

## Wandering Nights: Shahrazād's Mutations

In 2010, a group calling themselves 'Lawyers Without Shackles' (*Muḥāmūn bilā quyūd*) filed a complaint with Egypt's Prosecutor-general when a new edition of the Arabian Nights, known in Arabic as *Alf Layla wa Layla* ('Thousand and One Nights'), was published, due to its allegedly 'obscene' content. This was not the first time these accusations were levelled, nor is it just in the East that the Nights have caused controversy. When Disney released its animated musical *Aladdin* (1992), the opening song had to be amended following protest about the racism in some of the lyrics, while the film was accused of pandering to Orientalist stereotypes of Arab-Muslim society.

Controversy has beset the Nights for several centuries, as its genesis and early development are still, for the most part, shrouded in mystery. The story is one of manuscripts – both real and imaginary, forged and reconstructed – and contains as many, if not more, extraordinary twists and turns as the tales themselves.

### *A Traveller from the East...*

In 1766 an elderly scribe in Aleppo decided to chronicle his extraordinary adventures during a journey to the capital of the 'land of France' (*bilād Faransā*), where he met men of great learning:

An old man would often visit us. He was in charge of the library of Arabic books. He could read Arabic well, and translated Arabic books into French. At

that time, he was translating the book of stories of One Thousand and One Nights. This man sought my help for some things he did not understand, and I explained them to him. There were a number of Nights missing and I told him the stories that I knew. As a result, he was able to complete his book, and was extremely happy with me.<sup>1</sup>

His account is corroborated by the journal kept by the ‘old man’, who was none other than Antoine Galland (1646–1715). The diary entries for 1709 – the year he was appointed to the chair of Arabic at the Collège de France – make several references to the young visitor from the East he met at the house of fellow Orientalist and traveller Paul Lucas. The first dates to Sunday 17 March:

*J'allai le matin chez M. Paul Lucas lui reporter les medailles qu'il m'avait confiées 8 jours auparavant: je m'entretins quelque tems avec Hanna Maronite d'Halep: qui outre sa langue qui est l'Arabe, parloit turc, et Provençal, et françois assez passablement.*<sup>2</sup>

(This morning, I visited Mr Paul Lucas to return medals he had given me a week ago; I spoke for a while with Hanna, a Maronite from Aleppo, who, besides his mother tongue Arabic, is able to speak Turkish, Provençal, and French reasonably well.)

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<sup>1</sup> Diyāb, fol. 128a.

<sup>2</sup> Galland's journal, in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (= BNF), MS fr. 15277, p. 54.

One week later (Monday 25 March), ‘M. Hanna’ narrated ‘some very nice Arab tales, which he promised to put down in writing.’<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, none of Diyāb’s transcripts has survived, but Galland took notes during his meetings, and included summaries of some of the tales in his Journal. Diyāb provided a total of sixteen stories, ten of which made it into Galland’s translation, among them such emblematic tales as ‘Aladdin and the Lamp’ and ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves’.<sup>4</sup> When Galland met Ḥannā, eight (of the eventual twelve) volumes of *Les mille et une Nuit* (sic) had already been completed. The Diyāb tales were included in volumes 9–12 (1712–17), in the order in which they were narrated, but without, however, any mention of the Syrian informant. As no Arabic original has ever been found of the Diyāb stories, they became known as the ‘orphan tales’.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now turn to the protagonists in the story so far.

Trained as a classicist but turning to Oriental languages very early on, Galland first visited the East as secretary to Louis XIV’s ambassador to the Sublime Porte in 1670. During his stay, he perfected his knowledge of Turkish, Persian and Arabic, and also acquired a number of manuscripts. In 1675, Galland was back in Paris but was soon sent on another Eastern mission to purchase coins for the Cabinet du Roi. In 1679, he undertook his third, and longest journey to the Ottoman Empire (1619–83). The brief he received from the Minister Colbert, himself, was to learn all he could of the manners and customs of the Turks, but also to acquire artefacts and manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, none of the Journals of this period make any mention of the Arabian Nights.

Galland’s translation was not his first foray into the genre; in order to capitalize on

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> See Marzolph, in Bouffard & Joyard 2012: 87–91; S. Larzul, in Marzolph 2007: 16–31; Bottigheimer 2014; Kallas 2015.

<sup>5</sup> The term was coined by M. Gerhardt (1963:14).

<sup>6</sup> On Galland’s life and works, see Schwab 1964; Abdel-Halim 1964.

the popularity of fairy tales, he started translating a collection of Persian fables, known as *Kalīla wa Dimna*, which were – and still are – immensely popular in the Arab world. This was followed by the tale of ‘Sindbad the Sailor’<sup>7</sup>, but, as he explained later in his dedication to ‘Madame la marquise d’O, Dame du Palais de Madame la Duchesse de Bourgogne’, he discovered that “it was excerpted from a wonderful collection (*Recueil prodigieux*) of similar tales, in multiple volumes, entitled 1001 Nights.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, he decided to hold fire and withdraw the book from publication. At this stage, another actor appeared on the stage, François Pétis de la Croix (1653–1713),<sup>9</sup> *Professeur Ordinaire du Roy en Langue Arabique* at the Collège de France, and the King’s Interpreter for Arabic, Persian and Turkish. He, too, had realized the sales potential of Sindbad, and in 1701 completed his translation entitled *Histoire arabe de Sindabad le marin*.<sup>10</sup>

When exactly Galland made the connection between the two texts is not known, nor is the basis upon which he made it. It is more than likely that he assumed they were related merely because they were clearly part of the same genre. To this day, no authentic Arabic manuscript of the 1001 Nights containing the story of Sindbad has ever been found. The absence of textual evidence did not stop Galland from inserting Sindbad’s tales (Nights 70–80), and adding night breaks to make it fit into the text.

Intriguingly, he never referred to the nine-volume Turkish translation of the Nights (dated 1636), which had been in Paris since 1660.<sup>11</sup> In October of 1701, Galland obtained an Arabic copy in three volumes, from Syria, as he explained in a letter of 13th

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<sup>7</sup> BNF, MS arabe 3645, *Khabar Sindabād al-bahrī wa Hindabād al-ḥammāl* (‘News of Sindbad the Sailor and Hindabad the Porter’).

<sup>8</sup> Galland 1704-17: I, [4].

<sup>9</sup> L. Valensi, in Pouillon 2012: 798-99.

<sup>10</sup> Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Codex Gallicus 799. The text was recently edited by U. Mazolph and A. Chraïbi (*Sindbad le Marin. Traduction inédite de 1701* (Paris: Espaces & Signes, 2016)).

<sup>11</sup> See Thomann 2016.

October to Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), the Bishop of Avranches:

*Depuis trois ou quatre jours, j'ai appris par la lettre d'un ami de Halep, resident à Paris, qu'il a reçu de son pays, un livre arabe, que je l'avois prié de faire venir. Il est en trois volumes intitulé ... Les Mille nuits. C'est un recueil de contes, dont on s'entretient en ce pays-là dans les veillées. J'ai prié cet ami de me le garder jusqu'à mon arrivée à Paris, pour le prix de dix écus, à quoi il revient d'achat et de port. Ce sera de quoi me divertir pendant les longues soirées.*<sup>12</sup>

(‘About three or four days ago, I received a letter from an Aleppine friend, who resides in Paris, in which he stated that he had obtained an Arabic book I had requested from his country. It is in three volumes and entitled ‘The Thousand Nights’. It is a collection of tales, with which one entertains oneself in the evening in those countries. I asked this friend to keep it for me until I arrived in Paris, for the price of ten *écus*, which represents the cost of acquisition and postage. This will be something to amuse me during the long evenings.’)

