

Ulrich Marzolph, Göttingen

## The Persian *Nights*

### *Links Between the Arabian Nights and Iranian Culture*

The *Thousand and One Nights* – or, as I prefer to call them in the following for purely practical reasons: the *Arabian Nights* – as we perceive them three hundred years after Antoine Galland’s epochal French adaptation bear a distinct Arabic imprint. Meanwhile, the commonly accepted model for their textual history acknowledges various stages in the conceptualization and effective formation of both the collection’s characteristic frame story and the embedded repertoire. The vast majority of tales in the preserved manuscripts of the *Nights* has been integrated into the collection during two periods of Arabic influence, the so-called Baghdad and Cairo periods (Gerhardt 1963: 115–374). These “Arabic” stages are preceded by an Iranian version, probably dating to pre-Islamic times, which in its turn profits from both structural devices and narrative contents originating from Indian tradition. Considering the eminent position that Iran and Iranian culture hold in the early stages of the textual history of the *Arabian Nights*, surprisingly few details are known concerning the collection’s relation to and its actual position within the Iranian cultural context. In the following, I will discuss links between the *Arabian Nights* and Iranian culture on several levels. In surveying these links, I will treat five major areas: (1) the Iranian prototype of the *Nights*; (2) tales of alleged Persian origin; (3) Persian characters within the tales; (4) Persian translations of the *Arabian Nights*; and (5) the position of the *Arabian Nights* in modern Iran.

### *The Iranian Prototype Hazār afsān*

The title of the commonly acknowledged Iranian prototype of the *Arabian Nights* is given in the tenth century by both the Arab historian al-Mas‘ūdī and the Baghdad bookseller Ibn al-Nadīm in a more or less identical spelling as *Hazār afsān[e]* (Abbot 1949: 150f.). While this title is usually understood to mean “A Thousand Stories,” the Persian term *afsān[e]* is semantically close to terms like *afsun* and *fosun*, both denoting a magic spell or incantation, and, hence, an activity linked in some way or other to magic. Hence, Persian *afsān[e]* may be understood as not simply a narrative or story, but more specifically a “tale of magic.” The Persian title was translated into Arabic as *Alf khurāfa*, the Arabic term *khurāfa* denoting a genre of fantastic and unbelievable narratives. The

eponym of the literary term is *Khurāfa*, said to have been a man of the Arabian tribe of Banū ‘Udhra who was carried off by demons and who later described his experience. His tale is recorded on the authority of the Prophet Muhammad who himself vouched for the existence of the character and the authenticity of his statements (Drory 1994). *Alfkhurāfa* was not, however, necessarily the title of the Arabic translations of *Hazār afsān[e]*, since al-Mas‘ūdī further specified that those were usually known as *Alf laylah* (A Thousand Nights). Ibn an-Nadīm mentions that the Arabic version of the book continues through a thousand nights and contains less than 200 stories. At the same time, the content of the collection in any of its early versions, whether Persian or Arabic, is unknown. The oldest preserved Arabic manuscript dates from the fifteenth century and is the first document to inform about the content of the medieval *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (Grotzfeld 1996–97).

Ibn al-Nadīm’s summary of the opening passages of the frame story is short. While he mentions the king’s ritual behavior of marrying and killing a woman night after night, he neither states a reason nor elaborates on the previous events, such as the two kings witnessing the faithlessness of their wives, or their being violated by the tricky woman kept in a box by a demon (Horálek 1987). Either Ibn al-Nadīm had not bothered to actually read the introductory passages – given his judgemental verdict on the *Nights* as a “worthless book of silly tales” (Abbott 1949: 151) this appears to be quite probable – or whatever he had seen did not correspond to the refined and structured frame story known today. Moreover, Ibn al-Nadīm claims to have seen the book “in its entirety several times,” thus indicating that complete copies containing the conclusion of the frame story were available in his day, even though they might have been rare. At the same time less than a dozen manuscripts that can reliably be related to the period predating Antoine Galland’s French translation (1704–12) have been preserved. These manuscripts appear to indicate that the collection in its historical development was regarded as an open-ended concept with the potential to integrate an undefined number of tales, not necessarily comprising either a thousand nights or a thousand tales, and maybe not even aiming or requiring to close the frame opened at the beginning (Marzolph 1998).

As for the authorship of the Persian *Hazār afsān*, Ibn an-Nadīm reports the opinion that the book was composed for (or by?) Homā’i, the daughter of King Bahman; al-Mas‘ūdī, according to whom a certain Humāya was the daughter of Bahman, the son of Isfandiyār and Shahrazād, regards Humāya as the sister of the Achaemenid emperor Darius who reigned before him; this information is corroborated by various other Arabic historians (Pellat 1985). While the earliest preserved document of the *Arabian Nights*, an Arabic fragment dated 266/879 (Abbott 1949), testifies to the popularity of the collection in the Arab world in the first half of the ninth century, most conjectures as to its early history remain speculative. Both al-Mas‘ūdī and Ibn al-Nadīm were inclined to attribute a Persian or Indian origin to fictional narrative in general, and modern scholarship agrees on an Indian origin for the frame story or at least certain elements in it (Cosquin 1909). The Persian names of the main characters in the frame story of the Arabic

version – Shahrazād, Shahriyār, Dināzād, or similar forms – are taken to indicate an early familiarity with the Persian prototype, most probably dating back to pre-Islamic times. The Persian text might then have been translated into Arabic as early as the eighth century. A number of intriguing similarities between the frame story of the *Arabian Nights* and the historical events narrated in the biblical book of Esther even led Dutch scholar Michael J. de Goeje (1886) to presume a Jewish (or Judaeo-Persian) author as the compiler of the original version of the *Nights*. De Goeje's thesis has been refuted in great detail by Émmanuel Cosquin (1909).

