

ARTICLE

## A “wild man” from the island of Soqotra: a new text in its comparative setting

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### Abstract

The article presents an annotated edition of a newly recorded Soqotri text about a wild man. The authors attempt to locate the story within a wide range of “wild/feral” men narratives. The protagonist of the Soqotri story displays a set of features cross-culturally ascribed to wild men, and the narrative pattern of the account demonstrates a sequence of plot elements and motifs characteristic of this tale-type. The article includes a comparison of the Soqotri tale to the Enkidu narrative known from the Akkadian Epic of Gilgameš. Although both focus on the contact between human society and a wild outsider, the two stories develop the subject differently: while Enkidu loses his wild traits and becomes “civilized”, the Soqotri hero dies unable either to join the human community or to preserve his wild nature once people have interfered with his life.

**Keywords:** Soqotri; wild man; folklore of Soqotra; folklore motifs; Modern South Arabian; Enkidu

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to present to an interested readership (particularly, but not exclusively, folklorists and specialists in Modern South Arabian languages and cultures) a previously unknown thematic type of Soqotri narrative. The Soqotri story of a “wild man” was first recorded in Moscow in Summer 2021, as a part of the long-standing and ongoing Russian-Soqotri research project headed by Vitaly Naumkin.<sup>1</sup> The narrator is Ahmad ‘Isa al-Da‘arhi, who prepared a version of the story and then told it to us, with some minor changes to the wording.<sup>2</sup> Work on the text continued in December 2021 during a two-week fieldwork season on the island.

The genre of the text can best be defined as a legend, “a short, (mono)episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified, historicized narrative” (Tangherlini 1990: 385). The story is skilfully organized in terms of both structure and style, and the high concentration of complex metaphysical issues is striking. The tale invites listeners to reflect on such fundamental problems as the confrontation between an individual and society, the unconscious refusal to accept the Other, lack of understanding between parties trying to

<sup>1</sup> For general information about Soqotra and its culture, see Morris 2021: 1–9. A recent summary description of the Soqotri language and the extant corpora of Soqotri texts is found in Bulakh and Kogan 2019. The history and aims of the Russian-Soqotri research project are described in CSOL I ix.

<sup>2</sup> The introduction of the writing system on the island has substantially changed the format of the folkloristic fieldwork: quite often, both the narrative and poetic compositions are put down by the informants in advance, so that some sort of literary editorial work is inherently present in them (see CSOL I 27).

communicate, the inherent painfulness of the socialization process, unintentional infliction of harm and the dangers of attempting to improve a person's condition through force. Deep insights into human nature and interaction are rendered in a reflective and somewhat aloof, non-didactic and non-emotional tone, culminating in what is far from a happy ending. All this makes the story a true masterpiece of Soqotri oral literature.

The first part of the article presents the Soqotri text in a format established in earlier publications by the Russian-Soqotri team. Three renderings are given in three columns: (1) the Soqotri text in a conventional Semitological transcription; (2) a rendering in the Arabic-based Soqotri script; and (3) an English translation. As usual in our text editions, the composition is accompanied by linguistic and philological annotations, focused on hitherto-unknown Soqotri vocabulary as well as certain non-trivial grammatical features.

In the second part of the article, an attempt is made to look at the text from a folkloristic point of view, paying attention to the literary features of the tale and its position within a wide range of similar narratives throughout the world. After a brief overview of previous studies on “wild” or “feral” men narratives, we undertake a structural analysis and isolate episodes characteristic of this tale-type.

In conclusion, we will compare the structure, motifs and poetics of the Soqotri text with those of a famous – and by far the most ancient – account of a “wild man”, namely, the Enkidu narratives preserved in the Akkadian Epic of Gilgameš.

## 2. The text

### Ṭáḥrēr

1	hímaʿk éʔéfo tóʔo yəmotélan yəʕúmor éram ʔad ʕag bə- saqóʔtri la-ḥa bə-γarbíya yəʕúmor həy ʔáḥrēr	هيمعك أفو تۆو يماٲان يعومر أرم طاد عاج بسقٲري، لٲاحه بقر بيه، يعومر هيه طحرر.	I heard people tell a story: as they say, there was a man on Soqotra, in the Western Province – they called him Ṭáḥrēr.
2	ʕag mákraš ši al-yədáraʕ wa-yəšdóri ḥəyhe bər ḥóriš	عاج مقرش بسي آل يدارع ويشداري حيهي بار حارش.	The man was (always) naked: he did not wear anything, and he shied away from any man, son of humankind.
3	al-yóʕod wa-yəʔárəb máʔif kaḷ boḳ yóʕod wa-yíʕən bə-ḳanšérhən mənál toʔódən ʔəḥórhír yóʕod sésən	آل ياعد ويطارب ماٲف كالي بوق ياعد وييكن بقتشرهن منالي تعادن طحررر ياعد ساسن.	He did not walk around or go down to the plains, but walked and dwelt only in the mountain peaks, where the wild goats roamed – he walked with them.
4	wa-yhe də bə-ḥalf bər yhən éʔéfo al-déḷəḳ	ويهاه داه بٲلف بار بيهن أفو آل دالٲق.	(And people were not many in that place.)
5	wa-yəšérəd mənál ʔšərədnən lə-ker ḥíʕhem di-təkénən bə-ḳanšérhən wa-ʔal-béne yəšróʔš wa-yəšégəš	ويشارد منالي ٲشردنن لٲكار حلهم دنكائن بقتشرهن وآل بانى يشراوين ويشاچين.	He would go down to the watering-place where the goats went down – near the sources that were there in the mountain peaks, and he did not show up much or graze around.

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- wa-daš sáʿa di-yəšróʾoš  
al-šóune ʿəy ʿar mákrəš  
wa-kaḥ məy kən tóʾo kən  
di-fəžhər lākaʿ ʿəy ʿtīn  
wa-ḥodk mən máʿmid mənāḷ  
yəʿámod
- 7 yəšóune ʿəy mən sər yhom  
yəṭárəb wa-yənásat id-ṭaḥ  
wa-yəkténah id-kanšérhən  
di-neyf di-állā
- 8 ʿaf ṭəy šəm ṭad ʿag ḥa bər  
yhe láfi tóʾo šəṭaʿ šérkaḥ  
kanšérhən yəḥórə mən  
ṭəḥórhīr
- 9 wa-mənāḷ ʿad yəḥórə šérʾəš  
ʿəy
- 10 wa-ʾistáyrab bay šébbə  
di-maḥrīm ʿank ʿómor də  
di-boḥ al-ḥəyhe bər ḥóriš
- 11 wa-laṭ ébʾər həy lə-ri  
di-kanšad kor yəšmétoḷš
- 12 wa-ḥérə lišémteḷš  
wa-lišḥáberš al-kóḷə bəy ši  
ʿar al-koḷ lišémteḷ  
wa-ʿal-yəšeʿiyin métaḷ  
wa-kaḥ laṭ ʿéghem
- 13 tóʾo šīni ʿag də láfi ṭa ʿádfər  
həy bə-máʿabhər
- 14 tóʾo hímaʿ ṭáḥrər əbége  
di-máʿabhər kən tóʾo bédər  
wa-ʿal-ʿad mélok ʿəy
- 15 bəs ṭáher ʿag wa-žálaʿ éʿəfo  
ʿómor éhe ṭa kən wa-ʿéhe ṭa  
kən
- 16 náʿa ʿəgébən ṭəy šəm nəgré  
wa-nətéšal bay wa-nəšógar  
ʿəy ʿasé állā yənáṭaʿ  
ka-ʿérhən ṭəḥórhīr  
id-móšgir
- وداش ساعه ديشراؤين آل پسونى عيه  
عار مقرش وكاح ميه كان تۆو  
كان دفچهر لاقع عيه طين وحك  
من معدم منالي يعامد.
- بيسونى عيه من سار يهام بطارب  
ويناصت اد طاح ويكتاح اد  
قتشر هن دنيف دالله.
- عاف طيه شام طاد عاج حاه بار يهاه  
لافي تۆو صاطع شرقق قشهرن  
يچارى من طحرهر.
- ومنالي عاد يچارى سراپن عيه.
- واستغرب بيه شابي دمحرمنك، عامر  
داه دبووق آل حيهي بار حارش.
- ولاط ابار هيه لري دقتصد كار  
يشماتپش.
- وچارى لشمتهپش ولشحابرش آل كاپي بيه  
پسي عار آل كاپي لشمتهپ وآل يشانين  
ماتلي وكاح لاط عجهم.
- تۆو پسييني عاج داه لافي طاه عدفر هيه  
بمعير.
- تۆو هيمع طحرر اباچه دمبعير كان تۆو  
بادر والي عاد مالپك عيه.
- باس طاهر عاج وضاليع آفو عامر اها  
طاه كان واه طاه كان.
- ناعه عجابين طيه شام نجرى وينتاصلي  
بيه ونيساجر عيه عسى الله بناطع  
كارهن طحرهر اد مپسجر.
- And when he did show up, he  
was not (easily) seen because  
he was naked and his colour  
was like that of the earth: mud  
and dirt stuck to him from the  
place where he would spend  
the night.
- From time to time, one could  
see him descend, stare at the  
seashore and come back to the  
mountain peaks, to the cliffs of  
God.
- Now there was one man there,  
and he was quite strong. Once  
he felt hungry and went up to  
the mountain peaks, looking  
for wild goats.
- And while he was looking for  
them, Ṭaḥrər showed up to  
him.
- The man was surprised – he  
thought it was the devil. He  
said (to himself): “That one  
over there is not a man, son of  
humankind.”
- Then he went up to him, to  
one of the peaks, to talk to  
him.
- He tried to talk to him and ask  
about his whereabouts, but  
Ṭaḥrər did not answer  
anything because he did not  
know how to speak and did  
not understand speech – in  
fact, he was dumb.
- When that strong man saw all  
this, he threw a large stone  
against him.
- When Ṭaḥrər heard the  
rumble of the stone, he fled  
away like a meteor, and the  
man could not see him  
anymore.
- Well, the man left and told this  
to the people. He said: “Such  
and such things happened.”
- (And they said:) “Now we want  
to go together one day and  
look for him and trap him.  
With God’s help, he might fall  
into a trap alongside (wild)  
goats.”