However, the manuscript was incomplete as it contained a mere 35 stories, spread over 281 nights, and broke off at the beginning of the tale of ‘Qamar al-Zamān’.<sup>13</sup> The dating of the manuscript has been the subject of some debate. The earliest date mentioned in the manuscript, and thus the *terminus ante quem*, is 3 December 1536 in a reader’s annotation by a Christian owner called Rizq Allāh Ibn Yūḥannā in Tripoli (Lebanon). The manuscript later travelled to Aleppo, where the oldest Muslim reader’s note is dated 18 November 1591, and it remained there until it was sent to Galland’s

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<sup>12</sup> Abdel-Halim 1964: 414-5.

<sup>13</sup> BNF, MSS arabe 3609 (1–67 Nights); arabe 3610 (67–166 Nights); arabe 3611 (167–281 Nights). The text was edited by M. Mahdi (1984).

‘friend’ in Paris. Where exactly it was written and/or compiled is impossible to say; the language used is of the so-called ‘Middle-Arabic’ variety, a mix of classical Arabic and the vernacular (in this case mainly Syrian Arabic), which was the usual register for this type of literature in the period.<sup>14</sup> Over the past centuries, many tentative dates of have been put forward, ranging from the (late) 13th century, to the 15th. The current consensus lies somewhere in the middle, i.e. 14th–15th, with numismatic references pointing to the mid-15th century or, in any case, not before 1426.<sup>15</sup>

Another development occurred in 1702, when Galland allegedly received a fourth volume. However, as this has never been found, it has been suggested that Galland ‘invented’ it to legitimize his translation. The most compelling argument is that other manuscripts of what has become known as the ‘Syrian recension’ of the Nights end at the same juncture.<sup>16</sup>

Galland’s translation met with overwhelming success and the ensuing ‘Orientomania’ quickly transcended borders, influencing literatures across the European Continent, and embedding itself in the public consciousness. As one observer remarked, it ‘introduced to world literature a collection of tales that in terms of its international repercussion in imagination and creativity is second only to the Bible.’<sup>17</sup>

Soon after Galland’s 1001 Nights started to appear (1704), others released their own ‘Oriental’ tales, first among them Pétis de la Croix, who published *Les Mille et un Jours* (1710–12). This collection had its own imaginary pedigree; de la Croix claimed that they were based on a Persian manuscript which he had received from his Persian teacher (“Moclès”) during a stay in the East. Closer examination revealed that the main

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<sup>14</sup> See J. Lentin, in Chraïbi 2004: 434–55; Grotzfeld 1992; Guillaume 2002; Halfants 2007; Sartori 2014.

<sup>15</sup> H. Grotzfeld 1996-7; H. & S. Grotzfeld 1984: 26–27.

<sup>16</sup> Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. 782; Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS 647; Chraïbi 2008: 56; Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 71.

<sup>17</sup> Marzolph & Chraïbi 2012: 300.

source was, in fact, a Turkish translation of a well-known 10th-century Arabic literary anthology, *al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda* ('Joy after Hardship') by al-Tanūkhī (940–994).<sup>18</sup>

As each volume met with increasing success, Galland came under enormous pressure to produce more tales. He ran out of material from his original manuscript by volume 7, adding Sindbad and a full version of 'Qamar al-Zamān' from other – unknown -- sources. Desperate to satisfy demand, his publisher – without Galland's permission or knowledge -- printed volume 8 (1709), which contained a story ('Ganem') translated by Galland (once again from a hitherto unknown manuscript), alongside two stories ('Zeyn Alasnam', 'Codadad') translated by Pétis de la Croix for inclusion in his *Les Mille et Un Jours*. And so, his meeting with Diyāb could not have come at a more propitious moment.

Galland's translation method has attracted its fair share of criticism over the centuries, due to its cavalier use of sources, the unfettered embellishments and emendations to suit the taste of his audience. Indeed, the often dramatic differences between source and target texts have even led to speculation that Galland might have used other manuscripts, or that much of his text is a mere fabrication. His translation not only forged the image of the Nights in European literatures for centuries to come, but his approach also became a model for other translators.

In summary, there is a large number of stories for which no Arabic original has survived, or may reasonably be assumed to have been accessible to Galland, or even existed for that matter. Some are based on – now lost – manuscript versions provided by Ḥannā Diyāb, or on oral transmission. Some have no provenance, even if Galland never gave up hope of finding a 'complete' manuscript of the text, which has remained the

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<sup>18</sup> Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 720–1.

Holy Grail in Arabian Nights studies to the present day. It was perhaps the search for ‘closure’ that caused him to add the most fanciful of his additions, i.e. the ‘conclusion’ of the tale, which is very rarely found elsewhere – and for good reason; how is one to explain the ‘deus ex machina’ of the king’s children appearing without any prior reference to conception or delivery!

Who was Diyāb, and why was he in France? Galland provided us with the basic information: he was a Maronite from Aleppo and had an association with Paul Lucas. Until recently, very little else was known about him, until a manuscript held at the Vatican was identified as his autobiography. As it is dated in 1766 and the author gives his age at the time as 75, we are able to place his birth in 1691. He was, thus, only about 16 or 17 years old when he met Paul Lucas, adventurer extraordinaire, who was on his second journey in the Levant (1704–8) to acquire coins and Oriental *curiosités* for the Cabinet du Roi (just as Galland had done some forty years earlier). His introduction to the young Ḥannā could not have been more enticing:

If you want to travel the world, you’ll not find anyone better than myself... My task ... is to record everything I see, to look for ancient dates ..., coins and ... local plants. ... If you come with me, I’ll put you in the library of Arabic books; you will receive payment from the King and be under his protection for the rest of your life. [My] Minister also asked me to bring back a man who knows Arabic.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Abd al-Qārī Anṭūn Yūsuf Ḥannā Diyāb was born into a well-established merchant

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<sup>19</sup> Diyāb, fol. 8r.



family in Aleppo, and had been a novice at a monastery near Tripoli. However, it seems the young man's calling was weak and he returned home to reflect on his future. It is then that he met Lucas, and embarked upon a journey that would lead to Beirut, Cyprus, Egypt, the Barbary Regencies of Tripoli and Tunis, Livorno, Marseille and Paris, before returning home via Smyrna and Constantinople. Though Diyāb often speaks with affection and admiration of Lucas, the latter, like Galland, made no mention whatsoever in his own travelogue of his young Arab guide, who saved his life on at least one occasion.

Galland's predecessor at the Collège Royal was another Aleppine, Buṭrus Dīb (1620/2–1709), who was better known in France as Pierre Dipy and was probably the 'friend' providing the manuscript of the Nights. After studying in Rome at the Collegium Urbanum (precursor of the Pontifical Urban University), Dipy had arrived in France in 1667, and served as government interpreter before becoming Keeper of Oriental manuscripts. A number of Levantine Christian travellers in the period were men of the cloth, who received their clerical training at the Rome-based Maronite seminary (*Collegium Maronitarum*), which had been set up by Pope Gregory XIII in 1584. It was run by Jesuits and was intended to help strengthen ties with the Maronites, who had accepted Papal authority in 1182. The same Pope also founded a college for Neophytes (1599), that is, converts from Islam and Judaism, as well as the first Arabic press, the *Typographia Medicea* in order to produce Arabic and Syriac materials for distribution in the Orient. Eastern Arab Christians were considered a particularly susceptible group and a prime target within the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), which was founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. Like Dipy, a number of these Arab clerics stayed on in Europe after their studies to work as teachers

or librarians. They included Gabriel Sionita (1577–1648), who contributed to the Paris Polyglot Bible, and Joseph Assemani (1687–1768), who was curator of the Arabic and Syriac manuscripts at the Vatican library. Other Christian Levantines headed to Europe to escape poverty, lured by the prospect of employment (for instance, as interpreters), or to seek their fortune in trade. In Paris, a number of Syrians could be found in the café trade.