Various reasons have been suggested for the change of the original number of a thousand (tales) into a thousand and one (nights) (see Barth 1984). Most prominently, German scholar Enno Littmann (1953: 664) has supported the hypothesis that the latter number gained its superior position because of the prominence of the Turkish alliteration *bin bir*, meaning “a thousand and one.” Scholars of Persian literature tend to refute this opinion, quoting as their argument a number of instances from as early as the twelfth century, in which the number 1001 appears in Persian prose and poetry (as *hezār-o yek*) to denote an undefined and indefinite amount. The mystical poet Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (died 1201) in his biographical work on famous mystics quotes Hakīm Tirmidhī (died ca. 910) as saying that he saw God in his dreams a thousand and one times (Meier [no date]; Ritter 2003: 461). In his poetry, ‘Aṭṭār himself used the phrase “a thousand and one persons must be set in order ere thou canst properly put a morsel of food into thy mouth” (Boyle 1976: 46). The poet Neẓāmī (died 1209) even chose his pen-name deliberately so as to allude to the thousand and one secrets hidden in his tales (Barry 2000: 87f.), as the numerical value of its letters add to the amount of 1001 (n=50, z=900, ā=1, m=40, i=10). Though these instances indicate a strong position of the number 1001 in medieval Persian culture, it remains to be studied whether or not the Persian usage might have influenced the collection's general denomination in Arabic.

While it is possible to reconstruct the date of the first Arabic translation of the Persian *Hazār afsān[e]*, it is not altogether clear until what time the Persian book survived. Munjīk of Tirmidh, a highly literate poet of the tenth century, is quoted as having “read heroic tales and listened to their narration from written sources: ‘Many versions of the tales of the Seven Trials, and the Brass Fortress did I read myself, and heard recited [to me] from the book [called] *Hazār afsān*.’” (Omid-salar 1999: 329). Similar evidence is said to abound in the verse of the poet Farrokhi who lived in the early eleventh century (ibid.). And still Neẓāmī in a passage of his romance *Khosrou and Shirin* alluded to the collection under its ancient Persian name of *Hazār afsān* (Barry 2000: 87). The tales of the Seven Trials (Persian *haft khvān*) and of the Brass Fortress mentioned by Munjīk belong to the genre of mythical history and are also contained in the Persian national epic, the *Shāh-nāme* or “Book of the Kings” compiled by Munjīk's contemporary Ferdousi (died 1010). In consequence, the *Hazār afsān* alluded to by Munjīk appears to denote a collection of mythical or historical narratives rather than a precursor of the *Arabian Nights*. Driving this argument somewhat further, one might speculate that the term *Hazār afsān* in medieval Persian poetry did not even

mean a specific book or compilation. Probably the *Hazār afsān* was similar to the concept of *arzhang* (or *artang*), a denomination linked to the notion of a mysterious colorful masterpiece of art produced by the legendary Persian artist Māni. While the exact characteristics of this masterpiece are not clear, some sources mention his house and others refer to a lavishly illustrated manuscript (Sims et al. 2002: 20). By analogy, *Hazār afsān* might have implied a fictitious concept of a truly wonderful and unsurpassedly inspiring collection of narratives.

#### *Tales of Alleged Iranian Origin*

Jiří Cejpek in the chapter on “The Iranian Element in the *Book of a Thousand and One Nights* and Similar Collections” in Jan Rypka’s *History of Iranian Literature* is quite apodictic as to the extent of the Iranian material in the *Arabian Nights*. In an extensive passage devoted to this problem, he regards the “core of the *Book of a Thousand and One Nights*” as “undoubtedly Iranian” and speaks of its being “modeled on the Middle Persian prose folk-book *Hazār afsānak* which was Iranian throughout in character” (Cejpek 1968: 663). Accordingly, he also claims that the frame story, including its embedded stories, is of Iranian origin. Next Cejpek supplies a list of stories “all of which form part of the Iranian core in the *Book of a Thousand and One Nights*, i. e. the original *Hazār afsānak*,” the stories listed by him include “the stories of the Merchant, the Ghost and the Three Old Men [...], The Fisherman and the Ghost, The Three Apples [...], The Porter, The Three Ladies and the Three Qalandars [...], The Magic Horse, Hasan from Basra, Prince Badr and Princess Jauhar from Samandal, Ardashīr and Hayāt an-nufūs, Qamar az-zamān and Queen Budūr”. In addition, Cejpek mentions what he calls the “[d]efinitely Iranian” tales about “Ahmad and the fairy Parībānū, and the Story of the Jealous sisters,” conceding, however, that it is “doubtful and in fact unlikely” that these stories were part of the original Persian collection (664).

While Cejpek relies on previous research (such as Oestrup 1925: 42–71; see also Elisséeff 1949: 43–47), in terms of evidence to support his evaluation, it is interesting to note his arguments. Cejpek says: “Proper names are a great help and rarely let one down when determining the origin of a story. If they are Persian it means that they are original and prove the subject in question to be of Persian origin too. On the other hand, if one finds Arabic names in Iranian stories (which happens particularly in the magic fairy-tales), they have been invented and substituted for the Iranian ones later on.” (Cejpek 1968: 664) As detailed arguments are missing, this statement ought to be considered a fairly general one. In fact, in view of the other evaluations in Cejpek’s writing, it appears to be highly biased in favor of Iran. On a general level, comparative folk-narrative research has shown that the names that are not constitutive for a given folktale are as susceptible to change as numerous other ingredients or requisites (Nicolaisen 1999). Moreover, it remains unclear why Cejpek denies Arabic names the very quality he previously claims for Persian ones.

