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**Otherness and the Other Sex Within the Frame  
Story of *The Thousand and One Nights*: Texts and  
Criticism**

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**Drawing by Elena Soldano**

<b>Arabic alphabet</b>	
<b>Romanisation</b>	
أ	ʾ
ب	<b>b</b>
ت	<b>t</b>
ث	<b>th</b>
ج	<b>j</b>
ح	<b>ḥ</b>
خ	<b>kh</b>
د	<b>d</b>
ذ	<b>dh</b>
ر	<b>r</b>
ز	<b>z</b>
س	<b>s</b>
ش	<b>sh</b>
ص	<b>ṣ</b>
ض	<b>ḍ</b>
ط	<b>ṭ</b>
ظ	<b>ẓ</b>
ع	ʿ
غ	<b>gh</b>
ف	<b>f</b>
ق	<b>q</b>
ك	<b>k</b>
ل	<b>l</b>
م	<b>m</b>
ن	<b>n</b>
ه	<b>h</b>
و	<b>w</b>
ي	<b>y</b>

### Romanisation: main rules of application<sup>1</sup>

- 1) The long vowels are romanised *ū*, *ī*, and *ā* respectively. The diphthongs are romanised *aw* and *ay*, respectively.
- 2) *ا*, *alif*, and *و*, *wāw*, when used as orthographic signs without phonetic significance, are not represented in romanisation.
- 3) In initial position, *hamza* (ء) whether at the beginning of a word, following a prefixed preposition or conjunction, or following the definite article, is not represented in romanisation. When medial or final, ء is romanised ' (*alif*).
- 4) Initial *ا*, *alif madda*, is romanised *ā*. Moreover, *ا* when used to support *waṣla* *ا* and *madda* *ا* is not represented in romanisation.
- 5) *Alif maqṣūra* *ا* is romanised *ā*.
- 6) The ending of the relative adjective, *nisba*, is romanised *-iyy*, except when it is found within a proper name, in which it is romanised *ī*.
- 7) When the noun or adjective ending in *ة*, *tā' marbūṭa*, is indefinite or is preceded by the definite article, *ة* is romanised *a*. When the word ending in *ة* is in the construct state (*muḍāf wa-muḍāf ilayhi*), *ة* is romanised *t*.
- 8) Final inflections of nouns and adjectives:
  - Vocalic endings are not represented in romanisation, except preceding pronominal suffixes.
  - The *tanwīn* is not represented in romanization, except for *ān* in the accusative case (indefinite).
- 9) The hyphen is used:
  - To connect the definite article *al* with the word to which it is attached.
  - Between an inseparable prefix: *فَبِوَاللَّ*.
- 10) The definite article *al* is always connected with the following word by a hyphen. Note the exceptional treatment of the preposition *لِ* followed by the article: *li-l*.
- 11) *ابن* and *بن* are both romanised *bin* when they occur between two proper nouns; *ابن* is romanised *Ibn* when it precedes a proper noun.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the romanisation table for Arabic of The Library of Congress (2017).

## Introduction

A classic does not necessarily teach us anything we did not know before. In a classic we sometimes discover something we have always known [...] and this, too, is a surprise that gives a lot of pleasure, such as we always gain from the discovery of an origin, a relationship, an affinity.

Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?* (1987)

### Why yet another study of *The Thousand and One Nights*?

Many scholars who have experience with *Alf layla wa-layla* – a title translated in English in various ways, among which I have chosen here the most literary one, namely *The Thousand and One Nights* (AN, henceforth) – often make no secret of the complexity of this important work of literature, pointing to the rich body of literature surrounding it. The AN is the most famous Arabic collection of tales which brings together stories coming from different – mainly Indian and Persian – literary traditions. It is well-known that a unique version of the AN, however, does not exist, nor does a final, complete text. The work, whose oldest manuscript dates back to the 15th century, was “rediscovered” in the Western world by the French orientalist Antoine Galland in the beginning of the 1700s following centuries of supposed oblivion, and since the 1800s it began to be published in Arabic – after having been modified and changed. Five printed editions and approximately 114 manuscripts of different lengths and substance have brought about several translations in other languages since Galland’s original discovery (Akel 2016, 65). No matter how far one’s own study might have gone, approaching the AN immediately gives one a feeling of the extent of the subject, as well as the vast body of scholarship on it. The collection has been able to arouse the interest of critics, writers, artists or simply readers all around the world, surpassing a purely literary dimension to expand to other disciplines and areas of knowledge. Made up of stories that emerge from three continents and that cover at least six centuries, the AN has offered and continues to offer paradigms, metaphors and themes that say something to the contemporary world. There is a high number of research analyses, as well as literary works, that have referred to or have been inspired by the AN. This fact struck me a little while ago, when I was an MA student in the class of Arabic popular literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. I wondered what

conferred on the text the capability of engaging with modernity in such a transversal, borderless way (and I mean any kind of border, be it linguistic, cultural, historical, or literary). What is so peculiar about its literary contents? I was certainly not the first to notice the special appeal and extraordinary longevity of the AN, as critics in the past observed that it “suffers no deterioration from the vicissitudes of fashion or the change of customs”, and nothing has ever detracted “one jot from its popularity” (Silvestre De Sacy 1829a, 560–61). There is, evidently, the obvious fact that AN is a classic, namely “a book that has never finished saying what it has to say” (Calvino 1987, 128), and this has produced many readings and interpretations of the stories of the collections with a modern and contemporary take. Yet, the AN is also part of what we call world literature, namely a text whose origin, history and development have made it cross diachronic, geographical and cultural barriers. As a researcher, therefore, it would have been fascinating to investigate the reasons for this transformative, never-ending literary vitality of the AN. It could have been even more challenging to undertake this task from an alternative, original perspective capable of combining the literary and cross-literary elements of this text through a comprehensive study of its reception.

Some years later, while I was working on a draft project for a possible doctoral admission in Italy, I met some scholars during its preparation. The draft had as its object the frame story of the AN. Being interested in its powerful narrative and extraordinary literary “fertility”, I had decided to embark on a project about how it is understood, choosing the relationship between the two protagonists as privileged viewpoint over the question. I wanted to enquire about the process of interpretation of the opening narrative, with a special focus on male-female interactions. However, those scholars firmly discouraged me. The first remark they made was about the dubious value of the collection: the AN had achieved such great success only because it was the first Arabic book to have been put under the spotlight by the Western world. This is, historically speaking, partly true. Yet, I disagree. I do not think the intense interest in the AN is just a matter of celebrity. Fashions, even literary ones, come and go, but when a text remains despite the passing of time and becomes a classic, I believe that the case might be different. All in all, a classic is what survives “because generations of people cannot afford to let go of it and therefore hold on to it” (Coetzee 2001, 19). The second objection those scholars raised was that they could not

understand why one should still research on the AN, as it is an overexploited topic. They were convinced that everything about the text has already been said. I was reminded of the Italian writer Italo Calvino (1987, 127), who affirmed that a classic is a text that offers “with each rereading as much a sense of discovery as the first reading”. Likewise, criticism is “that which is duty-bound to interrogate the classic” (Coetzee 2001, 19), ensuring its survival, and that is why a classic is always surrounded by a variety of literature relating to it. Perhaps, those scholars might not have considered the AN to be a classic, or they thought a classic could stop talking to people at some point or exhaust its contents for non-specified reasons.

Whatever one’s appreciation of the text could be, the unusually extensive number of works dealing with or being inspired by the AN, and involving different literary theories and approaches, undoubtedly testifies to the interest the collection has aroused. The *Arabian Nightism*, to borrow from al-Musawi (2004, 329),<sup>2</sup> is a matter of fact. The complex textual history, the question of origin and dissemination, and the relation with other coeval and non-coeval works of literature, all these aspects have revealed many lines of research on the AN. Some scholars have taken into consideration either a single story or a group of them, while other critics have followed thematic, genre-based or narrative threads. Moreover, as writers from both the Arab and non-Arab world have been inspired by this work of literature and have given some of its tales a new life in their short stories, novels and even poems, specific studies that analyse the borrowing and rewriting of the collection within different literary traditions have also appeared. As for the frame story of the AN, the interest it has aroused is even greater, and for this reason, it has been the subject of several analyses and interpretations mainly focussing on the two protagonists, i.e., King Shāhriyār, and the storyteller and vizier’s daughter Shahrāzād.<sup>3</sup> Shahrāzād, in particular, has been seen by many as a literary legend; her character has been recast in various ways and she has been able to represent very different female role-models.

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<sup>2</sup> Discussing the AN, al-Musawi (2004, 329, note 1) uses this phrase to refer to “writings, research, translations, redactions, editions, abridgements and adaptations, in publication, media, cinema and the theatre”. For a short explanation about the origin of this phrase, see al-Musawi (2021, 26–27).

<sup>3</sup> This is the spelling I use throughout when I refer to the two protagonists of the AN, Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār, and is based on Mahdi’s edition of the collection.

As my research aim was to understand the process of the reception and interpretation of the frame story of the AN, I should start from the copious readings within academic literature. However, after having read extensively in the field I felt myself getting lost in the labyrinth of scholarship, as articles and books of literary analyses were too many. I realized that there was no comprehensive study that would have helped me to find my way through it. I, therefore, had a feeling that I needed to approach the intricate body of literature by myself, in order to make sense of the abundance of scholarship available. Undertaking research on the criticism of the criticism would help me to explore paradigms, representations and meanings that make this work of fiction so rich and prolific.

### **Research questions and objectives of the present study**

Works of academic literature on the AN began to proliferate at the close of the 19th century in the Western world, following the printed Arabic editions of the collection in the first half of the 1800s. With the passing of time the first pieces by Arab critics and written in Arabic also appeared (Rastegar 2005), and scholarship (both Western and non-Western) gradually focussed on literary criticism in a stricter sense, namely on the evaluation and interpretation of the collection. From the second half of the twentieth century almost all academic literature began to be extensively devoted to the reception and understanding of the AN. The necessity of unveiling different, yet unexplored levels of meaning undoubtedly testified to a novel sensitivity in academic literature. This new awareness, which gained strength to a large extent in the late 1970s, is deeply related, on the one hand, to the attention paid to the AN, and specifically to the frame story of the collection, by writers both from the Arab and non-Arab world. Inserting himself in the footsteps of a previous literary tradition of sequels to the story of Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār – and which includes, inter alia, Tawfiq al-Hakim's play *Shahrazād* [Shahrāzād] in 1934 and Taha Hussein's novel *Ahlām Shahrazād* [Dreams of Shahrāzād] in 1943<sup>4</sup> – Naguib Mahfouz is the first amongst

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<sup>4</sup> In 1845 Edgar Allan Poe, a non-Arab writer, had produced *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade*, a peculiar rewriting of the frame story that touches upon many modern issues, including women's independence, the effects of technology on humans and the complexity of the East-West encounter. Subsequently, other non-Arab authors, such as Marcel Proust and Jorge Luis Borges to name

modern authors who proposes, in his *Layālī alf layla* [Arabian Nights and Days], a socio-political interpretation of the opening narrative of the AN. His novel, written in 1979 and concerning questions of power, authority, corruption, people and religion which are narrated in a fantastic key, is also seen as a postcolonial, anticolonial and antipatriarchal rewriting of the frame story (al-Musawi 2003, 15). Moreover, it is considered an anticipation, in the realm of literature, of the political and socially oriented readings which have arisen within literary criticism in subsequent years (Capezzone 2012, 96). After Mahfouz, other writers of prose, poetry and theatre have considered the possibility of exploiting the opening narrative of the AN to give voice to their own works, often from an imaginative, dystopic viewpoint. These authors have been stimulated by the subversive power of this piece of popular narrative, often seen as a challenge to elitist conceptions of literature, and who have produced decentring and more inclusive forms of fiction countering centripetal ideologies of nationalist, colonialist and/or religious matrix (al-Musawi 2003). This explosion of stories has also contributed to shedding new light on the collection and its main characters, influencing the readings as well.

On the other hand, this new line of critical scholarship is the result of the changes that have taken place more broadly within the field of literary criticism as part of social and cultural movements starting from the 1960s and the 1970s and questioning, among other things, the production of knowledge both in academia and outside it (Punter 1996, 5). Since then on, those movements that are generally covered by the umbrella term “postmodernism” and aiming at destabilizing traditional and modern Western assumptions, values and philosophical viewpoints, have renegotiated the rigid barriers between academic disciplines. The latter have become considerably porous and, in a way, political, meaning that the humanities have overcome their boundaries to incorporate different analytical perspectives in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of texts and contexts. It has been noted that 1979 was the year

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a few, have referred to Shahrāzād and/or the AN in their works (Faris 1982, 827). John Barth was also greatly influenced by the collection, on which his novel *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991) is modelled. Other poets and writers, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Dickens and William Wordsworth read the AN in their childhood and were influenced by its imagery in their writing (Byatt 2001, xiv–xv).

of publication of Mahfouz's novel *Layālī alf Layla*, but one should not forget that the year before Edward Said published *Orientalism*, a fierce, postcolonial critique of how Western world, and particularly Western academia, have stereotypically approached Eastern cultures, producing distorted and unfaithful images of them. Also as a result of Said's work, the unity between the text and the context from which it originates is no longer ignored and is deemed crucial for literary analysis, resulting in the creation of topical readings reflecting the changes and challenges of society today (Said 1983, 3). Following a similar trend, from the 1970s onward scholarship on the AN has also concentrated upon the search for alternative interpretations of this world literature masterpiece, moving from "emphasis on diachronic to synchronic concerns" (Heath 1987, 3). In particular, the frame story of the AN has been connected with many disciplines in the field of humanities and social sciences. This has resulted in multi-layered, often vibrant, literary analyses – mainly written in Western languages, yet also in Arabic – which testify to the fact that the frame narrative of the AN is still capable of embracing many original meanings and of enthusiastically engendering new interpretations. What confers this vitality on this work?

Literary criticism is responsible for making sense of that indeterminate sense courtesy of which an ancient text is still perceived as alive, and worth reading. The same feeling also encourages writers to adapt and recast previous literary texts, no matter the age, to create something original. Within these texts, elements that offer topical reflection and that can be potentially engaged at different levels with the reality in which critics – and any reader – are immersed are many. In the case of the frame story of the AN, which is the subject of this study, there seems to be a common theme, a recurring question that lies at the heart of the greatest part of explanations concerning this opening narrative. From Todorov's concept (1977) of narrative-men, which excludes any psychological or personal dimension of the characters, to contemporary and more elaborate interpretations drawing from literary studies and also overlapping with social sciences, the reception of the frame story has the paradigmatic couple Shāhriyār-Shahrāzād at its centre. An attentive survey of the literary criticism of the frame story of the AN clearly shows that critical analyses revolve around a pivotal point, whatever the perspective adopted, namely the understanding of the interactions occurring between the protagonists or, to be more specific, around the relationship

with the other sex. Although the words “other” and “otherness” are barely mentioned by critics, the way in which the dialogic and dialectic rapport between Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād is perceived determines the viewpoint regarding the two characters and their representations, both as separate selves, and as a couple. Otherness is a concept that generally concerns the manner in which one views, experiences and perceives the non-self. The points of reference through which otherness is determined are many and include diverse elements, such as sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, class, religion, culture, language, disability and any other type of alleged diversity. The application of otherness as a concept is often fluid and, therefore, various definitions for the identification of the other exist. Within the frame story, otherness is mainly born of the interactions between male and female characters, which are of crucial importance in the plot. The two protagonists, namely King Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād, as well as Shāhzamān<sup>5</sup> and his wife, the queens and their respective lovers and the boxed woman and the jinn, all these couples carry a story in which both parties are placed according to a sexual and gendered juxtaposition. It can safely be assumed that this type of “sexual and gendered otherness”<sup>6</sup>, which incorporates sexuality and the biological sex on the one hand, and social behaviours and roles on the other, both in relation to the definition of masculinity and femininity, is the key theme emerging from the frame story. However, the relation with the other, i.e., the other sex, is also charged with further, intersectional meanings. These meanings expand the conceptual perspective on otherness by encompassing other dimensions defining the relational boundaries between selves. Additional layers of otherness are to be found within matters of class differences between the characters, in the question of the people versus authority, in the exchanges between humans and non-humans and, in particular, in the presence of “the cultural other”, namely the stranger/foreigner who is identified by a different ethnicity/race.

In my research project I identify in the realm of the representation of and of the relationship with the other sex the starting point from which to undertake the scrutiny of the academic literature of the frame story. This thematic choice is highly beneficial

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<sup>5</sup> This is the spelling I use throughout when I refer to Shāhriyār’s brother, and is based on Mahdi’s edition of the AN.

<sup>6</sup> From this point on I will not put the term “sexual and gender otherness” in quotes.

for two main reasons. Firstly, considering otherness – specifically, sexual and gendered otherness – as the central theme of the story evidences the causal tie between the literary vitality of the text and its prominent topicality. By focussing on the dynamics between individuals and, therefore, connecting with subjects in both humanities and social sciences that have a focus on understanding the working of human society, otherness makes the literary text immediately relevant for the present. The story says something about human interactions, in other words, *hominem sapit* (it smells of humanity), and says it in its own code.<sup>7</sup> The relationship with the other sex is, therefore, the transfer element that brings what lies outside literature within the text. Secondly, recognizing in the relationship with the other sex the common thread among the readings of the frame story gives me a vantage point in the organization and discussion of the critical materials.

In light of the above, the research questions of this project are as follows:

- How has the relationship with the other sex at the core of the frame story of the AN been interpreted in academic literature since the late 1970s?
- How has the opening narrative of the AN been reshaped by a pluralist literary criticism which intends to provide topical interpretations of the frame story?
- Where are the academic readings “situated” (Said 1983, 26) in relation to each other?