- 17 wa-<sup>?</sup>ətwá<sup>?</sup>ádo é<sup>?</sup>əfo məntá wa-məntá wa-šəgər <sup>?</sup>əy mənəl tətərəbən tōhórhir وأتعدو أفو منطاه ومنطاه وبياجر عيه منال تطاربن طحر هر .
- 18 wa-<sup>?</sup>laʃ kédəm fakḥ wa-fakḥ šérkaḥ wa-<sup>?</sup>áʔəb <sup>?</sup>árho wa-<sup>?</sup>hərəse kor yəšró<sup>?</sup>oš kə-tōhórhir ولاط قادم ففتح وفتح شرقح وأعطب عر هو وحراسه كار يشراوين كطحر هر .
- 19 wa-yhe a<sup>?</sup>-yəháməl šé<sup>?</sup>e wa-tó<sup>?</sup>o híma<sup>?</sup> sénne di-<sup>?</sup>árho šér<sup>?</sup>əš kə-tōhórhir ويهاه ال بحامل صاعه وتوو هيمع سنه دعر هو شراوين كطحر هر
- 20 wa-<sup>?</sup>ʔəb <sup>?</sup>əy <sup>?</sup>árho <sup>?</sup>af yəʔtərəb kə-tōhórhir وإعطب عيه عر هو عاف بطارب كطحر هر .
- 21 wa-tó<sup>?</sup>o tērob wa-<sup>?</sup>ébdəd šígir wa-<sup>?</sup>liyóh éftəg wa-<sup>?</sup>ətrébbəš kólə nhəfš róbaž wa-ya-<sup>?</sup>átaḥ tó<sup>?</sup>o táhrə<sup>?</sup>r وتتو طارب وأبدد ببيجر وليوخ أفتح واترئش كاي نهفش رابض وياطح تتوو طحرر .
- 22 wa-<sup>?</sup>tírab dəy wa-<sup>?</sup>lōwə bəy wa-k<sup>?</sup>təf šérhon wa-<sup>?</sup>ídi wa-<sup>?</sup>laʃ t<sup>?</sup>lak di-<sup>?</sup>ká<sup>?</sup>yəher وطيرب ديه ولاط بيه وكثاف بپرهن وايدي ولاط تلاك دفعيهر .
- 23 wa-<sup>?</sup>kaḥ tó<sup>?</sup>o érah ká<sup>?</sup>yəher wa-<sup>?</sup>óber <sup>?</sup>əy <sup>?</sup>əghétən wa-<sup>?</sup>əmbórye féza<sup>?</sup> w-šédra وكاح تتوو أرح قعيهر وغابز عيه عجهائن وأمبريه فازع وشدرى .
- 24 f<sup>?</sup>bər <sup>?</sup>əy ək<sup>?</sup>níyo a<sup>?</sup>-kóténə إعتبر عيه أقتيو ألي قتاني .
- 25 wa-<sup>?</sup>hərówə [əšómto] wa-<sup>?</sup>a<sup>?</sup>-yəšmétə [ar <sup>?</sup>éghəm wa-<sup>?</sup>a<sup>?</sup>-yəšə<sup>?</sup>ʔiyin وحرأوى لئشمتل وألي يشماتل عار عجهم وألي يشانين .
- 26 ídɛf <sup>?</sup>əy wa-<sup>?</sup>írbaḥ wa-ríhəž <sup>?</sup>af yəšnók<sup>?</sup>i إيدف عيه وإربح وربحض عاف يشناقى .
- 27 wa-yhe fōne a<sup>?</sup>-təgósər tk<sup>?</sup>ʔé <sup>?</sup>əy ə<sup>?</sup>əd <sup>?</sup>ar <sup>?</sup>ížo məy gəlído káno tó<sup>?</sup>o rokt di-šəb wa-məy ʔay di-tōhórhir ويهاه فاني ال تجاسر تكلى عيه أاد عار ععضو ميه جاليدو كانو تتوو ركت ديساب وميه طاي دطحر هر .
- 28 wa-<sup>?</sup>kíʃaf məy ra<sup>?</sup>t di-ri وقيصف ميه رعت درى .
- 29 tó<sup>?</sup>o ébdəd rího bə-gad wa-<sup>?</sup>kaḥ ébdəd ə<sup>?</sup>əd geté<sup>?</sup>ar a<sup>?</sup>-hémə [ə<sup>?</sup>əd وتتوو أدد ريهو بجاد وكاح أدد أاد جتاعر ألي حامل أاد .
- So people from here and there agreed to set a trap for him in a place where wild goats used to come down.
- Some waited in ambush and some went up shouting and yelling so that he would show up together with the wild goats.
- And he could not bear any shouting. So as soon as he heard just a little bit of their voices, he showed up with the wild goats.
- And they were shouting at him until he came down with the wild goats.
- When he came down and felt the trap and the snare (around him), he was confused and uncomfortable. He surrendered and lay down panting like a wild goat.
- They came down to him, seized him, bound his feet and hands and led him to the village.
- When he reached the village, women and children went out to see him, and he got scared and felt shy and uncomfortable.
- They offered him some food, but he did not eat.
- They tried talking to him, but he did not speak because he was dumb and did not understand anything.
- They took him and washed him and bathed him until he was clean.
- (Before that, one could not touch him by hand because his skin was rough, it was like the skin on the sole of one's foot, and his smell was that of wild goats.)
- And they also cut the hair off his head.
- When he felt the water and, then, their hands on his body, he got ill: he could not bear being touched by anybody's hand.

30	ídef ʿəy wa-bíʿeg ʿímer ʿasé yətórəf ke bíʿeg	ايدف عيه وبيج عيمر عسى يتارف كاه بيج.	They took him and set him free, saying: “He might recover if set free.”
31	wa-tóʿo bíʿeg táhər wa-yhe getéʿar	وتۆو بيج طاهر ويهاه جتاعر.	When he was set free, he left, but he was already ill.
32	wa-ḳarére šənówə nóyhər di-régom ḳanšérhən ʿímer bes táhərər di-šámə	وقراری پناوی ئیهر دراجم قنشرهن عيمر باس طحرر دصامی	A day after, birds were seen covering the mountain peaks. Then people said: “Well, it must be Ṭāhərər who died.”
33	wa-téhər éʿəfo ʿaf yəkábər mənaʃ ébraḥ nóyhər	وطاهر افو عاف يکابر منال ابرح نيهير.	The people set off and after a while reached the place where the birds were landing.
34	ḳasówə tóʿo šámə wa-ʿézʿəm ʿəy nóyhər kor yənádaʿš	کساوی تۆو صامی وازعم عيه نيهير کار ينادعش.	And he was found there, dead, and birds landed on him to peck at him.
35	ʿímer ifúʃ yəšóuge ʿímer yəʾóude ʿəy šármhin ʿan nóyhər kor aʃ-ʿindáʿš	عيمر افرلي يشوجی عيمر يعودی عيه شرمهن عن نيهير کار اې لنداغش.	They said: “What shall we do?” Then they said: “Tree trunks are to be put on him to protect his body from the birds, lest they peck him.”
36	wa-ʿaʿdówə ʿəy šármhin mən ṭəḳ wa-mən bo ʿaf aʃ-ʿad yəbóʿor məy ši	وأعداوی عيه شرمهن من طوق ومن بو عاف اې عاد يباور ميه پسي.	And they put some tree trunks over him, from here and from there, until nothing could be seen of him.
37	wa-ʃəṭ ṭəhórhír nətəkət ʿáʃa ṭəy wa-šámə ʿaf stətéʿən məy də ḥəʃf	وإط طحرهر نتاقت علی طيه وصامی عاف ستاتن ميه داه حلف.	From then on, the wild goats began to die one by one until they vanished from that place.
38	wa-náʿa aʃ-ʿad di-ḳíʿi boḳ kaʃ ḳanšérhən də bə-ḥəʃf	وناعه اې عاد دكيني بوق كال قنشرهن داه بحلف.	Now nothing is left there, in that place, only the mountain peaks.
39	wa-stóʿo toutéy	وستاؤو توتايو.	Here ends the tale.