Enno Littmann, who has also dealt in some detail with the various national or ethnic components in the *Arabian Nights* argues in terms of content. In his evaluation, relying on Johannes Østrup, those tales in which benevolent ghosts and fairies interact independently with human characters are of Persian origin (Littmann 1923: 18; id. 1953: 677–695). The most prominent tales he regards as Persian according to this evaluation are the tales of Qamar al-zamān and Budūr, Aḥmad and the Fairy Peri Bānū, The Ebony-horse, Jullanār the Mermaid, and The Two Envious Sisters.

To name but a third source surveying the Iranian element in the *Arabian Nights*, Jean-Louis Laveille in his recent study of the theme of voyage in the *Arabian Nights* (Laveille 1998: 189–193) also concedes a Persian character to about ten stories, including the already named ones of Qamar al-zamān and Budūr, the Ebony-horse and Aḥmad and the Fairy Peri Bānū.

Interestingly, at least two of the tales mentioned by the above quoted authors – those of Aḥmad and the Fairy Peri Bānū and of the Jealous sisters – belong to the stock of what Mia Gerhardt has termed the “orphan tales” (Gerhardt 1963: 12–14). Those tales are not included in the fifteenth-century Arabic manuscript used by Galland. Their outlines were supplied to him by the Syrian Maronite narrator Hannā Diyāb, and the tales Galland constructed on the basis of Hannā’s narration only became part of the traditional stock of the *Arabian Nights* after Galland had introduced them into his publication when his original manuscript material had been exhausted. This fact leads one to ponder about the feasibility of using the geographical or ethnical approach to identify the Persian element in the *Arabian Nights*, in fact about the very justification of any attempt to identify ingredients supposed to be constituted against or derived from a specific ethnical or national backdrop. Persian narrative literature at any given state, and certainly at the stage in which it might have contributed discernibly to the narrative repertoire of the *Arabian Nights*, was of a hybrid character, incorporating numerous elements originating from other national or ethnic cultures; besides the Indian narrative tradition, the Greek (Davis 2002) is most notab. Cejpek aims to compensate this hybridity by pointing out the fact that “the Indian material [in the *Arabian Nights*] was so completely iranized that there can be no question of the *Thousand and One Nights* being a direct descendant of an Indian model.” (1968: 665)

On the other hand, readers such as Laveille correctly point out that Iran in a number of tales in the *Arabian Nights* serves as nothing more than an imaginative matrix, a “never-never land of collective memory constituted by the legends” (“un pays de cocagne dans la mémoire collective constituée par les légendes;” Laveille 1998: 189; see also Djebli 1994: 205f.; Henninger 1949: 224). While this evaluation certainly holds true for the two “orphan-tales” mentioned above, its impact for the earlier history of the Iranian contribution to the *Arabian Nights* should also not be underestimated. Already in the early Islamic period, Iran had gained renown as a place of legends, similar to the manner in which Babylon – according to a Koranic allusion (2,102) and subsequent Islamic legend about the angels Hārūt and Mārūt – was invariably linked to the concept of magic. Altogether, the

present knowledge about this level of a Persian link to the narrative stock of the *Arabian Nights* includes little direct Persian influence and relies on general evaluations that have not been subjected to detailed scrutiny.

### *Persian Characters in the Nights*

Besides the standard Persian kings and princes, serving – somewhat like the kings of European fairy-tales – to illustrate the acme of royal (and, by analogy, permanent) rule, Persian characters in the *Arabian Nights* – quintessentially named Bahrām – figure in two distinct categories: the merchant and the Magian (Arabic *majūsī*), the latter corresponding to the Persian Zoroastrian.

Appearing frequently, the Persian merchant is essentially a neutral role supporting two major aspects. First, it indicates the cultural impact of medieval trade between Iran and the Arabic lands. This impact is already documented in storytelling by the famous anecdote of Nadhr b. al-Hārith, the Arab merchant who challenged the Prophet Mohammad by promising to narrate Persian legends (Omidisalar 1999: 328f.). Second, it stresses the general character of the *Arabian Nights* as being what Aboubakr Chraïbi has labeled a “mirror for merchants” (2004: 6; see also Coussonnet 1989). Since the merchant is an unobtrusive and unsuspecting character, villains would at times dress up in disguise as a Persian merchant, a motif figuring most prominently in the tale of Hasan of Basra.

In contrast to the neutral merchant, the Magian is one of the standard villain characters of the *Arabian Nights*. In medieval Arabic narrative literature, the Magians are imagined as infidels practicing a number of strange customs, including the worship of fire, human sacrifice and incestuous relations, specifically between grown sons and their mothers (Marzolph 1992: vol. 2, nos. 28, 706, 738; Marzolph 1999: no. 1). Practicing a different belief and rituals that were in stark contrast to the basic Islamic tenets, the Magians were vulnerable to being portrayed and stereotyped as a highly dubious ethnic Other. Besides customs conflicting with public morals, such as a certain Magian’s homosexual preferences in the tale of ‘Alā’ al-din Abū al-shāmāt, Magians in the *Arabian Nights* invariably practice magic and kill the true believers. Magians figure most prominently in the Tale of As‘ad and Amjad (Sironval 1984) which in turn is embedded in the tale of Qamar al-zamān, when As‘ad is kidnapped and held prisoner to be presented as a human sacrifice on the Mountain of Fire. Magians are furthermore encountered by Sindbād the sailor on his fourth voyage, when his comrades are killed by a tribe of cannibal Magians ruled by a ghūl. Magian adversaries are mentioned in the story of Gharīb and his Brother ‘Ajīb. And, finally, Badr Bāsīm, the son of Jullanār the mermaid and her human husband, is shipwrecked during his adventures on an island inhabited by Magians whose queen is the vicious sorceress Lāb. In all cases in which an ethically good (and hence, by extension, Muslim) protagonist falls victim to the Magians, the only means to save him is through the help of a Muslim (and hence, by extension, ethically good) man who often spends his life in the city or country of the Magians without professing his