The primary goal of the current study is to offer a documented and critical overview of the main trends in modern and contemporary reception and interpretation of the frame story of the AN since the late 1970s by analysing some of the most representative academic contributions in the field. To date there is no comprehensive study of the academic literature in itself aiming at breaking down the complex process of the reception and interpretation of the frame story. This research project aspires, therefore, to offer an annotated compendium of selected readings which are deemed to be relevant to the comprehension of otherness, exclusively according to the above-mentioned definition, within the frame narrative of the AN. In order to achieve this goal, this study proposes an innovative methodology which contrasts each critical

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<sup>7</sup> This expression by the roman poet Martial (40-104) is used by Gabrieli (2006, 1:XXXV), the first who has translated the whole AN in Italian, in the introduction to his work.

contribution with the original text(s) and/or translation(s) that have been used as the basis for literary scrutiny. The close comparison between the reading and its source – the latter having been previously analysed in comparison with the other versions and translations of the frame story taken into consideration – is functional to the identification of those interpretative choices which are less likely to be determined by subjective elaboration and more by original elements in the source text. This primary phase of research sees its continuation in the proper discussion about how the readings have presented the question of the relationship with the other sex in the opening narrative of the AN. Secondly, this research project aims to facilitate access to academic literature on the topic, and, in turn, provide a more comprehensive approach to the frame story itself. This is accomplished courtesy of a structured organization of the selected readings aiming at framing the disorganized nature of the critical literature on the frame story, which makes it difficult to navigate. This study is also the first attempt to offer an annotated outline of the modern and contemporary criticism of the frame story concentrating on both English (i.e., written in English) and Arabic (i.e., written in Arabic) scholarship. While I have examined a reasonable number of studies in English and have been able to make a selection of original and representative academic contributions in this language, I have included only a small group of readings in Arabic. The limited length of my research program has prevented me from undertaking a wider review of the academic contributions by Arab scholars focussing on the relationship between the protagonists of the frame story. To have an idea of the huge number of these contributions and the overwhelming scope of the study one can refer to the very exhaustive bibliography of works in Arabic dealing with the AN provided by Akel (2016). Despite its limitations, the present research intends, nevertheless, to be the first by no means complete overview of how critics writing in English and Arabic have investigated the opening narrative since the late 1970s through the lens of otherness. As a matter of fact, few studies have questioned the reception of the AN in modern and contemporary criticism, especially in the Arab world, and even fewer have done this with a particular thematic focus.

## **Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions posed by this study, as well as to achieve the objects outlined above, I have divided my work into three parts. The first one is an introductory section (part I) which contextualises the AN and discusses its origin, textual history, formation, genre, editions and translations; part I also offers a chapter on the development of the concept of otherness and its thematic dimension within the frame story of the collection. In part II, I undertake a linguistic and textual examination of the most relevant Arabic versions of the frame story within the printed editions of the collection, i.e., Calcutta I, Breslau, Bulaq, Calcutta II and Mahdi, as well as of their translations.<sup>8</sup> As recalled by Mahdi (1995, 88), the first four of these versions are called editions because they are not based on previous (printed) texts, even though they in no way meet the criteria of what can be considered a standard philological edition. In my analysis I concentrate, however, only on Bulaq, Calcutta II and Mahdi, and leave aside Calcutta I and Breslau<sup>9</sup> since it is widely accepted that these latter two editions are not based on original, well-known manuscripts, and for this reason, are generally not referred to in the academic readings. Moreover, since the AN has been known for centuries through its main translations, I deem it fundamental to include the most widespread English translations courtesy of which the frame story has circulated among general readers and critics all around the world. These translations have played, and continue to play, an important role in the criticism of the opening narrative of the AN because scholars who do not read Arabic can only base their readings on the translated texts alone. In light of the above, the scrutiny in part II aims at highlighting the characteristics of each version of the frame story taken into account, adopting the relationship with the other sex as the thematic focus which guides the selection of the relevant passages and language.

The reason why I start with a complete linguistic and textual analysis is that, given the diversity of the various editions and translations of the AN, the text used by the critic to carry out his/her own study becomes the first layer of interpretation, the original source of information that influences the process of reception before anything

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<sup>8</sup> The sibling collection of the *A Hundred and One Nights* is also be taken into consideration, though occasionally (see 2.2, part I).

<sup>9</sup> In this thesis, I refer to the Calcutta I edition, the Breslau edition, the Bulaq edition and the Calcutta II edition as Calcutta I, Breslau, Bulaq and Calcutta II respectively.

else. I, therefore, focus on the production of meanings in the realm of otherness, and specifically of sexual and gendered otherness, through a semantic investigation of the language used to refer to male and female characters, male-female interactions, and the phenomenology of male illness as a reaction to female betrayal. From the comparison of these segments of meaning within the three Arabic editions of the frame story it is possible to evidence modifications in the construction of semantic values shaping the liaison between the protagonists. These revisions, in turn, may affect the narrative structure, producing different representations of the characters and influencing the process of reception and its outcomes. In addition, a further comparison between the Arabic texts and their translations in English is functional to evidence how the latter conveys and perhaps modifies contents, representation(s) and meanings. Differences in the translations and in the original versions of the frame story may result in the substantially diverse theorization and understanding of the relationship with the other sex within the opening narrative of the AN. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to clarify if the origin of potential biases, misunderstandings, and/or particular meanings concerning otherness and the representation of the relationship with the other sex in a given literary analysis is grounded in the translated text on which the scholarship is built (El-Shamy 2005, 266). It must be noted that in my linguistic and textual investigation I do not take into consideration the variations between the manuscripts of the AN since this study focuses on the texts that have been used by the critics for their scrutiny of the frame story – i.e., the printed editions of the collection and their translations.

Part III of this study presents a comparative, critical investigation of the relevant modern and contemporary readings of the frame story in English and Arabic. In order to highlight how the text, and particularly sexual and gendered otherness within the text, have been received, modified and revised by critics, literary analyses are broken down according to two main criteria. The first consists of referring each reading to the Arabic edition/translation on which it is based, according to the linguistic and textual analysis in part II. Secondly, the critical work is read in connection with the literary theory and the theoretical framework adopted – what Sallis (1999, 66) calls “conscious mediatory stances”. This is functional to highlight the role played by a given theoretical perspective in the process of interpretation and attribution

of meanings. Meaning, as Said (1983) extensively explains, is always “situated”. Searching for primary and absolute significations within literary texts is, therefore, pure utopia because meaning is not a “transcendental signified”, namely a decontextualised entity coming from nowhere (Eco 1994). Although naturally infinite, meanings lie within the space of interpretation, which is in any case limitless, yet it must reflect and respect the internal coherence of the text (Sapiro, n.d., 321). Exploring the loci where signification is grounded may, therefore, offers a sounder perspective on the process of attribution of meaning. In this respect, the comparative scrutiny offered in part III situates the analyses of the relationship with the other sex within the frame story on the textual level – considering the linguistic base for any possible variations in the meaning-making of otherness and the other sex, i.e., the space of interpretation –, as well as on the critical level – evidencing the theoretical framework of reference that informs the process of interpretation. At the supra-text and critical level, otherness becomes an analytical category that supports the critical evaluation of the sexual and gendered relationship with the other sex within the narrative.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First of all, approaching a literary analysis in the light of its rapport with the original and/or translated text, as well as of the theoretical framework that lays the foundations of its critical view, aims to provide some measurable factors directly influencing the process of reception. It is, however, known that the process of reception and interpretation of a text is influenced by a multitude of variables, some of which are non-specific, namely related to the personal, educational, social and cultural background of the individual, and therefore very difficult to identify and analyse. They involve intimate dimensions and subjective processes – such as the conscious and unconscious involvement of the critic as a fundamental part of the interpretative act – that are not always directly observable and assessable. The delicate scrutiny of the non-specific factors, which is the domain of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy and cognitive studies, is out of the scope of this linguistic and literary research project.<sup>10</sup> What I take into consideration in my investigation, instead, are carefully selected more measurable

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<sup>10</sup> As Eagleton (1996, 167) argues, “the problems of literary value and pleasure would seem to lie somewhere at the juncture of psychoanalysis, linguistics and ideology, and little work has been done here as yet”.

factors that have a higher degree of objectivity, namely they can be monitored analytically as a result of the detailed examination of texts in part II alongside their readings in part III. I hope that this original approach will afford some insights into the main trends in the reception of the opening narrative of the AN, and also about critics' tendencies and inclinations. Of course, this scrutiny does not exploit all the aspects that may determine how literary analyses attribute meanings to the relationship with the other sex within the frame story, as it would be impossible to consider all of them in one study. Nevertheless, a linguistic and textual investigation on the variations of the source texts, together with a comparative scrutiny that cross-references literary theories and theoretical frameworks with the original versions taken into account, can undoubtedly deliver interesting outcomes. These results, though restricted, can be researched analytically.

Secondly, for the present study I have selected only a very limited number of contributions. With regard to literary criticism in Arabic, the sample size is even smaller, and is based on the immense bibliography on the AN provided by Akel (2016). I have chosen seven works among those which contain the mention "Shahrāzād" or "frame story" in the title and which were academic – or semi-academic – publications within Akel's list, preferring comments by literary critics or writers; I omitted articles published in general magazines or newspapers. Though belonging to various Arab countries, the selected critical works are in no way representative of the main trends in critical appraisal and tastes of scholarship in Arabic on the frame story. As previously stated, there is no comprehensive study about the reception of the AN in the Arab world I am aware of, so I have had no guidance to orientate myself in the process of selection. However, I hope that they can provide an initial insight into this subject, which may encourage further studies in this field.

As a third limitation, the readings and literary analyses I have selected belong to critics who have only written in English and Arabic. This is not because criticism on the frame story of the AN in other languages is considered less important than those in English and Arabic. Insights can be revealed in scholarship on the AN in other languages, such as French, which is the first language that the collection has been translated into following Galland's "rediscovery". I have made a choice which has been partially influenced by the fact that there is a strong interplay of Arabic and

English in relation to the history of the collection, its criticism and appraisal for a number of historical, political, cultural, and literary reasons. Furthermore, the literary analyses which have been generated since the late 1970s have been inspired by and interwoven with critical approaches such as feminist, gender, cultural and postcolonial studies, which have grown significantly in the Western world; this has resulted in English being used as *lingua franca* by scholars producing knowledge in these research fields.

## PART I

### **The *Thousand and One Nights*: textual history, literary genre, the frame story**

#### **1. What is *The Thousand and One Nights*?**

##### **1.1 Textual history and its implications**

For a long time, the AN has been referred to as a singular, compact work. The attempt to make uniform diversified narrative materials and to establish the most authentic version of this text has proven, nevertheless, to be far from the true nature of the collection. Being a very heterogeneous work, made up of stories from different narrative traditions, since its first appearance in the Arab-Islamic world<sup>11</sup> the AN went through innumerable modifications and subsequent additions (Irwin 2004; Marzolph, Leeuwen, and Wassouf 2004; Ouyang and Gelder 2005; Yamanaka and Nishio 2006; Leeuwen 2007; Marzolph 2007a; Chraïbi 2008). The literary structure of the collection spans diverse types of texts between orality and writing – i.e., fairy tales,<sup>12</sup> philosophical tales, exemplificatory tales, anecdotes, romances, novels, and legends. This unique literary status resulted in the AN being an open work which, therefore, continued to be expanded and modified until the 1800s in its written versions, while its stories kept circulating (and changing) orally both in private (female-bound) and public (male-bound) contexts (El-Shamy 1990, 83; 1999, 10–13; Mernissi 2001). The

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<sup>11</sup> In this study, I use the term “Arab-Islamic world” to indicate that portion of the globe which in medieval times was under the control of the /political/economic/cultural/social influence of the Arab and Muslim caliphate(s). I, therefore, do not refer directly, necessarily or merely to the Islamic religion, but also to the social and cultural aspects produced at that time in this vast geographical area.

<sup>12</sup> Imaginative stories in the AN can be assimilated to what is usually known today as fairy tale. However, many scholars are pretty skeptical about referring to Medieval Arabic tales as fairy tales, namely about using a word of modern origin (it was first used in France in 1697) and based on Western literary canons to refer to much more ancient narratives of a different historical and cultural background. Moreover, some of these stories cannot be considered as “pure” fairy tales, although they borrow from these latter motifs and structure (Zipes 2002, XV–XVI). For “fairy tale” as an appropriate term to refer to the tales of the AN, see Gerhardt (1963, 275–78) and Thompson (1946, 8).

many Arabic editions of the collection, as well as the question of its origin, sources, manuscripts tradition and transmission, testify to a stratified and multi-layered process of formation of the text. The different stages the “Arabic” AN went through have been analysed by several scholars (Macdonald 1924; Chraïbi 2016). Tales were divided into layers by 19th-century scholars, such as Müller (1886), Nöldeke (1888) and Oestrup (1925), who separated a group of older stories composed in Baghdad (and Syria) from a second more modern one originating in Mameluke Egypt (Littmann 1986). Considering its non-linear textual history, the classification of the AN within the literary landscape of pre-modern Arabic literature has turned out to be a challenging task. Three points must be taken into consideration in an effort to explain what the AN is, firstly the interplay between orality and writing, secondly the absence of a standard version of the text and thirdly the question of the literary genre. These three aspects are deeply interconnected and demand to be analysed in constant reference to each other; moreover, they intertwine, in turn, with other philological and textual dimensions of the oeuvre resulting in a convoluted texture whose interdependences are illustrated in this paragraph.

The question of the oral and written dimension of the AN has been at the centre of the academic debate since the end of the 19th century, when scholars started to extensively investigate the origin of the collection. The AN apparently entered the Arab-Islamic world in written forms, and coeval sources refer to the oeuvre always as a book (*kitāb*), although without neglecting its performative, recitative character. Nevertheless, an “oral traditional affiliation” is to be implied for many stories embedded in the AN, as for any pre-modern fictional narrative in the form of tales which would likely mingle with or originate from a folk-oral, popular background (Molan 1988; El-Shamy 1990). El Shamy (2005, 236) states that most of the tales of the AN “may be assumed to have been in oral circulation at the time(s) the book was being cumulatively formulated, and may represent older versions of contemporary folktale”. Implying that the AN is (just) oral narrative put into writing, however, may not be entirely correct; many stories seemingly had existed in written forms by the very beginning of the formation and translation of the collection into Arabic, being already embedded in Persian or Indian literary texts (Pinault 1992; Muhawi 2005). The most important contemporary Arabic sources of the AN, i.e., the Baghdadi

librarian Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) and the historian and geographer al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956), seem to confirm this perspective as they refer to the historical passages in which the collection was transformed into a book. The two authors account for the existence of a written work, the *Hazār afsān* [The Thousand Tales], a book of tales translated into Arabic from Persian between the 9th and the 10th century and considered the antecedent of the AN.

In his encyclopaedic compendium *Kitāb al-fihrist*, henceforth *Fihrist* [The Catalogue], Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 304) devotes the first *fann* (chapter) of the eighth *maqāla* (part)<sup>13</sup> to the “... accounts of those who converse in the evenings and tellers of [stories], with the names of the books which they composed about evening stories and [fictional tales]” (*fī akhbār al-musāmirīna wa-al-mukharrifīna wa-asmā’ al-kutub al-muṣannafa fī al-asmār wa-al-khurāfāt*).<sup>14</sup> In this *fann* the Baghdadi librarian (1872, 304) states that the first to write fictional tales down were the Persians, during different periods and through the generations: “*awwal man ṣannafa al-khurāfāt wa-ja‘ala lahā kutubān [...] al-furs al-awwal, thumma aghraqa fī dhālika mulūk al-ashghāniyya [...] wa-ittasa‘a fī ayyām mulūk al-sāsāniyya*” (the Persian were the first to compose fictional stories and to make a book out of them, then during the Ashkanian kings and the Sassanid the interest for these stories grew). Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 304) also says that the Arabs translated (*naqala*), polished (*hadhdhaba*), embellished (*nammaqa*) and composed (*ṣannafa*) new works similar to the Persian ones, and that the first text which went through this process was the *Hazār afsān*, namely the Persian version of the AN, renamed in Arabic *Alf khurāfa* [Thousand Stories].<sup>15</sup> The librarian concludes that the

<sup>13</sup> I use “part” for *maqāla* and “chapter” for *fann*, as suggested by Toorawa (2010, 219, note 6).

<sup>14</sup> Dodge’s translation (1970, 712) is used in this passage. However, I put in square brackets those words which, in my opinion, are erroneously translated and which I, therefore, substituted with my own translation. “Fable”, which generally indicates a moral tale with animals as protagonists, is not an appropriate translation for *khurāfa*, a genre that does not necessarily feature either animal figures or didactic purposes, and for this reason, I avoid this term. The Arabic edition of the *Fihrist* quoted in this thesis is the one by Gustav Flügel (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872). However, I constantly compare it with the only critical edition of the *Fihrist* existing, that by Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Ibn al-Nadīm 2009).

<sup>15</sup> In the eighth *maqāla* (part) of the *Fihrist*, the book of the AN is said to have been composed and embellished by the verbalists (*fuṣahā’*) and the rhetoricians (*bulaghā’*) among the Arabs (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304). The verb *ṣannafa*, to compose, clearly refers to a written composition, with a certain degree

*Hazār afsān*, was supposed to have been written (*allafa*) for Homāy, daughter of Bahman – a Kayānid queen and a mythological figure within the Iranian traditional history – whose second name was Shahrāzād, which is also the name of the female protagonist of the frame story of the AN.