### 3. Philological notes

**Line 1.** Throughout the text, the name of the protagonist (*táhrər*, masculine) contrasts with *táhrər*, pl. *ṭəhórhír* (feminine). This is due to the fact that goats are typically conceptualized as female on the island.

**Line 2.** The adjective *mákrəš* “naked” exhibits a rather complex background. On the one hand, a structurally comparable form is attested several times in the Vienna corpus (LS 388),<sup>3</sup> in each case with -š. In Müller (1902: 165, No. 9 and 183, No. 53), its meaning is “scarred, scratched (about one’s feet)” (*zerschunden*), presumably < “peeled, deprived of its skin” (cf. Müller’s informant’s Arabic rendering مقشر). In Müller (1905: 318, No. 620), however, the editor prefers the translation “der Zerlumpte” (= “ragged, wearing an old, torn garment”), coming close to the meaning “naked” attested presently, but also explained as مقشور by his informant. On the other hand, both the forthcoming CSOL III (No. 27)

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the works of the Russian-Soqotri research team, “the Vienna corpus” is a conventional designation for Müller’s editions (1902, 1905 and 1907) of Soqotri texts, most of them recorded and analysed in the Austrian capital. See CSOL I 21–23 for an overview of this remarkable corpus and its significance for Soqotri studies.

and Morris's corpus (2021: 2235, Text 28/17) feature *mákraš* “stark naked” (with -š) as the name of the pre-historical wise man. The relationship between the two terms is obscure to us.

The verb *šádrá* (*yašdóri*/*lišédre* or *lišédri*) “to be shy, to feel uncomfortable” is undoubtedly related to the well-known adjective *dārhi* “foreign, strange; stranger” (LS 135, CSOL I 530, CSOL II 450). Maria Bulakh has kindly provided the following illustration for its use: *mábrahe yašdóri hāyhe dārhi yboš ke édoḡ ay aḡ-yaškabīlīn toy* “A child **feels shy and uncomfortable** with a stranger; he weeps if a stranger touches him, and he is not happy with him.”

**Line 3.** *mátif* (du. *matīfi*)<sup>4</sup> “plain” has been illustrated as follows: *sémsomk tó'o nāfégo ére mən ri di-fādhon 'af tó'o kārīb taftakēhən hte tērobk id-mátif bes aḡ-ak é'tolk wa-šé'ad énhī wa-aḡ-saréko tho óram* “I set off trotting when the moon appeared from the mountain peaks, and when the night reached its middle, I came down to the **plain**, and I was no longer afraid: it became easier for me to walk and the road did not confuse me anymore.” The word, previously unattested, is now also found in a lullaby published by Morris: *bes he mən sahlilyā wa-mátif / bes he mən taṭwír di-mátif* “I have had enough of the coast and the **lowlands!** I had my fill of the ‘development’ in the **lowlands!**”<sup>5</sup> (Morris 2021: 913; see also the Glossary, 127).

The adjective *kánšar* (LS 379, Naumkin et al. 2015: 76)<sup>6</sup> is known to designate a long-horned cow. The masculine form *kánšer* can also be substantivized with the meaning “mountain peak”: *laḡ nākānəm fālho bər e'lhītān nāródyhən 'af lišérād óu'əz yhen lə-ker š'rah kor yáhšēš lə-nōfoy mən kásho wa-yašrókəḡ 'af likéb lə-ri di-kánšérhən* “When we begin to accustom calves, sons of cows,<sup>7</sup> to grazing, we water them until they quench their thirst, then they are driven to the foothills so they can graze on grass, then they go up until they reach the **mountain peaks.**” This lexeme is not identical to Leslau's *qanéšéhéten* “sommets de montagne” (LS 378), which seems rather to render *kanāšá'yhon*, pl. of *kónšī* (du. *kónšī'i*) as “mountain top”.<sup>8</sup>

**Line 5.** The double *n*-marking in *tšarédnən* (instead of the expected *tšarédən*) is noteworthy, but difficult to explain, as *šérād* (*yašérod*/*lišéred*) “to be watered, to drink” (LS 73) is not an intensive-base verb. Moreover, the expected regular form is once attested in the Vienna corpus: *gēhi di-mešoiten šésen // máhtirémoh gib'éleh // tšerédən wa-á-tḡayémen // wu-min hámrēh 'áfedóken* “Ein Wādi fließenden Wassers ist bei ihnen // Und eine schmutzige Pfütze // **Sie** (die Schafe) **trinken** und verschmähen's nicht // Und das trübe Wasser schlürfen sie” (Müller 1905: 332<sub>10–13</sub>).

For *hálmi* (du. *hálmiti*, pl. *híl'hem*) “water source” (LS 177) cf. the following verse from the Vienna corpus: *il-érəḡ tri šigeriti // ṡey šígreh wāl-hémalótšen // il-šíríd tri hálémítī // ṡey hálémih wāl-ridótšen* “Die zwei Bergpässe bestiegen // Weil sie ein Bergpaß nicht trägt // Die aus **zwei Quellen** trinken // Weil sie eine **Quelle** nicht tranken kann” (Müller 1905: 347<sub>13–16</sub>).

<sup>4</sup> No plural form could be elicited.

<sup>5</sup> That is, “I'm fed up with the ‘civilized’ world of the Hadibo plain and prefer the traditional Bedouin life-style of the inlands.”

<sup>6</sup> Masculine *kánšer* (du. *kanšéri*, pl. *kanšérhən*), feminine *kánšar* (du. *kanšīri*, pl. *kanóšir*).

<sup>7</sup> The Biblical flavour of this expression is not occasional, as it is just one of the many Soqotri noun phrases strikingly similar to Hebrew *'égāl bān-bākār* (for which see extensively BDB 121, meaning 7b).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, *di-kánš'a* can also be used to describe an animal, according to Morris 2021: 143 (“single horned; the horn rising straight up from the head [goats]”); contrast *kánš'er* “horns growing straight up from the head [cattle]”. For *kánš'a* as a topographic term (“the highest peak of a range”), see Morris 2021: 124.

**Line 6.** The newly detected verb *lákāʿ* (*yəlákāʿ/l'il'káʿ*) “to stick, to adhere” has been illustrated by the following examples: *ékdomk ʿáze di-ḥaniʿo la-ʿlidi wa-la-šérhon wa-lákóʿo ʿas ḥánna wa-ʿatékfo wa-tšəžóri mən škʿro* “I saw a woman who dyed her hands and feet with henna, and the henna **stuck** to her so well that one could admire her beauty”, *šínik ʿag di-šəreʿayhots ḥatibe wa-se ʿaméro ḥúmra ʿaféro wa-lákóʿo ʿay ḥúmra bə-nášar wa-ʿal-žələdʿo ḥəy bər ləkóʿo ʿay ḥúmra wa-tóʿo égaḥ di-métro šénə éʿəfo məy bə-nášar tóʿo šibhe wa-bet éʿəfo bər ʿáze ʿádo məy ʿaf nášar wa-tóʿo éraḥ diʿyhe káʿar šíni nḥəfs bə-mérə tóʿo mlii ḥúmra wa-ḥébən yəsáḥam la-nḥəfs mən fʿzaʿ mən dəs ʿézmə* “I saw a man who was kissed by his fiancée, and she had put red lipstick on her lips. So the lipstick **stuck** to his cheek, but she did not tell him that the lipstick **stuck** to him. When he took the subway, people saw something like lips on his cheek and they realized that a woman had touched his cheek. When he came home, he saw his cheek full of lipstick in the mirror, and nearly wet his pants out of fear, out of such disgrace.”

**Line 7.** The pious genitive attribute *di-állā* “belonging to God” that modifies *nəyf* “cliff” cannot be separated from the Arabic nominal phrase *iyýámat állā* “days of God” (CSOL I 691)<sup>9</sup> and especially *rīho di-állā* “water of God”, designating natural bodies of water used for household needs (see Naumkin 2012: 257).

**Line 10.** The expression *māhrím ʿank* as a curse on the devil is attested already in Müller (1905: 99<sub>11</sub>). Judging by the shape of *māhrím*, it may be an early borrowing from Mehri *māhrīm* “deprived” (ML 186), in turn borrowed from Arabic *māhrūm*- (the vocalic correspondence is regular in this pattern; see Bittner 1909: 29). The expression is used here as an euphemism for the devil, “the one about whom ‘*māhrím ʿank!*’ is said”, cf. the following example featuring a by-form *di-bāhrím ʿank* (with the same meaning): *wa-yhéḥən ʿouyéghən yíšaʿ mən šətrəḥər di-šətrəḥər wa-yəšóʿo wa-sáʿa yəžóḥok wa-yənešikín tóʿo di-bāhrím ʿank wa-yənefikín tóʿo mətṛəd wa-yóʿod mənál ʿod wa-yəkténaḥ diʿyhe di-ḥəlf mənál diʿyhe káʿar* “That boy was running from tribe to tribe and shouting, and from time to time he was laughing and yelling like the **devil**, and running around like one possessed, moving away and then coming back to the neighborhood where his house was.”