true belief. The practice of hiding or even denying one's true belief in time of imminent personal danger constitutes a legally accepted practice in Islam known as *taqiyya*. This practice is particularly linked to the Persian context by the fact that the adherents of the creed of Shiism, which only became the dominant creed in Iran from the Safavid period onwards, were often subjected to severe persecutions and practiced *taqiyya* in order to both survive and remain true to their belief (Meyer 1980).

It would be interesting to study the reception (and hypothetical change) of the image of Iranian characters in Persian translations of the *Arabian Nights*. After all, Persian authors and readers might justly be supposed to be more sympathetic towards their fellow country-men than the ethnically different Arabs, regardless of the former's religious creed. Historical circumstances make it, however, obvious, that the image of Iranians in Persian translations of the *Arabian Nights* is unlikely to be different from that of the Arabic version. The outlook and worldview of the *Arabian Nights* is not defined by the language of the tales, be it Arabic, Persian, or any other language, but rather by the cultural background. This cultural background is dominated by (Islamic) religion which in turn is the same for Muslim Arabs and Muslim Iranians. And it is Muslims that constituted the overwhelming majority of the country's population soon after the Islamic conquest and certainly the main category of readers at the time when the Persian translations of the *Arabian Nights* were prepared.

The implications of the image of the Magians in Persian versions of the *Arabian Nights* may in some way be compared to the development, the image of Alexander the Conqueror underwent in Persian and general Islamic tradition. In historical Persian sources originating against a Zoroastrian backdrop, Alexander is an evil destroyer, a conqueror annihilating traditional values – such as he had, in fact, been experienced in history (Yamanaka 1993). In contrast, later Islamic sources transformed him not only into a triumphant conqueror, but also into a just ruler, and eventually into a sage and a prophet (Waugh 1996). Regardless of the language in which later sources were compiled, the common religious perspective determined the evaluation of Alexander in the Islamic sources. Since Iran's Arabic conquerors were in a similarly alien and hostile position towards Iran as had been Alexander, it was tempting for them to propagate his image in a similarly sympathetic way as Greek and Hellenistic sources did. By analogy, a Persian translation of the stereotype image of the pre-Islamic fire-worshippers pictured in the Arabic sources would not result in any major changes, as the religious perspective of Islam was and still is shared by both Muslim Persians and Arabs, and Magians despite their national or ethnic proximity to their fellow Iranians would be – and in fact often are – alienated because of their religious creed.

At any rate, the negative image of the Magian is characteristic of Arab sources, and no truly Persian version of a given tale would – for various reasons – employ the character of the Magian as a villain. Whereas narratives rooted in ancient Iranian belief would resort to fictitious characters such as evil demons or sorcery-

ners, the standard ethnical villain characters in modern Persian folktales are the Jew, the black man, and the gypsy (Marzolph 1984: 29).

### *Persian Translations of the Nights*

When and where the *Arabian Nights* were first translated into the Persian language is not known exactly. While Turkish translations from the Arabic, some probably enlarged, already existed before Galland's French adaptation (Chauvin 1900: 23, 201), Persian translations apparently were not prepared before the beginning of the nineteenth century. As is well known, the British colonial enterprise exercised a decisive influence on the textual history of the *Arabian Nights*, particularly as two of its early printed editions were published in Calcutta (1814–18, 1839–42). In a similar vein, the attention generated by the publication of the printed editions might have given rise to suggesting a version of the *Arabian Nights* in Persian, a language that continued to hold its position as the local *lingua franca* of all of India. The catalogues of Persian manuscript collections worldwide list at least four early nineteenth century versions of the *Arabian Nights* in Persian, variously known as *Alf leile va-leile*, *Hezār-o yek shab*, or – in a curious distortion of its Arabic name – as *Alfal-leil*. None of these manuscript versions has so far been studied in detail. While Ahmad Monzavi's *Union Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts* (1349/1970: 3659) lists two manuscripts presently not available for inspection in Madina and Teheran, the *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Mss. In the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore*, India, mentions a manuscript "collection of one hundred tales from the Alf laylah," compiled in satisfaction of his friends' request by a certain Auḥad b. Aḥmad Bilgrāmī and completed on Dū 'l-qa'da 15, 1251, corresponding to March 3, 1836 (Muqtadir 1925: 195, no. 767). The content of this manuscript, comprising some 102 folios, is not known.

The Berlin Staatsbibliothek possesses yet another Persian translation, the only manuscript whose text is available to me at present (Pertsch 1888: 967f., no. 998). The text of this manuscript comprises 118 folios covering 81 nights, and containing the opening of the frame story up to a part of the tale of Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī and His Son Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan. The sequence of tales reminds one of the Breslau edition prepared by Maximilian Habicht (and, after his death, continued by Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer; 1824–43). The manuscript is written by different hands, suggesting its production as the copy of an already existing manuscript through the collective effort of different scribes. The manuscript's language both in terms of syntax and vocabulary indicates its origin from Northeastern Iran. This evaluation is also corroborated by the name of the translator/compiler that is given as Mirzā Zein al-Ābedin Khān Neishāburi (fol. 29b/-1–30a/1: *motarjem-e in ketāb*), i. e. a person originating or living in the town of Neishābur. As the manuscript is not complete, it does not contain a colophon mentioning the date of compilation; the circumstances would, however, suggest a production in the first half of the nineteenth century. The text of this Persian manuscript version is



particularly curious inasmuch as both its wording and division into nights differs considerably from both contemporary printed editions of the Arabic text, Bulaq I (1835) and Calcutta II (1839–42). Further research is needed in order to determine the Arabic text used as the basis of translation, most probably a manuscript, and its relation to other versions of the *Arabian Nights*.