In the *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar* [Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems], henceforth *Murūj al-dhahab*, an historical encyclopaedia which contained both facts and anecdotes, al-Mas'ūdī (1914, 4:90) says that the *Hazār afsān* and other books (*kutub*) of the same type (such as the book of *Farzah and Sīmās* or *Sindbād*) were similar in their written form (*ta'liḥ*) to the books containing Indian, Persian and Greek *akhbār* (accounts). Al-Mas'ūdī (1914, 4:89-90) specifies that *akhbār*, such as those of 'Abīd bin Shariyya (d. 686), one of the first Arab historians and authors of *akhbār*, were considered by people who knew them as invented stories used to gain the favour of the powerful. *Akhbār* were narrated to the kings (*bi-riwāyatihā*), and then they were learnt and preserved in the manner of the books of *akhbār* translated from Indian, Persian and Greek. According to both Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Mas'ūdī, therefore, the early medieval AN, that is the text that was translated from the Persian *Hazār afsān*, was a *kitāb* (book), but specifically a *kitāb* of *asmār* (evening/night tales), *khurāfāt* (fictional tales)<sup>16</sup> and *akhbār* (accounts).<sup>17</sup> All these three terms imply a

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of originality. Ghersetti (2016) has explored the terminology concerning the process of textualization in relation to the question of authorship in Medieval Arabic literature. The verbs *ṣannaḥa* (to single out, to discriminate) and *allafa* (to combine, to put together) represent the two moments of the composition of a written text, i.e., the analytical process – “separating into categories and differentiating” – and synthetic process – “combining” –, which are to be inscribed within the tradition of compilatory texts and anthologies characterizing most of *adab* (courtly) literature (2016, 26–28). Furthermore, *ṣannaḥa* refers to a higher level of autonomy in the composition of the text than *rattaba*, which simply meant “to put into proper order”. Nevertheless, it is perhaps an exaggeration to affirm that *ta'liḥ*, the infinitive of the verb *allafa*, means “original work” (Capezzone 2000, 403), since the degree of originality, according to Ghersetti (2016, 28), is to be found in the subjectivity of the “selection, combination and arrangement of materials”, through which the author leaves his mark in the text. Therefore, *ṣannaḥa* and *allafa* respectively refer to the reception and recomposition of texts (2016, 26).

<sup>16</sup> El-Shamy (1990, 66) associates *khurāfa* with *zaubermärchen* (tale of magic).

<sup>17</sup> Originally an historical or biographical account; subsequently it also meant anecdote, or a narration which does not necessarily have to be true – Ibn al-Nadīm uses this term in the latter sense. Pellat (1986) says that *khavar* is interchangeable with *ḥikāya* (story) and *ḥadīth* (narrative, talk).

performative/oral aspect of the narrative, and the tellers of these tales were gathered by caliphs, emperors and men of power to recount their narratives. Moreover, the word *samar* expresses in the meaning of its own root also the temporal setting in which the stories were related, namely in the evening/at night. In the light of the above, to the question what came first in the case of the AN, the book of tales or the oral tales, a suitable answer could be probably the book, which, however, was not meant to be read but to be heard and recited; this likely paved the way for other – local, i.e., Arabic – stories to be included into the collection, which were many and part of the oral narrative tradition.<sup>18</sup>

What makes things more complicated regarding the nature of the AN is that the collection never represented one fixed, standard text, neither in the early days of its new Arabic “life” nor in modern times. Scholarship has sometimes tended to explain and justify the ambiguities and incongruences of the different versions of the collection looking for the best, the truest and the most original version – a long academic tradition, from the end of the 19th century until Maḥdī’s critical edition of the AN in 1984 –, whilst other studies have focussed on the search for unifying points in either the narrative structure or the narrative themes (Ghazoul 1980). Other scholars, instead, such as Macdonald (1924) and, far more recently, Chraïbi (2016) have drawn attention on the co-existence of multiple versions of the AN,<sup>19</sup> and this last position seems to be much more in line with the evolution of the history of the text. In its impact on the Arab culture of the Abbasid period, not only did the AN inspire the creation of other sibling collections, but also of different versions of the text which had dissimilar degrees of orality/writing according to the audience they targeted and the context of reception of the text. This is especially evident in the most ancient fragment of the AN (9th century) in which the tales told by the female protagonist of the frame story (Shahrāzād, although her name does not appear in this manuscript) are indicated as

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<sup>18</sup> In this respect, before the advent of paper in the Arab world in the mid-eighth century, popular narrative was only oral. To this rich tradition belonged *siyār* (biographies, both of religious people and of heroes, i.e., *sira sha’abiyya*), *isrā’īliyyāt* (narratives from Israel), *akhbār*, *nādirāt* (anecdotes) and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (stories of the prophets).

<sup>19</sup> Another point which has been stressed with regard to the complexity of the textual history of the AN is the matter of authorship. See Muhawi (2005).

narrative about “*adab shāmiyy wa-a‘rābiyy*” (the *adab* of the Syrian and Bedouin)<sup>20</sup> (Abbott 1949, 132), contrary to what both al-Mas‘ūdī and Ibn al-Nadīm claim about the origin of the stories included in the collection. This fragment and the two scholars’ declarations are, nevertheless, not entirely opposing: the interplay between the Persian source of the AN and the lively Arabic narrative tradition at the time brought about a gamut of more or less diversified versions and types of the “original” collection of stories. In this respect, the changing of the title following the translation into and composition of the AN in Arabic, from *Thousand Stories* [*Alf khurāfa*] to *The Thousand and One Nights* [*Alf layla wa-layla*], is considered another piece of evidence of the presence of parallel texts sharing – at least – the same frame story, namely the story of Shahrāzād, which is the only segment that undoubtedly belonged to the “original” text.<sup>21</sup> *Alf Khurāfa* [Thousand Stories] is the literal translation of *Hazār afsān*, namely the Persian antecedent of the AN that is mentioned by both Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist* and al-Mas‘ūdī in the *Murūj al-dhahab*. On the other hand, *Alf layla wa-layla* [The Thousand and One Nights] is the new, full title given to the collection simultaneously or just immediately after its entry into the Arab-Islamic world, which is first found in one of the manuscripts of the *Murūj al-dhahab* dating back to the second half of the 10th century.<sup>22</sup> Abbott (1949, 152) explains that the modification of the title is in no way awkward, given the nature of the collection; as said above, the stories of the AN were part of a narrative traditionally told at night (*asmār*), thus, changing *khurāfa* (fictional story) into *layla* (night) must have sounded quite natural.

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<sup>20</sup> See note 26.

<sup>21</sup> For “original”, I mean here the most ancient version of the collection to which the oldest sources refer. All these texts have in common the reference to Shahrāzād or to her night storytelling.

<sup>22</sup> *Alf layla wa-layla* is to be found in one of the manuscripts of the *Murūj al-dhahab*, but indirect testimonies of the use of the full title before the 12th century are indicated by Chraïbi (2016, 21). Later evidence of the title *Alf layla wa-layla* is found in the notebook of a Jewish doctor who lent the book to someone in Cairo around 1150 and recorded the name of the borrower (Goitein 1958). Macdonald (1924, 380–81) points out that the AN was well known in Egypt during the Fatimids, and was quoted using the title *Alf layla wa-layla* by the historian al-Qurtūbī, who wrote a history of Egypt under the last Fatimid caliph (d. 1172). In truth, this fact had already been evidenced earlier by Lane (1979, 3: 676), who stated that a writer of the *Athenaeum*, a literary journal published in London from 1828 to 1921, first noticed the quotation by al-Qurtūbī.

Chraïbi (2016, 22), instead, is more suspicious, and states that the transformation of the title may have served to conceal the content of the book, that is fictional, untrue *khurāfāt*.

The third element to mention when attempting to define the nature of the AN is the question of the genre(s) to which the collection belongs or according to which it can be classified. In this respect, the attention to the type/register of language used in the manuscripts and the printed editions proves to be a good starting point for scrutinizing the literary affiliation of this work. Putting aside the printed editions of the 19th century, whose language is the result of an incisive embellishment by the copyists and the editors,<sup>23</sup> the linguistic style of the various manuscripts of the text has much in common with classical Arabic, and this holds true for the oldest existing manuscript of the AN (15th century), called manuscript G, as well as for the most ancient fragment of the AN in our possession (9th century). Although the manuscripts do show many signs of spoken Arabic, as colloquial words are present and terms are sometimes misspelt under the influence of the spoken language (Beaumont 2004, 1), they are still closer to the classical language than the colloquial (Mahdi 2014, 1:49).<sup>24</sup> The proximity of the AN to literary works regarded as *adab* literature,<sup>25</sup> is another undeniable fact of the intertwining with the high literature of the time; in some instances written narrative, although considered fictional as is the case with *khurāfāt*, could be included in learned literature and destined for the formation and/or entertainment of men in power (Chraïbi 2016, 27). The AN stories were meant not only to entertain (*al-ladhha*) but also to be preserved (*al-ḥafz*, *al-ḥars*) probably

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<sup>23</sup> Calcutta I, Bulaq and Calcutta II, three of the five printed editions of the AN, which will be analysed in depth in the following paragraph, all underwent editorial corrections and amendments to the language of the original manuscript. Calcutta I is preceded by an introduction in which the editors explain their modification of the language in the manuscripts in order to “correct” the broken Arabic.

<sup>24</sup> As for manuscript G, Mahdi (2014, 1:49-50) affirms that it follows the writing rules of the Quran (*khatt al-muṣḥaf*), that of prosody (*khatt taqī‘ al-‘arūd*), which is used for classical poems, and that of classical Arabic (*khatt al-fuṣḥā*), and also specifies that the former two are generally found in the dialogues.

<sup>25</sup> *Adab* literature can be described as courtly educational, ethical and entertaining literature, a belles-lettres prose genre (including also some poetry) for people of the upper classes, as well as for rulers, intellectuals and professionals living and working at the court of the caliphs during the Abbasid period.

because they were considered worth remembering for their lessons, and this hold true in particular for the versions destined for kings and chiefs (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304):

*wa-ista‘mala li-dhālika ba‘dahu al-mulūk kitāb Hazār Afsan* (and kings after him [Alexander] used the book of *Hazār afsān*) (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304).

*Nazzamaha man taqarraba ilā al-mulūk bi-riwāyatihā wa-ḥāla ‘alā ahl ‘aṣrihi bi-ḥafzihā wa-al-mudhākara bi-hā* (they [the stories] were composed by whoever had come closer to the kings by recounting these tales and who suggested to his contemporaries to preserve them) (al-Mas‘ūdī 1914, 89).

The *Kalīla wa-Dimna* [Kalīla and Dimna] by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 757) is a collection of edifying apologues and didactic/moral fables written in an amusing and pleasant style; it is considered one of the best representatives of the classical literary tradition of *adab*, and, like the AN, is made up of enframed stories.<sup>26</sup> The textual histories of the AN and the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* are quite similar, except for the absence of a unique and known compiler in the former – not a small difference though, as authorship was one of the criteria for establishing the reliability of a text;<sup>27</sup> furthermore, both collections are translated into Arabic around the same period from Persian texts, which in turn derived from Indian prototypes. For this reason, it is no surprise that Ibn al-Nadīm inserts the two works in the same narrative section, namely in the first *fann* of the eighth *maqāla* of the *Fihrist* under the heading “*asmā’ al-kutub al-muṣannafa fī al-asmār wa-al-khurāfāt*” (the names of the books about evening stories and fictional tales) (1872, 304–5), although the two texts are very different in

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<sup>26</sup> In the case of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, both the original source and its translators (but also compilers, as not only did they translate from the original, but they also added other stories taken from different sources) are known. The Indian prototype of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* is the *Panchatantra* [Five Treatises], a text in Sanskrit compiled by an unknown author around 200 BCE. The *Panchatantra*, a compilation of fables of animals embedded in a frame tale, was translated from Sanskrit into Pahlavi (Middle Persian) by the Persian Burzoe in the 6th century, and into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 760).

<sup>27</sup> See in this respect Chraïbi (2016, 63) and Ghersetti (2016).

terms of style, language and content (Chraïbi 2016, 17) – however, they are less so with regard to their final purposes. In addition, the AN is associated by Ibn al-Nadīm with another compilation of tales, which he deems *fāḍil* (praiseworthy), by al-Jahshiyārī (d. 942), also author of a famous collection of historical anecdotes, the *Kitāb al-wuzara' wa-al-kuttāb* [The Book of Viziers and Secretaries] (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304). We know from the author of the *Fihrist*, as well as from al-Mas'ūdī, that the AN and other similar works were recited in the courts in front of governors. In its first Arabic version (or versions) – at least in the version(s) quoted by the coeval sources – the collection, therefore, should have resembled other traditional types of Arabic narrative such as the “mirror for princes”, a literary genre which was meant to instruct men of power, and *adab* literature.

However, despite the convergences with appreciated works of classical Arabic literature, the AN is alien to this literary category, and was never considered *adab*. Its prose, unlike that of important works by other men of letters, such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868/869) or al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023), was never included into high Arabic literature and was often given very little consideration in pre-modern times by the Arabs (Beaumont 2004, 1).<sup>28</sup> In this respect, Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 304) says that the compilation is a “*kitāb ghathth bārid al-ḥadīth*” (an inferior book of silly narrative), and other Arab-Islamic scholars had similar opinions.<sup>29</sup> Chraïbi (2016, 62–63) provides a comprehensive list of the reasons because of which the AN was not regarded as high literature, affirming that it can be better classified as a semi-literary work, as “Arabic middle literature” characterized by Middle Arabic, namely a linguistic register whose grammar was modified by the influence of the spoken language.<sup>30</sup> Mahdi (2014), who has undertaken the only critical edition of the AN so far existing, illustrates that texts mixing different registers or types of the Arabic language to fulfil recitative purposes

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<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Chraïbi (2016, 20) affirms that “what is certain [...] is that the Arabic literati were by no means indifferent to the *Nights*”, which “interacted fruitfully with Medieval Arabic literature by encouraging the mergence not of a single text, but of a vast ensemble”.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Tawḥīdī states that stories like those of *Hazār afsān* provoke feelings of addiction to the narrator, to the originality of the story and to the plot (1900, 23).

<sup>30</sup> For further information on middle Arabic refer to Lentin (1997), Larcher (2001) and Guillaume (2002).

and which were composed for relaxing moments or evening/night events had existed since the first centuries after the advent of Islam. He specifies that these types of texts were initially written by Christian and Jewish authors, and later by Muslim ones, and flourished particularly during the Mamluk era; poetry composed using non-classical Arabic and mixing this with vernacular registers was also known, and Mahdi mentions two poets who supported this blended language, the first one being Ibn Quzmān (d.1160), a composer of *zajal* (a form of oral poetry characterized by colloquial language), who wrote the following line in defence of middle Arabic: “I got rid of grammatical arrangements of words [*i`rāb*] like someone who draws his sword from the scabbard” (Mahdi 2014, 1:38). The second poet is Ṣāfi al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d.1350), who was the first to write a book on the poetics of popular poetry, the *Al-`āṭil al-ḥālī wa-al-murakkhaṣ al-ghālī*, in which he says that there are artistic texts whose craft loses power if it has to comply with grammar (*taḍ`ufu ṣan`atuha idhā ūdi`at min al-naḥū ṣinā`a*) (Mahdi 2014, 1:46).

It is worth spending a few more words on the delicate aspect of the semi-literary status of the AN in the light of the line, which is by all means movable, that separates high prose literature from the uncanonical, popular literature in the Medieval Arab world. If one looks at the way in which pre-modern scholars referred to the AN, the latter was assimilated to fictional narrative, falling within the categories of *samar* (evening or night tale) and *khurāfa* (fictional story). Both terms indicate fabricated stories which were narrated mainly at night, in the courts during *musāmarāt* (night gatherings) and *majālis* (assemblies), as al-Tahwīdī describes in his *Kitāb al-imtā` wa al-mu`ānasa* [The Book of Delight and Entertainment], but also in other public and more popular spaces courtesy of the numerous *quṣās* (storytellers), who were in demand at the time. Remarkably, it is not so much a question of the themes and topics found in the stories of the AN that separate them from high literature, although it is true that some of the tales are quite explicit about sex, and may have, therefore, been perceived as scabrous or illicit. However, the Arabs were well familiar with questions related to man-woman intercourse, the sexual act and different sexual orientations, and texts on these themes were widely accepted if falling within the frame of canonical literature. Conversely, when transformed into or included in fictional stories, the same themes were viewed warily. Fictional stories were seen as incompatible with high

literature (Gerhardt 1963, 45), and the reason for this may lie in the enjoyment deriving from reading imaginative stories (whether they included these themes or not) which was considered either misleading or suitable only for women and children, i.e., for weaker minds who are easily impressed. Therefore, it is important to highlight that the division between high and popular, praised and substandard literature lay more in the genre and its rapport with fictionality and factuality than in the themes dealt with by the text.

It has been affirmed at the beginning of this paragraph that the key aspects concerning the definition of the literary “identity” of the AN, i.e., orality and writing, the absence of a standard version and the question of the genre, are strongly linked together; this is particularly true if one considers the fact that the work disseminated through a double medium, resulting in different modalities of reception which, in turn, likely affected the narrative themes and the way in which they were treated. The more ephemeral character of the spoken word owing to the performative dimension of the storytelling paved the way for the transformation of some of the stories which, free from the literary canons, could be given different endings (Mernissi 2001, 5–9). An entire female oral tradition seems to have survived until modern times through female narrators in the private domain, male storytellers avoiding telling fictional tales (El-Shamy 1990, 65). However, its written forms known today cannot speak for the AN’s corresponding oral formats, and very little is known about the latter before the beginning of the 20th century, when folklorists started analysing and even recording oral performances especially by the Egyptian *ḥakawātī* (storytellers) who would recite tales of the AN (Basset 1920; Blachère 1964).

## **1.2 Manuscripts**

The earliest extant manuscript of the AN, manuscript G – namely the manuscript on which the French orientalist Galland based the first translation of the AN into a European language, and published in the years 1704-1717 –, dates to between 1400-1550. All the other surviving manuscripts of the collection mostly go back to the late 18th or early 19th century; their total number reaches 114, out of which only fifteen are complete (dating to the 1800s), ten questionably belong to the collection, and five are lost (Akel 2016, 66). According to the version on which they

are based or to which they refer, the manuscripts of the AN have been classified into three main groups. Zotenberg (1887b) is the first to embark on a reconstruction of the textual history of the collection through an extensive study of the manuscripts, and categorises the latter into those belonging to the “Syrian branch”, to the “Egyptian branch”, and to a third group of independent manuscripts with peculiar characteristics that cannot be traced to either of the former classes.