How did Ḥannā know all these stories? The English naturalist and physician Alexander Russell (1715–68) left a detailed account of the dramatic performance – and impact on audiences – of these stories in coffee-houses by professional reciters (known as *ḥakawātī*), who ‘in the midst of some interesting adventure, when the expectation of [the] audience is raised to the highest pitch, [break] off abruptly, and ... escape from the room’.<sup>20</sup> It is very likely that Ḥannā would have attended such gatherings, which were very popular among Christians and Muslims alike. In fact, they proved a little too popular and a number of Aleppine Catholic Orders prohibited their members from attending such meetings due to their alleged immoral character.<sup>21</sup>

The stories, too, reflect the ‘multiconfessional’ audiences and contain Christian, as well as Jewish and Muslim elements. The practice was a common one in other cities, too, and the British Arabist Edward Lane wrote on such gatherings in Egypt, where it was a particular type of reciters who specialized in the Arabian hero Antara’s exploits that would also recite from the Nights. He also remarked that copyists regularly ‘altered and modernized’ the language to suit the intended audiences.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Russell 1794: I, 148-50.

<sup>21</sup> B. Heyberger, in Bouffard & Joyard 2012: 71.

<sup>22</sup> Lane 1836: II, 117ff., 130, 150.

Before leaving Diyāb, there is a passage in his travelogue that has some relevance to one of his stories. Not long after leaving Aleppo, Lucas and his entourage hit upon a tomb at the top of a mountain:

He [Lucas] walked around the tomb, looking for a way in. He only saw a small opening, and asked one of the armed escort to go down through it. None of them did; they said that it could contain a wild animal, like a hyena, leopard, or something. ... As we were talking, a shepherd walked by, and the officers asked him to go down. ... The tomb was six feet and one span of the hand deep. The Frenchman said to the shepherd: 'Go around the tomb and give me everything you find.' He started to walk around and saw a human skull, which he handed over. It was the size of a large watermelon. The Frenchman told us it was the skull of a man. Then, the shepherd handed him another skull, which was smaller. The Frenchman said it belonged to a woman. He claimed that the tomb was that of rulers of the area. He threw the shepherd a piece of cloth and said: 'gather everything you find on the ground and give it to me.' The shepherd proceeded to do so, and among the things he collected we saw a large flat ring. The Frenchman examined it and said that it was rusty, and that there was no clear writing on it. He was not able to identify the metal from which it was made, nor whether it was gold, silver, or something else. He kept it with him. Then he said to the shepherd: 'Feel around the walls of the tomb.' As the shepherd did so, he felt a niche inside of which there was a lamp, similar to those of butter vendors, but he could not identify the material....<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Diyāb, fol. 9r-v.

Someone asked to go down a mysterious tomb to collect precious items, a ring, a lamp – is the uncanny resemblance to elements in the story of Aladdin a mere coincidence? Or is this a case of a talented raconteur aiming to please ‘the old man’ by drawing on a pool of stories he has heard, and then like all good *ḥakawātīs* embellishing it with his own imagination and ‘combining the incidents of different tales’?<sup>24</sup> In the absence of an Arabic source text, it is as valid a hypothesis as any.

### *Dawn of The Nights*

What is actually known about the composition of the earliest texts of the 1001 Nights? Where and when did they originate? Where should they be situated within Arabic literature?

The first reference can be found in the monumental encyclopaedia *Murūj al-dhahab* (‘Meadows of Gold’) by the Baghdad-born historian al-Mas‘ūdī (first half 10th century). In a section on translations of books from Persia, India and Greece, he mentioned a book called *Hezār Afsāneh*, ‘which is Persian and translates into Arabic as “One thousand fairytales (*khurāfāt*)”.... It is the story of a king, his vizier, his daughter and slave, Shīrāzād and Dīnāzād. This is similar to ... the book of Sindbad’.<sup>25</sup>

A few decades later, Ibn al-Nadīm’s ‘Index’ (*fihrist*) of Arabic books (986) provided additional information, as well as the only literary critique of the Nights until the early

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<sup>24</sup> Russell 1794: I, 149.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Mas‘ūdī 1861-1877: IV [1875], 89-90 (2005: II, 201).

modern age: ‘it is truly a coarse book, without warmth in the telling’.<sup>26</sup> A number of crucial elements can be deduced from these accounts. Although the tales were traced to a Persian original (with Indian influences), they underwent a number of transformations rather than mere translation into Arabic. A Persian origin is further supported by the names of the characters in the frame-story, even though their status and names show some variation: Dīnārzād/Dīnāzād (the Dunyāzād of ‘modern’ texts) isn’t Shahrazād’s (or Shīrāzād) sister, but her slave (al-Mas‘ūdī), or the head of the household (Ibn al-Nadīm). The Nights were already considered part of a genre, which included the tale of Sindbad (the *Sindbād-nāmeḥ* of Persian literature),<sup>27</sup> and fables like *Kalīla wa Dimna*. The tales were recited in gatherings at courts, and despite their low literary value they merited written preservation because of their *cultural* significance, which gainsays the hypothesis that the Nights were only produced orally. Their importance is underscored by the fact that the brother of one of Islam’s greatest religious scholars, al-Shāfi‘ī, is said to have made a compilation of the Nights. Ibn al-Nadīm also states having seen several complete copies. Last but not least, he mentions the name of an alleged principal compiler, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Jahshiyārī, who selected tales from ‘books of night-time stories’, but only managed to complete 480 out of 1,000 nights before his death.

In 1949, Nadia Abbott discovered what is still the oldest manuscript extract amidst a collection of papyri purchased by the University of Chicago. The document consists of two folios with six fragments of a miscellany, including the draft of a letter and some legal testimony, dated 879. As a result, the extracts from the Nights – the title page and a few lines from the opening page – must be older than that, which is in keeping with

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1872: I, 304; Dodge 1970: 713–15.

<sup>27</sup> The oldest Persian manuscript of this text dates to 1160, though a slightly earlier (1090) Greek version is also extant. The origins of the story probably go back to the famous Middle Egyptian text of *The Shipwrecked Sailor*.

the *kufic-naskhi* script used. Like everything else in the history of the Nights, the fragment raises a plethora of crucial questions, but answers none. The fact that the text is on paper that had become waste already by 879 would exclude Egypt as the origin since papyrus was in much longer use there, and the manufacture of paper was introduced only in the first half of the 10th century. There is a reference to Syria and Bedouins in the text, an owner who had left Antioch (northern Syria), but it was found in Cairo (Fustat)! This is crucial evidence of the fact that already by the mid-9th century, a version (still ‘one thousand nights’, rather than 1001) was circulating across the eastern Mediterranean. The popularity of the Nights is supported by a number of later sources, such as the *Tārīkh Miṣr* (‘History of Egypt’, 1160–71) by Ibn Sa‘d al-Qurṭī, which contains the oldest literary reference to ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ (rather than ‘One Thousand’). In the same period, possibly slightly earlier, the title also appeared in a Jewish bookseller’s records from the Cairo Geniza (ca 1150).<sup>28</sup>

It is very difficult to make any statements about what happened to the Nights between the 10th and 15th centuries. Based on the currently available evidence, it would appear that there was a more or less stable ‘core’, including the frame story and the first five cycles of the Galland manuscript (‘The Merchant and the Demon’, ‘The Fisherman and the Demon’, ‘The Porter and the Three Ladies’, ‘The Three apples’ and ‘The Hunchback’s tale’), based on a thematic coherence between the frame story and the embedded stories. It is to this core, then, that an unstable collection of stories was added through various compilations.<sup>29</sup> Research has shown that prior to the Galand manuscript there was probably at least one other text tradition. This hypothesis relies on the inclusion of the tale of Ṣūl and Shumūl in two manuscripts, held in Tübingen and

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<sup>28</sup> Goitien 1958.