The only existing complete version of the *Arabian Nights* in Persian was prepared by Mollā ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Ṭasuji together with the poet Mirzā Soroush of Esfāhan and was completed in 1259/1843. Soon after, the translation was published in a two volume lithographed edition, the calligraphical work of which was accomplished in 1259/1843 and 1261/1845 respectively<sup>1</sup>. After his accession to the throne in 1264/1847, young Nāṣer al-dīn Shāh, who was an avid reader of the Persian translation (Amanat 1997: 49f., 66)<sup>2</sup> and is said to have yearned for a finely illustrated copy of the book ever since he first listened to the stories, ordered the calligrapher Moḥammad Ḥosein Tehrāni to copy the text. When this job was achieved on a total of some 570 text folios in 1269/1852, a team of more than forty leading artists under the supervision of the famous Abu ‘l-Ḥasan Khān Ghaffāri Ṣani‘ al-molk supplied an equal number of folios containing illustrations, besides preparing the bookbinding that is lavishly embellished by lacquer work. The working conditions in the chambers of the polytechnical school (the Majma‘-e Dār al-ṣanāye‘) appear to have been “cramped” (Zokā‘ 1382/2003: 33), as numerous people had to work together in modest quarters. The resulting work, now preserved in the library of the Golestān Palace in Tehran, was finished only seven years later in 1276/1859. It comprises a total of 2279 pages in large folio format that are bound in six exuberantly decorated volumes (see Ātābāy 2535/1976: 1375–1392; Zokā‘ 1382/2003: 33–38, 83–105, plates 12–34). This manuscript represents the last outstanding specimen of the traditional art of the book in Qajar Iran. According to a recently published document (Bakhtiyār 1381/2002), the cost of preparing its illustrations and illumination totalled the sum of 6,850 *tumān*. This amount was equivalent to a sixth of the total amount spent to construct and decorate the contemporary multistoried palace in Tehran known as Shams ol-‘emāre, itself the most sumptuously decorated royal building of the Qajar period. A painting by Abu ‘l-Ḥasan Khān Ghaffāri depicts Dust-‘Ali Khān Mo‘ayyer al-mamālek, head of the polytechnical school, presenting a volume of the manuscript to the ruler (Zokā‘ 1382/2003: 134, no. 69; Bakhtiyār 1381/2002: 130).

Except for two places in the manuscript, the text folios alternate with those containing illustrations. The space on the illustrated folios has been divided into at least three and up to as many as six images per page, the individual images being framed and separated from each other by a band of illumination that also includes a caption indicating the content. The illustrations number a total of 3,600 different scenes. In the course of restoration in recent years, making a photographic documentation and reproduction of this manuscript has repeatedly been discussed, as doing so would serve both conservatory functions and make this monument of Qajar art available to national and international scholarship. In view of the uninhibited and outspokenly playful illustration of the sexual scenes

particularly at the manuscript's beginning, such a reproduction contradicts the presently propagated values in Iran and is unlikely to happen soon. Even so, the manuscript's published images contain a wealth of information about popular customs and material culture of the Qajar period.

One of the most fascinating images illustrates a scene from the story of Ghānim ibn Ayyūb in which, as the caption says, the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, who in the *Nights* embodies the quintessence of just rule (Marzolph 1990), speaks to his vizier Ja'far al-Barmakī (*Zokā* 1382/2003: 85, no. 12). The fact that the Abbasid caliph and his vizier are rendered in the likeness of the young Qajar ruler Nāṣer al-dīn Shāh and his prime-minister Amir Kabīr add a tragic touch to this image. Amir Kabīr, who was an extremely able and powerful prime-minister as well as the Shāh's favorite, had suddenly been dismissed by the Shāh in late 1851, and he was subsequently executed on Rabī' I 17, 1268, corresponding to January 9, 1852. In this manner, he had suffered a similar tragic fall from the ruler's favor and untimely death as had been experienced by Hārūn al-Rashīd's vizier Ja'far and the Barmakid clan. If it holds true that the manuscript's illustration was not begun before the year 1269, the image rather than unknowingly foreshadowing the tragic event probably represents a late tribute by the artist (and the ruler, who undoubtedly approved of the illustrations in person) to the once powerful and highly esteemed politician.

When the first lithographed edition of the *Arabian Nights* was prepared in 1259–61/1843–45, lithographic illustration had not yet become a regular phenomenon. Soon after the preparations for illustrating the luxurious royal manuscript had begun, a second lithographed edition was ordered, this time containing illustrations. As the effort of preparing the lithographed book was considerably easier, the task was achieved much faster than the manuscript, and the result was published in 1272/1855. This first illustrated lithographed edition of the *Arabian Nights* in Persian, in fact the first ever Oriental edition of the *Nights* containing a regular set of illustrations, includes 70 illustrations executed by Mirzā 'Ali-Qoli Khu'i, an eminent artist of the day (Marzolph 1997), and two of his apprentices, Mirzā Reżā Tabrizi and Mirzā Ḥasan (see id. 2002: 232). This edition in turn appears to have created an increased popular demand, since only three years later Mirzā Ḥasan, the son of the well-known court painter Āqā Seyyed Mirzā, illustrated another edition on his own, albeit with a slightly reduced iconographical program (ibid.). A total of at least seven additional lithographed editions of the *Arabian Nights* in Persian were published between 1289/1872 and 1357/1938, all but two of which – the editions of 1292–93/1875–76 and of 1357/1938 – contain illustrations that are usually modeled on either of the two early illustrated editions<sup>3</sup>.