**Line 13.** The verb *ʿádfər* (*yəʿádfor/l'iʿádfər*) means “to throw, to hurl”: *ʿádfork šəka e-ʿáze kor tškəl la-nḥəfs kor al-lišné éʿəfo məs la-ri* “**I threw** a mantle to a woman so that she could cover herself and people would not see her head.”

**Line 14.** The verbal noun *əbége* “rumble” is derived from *óbog* (*yoʿóbəg/libég*) “to rumble, to rattle”, very often about thunder: *əbégo*<sup>10</sup> *bəraḥtétən bə-šed ʿaf yətəbər fədnhin* “The day before yesterday **it thundered** so loudly that an echo was heard.”<sup>11</sup>

*bédər* “falling star, meteor” is used as a paragon of high speed: *wa lḥe di-ʿad bəyḥən bər ḥérə liṭréd wa-ʿal-kérbo dəy ʿar laḥ yíšaʿ yíkən tóʿo bédər* “Those who still had some strength tried to catch him, but couldn’t get near him, for he was as quick as a **meteor**.” The word is an Arabism, cf. *bādir* “eilig” (Behnstedt 66).

**Line 16.** The form *nətəšal* “let us help each other” is derived from the inherently reciprocal verb (VIII stem) with the meaning “to help each other”: *atəšal ʿəghétən diʿsen bə-nəfaʿ ʿaf yətétə* “The women **helped each other** with their work until it was

<sup>9</sup> And its puristic Soqotri calque *énhor di-állā* (CSOL I 4:16, 7:4, 18:1, 19:2 and 7 and elsewhere).

<sup>10</sup> In this example, the verb is used in 3 sg. f., as many other Soqotri verbs denoting natural phenomena (*lišo* “it rained”, etc.).

<sup>11</sup> Literally, “so that the mountains broke”.

completed.” The singular forms are not attested, but can be reconstructed by inference as \*atésal (\*yátésal/\*litésal).

The verb *šégor* (yášógar/lišgér) “to set a trap; to sit in ambush, to lure into a trap” is well attested in the Vienna corpus (LS 425). An additional illustration: *šégor*k lə-tər di-ká‘ar mən ‘ag kor ləl yášrákah mən káne wa-yəhárof tho á‘amt əgámaš mən hérhən “I was lying in wait for a man outside the house so that when he would go out and turn his side towards me, I would seize him from behind.”

**Line 18.** For the idiom *á‘təb ‘árho* “to utter a cry, to call out”, cf. *táherk ahátab tírob mənál ətobírin híma‘k əž‘éyrhər di-‘ó‘oz tó‘o lahágo bə-kátbe*<sup>12</sup> *á‘təbk ‘árho kə-‘əyyúg kor yərokéħəs mən ləħeg* “I went out to gather some firewood, and while I was breaking it, I heard the shriek of a goat as it got stuck in a net. I yelled for people to get it out of the trap.” The same expression can use *ħərəse* (pl. *ħərəsətən*) “cry, scream”: *á‘təbk ħərəse ‘af yátékəť ke íno di-démə* “I uttered a scream so that anyone who might be sleeping would wake up.”

**Line 21.** The verb *ətrəbbəš* is a borrowing from dialectal Arabic: “to be or become confused” (Piamenta 1990: 172).

The verbal expression *kólə nhəfš* (cf. CSOL I 577) seems to be used here with the meaning “to restrain oneself” > “to give up, to surrender”, cf. *tó‘o éramk təy ‘éno řad ‘ouyégħen bédə ħe wa-šóřif ħe mudarrásín kor yəžóħok wa-łəť tó‘o híma‘k šóřif ħe wa-yħe ħə še hémən əłátamš kólək nóřín wa-‘ámok bismill‘á də ‘ag di-ħə díyá‘ ‘égəb éñhi múskil‘a wa-łoyk bə-nóřín* “As it happened to me one year, a boy was spreading lies about me and slandering me before our teachers to make fun of me. When I heard him slander me and he was near me, I almost gave him a slap in his face, but restrained myself. And I said to myself: ‘Dear God! this is a bad man! He wanted to create problems for me’. But I got a grip on myself (and didn’t beat him).”

*l‘ayħ* (pl. *l‘iyóħ*) “net” is widely attested in the Arabic dialects of the Gulf, as well as in Mehri and Jibbali (al-Salimi and Staples 2019: 572; Qafisheh 1997: 552; ML 259). Its ultimate origin is obscure to us.

For a similar image, cf. Isaiah 51:20: “Your children are lying helpless at the end of every street like an antelope trapped in a net (*kə-tō mikmār*).”<sup>13</sup>

**Lines 22–31.** These segments feature a dense concentration of impersonal passives (Lonnet 1998: 78–79), mostly with experiencers encoded by prepositions with pronominal suffixes (*tírab dəy*, *łowə bəy*, *řber ‘əy əħníyo*, *ħəřówə ləšómtol*, *łđef ‘əy*). Particularly interesting is *tírab dəy* “they went down to him”, with an intransitive verb of movement.

**Line 27.** The word *gel‘ido* (du. *gel‘idóti*, pl. *gél‘yod*) “skin, hide; body”, previously recorded by Simeone-Senelle and Lonnet (1991: 1457), is evidently related to the well-known *gad* with the same range of meanings.<sup>14</sup> What is meant here is Táħrer’s firm, coarse skin that is loathsome to the touch. For the meaning “skin, hide”, cf. *šáre wall‘á ħánžehər də di-ħóuzoz bəy əll‘əħe l‘ázim yíkən ħələf béne bər gel‘ido di-‘əll‘əħe ‘ízo əl-tó‘o šóřhi di-‘ó‘oz*

<sup>12</sup> *kátbe* (du. *kaťbítí*, pl. *kaťéťb*) “net, trap” has been explained as follows: *kaťéťb šə‘óurok bésən šóde wa-‘ad yášóugor bəy lə-bəsátín ‘an éřhon wa-řa yášóugor bəy lə-řohóřhir* “People use *kaťéťb* to fish with them, to fence with them their gardens to protect them from goats, and to catch feral goats.”

<sup>13</sup> The differences between the Soqotri and Biblical phrases are not to be ignored, though. The Soqotri text is not completely metaphoric: it is natural for Táħrer to behave like a wild goat, and he is literally captured. Conversely, in Isaiah no physical captivity is involved, nor a real antelope: it is only the bad, humiliating condition of the people that makes them similar to animals.

<sup>14</sup> The morphological shape of *gel‘ido* is unusual (not a diminutive). From a purely formal perspective, it is identical to the pattern of the verbal noun (infinitive) of the intensive (II) stem.



wa-di-té'ε “A knife or a dagger with which one slaughters a cow must be very sharp, because a cow's **hide** is tough, unlike a goat's or a sheep's hide.” For the meaning “body”, see the following example (about a TV wrestling show): *ékdomk 'ag háhar di-yo'ouge wa-yhe al-'ólá 'ámok dás gεl'ido di-boḵ al-to'ólá bā-bīle agówā bā-kúrsi di-héshin ha ébdad ántan wa-lákin táma' báyhən wa-zé'e dí'yhe gá'iza* “I saw a black man who was hit (by one of his rivals), but did not care. I said (to myself): ‘That **body** won't be bothered by anything.’ Then he was hit with an iron chair and did finally feel a little bit. Still he overcame them all and got the prize.”

The anatomic term *rokt* (du. *rókti*, pl. *érkot*) designates the rough skin on the sole of one's foot (or, metonymically, the sole itself):<sup>15</sup> *laḷ róukot tómər róukot bā-érkot di-šérhon* “When dates are trampled, they are trampled with the **sole** of the foot.”

**Line 35.** The verb *á'da* (*yá'ódi/lá'dε*) “to put, to set” has been illustrated with the following examples: *tó'o taté'an láhi di-fólho á'deyn mən hóyhi il'lihan á'anhe id-zórif 'an nóyhər* “When we finished feeding our calves<sup>16</sup> **we took** our leather vessels from the ground **and put** them among *zórif*-trees (to protect them) from (scavenger) birds”, *laḷ yá'ósá é'εfo n'haḷ šérhom yanoké'an méraht wa-yánóuzaf wa-laḷ yóudah bəs šáhan di-'írhez wa-te wa-laḷ yá'ósá wa-bá'ad-al fšá ke íno te di-ki'i yázóugod mən méraht id-šáhan wa-laḷ yázóugod šáhan id-našf wa-méraht yantagéfən mas e-suwá'id wa-laḷ 'óude la-táda' di-šáhan wa-kólá 'as méraht óbən mən 'álε aḷ-lárbók aḵniyo wa-é'εfo yá'tómak 'af la-'isirhin yá'ótáf dí'yhən la-'aḵniyo* “When people have lunch under the trees<sup>17</sup> they fetch an eating mat and spread it, and then a plate of rice and meat is put on it. People have their lunch, and after they have it, if there is any meat left, it is taken from the mat to the plate, and the plate is put aside. As for the mat, they shake it for the vultures, and then **it is placed** over the plate, and a stone is put on the mat to prevent the food from spoiling. Then people take a nap before getting back to their food in the evening.”

