledge in husbandry

   (it is not known how to rear children—IFA 806 b, IFA 1012 d; it is not known how to attend to domestic animals—IFA 1012 e; it is not known how to take care of laundry—IFA 1624 a; it is not known how to store grain—IFA 802, IFA 1012 a; it is not known how to attend to the needs of a cat—IFA 17).

Lack of knowledge of everyday objects

   (cats are unknown—IFA 17; swords are unknown—IFA 1188; the difference between a book and a saddle is not known—IFA 806).

There is no capability to solve simple technical problems

   (worthy merchandise is given away—IFA 1012 b, c; it is not known how to set free an animal's head from a narrow pot—IFA 807; it is

not known how to enter a low door—IFA 1588 a, IFA 5464; it is not known how to direct one's canons—IFA 7857 b).

2.2   Lack of capability to apply non-deductive rules of inference.   In this group of acts the numskulls are apparently acquainted with the world around them, but their way of thinking reveals inappropriate applications of non-deductive rules of inference, a lack which involves them in absurd conclusions and consequently, absurd decisions.   Several examples will serve as a demonstration:

Text IFA 1181.   Nasr ad-Din needs a *means of self-identification* since he applies to himself the principle that in order to make it possible to identify one specified item within a population of similar items one has to associate with it some distinguishing trait.   The principle, which is in general helpful, can be applied only in the case where the object which has to be singled out is not oneself, since in order to re-identify any object, one needs to be oneself.   This is so because the relying on one's memory presupposes one's having a continuous identity.

Text IFA 2176:   The people of Chelm do not see that a decision which is made in order to avoid a certain undesirable result (that the beadle will spoil the snow) incurs results which are much more undesirable with respect to the same aim in view (to keep the snow clean) and thus, a principle of rational action is missed.   The principle is: If some expected event will have undesirable consequences, one can avoid the consequences by preventing the event.   This principle is misapplied here since another principle, which is usually used to limit the applcation of the first is not taken into consideration: Wherever one is taking preventive measures against some undesirable event—one must take into account the results of one's own preventive measures.

Text IFA 7857 b: The numskull commander here misapplies a rule of reasoning of "a-fortiori": If by shooting I have killed my own soldiers—a-fortiori—the enemy was damaged to a much greater extent.   The principle which is applied here is that whenever an activity directed to a certain aim has side effects—the more vigorous the activity—the heavier the side effects.   In this case, though, the principle cannot be applied since the "side effects" involved are the only effects which were produced, and the activity which was directed to a certain specified aim (destruction of the enemy) has not reached it at all.

In all these cases, non-deductive principles of reasoning, all involved in conclusions relating to certain activities and decisions, were misapplied, or rather applied in inappropriate con-

texts precisely because they were treated as if they had the unlimited validity of deductive rules of inference.

After this acquaintance with the numskulls let us take a look at the world in which they live.

3.   The realm of the numskull world.

Bearers of oral literature suppose that every happening they are telling about in a certain story took place somewhere in a certain geographic space in the world they know. The heroes of the tale (or narrative song) walk around in "our village" and its surroundings, in the realm of "our country", or perhaps reach the fringes of "this world". Here both "this world" and "after world" are parts of the geographic picture of the normal known world of the narrator. Both may be located side by side on the same level in space, or may be located one above the other; they may have different qualities, but both are thought of as existing in the known normal world. (For more details about the geographic picture in oral literature of Near Eastern Jews, which are, however, unimportant here, see Jason 1971 b).

Where does the realm of the numskull world lie and what is the nature of the barrier between it and the normal world?

Numskull tales are usually thought of as being connected to a certain locality: These are tales about the wise men of Gotham (England), Schildau (Germany), Chelm (Polish Jews), Poshekhon (Russia), etc. This locality is part of both the normal and the real world. Let us examine our corpus of tales and see to what extent it is the specific geographical locality which characterizes the numskull world, or does the numskull world and the barrier between it and the normal world have a nature which is basically not spatial-geographical.

The texts show that numskulls do not live among normal people. Sometimes they are shown living in a specific settlement. This may be a known real settlement (Chelm in Poland—IFA 2176;[8] Homs in Syria—IFA 7857) ; it may be an unnamed settlement in a known country (unnamed village in Kurdistan—

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8. 'Chelm' is here a little out of place. It belongs properly to the repertoire of European Jewish oral literature while we are here dealing with Near Eastern Jews. In the same manner snow is not at home in the Near East. The man who narrated the story is a Sephardic Jew, born and grown up in Jerusalem, in close proximity to European Jews and there he got both the name 'Chelm' and the 'snowy' story.

IFA 1588) ; it may not bear a real name at all but rather a sym-
bolic one without any real location, such as *Shar'a al-Majanim*
(=the street of the madmen—IFA 1012).   In the texts only
three locations are mentioned which sound in some measure real.
Where should one look for the location of the numskull popula-
tion in the rest of the texts (11 texts out of 14) ?   Nothing is
said about this in our tales.   We have to look for indirect indica-
tions in order to determine the location.

In the tale a person (the stranger) from the non-numskull,
the human world enters the numskull settlement and leaves it
again.   There is evidently some empty space between the normal,
human world and the numskull world.   Within this empty space
there is a path which connects the two worlds.   Thus the num-
skull country lies spatially outside of the human world.   Another
indication that the numskull world is outside the realm of the
human world is the fact that the human stranger never remains
in the numskull realm and leaves it to return to this world.   He
leaves the numskull world in spite of the fact that in it he could
be in a leading social position whereas in the human world he
is of a very low status.   This fact indicates that there is a com-
pulsion for the 'stranger" to leave the numskull world.

Where then is numskull country located?   Is it in the after
world?   The stranger enters the numskull realm alive and leaves
it alive.   Thus, since in the tales of Jewish Near-Eastern culture
man does not enter the afterworld while alive, the numskull
country cannot be located in the afterworld[9].   The numskull
country should be located between the two worlds, this world
and the afterworld.   This in-between space is a realm into which
in the tales of the discussed culture, a person from this world
may enter and leave again without having changed his qualities
as a normal human being (see, for instance, a Yemenite fairy
tale—Noy 1963, No. 28—where the hero enters and leaves such
an in-between location.   In this Yemenite tale the in-between
location is explicitly located on the spatial fringes of "this
world", on a lonely unknown shore, in an out-of-the-way desert).

In most of the tales some kind of a spatial concept symbol-
ises the numskull realm and the barrier between it and the nor-
mal world.   In addition there are however, several tales in which

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9.   In tales from European Christian culture man may enter the after
world while alive and leave it alive.   See for instance, in Aarne-Thompson's
Index tale plot no. 470 where the hero enters the after world, observes
sinners' punishments, receives explanations from God or angels and returns
to the human world.

concepts entirely different from spatial terms symbolize the numskull realm and the barrier between the two worlds. Let us examine the texts in our corpus. We begin with texts with an explicit spatial location, proceed to various spatial barriers and end with non-spatial barriers.

In texts IFA 807 the numskull settlement is described as being a group of shacks built of branches and leaves, clearly a separate settlement, since Yemenite villages usually consist of dried brick houses. The normal world and its representative, the stranger, do not appear here. The barrier between the two worlds is the space around the numskull settlement. No meeting point of the two is described.