The Syrian branch includes a more ancient group of manuscripts that break off at night 282 (apart from manuscript T, see below), namely in the middle of the tale of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr*, so they do not reach 1001 nights and lack a conclusion of the frame story. Macdonald (1909; 1922; 1924), one of the few scholars who has undertaken a critical analysis of the manuscripts of the AN (together with Zotenberg, Mahdi and Grotzfeld), aimed to provide a critical edition of the Syrian family of manuscripts but he could do nothing apart from recognizing the affiliation of the manuscripts to the respective families; according to Mahdi (2014, 1:26), he lacked the deep comparative analysis of the manuscripts which was necessary to understand the relationships among them and to create a stemma – the same holds true for Zotenberg with regard to the manuscripts of the Egyptian family. Conversely, Mahdi undertook a remarkable philological and critical analysis of the manuscripts of both branches in order to produce a critical edition of the text of manuscript G, the oldest one, through a process of collation among the manuscripts of the Syrian family (and, when needed, also of the Egyptian group). To accomplish this task, he reconstructed the whole stemma of the collection: not only did he distinguish the manuscripts belonging to the Syrian branch from those which were part of the Egyptian branch, but he clarified the relationships among all of them, establishing derivations, correlations and affinities. He stated, based on his thorough study, that the mother-manuscript (*al-nuskha al-umm*) goes back to the 13th century, during the Mamluk reign (1250-1517) that at the time spanned both Egypt and Syria. Thus, the first archetype (*al-nuskha al-dustūr*)<sup>31</sup> was copied from the mother-manuscript (*al-nuskha al-umm*), or from a copy of the manuscript matrix after a generation or two: it contained all the stories and was

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<sup>31</sup> For “archetype” is meant the (lost) prototype based on the mother-manuscript. However, variations, errors and missing parts of the archetype can be found, according to Mahdi (2014, 1:29), in all those places in which the original manuscript of both the Syrian and Egyptian branches agree with each other.

characterized by the same language of the mother-manuscript. This first archetype is the source from which the archetypes of the manuscripts of the two branches derive. Mahdi could reconstruct the Syrian and the Egyptian archetype – the latter in a more general way – through a process of collation, and then inferred the common matrix. Nevertheless, neither family of manuscripts is complete in medieval times as they both contained only 300 nights. Subsequently, copyists in Egypt inserted other stories and that is why the manuscripts of the Egyptian family include 1001 nights (Mahdi 2014, 1:18).

The manuscripts belonging to the Syrian branch are the following – letters are given according to Mahdi’s classification (2014):

- manuscript G (which Mahdi calls *alif*),<sup>32</sup> preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (ms Ar France Paris BnF 3609-3611 – Ancien Fonds 1508, 1507 and 1506), contains 282 nights, and is divided into three parts (vol.1 nights 1-67, vol.2 nights 67-166; vol.3 nights 167-281). According to a note at the bottom of this document, which indicates the name and location of the people who possessed it at that time, the manuscript was in Hama and Tripoli in 1536. Grotzfeld (1996) affirms that manuscript G was compiled in the second half of the 15th century, referring to the mention within the text of a coin, the *Ashrafi* dinar, put in circulation by Sultan al-Ashraf Sayf al-Dīn Barsbāy in 1425 and issued until the end of the Mamluk state in 1517.<sup>33</sup> However, Macdonald (1924, 382–89) says manuscript G is in no way older than the 1400s, and arrives at this conclusion after having profusely discussed dates, names of localities, names of caliphs and appellations in the different printed versions of some of the tales. Marzolph and Van Leeuwen (2004, 715) also share the same opinion, as well as Chraïbi (2016) and Akel (2016), who believe that manuscript G dates to the second half of the 15th century, while Mahdi (2014, 1:29) thinks that the folio and the calligraphy of

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<sup>32</sup> The letter “G” derives from the surname of the first European translator of the AN, Antoine Galland.

<sup>33</sup> Schultz (2015, 19–24) does not agree with Grotzfeld and proposes that the production of manuscript G is to be set immediately after this date and, in any case, before the second half of the 15th century.

the manuscript show that it is earlier, probably 14th century – also Zotenberg shares the same view);<sup>34</sup>

- manuscript *bā'* is conserved in the Vatican Library (ms ar. 15-16 Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 782). On the last folio of this manuscript there is the name of a man called Ibrāhīm al-Ramāl, in or of Aleppo, and a date, Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> of *Ṣafar* 1001, that is November 17th, 1592, although it was a Tuesday and not a Wednesday;
- manuscript *tā'* (ms Ar 18 England Manchester John Rylands Library 647 [40]), copied in Aleppo between 1750 and 1771, was the property of Patrick Russell (1727-1805);
- manuscript *tā'1* (ms Ar 18 England British Library IO ISL 2699), called the John Leyden manuscript,<sup>35</sup> is copied from *tā'* in the Middle East. It contains 281 nights and stops at the beginning of the tale of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr* (although the text of night 281 is the same as that of night 282 in manuscript B). This manuscript, which was probably the direct source of the Calcutta I edition, is used by Mahdi to replace manuscript T (which breaks off at night 141) in his critical work on the manuscripts of the Syrian branch.

Mahdi (2014, 1:30) draws the family tree of the Syrian manuscripts of the AN in order to evidence the relationships among them:

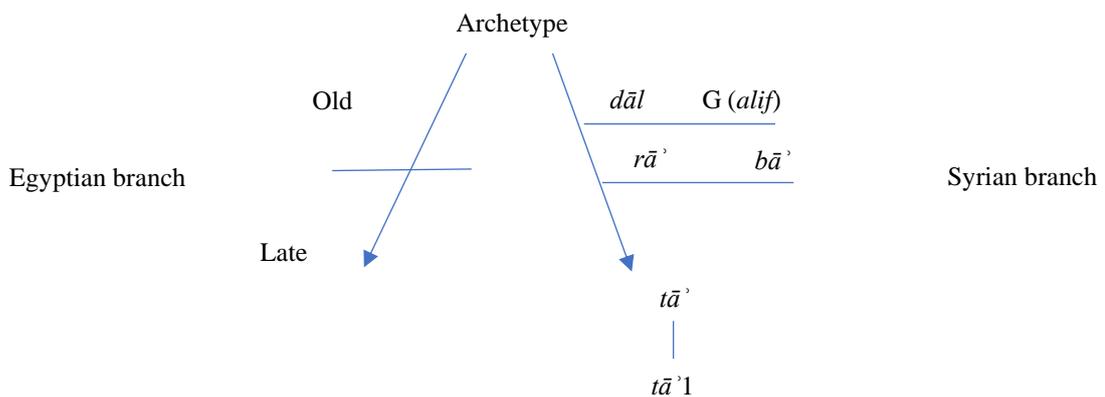


Fig.1 Image taken from Mahdī (2014a, 1:30)

<sup>34</sup> After analysing the handwriting of manuscript G, Zotenberg says that the latter to date back to the latter half of the 14th century. Macdonald (1924, 384) believes that this dating is too old.

<sup>35</sup> John Leyden is its last owner, but not its copyist, as Mahdi incorrectly thought (Van den Boogert 2020, 294).

Mahdi specifies that manuscript G is not the archetype of the manuscripts of this family but is based on an antecedent, which Mahdi calls *dāl*, while the other remaining manuscripts of the Syrian branch are drawn on another source (which has not reached us), *rā'*, deriving from *dāl* (and not from manuscript G). A philological comparison between the texts of manuscripts *bā'* and *tā'* helps reconstruct the antecedent of both of them (*rā'*) in all those places where the two manuscripts converge. Mahdi (2014, 1:31-32) illustrates that a critical analysis of the texts of manuscript G and *rā'* (*bā'*, *tā'*), specifically at the points where manuscript G and *rā'* are convergent, allows the establishment of the text of *dāl* and also the filling of the gaps in manuscript G. Mahdi highlights that by using the equivalence  $dāl = G$  and  $rā' (= bā' \text{ and } tā', tā'1)$ , he can identify the antecedent *dāl* and systematize the text of manuscript G, amending it only if necessary, through the addition of pieces of manuscripts *bā'*, *tā'* and *tā'1*. The philological analysis of the manuscripts of the Syrian branch also allows Mahdi to highlight the passages in manuscript *tā'* in which the text mingles with those of the Egyptian branch; these passages are those in which manuscripts G and *bā'* converge, while manuscript *tā'* differs because of the additions of the manuscripts of the Egyptian branch.

The critical edition of manuscript G, so far the only critical edition of any of the manuscripts of the AN, was published by Mahdi in 1984. One of the greatest achievements of this work is that the manuscripts belonging to the two branches are finally separated in a crystal-clear way. Previous scholars, such as Macdonald and Zotenberg, could not always recognise the right affiliation of the manuscripts of the AN because the order of nights is sometimes the same in both the Syrian and the Egyptian branches, and this leaves room for confusion. Mahdi (2014, 1:32) clarifies that in his critical edition of manuscript G he did not add elements from the Egyptian texts of the AN, except when he realized that there were mistakes in the text due to wrong copying from the archetype, when parts lacking in manuscript G would not allow for the text to be completed, and when the Egyptian branch preserved variations that had disappeared from the Syrian branch.

In undertaking this critical analysis, Mahdi (2014, 1:36-51) also examines the language of manuscript G and makes interesting points with regard to its usage,

grammar, spelling and punctuation. The main differences between the language of manuscript G and classical Arabic are to be found in the indication of short and long vowels, in dual and plural inflections, in words that change when put in a construct state (*iḍāfa*), and in verbal inflections modified for aesthetic purposes or to follow a rhyme without necessarily respecting the rules of poetic meters. On the grammatical level, case endings (*i' rāb*) are not indicated, and vowels change their duration bringing about new noun and verbal forms which do not belong to classical Arabic; moreover, forms of the classical language are used in different positions or in the place of others which were not particularly frequent (like the passive form). The middle Arabic of manuscript G also registers an increased number of prepositions that serve to indicate the relation between the terms within a sentence and among the sentences themselves, as is the case with the letter *bā'*, which is often found in front of present tense verbs. With regard to the spelling, vowels and consonants are frequently exchanged, for example *bā'* and *lām* are written *bā* and *lā*, and the conjunction *fā'* becomes *fā*. Moreover, the letters *thā'* and *dhāl* are substituted by *tā'* and *dāl* and sometimes confused with each other, a fact that creates problems in words where two *thā'* meet and where the *shadda* (the diacritic marking a long consonant) is not written. Other consonants are also exchanged, so *ḍad* is used instead of *zā'*, *sīn* for *ṣād*, *shīn* for *sīn* and *tā'* for *ṭā'*, while in some words, the order of the letters is inverted, and others are defined by the addition of the article even when it is not needed (i.e., *al-sindbād* instead of *sindbād*). With regard to the writing of *hamza*, this letter disappears, softens and/or melts into the vowel it holds, which in turn becomes long – for this reason, *alif*, *yā'* or *wāw*, the long vowels corresponding to the respectively short ones *fatha*, *kasra* and *ḍamma*, are usually put in place of the *hamza*. In other places the *hamza* becomes *alif madda* (a double *alif*), *alif al-maqṣūr* (long *alif* at the ending of a noun) and/or *tā' marbūṭa* (a variation of letter *tā'* used at the end of feminine words). Sometimes, copyists put together letters or words originally separated, such as *lisa'a* instead of *li-hādhīhi al-sā'a* (for this time/hour), *fīsā'a* instead of *fī hādhīhi al-sā'a* (at this time/hour), *bilāsh* and *bilāshā* for *bi-lā shay'* (with nothing). Mahdi (2014, 48) affirms that manuscript G still has traces of the spoken language of Iraq in the Abbasid period, which are visible in the inflections of the nouns and of the verbs, although the language is that of Syria and Egypt during the Mamluk reign under which the two countries

were a unitary state. The scholar wonders if this means that people in Syria and Egypt spoke the same (variation of the) language, and quotes the historian Ibn al-Dawādārī, who lived in Cairo at the beginning of the 14th century and would distinguish between the spoken Arabic of Egypt and Syria: *wa-qāla lī akhruju alqā al-amīr Sayf al-Dīn Asandamura fa-innahum muta 'ashshina fī hādha al-ḡalām yaqūlu bi-hādha al-lafẓ lafẓ al-sha' miyyina* (And he said I am leaving, I am meeting the prince Sayf al-Dīn Asandamura; they are having dinner now. And he said that with this accent, namely the Syrian accent) (Mahdi 2014, 1:49).

The second group of manuscripts, that is the “Egyptian branch”, includes manuscripts which were copied between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century,<sup>36</sup> and which are based on the same recension.<sup>37</sup> The manuscripts deriving from this recension have been named ZER, namely the Zotenberg Egyptian recension, after Zotenberg’s study. They have some common characteristics, such as similar or same night division and sequence of the tales,<sup>38</sup> in addition, they are all divided into four volumes and the complete ones contain the end of the frame story. It should be remembered that the Bulaq, Calcutta I and II printed editions of the AN published in the first half of the 1800s are based on ZER; while Breslau, after MacDonald’s article (1909), was regarded as spurious (see next paragraph).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> According to the report of Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, a German traveller who mentions in his diary that a complete version of the AN was compiled in Cairo in 1770 (Ott 2007, 334).

<sup>37</sup> Zotenberg (1887) demonstrates that the most ancient of this group of texts was fixed in Cairo in the late 18th century, although one manuscript (manuscript Ar 19 Germany Gotha Forschungsbibliothek orient A 2632-2635), which belongs to this recension and contains the nights 889-1001, dates back to 1759, a fact that duped Macdonald into thinking that an older version of ZER existed.

<sup>38</sup> Franssen (2012), who offers a codicological analysis of each of the thirteen manuscripts of ZER, says that they amount to thirteen, out of which just three are incomplete, namely ms Ar 19 Belgium Liège Bibliothèque Générale de Philosophie et Lettres 2241 C (only volume 2), belonged to Adrien Wittert, ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3606-3608, supplément 2198-2200, fonds Asselin (volume 2 lacking), and ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 4675-4677, supplément 2519-2521 (volume 4 lacking).

<sup>39</sup> The Breslau edition (1824-1843) was edited by Habicht (first eight volumes; the last four volumes were edited by Fleischer) who made a patchwork of different manuscripts, mainly based on the version given by manuscript G. The first, second, and part of the third volume of Breslau were based on manuscript G, with the addition of materials from Chavis, Sabbagh and Caussin de Perceval, Arabists

Zotenberg (1887b, 212) studied and classified with particular attention the Egyptian branch, identifying sixteen manuscripts plus a fragment as being part of this group. However, some of them were later recognized as having different features from those of this family (manuscript *bā'*; ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF de Bibliothèque Nationale de France 3617, supplement 1720, fonds Asselin), while two were lost (ms Ar 19 Austria Vienna Orientalischen Akademie CL and ms Ar 19 Russia St. Petersburg Bibliothèque Publique CXLII), and another two which are actually part of the Egyptian branch were missed by Zotenberg (ms Ar 19 Egypt Cairo Dār al-kutub 13523 z and ms Ar 19 Egypt Cairo Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 18). Today, thirteen manuscripts are recognized as belonging to ZER (Franssen 2012):

- ms Ar 19 Belgium Liège Bibliothèque Générale de Philosophie et Lettres 2241 C (only volume 2);
- ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3598-3601, supplément 1718 I-IV, fonds Asselin;
- ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3602-3605, supplément 1719 I-IV, fonds Asselin;
- ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3606-3608, supplément 2198-2200, fonds Asselin (volume 2 lacking);
- ms Ar 19 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 4675-4677, supplément 2519-2521 (volume 4 lacking);
- ms Ar England London British Library Or. 1595-1598;
- ms Ar 19 England London British Library Or. 2916-2919;

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who were in Paris at the beginning of the 19th century studying, transcribing and even forging materials related to the AN (Mahdi 1995, 51–71). All these scholars produced manuscripts based on manuscript G yet contaminated with Egyptian ones, and sometimes even relied on each other's versions, which were usually embellished and modified. For the last part of his edition Habicht used a manuscript copied by Mordecai Ibn al-Najjār and that the latter said was based on a mysterious Tunisian manuscript – and which turned out to be a copy of manuscripts preserved in Paris. This is to say that Habicht in no way based his edition on a unique manuscript/text, but he put together manuscripts of dubious origins, and a “significant portion of it originated in Paris during the first two decades of the nineteenth century” (Mahdi 1995, 93). Zotenberg, instead, believed Breslau to be based on true manuscripts, part of which would have belonged to ZER (1887b, 214).

- ms Ar 19 Germany Gotha Forschungsbibliothek orient A 2632-2635;
- ms Ar Germany Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 623-626;
- ms Ar 19 Russia St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts B 1114;
- ms Ar 19 Egypt Cairo Dār al-kutub 13523 z;
- ms Ar 19 Egypt Cairo Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 18;
- ms Ar England Cambridge University Library, Qq 106-109.<sup>40</sup>

To date, no critical edition of ZER exists; Mahdi, in his attempt to provide a critical edition of the manuscripts belonging to the Syrian family, also studied the ZER manuscripts, in particular the older ones, in order to find elements of the Syrian branch which disappeared in the latter but were conserved in the former. The scholar makes an important distinction recognizing two groups of manuscripts in the Egyptian family, namely the old Egyptian branch, whose manuscripts date back to not before the 17th century – a hundred years earlier than the Egyptian recension mentioned by Zotenberg (1887b) – and the late Egyptian branch, whose texts were copied, as already said, between the end of the 18th and the 19th century (2014, 1:31-34). Old Egyptian manuscripts are usually fragmented and incomplete; the order of the tales is sometimes random and different – in particular, after the tale of *The Hunchback and the King of China* – and they might or might not have night divisions but none of them have night numbers. On the other hand, late Egyptian manuscripts are divided into four volumes and are characterized by the same order of stories with consistent night numbers; the frame story also has a similar beginning and conclusion (where still present) in all the texts belonging to this group (Mahdi 1995, 97). The ending is generally characterized by the mention of the birth of three children and by the apparent non-connection between the tales that precede the epilogue of the frame story and the epilogue itself (Grotzfeld 1985). Zotenberg analysed only the late Egyptian manuscripts because he was convinced that there was no original source for these manuscripts before the end of the 18th century; Mahdi, instead, believes that all the ZER manuscripts go back to a unique antecedent which he calls *dhāl*, whose characteristics can be inferred by

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<sup>40</sup> List taken from Franssen (2012). Akel (2016, 66) adds to the list of the complete ZER manuscripts also ms Ar 19 India Patna Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library 2637-2640, copied in 1829 by the same copyist of ms Ar 19 England London British Gallery Or. 1595-1598.

comparing the texts of the Egyptian family with those belonging to the Syrian one with regard to variations, suppressions and errors. He discovered that the relationship between the manuscripts of the old Egyptian branch changes after night 61, which means that also the antecedent *dhāl* was divided into two parts, that were subsequently put together again but without considering the discrepancies (2014, 1:32).<sup>41</sup> It is important to remember that Mahdi's study has been criticized for being very committed to the Syrian branch of manuscripts of the AN, underestimating the importance of the Egyptian one, which he considered younger and, therefore, less reliable and original (Pinault 1987, 142–43). However, philologists such as Macdonald (1922, 321) and Grotzfeld (1985, 87) advise against the attitude of disregarding more modern manuscripts, which sometimes preserve elements of older traditions.

