Faced as they were with a superabundance of material, the compilers' hardest task must have been to decide which words to include and which to exclude. I have had the opportunity of subjecting the result to a gruelling test while working on a number of extremely difficult folk texts. In this area, there will apparently always be a need to guess at the meaning of some words or idioms from the context in which they occur—such as yikrim for "to pay out [a rope]," tansha for some kind of a seat, probably a throne, or mäshi ẓala gher bunkuh for "acting uncharacteristically". But I have found in this dictionary words recorded nowhere else yet that would have defied guesswork, such as ʿawīl for "a rope by which a lateen sail is furled against the mast". Above all, one must be grateful to the compilers for the trouble they have taken over set phrases all too often neglected in Arabic dictionaries. A minor inconsistency in this respect, however, is that some have been given a literal translation as well as an idiomatic one, but some have not—see, for example, the entry under mayya "water".

The publisher too deserves to be complimented for producing a volume not only remarkably free of typographical errors, but also very legible and indeed elegantly set out.

Arabic colloquials are no longer needed only for the practical purposes of dealing with the Arab man-in-the-street. Eminent writers are using them at least in the dialogue of plays, novels, and short stories, and they are of course the essential key to the vast corpus of folk literature, too long neglected by scholars. It is time their study was made not a marginal, but an integral, part of Arabic programmes.

Dr. Martin Hinds and Dr. El-Said Badawi have provided us with a major tool for the purpose.

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Pierre Cachia


This publication is the latest to appear about the *Sirat Bani Hilāl* which almost alone survives as the orally recited "folk epic" in the Arabic-speaking world today. It is hardly surprising that this *sira*, in particular, has latterly received the greatest attention. Though once one of a group, it has been comparatively neglected until recent times. Before the turn of the century the *Sirat Antar* was the focus of interest, nor were Rudi Paret, nor Henri Grégoire, especially concerned with the Hilālis and their westward *rahil* into Africa (the *taghriba*). It is now the sole representative of "folk epic" (if indeed it be an epic) that is sung by oral epic poets. It is by far the most illustrative of their art and it appears to have been the aptest amongst the *siras* for the expression of the cultural, political and popular ambitions and ideals of the Arab public, irrespective of frontier and régime.

The recent studies of it may be broadly divided into those written in French and those in English, the latter mainly by Americans. Amongst the former one might mention A. Ayoub and M. Galley, *Images de Djazya* (Paris, CNRS, 1977).
Attention might be drawn in particular to the study by Ayoub on manuscripts which are concerned with both the Sirat Bani Hilal and Qissat al-Zir Salim, to which it is related, in *Revue d’Histoire Maghrebine*, Nos 33-34, June 1984, Tunis, pages 19-40. *La Geste hilaliennne: Version de Bou Thadi*, by Lucienne Saada, Editions Gallimard, 1985, is one of the latest. These publications are centered on North Africa, Tunisia in particular, and they contain long extracts in text (or in translation), which, in the case of *Histoire des Beni Hilal* (Paris, Armand and Colin, 1983), is entirely printed in Arabic script. The *milieu* is essentially Maghribi and much stress is laid upon the historical motivation; the eventual integration of the Arab bedouin intruders into the settled, markedly Berber, communities which had been indigenous to North Africa for many centuries. The sources for these studies were oral epic poets: a Nefzaoua text left by the Orientalist, Gilbert Boris, a text attributed to Mahmud of Techine derived from a recording (in both verse and prose), a text transcribed by Abderrahman Ayoub from the râwil, Ali Nwigis, and, lastly, “The Bou Thadi version” which was collected by Lucienne Saada from Mohammed Hsini in the region of Sfax. These Maghríbi versions have much in common. The works above pay special attention to Jâziya, the tragic heroine of the sîra and the “texts” are discussed in a part-historical, part-sociological context. An index of themes, an extensive section of notes and a comprehensive general index are to be found in these studies. Comparatively little is said about the performance of the sîra or about the instruments that are played when it is performed.

The second group of studies, to which this original work, here reviewed, must now be added, are centred in Egypt (though not exclusively so, as Dr. Cathyren Anita Baker’s thesis is based on southern Tunisian material) and they reflect the artistry and individuality of the shâcir (the studies of G. Ganova in particular). The bard will be familiar to some as a character who is graphically portrayed by Taha Husain in the opening pages of *al-Ayyâm*.

The most comprehensive published study of the Egyptian sîra in a Western language is Professor Bridget Connelly’s *Arab Folk Epic and Identity*, University of California Press, 1986, although she roam widely in her sources, from Borno to Tunis and from Southern Arabia to Northern Syria. Her approach owes much to the counsel of A. Abnoudy, himself a shâcir, and the author of *La Geste Hilalienne* (French translation by T. Guiga, Cairo, 1978). Like Professor Connelly, Dr. Slyomovics acknowledges the debt which she owes to ‘Abd al-Hamîd Hawwâs who is the director of the Folk Literature Unit, Folklore Institute in Cairo, as well as to other supervisors of her doctorate, which has now been published here. A large proportion of its content (pages 74-268) consists of taped text. It is transliterated according to the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* for the written and printed material in literary Arabic, and for the Şafîîi Arabic, a system which is clearly set out and explained on pages 269-73. The text contains 1347 verses, each of which is translated, occasionally rather freely, into English. The notation is sparse and is largely confined to the explanation of certain words and about the manner of the performance which she has recorded. The spacing of the text is not ideal, the translation following the verse, not on a facing page.

The artist who has inspired this study is “the merchant of art”, the Hilâlî “epic poet” ‘Awâdallâh ‘Abd al-Jâlîl, and his fellow artists, Jamâl Zaki al-Dîn al-Hâjîjî and Najîq al-Hâjis, who appear in several photographs taken in Luxor and Aswan, with or without a musical instrument. Unlike the North African