The same applies to the known numskull towns such as Chelm (text IFA 2176) or Homs (text IFA 7857). These towns are well defined, specific settlements separated by unsettled space from the normal world (the space is unsettled in the tale only; around Chelm no villages are mentioned). In text IFA 1588 numskulls live in a separate village to which the stranger, a wandering vagabond, must come from the normal world by way of a road.

In text IFA 1012 two settlements are shown: "Shar'a al-Majanim" (street of the madmen) in which Dad and Dada, the numskull parents live and the distant village in which their normal daughter lives, this latter village being in the normal world. Between the two villages there is normal landscape, with trees and fields. This case is exceptional in that the numskulls enter the normal world and there perform their foolish deeds.

From whole, well defined numskull settlements we move on to undefined regions and parts of settlements.

In text IFA 1188 numskull country is located in distant undefined mountains. The stranger—'somebody'—who points out to the numskull shepherd that he has really killed his friend, chances to come by from the normal world, only to return there again. The barrier between the two worlds is the wilderness which surrounds the mountains.

In text IFA 17 the numskull world is confined to a monastery (the monks that live here are not acquainted with cats). The stranger—the youngest brother, (owner of the cat)—comes from the normal world, enters the faraway numskull world, solves the numskull's problems and returns to the normal world. The walls of the monastery represent the barrier between the two worlds and the gate is their meeting point.

In text IFA 802 the numskulls (here a caste of untouchables in Yemen—*Ahdam*, see Grohmann, 1922–1933; I, 96–101) do not live in a separate settlement, but in a separate yard on a street which they share with normal neighbours. The fence of the yard represents the barrier between the two worlds and the gate of the yard is the meeting point between them. Through the gate the neighbours—the strangers—enter in order to tell the wife that her husband is, in reality, dead and does not mock her as she thinks he does.

In text IFA 806 the events take place in a tavern. The numskulls—here *Ahdam*—come from somewhere 'outside' and enter the tavern. There are in reality no taverns in Yemen for the untouchable *Ahdam*, and as untouchables they are not supposed to enter Muslim or Jewish establishments. On the other hand, we do not hear in the tavern about anyone else except the *Ahdam*. Where are, for instance, the host, a waiter or some servant who would notice the strange behavior of the *Ahdam*? The soldier who scolds the *Ahdam*, plays here the tale role of the stranger. He enters through the door of the tavern from the outer, normal world, plays his role (demonstrates to the numskulls that their behaviour is non-normal) and disappears. In the real Yemenite world, a tavern is not considered a proper place for *Ahdam* since they are thought to defile the food of both righteous Muslims and Jews. Therefore, after the conflict in the tale is resolved, the tale lets the *Ahdam* go out to their natural place in the real world—the road. This detail is realistic (*Ahdam* lead in Yemen a gypsy-like way of life).

The tavern is the numskull realm for the span of time the numskulls are in it. Its walls play here the role of the barrier between the two worlds, the door being the meeting point between them. The tavern does not seem to be located within the confines of a settlement. As was said above, fringes of settlements, lonely roads and deserts serve in Yemenite tales as that undefined realm of space which lies between "this world" and the "after world".

In episode *a* of both texts IFA 1624 and IFA 4548 the numskull realm is located within the confines of the numskull-woman's house. Her husband plays the tale role of the stranger. In text IFA 1624 only episode *a* takes place in the realm of the numskull world. In the following episodes the husband physically leaves the numskull realm and acts as a swindler according to the definitions of the normal world. In the second text (IFA

4548) the husband remains in the numskull realm in episode *b*
(the family which bemoans the death of the unborn child of their
daughter who has not yet married and conceived the child be-
longs to the numskulls). Here we see the numskull country with
two settlements. The husband rotates between them in a circle.
Already at the beginning of the tale we meet him inside the
numskull realm. He tries consciously to run away from this
realm and searches for evidence that this world is really non-
normal, but he succeeds neither in finding this evidence, nor in
leaving the numskull realm. In text IFA 1624, the husband
succeeds both in leaving the numskull realm and in finding evi-
dence that his wife lives in the numskull realm. This he does
immediately in episode *b*, and does not return. On his way he
meets stupid people, but they are normally stupid, and are not
numskulls. At the end of the story the house in which he accepts
the people whom he cheated is located in the normal world. His
numskull wife does not appear here anymore and the husband
cheats his guests according to the concepts of the normal world.

In the following texts we see the barrier between the num-
skull realm and the normal world being expressed in non-spatial
terms: the function of a place rather than its location is decisive,
the ethnic and social identity of the numskulls represents the
barrier, as well as states of consciousness.

In text IFA 848 the numskull acts in the market place of the
town. The tale role of the stranger is played by two acting
characters: the wife of the numskull, acting in their common
home away from the market place, and the man who captures
the he-goat in the fields around the town. As in texts IFA 1624
and IFA 4548, the home is the common residence of both num-
skull and normal spouse. This text is rather exceptional in that
it is the numskull who moves from one world to the other, i.e.,
he goes from the stage of his actions—the market place—to the
realm of normal people, represented both by the house with the
woman and the field with the man.

The market place is the numskull realm; the rest of the
town, with the numskull's home in it, and the fields around the
town are in the realm of the normal world. In this case there is
no material barrier between the two worlds. The difference
between the function of the market place and the function both
of the residential areas and the fields symbolizes the barrier be-
tween the two worlds.

In text IFA 5464 the dissimilarity of two ethnic groups—
Jews and Arabs—represents the barrier between the two worlds.

In the normal world the two groups live side by side, each in a geographically separated living quarter. In the present text this spatial separation, however, does not play any role; the place of the Arab wedding is not indicated.

In text IFA 1588 *a* an identical tale has an explicit spatial barrier between the two worlds. Thus the nature of the barrier does not depend on the plot of the story.

In texts IFA 17, IFA 802, IFA 806, IFA 807 and IFA 1188 we find numskulls characterized by a certain low social status. In IFA 17 monks are ridiculed; in IFA 1188 Bedouin-like illiterate shepherds are ridiculed by the sophisticated townsman. In IFA 802, IFA 806 and IFA 807 the numskulls are labeled *Ahdam*, a caste of untouchables in the narrator's society. As was shown above, in all of these texts the barrier between the two worlds is also expressed in spatial terms. Thus, the barrier is expressed in two forms. More texts from our culture would be needed on order to decide which of the two expressions of the barrier is the primary, or the more important one.

In text IFA 1181 the story takes place in a public bath house. The location of the bathhouse is irrelevant and is not indicated in the story. The barrier between the two worlds is expressed on the level of psychic states of the actors; the sleeping state is the realm of the normal world, while the waking state is the realm of the numskull world. Thus the numskull world is in the foreground of the tale. Nasr-ad-Din acts while awake; the stranger—one of the normal sleeping people—has to awake in order to play his role. The way from normal world to numskull world is not a physical path, but it is the transition from the state of sleep to the state of waking, and *vice versa.*

We began by discussing the geographical location of the numskull realm in the real world, passed on to fabulous locations with symbolic names, and then to anonymous numskull settlements and their parts. Furthermore, we found that the barrier between the two worlds may be defined in terms denoting not only spatial concepts but social or psychic as well. All three kinds of specifications are symbols expressing the idea of a barrier between the two worlds. The nature of this barrier does not depend on the plot of the tale; it is entirely symbolic. Thus, numskull tales cannot be defined on the basis of the location of the numskull settlement (the numskulls being "the wise men of city so and so").