**Line 37.** The verb *netékat* (*yántékat/l'intékat*) seems to be used here as a modifier in a hendiadys construction with the meaning “to do something one after another”. Its basic meaning is “to go/come one by one, to disperse”, as in the following examples: *gédəḷ é'εfo di-maḷár wa-notékat kull'ə ṭad dí'yhe di-sá'le* “People got to the airport and **went each** to his waiting area”, *tó'o ebróho tá'ira bā-maḷár wa-ḵə'ówə tər di-tá'ira notékat é'εfo 'ála ṭad ṭad id-tər 'af yá'ké'ə ṭayyár wa-mužayyifát* “When the plane arrived at the airport and the door of the plane opened, people **began to go out one by one**, until only the pilot and the cabin crew were left”, *ékdomk 'ag di-yəhóləb bā-ḵáne di-mišhər yáḵanəḵinin dí'yhe la-'érhon wa-yhe éz'am bā'amḵ di-mišhər wa-érhon tántékat idáy 'ála ṭay ṭay tər'ómən wa-yhe yəhóləb* “I saw a man milk his goats in his pen: he was singing to his goats while he was sitting inside the pen, and the goats **would come to him one by one**, fawning over him, and he would milk them.” The following example illustrates the meaning “to die one by one, to disappear gradually” (coming rather close to the passage under scrutiny): *tó'o kən firus kuróna bā-l-'álam notékat é'εfo bā-mi 'af hébən yátétá 'an régom be 'ad álla mən 'ále zəgédəs wa-háffaf 'an é'εfo* “When the coronavirus struck the world, people **were dying one after another** until they nearly disappeared – if not for God who took the virus away and relieved the people.” Still another, rather divergent, meaning – “to come off, to drop off” – features in the following example: *netékat má'abhər mən ri di-fədnhin 'af yəbárah di-ḵánə di-'iše wa-régom dí'yhe 'iše mən řáḵar* “A stone **slid off** from a mountain peak, landed into a pond and covered the pond, being so large.”

<sup>15</sup> ‘Plante du pied; talon’ (Simeone-Senelle and Lonnet 1991: 1469).

<sup>16</sup> Artificially, using leather vessels as jugs.

<sup>17</sup> In a kind of picnic.

#### 4. The “wild man” narrative: towards a theoretical framework

The overall structure of the text, some characteristic details of its plot and the main character’s image come close to those found in the stories of “feral men”<sup>18</sup> – adults or children who are found in the wild, display animal-like behaviour and cannot be introduced into society. Known images of “wild men” range from purely fantastic, indeed not quite human, creatures (similar to fairies or gnomes) to “true” human children who became wild in isolation from society. Across this spectrum, common clusters of motifs can be observed permeating a disparate variety of narratives, from academic texts to non-textual sources.<sup>19</sup>

The credibility of accounts describing contact with “true” feral men has been debated by scholars (and laymen) for centuries,<sup>20</sup> alongside such issues as the origin of “feral men” and the nature of their “wildness”.<sup>21</sup> As of today, it seems that the reality of the phenomenon can be neither proved nor disproved conclusively, but it is safe to assume that at least part of the stories that found their way into academic and documentary discourse are highly coloured by or even wholly rooted in folklore.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that folkloric stories about “feral men” often exhibit conspicuous commonalities with the “scientific” accounts. For instance, Dennis (1941: 427) points to the fact that supposedly “real” records of children reared by wolves come from India, whereas “bear-boys” were found only in Lithuania, “although bears, like wolves, have a very extensive geographic distribution”. It means that the informants who reported the respective cases were actually influenced by images and concepts characteristic of local folkloric traditions. It is possible to establish a common repertoire of the characteristic features of the “wild man” and related plot elements that are applicable to both folkloric stories and documentary reports.

In her detailed survey, Benzaquén (2006) focuses primarily on the presence of “feral men” in non-fictional writings (mostly in accounts left by travellers and journalists) and suggests approaching them as a type of narrative and setting aside the issue of credibility. She traces the history of the scholarly and philosophical debate on the subject and shows that the kernel of most of the pertinent works is formed by lists of “wild children” cases known to this or that author. Descriptions of individual cases tend to be standardized and form a kind of narrative pattern with characteristic motifs and images, often overlapping with those found in folkloric and literary accounts. This is, of course, only natural, as many accounts pretending to be “real” have been in fact either influenced by oral and/or written literature or can be appropriately qualified as folkloric. Benzaquén (2006) then describes the narrative pattern characteristic of most of the documented “wild men” accounts. As we will see below, her results can be used to analyse literary narratives as well.

Both academic and literary narratives often mention a number of characteristic traits of “feral men”. Lists of such traits have been compiled in scientific works from as early as Carl Linnaeus, who based his description on the eight cases that were known at that time: a “wild man” must be *mutus*, *tetrapus*, *hirsutus* – mute, quadruped and hairy (Linnaeus

<sup>18</sup> As pointed out in Benzaquén 2006: 70, in virtually all non-literary stories about “wild men” the protagonist is a child, so that the motif can be properly labelled “feral child” rather than “feral man”. The age of the “feral children” varies from infants to teenagers to adults up to 23 years old (Carroll 1984: 66; Zingg 1940: 500). Note, though, that Tylor 1863: 23 mentions that in Tahiti, among the “wild man” cases were a few adult war fugitives from the French-Tahitan war (1844–7) who had become insane and taken to roaming in the mountains: two of them were later examined by missionaries and showed some characteristic “wild” traits.

<sup>19</sup> For European literary and artistic images, see Bernheimer 1952 and Bartra 1994.

<sup>20</sup> As early as in 1811, J.F. Blumenbach pointed to the lack of reliable supportive evidence in all cases known to him and, therefore, tried to discard them altogether (Zingg 1940: 489).

<sup>21</sup> Typical causes of this condition are isolation (due to staying alone in an uninhabited place or to lack of proper contact with humans within society) or being reared by animals (McNeil et al. 1984: 70; Zingg 1940: 487).

1758: 20).<sup>22</sup> This list became classical in later literature, but subsequent authors tried to expand it. Eventually, such lists became a common structural element of this narrative pattern in documentary and academic reports. But it is interesting to note that the folkloric accounts, too, tend to highlight the peculiarities of the “wild man”, making the respective segments stylistically different from the rest of the text.<sup>23</sup>

Examination of documentary reports allows one to detect the following additional features thought to be typical of a “wild man” (Dennis 1941: 430–1; Zingg 1940: 504–14; Benzaquén 2006: 58–9).<sup>24</sup>

- can produce animal sounds;
- is untidy in relieving his bladder and bowels;
- has strange eating habits – consumes raw meat or grass, refusing “normal” food, eating in an animal-like manner;
- is insensitive to cold and heat;
- does not wear clothes (at times may have some articles from previous contacts with people), refuses to dress or tears off clothes put on him upon capture;
- avoids people, shows no attachment to them;
- has inhibited or peculiar sexuality;
- possesses unusually acute senses – sharp vision, hypersensitive hearing or smell;
- can be angry and impatient;
- prefers the company of animals to humans, especially the kind of animals he was found with;
- suffers (and eventually dies) of illness(es) caused by the society’s efforts to “civilize” him.

## 5. The Soqotri narrative as a specimen of its kind: commonalities and differences

We will now enumerate the key elements of the narrative pattern described by Benzaquén (2006: 66–70) and examine our story against this structural background, paying attention to the typical “wild men” features and characteristic details.

### 1. Encounter/discovery

This element may coincide with the next element, namely capture, “but usually some time elapses between discovery and capture, filled by astonishment and confusion” (Benzaquén 2006: 66). The “feral man” may be spotted in the wilderness by an individual or group of people, but sometimes he or she suddenly appears among “civilized” people. The first one to find

<sup>22</sup> The last of these is thought to be not very realistic: Benzaquén (2006: 59) cites Malson, who calls it “probably a literary survival” and Tinland, who suggests that the unusual colour of the skin, due to poor hygiene and weather conditions, could be mistaken for hairiness. Zingg (1940: 487) disregards it “since few of the cases are reported as hairy”. Some of them, however, *are* reported as such, probably on account of the strong association with folklore and mythological characters.