Finally, there is a third group of manuscripts which seems to have independent characteristics and cannot be directly traced to either of the above-mentioned branches; Macdonald (1922) identifies among them three manuscripts, the first one being Ar 18 Spain Madrid Real Academia de la Historia Gayangos 49, which dates to the first half of the 18th century according to Akel (2016, 85), and of which only two volumes remain – the first one is divided into nights, although they are not numbered, while the second is not. Macdonald (1922, 308) says that the first volume of this document mainly follows the order of the tales in manuscript G, while the second is certainly not part of ZER; on the other hand, Mahdi considers this manuscript to be a representative of the Egyptian branch (Akel 2016, 86). The other two manuscripts, which are in line with the one in Madrid, are Ar 17 Germany Tübingen Universitätsbibliothek M. a. VI. 32, which seems to date to the 17th century,<sup>42</sup> and manuscript Ar 17 England Manchester John Rylands Library 646 [706], which has the same origin as the manuscript in Tübingen and goes back to the middle of the 18th century. Macdonald

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<sup>41</sup> Mahdi (2014, 1:35) also found that the tale of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr*, the story in the middle of which some manuscripts of the Syrian family break off, was part of the archetype of the AN, and was preserved in both families of manuscripts, although in the Syrian one it is incomplete. The story is more ancient in manuscript ms Ar 18 England Oxford Bodleian Library Bodl. Or 550-556, copied in 1764 and belonging to an independent – neither Syrian nor Egyptian – manuscript family, than in the version found in Bulaq.

<sup>42</sup> The first date mentioned in the manuscript is 1836.

(1922, 310) believes that these two manuscripts (and also a fourth one, Ar 17-18 England Oxford Christ Church College Library 207) may represent an old recension of the AN, different from ZER, whose first part consisted of the contents of manuscript G, while the second consisted of the romance of *'Umar al-Nu'mān* as it is found in the manuscripts of Tübingen and Manchester.

Grotzfeld (1985, 78) indicates five versions which have different and “more skillful” conclusions of the frame story than that of ZER and, therefore, witness a manuscript tradition other than the Egyptian and the Syrian ones. Four versions are characterized by the fact that they do not mention any child/children in the epilogue of the frame story;<sup>43</sup> three of these versions are manuscripts, i.e., ms Ar 16 Turkish Kayseri Raşid Efendi Kütüphanesi 674, probably dating back to the 16th century (Thomann 2020, 27), ms Ar 18 Germany Berlin Staatsbibliothek We.662 (copied in 1759), and ms Ar 17 France Paris BnF 3619 (supplément 1721 II, fonds Asselin), which dates back to the 17th century. The fourth is not a manuscript but the Breslau edition of the AN (1824-1843) that, although regarded as apocryphal, does contain some authentic parts copied from manuscripts preserved in Paris at the beginning of the 19th century. The texts of these four sources are based on the same version of the AN but form two different recensions, as it is shown by the difference in the collocation of the tales which precede the conclusion of the frame story.<sup>44</sup> Grotzfeld (1985b, 78) affirms that once a prologue (frame story) like the one found in manuscript G and an epilogue (namely a conclusion of the frame story) as in the four texts above mentioned constituted a version of the AN earlier than the text of manuscript G. Then,

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<sup>43</sup> A story similar to that of the frame, but whose protagonists have no names, is recounted by Shahrāzād to the king before the epilogue. The king recognizes himself in it and comes to his senses, organizing his marriage with Shahrāzād and that of Dīnārzād (Shahrāzād's sister) with his brother. For the plot of the frame story see 2.2, part I.

<sup>44</sup> Grotzfeld (1985, 80-81) maintains that the conclusion in Breslau “follows the ‘Tale of the King and his Son and his Wife and the seven Wazirs’ (i.e. the Arabic version of the *Book of Sindibād* or *Book of the Seven Sages*) [...]” He also specifies that “in the three other texts, this conclusion is interwoven with the ‘Tale of Baibars and the Sixteen Captains of Police’”: the way in which the tale resembling the frame story is interwoven into that of *Baibars* shows that the former (and, therefore, the conclusion of the frame story that follows) was not initially crafted for the manuscripts in which it is found now, but it is much older, perhaps going back to the 16th century.

he mentions a fifth manuscript known as Reinhardt, ms Ar 19 France Strasbourg Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire 4278-4281, which has an epilogue still different from those of both the Syrian and the Egyptian branches and, therefore, should also have belonged to a separate tradition – although borrowing from elements of ZER, such as the number of Shahrāzād’s children.<sup>45</sup> The epilogue of the frame story in these independent manuscripts (i.e., neither explicitly Syrian nor Egyptian) usually entails no reference to children – usually but not always, as ms Reinhardt demonstrates –, and is preceded by a tale in which the king recognizes his own story.<sup>46</sup>

It is interesting to note that Marzolph and Van Leeuwen (2004, 635–36), besides presenting the division between Syrian, Egyptian and independent branches of manuscripts, suggest a second type of classification and divide them into two groups, i.e., those copied before Galland’s translation and those after.

### 1.3 Printed editions

The main printed editions of the AN in Arabic are five, however, there are many other editions of the collection which are considered reprints and/or revisions of the main ones.<sup>47</sup> In 1814, in the Faculty of the College of Fort William in Calcutta, the first volume of the first edition of the AN appeared; the College had been founded in 1800 to train the British officers working in India in the history, culture and languages of the colonized territory – in which Persian was used as the language of administration and Arabic as the language of the Islamic law. Under these circumstances, Shaykh Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Shīrwānī al-Yamānī, a professor of Arabic at the College, prepared an edition of the AN with didactic purpose, namely to serve as a manual for

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<sup>45</sup> In this manuscript, Shāhriyār listens to a story identical to his own, which ends with the queen delivering three children. At this point, Shāhriyār asks to see his own children and then changes his attitude towards Shahrāzād. Grotzfeld believes that this manuscript “comes closest” to that given by Ibn al-Nadīm. This latter manuscript belonged to Carl Reinhardt, and dates back to 1832.

<sup>46</sup> And then, in the epilogue, the king repents, organizes a double marriage and orders the recording of the stories told by Shahrāzād.

<sup>47</sup> Mahdi (1995, 88) regards all the main editions before his, with the exception of Bulaq, as a literary construction. A complete list of all the printed editions and reprints of the AN available in Arabic is given by Akel (2016, 431–45).

his students of Arabic. Al-Yamānī's edition in two volumes – the second one was published in 1818 –, contains 200 nights and includes tales taken from the manuscript which al-Yamānī edited, plus some other alien stories. The manuscript in question has been recognized by Mahdi (1995) as manuscript *tā'1* (ms Ar 18 England British Library IO ISL 2699), copied in India before John Leyden's death in 1811, and deriving indirectly from manuscript *tā'* (ms Ar 18 England Manchester John Rylands Library 647 [40]), which goes back to the second half of the 17th century (see the previous paragraph). As this edition of the AN was supposed to be used by students of Arabic, the editor changed the language of the text and corrected it, according to what he affirms in the introduction to his work. Al-Yamānī thought that the author of the manuscript of the AN in his possession was Syrian and wrote in colloquial Arabic in order to teach people the oral variety of the language. He, the editor, had therefore the duty to correct the text and embellish the Arabic, so that it could have been used by his learners, and for this reason, Calcutta I is an artificial, strongly modified edition.

Breslau (1824-1843) is the only Arabic edition of the AN printed in Europe; the first eight volumes (1824-1838) were edited by Maximilian Habicht, professor of Arabic at the University of Breslau and member of the Asian Society in Paris, and after his death, the remaining four volumes (1842-1843) were published by Heinrich Fleischer, who taught Arabic at the University of Leipzig. Breslau is the first “complete” edition of the AN, as it is mentioned in the incipit of its volumes, and it is said to be based on a Tunisian manuscript that Habicht claimed to have obtained from Murād bin al-Najjār (Mahdi 2014, 1:16), a Tunisian teacher of Arabic who lived in Paris in the period in which the interest in the AN led many scholars to produce and copy manuscripts from sources sometimes of dubious origin. Al-Najjār stated that he had copied a version of the collection from a Tunisian manuscript in ten volumes, the last of which is dated 1731, but in reality Breslau is a combination of different pieces of the AN. Macdonald (1909, 696) was the first who denounces that from “the end of vol. II to the beginning of vol. IX it [Breslau] consists of a very miscellaneous collection of stories, not divided into Nights and claiming no connection with the Nights”. The beginning of Breslau, including the frame story, is based on two manuscripts, one handwritten by Habicht and the other divided in two parts, the first of which contains the frame story and is “in a small, unknown, modern hand, and ends

in N 69” (Macdonald 1909, 690); both manuscripts “appear to be practically of the same recension and remotely connected with Galland’s MS.; to the precise origin of either I have no clue” (1909, 690). Basically, Breslau is made of: pieces from manuscript G; a translation into German of Edouard Gauttier’s revision of Galland’s AN (until night 567); 180 pages from a continuation of the AN made by Caussin de Perceval, and Murād bin al-Najjār’s manuscript to fill in the nights from 884 to 1001 – the source of which was never found, rather it was a forgery (Mahdi 1995, 94). Breslau, therefore, was put together in Paris from a collection of manuscripts which were essentially based on manuscript G, indirectly linked to it or even created on purpose to meet the thirst for complete manuscripts of that time (1995, 93). Mahdi explains that Macdonald noticed a strong similarity between Breslau and manuscript G but could not detect how much Habicht had borrowed from it, as well as from Michel Sabbagh and Dom Denis Chavis,<sup>48</sup> two other Arabists who were in Paris during the first half of the 19th century working on the manuscript of the collection. The first two volumes of Breslau are, therefore, based on the versions of manuscript G manipulated and transcribed by Chavis and Sabbagh respectively, and from Najjār who in turn revised Chavis and Sabbagh’s copies. Sabbagh is also famous for having made a copy from an Iraqi manuscript dated 1703, whose resemblance to manuscript G did not go unnoticed by Macdonald – while Zotenberg believed it to be true –, although only Mahdi (1995, 92) recognized it as a falsification, being copied by Sabbagh himself.

Bulaq (1835) is the only complete edition drawing on a unique manuscript, which was more than likely part of the late ZER compiled in the last decades of the 18th century; it was first printed in Egypt in two volumes and was edited by ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Ṣafatī al-Sharqāwī, a scholar of al-Azhar University in Cairo. Mahdi (2014, 1:19) is very critical about this edition and supports his negative judgement by quoting al-Sharqāwī’s words: “*qad tamma ṭaba‘ hādhā al-kitāb...muhadhdhaba ‘ibārātuhu wa-muḥarrara i‘tibārātuhu bitaṣḥīḥ abda‘ min badī‘ al-ta’līf [...] ḥāydan ‘an rakākat al-ghalaṭāt al-sakhīna*” (in this printed edition...utterances are polished and phrases well redacted through a work of editing which is more original/creative than the act of

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<sup>48</sup> Chavis was a Syrian priest. Mahdi (1995, 61) explains that his knowledge of Arabic, however, “left much to be desired”.

composing [...] avoiding the imperfection of silly errors). Bulaq has been used as the source of most modern European translations of the AN.

The second Calcutta (1839-1842), or Calcutta II, was compiled from a late Egyptian recension and is considered the most complete of all the printed editions.<sup>49</sup> The title page in English of the Arabic text indicates that Calcutta II is the original version of the AN, published in Arabic in four volumes from an Egyptian manuscript brought to India, but acquired in England, by the Major Turner Macan and edited by William Hay Macnaghten. Macan's manuscript is now lost, it was probably "destroyed by the printers once it had served their use" (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:XIV). However, Mahdi found a manuscript in the British Library, ms Ar 19 England British Library Or. 1595-1598, dated 1829, which seemed to correspond to the one on which Calcutta II relies (2014, 1:21); it is described in the library catalogue as a possible source of Calcutta II, and it was in possession of the same publisher, W. Thacker & Company, which printed Calcutta II. However, in the catalogue entry of the British Library it is made clear that there are many discrepancies between this manuscript and the text of Calcutta II, so some scholars think that the former may be the original source to which pieces from other editions were added by the copyists and/or editors when preparing the edition of Calcutta II. Mahdi (1995, 102) sustains that there was a massive process of modification and expansion of the original Arabic manuscript, for which also Calcutta II can be considered as a collage of different parts mainly taken from Breslau and Calcutta I. It should also be noted that many different people worked on the text of Calcutta II – Aḥmad bin Moḥammad, Mawlawī Ṣāḥib 'Alī Khān and Henry Thoby Prinsep corrected the press proofs. Based on Mahdi's work, Grotzfeld (2004, 227) assumes that Calcutta II "is the result of a definite plagiarism. The last volumes of the Calcutta II edition are nothing but a reprint of the Bulaq." Moreover, in 1838 the same publisher of Calcutta II also published Henry Torrens' translation in English of the first fifty nights of the AN (*The Book of The Thousand and One Nights: From the Arabic of the Egyptian M.S. as edited by Wm. Hay Macnaghten, Esq. B. C. S., done*

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<sup>49</sup> Mahdi (1995, 124) evidences that the presence of the tale of *King Sindbad and the Falcon*, instead of the tale of *The Merchant and the Parrot* – which is found in the Syrian branch and in the early Egyptian branch –, within the story of *The Fisherman and the Jinn*, testifies to the belonging of this manuscript to the late Egyptian branch.

into English by Henry Torrens B.C.S.B.A. and of the Inner Temple), which is also meant to be based on the same manuscript as Calcutta II's, i.e., the so-called Macan's manuscript. Torrens' translation is, in fact, very much similar to Calcutta II – but not to the manuscript at the British Library that Mahdi believes to be a possible source of Calcutta II. Again, this might reveal that the manuscript at the British Library was used as a base but then modified by the editors/translators (Mahdi 1995, 122).

Muḥsin Mahdi's edition of the AN is the only critical edition, based on the most ancient manuscript of the collection, namely manuscript G (Galland's manuscript). Published in 1984, this edition is composed of two volumes: volume 1 contains Mahdi's preface and the Arabic text, while volume 2 includes the critical apparatus, the description of manuscripts and the indexes.<sup>50</sup> Mahdi edited manuscript G undertaking a philological analysis and pointing out the importance of serious, scientific philological work on the manuscripts. In order to reconstruct the text, he highlighted all the omissions, modifications and errors he found in this manuscript and compared it with other manuscripts belonging to the Syrian (and sometimes also the Egyptian) branch. In those places where the scholar decided to insert something, or to add parts taken from other sources to fill in the gaps found in manuscript G, he always gave an indication of the changes he made. Regarding his rendering of the language, Mahdi kept the original orthography and grammar, so he neither added diacritics nor amended any words. In his introduction to volume 1, the scholar describes the challenges and the difficulties of applying a philological analysis to a text with a complex textual history, with no author, and whose manuscripts were written down by copyists for storytellers, namely without following the original verbatim. To underline the scale of his work, Mahdi (2014, 1:40-45) also compared selected passages of the tale of *al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī* taken both from the Bulaq edition and his edition of manuscript G highlighting how heavily the Arabic language was modified in the former compared to the latter. The scholar's main intention was to edit the text of the most ancient manuscript and, at the same time, pave the way for the reconstruction of

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<sup>50</sup> In 1994, Mahdi published *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf layla wa-layla)*, volume 3, which includes three chapters on the history of the collection from the 19th century onwards, three essays and two indexes (one to the Arabic text of the AN and the other to the critical apparatus). This volume was published again without the indexes in 1995 under the title *The Thousand and One Nights*.

the *al-nuskha al-umm*, namely the common antecedent of all the versions of the AN, which he thought would go back to the 14th century; moreover, he believed that he could have inferred the existence of this antecedent by collating the texts of the Syrian with those of the Egyptian branch. Mahdi's view on the redactions belonging to the Egyptian branch is, however, quite denigrating; he states that these contrived texts merely weaken their source materials, denying them any creativity or improvement in terms of narrative (Pinault 1987, 125–35). This fact has attracted much criticism toward Mahdi's work and is in contrast to his first, philological aim. Despite his attempt at offering a non-orientalist and, therefore, non-corrupted version of the AN, Mahdi and his translator Haddawy have been charged with neglecting the transcultural nature of the collection in the name of an ideal of purity – and, perhaps, of Arab nationalism (Habegger-Conti 2011). When he wrote his article *Mazāhir al-riwāya wa-al-mushāfaha fī uṣūl Alf layla wa-layla* [Manifestations of Storytelling and Orality in the Sources of The Thousand and One Nights] in 1974, Mahdi meant the variations among the different manuscripts and branches of the AN to be owing to the different transcriptions of the oral recitation of the tales made by the copyists. However, in his monumental work of editing of manuscript G, he leaned towards the relevance of the Syrian branch over the copies of the Egyptian one: the variations of the latter were, therefore, seen no longer as the result of oral transmission but principally as interpolations.