4. How does the numskull world look?

Each genre of oral literature has its own world. The world of the fairy tale, for instance, is populated by golden castles and glass mountains, talking animals and flying carpets. The world of the legend contains ghostly, dark ruins, hidden treasures and curiously formed stones which are in reality sinners who have been petrified for punishment.

The world of the numskull tales looks much like the normal every day world of the narrating society. In it neither marvels or horrors, nor royal splendor is found—just ordinary low class environment. In the numskull world one finds settlements with houses with their rooms, doors and windows surrounded by yards; the settlement has public buildings such as synagogues and monasteries with churches. The buildings may be built from flamable materials. There are slums with shacks built of branches and leaves. The settlement is surrounded by fields: mountains and pastures are found; a well is mentioned. Diverse kinds of animals inhabit the area: sheep, goats, cows, mice. Wheat is grown; fat is mentioned and household utensils and weapons such as: pots, clothes, tubs, swords, cannons, icons[10].

In several of the texts there is a description of a special quality found in this non-normal world. This quality is the lack of an object found in the normal world. The objects differ but the quality of lack is constant and differentiates the non-normal world from the normal world. Due to a lack of bricks, numskulls live in shacks made from branches and leaves (IFA 807: in this case the *ahdam* are in Yemenite reality poor vagabonds, but the very explicit mentioning of their shelter answers the need of a symbol which would differentiate the two worlds). Certain useful animals and implements are lacking (IFA 17: cats, IFA 1188: swords). It should be emphasized that no object was found in the numskull tales which is not found in the normal world (such as would be, for instance, marvels in fairy tales).

Numskull society is similar to the normal society of the

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10. Sources: IFA 2176: settlement with streets, markets and residental houses; IFA 1588, IFA 2176, IFA 5464: rooms, windows, doors; IFA 802: a yard; IFA 4548b: a well; IFA 2176: a synagogue; IFA 17: buildings of flamable materials; IFA 1188: mountains, pastures; IFA 1188: sheep; IFA 807, IFA 848: goats; IFA 17: mice; IFA 1012 *a*: wheat (in IFA 802 the wheat is brought in from the normal world); IFA 1012 *b*: clothes; IFA 807: a pot; IFA 7857: a tub, a cannon; IFA 17: icons.

narrating community.   Well-defined social roles are found: a
rabbit, a synagogue beadle and commoners; an army commander
and his soldiers; the assembly of townsmen.   We see social in-
stitutions such as a synagogue, a market place and a monastery;
the institution of family and kinship and of neighbourhood rela-
tions; economic institutions such as stores, taverns and money[11].

The traits of their social world which we enumerated, make
the tales seem realistic.   However, the barrier between the two
world we described above should serve as a warning not to take
the descriptions at face value.   The tales are not realistic descrip-
tions of the normal world.   The numskull world is a world in
itself.   The strange circumstance that the numskulls lack the full
range of skills necessary to survive in the real world, and never-
theless do survive in their world, shows that the qualities of the
numskull world are different from the qualities of the normal
world.   Later on (paragraph 7) we will return to this question
in an attempt to interpret the tales, and here the circumstance
of the lack of certain objects or abilities in the numskull world
will serve as a clue for the interpretation.

5.   Numskulls as acting characters.

Oral literature has its population of acting characters.   Most
of these characters are bound to certain genres of oral literature.
For instance, the warrior will play in epic songs; the unfaithful
lover in ballads; the treacherous wife in the *novella*, the princess
in the fairy tale, and dead souls in legends.   If a character ap-
pears in an unusual place, the answer is to be sought in that
the respective text does not belong to a clear-cut genre.   Such
are, for instance, versified fairy tales.   These have the prosodic
form of an epic song; otherwise they have for the most part
fairy tale qualities, including fairy tale acting characters (see
for a discussion Bošković-Stulli 1962).

As each culture has its own repertoire of genres, each cul-
ture has its repertoire of acting characters as well.   For instance,
the *baba Iaga*-witch plays in Russian and adjacent Slavic fairy
tales only; the troll belongs to Scandinavian legends, the *vila* to

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11.   Sources: IFA 807: the wise man, laymen; IFA 2176: synagogue
beadle, commoners; IFA 7857 *b*: army commandor; IFA 2176: assembly of
towns-men, a synagogue; IFA 848: market; IFA 17, 848: trade relations;
IFA 806: tavern; IFA 1588: money; IF A1012, 158, 5464: marriage; IFA
802, 848, 1012, 1624, 4548: family as economic unit; IFA 802: neighbour-
hood relations.

heroic songs of the Southern Slavs, Br'er Rabbit to anecdotes of
New World Negroes, and Coyote the Trickster to myths of cer-
tain North American Indian tribes.   Each of these characters
has its own qualities, and one cannot equate the Arabic *jinni*, a
population of supernatural beings playing in legend and folk be-
lief, to Scandinavian troll population, or to fairy population of
the British Isles, although all three kinds of populations have
many attributes in common: they play in the same kind of tales,
are thought of as a population living in the same general terri-
tory as the respective people, and have certain contacts with
humans.   In addition to these common characteristics each of
these populations has its individual qualities and abilities.

Unfortunately, the population of oral literature has not been
thoroughly investigated so far.   No full catalog of its kinds
exists for any one culture and their qualities have not been sys-
tematically examined.   It may be assumed that the examination
will establish some regularities in the qualities of acting char-
acters of a culture and in their interrelations.   The numskull
population should also find its place in the framework of oral
literature population.   Presently, however, only an attempt at
a description of the numskulls alone can be undertaken.

In their physical appearance numskulls do not differ from
human beings.   There is no mention of non-human elements in
their features.   They have a head, a mouth, and eyes, legs and
hands, breasts and behinds.   They perform with their limbs
human activities: they speak as humans do, they eat, bake bread,
fetch water, cut with a knife, tend babies, bath, break wind,
weep.   They do not eat anything that human beings do not eat[12].
Thus, they seem to belong to the category of 'natural beings', as
opposed to the category of 'supernatural beings' which have a
non-human appearance and are performing non-human actions.
Whether such a distinction of the acting characters will stand
the criticism, has yet to be investigated.

Coming, however, to their capabilities, the numskulls dif-
fer from humans in those acts which are crucial for the devel-
opment of the tale-plot (see paragraph 2).   Here they show clear
inferiority to humans in technical skill and logical thinking.   In
regard to these attributes numskulls seem to be unique among

12.   Sources: IFA 1188: head; IFA 802: mouth; IFA 848: beard,
hands; IFA 1012 *a*, 1588 *b*: legs; IFA 806: breasts; IFA 806, 5464: behind;
IFA 17, 802, 806, 848, 1012 *a*, *b*, 1588: numskulls eat; IFA 4548 *a*: they
bake bread; IFA 4548 *b*: they fetch water and weep; IFA 1012 *e*: they cut
with a knife; IFA 1012 *d*: they tend babies; IFA 1181: they bath; IFA
4548 *a*: they break wind.

the acting characters in the culture of Near Eastern Jews. They can be set in opposition to *shed*-s, a supernatural population in the same culture. *Shed*-s are thought of as parallel to human population in geographical space, and exceeding humans in technical skill and magical abilities. (In the framework of oral literature populations as a whole it will be seen how magical skill may be understood: is it a special technical skill, or can it be paralleled to logical abilities?) In their lack of technical skill numskulls are half-way between humans and dead souls, these latter having lost any abilities of survival.