<sup>23</sup> Note, for instance, the use of isomorphic syntactic structures (syntactic parallelism) used in lines 3 and 5, then in lines 24–25 of our text. A very similar formal organization is characteristic of the description of Enkidu in the Old Babylonian Gilgameš Epic (Gilg. P 87–9 = George 2003: 176–7).

<sup>24</sup> It is important to observe, at this point, that the pool of motifs and concepts pertaining to “feral man” has been often extended to entire peoples seen as “primitive”, thus contributing to folkloric images and common perceptions of “savage people” or “barbarians”. This trend proved very persistent and survived, in particular, in the early (and not so early) European narratives of the Other. An interesting instance of this transfer is provided by Dickason (1977: 19–22): early colonial accounts of Native Americans attribute to them some features otherwise characteristic of mythological “wild men” and, curiously, even more of them attempt to disprove this, particularly the hairiness – for example, by referring to traditional costumes made of fur and feathers. Bartra (1994: 7, fn. 6) notes that accounts of “hairy savages” were still created as late as the end of the seventeenth century.

the “feral man” may himself be a socially marginal person frequenting the areas which lie outside the realm of civilization such a hunter, a soldier or a native.

## 2. Capture/rescue

“Civilized” people decide to track down and capture the “feral man”. The act is often seen as a kind of rescue operation motivated by their concern for the situation of the “wild man” and his future. Usually the aim is to make him or her “normal” and introduce them into society. Ethically, the episode can be ambiguous, as the wish to rescue a human being often disguises mere curiosity about a wild, unusual creature, whose eventual fate is rarely considered beforehand.

## 3. Curiosity/concern/diagnosis

The story then usually moves to the impression the “wild man” makes upon common people and/or researchers (whether professional or self-proclaimed). The former typically have a very emotional reaction, whereas the latter aim at a kind of scientific account. Both groups of observers may compile lists of the distinctive features of the “wild man”: nakedness, muteness, strange habits. He is tested and examined in various ways, alongside initial attempts at socializing and “civilizing”.

## 4. Response/care/treatment

“Something is always done to and with the [feral] child” (Benzaquén 2006: 68). Authorities and organizations try to determine further treatment for the “wild man” and he might be placed in a teaching and/or socializing institution. Ways of treating the “wild man” vary widely and naturally depend on the historical and geographical setting of the story.

## 5. Knowledge production/controversy

Scientists and philosophers study the “wild man”, looking for an insight into human nature. Their involvement may interfere with the care and treatment procedures, but occasionally there is no direct contact between the two: research into the “wild man” may be done indirectly, via reports, sometimes years or even centuries after the event.

## 6. Disappointment/indifference

The “wild man” may escape or die shortly after the capture. The story may then involve a debate on whether the event was true or not. But if there is no quick, dramatic solution, he is forgotten by the public and left to live the rest of his life under human/institutional care. The researchers and philosophers are unable to get any valuable information from him, and all attempts to socialize him yield no results or a very modest one.

It turns out that our story exhibits almost every of the aforementioned plot elements, except for 4 and 5, since in our case the interaction was too brief to establish any long-term treatment for Ғаһрەر, and no researchers were present to conduct the experiments.

Lines 1–7 describe Ғаһрەر and his way of life **before his direct interaction with “civilized” people**, when he could only be seen, rarely, from a considerable distance (line 7). He roams with “wild goats”<sup>25</sup> high in the mountains. Though it is not explicitly stated that

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<sup>25</sup> The protagonist is actually named after those very goats he lived among. In the modern Soqotri usage, *ṭāḥrēr* is a “semi-wild goat” (CSOL I 685, II 618), i.e. one that used to be domestic, but became feral (Morris 2021: 169–70). The word is rendered as “gazelle” throughout Müller’s corpus (see LS 202 for the list of passages),

he was reared by animals, he demonstrates some diagnostic features of animal-nurtured children: keeps company with goats, walks their paths in the mountains, drinks with them at their watering places, avoids people. He is even said to be “grazing” (*yašēgaš*, line 5).<sup>26</sup> Ṭaḥrēr’s animal-like appearance and behaviour are further emphasized later in the story (lines 18–20 and 27). Some of the prototypical “wild man” features, such as nakedness (line 2) and unusual skin colour (line 6) are also mentioned.

**Lines 8–14** deal with his **first encounter** with “a strong man” (*ʿag lafi*) who was hunting “wild goats”. He thought Ṭaḥrēr to be a devil (*di-maḥrīmʿank*, line 10) – quite a typical detail for the “feral man” stories (Benzaquén 2006: 67). The hunter tries to make contact with the strange creature, but gets no answer so that another classical feature of the “wild man” – his dumbness – becomes apparent (line 12).

**Lines 15–22** deal with the **capture**. The people of the village decide they should catch Ṭaḥrēr. The background of this decision is not explained, as the story is more concerned with the technical details of setting the trap and ambush,<sup>27</sup> as well as with Ṭaḥrēr’s animal-like behaviour: he is captured along with wild goats on an animal path, acts like one of them during the capture and makes sounds similar to those of a wild goat (line 21).

**Lines 23–29** describe the villagers’ **reaction** to the appearance of the “wild man” in their midst and their attempts to **interact** with him. They are curious: women and children come to see him upon his arrival. They attempt to communicate with him and “civilize” him, but all in vain. This segment catalogues people’s actions and Ṭaḥrēr’s very passive – yet always negative – reactions: they offer him “human” food, but he refuses it; they try to talk to him, but he doesn’t understand; they wash him and cut his hair, only to find him later afflicted by an unknown and fatal disease. As surmised by the narrator, this could be caused by the loss of some of his genuine features: the characteristic goat smell and the rough skin (line 27) disappeared when he was washed and touched by people.

**Lines 30–36** describe Ṭaḥrēr’s **death**: as with many other “wild men”, he could not survive after being torn from his natural environment. He was unable to return to his old life

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apparently because Soqotrans – up to now – use *ǧazāl* as the Arabic equivalent of *ṭaḥrēr* in their communication with outsiders. In literary contexts, it seems at least sometimes to denote a species of wild ungulates (presumably, “mountain goats”) distinct from domestic goats. However, no reliable report on the existence of true wild goats on the island has ever been published. “Gazelles” are sometimes mentioned in expedition reports; the first of those seems to be Heuglin’s account (1861: 150: “Schakale and Gazellen sollen sich im inneren aufhalten”). None of them could be confirmed, see Forbes and Ogilvie-Grant 1903: 5 and Wranik 2003: 92. In another expedition report, Boxhall (1966: 217) states that he had seen two types of “gazelles” – “reddish-brown” and “greyish” ones – but “gazelle are now nearly extinct in Socotra”. According to the papers of the Socotra Conservation and Development Program, prepared by an international team (Scholte et al. 2008: 3), domestic goats were introduced on the island at least 2,000 years ago, becoming an integral part of the local ecosystem since then. The so-called “wild goats” must be their descendants, although “it remains a matter of speculation as to whether the introduction of these goats coincided with the extinction of a native herbivore”. At any rate, the high functional load of the “wild goat” in Soqotri folklore and traditional thought is evidently due to the well-known lack of major quadrupeds on the island. Exactly the same is the case of the “wild cats” (in all probability, also feral descendants of domestic ones) which, although indeed harmful to livestock, are heavily demonized in the traditional narratives (cf. Morris 2021: 85) as well as the dragon-like snake *bekele* (Naumkin and Porkhomovsky 2000). Last but not least, the colourful accounts of pursuing and catching feral donkeys, and especially feral billy goats, often acquire the dimensions of a real taumachy (see, for instance, Naumkin and Porkhomovsky 1998).

<sup>26</sup> See CSOL II 276 for the use of the verb.

<sup>27</sup> Quite a similar scene of the traditional goat hunt is found in Wellsted’s 1835 expedition report: “When the shepherds are desirous of catching them, they seek the track by which they pass up and down the mountains; across this they spread a net; and one of their number then ascends to the summit of the mountain by another route, and makes his appearance before the animal, who no sooner discovers him than he darts down the path, and becomes entangled in the net, when he is quickly secured by those stationed there for the purpose” (Wellsted 1835: 202).

or to remain in the community. The villagers set him free, but it is too late. After his death, they seem to regret their incautious actions and organize a kind of funeral – undoubtedly one last, post mortem act of “civilizing”.

**Lines 37–38** represent a legend-like **conclusion**, probably of an etiological nature: Țăhrer’s story explains why the wild goats ceased to live in the area. At the same time, the way this concluding part is incorporated into the narrative seems to make sense on the level of the text’s integrity. Throughout the story, wild goats are strongly associated with Țăhrer: they accompany him during his everyday activities such as roaming and visiting watering-places (lines 3, 5); side by side with him, they experience the fear and confusion of the capture (in line 21 Țăhrer’s stressful reaction to the violence of the hunters is directly compared to that of a wild goat) – after all, they are the animals after which he is named. The wild goats are Țăhrer’s lifetime companions and indicative of his own condition, so their presence in the story is closely connected to and depends on Țăhrer’s whereabouts.<sup>28</sup> It is no wonder that, in the end, the goats share Țăhrer’s fate by dying out upon his death. Their sudden extinction comes as a consequence of Țăhrer’s end, reinforcing the association of Țăhrer with wild goats<sup>29</sup> and thus shoring up the story’s internal coherence. The skilful arrangement of the etiological coda aptly meets this challenge.