The translation prepared by Ṭasuji and Soroush is regarded as an exceptional piece of literature (Bahār 2535/1977: 369) in the formative period of the modern Persian language. Its textual basis has never been discussed in previous scholarship, and a close comparison between the translation and the Arabic original constitutes a promising field for future study. In theory, both the editions of Bulaq and Calcutta II would have been available, even though the publication of the

latter one was probably just finished when the Persian translation was already under way. Fortunately, both editions differ considerably in wording, and a particularly peculiar lacunae proves the Bulaq edition beyond reasonable doubt to constitute the basis for the Persian translation. The Bulaq edition offers a highly reduced version of the Third Qalandar's tale that is narrated within *The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad*. In its full version, this tale consists of three episodes: The destruction of the talisman on the Magnetic Mountain, the fateful slaying of the youth in the underground palace, and the protagonist's adventures with the forty maiden. While the Calcutta edition contains the tale's full text, the Arabic manuscript serving as the basis for this particular passage of the Bulaq edition must have suffered from a lacuna of several folio occurring shortly after the beginning of the second episode and affecting the text of the third episode up to the point at which the protagonist is about to break the tabu of opening the forbidden door. In order to mend the break, the compiler of the printed edition has merged the originally distinct second and third episodes: As in the second episode, the hero watches a group of people preparing an underground mansion. As soon as they have left, he uncovers the mansion's lid, enters, and then, as towards the end of the third episode, wanders through 39 beautiful gardens. When opening a door, he finds the magic horse that brings him to the ten mournful youths and hits out one of his eyes. This version by way of its Qajar period Persian translation was also popular as a separate chapbook under the title of *Se gedā-ye yek-chashm* (The Three One-Eyed Beggars) in mid-twentieth century Iran (Marzolph 1994: no. XLIV) and lingers on as far as the modern study of the *Arabian Nights* in Iran, when the tale's summary simply reads: "By accident, [the hero] in an underground city mounts a horse whose tail makes him blind. [...]" (Ṣamini 1379/2001: 392)

Two further Persian language adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* need to be mentioned. One is an illustrated chapbook version of the frame story, published in pocket-book format in 1280/1863 (Chauvin 1900: 23, no. 20 zz; Edwards 1922: 129); the other one is a complete versified version prepared by the Persian poet Seif al-sho'arā' Mirzā Abo l-Faṭḥ Dehqān (died 1326/1908), published under the title *Hezār dāstān* (One Thousand Stories), in a folio-sized lithographed edition in 1317–18/1899–1900. The latter edition contains a set of 59 illustrations prepared by the contemporary popular artists 'Ali-Khān and Javād (Marzolph 2002: 243).

#### *The Arabian Nights in modern Iran*

As a final point, the position of the *Arabian Nights* in modern Iran deserves to be mentioned. Reliable and extensive information about international *Arabian Nights*-scholarship is available to Persian readers through two studies published by Jallāl Sattāri (1368/1989, 1382/2003). A first edition printed in movable type had been prepared by Moḥammad Ramažāni, head of the famous publishing house Kolāle-ye khāvar as early as 1315–16/1936–37. This edition also contained a learned introduction by the scholar 'Ali Aṣghar Ḥekmat. While Ramažāni's

edition appears to reproduce major parts of Ṭasujī's nineteenth century translation faithfully, even a superficial comparison reveals various editorial changes that were obviously deemed necessary to adjust the content and wording to contemporary taste. Several printed editions in Persian circulate since the 1990s, all of them presenting adapted, if not censored versions following Ramaẓānī's edition. One of the editions available to me is a typical "Bazaar edition." It is presented in the traditional style of Persian chapbooks (Marzolph 1994) as *Ḥekāyat-e shirin-e Alf leile va-leile shāmel-e barkhi as ḥekāyāt-e Hezār va yek shab* (The Sweet Story of the [Arabic] "Thousand and One Nights," containing some of the stories of the [Persian] "Thousand and One Nights.") The fact that this booklet, dating from the 1980s, is printed as "grey literature" without the obligatory mention of publication details might indicate that the publisher was not sure whether the book's content might cause him trouble. Mitrā Mehrābādi's one volume edition of "Ṭasujī's translation" follows Ramaẓānī's edition quite closely inasmuch as she includes the preface by ʿAlī Aṣghar Ḥekmat and even reproduces most of the illustrations from the former edition. At the same time, her short introductory notice makes it perfectly clear that some of the disputable passages could not be reproduced in a "society paying respect to moral values" (*yek jāme'e-ye akhlāq-garā*; Ṭasujī 1380/2001: 4). In contrast to most other recent editions, Mehrābādi's adapted reprint footnotes difficult passages and at the end of each of the five volumes of the original edition has a glossary of terms unfamiliar to modern Persian readers.

Particularly the sexually pronounced passages of the frame-story and the introductory set of tales of the *Nights* are bound to conflict with the moral standards propagated in today's Iran (Marzolph 1995) and have been adjusted accordingly. As a case in point, I have compared in detail two passages in various available editions. The first one is the introductory passages in which Shāhẓamān surprises both his own and his brother Shahriyār's wife committing adultery and in which later on both are violated by the beautiful woman kept in a box by a demon; the second one is the joyful discussion of the various denominations of the female and male sexual parts celebrated by the porter and the three ladies in the story of the same name.