Numskulls are more or less confined to their realm (see paragraph 3). It is only the stranger, the normal human, who moves from the normal world to numskull realm and back again. Numskulls usually do not go to the normal world, to be, for instance, astonished at the sight of a cat. The cat has to be brought to the numskulls by a human, a being which is endowed with more capabilities. Numskulls perform their numskull acts in the confines of their realm, and are not pictured going to the normal realm to perform them there. They usually do not leave their realm at all, except in a few cases where they call upon the stranger—the human—to help them (IFA 802—to call the immediate neighbours). Texts IFA 848 and IFA 1012 *b-e* are exceptional in that the numskulls go to the normal realm to perform their deeds there. But in these cases they remain in the confines of their family: the numskull husband goes home to his normal wife, or the numskull parents go to visit their normal daughter. The common home of a family the members of which are divided between numskulls and humans, seems to be an in-between location between clear-cut numskull realm and clear-cut human realm. In no case in our corpus of tales do we see numskulls entering well defined human realm.

Throughout all the tales the numskulls remain constant. They do not develop, they do not learn from past experience. This feature is nicely demonstrated in text IFA 1588 *b*: numskulls cannot find their legs; the wayfarer helps them to find their legs by stricking them. The last numskull, however, remains lying with only one pair of legs left. This pair cannot possibly belong to anybody else, yet by mistake it has not been struck, so he did not feel his legs hurt. He does not learn that these are his legs from watching what has happened to the others; this last pair of legs has to be struck too in order for him to acknowledge it as his legs. He was not able to learn from experience.

Numskulls belong to the category of acting characters who are not named. Only twice in the corpus appear named actors: in text IFA 1012 they bear symbolic nonsense names, indicating that they are fools, 'Dad' and 'Dada'; in text IFA 1181 the numskull is named Nasr-ad-Din, a name which usually refers to an otherwise well-known figure: the wise fool. He is popular in the whole Mediterranean and Middle East. The wise fool is not a numskull; he seems to be a poetic vehicle to express folk wisdom, often putting on himself the fool's cap. Tales in which he plays are very seldom without his name, each country having its own name (Arabic speaking countries call him Juha, Joha; Turkish and Persian speaking Hodzha or Mulla Nasr-ad-Din; in Persia sometimes Bahlul; see Weselski 1911). Such a naming of a numskull actor happened here apparently by chance.

6. The temporal aspect of numskull tales.

6.1   The historical frame. Just as the action of a tale is thought of as having taken place somewhere in space, it is also thought of as having taken place sometimes in history. When did our numskulls commit their deeds? Was it yesterday, or several years ago, at the time when "my grandfather lived"? Or maybe, at the time when kings reigned in Judah and Israel? Or even as far back as the grey mythical times of Noah and his Ark?

An examination of tales from the Jewish Near Eastern culture exposed a distinct historical scheme in the frame of which the tales are thought of as having taken place. This framework is shaped by folk philosophy out of real history data but is not identical either with real history or with the normal history as perceived by members of the narrating society. The narrator is not aware of this historical framework and it has to be inferred from the tale texts. In the case of the discussed culture it consists of two kinds of temporal periods:

(a)   short periods of time in which important historical events (real or imaginary) took place. These events are explicitly mentioned in the tales in some way. Such tales are rare.

(b)   prolonged periods of time in which nothing changed in the opinion of folk philosophy. The placing of a tale into these periods is not explicitly mentioned in the texts and has to be inferred. Most tales take place in such periods of time. The important ones in the Jewish Near Eastern oral literature are: the prolonged period of the general Jewish Diaspora, the begin-

ning of which is not exactly perceived, and the recent times, which include the period as far back as real family or village tradition and remembrance go. The time scale starts with mythical time, goes on with historical time and ends with the time of Redemption. Each period has its own qualities (for a detailed discussion of this time scale see Jason 1971b).

Where can one locate the numskull tales on this scale? They obviously do not play in mythical times as they have no mythical quality: they have no religious significance and their time has no revertible quality (see Eliade 1959, Garber-Talmon 1951). Proceeding to historical times, we find numskull tales playing on a quasi-realistic stage of a world belonging to the traditional Near Eastern society. This is the world of the Jewish Diaspora. Thus we could not assign them, for instance, to the period of Judean kings. In the period of Jewish Diaspora we distinguished between two periods: the recent times and the remote Diaspora times. On order to be placed in the "recent times" period tales should have a connection to a person known to the narrator or to his villagers. Such known personages we did not find in the tales: the numskulls are not named, or have symbolical names. Thus the only period on our scale which can claim the numskull tales is the wide, poorly defined period of the general Jewish Diaspora.

Folk tales cannot be distinguished in the confines of the Diaspora period as being earlier or later: they cannot be ordered chronologically. The same can be said about our numskull tales. They cannot be arranged in a chronological order of, say, the history of the town Chelm. Even in texts which consist of a chain of episodes, only the opening and closing episode sometimes have their necessary place at the beginning and the end, respectively. The middle episodes can be freely rearranged, and different texts contain differing middle episodes (see for instance texts IFA 1624 and IFA 4548 which are built around a similar idea but consist of different episodes.)

6.2 The organization of time in a text. The time in numskull tales is continous. No period empty of actions exists between one action and the next. A lapse of time may be observed between the episodes in a tale built as a chain of episodes. In this case each episode is a complete tale in the confines of which again no lapse of time occurs.

The events in the tale may be arranged on a single time axis and thus follow each other; or, they may be arranged on a separate time axis for each actor, thus several events taking place

simultaneously. In text IFA 848, for instance, three actors act simultaneously, each one in a different location: at the time when the numskull husband sits in the coffee house on the market place, his wife waits at home in vain for the food with which to cook the meal, and the stranger in the field captures the he-goat.

The patterns of correlation between narrative structure and the organization of time in a tale have not been investigated so far, thus no further analysis can be given here.

7. An attempt at interpretation.

Above (paragraph 1.2) it was suggested that the tales about numskulls be interpreted as being a satire of the normal society. In some tales numskull society and the actions of numskulls look like a parody of normal society (as in texts IFA 802, IFA 1012 *a, e*: the numskull tries consciously to immitate a normal peasant's way of life and does not succeed). The more striking in this respect is the pair of actors: numskull society leader, who in his 'wisdom' does the most foolish deeds and gives the most foolish advice (so in text IFA 807—note the fine irony!—, IFA 2176, IFA 7857 *b*) *versus* the stranger, a person of low social status, who offers ordinary common sense as being special wisdom which overcomes the numskull leader's 'wisdom' (as in texts IFA 17, IFA 806, IFA 1188, IFA 1588 *a, b*, IFA 5464). Even if they do not appear together in the same tale, the stupid numskull leader and the wise vagabond, they form a pair in the corpus of numskull tales as a whole.

Could one see in these tales a kind of "ritual of rebellion" which represents an institutionalized way of expressing the antagonism towards the social leadership (after Gluckman 1963, ch. 3) ?

Against this assumption let us bring up another kind of oral tale in our society, the sacred tale, in which the antagonism to the social leadership finds a much more direct expression (see Jason 1968). While only very few numskull tales are found in the about 5,000 examined texts (about two dozens), approximately a fifth of all tales in the Jewish Near Eastern culture are sacred tales. Thus, there exists a much more popular vehicle in the system of oral literature of this culture to express the conflict with the leadership than numskull tales would provide (for a discussion of the system of oral literature see Jason 1969). The problem of class conflict is too important to be handled by

so rare a kind of tales as numskull tales are.