<sup>29</sup> Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 372ff.; A. Chraïbi, in Bouffard & Joyard 2012: 33–39.

Riyad, tentatively dated to the 14th and 15th centuries, respectively.<sup>30</sup>

A collection of between fifteen and twenty stories entitled ‘101 Nights’ (*Mi’at layla wa layla*) constitutes another interesting line of inquiry as the existing manuscripts were all produced in the Muslim West (North Africa, Muslim Spain), while an early 13th-century copy has recently (2010) come to light.<sup>31</sup> It may be (part of) a ‘Western’ variant of the Nights, or even a separate stage in their development. There are similarities in the frame-story and a number of the tales, but its exact status in the history of the Nights remains to be determined.

The Vatican library holds a copy of the Galland manuscript from 1001AH/1592CE, though the ‘coincidence’ in the Muslim year and the number of Nights has raised some doubts about the veracity of the copyist’s note.<sup>32</sup> Two other manuscripts tentatively dated to the 16th century are also worthy of mention. One is in Kayseri (Turkey) and may be the oldest to include the conclusion of the Nights, whereas the other (John Rylands Library) is of particular significance since it is the only one to include illustrations (29 in total).<sup>33</sup>

The 17th century was a particularly fruitful period with no fewer than thirteen manuscripts of the 1001 Nights – once again all incomplete and with uncertain dating.<sup>34</sup> The manuscript brought back by the French consul in Egypt, Benoît de Maillet (1656–

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion, see Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 69-70; Chraïbi in Chraïbi 2016: 115–260. The dates are, however, subject to considerable controversy as chronological references in the manuscripts are much later: 1773 (Riyad) and 1843 (Tübingen).

<sup>31</sup> Chraïbi & Marzolph 2012. The Arabic editions available to date are based on later manuscripts, dated to 1190AH/1776CE (ed. M. Ṭarshūna, Tunis: Dār al-ʿArabiyya li ‘l-Kitāb, 1979; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cologne: al-Jamal, 2005; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Tunis: Bayt al-Ḥikma, 2013; French trans. Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Les Cent et Une Nuits*, Paris, 1911; Paris: Sindbad, 1982) and 1257AH/1841CE (ed. Shuraybiṭ A. Shuraybiṭ, Algiers: al-Maktaba al-Waṭaniyya al-Jazā’iryya, 2005). A German translation of the recently discovered manuscript was made by Claudia Ott (2005). An earlier translation (Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 1911) was based on 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts.

<sup>32</sup> Marzolph 1998: 158.

<sup>33</sup> Macdonald 1924: 393–5; Marzolph 1998: 158; Grotzfeld 1984: 41; Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 75–6; Mahdi 1984: II, 298–300. The text covers parts 6–12 of the Nights, as from Night 255.

<sup>34</sup> Also see list at the end of the chapter.

1738) in 1702 is significant as it covers 1–905 Nights (with some omissions), which is the highest number until the appearance of complete sets in the 19th century.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, it cannot be subsumed in the main recension families and may thus afford valuable insight into the development of the cycle since the Galland manuscript.

Let us turn to the hypotheses regarding the various interconnecting strands in the genesis of the Nights. Abbott held that the *Hezār Afsāneh* was translated from Persian into Arabic in the 9th century, with additional Arabic material being added in the initial version of the Nights. As a result, the tales were expanded and/or ‘re-sited’ through the inclusion of settings and characters. As regards the alleged collection by al-Jahshiyārī in the 10th century, its contents are entirely unknown as the text is lost and no other references to it have been found. A further stage would then have taken place between the 13th and 16th centuries, with the inclusion of Egyptian tales. To this one should add a number of other antecedents. First among them is the Indian influence in the use of a frame-story and even similarities in some of the tales.<sup>36</sup> One should be wary, however, of establishing narrative lineages as a number of common features co-existed in oral stories across the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, no text of the *Hezār Afsāneh*, or of any of the proposed compilation stages has survived. It is not unlikely that a ‘canonical’ text never existed, and that different compilations were in circulation at any given time. The title, itself, might suggest an ‘open-ended’ set of stories, rather than a closed cycle of exactly 1001 nights.

There is little doubt that the tales were primarily intended for recitation and that they were part of a large tradition of oral folk tales, many of which were written down. The

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<sup>35</sup> Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 72–3.

<sup>36</sup> Macdonald 1938.

<sup>37</sup> H. El Shamy, in Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 10 (9–13).



‘low-brow’ language and intent also explains the near-absence of the text from classical Arabic literature and the low esteem in which it was – and still is – held.

### *Imaginary Wanderings*

On the heels of the success of the Galland translation, the Nights began to wander across ever more labyrinthine paths as Orientomania rose to fever pitch, with an added impetus being given by Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign (1798–1801).

The appetite for new stories caused a renewed hunt for manuscripts and the dearth of copies in the East presented lucrative opportunities for copyists -- as well as would-be forgers. First among the latter, we find an Aleppine cleric, known as Dom Denis Chavis (Diyūnīsiyūs Shāwīsh), a former student of the St Athanasius Greek School in Constantinople, who had arrived in Paris in the early 1780s and taught at the Bibliothèque du Roi, presumably Arabic to the so-called ‘*Jeunes de langue*’, young boys destined for a career as dragoman (interpreter) in French consulates in the Ottoman Empire. He claimed to have found a manuscript from Baghdad, which completed that of Galland.<sup>38</sup> In addition to continuing the story of ‘Qamar al-Zamān’, it contained the much-sought-after Arabic version of a number of orphan stories, including Aladdin, combined with other material from an eclectic mix of sources. Chavis soon realized that the real potential – and financial gain – lay in a French text, and he approached the editor of *Le Cabinet des Fées*, Paul Barde. The proposal to render the ‘continuation’ of

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed discussion of the background to the Chavis manuscript, see Mahdi 1984: III, 51–61. The Chavis manuscripts are held at BNF, MS arabe 3613–4 and 3616. Also see Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 520; Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 87–8.

Galland into French was eagerly accepted and Barde suggested a collaboration with Jacques Cazotte (1719–1792). Chavis ceased work on his ‘recension’ (reaching the 631st Night) and refocused his efforts on a French translation. It is interesting to note the similarity in methodology with Galland and Diyāb, as Chavis provided a French gist translation, which Cazotte then transformed into a French literary text. The translation appeared in 1788–9 in Geneva under the title *Continuation des Mille et Une Nuits*, the editor stating proudly:

*le reste des manuscrits qui devoient terminer l’ouvrage... viennent d’y être apportés par Dom Denis Chavis... ce savant arabe a entrepris d’enrichir notre littérature amusante, de cette charmant Suite qu’il a apportée en France.*<sup>39</sup>

(‘The remainder of the manuscripts that were supposed to complete the work... have been provided by Dom Denis Chavis.... this Arab scholar, who has made it his task to enrich our entertaining literature with this charming sequel, which he has brought with him to France.’)