#### Summary of the printed editions quoted in this paragraph

Al-Shirwānī al-Yamānī, Aḥmad Bin Moḥammad bin 'Alī bin Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī, ed. 1814-1818. *Ḥikayāt mi'at layla min Alf layla wa-layla* [The Arabian Nights' Entertainments]; in the Original Arabic. Published under the Patronage of the College of Fort William. 2 vols. Calcutta: printed by P. Pereira, Hindoostanee Press.

Habicht, Christian Maximilian, ed. vols. I-VIII 1824-1838, Fleischer, Heinrich Leberecht, ed. vols. IX-XII 1842-1843. *Hāḍā kitāb Alf layla wa-layla min al-mubtadā' ilā al-muntahā'*. Tausend und eine nacht: Arabisch: nach einer handschrift aus Tunis [This is the Book of The Thousand and One Nights from the Beginning to the End.

Thousand and One Nights: Arabic: Based on a Tunisian Manuscript]. 12 vols. Breslau: *Dār ṭibā‘at al-madrasa*.

Al-Sharqāwī, al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Ṣafatī, ed. 1935. *Kitāb Alf layla wa-layla* [The Book of The Thousand and One Nights]. 2 vols. Cairo: *Bulāq*.

Macnaghten, William Hay, ed. 1839-1842. *The Alif Laila, or Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night, Commonly Known as ‘The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments’ Now, for the First Time, Published Complete in the Original Arabic, from an Egyptian Manuscript Brought to India by the Late Major Turner Macan, Editor of the Shah-Nameh*. 4 vols. Calcutta: W. Thacker & Company.

Mahdi, Muhsin, ed. 1984. *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf layla wa-layla)*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill.

#### **1.4 Translations<sup>51</sup>**

The history of the translations of the AN is particularly convoluted, and has been highly influential in the reception, understanding and destiny of the collection. Rendering the AN into Western languages was, for at least one century since Antoine Galland’s “rediscovery” of the collection in 1704, the only way through which both scholars and the general public were given access to this literary work. Subsequently, at the beginning of the 19th century, scholars and lovers of Arabic literature started paying attention to the question of the sources of the AN and looking for the “original” text. Many other versions and editions in Arabic became available to meet this demand, and several translations based on these editions also appeared. Nevertheless, these translations relied on different editions and often entailed additions to and/or modifications of the Arabic texts. In this paragraph, the main translations of the collection are recalled, specifically those in English and French since they have been

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<sup>51</sup> For further information on the translations of the AN, refer to Gerhardt (1963), Knipp (1974), Ali (1977), Wazzan (1993), Schacker-Mill (2000), Rastegar (2005), Ross (2008) and Regier (2010).

the most prominent and widespread, while translations in other languages are only mentioned for the sake of completeness.

The first translation of the AN that brought this work to light after centuries of oblivion – during which, however, the collection kept circulating unofficially – is Galland’s *Les milles et une nuits*, published in 12 volumes between 1704 and 1717. Galland based his work on a manuscript of the AN which incidentally turned out to be the oldest existing document, and which was named after him manuscript “G” (see 1.2, part I). Since this manuscript was fragmentary, Galland spent his life searching for a complete version of the AN. In 1701, in a letter to Pierre Daniel Huet, Galland stated that the manuscript in his possession contained only three volumes, but in subsequent letters written in 1702 and 1704, he claimed to own two more volumes, probably referring to two manuscripts containing the tales of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr* and *Ghānim bin Ayyūb*, and of *Sindbād the Sailor* respectively (Mahdi 1995).<sup>52</sup> The French orientalist completed the first eight volumes of his *Les mille et une nuits* relying on manuscript G and another manuscript not identified, which he used for volume 7 and 8. More specifically, volume 1 and 2 of Galland’s AN correspond to the first volume of manuscript G (until night 69) and include the frame story and all the other stories in this document, namely *The Merchant and the Jinn*, *The Fisherman and the Jinn*, *The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad* (including also the tale of *The Envier and the Envied* told within the story of *The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad*, which is only found in the manuscripts of the Syrian branch). In volume 3, Galland omits the opening clauses at the beginning of each night because, as he explains in the preface to this volume, his readers complained about the repetition of the same introductory formula, and yet he includes the narrative cycle of *Sindbād the*

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<sup>52</sup> Galland’s interest in the AN probably began when he translated the story of *Sindbād the Sailor* from an unknown manuscript. For a complete account of Galland’s life story and his engagement with the translation of the AN, as well as of his other works of literature – among which *Bibliothèque orientale, ou dictionnaire universel contenant tout ce qui regarde la connoissance des peuples de l’Orient* [Oriental library or universal dictionary containing everything related to the knowledge of Oriental peoples] based on the work of Ḥājī Khalīfa (d.1657) and completed by Galland in 1697 –, see Mahdi (1995, 11–41).

*Sailor*, which is not found in manuscript G.<sup>53</sup> Volume 4, 5 and 6 reproduce the contents of the rest of manuscript G (volume 2 and the first pages of volume 3), and encompass the stories of *The Three Apples* – which includes the tale of *The Two Viziers Nūr al-Dīn and Badr al-Dīn* –, *The Hunchback and the King of China* and the tale of *‘Alī bin Bakkār and the Slave Girl Shams al-Nahār*. In volume 6 Galland adds the tale of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr* from another manuscript – this tale is present partially in manuscript G, but Galland did not use that version). In volume 7, published in 1706, he inserts the last two stories of volume 3 of manuscript G, yet at the same he suppresses the night breaks completely, illustrating that he was forced to do that due to the difficulties he had encountered, and that it was sufficient that the readers knew “the author’s design” (Mahdi 1995, 30). Volume 8 was brought out three years later and contains the tale of *Ghānim bin Ayyūb* that Galland had previously given to the book seller who, however, published it without the permission of the French scholar.<sup>54</sup> The last four volumes of Galland’s work were printed starting from 1712, six years after the last volume to whose publication he had agreed – volumes 11 and 12 appeared after his death –; they were filled with tales of Arabic oral folklore recounted to Galland by the Maronite Ḥannā Diyāb, who lived in Paris in the same period.<sup>55</sup>

It is evident that Galland’s translation is not faithful to the text of manuscript G, rather the French orientalist tries to adapt its style to the tastes of the readership of

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<sup>53</sup> Galland indicates that he found the narrative cycle of *Sindbād the Sailor* in a separate manuscript which had no night breaks, so he had to invent them to make the story fit into the collection. An edition of *Sindbād the Sailor* in Arabic based on an independent text appeared in 1814, while an older version of this story is included in a Turkish translation of the AN, which dates to the 17th century, and in a 18th century Egyptian manuscript of the collection (ms Ar France Paris BnF Bibliothèque Nationale de France 3615, supplément 1721 IV, fonds Asselin). See Bellino (2015).

<sup>54</sup> This story was published without Galland’s permission together with two other tales which had nothing to do with the AN, namely *Khudadād* and *al-Amīr Zayn al-Aṣṣnām*, translated from Turkish by Pétis de la Croix, who also had not given permission for publication.

<sup>55</sup> Galland wrote in his diary that he met Ḥannā Diyāb in Paris, at his friend Paul Lucas’ house in 1709, and that the Syrian Maronite gave him the Arabic manuscript of *‘Ala al-Dīn*, known as *Aladdin* (Sadan 2001, 174–76). However, the manuscript has never been found, and the most ancient version of this tale is the French one in Galland’s *Les mille et une nuits* (1704). Ḥannā Diyāb also told Galland the tale of *‘Alī Bābā and the Forty Thieves*.

his time. His intention is to make the AN a point of reference for virtue and morality, so he suppresses licentious scenes and, when accused by his readers of interspersing the stories with repetitive night breaks, he simply removes them (Ali 1977, 16). Also, Galland does not include any translation of the poetical passages thinking that they might not be well received by the audience. It is interesting to note that the conclusion of the frame story in his *Les mille et une nuits*, which he could not find in his manuscript, has been thought for long time to be invented by Galland. However, Grotzfeld (1985b, 81, note 21) reveals that the ending used by the French Orientalist, namely Shahrāzād obtaining mercy from the king not because of their offspring, but just for the power of her convincing storytelling, was already in circulation in some independent manuscripts of the AN. Galland should have known it, as he seems to point in a letter he wrote in 1702.

Galland's *Les mille et une nuits* was the prevailing and authoritative version of the AN for almost a century; it was the text on which the so-called "Grub Street" translations, namely the first anonymous translations of the AN into English, were based – they appeared around 1706, the earliest one in our possession dates back to 1712. Almost a hundred years later, in 1802, Reverend Edward Forster translated select tales from Galland's *Les mille et une nuits* into English (*The Arabian Nights*) in five volumes. In 1811, Jonathan Scott produced the first verbatim translation of Galland's French text into literary English, *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, in 6 volumes.<sup>56</sup> Subsequently, in 1838, Henry Torrens translated the first fifty nights of a manuscript which apparently was the same manuscript on which Calcutta II is based – namely, ms Ar 19 England British Library Or. 1595-1598. However, Torrens' text was very similar to Calcutta II but different from the text of the manuscript in question, so it is likely that Torren's work was either based on another manuscript – and this holds valid also for Calcutta II – or on a modified version of this manuscript.

In 1838 Edward Lane published a translation of the AN commissioned by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, an organization founded in London in

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<sup>56</sup> This translation was initially supposed to be based on ms Ar 18 England Oxford Bodleian Library Bodl. Or 550-556, brought from Turkey (the so-called Wortley-Montague manuscript), but then Scott gave up on the idea and preferred to translate from the French version of Galland.

1826, among whose philanthropic aims was the extensive diffusion of culture.<sup>57</sup> Prior to this, English readers appeared to have complained about the fact that Galland's translation was incomplete, pointing out that many full manuscripts of the AN were still untranslated, so Lane's work was meant to satisfy the needs of the general public (Schacker-Mill 2000, 167). His translation, illustrated by William Harvey and published by Charles Knight in association with the Society, is mainly based on the Bulaq edition, although some parts are taken from Calcutta I and Breslau.<sup>58</sup> It is, however, far from being complete because Lane made a selection of the materials available to him and included in his work only thirty long tales and fifty-five portions of stories chosen from the short tales in his sources (Gerhardt 1963, 75). In order to comply with the "Puritan subterfuge", as the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1999, 94) calls Lane's prudish attitude in removing anything that he thought to be inappropriate, Lane (1979, 1:XIII) decided to omit parts of the tales if they were "uninteresting or on any account objectionable". He also left out tales which were very famous at the time thanks to Galland's translation, such as *'Ala al-Dīn* (known as *Aladdin*) and *'Alī Bābā and the Forty Thieves*, a fact that did not meet the popular demand. Moreover, he chose to omit the opening and closing passages related to Shahrāzād's storytelling for each night and did not insert night breaks and night numbers, while each story was introduced by a heading. As for the poetical passages, Lane (1979, 1:XIII) states that he first wanted to leave out the poetry, because the process of translation involved "the loss of measure and rhyme, and the impossibility of preserving the examples of paronomasia and some other figures". Nevertheless, he subsequently decided to partially keep it in order to conserve the original character of the text, selecting the parts worth preserving and omitting those he considered unsuitable. Moreover, Lane (1979, 1:IX) thought that the Arabic text needed to be manipulated but he felt that Galland had exaggerated in this respect, so he strove to keep the language plain and concise. He aimed to be (excessively) faithful to the

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<sup>57</sup> Lane's work was first published in thirty-two instalments (1838-1840) and then in three annotated volumes (1839-1841).

<sup>58</sup> In 1859, Lane's nephew Edward Stanley Poole offers a revised edition of his uncle's translation that also refers to Calcutta II, which Poole suggests could be derived from the same original as that of Bulaq and which does not present relevant different readings (Lane 1979, 1:XI).

Arabic text so his translation is at times overly literal, and in addition, whilst at the same time, he inserted many transliterations of Arabic words which make difficult reading.

The crucial feature of Lane's work is its apparatus of notes and explanations, which he felt to be a necessary addition to his translation in order to help his countrymen get closer to the literary culture of the AN.<sup>59</sup> For this reason, he used a sociological and ethnographical approach to the text, meaning that he provided lengthy notes in which not only did he give an explanation for specific passages in the text, but also digressed into discussion of art, traditions, music, literature and storytelling.<sup>60</sup> Lane (1979, 1:X) believed that the scenarios and the peoples described in the AN were specifically representative of Egypt, namely the country in "which Arabian manners now exist in the most refined state". His gaze is that of a man who was "received into their society on terms of perfect equality", so he thought he could elucidate the meanings hidden in the text for he penetrated the Egyptian society and had a privileged point of view (1979, 1:XII–XIII).<sup>61</sup> The notes that Lane adds to the main text are very detailed because he wants to make the text "intelligible and agreeable to the English reader", and also to show that "the most extravagant relations in this work are not in general regarded, even by the educated classes of that [Egyptian] people, as of an incredible nature". Although these notes, which were appreciated by Lane's

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<sup>59</sup> For a detailed description of the notes at the end of each of the thirty chapters of Lane's translation refer to Schacker-Mill (2000, 176). These notes were subsequently separated from the rest of the tales to meet the reading public's interest, who largely did not appreciate them, and became an independent volume, *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages: Studies from The Thousand and One Nights*, published in 1883.

<sup>60</sup> Before the AN, Lane had published *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* in 1836, an account of social life in Egypt according to his first-hand experience. In this book Lane (1963, XXIV–XXV) explicitly indicates that the AN, which he had not finished translating at that time, was a picture of "the manners and customs of the Arabs, and particularly of those of the Egyptians".

<sup>61</sup> Lane (1979, 1:XIII) affirms that "no translator can always be certain that, from twenty or more significations which are borne by one Arabic word, he has selected that which his author intended to convey; but, circumstanced as I am, I have the satisfaction of feeling confident that I have never given, to a word or phrase in this work, a meaning which is inconsistent with its presenting faithful pictures of Arab life and manners".

contemporaries, are neither judgmental nor dismissive, they do serve to explain and/or justify what was perceived as the thorny “extravagance” of different customs and people. For this reason, postcolonial critics, such as Said (2003) and Kabbani (2004), highly criticized Lane’s attitude, as well as that of Burton, the latter being more overtly discriminatory against (some categories of) Eastern, and specifically Eastern women.

In 1884, the first unexpurgated translation of the AN into English was published in nine volumes by the Villon Society in London for its 500 subscribers. The author, John Payne, was a poet and a remarkable translator – he also translated Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, a very popular Italian collection of tales which appeared in 1353 and had similarities and connections with the AN. To accomplish his task, Payne used the Calcutta II edition of the AN and translated it altogether, then adding three more volumes titled *Tales from the Arabic* containing other stories taken from Calcutta I and Breslau, as well as from other sources. He stated that Calcutta II was undoubtedly the less corrupted and most comprehensive version of the AN, and for his work he collated it with Calcutta I, Bulaq and Breslau. On the linguistic level, Payne (1901, 1:VIII–X) “remedied the defects (such as hiatuses, misprints, doubtful or corrupted passages, etc.)”, and chose not to transliterate Arabic words to avoid annoying “the reader of a work of imagination”. Payne fully translated all the poetry, and starting from night 4, he did not maintain the original division into nights, nor did he keep the opening and closing formulas among them – yet night numbers are still given in the margin. Payne did not insert philological annotations, and variations of the text were not reported as he was not interested in producing an irreproachable philological work. His comments are to be found in his *Terminal Essay*, which contains literary remarks on the collection and the process of translation.

Undoubtedly, the most influential translation of the AN is that of Richard Francis Burton, who was an explorer, a diplomat, a soldier, an anthropologist, a linguist and a scholar. His translation of the AN has been (and perhaps still is) the most widespread, and scholarship on the AN has largely referred to his work. Burton produced ten volumes in two years (1885-1886),<sup>62</sup> something that he could do in so

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<sup>62</sup> In the *Foreword* preceding his translation, Burton (1897, 1:XIX) says that he began copying the translated text in 1879, although he had already commenced working on it earlier, corresponding about the AN with his friend Steinhäuser for years. In truth, he only discussed with Steinhäuser a possible

little time because his translation drew on Payne's, never fully acknowledging his debt.<sup>63</sup> Payne, in fact, had agreed to the publication of only 500 copies of his translation of the AN for private circulation, but subscribers turned out to be 2000, so Burton profited from the situation and thought to produce his own translation to satisfy Payne's disappointed readers. After having asked permission from Payne, Burton published his AN with the Kama Shastra Society, the publishing house he founded in order to permit circulation of books on sexual matters, otherwise censured by the Society for the Suppression of Vice.<sup>64</sup> In truth, the exotic name of the imprint, as well as the place of publication (Benares), was Burton's creation to conceal the fact that the texts he translated (the AN, *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight* by al-Nafzāwī and *The Hindu Art of Love*) were published in London and to avoid any possible charges for obscenity, given the nature of these works (Kennedy 2000, 324–25). Burton's translation of the AN came out in ten volumes plus six more volumes called *Supplemental Nights* containing tales taken from *Tales from the Arabic* by Payne, the orphan stories of Galland, tales included in other manuscripts, Burton's notes and memoirs, and contributions by other scholars. Burton's translation is mainly based on Calcutta II, but it also includes parts of Breslau and Calcutta I, and occasionally of Bulaq; with regard to the conclusion of the frame story, Burton mingles the ending of Calcutta II, characterized by the motif of the three children, with that of Breslau, which is known for the ending revolving around the double marriage (see 2.2, part I). Burton (1897, 1:XXIII) kept the breaks between the nights and the repetitive formulas with which each night is introduced/concluded because "without the Nights no Arabian Nights" would exist. At a stylistic level, he is considered faithful to the original in Arabic although his language is often full of eccentric, flamboyant and obsolete words and, therefore, difficult to read, as many have suggested (Gabrieli

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collaboration for his project of translating the AN, but by 1881 "had not yet translated a single word" (Gerhardt 1963, 78).

<sup>63</sup> Burton profusely declared his love for the AN and for his translation project, which he stated took twenty five years; however, this is not true for he relied on Payne's work, which he took over mainly for economic reasons and not for nobler aims (Knipp 1974, 44–45).