Another interpretation seems more suitable and is on the literary symbolic level.

The numskull world lies outside the normal human society. Its leader is in symmetrical opposition to the leader in normal society. The leader of the normal, 'wise' society is thought of as having the maximum of the qualities of his society, i.e., as being especially wise. He is the symbol of wisdom (as, for instance, is the wise rabbi). Analogously, the leader of the numskull society incorporates the maximum of the qualities of his society, i.e., he is the symbol of foolishness. When both societies are juxtaposed in the meeting of numskull leader and stranger, each is symbolized by its representative. The folly of the numskull leader is not a satire of the normal leader who pretends to be wise but is not; it is the symbol of numskull society, and is the result of oral literature in general being couched in symbolic terms.

The stranger can be analyzed in the same terms. He symbolizes the normal world as opposed to the numskull world. His being in the normal world of low social status and his 'wise deeds' being just ordinary common sense in the normal world set off the more the foolishness of the numskull world and of its leader. The numskulls are inferior even to most low-status humans.

In the frame of the oral literature in this culture the circumstance of the stranger being a low status vagabond half on the fringes of society relates him to similar figures in other kinds of tales: the simple peasant in the city, the simple Bedouin in the eyes of the sedentary people (see tale plots Arne-Thompson Nos. 1337–1339). In this frame the man of low status symbolizes the lack of intelligence in the normal world and the wisdom in the numskull world. In contrast, the leader symbolizes the folly in the numskull world and the wisdom in the normal world. In a diagram:

	normal world	numskull world
man of low status	folly	wisdom
social leader	wisdom	folly

One could ask the same question about the deeds of the numskulls: in what measure do they represent a satire on human weaknesses? Here we would also choose rather another interpretation. As it was said above, the actions of the numskulls are entirely different from normal human foolish acts. Normal

human stupidity is ridiculed in a whole series of oral tales and jokes in our society in a much more effective way than the numskull tales could do it (see paragraph 2), so the system of oral literature does not need the rare numskull tales for this purpose.

The difference between normal and numskull behavior is that the latter's behavior is distorted. While the numskull world which is delimited by a barrier from the normal world, looks much like the normal world, its physical equipment and social orders being similar to the normal world's, the numskulls perceive them differently. They themselves are different. This difference finds its expression in two ways:

(a) in a direct way when the numskulls commit errors in reasoning;

(b) in an indirect way when the distortion is expressed as a lack of knowledge of basic qualities of nature and technology, without which men cannot survive in the real world.

This lack of knowledge in basic technical abilities and natural qualities is a symbol of the numskull's distorted thinking and, thus, is not a satire on weaknesses of normal people. Such a way of thinking as the numskull's is not appropriate for the survival in the normal world.

Beings whose way of thinking is distorted, are not fully human. Besides distorted thinking of the numskulls there are other qualities which point as well to their not being fully human. The site of numskull country is in the not well defined realm of the border area between this world—the human world, and the other world—the world of the dead souls, while keeping in touch with the human world. This world is on the fringes of the human world. The location of the tales in the historical frame is in the confines of a long period in which there are no exact points in time, i.e., it is not well defined. Although their world is quite similar to the normal, human world, it diverges from the human world in that it exposes a lack of certain elements, i.e., numskull world is in some respect inferior to the human world. Numskulls have some measure of knowledge about nature and technology, otherwise they obviously would not be able to survive in the world even for a day. They succeed in building houses and huts, in raising crops and preparing meals, in attending domestic animals, in raising children, but their abilities are inferior to the abilities of normal humans. Normal people have the ability to enter the numskull realm, but numskulls usually are not able to cross the barrier between the two worlds. Numskulls are not able to learn from experience as humans do. On

the other hand, their ability to survive is greater than that of dead souls which ceased to survive in this world. The social status of numskulls is low in regard to the respective narrating society, be it on the ethnic or the on class level; this status is lower than the very lowest member of the human society. They are located on the fringes of the human society of the narrators, but are not entirely outside of it, as are dead souls, for instance.

On the basis of all these properties we may characterize the numskulls as being a kind of in-between beings identified through their quality of distorted thinking. They stand between humans and dead souls in their capabilities, in their spatial location, in the equipment of their world which lacks certain objects (dead souls have no material equipment at all), and in their social status (dead souls, except the ones of holy men, are beneath human society; corpses are ritually polluting).

Thus, numskulls are not a mirror ridiculing human society, but are perceived by the narrating society as part of the universe of beings, real and imaginary, which populate the normal world.

8. Appendix

Texts from the Israel Folktale Archives (IFA), as indexed according to Aarne-Thompson's Type index (AT) and Jason's index for Jewish tales (Jason 1965).

IFA manuscript No. IFA 17; recorded from a new immigrant from Turkey; indexed in Aarne-Thompson 1961, as tale plot Nos. AT 1281, AT 1650 IIa, AT 1651.

There was once a poor peasant who had three sons. When he felt that his end was near, he called his sons to him and said to them:
—As you know, my sons, your father is a poor man, and has no inheritance to leave you, except a cock, a scythe and a cat. Divide these among yourselves: one will take the cock, another the scythe and the third the cat.—The father finished speaking and drew his last breath.
The three brothers buried their father and mourned him. After some time they decided to go into the world to find their fortune.
[....] The youngest brother put his cat into a bag and went on his way. Eventually, he arrived at a monastery. He knocked at the gates and when they were opened he asked for a little food and a place to spend the night. The monk who let him in, said:
—You can eat with us, but you have to hold a club in your hand, as we have innumerable mice and these will snatch the food away from your mouth if you do not defend yourself with a club.—The youth entered the room and immediately released his cat from the bag. The animal attacked the mice and killed many of them. When the monks saw the

strange animal and its special qualities, they asked the youth to sell it
to them. At first he refused but when they offered him fifty pounds, he
gave them the cat.
—Does the cat eat bread too?—asked the monk.
—If you do not give it bread, it will even eat monks!—answered the
youth. The monks gave him the fifty pounds and the youth went on
his way home.

In the meantime the monk told his fellow monks what a strange
animal he brought. The monks became very alarmed and said:
—If we do not give it bread the cat will devour people too. This means
if we do not have enough bread, it will devour us, as it devoured mice.—

One day the cat went for a walk to the church. One of the monks
followed it and quickly set the church on fire so that the cat would burn.
The church burned down, the cat, however, saved itself by jumping out
through the window. After the fire nothing remained of the church
except the holy icon. The monks came and saw the cat sitting and
licking its mustache, the way cats do. The monks thought that the cat
was praying and were very sorry that they had burned the church.

When word came to the youth that the monks had burned their
church he went to them and returned the money he got for the cat, and
said:
—With this money you should rebuilt your church, but on the condition
that you engrave over the church door the names of my brothers, my
name and the name of the cat.—The monks agreed to this condition and
built a new church.

IFA 802; Yemen; AT *1328 (Jason).

Once there was a *Hadem*. He said to his wife:
—Look, my lady, why should we always remain poor? Next year let us
collect grain behind the harvestmen, make a small pit and put the grain
into the pit and see [what happens]. I think, really, after a few days
that we will be rich.—His wife said:
—It is good, my lord.—

At harvest time when the Arabs harvested, they went to collect.
They collected some grain, just a little. They dug a small pit in the
yard outside their house, behind the house, and put what they had into
this pit. Rain fell but they did not cover the pit as was necessary. The
pit was, may be a quarter full with wheat, but the rain came and filled
[the pit with water] until it was completely full.