Seven of the stories in the French translation are not in the Chavis recension, or anywhere else for that matter, and must therefore be assumed to be inventions by Cazotte or Chavis (or both). Very early on, the Chavis manuscript raised doubts, especially due to the large number of French calques in the Arabic. In fact, the entire copy was a fraud and was essentially a patchwork of ‘back-translation’ of Galland’s French text, though replacing the Sindbad cycle with another story, as well as additions

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<sup>39</sup> Vol I, 1788, p. 6.

from other collections,<sup>40</sup> and an Arabic translation of Pétis de la Croix's *Zayn Asnām* (from the eighth volume of Galland's translation). For a while, the duo got away with their deception and the 'Continuation' became a success abroad as well, with no fewer than three English translations between 1792 and 1794. Many of the Chavis stories can also be found in some of the 19th-century translations of the Nights.

The 18th century saw a dramatic increase in the number of manuscripts, with over thirty partial collections. One should be wary to explain this through a sudden boost in interest in the tales in the Arab world as many of the manuscripts were copies made for European travellers. Among them, there is one copied in Egypt in 1764 and owned by Edward Wortley-Montague (1713–1776).<sup>41</sup> It stands out not only because of its size (only one of an originally complete set of eight volumes is missing), but also because over thirty stories are found only in this manuscript.<sup>42</sup> Although some parts are similar to the Galland manuscript, most of it belongs to a different tradition.<sup>43</sup> The manuscript acquired by Alexander Russell in Aleppo merits attention as well. He commented that he only found copies containing 280 Nights, which corroborates the earlier point that Galland's Syrian recension was already incomplete (and remains so to the present).<sup>44</sup> As the Russell manuscript is a copy of the one in the Vatican, it is the final known descendant of the Galland text.<sup>45</sup>

In the 19th century, the story of the Nights would take even more unusual turns, not least because for the first time complete sets were located (or copied), and by the end of

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<sup>40</sup> The tale of al-Bunduqānī (the first in the *Continuation*; vol. I, pp. 11–112) is taken from a volume of miscellaneous stories (BNF, MS arabe 3637, dated 1772); Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 87.

<sup>41</sup> Grotzfeld and Grotzfeld 1984: 43–4; Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 87. Edward was the son of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), known for her letters from Turkey, where she had accompanied her ambassador husband, and for introducing smallpox inoculation to Britain.

<sup>42</sup> Tauer 1995.

<sup>43</sup> Zotenberg 1887: 216–7.

<sup>44</sup> Russell 1794: 306.

<sup>45</sup> Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 83–4; Mahdi 1984: II, 262–8. The remaining volume (of two) of the Russell manuscript is currently held at the John Rylands Library (No 647 [40]).

the century no fewer than ten were held in European libraries. However, the circumstances in which they came into being often have more in common with detective fiction than with codicology.

The man at the centre of the story of the first of these manuscripts was a Syrian expatriate by the name of Mikhāʾīl Ibn Niqūlā Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ṣabbāgh (*ca* 1775–1816), better known in France as Michel Sabbagh. Born into a prominent Melkite family in Acre, where his grandfather was personal physician to the ruler, he spent his early childhood in Damascus before moving to Egypt. When the French invaded, he entered the employ of the occupying army as an interpreter. After Napoleon’s defeat, a large number of Christians (both Egyptians and Syrians) who had collaborated with the French accompanied the retreating army to France. Though the community was initially welcomed, their economic situation grew increasingly precarious as the majority could only rely on meagre government pensions. Sabbagh was able to eke out an existence as a scribe and corrector at the royal printing works, and then at the Bibliothèque du Roi where he was entrusted with the restoration and copying of Arabic manuscripts. Money was always tight, as shown by the moving letter he wrote to the King in which he begged for funds, after his forced departure from Egypt when ‘the Muslims pillaged, sold our women and killed my uncle’.<sup>46</sup> At one point, the doyen of French oriental scholarship, Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) even intervened on Sabbagh’s behalf, praising the assistance he provided to ‘*des travaux relatifs à la langue et à la littérature arabe*’ (‘research related to Arabic language and literature’).<sup>47</sup> His contribution to the *Nights* came when he transcribed a manuscript for Jacques Caussin de Perceval (1759–1835), then curator of Arabic manuscripts at the Royal Library as well as incumbent of

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<sup>46</sup> Service historique de la Défense (SHD), Paris, “XL/37<sup>i</sup>: Orientaux a Paris, 1789 à 1815: Aumôniers et Interprètes”, dossier ‘Mikha’il Sabbagh’; letter, dated 4 April 1814.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., letter, dated 30 July 1814.

the chair of Arabic at the Collège de France. The manuscript Sabbagh claimed to have discovered was remarkable in a number of ways.<sup>48</sup> As it was a complete set, dated 21 October 1703 in Baghdad, it not only pre-dated Galland's translation, but its provenance also pointed to an Iraqi strand in the textual tradition of the Nights, which would be logical as the Abbasid capital was the setting of many of the core stories.<sup>49</sup>

Besides the tales of the Galland manuscript, Sabbagh's text contained the additional stories of the mysterious fourth volume, as well as tales also found in the Chavis redaction. All of this, combined with the absence of the Sindbad and Ali Baba cycles, pointed towards the Sabbagh manuscript being the missing link between different recensions, all neatly broken down into Nights and added with the happy ending so vital to fairytales. The problem was that, as we have seen, there was no fourth volume and Chavis' text was a counterfeit. Furthermore, the original manuscript was never actually seen by anyone else. Contrary to Chavis, however, Sabbagh was an experienced manuscript copyist and through astute linguistic manipulation was able to hoodwink specialists for almost two centuries. The deception was unravelled only in 1984 by Muhsin Mahdi, who established that Sabbagh copied the frame story and the first 69 Nights from the Galland and Chavis manuscripts, added with stories from the Maillet version and a miscellany of other manuscripts, amending and emendating as he went along. Very much like a painter going through several sketches, Sabbagh honed his forgery in a number of drafts.<sup>50</sup> His manuscript hugely impacted – or 'contaminated' (to

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<sup>48</sup> Mahdi 1984: III, 61-72. The two-volume manuscript is still at BNF, MS arabe 4678-9.

<sup>49</sup> This was probably also why Chavis chose Baghdad as the origin of his fictitious manuscript.

<sup>50</sup> Akel suggested that the first draft is the one in Munich (BS 629), which was followed by the manuscript held in St Petersburg. This was refuted by Lentin, on the basis of differences in handwriting and content. Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 91, 100-1; Lentin, in *idem*: 355. The manuscript submitted to Caussin de Perceval is now at the BNF, MS arabe 4678-9.

use Mahdi's term) – the textual history of the Nights as it directly or indirectly served as a source for a number of translations as well as printed editions.<sup>51</sup>

In the same period, there was an increase in the circulation of the text in Egypt, including, for the first time, complete sets, several of which were brought back to Europe by travellers such as the Swiss John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817),<sup>52</sup> the German Ulrich Seetzen (1767–1811)<sup>53</sup>, and the Frenchman Asselin de Cherville (1772–1822)<sup>54</sup>. Another major development was the recognition of a new branch of the Nights that was distinct from the Galland text and had emerged in Egypt. The earliest compilation of what would later become known as the Egyptian recension, or the 'Zotenberg Egyptian Recension' (ZER), after the scholar who first researched it, can be traced back to the 1770s, when a complete copy was made by an Egyptian shaykh, whose name and motives remain unknown. The oldest reference can be found in Seetzen's journal for July 1807, which confirmed the theory of a nucleus of tales being added with a variable pool of other stories; Asselin (the then dragoman of the French consulate) 'discovered that the Arab tales of 1001 Nights were not all made by the author (*Verfasser*), who only wrote around two hundred Nights, the remaining ones being drawn from a collection of existing stories, which he gathered together. The one who did this was a local shaykh by the name of ..., who died some 26 years ago and was known by many living shaykhs'.<sup>55</sup> This rather cryptic statement is generally taken

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<sup>51</sup> Mahdi 1984: III: 71–2.