Both Ṭasujī's (1275/1858: fol. 1b–2b) and – reproducing Ṭasujī's wording verbatim – Ramaẓānī's (1315–16/1936–37: vol. 1, 3–8) texts present the sexually pronounced elements of the frame story in a manner closely following the wording of the Arabic text. Ramaẓānī even includes an uninhibited (European) illustration of the scene in which Shāhẓamān spies on Shahriyār's wife and her servants as they embrace their male lovers in the garden just after Shahriyār has left to go hunting (*ibid.*: vol. 1, 5). While the same text is also reproduced in the Bazaar edition and one of the modern editions (Ṭasujī 1379/2000: vol. 1, 1–6), Mehrābādi in her edition of "Ṭasujī's translation" has opted to replace the three instances of extramarital sexual relations with an all-embracing summary in a wording reminiscent of Ṭasujī's style: "Yet, there came a time when those two brothers due to the filthy and disagreeable character of their wives killed them ..." (*lik zamāni farā resid ke ān do barādar be-sabab-e khu-ye zesht va nā-pasandi ke*

as *hamsarān-e-shān bedidand, ānhā-rā koshtand* ...). The sentence is then continued with Ṭasujī's words: "... and from then on, Shāhzamān chose to live in celibacy ..." (... *va az ān pas, Shāhzamān, tajarrood gozide* ...; Ṭasujī 1380/2001: 22).

The version published under the title *Dāstānhā-ye Hezār va yek shab* (The Stories of the "Thousand and One Nights"; 1377/1998) contains a modern retelling that follows Ṭasujī's text to some extent while justifying the rendering of the reprehensible action by additional comments aiming to illustrate the psychological conflict experienced by Shāhzamān. Whereas Shāhzamān in the older versions, including the Bulaq edition and Ṭasujī's translation, have Shāhzamān return to his wife simply because he has forgotten something<sup>4</sup>, this version (vol. 1, 11) states that Shāhzamān loved his wife dearly (*nesbat behamsar-e khod delbastegi-ye besyār dāsht*) and for that reason wanted to see her one more time before he left. As he approached her bedroom, he was hoping that his unexpected appearance would make the queen even happier. In consequence, the loving husband Shāhzamān was shocked even deeper than in the previous versions to discover his wife's adultery. As a further digression motivating his following action, instead of straightaway slaying the sinful lovers, he could not believe his eyes and went into an inner dialogue how this situation was possible at all before he finally killed them. Probably this version is not so much indicative of the restraints experienced by publishers in modern Iran than by the requirements of motivating the action so that juvenile readers – at whom this edition is apparently directed – were given a better chance to understand.

The joyful sexual discussion between the porter and the three ladies has been translated by Ṭasujī in minute detail (ed. 1275: fol. 11f.). When their party reaches its climax, the text first says: "In short, they spent their time drinking wine, reciting poetry and dancing until they got drunk ..." (*al-gharaḥ be-mei keshidan va ghazal khvāndan va raqṣ kardan hami-gozarāndand tā inke mast shodand* ...). Then follows the scene in which they undress one after the other, take a bath in the pool and tease the other sex with proposing to guess the name of their private parts. Soon after Shahrazād has resumed her narrative in the eleventh night, it is time for the characters in her story to have dinner, and the young ladies ask the porter to leave (... *tā hangām-e shām shod dokhtaregān goftand aknun vaqt ān-ast ke az khāne birun ravi*). In Ramazāni's text (1315–16/1936–37: vol. 1, 54–56) and, following him, in one of the modern editions (Ṭasujī 1379/2000: vol. 1, 35), the beginning of this scene is just the same, and the three ladies one after the other take a bath, sit close to the porter and "have fun with each other" (*be-shukhi va-lahv mashghul shodand*). While the playful slapping in the original version is justified by the fact that the porter does not guess the "correct" denomination for the women's sexual parts, in this version it is motivated by sheer joy, if anything, before – with the wording of Ṭasujī's text – the women ask the porter to leave.

It is interesting to note that the unrestricted sexual joy of this particular passage has also been regarded as revoltingly obscene in some of the European translations. While Richard Burton, renowned for his particular delectation of

obsessive sexuality, renders the passage in detail (1885: vol. 1, 89–93), Edward William Lane (1859: vol. 1, 124f.) in his puritan manner has the following wording:

The wine continued to circulate among them, and the porter, taking his part in the revels, dancing and singing with them, and enjoying the fragrant odours, began to hug and kiss them, while one slapped him, and another pulled him, and the third beat him with sweet-scented flowers, till, at length, the wine made sport with their reason; and they threw off all restraint, indulging their merriment with as much freedom as if no man had been present.

At the end of this passage, and before the ladies ask the porter to leave, Lane has inserted a footnote entitled “On Wine, Fruits, Flowers, and Music, in Illustration of Arab Carousals”. He begins by mentioning that in his translation he has passed over

an extremely objectionable scene, which, it is to be hoped, would convey a very erroneous idea of the manners of Arab *ladies*; though I have witnessed, at private festivities in Cairo, abominable scenes, of which ladies, screened behind lattices, were spectators. Can the same be said with respect to the previous carousal? This is a question which cannot be answered in a few words.

He then delves into an extended and most learned discussion of the mentioned subjects occupying more than twice the space a translation of the actual passage would have required (ibid., 193–204).