After a few days the *Hadem* said to his wife:
—Come, let us go and open the pit and take out a little grain for our-
selves from there.—She said:
—Really!—The woman went and opened the pit. The woman went
with him to the pit. She saw that the little grain that was there, it is
all full and overflows the lid. She said:
—Surely! The Arabs make it so: he who has a little wheat, puts it
into the pit and becomes very rich. We have wealth now too, the pit is
already full.—She went to her husband and said:
—Come, come, my lord, and look!—
—What has happened?—She said:

—Did you see before how much we left in the pit? How much wheat?—
—Yes.—She said;
—Now come and look! The pit, it is already full, and there is no place left!—
—What are you saying!?—She said:
—Really, come let us make a feast!—They went, she and her husband, and they saw, really, the pit is so full that the lid already moved. He said:
—This is all the wealth of the rich! It comes from this!—She said:
—Listen, my lord! Today is a great day for us! All the time we are eating what we have, so, poor wheat. Today I want you to enter the pit, right into the middle, and bring us out wheat from the pit.—He said:
—Alright. Go and bring me a bag, or something and I shall enter in the meanwhile.—The *Hadem* opened the lid and entered. What did he enter? He entered the water until the water suffocated him and he died on the spot. He remained on the top [with his] mouth full of wheat.

After he has died, his wife comes and thinks he is laughing, mocking her. She said:
—Well, come out! You've had enough fun. It is late. Bring us a few bags of wheat out, bring us some and let's go. I want to prepare the meal.—To whom is she speaking? Her husband is already dead! And so it goes on:
—Well, say something! Come out!—Nothing, no answer. She saw that there is no other way. She said:
—If you do not come out in a few minutes, I shall go and call and say it to the people, and the people will come and will say that we are poor and will take all that we have. It is not in your interest that people should know we are already rich!—Once more he does not answer her. She said:
—Well, do you want me to go?—she asks her husband. She sees how often she warns him and he does not answer. She said:
—Now I know that he is so satiated that he is already proud. Well, I am going.—She went out to the people and said to them:
—Listen, I will tell you the truth. We have really been all the time poor but this year we were clever. We decided we wanted to gather wheat. We want to make it as you do. We went and opened a small pit and put into it all the wheat that we had. This was really not so very..., it was may be almost a third [of the pit]. But what? Almighty had mercy on us and lo! the pit became full. Thanks to the Almighty, come and see now. I told my husband to go into it and take out a little wheat. My husband sits [there] already, chews *kat*, is merry and does not want to answer me. I know that he is proud, so proud that he does not want to answer me.

The people laughed at her. They knew that the rains had come and that the pit was [presumably] not well closed. They knew that this was already full of water. They said:
—Where is this?—She said:
—Come!—They came, looked and saw that the pit was already full of water, and her husband dead. Instead of *kat* he has wheat in his mouth. They said:

—Well, go first and bring us several cans, something to take out the water. That is water in the pit and not wheat.—
—Water?! Where from? My husband and I closed the pit very well. That is wheat! Why are you mocking me? That is wheat, really.—
They said:
—Listen to us,—they said to her,—Listen! That is water inside and your husband is already dead.—
—What?! Nonsense! From what could he be dead? [Only] a few minutes ago he talked to me. That is only because of his being proud for he is satiated. We are not used to being so as you are.—
—Go, bring something to clean up the water.—The people went together with her, found empty cans and started to take out the water. It went down. She saw that the waters really were going down and that her husband was going down, down.
—What happened?—They told her:
—Water. Your husband is dead.—They took her husband. He was already dead, and the wheat already all [of it] wet. They said:
—That is it. Already you wanted to get satiated, now all the wealth is gone.—And she remained a lonely widow as she has been since then.

IFA 806; Yemen; AT *1328 (Jason)

(see full text in paragraph 1.1)

IFA 807; Yemen; AT 1294.

An ox entered the tent of *Ahdam*. And the tent was plashed from branches and leaves, and in the tent there was an earthen pot with a narrow neck, full of wheat. The ox stuck its head into the pot, ate wheat, but, oh! oh!, it could not get its head out. The ox mooed, ran back and forth inside the tent, but it could not get out. The *Ahdam* flocked together—what is to be done? This one says:
—Let us break the pot!—
—It is a pity for the pot, we don't have another one.—That one says:
—Let us make a hole in the tent, so the ox can get out of it.—
—It is a pity for the tent,—they answer.

What should be done? They remembered the wise man of the *Ahdam*. But one has to pay him, otherwise he will not come. What should be done? And the ox mooed and mooed. They paid.

The wise man came, looked on, put on his glasses, knitted his brows —and contemplated.
—Firstly, destroy the tent,—he commanded. The *Ahdam* rushed to destroy the tent. The ox came out, but, oh! oh! the pot is still on its head. What should be done? The wise man went on contemplating, knitting his brows:
—Slaughter the ox!—he said. The *Ahdam* rushed to slaughter the ox. But oh! oh! the head of the ox is still in the pot! What should be done? The wise man went on contemplating, knitting his brows:
—Break the pot!—he said. They broke the pot.

And the *Ahdam* thanked God that they had solved the hard

problem.

IFA 848; Yemen; AT 1291**.

A fool went to the market [and] saw a he-goat with a long beard. He said in his heart:—This one is cleverer than I am, he has a longer beard than I have.—He bought the he-goat, in addition he bought much food of various kinds, he spent twenty lira. He loaded these things on the goat, bound them to its back and said to the goat (he lifted the goat's head so that the goat looked into his eyes):

—You are very clever, I see it as your beard is longer than mine. Listen well to what I am saying to you: go to my house. My house is the house before the big tree. Tell my wife to slaughter you. She should cook a quarter of you, and roast the rest, and when I come home at noon time, the meal should be ready. Do you understand?—The man let the goat loose and went his way. And the goat felt itself free, so it rushed from the market place to the fields. There a man caught it, took down the goodies from it and locked it in his house.

The fool stayed in a coffee house the whole morning and at noon time went home to eat. In the meantime his wife was waiting impatiently for her husband to bring or to send her the food, wheat and [other] products for the house. She had still to grind the wheat! She was nervous, waited and waited—but nothing came.

And now, the fool comes home, takes off his clothes, washes his hands and sits down to eat.

—What is this? Why did you not bring food from the market? Why did you not send a man with the food?—

—What do you mean I did not send? Of course I sent! I bought a he-goat and sent him home with all the food. He did not arrive? How can it be? I explained to him exactly where our house is!—

The man jumped up and rushed out to look for the goat, accompanied by his wife's scoldings. Although she already knew her husband was foolish, she got angry.

He went out, looked and looked, but did not find it again.

IFA 1012; Yemen; AT 1291 B, AT 1291 C, AT 1681 *C (Jason).