<sup>52</sup> Cambridge University Library, Qq106-109. Akel, in Chraïbi 2016: 92.

<sup>53</sup> Besides the complete set (Gotha, Orient A 2632-5), he brought back three partial copies (Gotha, Orient A 2637, A 2638, A2639). Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 80–1, 89-90.

<sup>54</sup> The 'fonds Asselin' in Paris (BNF, MSS arabe 3595–7, 3598–3601, 3602–5). There is also a partial copy made by Asselin, himself (Arabe 3617, 285–326 Nights). Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 97-8.

<sup>55</sup> Seetzen 1854-5: III, 188.

to mean that the anonymous shaykh used a pre-existing core of two hundred Nights to which he added other known tales.<sup>56</sup>

The first Arabic printed edition was another foreign endeavour, and intended as a teaching tool for British officials studying at the College of Fort William in Calcutta, where it was also printed in two volumes (1814–18). In his Persian preface, the editor ‘Shuekh Uhmud Bin Moohummud Shirwanee Ool Yumunee’ (Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Shīrwānī al-Yamanī), who was an Arabic teacher at the College, explained that the Syrian author wrote the text in a conversational style and informal language for those wishing to learn the language. By accident, rather than by design, the edition relied on a recension close to the Galland manuscript.<sup>57</sup> Al-Yamanī randomly selected two hundred nights, but despite essentially corresponding to the Galland (Syrian) recension, there are some significant differences, such as the addition of the tale of Būrān and al-Ma’mūn’ (Nights 94–100) from ZER, and stories from Langlès’ *Les voyages de Sind-Bâd le Marin et La Ruse des Femmes* (1814). Al-Yamanī also made considerable editorial changes to the language, classicizing many of the colloquialisms. Due mainly to its limited scope, this Calcutta edition was never widely circulated, though there was a single-volume lithograph reprint in 1829.

The next decade saw the publication of the first – and only – European edition of the Arabic text, with another mysterious manuscript, this time from a purportedly North African strand of the Nights. The editor was the German scholar Christian Maximilian Habicht (1775-1839), who arrived in Paris in 1797 as secretary to the Prussian legation and remained until 1807, taking classes at the École des Langues orientales, where his

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<sup>56</sup> Mahdi 1984-94: III, 99.

<sup>57</sup> Until recently, it was thought to be a copy of the Russell manuscript, made for John Leyde in India in 1811 (British Library, IO ISL2699). However, recently British Library, DEL AR1308 has been identified as the source. See Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 82–3, 92–3, 432–4; Mahdi 1984–94 III, 88-92; Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 545.

teachers included de Sacy, and the Aleppo-born Melkite Priest Rafā'īl Antūn Zakhūr (1759–1831), known in France as Dom de Monachis, who had been one of the official interpreters to the French occupation force. In recompense for his services, he was appointed to the chair in dialectal Arabic (1803–16) at the School, where Champollion was among his first pupils.

During his stay in Paris, Habicht established close relations with members of the Arab expatriate community, among them the Tunisian Jew Mordechai Naggiar (Murdīkhāy al-Najjār), with whom he even shared a flat in Paris.<sup>58</sup> Hardly anything is known about this scholar who was the last of the Arab compilers of the Nights in Europe. According to the American missionary Joseph Greaves, who met him in Tunis in 1825, al-Najjār had contacts with de Sacy and ‘other Oriental scholars.’<sup>59</sup> In the 1820s, Habicht, who by then had taken up the chair of Arabic in his native Breslau, began publishing both an Arabic edition (1824) and a German translation of the Nights (1825), both of which have been discredited.<sup>60</sup> Habicht’s methodology was very much in line with the Chavis school of ‘textual tradition’, with a fabricated ‘Tunisian’ recension of the Nights provided by al-Najjār serving as the fictional basis for an expanded translation.<sup>61</sup> The fraud was unmasked by the American Arabist missionary Duncan B. MacDonald (1909), who proved that the Tunisian manuscript never existed; rather, Habicht’s edition was concocted from the Chavis, Sabbagh and, possibly, Maillet manuscripts, added with some stories ‘originated’ by al-Najjār from a variety of sources.

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<sup>58</sup> See Valensi 2008; Collier 2011: 76, 78, 80.

<sup>59</sup> Jowett 1825: 478.

<sup>60</sup> Akel in Chraïbi 2006: 434; Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 579–80. Only eight volumes were published in Habicht’s lifetime (1824–38), with Heinrich Fleischer editing the last four (1842–1843).

<sup>61</sup> A copy of Mordecai’s manuscript has apparently survived in Berlin (Staatsbibliothek, Do.183–4); Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 88–9.



Habicht's German translation, which contains nearly seventy stories that are not in his Arabic edition, is based on another amalgam of texts, including the translations by Caussin de Perceval (1806) and Jonathan Scott (1811), combined with several Nights (884–1001) from the spurious Tunisian recension, and nearly thirty stories found only in Wortley-Montague. It is unclear whether al-Najjār prepared the fraudulent text at Habicht's request – and knowledge – or whether he did so without a specific buyer in mind. It is known that Habicht started collecting materials relating to the Nights during his Paris stay and his interest would, of course, have been known to his friends, nearly all of whom were active in what had become a cottage copying industry for 1001 Nights manuscripts to satisfy demand from scholars. When it comes to Habicht's role, one observer accused him of 'wilfully creat[ing] a literary myth, and enormously confus[ing] the history of the *Nights*'.<sup>62</sup>

Another member on the fringes of the Parisian Arab community in the early part of the century was a certain Jean Varsy, whose name would become connected with what was thought to be the oldest Arabic redaction of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'. The story surrounding this text is every bit as enthralling as those of Sabbagh and Chavis. In 1860, a Parisian bookseller sold the Bodleian Library a manuscript containing the tales of 'Hārūn al-Rashīd and The Daughter of Kisrā', and 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and Morgana the Slave-girl' (*ʿAlī Bābā maʿa l-luṣūṣ al-arbaʿīn wa l-jāriya Marjāna*). It lay unexplored for nearly half a century, before drawing the attention of Duncan MacDonald, who published the text and suggested it was the version given to Galland by Diyāb. There were a few oddities, though, such as the discrepancy between the clearly Christian name of the copyist – Yūḥannā [Ibn Yūsuf Wārisī] – and the use of

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<sup>62</sup> Macdonald 1909: 686.

Islamic religious formulae. Secondly, Galland's journal did not mention a written version of the text, only a synopsis of what was recounted to him by Diyāb.<sup>63</sup> Finally, there was the language, which was a rather peculiar hotchpotch of dialects and literary Arabic, with the odd calque from French. However, Macdonald, and others, excluded that it was a translation of Galland's text, on the grounds that there were significant differences between the two. Macdonald was able to establish that 'Yūḥannā Wārisī' was, in fact, Jean Varsy, and concluded that he, like Galland, had copied a tale he had read or heard.<sup>64</sup> For seventy years, this remained the consensus, until Muhsin Mahdi re-examined the text and, based on inconsistencies in both content and language, was convinced that it was, in fact, another fiction, an Arabic 'recreation' of Galland's translation.<sup>65</sup> K. Zakharia's recent researches<sup>66</sup> have shed more light on the alleged forger, Jean-Georges Varsy (1774–1859), whose family ran a trading house in Rosetta. Like so many European merchants, they were forced to flee the country after the defeat of the French army, as the local population exacted its revenge on their property. Besides his commercial activities, Varsy was a keen Arabist, manuscript collector and copyist.<sup>67</sup> Zakhariya makes a compelling case for Varsy's Arabic ability, thus eroding Mahdi's comments about his linguistic incompetence. Furthermore, the mixture of Classical Arabic and vernacular in the Ali Baba text are in keeping with the Middle Arabic register of the genre. Although Zakharia's findings undermined Mahdi's arguments, they do not, in themselves, refute the forgery claim, rather that it is a more adept one. On the other hand, if one adds the extent and nature of the discrepancies between Galland's and Varsy's texts, it does become less likely that Varsy adapted the

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<sup>63</sup> BNF, MS fr. 19277, p. 140; Macdonald 1913: 41–6.