## 6. In lieu of a conclusion: Țăhrer and Enkidu

The Babylonian Enkidu is the oldest “wild man” attested in a written source. He has often been seen as a precursor of later European heroes of this type (Bartra 1994: 55–6; Wells 1975). As noted by Mobley (1997: 220–3), Enkidu and his story share numerous commonalities with the medieval pattern of the “wild man” story outlined in Bernheimer (1952). In his wild state, Enkidu is quite close to the “feral man” type:<sup>30</sup> nurtured by gazelles,<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Professor Nekludov has drawn our attention to Țăhrer’s similarity to the so-called “wild shepherd” – a mythological figure attested primarily in the German folklore (Mannhardt 1877: 96–8). The “wild shepherd” is a benevolent being responsible for the fertility of a community’s flocks: he gathers domestic animals at a certain stone and then drives them to an unknown location; in the evening they are found near the same stone from which they were taken, their udders full of milk. There are several reports of the villagers’ attempts to catch him. According to one account (Mannhardt 1877: 98), the “wild shepherd” ceases to patronize people after they make him drunk and catch him, then try to make him reveal his secret. Typologically, the “wild shepherd” is close to the “master of animals” (Röhrich 1990; Bäcker 2014), primarily relevant for hunting societies, where he is thought to maintain a balanced communication between animals and hunters. The “master of animals” does not let hunters kill too many animals, but, at the same time, a hunter’s luck depends on his benevolence. The conceptual background behind the proximity of the two types is rather straightforward: “die Jagdtiere des Menschen sind die Haustiere des Herren der Tiere; er ist der “Hirte” und “Hüter” des Wildes” (Röhrich 1990: 866). While nothing is said in our text about Țăhrer’s shepherding or protective function, it is possible that a certain belief of this kind is actually in the background of the Soqotri story. The very name of the protagonist suggests that he is, in a way, “The Wild Goat”, that is, he represents the whole kind without being, biologically, a wild goat himself. This is, indeed, how “masters of animals” are usually imagined: they are sometimes anthropomorphic and sometimes zoomorphic, and in the latter case they are often conceived as much larger representatives of the kind of animals they patronize (Röhrich 1990: 867; Bäcker 2014: 804). As will be shown below, an even more precise correspondence to the “master of animals” type may be detected in Enkidu’s image.

<sup>29</sup> We tend to agree with the anonymous reviewer who suggests that the connection between creatures related by name works as a kind of “sympathetic magic”: the death of the protagonist brings about the death of his eponymous animals. This “sympathetic” connection may be related to the “master of animals” motif; see the previous footnote.

<sup>30</sup> See Tigay 2002: 206 and George 2003: 450 (“the earliest of the well-known corpus of folk tales of human babies raised by wild animals”).

<sup>31</sup> Quite literally in Gilg. P 85, 188 (George 2003: 176–7, 178–9) and more or less figuratively in SB Gilg. VIII 3–6 (George 2003: 650–1) and Gilg. P 18–19 (George 2003: 172–3).

naked and hairy, he lives in the wilderness with the animals and behaves like one of them. His later story exhibits many motifs shared by medieval “wild man” legends: he is civilized by a woman after sexual intercourse and becomes a great warrior and a faithful companion of King Gilgameš.

Enkidu’s image as a “wild man” may have developed independently in the Mesopotamian oral tradition, to be later incorporated into the broader literary framework of the epic. The Sumerian legends about Gilgameš do not portray Enkidu as a “wild man”: here he is merely a junior companion of the protagonist or his servant (George 2003: 140–4). And, conversely, the image of Enkidu as a “wild man” is present in at least one Akkadian text other than the Gilgameš Epic (Westenholz and Westenholz 2000: 438, n. 7), namely, in the *mannam lušpur* (“Whom should I send...”) formula of the Old Babylonian lullaby-incantation OECT 11, 2. In this formula, which is a widespread element in a variety of Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian incantations, the narrator addresses one or several mythological figure(s) with a plea to help him or her to achieve the goal of the incantation. Here the formula is addressed to Enkidu, who is expected to calm the baby “as he calmed the gazelle and her fawn in the steppe” (Farber 1990: 303, 309).<sup>32</sup> Enkidu is not only associated with gazelles and the wilderness, but can also be seen as their patron.

The Soqotri story of Țahrer and the Enkidu narratives in the Gilgameš Epic are both prominent representatives of the “wild men” story type, which makes them suitable for comparison in terms of plots, motifs and ideas. The number of parallels between the two stories is remarkable, although it is impossible to decide whether there could be any direct influence.

Both characters live among wild ungulates (“gazelles”) and roam with them in the wilderness, eating grass and drinking from their watering places. A structural similarity between lines 3 and 5 of our text and Enkidu’s description in the Hittite Gilgameš Epic I ii 9–12 (Tigay 2002: 199)<sup>33</sup> is noteworthy:

Wherever the wild beasts to graze  
Go, Enkidu goes with them,  
And wherever they go to water,  
Enkidu goes with them.

3. He did not walk around or go down to the plains, but walked  
and dwelt only in the mountain peaks, where the wild goats  
roamed - he walked with them.

5. He would go down to the watering-place where the goats went down -  
near the water reservoirs that were there in the mountain  
peaks, and he did not show up much or graze around.

Enkidu is explicitly seen to be responsible for rescuing wild animals from traps (SB Gilg. I 130–3, 157–60 = George 2003: 546–7) – a prominent trait of the “master of animals”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For deer and gazelles as prototypical sleeping creatures, see Kogan (2004). Farber (1989: 38) states that “das Motiv von Enkidu und den Gazellen der ‘Steppe’ ist schon in der sumerischen Literatur wohlbekannt”, but contrast George (2003: 142): “There is no sign in any of the Sumerian poems of the notion of Enkidu as a wild man <...> This story, which has parallels in the folklore of other cultures, has the appearance of having been taken over from some other source.”

<sup>33</sup> Descriptions of humans eating grass and drinking water like animals are found elsewhere in Mesopotamian literature, either about primordial people (the Sumerian “Dispute between Ewe and Grain”) or those suffering calamities and doomed to wander in the mountains or steppe (George 2003: 450; Tigay 2002: 203–04).

<sup>34</sup> The delicate issue of whether Enkidu is primarily associated with wild or domestic animals acquires some importance in this context. Fleming and Milstein (2010: 19–31) argue that Enkidu’s image in the Yale tablet differs from what we learn from the Pennsylvania tablet (both Old Babylonian): while in the latter Enkidu is presented as a true “wild man” born in the wilderness and sharing the company of wild animals (*nammaštū*), in the former he is instead depicted as a herdsman, well-trained in dwelling in the open country and protecting the livestock (*bīlu*) from different kinds of dangers. The standard version of the Epic later adapted the image known from the Pennsylvania tablet. It is difficult to say whether such a strict separation is truly justified. The meaning of *bīlu* remains obscure. Fleming and Milstein (2010: 23–7) argue that the term originally

(for ʾAḥḥer's background as a "master of animals" see fn. 28). However, Enkidu is no longer a mighty supernatural being of a higher rank, but comes closer to the "wild man" proper. This is the reason why, instead of trying to placate him, the hunter decides to devise a plot and actually succeeds.

At the same time, ʾAḥḥer is explicitly called "naked" (*mākraš*) in line 2, but nothing is said about his hairiness. Moreover, some details of the plot suggest that his body was not hairy: the villagers only cut the hair on his head<sup>35</sup> (line 28) and his skin is described as rough (line 27) and unusually coloured (line 6), but not hairy. ʾAḥḥer is thus perceived more as a human being than a fantastic creature. Enkidu's "all body" is "matted with hair" (SB I 105 = George 2003: 544–5) and he is said to be "clad in a garment like Šakkan's" (SB I 109 = George 2003: 544–5). This is usually interpreted as a reference to his nakedness or hairiness, or both (George 2003: 790, Lambert 2013: 519).<sup>36</sup>

Both characters are torn away from their normal life in the wild after an encounter with a hunter. It is remarkable that "the strong man" in the Soqotri story is unnamed, like the hunter in the Gilgameš Epic.<sup>37</sup> The hunter then takes counsel with his fellow villagers (ʾAḥḥer) or with his father and the king (Enkidu), before a plan to lure the "wild man" into a trap is devised.