(a) There was a family living in *Shar'a al-Majanin* (the street of the madmen), father and mother, Dad and Dada, and their seven daughters. After the harvest Dad and Dada had to wash the wheat as all the inhabitants of Yemen do before they grind it so that the corn will come out of the chaff. The family Dada and Dada took the wheat and put it into a deep pit full of water. Dad and Dada asked their eldest daughter to enter the pit and to take out the wheat. The eldest daughter slipped and she fell into the pit, drowned and died. And, Dad sent his second daughter to bring wheat from the pit because they needed wheat to grind and to bake bread. And the second daughter of Dad descended into the pit and she too drowned and died as had the first [daughter]. And father Dad, who was hungry, sent his third daughter to go down

to the pit to bring wheat for grinding for they had nothing to eat. And the third daughter of Dad did as her father said and tried to take out wheat but at the end she too slipped and fell into the pit, drowned and died. And father Dad was very sad for his three daughters but was very hungry, so he sent his fourth daughter and she too drowned and died. He sent his fifth and sixth daughter and these too drowned and died. To Dad remained now the last daughter, the seventh and the youngest, and his heart was sad and he cried bitterly over his six daughters and did not send his seventh daughter, as her sisters, to bring wheat from the pit. The seventh daughter remained in the house of their parents and they coddled her and cared for her as the light of their eyes, for she was their only child now.

(b) When the only daughter of Dad became of marriagable age, matchmakers from Shar'a al-Majanin came to arrange a match for her with a good and industrious youth whose house was in a far away village, far from the place Dad and Dada were living. The parents were happy about the match and married off their only daughter to this youth. They sent her away to her husband with joy and rejoicing, as it is written: the daughter will leave the house of her father and mother and cleave to her husband.

The parents Dad and Dada remained lonely in their house, spending their days in boredom, being lonely as there was nobody to speak to them.

Sometime after the marriage of their daughter they decided to go and visit her in the distant village. They took with them presents for their dear daughter: a can full of fat and new clothes.

On their way they saw a foliage tree looking naked without its foliage and fruits. Coming to the tree Data exclaimed:

—Oh, Dad, my husband, look how miserable this tree is! He is stirring my compassion!—And Dad answered:

—What happened, Dada?—and he looked at the tree. And compassion overcame him and he started to cry:

—Oh, Almighty, have mercy upon him! Come, let us perform a good deed and dress the tree, and we will earn the merit of fulfilling the commandment as it is written: if you see a naked one, cover him!— And Dad and Data opened their bundle and covered all the branches of the tree with clothes, so the tree should be warm. They used up all the clothes which had been prepared as a present for their only daughter, and proceeded on their way happy that they had earned the merit of fulfilling a commandment.

(c) And as they were walking on, they came upon a field which was completely dry. Dada said to her husband:

—Ya, Dad, look how dry and cracked this earth is. May Almighty have mercy upon us!—and Dad answered:

—This earth stirs compassion, she is thirsty. Come, my wife, let us moisten it with the fat.—And without much fuss they took the can with the fat which Dada was carrying all the way on her head, and moistened the dry earth. They fulfilled joyfully the commandment: if you see a thirsty one you should give him a drink and rescue him from death.

And they went on. At evening time they arrived at their

daughter's. The daughter received them with great joy. She treated them to a good meal, with tasty soup, fresh meat and sweets. Then she showed them her household and husbandry and how well she lived with her husband, who was blessed in his work. Thanks be to the Almighty, there is blessing in everything.

(d) The parents were very glad that their daughter was happy; only Dada was concerned that her daughter was overloaded with heavy work: she had to attend to her son, to the goats and the cows, and to the field. Her only daughter whom she coddled so much now has to work so hard. The next day she said to her daughter:

—Listen, my daughter, you have very much work. Let me help you by taking care of the baby.—The daughter agreed and went off to milk the cow. And Dada fed the baby its porridge, changed its diapers, and swaddled it. She tied it very tightly so that it would not be able to move. And the baby cried ceaselessly. Dada looked at the baby and saw that it had dandruff on its head. She thought this is lice and what did she do? She tore out one hair after the other from the baby's head and pinched the place with a needle. The baby was crying and crying, while she talked to it gently:—Oh, oh, your head is full of lice. I am cleaning you, be quiet, my soul, my angel!—So she took care of her grandson until the spirit of the baby left it and thus it became silent. She put it to bed, covered it to keep it warm, for she thought it had fallen asleep, and was sleepnig well after her fine care.

(e) Dada wanted to help her daughter who worked so hard. What did Dada do? She went to the stable and thought how she could help her daughter. Finally she took a knife and cut off the cow's and the goat's udders and hung them in her daughter's kitchen, so they would be near at hand and her daughter would not have to go out to the stable to milk the animals.

In the evening when the daughter finished her work in the husbandry and entered the house, she went to see her son. Her mother welcomed her joyfully and told her how well she had taken care of the baby and cleaned the lice from its head and the baby was now sleeping. And also how she had seen to it that her daughter should not have to tire herself and go to the stable to milk the animals. She had brought the udders in and hung them in the kitchen. The daughter asked:

—How did you bring the udders to the kitchen? Did you cut them off?!—

—Yes!—answered Dada. And the daughter saw the udders hanging in the kitchen. And she cried bitterly on account of the great disaster her mother had brought upon her. Then she went to see her son, and oh! he was dead.

And the visit of her father and her mother left the daughter miserable for the rest of her life.

IFA 1181; Afghanistan; AT 1284.

Mulla Nasr-ad-Din entered the public bath house. After he finished washing his body he saw that all the bathers were lying on the floor and their snoring broke through ceiling to heavens. He said in his heart that he would do better to lie down as they were and sink into a

sweet slumber. But what should he do not to mistake himself for one of his neighbours when he wakes up? He took a jar, tied it to his hip and fell asleep.

In the course of time one of the sleepers woke up and saw the jar on Nasr-ad-Din's hip, and liked it. So he took the jar and tied it to his own hip.

After some time Nasr-ad-Din woke up and lo! the jar was not on his hips! He looked for it here and there, and lo! he saw it on the hips of another. He woke him up and asked:

—My friend, if I am I, where is the jar? And if you are me, then who am I?—

IFA 1188; Afghanistan; AT 1205 *B (Jason).

Two shepherds who grazed their sheep on distant mountains, came upon a cave. They found a sword. One of them lifted the sword and said to his colleague:

—Do you know what this is? It cuts off heads.—His friend said:

—It is not true!—Said the first one:

—Do you want to bet?—Said the second:

—Yes!—They made a wager for one *karan* [=approximately one cent]. The first one lifted the sword and cut off the head of the second. He fell.

Somebody came by per chance. He asked the first [shepherd]:

—What have you done? Why did you kill him?—He said to him:

—We wagered. I said that this cuts off heads, and he said that it does not. Now that he has lost, he is snoring and does not want to pay me the bet.

IFA 1588; Iraq; AT 1288, AT 1295 A*.

(a) One was going. He came to a village of fools in the land of the Kurds and found them confused and upset.

—What had happened?—asked the wayfarer,—why are you upset?— They said:

—What can we say and what can we speak? A son of the village married a daughter of the village, celebrated the wedding and invited us for the feast; now he wants to enter the room of the bride and [finds that] the door is too low. He cannot enter if we do not cut off his head! —The wayfarer saw that they were foolish so he said:

—Give me ten sovereigns and I will show him how to enter.—They were very glad and gave him the ten sovereigns. The wayfarer took the groom, brought him before the door and gave him a strong blow on the head. As the groom bent from the strength of the blow, the wayfarer pushed him and threw him into the room. The villagers saw this and rejoiced happily, and carried the wayfarer on their hands and seated him at the head of the table. They ate and drank, drank and ate until they became intoxicated and fell asleep in their places.

(b) In the morning the wayfarer woke up and found them crying and

complaining.

—What happened? Why are you crying?—asked the wayfarer.