<sup>64</sup> Macdonald 1910; *idem* 1913.

<sup>65</sup> Mahdi 1984: III, 72–86; Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 90–1.

<sup>66</sup> Zakharia 2015, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> BNF, MSS arabe 3602–5. Elisséeff 1949: 6; Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 97.

French text. As a result, the hypothesis that the text was copied from an existing source cannot be rejected out of hand.

After the flurry of copying activity at the start of the century in order to meet the demand by European scholars, the supply of manuscripts of the Nights had dwindled in Cairo by the 1830s. According to Lane ‘even fragments of them are with difficulty procured; and when a complete copy of “the Thousand and One Nights” is found, the price demanded for it is too great for a reciter to have it in his power to pay’.<sup>68</sup> In 1831, another complete was made for the German vice-consul in Egypt, Carl Reinhardt, and remains important since, like the Wortley-Montague manuscript, it falls outside the Syrian and ZER families.<sup>69</sup>

The increased demand, and perhaps also interest in the Nights in Egypt, led to the printing of the first complete edition in October 1835, at the government press in Bulaq (then a suburb of Cairo), which had been set up only a decade earlier (1822). The two volumes went on sale for the price of 100 piasters, which was quite considerable and equivalent to a year’s supply of sugar or rice for the average middle-class Cairene family.<sup>70</sup> The Bulaq edition represents the Egyptian recension of the 17th and 18th centuries, and was based on the text compiled by the above-mentioned anonymous shaykh in the 1770s, though the actual manuscript(s) has not been located. It was edited by Qitṭa al-ʿAdawī (d. 1864), a teacher at the newly founded Language School and a revisor at the printing press.<sup>71</sup> It is in this edition that the phrase most associated with the Nights in Arabic today -- ‘*adraka Shahrazād al-ṣabāḥ wa sakatat ʿan al-kalām al-mubāḥ*’ (‘As morning overtook Shahrazad, she ceased her lawful speech’) – made its

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<sup>68</sup> Lane 1836: II, 150.

<sup>69</sup> The four-volume manuscript is currently in the Strasbourg University Library (Nos 4278–81). See Chraïbi 1996.

<sup>70</sup> Bianchi 1843: 46 (with the incorrect date of 1836); Lane 1835: II, 381.

<sup>71</sup> Newman 2011: 48ff.; al-Shayyāl 1951: 39, 149.

first appearance. The text gained considerable popularity and a number of other editions followed in Cairo (1862, 1880) and Beirut (1880, 1888-9). The first printed Turkish translation appeared in Istanbul in 1850.

Four years after the Bulaq edition, it was in Calcutta that the so-called ‘Vulgate’ of the Arabian Nights was published in four volumes (1839–42), edited by Sir William Hay Macnaghten. It was primarily based on a manuscript that originally belonged to the Egyptologist Henry Salt (1780–1827), or so it was thought. Mahdi’s ingenious detective work revealed that here, too, deceit had been aforethought, and that the Salt manuscript was a composite of a late ZER manuscript, Calcutta I and the Breslau edition.<sup>72</sup> As the latter were based on the Galland manuscript, the Syrian and Egyptian strands thus merged for the first time in Calcutta II, after being separated for several hundred years. In a final irony, it is this edition which soon gained ‘canonical’ status as the most complete, authentic and original Nights. From then on, Arabic editions have been reprints of Bulaq or Calcutta II, with varying degrees of editorial additions, omissions and bowdlerization.

### *Noctes Volant, Scripta Manent*

As already stated, it was not until the late 19th century that the Arabic text of the Nights became the object of serious research with the trailblazing work by Hermann Zotenberg (1887, 1888), who identified an Egyptian recension, compiled in the 18th century and represented by Bulaq and Calcutta II. It is distinct from the Syrian strain through the

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<sup>72</sup> Mahdi 1984-94: III, 101–26.

addition (often from miscellaneous folktales), omission and amendment of tales, as well as a number of other features in terms of genre, language, characterization, cultural origins, and setting.

Dating – and authentication – of the manuscripts poses a number of intractable problems; palaeographic evidence is not always conclusive, whereas we have seen that scribal and other metatextual information cannot always be taken at face value. Rather than tracing a single ‘hypotext’, the analysis often has to take into account variable dates of individual tales. There are many stories whose provenance and time of inclusion in the 1001 Nights is unknown. What is more, in cases where tales occur in only one manuscript, one cannot exclude the possibility that these were added by a copyist.

Historical details often provide valuable clues; for instance, the reference to coffee and tobacco in the tale of ‘Abū Qīr the Dyer and Abū Sīr the Barber’ (Calcutta II) precludes a date prior to the 16th century when these items were introduced in Egypt. Linguistic features, too, are a highly complex indicator, as dialects develop over time and judgements based on current geographical distribution of features cannot always be extrapolated. There was interference between versions from different branches, further compounded by emendations at the hands of copyists and editors, who often felt compelled to ‘classicize’ colloquialisms.<sup>73</sup>

A key question revolves around the comparative analysis of the extant manuscripts that contain stories from the Nights. At present, their number stands at around 105, most of which await further study.<sup>74</sup> Only thirteen manuscripts are complete (all of the ZER

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<sup>73</sup> J. Lentin, in Chraïbi 2016: 353–66.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix. This is a number based on I. Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 65–114. On the manuscript traditions, also see: H. Grotzfeld, in Mazolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 17–20; Marzolph 1998; Chauvin 1892–1922: IV, 197–213.

text), with different parts surviving in the partial copies. The history and development of the text of the Nights do not enable us to make reliable judgements about any collections predating the incomplete Galland manuscript. The fact that a ‘nucleus’ can be found in the major manuscript and printed collections does not provide any evidence regarding some sort of canonical set prior to the 15th century, rather of subsequent copying. The *Encyclopedia of the Arabian Nights* lists 551 stories across the major manuscript, printed and translated collections.<sup>75</sup> If we exclude some duplicates across editions, we are left with about 305 main stories,<sup>76</sup> with the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions containing around 260. Even within the same recension there is variation in the stories that are included. A particular feature of texts that are neither in the Syrian nor ZER branches is the number of unique stories, though this affects others as well. For example, over thirty tales are found only in Reinhardt, around ten only in the Maillet manuscript, and over sixty only in the Wortley-Montague and Breslau texts.<sup>77</sup>

Other differences include the absence of a breakdown into nights, the length of individual nights, as well as the language and content of the stories, with the expansion or reduction of tale cycles. Even within the canonical ‘core’, differences can be quite substantial. Let us take, for example, the famous ‘Tale of The Three Apples’. This has been called the first whodunit in Arabic literature, and involves the discovery of a box containing the dismembered body of a young woman, and the subsequent unmasking of her killer. In the Galland manuscript, it starts in Night 69, though in his translation it only comes in the 90th (after Sindbad’s 7th Journey). The Breslau edition keeps the

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<sup>75</sup> This list is based on the Wortley-Montague manuscript, the editions by Chraïbi 1996; Mahdi (1984–94), Bulaq (1835), Calcutta II (1839–42), and Breslau (1825–43); and the translations by Galland, Habicht (1825), Burton (1885–8), Mardrus (1899–1904), Littmann (1921–8), Lane (1839–41), Weill (1838–41), and Payne (1882–4).