The initial contact between the "wild man" and the civilized people is quite different in the two cases: while ʾAḥḥer is hunted and trapped like a wild animal, Enkidu is lured into abandoning his wild nature by Šamḥat who first seduces him<sup>38</sup> and then convinces him to go to the city, where she introduces him to a civilized lifestyle. No direct violence is involved, and the process of introducing him into society is gradual: at first Enkidu interacts only with the harlot, then she brings him into a shepherds' camp and after that to the city; at each stage he learns new things. Conversely, ʾAḥḥer is caught by surprise and physically taken into captivity, where he is forcibly washed and his hair is cut. In contrast to Enkidu, who actively interacts with Šamḥat (even if he has no idea about her ultimate intentions), ʾAḥḥer is presented as extremely passive.<sup>39</sup> He is static both physically and mentally and does not undergo any transformation, in contrast to Enkidu's dynamic involvement and curiosity. If Enkidu's predominant emotion – from his first meeting

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designates domestic animals as one of the proofs of Enkidu's original status as a herdsman. Some authors prefer not to narrow the meaning in such a way, assuming that it has no connotations of tamedness or wildness: see, for instance, George's neutral translation "herd" in Gilg. Y 107 (George 2003: 199). See, however, EDA I 84–85: the word is probably derived from \*b-ʿl "to own, to possess", suggesting the original meaning "domestic animals, cattle"; only later does it become applicable to both domestic and wild animals.

<sup>35</sup> Professor Nekludov informs us that shaving and washing the captive "wild man" is a relatively rare element of the plot. It is all the more significant, therefore, that in the Pennsylvania tablet Enkidu's hairy body is treated by a barber (Gilg. P 106 = George 2003: 176–7).

<sup>36</sup> Tigay mentions an alternative interpretation, presuming that "Šakkan's garment" is a kind of special clothing, but recognizes that in Gilg. P 110 (= George 2003: 176–177) Enkidu, while learning the ways of civilized people, puts on a garment (*ilbaš libšam*), which implies his previous nakedness (Tigay 2002: 200, fn. 4 and 5).

<sup>37</sup> We are grateful to the anonymous reviewer of BSOAS for this observation.

<sup>38</sup> It is remarkable that the matter of sex is given as much significance in the story of Enkidu's civilizing as it is completely irrelevant for the story of ʾAḥḥer – we simply know nothing about his sexuality. As for Enkidu, the intercourse with Šamḥat is the starting point of his acquaintance with the human world and inspires him to further explore the civilized way of living. The sexual contact is described as extraordinarily passionate (Gilg. P 46–49 = George 2003: 174–5, SB Gilg. I 194 = George 2003: 548–9), which seems to correlate with the fact that unusual sexual behaviour (notably, high sexual desire) is one of the universal characteristics of "wild men" (Bartra 1994: 100–06).

<sup>39</sup> Note that the whole fragment dedicated to ʾAḥḥer's interaction with the villagers (especially lines 22–31) abounds in passive forms, in all probability intended to produce a kind of literary effect highlighting ʾAḥḥer's lack of agency.



with Šamḥat until his confrontation with Gilgameš in Uruk – can be described as genuine interest, in Ṭaḥrer’s case it is nothing but shock, fear, dismay and insecurity.<sup>40</sup>

This distinction can be demonstrated by a comparison of the scene in both stories, corresponding to the third stage in Benzaquén’s narrative pattern. When brought among civilized people, the “wild man” is given human food and expected to learn how to eat and drink as a human, then undergoes grooming procedures.

The initial events are structurally quite similar in the Epic (Gilg. P 87–93 = George 2003: 176–7) and the Soqotri text (lines 24–5) as they involve the people’s action – the character’s perplexed reaction to it – an explanatory remark:<sup>41</sup>

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| They put bread before him, he watched intently, gazing and staring.<br>Enkidu did not know how to eat bread, how to drink ale he had never been shown. | 24. They offered him some food, but he did not eat.  |
|  | 25. They tried talking to him, but he did not speak because he was dumb and did not understand anything. |

The background of this startled response is different, however. While Enkidu just awaits instructions, Ṭaḥrer remains shocked and unresponsive throughout the villagers’ manipulations.

After eating and drinking, Enkidu feels merry – either because of his introduction to human practices or as a result of plentiful drinking<sup>42</sup> or both. Either way, he is now at ease and comfortable. When treated by the barber, he actively participates in the process, then anoints himself and “becomes a man” (*awiliš iwe*, Gilg. P 109 = George 2003: 176–7).<sup>43</sup> Having put on some clothes, he acquires a new occupation: chasing wild beasts and protecting the herds. This is the point at which Enkidu’s character takes on the features of an epic hero (as opposed to the “wild man”<sup>44</sup>). Conversely, Ṭaḥrer refuses to eat and interact with people and, right up to his tragic end, continues to behave like a wild animal in captivity (lines 24–29).

The distinction between the outcomes of the two stories (socialization versus death) is complicated to some extent if the broader perspective of the Enkidu narrative is taken into consideration. Contact with Šamḥat puts an end to Enkidu’s wild state, but this transition to a “civilized state” has its price: the wild animals grow estranged from their former companion (SB Gilg. I 195–200 = George 2003: 548–51), who has lost the abilities he previously possessed as a part of the natural world. After Enkidu meets Gilgameš in Uruk, the narration focuses on their joint heroic adventures and the theme of Enkidu’s wild background is set aside – only to re-emerge bitterly in the description of Enkidu’s

<sup>40</sup> The non-consensual nature of Ṭaḥrer’s contact with the villagers is highlighted by several mentions of his reactions to what is done to him: in lines 18–20 he is unable to bear people’s yelling, while in line 21 he is “confused and uncomfortable” in captivity. Quite remarkable is his “panting like a goat” in line 21, obviously a sign of his bad physical and/or psychological condition. When our informants explained the meaning of the verb *ataḥ*, they actually imitated the sound of panting. The only other attestation of the verb in our corpus is CSOL II 348 (annotation to Text 29:23), again dealing with a critically ill goat.

<sup>41</sup> The last element is absent in line 24 of the Soqotri text.

<sup>42</sup> “This first stage of his conversion into a civilized being ends with him drunk on beer, laughing and singing” (George 2003: 167).

<sup>43</sup> See the discussion in Zgoll 2012: 141–4 – Enkidu becomes fully human only at this point, after eating human food, washing and anointing his body and getting dressed. The words *awiliš iwe* summarize the meaning of this chain of actions, which can be seen as a kind of rite of passage. The sexual contact with Šamḥat alone was not enough to bring Enkidu into the human realm.

<sup>44</sup> “His first act on becoming a man is to take his weapon ‘to chase the lions’; this is his entrance as a hero” (Wolff 1969: 365).

death in Tablet VII of the standard version of the Epic.<sup>45</sup> When death approaches, Enkidu curses the hunter and the harlot (SB Gilg. VII 94–99 and 102–31 = George 2003: 638–41),<sup>46</sup> that is, those who were responsible for his socialization and whose disruption of his uncivilized existence “was the first link in the chain of events that led inexorably to his doom” (George 2003: 479). Not unlike ʿAḥḥer, Enkidu’s identity as a “wild man” is inevitably lost through close contact with people. But while Enkidu, for the most part, manages the transition, for ʿAḥḥer the termination of his wild *modus vivendi* signals the termination of his life.

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#### Abbreviations

- Behnstedt Behnstedt, P. 1992–2006. *Die nordjemenitischen Dialekte (Glossar)*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag.
- BDB Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs and Wilhelm Gesenius. 2010. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic; Coded with the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. [Nachdr.], Reprinted from the 1906 edn. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- CSOL Naumkin, Vitaly, Leonid Kogan, Dmitry Cherkashin, Maria Bulakh, Ekaterina Vizirova, ʿIsa Gumʿan al-Daʿrhi, Ahmad ʿIsa al-Daʿrhi and Maysoun Mohammed al-Daʿrhi. 2014–. *Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature*. Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics. Leiden: Brill.
- EDA Kogan, L. and M. Krebernik (eds). 2020–. *Etymological Dictionary of Akkadian*. Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter.

<sup>45</sup> In terms of setting and style, the episodes of ʿAḥḥer’s and Enkidu’s deaths are dramatically divergent. Enkidu’s end is a solemn death of a glorious hero doomed by the gods. No less than two tablets of the standard version of the Epic (VII and VIII) woefully anticipate and grieve over Enkidu’s death, including a description of his destiny in the netherworld, the mourning rites and commemoration of his fate. ʿAḥḥer humbly dies on his own, unnoticed and unmourned, and, as a character, he is rather “off screen” in the final segments of the story: we see his death only through the eyes of the villagers.

<sup>46</sup> The closing part of the curse (lines 130–1), focused on Enkidu’s painful deprivations provoked by becoming civilized, is formulated as an overt reproach: through her intervention, Šamḥat had “belittled” (*šumṭū*) the previously “pure” (*ellu*) man and is to be blamed for his eventually tragic fate.

- LS Leslau, Wolf. 1938. *Lexique Soqotri (Sudarabique moderne) avec comparaisons et explications étymologiques*. Collection linguistique publiée par la Société de linguistique de Paris 41. Paris: C. Klincksieck.
- ML Johnstone, T.M. 1987. *Mehri Lexicon*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- OECT Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts. 1923–1984. London: Oxford University Press.

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