—What can we say and what can we speak?—said the villagers,

—Yesterday we got drunk and fell asleep; we woke up and saw that our legs were not with us, and without them we cannot get up!—The wayfarer said:

—Give me ten sovereigns and I will give you back your legs.—They gave him ten sovereigns. He swung his club and struck their legs. Every one who got a blow felt pain and jumped up with joy:

—I found my legs! I found my legs!—

The last one of them remained lying motionless. The wayfarer said to him:

—Get up, stand up! Here are your legs on the bed.—The man said:

—But how do I know that these are indeed my legs?—The wayfarer struck him with his club, the legs hurt from the strength of the blow, the man jumped up and called out joyfully:

—Now I know that these are [indeed] my legs!—

The villagers surrounded the marvelous wayfarer, invited him to every house, filled his bag with goodies and accompanied him on his way with jubilation and cries of joy.

IFA 1624; Persia; AT 1384, AT 1530, AT 1540.

(a) On a winter day a woman hung out her laundry. Suddenly a great wind came and moved the laundry in an unusual way. The wife had pity on the laundry and said:

—Are you cold, my laundry? Let me go and light a fire under you so you will be warm.—She rushed into the house and brought out a stove, loaded it with fire wood and lit a fire. The flames licked the wood, took hold of the laundry and all the laundry was consumed by flames.

When her husband heard about his wife's deeds, he ran away saying:

—If I will find a madder woman than she is [only then] will I return to her.—

(b) While he was walking he met a woman whose face was covered sitting at the road. The woman asked him:

—From where do you come?—

—From Hell,—answered the man,—there I saw your brother, the Negro, being beaten, for he had not a hundred *tuman* to pay.—

—Here you have hundred *tuman*,—she stretched out her hand,—go and rescue my brother from the sentence of Hell.—

(c) From there he went to a mountain and he saw a man climbing the mountain carrying a heavy bundle. He said to the man:

—Hallo, you there! Take care, the mountain is going to fall. Give me your bundle, and climb to the top of the mountain, and hold on tightly to it so it will not fall.—And he took the bundle from the climber and went on his way.

(d) On the way he met a peasant ploughing his field with a pair of oxen, and he said to him:

—Don't you know that the authorities have forbidden one to plough with oxen? If they catch you they will take away your oxen and execute you!—

—Oh, please, have mercy with me!—begged the peasant,—please, watch my oxen until I return from town.—[The peasant departed] and the man took the yoke, stuck it into the ground, put on it the oxen's excrements and took the oxen to his home.

(e)   The woman with the covered face told her husband how she gave hundred *tuman* to rescue her brother from the sentence of Hell. Her husband scolded her and rushed out after the cheater to get his money back.   To his astonishment he saw a man holding a mountain with both his hands.

—What are you doing here?—asked the husband. The man told him the story, and they went together to look for the cheater.

Then they met the cheated peasant and he told them how he was cheated and showed them the yoke with the oxen's excrements on it and said:

—Really, my oxen went to Heaven!—And they took the peasant with them to look after the cheater. They found him in his house.

—Come in, please,—called the man,—be my guests for this night, and tomorrow I will return to everybody his deposit.—He made a good meal and they ate and drank until they fell asleep from intoxication. At midnight the man came quietly and besmeared their pants with a thick pap from flour and went back to sleep. In the morning, when the people woke up they were ashamed, so they went quietly off, each one to his house.

IFA 2176; Palestine Sephardi; AT 1201.

Once, they say, snow fell in the land of the numskulls. The people of Chelm [Poland] peeped through the windows and through the doors and looked at the snow which fell in their country. Finally they said:
—How beautiful the snow is! It is a pity to step on it and to spoil it and make it dirty, for it will not stay for ever so beautiful and clean!—
Therefore they decided to look at the snow and not walk on it.

Suddenly, however, it occurred to them that the synagogue beadle would have to step on the snow when he went from house to house to call the people for prayer, and he would spoil the snow and the beauty. So they thought and thought what to do in order to prevent the synagogue beadle from spoiling and dirting the snow. Finally, they decided among themselves that four people from the onlookers should go and lift the beadle on their shoulders and go with him from house to house to wake up all the Jews for the prayer, and so the beadle would not spoil the beautiful snow. And so they did: four people of Chelm lifted the beadle.

IFA 4548; Persia; AT 1384, AT 1387 *B (Jason).

(a)   There was a man and a woman and grandmother, and they had a she-goat. Then the man went to work and the woman was sitting and baking bread. While she was baking bread, she broke wind. And the she-goat was bleating and the woman said to the she-goat:
—Don't tell my husband,—she begged the she-goat. The grandmother

too pleaded to it, and the grandmother said:
—We will give to you all the bracelets and the gold and all what we have, only don't disclose this to her husband.—And the goat bleated.

All of a sudden the husband came home and they were talking among themselves. The man said to them:
—What happened?—The grandmother said:
—Your wife has broken wind and the goat wanted to disclose it to you.
—The man said:
—I am going away from here. If I will find somebody [more stupid than you] I will return to you; if I do not find anyone, I will remain there.—
(b)   He was walking and walking until he came to a house.   And He entered the house and the host received him and entertained him. The big daughter [of the host] went to fetch water.   She was sitting at the well and thinking.   She said in her heart:—This man came to marry me, and I will give birth to a son.   And the child will come to the well, and it will climb up this tree at the well, and it will fall into the well and will die.—[And she wept on account of the disaster.]

And the wife and grandmother [of the house] were now in the house.   The wife of the host came to the daughter and said to her:
—Why are you weeping?—She said:
—This man has come to marry me, and I will bear a child and the child will come and climb the tree and will fall into the well and will die.—And the wife took a seat with her and wept [over the disaster].
Both were sitting and weeping until the host came and said to them:
—Why are you weeping?—And they told him all that happened.   The host took also a seat and wept, and the guest remained alone.

And the guest also came and said to them:
—What happened?—And they said to him:
—You came to marry my daughter, and she will give birth to a son and he will climb the tree and he will fall into the well and die.—After this the guest said:
—Pay me the blood money for my son!—They said to him:
—You have no son yet.—

And the guest returned to his house and said to his wife:
—I have found madder people then you are.—And he remained with his wife.

That is the end of the story.

IFA 5464; Egypt; AT 1295 A*.

Once there was an Arab who was about to marry a girl.   There, as it is known, one does not see the girl before the wedding day.   She was rich but very tall, too tall.   After the marriage she wanted to enter the room but she was so tall so that she could not enter [through the door].   She was standing there and crying.   They said her head should be cut off.   One said she would die, [better] cut off her legs.

They did not know how or what to do.   There was a Jew standing nearby, he took and gave a blow on her behind and she fell and entered the room.

IFA 7857; Lebanon; AT 1335, AT 1228 A.

(*a*) A man from Homs [Syria] came in the evening to Hama [Syria] and saw a tub with water there and in it the reflection of the moon. He got angry at the people of Hama who stole the moon from his town. He returned to Homs and told his fellow-townspeople about the theft of the moon. They went to Hamma and [indeed] found the moon in the tub.

(*b*) They got very angry and decided to get the moon back to Homs by force. They appointed a commander and prepared for war. Their commander, however, made a mistake and directed the muzzle of the cannons in the opposite direction, into the direction of his own soldiers instead of the direction of the enemy. When he gave the command: 'Fire!'—his soldiers were killed.

   The commander did not lose his wits and was certain of his victory, for if the fire has killed his soldiers, it was even more obvious that the soldiers of the enemy were killed.

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