<sup>76</sup> Chraïbi 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Data based on Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004.

beginning in the 69th Night, whereas in Calcutta I, it is the 68th, in Calcutta II and Bulaq, the 19<sup>th</sup>, in Maillet, the 66<sup>th</sup>, and the 18<sup>th</sup> in the 1935 Cairo edition.

### *Translation and Appropriation*

It was the next journey of the Nights, that of ‘translation’ to the West in the early modern period that would have the widest impact on the status and image in both Western and Arabic literatures. The almost obsessive quest of 19th-century scholars for more Arabian Nights was matched by the insatiable demand for translations by Western audiences. In 1836, the critic and poet James Leigh Hunt wrote that the Arabian Nights were, quite simply, ‘the most popular book in the world’.<sup>78</sup>

The complexities of the Arabic source text(s) discussed above naturally impinged on the translations, which further muddied textual waters. In addition to translators basing themselves on material that is now known to be fraudulent, some further corrupted the text by idiosyncratic restructuring of existing elements and/or interpolating others from extraneous sources, both real and invented. The issues with Habicht’s German text were by no means exceptional. Equally whimsical and fraudulent in its sourcing was Joseph Mardrus’s French rendition (1899–1904), which introduced a number of stories previously unrelated to the Nights.<sup>79</sup>

Edward Lane, for his part, based his English translation (1838–41) on the Bulaq, Calcutta I and Breslau editions, and not only heavily expurgated the text, but also omitted the division into nights and much of the poetry.<sup>80</sup> Lane’s translation quickly

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<sup>78</sup> *London and Westminster Review*, XXXIII, p. 106.

<sup>79</sup> Larzul 1996: 140–216; Irwin 1994: 36–40.

<sup>80</sup> Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 618–20; Irwin 1994: 23–5, 90–1, 112–3.

gained popularity, with new editions appearing in 1859 and 1883. However, it was soon overshadowed by Sir Richard Burton's (1821–1890) version, which contains 417 tales and remains the most extensive version of the 1001 Nights available in English, at least in quantity, if nothing else. Burton used a variety of editions (Calcutta II, Breslau, Wortley-Montague) as well as translations (Galland, Pétis de la Croix, Chavis & Cazotte) available to him. The extent of Burton's reliance on John Payne's text (based on Calcutta II and Breslau editions), which appeared shortly before (1882-4), resulted in accusations of plagiarism, which are still hotly debated today.<sup>81</sup> The success of the first ten volumes (1885–6) prompted Burton to publish a second set of six supplemental volumes (1887–9). Due to its allegedly lewd content – much of it greatly enhanced by Burton, himself – the text was officially printed in Benares, for the members of the Kama Shastra Society, to avoid prosecution under British obscenity laws. In addition to textual liberties, it was Burton's salacious mock-critical apparatus that attracted most attention, particularly the 'Terminal Essay' and its discussion of the '*turpiloquium*' in Eastern societies.<sup>82</sup>

By the first quarter of the 20th century, the image of the Nights in both France and England was determined by, respectively, Mardrus' and Burton's fanciful translations, which were the fountainhead of many of the Orientalist stereotypes and tropes that have been reinforced in popular culture. Mardrus' text served as the source for the translation by Edward Powys Mathers (1923), whose lack of knowledge of Arabic did not prevent him from making further amendments. Although the most recent translators Malcolm and Ursula Lyons (2008) eschewed Burton's "mock-Elizabethan, bogus Oriental

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<sup>81</sup> Marzolph & Van Leeuwen 2004: 504-8; Irwin 1994: 28-36.

<sup>82</sup> 1885–9: X, 173ff.



style”,<sup>83</sup> the source text (Calcutta II) remains equally flawed. Notable exceptions are the translations of the Galland manuscript into English (Husain Haddawy, 1990) and German (Claudia Ott, 2004).

Very little has changed in the meantime in terms of the textual history of the Nights. The Galland manuscript remains the oldest Arabic version to be unaffected by modern fraud and represents at least one medieval recension. The many post-19th century Arabic editions (thirty-eight since 1950)<sup>84</sup> often mix multiple unacknowledged recensions, combined with extreme editorial licence.

In the modern era, the most important innovation, if one may call it such, in the Arabic textual tradition has been the insertion of European tales, such as the orphan stories, and ‘Europeanized’ versions of others. The naturalization or cultural appropriation – or re-appropriation, to be more exact -- of these is perhaps the most remarkable part of the story of the Nights, as they mutated through redaction and translation, and back again. What is more, it is the European invention of the Nights that has penetrated the editions in the Arab world; today most Arabic-speaking children claim Aladdin as their own, and are as familiar with the magic lamp and the flying carpet as their Western counterparts. The shibboleth ‘Open, Sesame!’ is firmly embedded in Arabic cultural idiom (*Iftah yā Simsim!*), and even serves as the title of the Arabic production of the popular television show *Sesame Street*. And so, in a bizarre case of re-transference, the text of the Nights has returned to its homeland as much a fiction as the stories, themselves.

This begs the question to what extent the current versions of Arabian Nights can be considered a representation of Arab culture of any age, and their long-standing use as a

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<sup>83</sup> Lewis 1993: 71.

<sup>84</sup> Most of these have been published in Beirut (22), and Cairo (10). See Akel in Chraïbi 2016: 431–91.

historical source or manual to medieval Islamic civilization. Furthermore, in the absence of an authentic medieval recension, and anything remotely resembling a ‘canonical’ version, where does this leave the ever increasing Arabian Nights scholarship, which is still predominantly the preserve of Western academe? A lot remains to be done, of course, not least in terms of the analysis of extant texts, many of which await further examination. Translation, too, has more to offer, and early Turkish versions hold out the hope of new insights into the textual development and distribution of the Nights.

In Western culture, the image is equally distorted, and it is Burton’s prurient monument to Orientalism, which, despite its ludicrous and impenetrable prose, has had the greatest influence on the reception of the Arabian Nights and, by extension, of Arab-Islamic culture. Like all works of world literature, the Arabian Nights have transcended literatures, cultures, and history, and may rightfully be claimed by all. Regardless of the shape and format the Nights mutated into, they have continued eminently to serve the aim with which they were once created – to entertain and divert wherever they may wander.

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Extant Arabic manuscripts of 1001 Nights <sup>85</sup>							
	10thc.	14thc.	15thc.	16thc.	17thc.	18thc.	19thc.
al-Azhar (Cairo)						Ṣād9483/ʿayn133413 adab), dated 1719	
al-Maṭḥaf al-Waṭanī (Baghdad)					23220	-849 [260fols] -1413	
Arcadian Library (London)					[30 octavo notebooks]		
Bangladesh National Museum Library (Dacca)							X
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Munich)							-623-626, 4vols * [498/339/316/340fols] -627-628, 2vols -629
Berlin Staatsbibliothek						-Pett. 109 [40fols] -We.521 [60fols] -We.662 [132fols], dated 1759 -We.601 [197fols]	-Do183-4, 2 vols [105/17fols] -We.663 [100fols] -We.1082 [50fols]
Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican)			782 [264fols]			778-781 (182/186fols)	
Bibliothèque générale de Philosophie et						2241C [422fols]	

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Arcadian Library (London)					[30 octavo notebooks]		
Bangladesh National Museum Library (Dacca)							X
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