Mehrābādi has again opted for an even more condensed and less objectionable wording than the one given by Ramažāni. In her version, there is neither wine, nor dance, nor even poetry, and – needless to mention – even less bathing or nudity. Instead, the porter is accepted by the ladies as an educated boon-companion with whom they spend some time in pleasant conversation (*ḥammāl-rā be-nadimi bar-gozide be-ṣohbat neshastand*) before sending him away at dinner-time (Ṭasuji 1380/2001: 38f.). Again, the related illustration in Ramažāni’s edition has not been reproduced. Similarly, in the modern retelling the original drink of wine (Persian *mei* or *sharāb*) – whose consumption is strictly forbidden under the present interpretation of Islamic laws in Iran – has been replaced by an act beyond reproach, namely passing around a cup of *sharbat*, or sweet juice (*Dāstānhā* 1377/1998: vol. 1, 137), and the company spends their time reciting love-poetry, a past-time “all of them sincerely enjoyed” (*hame-ye ānhā az in bazm ṣamimāne lezzat mi-bordand*) before, once more, the porter is asked to leave.

Since Iran has constituted decisively to the genesis and character of the *Arabian Nights*, it appears natural that his body of world literature is appreciated in today’s Iran as part of the country’s literary heritage. However, a sound appreciation of the collection’s original character appears more jeopardized than ever before, as the treatment of the text passages just discussed demonstrates. The consumption of alcoholic beverages and the indulging in extramarital sexual relations, both of which are frequently encountered in the *Nights*, contradict the moral values

presently propagated in Iran, and publishers opt for different strategies to adjust the text so as to eliminate reprehensible components. As both Ramažāni's Persian edition and Lane's English rendering prove, similar strategies have been at work in different periods as well as different cultural contexts, albeit with varying success. Whereas the Western world has grown accustomed to regarding the *Nights* as a monumental and uninhibited affirmation of the joy of life in all its manifestations, Iranian readers are restricted to textual versions that have been adapted to their present political circumstances.

On the other hand, the *Arabian Nights* throughout their history have proven to be highly capable of adjusting to a diversity of cultural contexts. Two announcements in the current issue of the Iranian journal *Farhang-e mardom* (Folklore) indicate some of the directions into which the future reception of the *Arabian Nights* in Iran develops (Vakiliyan 2003: 164f.). The Iranian writer Moḥammad Bahārlu is preparing a new Persian edition. The text of his edition, comprising a total of 1,400,000 words, will be completely adapted to the grammar and style of the modern Persian language while remaining faithful to Ṭasujī's translation. Moreover, the edition is to contain an annotated index of the Koranic verses and Prophetic utterances as well as of other Arabic and Persian expressions that might need to be explained to the modern readers. Another publication, by the folklorist Moḥammad Ja'far Qanavāti, is to present versions of tales from the *Nights* collected from living oral tradition. Besides documenting a renewed interest in the *Nights*, both publications will indicate the degree to which official guidelines determine how this part of the country's literary heritage is to be dealt with. At any rate, this is an unfinished chapter in the collection's history that the future is still writing.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Early Persian lithographed books do not contain a regular date of publication. As they constitute the direct successors of previous manuscript production, their dating is to be inferred from the book's colophon in which the calligrapher would often state his own name and the name of the person who ordered or paid for the preparation of the book together with the year (and sometimes the day and month) of completion of the written text that served as the basis of lithographic reproduction.

There is some confusion in Iranian studies concerning the completion of the manuscript and the publication of the first lithographed text. Moḥammad Ja'far Maḥjub in his influential study still holds the work of translation to have begun in 1259; in consequence, he considers the data concerning printed editions of 1259, 1261, and 1263 as faulty (1339/1960: 48). He quotes the Islamic date 1263 with reference to Chauvin (1900: 23) who lists a lithographed edition Tehran 1847; this edition cannot be verified. For copies of the Persian *editio princeps*, said to be "the best printing ever made of this work" (Zokā' 1382/2003: 33), and later editions see Marzolph 2002: 231f.

<sup>2</sup>The Iranian National Library contains a total of six copies of the *editio princeps*. As the National Library also incorporates the holdings of the former library of the royal palace, this comparatively large amount is also indicative of the ruler's interest.

<sup>3</sup>Two editions printed in Lahore are listed by Naushahi 1986: vol.1, 552f.

<sup>4</sup>While the Bulaq text (1252: vol. 1, 2) has a simple “something” (Arabic: *ḥājjā*), Ṭasujī argues that Shāhzamān had forgotten to take along a precious jewel (*gouhari gerāmmāye*) intended as a present for his brother.

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### Abstract

This essay is concerned with the links between the *Arabian Nights* and Iranian Culture. While the links are to some extent quite obvious and have been extensively discussed in previous research, some implications are less visible. In surveying these links, I discuss five major areas: (1) The Iranian prototype of the *Nights*; (2) Tales of alleged Persian origin; (3) Persian characters within the tales; (4) Persian translations of the *Arabian Nights*; and (5) The position of the *Arabian Nights* in modern Iran.

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz befaßt sich mit den Verbindungen zwischen den Erzählungen aus *1001 Nacht* und der iranischen Kultur. Während einige der Verbindungen recht offensichtlich sind und dementsprechend intensiv in der bisherigen Forschung diskutiert wurden, sind manche der damit zusammenhängenden Implikationen weniger deutlich. Der vorliegende Überblick über diese Verbindungen gliedert sich in fünf Abschnitte: (1) Der iranische Prototyp von *1001 Nacht*, *Hazār afsān*; (2) Geschichten, für die in der Forschung persischer Ursprung geltend gemacht wird; (3) Persische Handlungsträger in *1001 Nacht*; (4) Persische Übersetzungen von *1001 Nacht*; und (5) Die Stellung von *1001 Nacht* im zeitgenössischen Iran.

### Résumé