Selim and His Shadow

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This is the latest children’s e-book in Mehri produced for the Leverhulme Trust-funded Documentation and Ethnolinguistic Analysis of Modern South Arabian project (2013–2016), and the second story in the Selim and the Natural World series. For the full multimodal e-book, voiceover is by Abdullah al-Mahri.¹ The story follows Selim taking a goat skin bag from his mother to his grandmother. Along the way he sleeps beneath an Acacia tortilis tree, hanging the goat skin bag on a branch. He forgets the bag, and later loses his shadow. He arrives at his grandmother’s cave home with no goat skin bag and no shadow. His grandmother sends him back to look for the bag and tells him to look for his shadow on the way. The story draws on the significance of shade and shadow in Mehri culture: to provide for someone you should assure shade from the sun and shelter from the cold and the rain. When people are very forgetful the importance of shadow returns in the saying: ɣəbnayh əbahlab ‘[he is so forgetful] he forgets his shadow’.

¹ A multimedia PowerPoint of this story will be available at the Mehri language archive on ELAR.
Selim woke in the cave home with his mother.

His mother said: I want you to take this goat skin bag to your grandmother, and make sure you don’t forget it again!
Selim walked and walked and walked until he got tired.
He found an Acacia tree with lots of shade and said: I’m really tired, I’m going to sleep for a bit.

He hung the goat skin bag on a branch of the Acacia tree and said: I’m not going to forget my grandmother’s bag.
He fell asleep.

He woke up and set off, leaving the bag where it was.
He walked and walked and walked until he found a pool, and said: I want to play a bit here.

He jumped here and there until his shadow got tired of jumping.
His shadow stayed on the other side of the pool and Selim carried on.

He walked and walked and walked until he arrived at his grandmother’s cave home.
His grandmother said: Selim, what are you doing here?
He said: Mother told me to bring you this goat skin bag that I have.

His grandmother said: Selim, have you gone and forgotten the goat skin bag again?
He said: Oh no! I must have left in under the Acacia tree.

She said: Bring the goat skin bag, and while you are at it, look for your shadow!
Selim set off back the way he had come.
He found the goat skin bag in the Acacia tree and looked for his shadow.

He walked by a hill and saw a shadow. He said: That is my shadow!
The shadow said: No this isn’t your shadow! Look up!
He looked up and saw a fox.

Then he saw another shadow. He said: That is my shadow!
The shadow said: No, this isn’t your shadow! Look up!
Selim looked up, and saw a goat.

Then he saw another shadow. He said: That is my shadow!

The shadow said: No, this isn’t your shadow! Look up!
Selim looked up, and saw an Arabian leopard.

Then he saw another shadow.
Selim looked up, and didn’t see anything.

He said: That is my shadow! I never thought I would find you!
The shadow said: Yes indeed, this is your shadow.
Selim went back to his grandmother’s cave home together with himself, his shadow and the goat skin bag.