<sup>64</sup> The Society for the Suppression of Vice was founded in London in 1802 to prevent dissolute practices related to sex, cursing and swearing, and to promote morality among the public.

1947; Gerhardt 1963; Haddawy 2008). Nevertheless, Burton (1897, 1:XXIV) is the only translator among the English who maintains the *saj*' (rhymed prose) in order to preserve the “artfull alliteration” of the original text, and he also accurately includes all the different types of poetry trying to maintain their rhymes and prosody.

The main issue related to Burton's translation seems to be the nature of his comments, which he scatters throughout the text in the notes, as well as in his *Terminal Essay* (the title is taken from Payne) in volume 10.<sup>65</sup> Some of his observations are overtly discriminatory, not to mention what he added in translation only to exaggerate filthy or abnormal features of certain characters, such as black slaves. Furthermore, the language Burton uses and the translation choices he makes often reveal a morbid curiosity about sexual details and about women's lust, which probably reflects Burton's criticism of what he perceived to be the illusory morality of the British society of his time. In the *Terminal Essay*, Burton (1897, 1:XXXII) provides extensive accounts of pederasty and abnormal sexual practices among the Arabs, yet disguised by a pseudo-scientific approach.<sup>66</sup> He states that the intent behind his anthropological and ethnographic interest in the AN is to provide his motherland with knowledge of the “Eastern races with whom she [England] is continually in contact”. For this reason, Burton feels vested with the responsibility for fighting the ignorance of his fellow citizens concerning the East and emphasizes narrative passages he deems relevant to

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<sup>65</sup> The *Terminal Essay* is in volume 10 of the 1885-1886 edition of Burton's *A Plain and Literal Translation of The Arabian Nights' Entertainments, Now Entitled The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night: With Introduction, Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay upon the History of the Nights*. The 1897 edition of Burton's translation of the AN I consulted, and from which approximately forty pages containing passages of extreme coarseness have been omitted, consists of twelve volumes, and the *Terminal Essay* is in volume 8.

<sup>66</sup> The *Terminal Essay* is divided in five sections: 1) *The Origin of The Nights*; 2) *The Nights in Europe*; 3) *The Matter and the Manner of the Nights*; 4) *Social Condition*; 5) *On the Prose-Rhyme and the Poetry of the Nights*. The paragraphs on pornography and pederasty are in section 4. Burton (2002, 42–43) goes so far as to name specific areas of the world, including South Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, as “Sotadic zone”: “There exists what I shall call a ‘Sotadic Zone,’ bounded westwards by the northern shores of the Mediterranean (N. Lat. 43 degrees) and by the southern (N. Lat. 30 degrees). Thus the depth would be 780 to 800 miles including meridional France, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and Greece, with the coast-regions of Africa from Marocco to Egypt.” In the Sotadic Zone the “Vice”, i.e., pederasty, “is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo”.

his mission. In some places, his approach sounds like a friendly declaration in support of the virtues of the Arabs, including Arab women, as when he says that the latter have a high legal status and great influence in both public and private life (Kennedy 2000, 331). Elsewhere, and in most cases, the tone of his annotations is completely different and denigrating –for example, “debauched women prefer negroes as lovers” (1897, 1:5, note 2), “because Easterns build, but never repair” (1897, 8:58, note 1).<sup>67</sup> If, on the one hand, it is true that Burton (1897, 1:XXVI), an outsider himself, wanted to oppose the false “morality of the tongue not of the heart” within Victorian British society by offering an unbowdlerised translation of the AN that was explicit about sex,<sup>68</sup> on the other hand it is misleading to simply affirm that he wanted to defend the bona fides of the collection.<sup>69</sup> When the discourse focuses on women – and slaves, specifically black slaves –the “subtle corruption” and “covert licentiousness” which Burton (1897, 1:XXVI) believes to be “utterly absent” from the AN are, instead, reincorporated into his translation. In particular, Eastern women are deemed more independent and powerful than their Western counterparts and are also seen as a danger because of their voracious sexual appetite. Burton seems to be mostly concerned with female sexual superiority; he is convinced that male Easterners cope better with this issue than English men do as the former study the art of physically satisfying women and know extensively about it (Kennedy 2000, 332). In this respect, Burton’s considerations seem to reveal “[...] more about contemporary British sexual preoccupations than [...] about Arab sexuality” (Colligan 2006, 57). The attention Muslims and Arabs pay to female excessive sexuality in order to contain what is,

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<sup>67</sup> In the last part of the introduction to the *Terminal Essay*, Burton (1897, 8:61) claims that there are also “barbarian” Arabs, who are characterized by “stolid instinctive conservatism” [...] “mental torpidity, founded upon physical indolence, [which] renders immediate action and all manner of exertion distasteful”. He clarifies that “these contrasts [between the moderate, dignified Muslim mind and the ignorant, savage one] make a curious and interesting tout ensemble”.

<sup>68</sup> This topic is widely explored by Colligan (2006, 58), who indicates that the great attention paid by the British public to obscenity and sexuality in the AN unveils a “pervasive preoccupation with the idea of British sexual inadequacy”.

<sup>69</sup> Kennedy (2000, 323,331) points to this and illustrates that Burton thought women to be affected by sexual voracity. In Burton’s view, the stories within the AN clearly testify to female sexual appetites, which are far greater than those of the male characters.

according to Burton, a real “disorder” should set an example to all the other men (Kennedy 2000, 332). Clearly, his words reveal a patriarchal view on both Eastern and Western man-woman relationships; even when he praises Arab men for dealing with the female question in less moralistic terms and for directly facing the sexual issue, the goal is to know how to use and exploit women, that is to objectify womankind (Burton 1897, 8:180). Notwithstanding the above, Burton’s translation has been used and overused, glossing over his troublesome inclinations. The question of Burton’s disputable remarks was raised during the seventies, yet it never prevented scholars and writers, such as Borges (1999), from considering his the best translation of the AN.

In 1898 Andrew Lang, like Forster and Scott before him, translated Galland’s French version of the AN into English. Lang (1898, XII) shortened some of the stories “here and there” and made omissions because he thought that some “pieces [were] only suitable for Arabs and old gentlemen”. Almost a hundred years later, in 1990 Husain Haddawy translated in 2 volumes Mahdi’s edition of the AN,<sup>70</sup> making it available for non-Arabic speaking readers and scholars. He claims to have been as faithful as possible to the original text, only modifying it when the meaning would have been lost if he had insisted on a literal translation. Moreover, Haddawy tries to maintain the different registers of Arabic alternating between the colloquial and the standard language according to the narrative context. He also carefully renders the poetic passages and takes the liberty of adopting a different rhymed scheme, generally making them appear “neither better nor worse” (Haddawy 2008, 34). In 2008, Malcolm Lyons and Ursula Lyons published *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, based on Calcutta II. This three-volume translation is written in a simple, yet clear and easy-to-read English and is very faithful to the original in Arabic of which it preserves all the poetry, as well as the night breaks and night numbers. Now, a new translation of the AN based on Mahdi’s edition, as well as on French sources, has been preparing for the American publishing company W.W. Norton, and for the first time it will be entirely made by a woman (Yasmine Seale).

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<sup>70</sup> Haddawy excludes from his work the tale of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr*, which is incomplete in manuscript G.

For what concerns the translations into French, beyond Galland's enterprise there are three other works that are important to mention here. The first one is that by Joseph Charles Mardrus, published in sixteen volumes between 1899 and 1904. Mainly based on Bulaq, it includes only half of the contents of this edition, namely only seventy tales, to which Mardrus added six entire stories taken from Galland and other brief parts taken from Breslau, Scott and other modern collections. Mardrus changed and expanded his source and especially the erotic passages, having very little commitment to the original text; poetry was only occasionally included or it was included and modified, and for this reason, Gerhardt (1963, 103) states that Mardrus' translation is a work of Parisian boulevard literature. A translation of Mardrus' French text beautifully crafted into English was made by Edward Powys Mathers, and is still in print. The other French translation in four volumes, *Les Mille et une nuits: Traduction nouvelle ... faite directement sur les manuscrits* (1965-1967), was by René Rizqallah Khawam, who based his work on manuscript G and disqualified Bulaq and the other Egyptian versions of the AN (Larzul 2014, 210). Khawan also translated *Sindbād the sailor* but separately together with other tales, as he did not consider it part of the collection. The last relevant translation of the AN into French is that of Jamel Eddine Bencheikh and André Miquel; between 1991 and 2001 the two scholars had already published a selection of tales from Bulaq and Calcutta II in French. Their complete translation in three volumes is based on Calcutta II (2005) and includes the stories of *'Ala al-Dīn* and *'Alī Bābā and the Forty Thieves*, but with the indication that they are not part of the AN.

Lastly, it is important to briefly mention the translations of the AN in German and Italian. In the years 1838-1841, Gustav Weil produced the first complete translation of the collection into German in four volumes. However, the publisher authorized many modifications to the original text in order to attune it to the tastes of the general public, therefore, Weil's philological accuracy was lost. Following this, Max Henning translated the AN from Bulaq – for the first seven volumes – and from Burton producing a twenty four-volume translation (1895-1897). In the years 1921-1928, Enno Littmann worked on his six-volume translation of the AN from Calcutta II; these volumes are considered an accurate, yet literal translation. Regarding the Italian translations, the first and most important work is that by Francesco Gabrieli,

who, together with a team of collaborators, produced a four-volume text working in 1949. His translation is mainly based on Bulaq – specifically, on a reprint (1888-1889) by the Cairene publisher *al-Maṭba‘a al-‘āmirā al-sharfiyya* of the second Egyptian edition (1862) of Bulaq –, this edition being occasionally compared with Calcutta II. In 2006, a new translation based on Mahdi’s edition was produced by Roberta Denaro and Mario Casari.

#### Summary of the translations quoted in this paragraph

##### **English**

Edward Forster, trans. 1802. *The Arabian Nights*. 5 vols. London: William Miller.

Jonathan Scott, trans. 1811. *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*. 6 vols. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Broen.

Henry Torrens, trans. 1838. *The Book of The Thousand and One Nights: From the Arabic of the Egyptian M.S. as edited by Wm. Hay Macnaghten, Esq. B. C. S., done into English by Henry Torrens B.C.S.B.A. and of the Inner Temple*. Calcutta: W. Thacker & Company; London: W. H. Allen & Co.

Edward William Lane, trans. 1838-1840. *The Thousand and One Nights, Commonly Called, in England, The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. A New Translation from the Arabic, with Copious Notes*. 3 vols. London: Charles Knight.

John Payne, trans. 1882-1884. *The Book of The Thousand Nights and One Night; Now First Completely Done into English Prose and Verse, from the Original Arabic*. 9 vols. London: Villon Society.

Richard Francis Burton, trans. 1885-1886. *A Plain and Literal Translation of The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, Now Entitled The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night: With Introduction, Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay upon the History of the Nights*. 10 vols. Benares [= Stoke-Newington]: Kamashastra Society. / Burton, Richard F. 1886. *Supplemental*

*Nights to the Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night. With Notes Anthropological and Explanatory.* 6 vols. USA: The Burton Club for Private Subscribers Only.

Andrew Lang, trans. 1898. *The Arabian Nights Entertainments.* London: Longmans, Green & Co.

Husain Haddawy, trans. 1990. *The Arabian Nights.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Malcolm Lyons and Ursula Lyons, trans. 2008. *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights.* Introduction by Robert Irwin. 3 vols. Harmondsworth: Penguin.<sup>71</sup>

### **French**

Antoine Galland, trans. 1704-1717. *Les mille et une nuits: contes Arabes.* 12 vols. Paris: Impr. de la Vve Cl. Barbin.

Joseph Charles Mardrus, trans. 1899-1904. *Les mille nuits et une nuit.* 16 vols. Paris: Éditions de la "Revue blanche" (Charpentier et Fasquelle).

René Rizqallah Khawam, trans. 1965-1967. *Les mille et une nuits: traduction nouvelle ... faite directement sur les manuscrit.* 4 vols., Paris: A. Michel.

Jamel Eddine Bencheikh et André Miquel, trans. 2005. *Les mille et une nuits.* 3 vols. Paris: Pléiade.

### **German**

Gustav Weil, trans. 1838-1841. *Tausend und eine nacht Arabische erzählungen.* 4 vols. Stuttgart: Verlag der Classiker.

Max Henning, trans. 1895-1897. *Tausend und eine nacht.* 24 vols. Leipzig: Reclam.

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<sup>71</sup> This list is taken from Ross (2008).

Enno Littmann, trans. 1921-1928. *Die erzählungen aus den Tausendundein nächten*. 6 vols. Leipzig: Insel-Verl.

**Italian**

Francesco Gabrieli, ed. 1949. *Le mille e una notte*. Translated by Antonio Cesaro, Costantino Pansera, Umberto Rizzitano, and Virginia Vacca. 4 vols. Torino: Einaudi.

Roberta Denaro and Mario Casari, trans. 2006. *Le mille e una notte*. Roma: Donzelli.

## 2. The frame story

### 2.1 The genre of the frame story: *samar* and *khurāfa*

In his *Fihrist*, the Baghdadi librarian and *warrāq* (copyist, book seller) Ibn al-Nadīm refers to the contents of different collections of fictional tales, among which is the AN (see 1.1, part I). Ibn al-Nadīm is a key figure of Arabic scholarship in the classical age, his *Fihrist* being an exceptional compendium of medieval Arab-Islamic scholarship and knowledge. In this text, Ibn al-Nadīm groups people and titles following an order that is not only bibliographic and chronological, but also based on the principles of proximity and resemblance (Toorawa 2010, 246–47). The *Fihrist* is divided in ten parts (*maqālāt*) and thirty chapters (*funūn*); the eighth part or *maqāla*<sup>72</sup> of the *Fihrist* which consists of three *funūn* and is the shortest part of this work, is the third to last, followed by two parts on doctrines of the non-monotheistic creeds and alchemy respectively.<sup>73</sup> The eighth *maqāla* is considered one of the less defined sections of the whole compendium, for it contains accounts of various nature and on different topics, some being fantastic while others are related to daily and social life.

As already indicated in 1.1, part I, the first *fann* (chapter) of the eighth *maqāla* is dedicated to the “... accounts of those who converse in the evenings and tellers of [stories], with the names of the books which they composed about evening stories and [fictional tales]” (*fī akhbār al-musāmirīna wa-al-mukharrifīna wa-asmā’ al-kutub al-mušannaḡa fī al-asmār wa al-khurāḡāt*).<sup>74</sup> This *fann* gathers together many narrative works, including the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa’, a collection of evening stories by al-Jahshiyārī (d. 942) and the AN, to which Ibn al-Nadīm refers as *samar* (evening/night tales) and *khurāfa* (fictional stories). The Baghdadi librarian seems to have a vested interest in these types of texts – more interest than they ever received either before or after him – purposely associating them with non-factual narrative and with the above-mentioned pair of words. Ibn al-Nadīm’s use of the pair of words *samar*

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<sup>72</sup> The eighth *maqāla* encompasses *akhbār al-‘ulamā’ wa-asmā’ mā ṣannaḡūhu min-al-kutub* (accounts of scholars and the names of the books they compiled) (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304).

<sup>73</sup> The eighth *maqāla* occupies fifteen pages/folios in the Chester Beatty MS 3315 and Şehit Ali Paşa MS 1934 (Toorawa 2010, 220).

<sup>74</sup> See note 15.

and *khurāfa* is copious and rather peculiar, and therefore it deserves some attention, as the following examples illustrate. To begin with, Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 302) translates *Hazār afsān*, the Persian title for the AN, as *Alf khurāfa* [*Thousand Stories*] using the word *khurāfa* to refer to the nature of the tales within the collection. Just a few lines below in the same passage, he calls the two hundred tales of the *Alf khurāfa* as *samar*, establishing an equivalence of meaning between *samar* and *khurāfa*:

[...] *Kitāb Hazār afsān wa-yaḥṭawī ‘alā alf layla wa- ‘alā dūna al-ma`itay samar* (the book *Hazār Afsān*, which although it was spread over a thousand nights contained less than two hundred tales) (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304).<sup>75</sup>

The two words are also paired with reference to the *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, meant by Ibn al-Nadīm as a collection of both *asmār* and *khurāfāt* told by animals. Equally, the librarian uses two different terms, one belonging to the semantic field of *samar* and the other of *khurāfa*, to describe the act of storytelling. He states:

[...] *wa-aḥḍara al-musāmirīna* (he summoned to his presence the storytellers) (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304).<sup>76</sup>

*Al-musāmirūna*, namely storytellers, comes from the root of *samar*. Another example is:

[...] *yuqālu lahā Shahrāzād fa-lammā ḥaṣalat ma`ahu ibtada`at tukharrifuhu* (she was called Shahrāzād, and when she came to him she started telling him a story) (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304).<sup>77</sup>

*Tukharrifuhu*, namely “she tells him stories”, comes from the root of *khurāfa* and is the third person feminine singular of the verb *kharrafa*, which is the second

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<sup>75</sup> Translation by Dodge (1970, 714).

<sup>76</sup> Translation by Dodge (1970, 714).

<sup>77</sup> My translation.

form of the root *kh - r - f*. The use of *kharrāfa* deserves special attention because this verb is not very common in classical Arabic, being mentioned in classical dictionaries but scarcely found in prose texts. The most ancient testimony of the verb *kharrāfa* meaning “to tell invented stories” is to be found in the *Kitāb al-‘ayn* [The Book of the ‘Ayn] by al-Khalīl bin Aḥmad (d. 791) (2003, 1:401), *wa-al-khurāfa ḥadīth mustamlaḥ kadhib. Wa-kharraftu fulānān: ḥaddathtuhu bi-al-khurāfāt* (and the *khurāfa* is a pleasant, invented story. I “storytold” somebody: I told somebody a *khurāfa*)<sup>78</sup>. *Kharrāfa* probably derives its original meaning from its corresponding first form *kharaḥa*, “to talk nonsense because of old age”, or more likely from *ikhtarāfa* “to pluck fruit” – al-Nahrawānī (d. 1000) (1981, 1:274–75) explains that tales are plucked and selected as delicious fruits.<sup>79</sup> The *Lisān al-‘Arab* indicates that *khurāfāt* are recounted at night (*al-khurāfāt al-mawḍū‘a min ḥadīth al-layl*), as in the case of *samar* stories (Ibn Manẓūr 1984, 9: 65-66). Ibn al-Nadīm employs the term *kharrāfa* (in the second form) to precisely refer to the act of narration, and possibly of the narration of *khurāfāt*, a fact that provides the verb with a specific, original connotation.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Here “to storytell” is my neologism.

<sup>79</sup> “[...] *Inna al-mujtami‘na ‘alā ḥādhihi al-aḥādīth al-mu‘jiba al-mulidhdha al-muṭrifa bi-manzilat al-mujtami‘na ‘alā mā yukhtarafu min al-fāhika [...]*” (those who gather to listen to these marvellous, delicious and amusing stories are similar to those who gather to pluck fruits that give them joyous pleasure” (al-Nahrawānī 1981, 1:275).

<sup>80</sup> Lane’s sources in his *Arabic-English Lexicon* for attributing *khurāfa* the meaning of fictional night stories are: (Ṣ) *al-Ṣiḥāḥ fī al-luḡa* [The Valid in the Language], by Ismā‘īl bin Ḥammād al-Jawharī (d.1008); (Ḳ) *al-Qamūs* [The Dictionary], by al-Fayrūzabādī (d.1414) and (Lth) *al-Layth* or *Mu‘jim al-‘ayn* [The Dictionary of the ‘Ayn], by Ibn Naṣr bin Sayyār (d.748) (Lane 1968, 726). These sources clearly distinguish the narrative genre of *khurāfa* from *Khurāfa* the man, the latter being the protagonist of the story of a man captured by the jinn, which the *hadīth* tradition indicates it was told to ‘Aishā by the Prophet (see below). The first dictionary that refers to this story is *Jamhara fī al-luḡa* [The All-Embracing in Language] by Ibn Durayd (d.933), who mentions, like al-Khalīl bin Aḥmad, a man named Ibn al-Kalbī as the first to report the issue. In the *Lisān al-‘Arab*, *khurāfa* is defined as follows: *mā uḥaddithuka ḥadīth khurāfa wa-al-rā’ fī-hi mukhaffafa wa-lā tadkhuluḥu al-alif wa-al-lām li-annah ma‘rifatun illā anna yurīda bi-hi al-khurāfā al-mawḍū‘a min ḥadīth al-layl* (What I tell you is a *Khurāfa* story, here the letter *rā’* is not doubled and there is no article, because the word is already determinate, unless one means the stories made of the night talk/narration) (Ibn Manẓūr 1984, 65–66).

The examples mentioned above regarding the pairing of *samar* and *khurāfa* testify to the similar meaning of these words and give reason to reflect on whether Ibn al-Nadīm considered both terms to be exactly the same. On closer examination of their use in the *Fihrist*, they appear to be almost interchangeable, and a clear distinction between them is found nowhere in the eighth *maqāla*. This is evident in the fact that the two terms very often come one after another, and even if the use of *samar* is more frequent, the verb *kharrāfa* compensates for the minor presence of *khurāfa*; *samar* is found fifteen times in the first *fann* of the eighth *maqāla* of the *Fihrist*, while *khurāfa* is only found ten times. For this reason, it seems that Ibn al-Nadīm follows an idea of fictionality which particularly concerns imaginative stories and which includes, first and foremost, *samar* and *khurāfa*. In this respect, the fact that the two terms are frequently used in the first *fann*, but they almost disappear in the remaining two *fann(s)* of the eighth *maqāla* – *khurāfa* alone occurring once, in the third *fann* (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 313) –, could reinforce this observation. If one takes a closer look at the first *fann*, what merges is that it deals with three types of narrative, namely collections of imaginative/fictional stories (*asmār* and *khurāfāt*),<sup>81</sup> literature of wonder (*‘ajā’ib*)<sup>82</sup> – mostly from non-Arab traditions (Greek, Indian and Persian) – and tales of lovers. These three types of narrative works are specifically fictional either by their very nature, as in the case of fictional stories and literature of wonder that rely on fanciful imagery, or because treated as so, like the tales of lovers. The latter are included by Ibn al-Nadīm in the realm of *samar* and of the fictional in two ways. Firstly, through use of an explicit statement, as in the section titled “the names of passionate lovers whose [accounts] enter into the evening stories”(Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 307),<sup>83</sup> and secondly, through the transformation of historical persons and lovers into fictional

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<sup>81</sup> Imaginative or fictional narrative can be assimilated to what is usually known today as fairy tale, and is found both in the AN and in other sibling collections (Marzolph 2017, 36–37). Some of these imaginative tales are, instead, tales of the marvellous and strange, and represent a precise genre within medieval Arabic literature, namely the narrative of *‘ajab* (the marvellous).

<sup>82</sup> It is just a little paragraph at the end of the first *fann*. Here, the word used to refer to “story” is *ḥadīth*. See Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 308).

<sup>83</sup> The translation is by Dodge (1970, 719). However, I changed the original using “accounts” instead of “traditions”, for “tradition” usually refers to canonical and religious literature.

characters for the purpose of narrative.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, in the second and third chapter of the eighth *maqāla*, the absence of *samar* and *khurāfa* is offset by an increase in the use of the term *ḥadīth* (narrative/talk)<sup>85</sup> – which in the first *fann* appears in both singular and plural fifteen times (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304–8, 313–14). It is worth noting that the second chapter includes accounts of exorcists, jugglers and magicians, while the third chapter covers varied subjects, from accounts of buffoons and fools to veterinary surgery, interpretation of dreams and food. The omission of *samar* and *khurāfa* in these chapters may be due to the fact that here the contents are centred around daily culture and social life, instead of dealing with the supernatural and overt fictional dimension of imaginative stories.

Apart from *samar*, *khurāfa* and *ḥadīth*, in the eighth *maqāla* there are other words which refer to works of narrative, such as *khavar* (information/account),<sup>86</sup> *sīra* (record of a man’s actions), *nawādir* (anecdotes) and *tawārīkh* (histories).<sup>87</sup> These terms reveal a higher degree of interchangeability in comparison to *samar* and *khurāfa*, according to Ibn al-Nadīm’s use which means that if these other terms can be put in place of *samar* and *khurāfa* to refer to a fictional account, the converse seems not to be possible. In other words, if an account is non-fictional, it cannot be labelled either as *samar* or *khurāfa*. Pellat (1986, III:369) divides the words used for “story” or “tale” into two categories by making reference to the vocabulary of the Quran. He indicates that when the terms relating to “story” or “tale” are found in the Holy text, they identify

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<sup>84</sup> “[...] Historical persons, though also characters” (Dodge 1970, 719).

<sup>85</sup> Within the Muslim tradition, the word *ḥadīth* has acquired the technical meaning of “sayings of the Prophet”, and this has often overshadowed its other independent use as “narrative” and “account” (Pellat, Bausani, et al. 1986, 369).

<sup>86</sup> The term *khavar* generally refers to an account with a historical foundation, or which is perceived to be so (Jayyusi 2010, 15–20). Ibn al-Nadīm tends to associate the term with titles of books about historical people, even though many of them may never really have existed, as in the case of the protagonists of the books of lovers or of humans who loved jinn (and the other way round).

<sup>87</sup> The term *tawārīkh*, usually applied to historical writing, comes physically close to *samar* in the first *fann* within a section on historical and narrative books of the Byzantines/Greeks, in an unusual association that gathers fictional and non-fictional narrative. See Dodge (1970, 718), who erroneously uses “fable” for *samar*, and note 15. The term *rūm* can mean Byzantines, Greeks, Eastern Christians and the Orthodox.

a type of narrative with religious and edifying purposes, and are perceived as either true stories or stories whose fictional feature is less important than the noble purpose they may serve. Conversely, if the term is not in the Quran, then it is untrustworthy and may be dangerous for believers, in other words, it is perceived as fictional.

According to Pellat (1986, III: 369), out of twelve words used in Arabic for story or tale, the ones found within the Quran are: *qiṣṣa*,<sup>88</sup> *uṣṭūra*, *naba'*, *khābar*, *sīra*, *ḥadīth* and *mathal*, while *ḥikāya*, *riwāya*, *nādira*, *samar* and *khurāfa* are to be placed outside it. All these words originally had a connotation related to oral transmission and narration long before the rise of Islam. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two groups is not so black and white, and some of the words of the first group (words to be found within the Quran) have often crossed the borders to enter the second (words to be found outside the Quran). The degree of interchangeability and permeability these terms acquired, maintained or lost throughout the medieval period is particularly relevant to the discourse on fictional narrative. There is evidence that words such as *ḥadīth*, *khābar* and *ḥikāya* failed to maintain semantic rigidity and were already interchangeable by the tenth century,<sup>89</sup> as their porous usage by Ibn al-Nadīm also testifies. Accordingly, within such semantic permeability *samar* and *khurāfa* seem to have indicated, as has already been seen, something very specific, that is fictional narrative. The necessity of putting the adjective *saḥīḥa* (true) after the word *asmār* in the phrase *asmār saḥīḥa*, namely true “and” imaginative/fictional evening/night tales (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 305), may be read as Ibn al-Nadīm’s attempt to add an otherwise

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<sup>88</sup> Pellat (1986, 186) underlines that the word *qiṣṣa* is not present in the eighth *maqāla* of the *Fihrist* and ascribes the absence to the fact that it still referred to religious stories rather than to secular fiction at the time of Ibn al-Nadīm. However, *qiṣṣa* does appear in the above mentioned *maqāla* once, within the first *fann* in a section that gathers the Indian books’ titles of fictional stories, evening tales and other stories (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 305). The term refers to the *Hubūt Ādam* [The Fall of Adam], so the usage of *qiṣṣa* may be owing to the alleged biblical nuance of the story.

<sup>89</sup> The different terms for story or tale had already a significant semantic overlapping in the tenth century, except for, perhaps, *qiṣṣa*, which seems to have described stories of religious character until the eleventh century. However, also *qiṣṣa* could have been substituted with other terms such as *ḥadīth*, *khābar* and *naba'* in the Quran, and *ḥadīth* and *khābar* in the *Lisān al ‘Arab*. In al-Jāhiz (d. 868-869) the word has the sense of religious tale yet, sometimes, it is given a fictional nuance. For a throughout explanation on the word *qiṣṣa* see Pellat (1986, 186-87).

impossible non-fictional nuance to the word itself (and a small group of *asmār saḥīḥa* is included by Ibn al-Nadīm in the first *fann* of the eighth *maqāla*).

As for *samar*, the term specifically refers to a conversation/narration that occurs in the evening/at night. Medieval Arab scholars seem not to have provided a sharper definition of *samar*, yet they often recommended people to clearly distinguish between imaginative tales like *samar* and the truth. In his *Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind* [Investigation on Hind], al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) advises against trusting *asmār*, and writes:

"[...] who knows the true situation would treat them as night tales [*asmār*] and fictional stories [*asāṭīr*], listening to them for pleasure never trusting nor believing these stories." (al-Bīrūnī 1887, 3).

Here al-Bīrūnī associated *asmār* with *asāṭīr*, a word we have seen before, which is found in the Quran only in the plural and always referred to the “tales of the Ancients” (*asāṭīr al-awwālīn*). The phrase “tales of the Ancients” is usually put by the Quran in the mouth of non-believers, who considered the Quranic revelation “tales of the Ancients”.

On the other side, the word *khurāfa* is linked to the story of an ‘Udhri man, named Khurāfa, who was captured by a jinn and once back started telling incredible tales. The story was told by the Prophet to ‘Ā’isha, first recorded by Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad* (d. 855), in the *hadīth* 24716. Following Drory’s suggestion (1994), Chraïbi (2016, 28–32) maintains that the personification of *khurāfa* was a means supported by Islam to insert a certain type of fictional narrative characterized by the astonishing and by fancy within classical literature, especially within the religious tradition.<sup>90</sup> Fancy

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<sup>90</sup> Chraïbi highlights that authors such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) and Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) contributed to the transformation of *ḥadīth khurāfa* (fictional stories) into *ḥadīth Khurāfa*, true stories of Khurāfa, which cancels the fictional dimension implicit in the first phrase through the authentication of the Bedouin Khurāfa’s accounts. A similar process of narrative adaptation is illustrated by Gutas (1981) in relation to *ḥikma*, “wisdom”, literature. Another example is the genre of the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* [Tales of the Prophets], which Goldman (1995, xv–xvi) describes as a popular, “fanciful elaboration” of the narratives surrounding the Quran and an attempt to compensate for the lack of narrative elements concerning the Muslim prophets’ life stories.

and astonishing events and facts were embodied in a human character (the man *Khurāfa*) in order to move from fictional to historical, in doing so undermining the subversive potential of this imaginative narrative. *Khurāfa* tales are clearly meant to be fictional and constructed by al-Mas‘ūdī (1914, 4: 89) who considers the *Arabian Nights* a collection of stories “created, adorned, invented” (*mawḍū‘a muzakhrafa maṣnū‘a*). The word *khurāfa* has a clear negative meaning in the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, a classical Sunni explanation (*tafsīr*) of the Quran, where it is equated with an act of derision towards the Holy text. The *ṣūra* of Luqmān (31:6), in fact, reports:

“And of the people is he who buys idle discourse to mislead [others] from the way of Allah without knowledge and who takes it in ridicule. Those will have a humiliating punishment.”

*Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* claims that the phrase “who takes it in ridicule” should be interpreted as “they consider the Quran ridiculous because they equate it to *khurāfāt*” (*li-muḥākāti lahā bi-al-khurāfāt*) (al-Ṣāwī al-Mālikī 2018, 3:202).

The idea of the inferior and non-artistic character of fictional stories is commonly paired by medieval Arab authors also with the belief that the use of these stories helps to bring relief from the distress of daily life. The association between fictional stories and a weakness of human nature, because of which people need these stories to entertain themselves, is what allows a text in prose overtly admitted as fictional to be tolerated. On the one hand, these stories have to be accepted because they comply with a human need. On the other hand, the degree of tolerance towards this kind of narrative varies and sometimes has an unpleasant aftertaste. Likewise, al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023) states that to prevent boredom of the mind:

“...one of the predecessors said: give these people the opportunity to listen to stories, as they are liable to be corrupted quickly. As he wanted to say: polish them [their hearts] and remove the rust from them” (1900, 23).

Al-Tawḥīdī (1900, 23) also indicates that stories like those of *Hazār afsān* provoke feelings of addiction to the narrator, the originality of the story and the plot.

Nevertheless, an intense longing for these stories is perceived also by other scholars – such as al-Yamānī (d. 1010) and al-Qarṭājannī (d. 1285) – to be much stronger in children and women, for their temperament is weaker than men’s:

“And they made them [*Kalīla wa-Dimna*] similar to *samar* in order to delight children and turn them away from Arabic poetry” (al-Yamānī 1961, 7).

“...invented stories (*qaṣaṣ mukhtara*) were narrated by elderly people to children in their *asmār*, which contain things that cannot happen” (al-Qarṭājannī 1966, 78).

“... [Listening] to a story (*ḥadīth*) is a passionate feeling with the help of the mind, therefore children and women love it. And he said: How can it [the story] help the minds of those who have no mind? I replied: There is he/she who has potential mind and he/she who has actual mind. They [women and children] have just one of them, which is the potential mind [...]” (al-Tawḥīdī 1900, 23).

These quotes being not supportive of the intelligence of women and children, they indirectly establish a connection between children, women and a more fanciful dimension of narrative. Children and women are seen as the natural recipients of fictional stories, and this may have contributed to (or, conversely, been one of the causes of) the stigma against *samar* and *khurāfa* (Blachère 1964, 3:741). In this respect, al-Jāhīz assigns to women the practice of telling *khurāfāt* indicating that “women and womanlike have *khurāfāt*”: on the basis of this, El-Shamy (1999, 12–13) concludes that “as early as the ninth century A.D., the role of telling fantasy tales was assigned to women and the womanlike”.

## **2.2 Plot: origin and variations**

From the very moment of its appearance in the Arab-Islamic world until the publication of the printed editions in Arabic in the 19th century, the AN seems to have

acted as an open frame capable of embedding stories.<sup>91</sup> The frame story is the only segment which has always been part of the collection together with the following five stories which are traditionally considered as the most ancient core of the text and are located after the opening narrative of the collection: *The Merchant and the Jinn*; *The Fisherman and the Jinn*; *The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad*; *The Three Apples*, and *The Hunchback's Tale*. A manuscript is, therefore, identified as belonging to the AN if it contains the frame story.<sup>92</sup>

The frame story opens with the narrative of two kings, who are brothers. The younger, Shāhzamān, is the ruler of Samarkand while the older, whose name is Shāhriyār, is the wise and fair king of China and India.<sup>93</sup> One day Shāhzamān decides to visit his brother, having not seen him for a long time, and sets off with all his servants, functionaries and soldiers. However, a short time after his departure he needs to return to his castle and, once there, finds his wife with a slave/a man of inferior status. Full of anger, Shāhzamān kills both of them and resumes his journey.<sup>94</sup> When he reaches his brother, Shāhzamān is so desolate about his situation that his body is

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<sup>91</sup> The question of the thematic congruity between the frame story and the other tales of the collection has been widely discussed by critics. Two main ideas are predominant, on the one hand, the frame story is considered as a separate narrative unit and as a device to include a potentially infinite number of tales; on the other, it is seen as having thematic continuity with the remaining tales of the AN.

<sup>92</sup> A manuscript in Arabic is identified as a manuscript of the AN if it contains the frame story or, if the latter is missing, if it has night breaks referring to the frame story (Akel 2016, 65).

<sup>93</sup> In the Syrian branch, as it comes in Mahdi's critical edition, the prologue opens by immediately introducing the two brothers, Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān, the former and elder governing in India and China, the latter and younger ruling over Samarkand. In the Egyptian branch, instead, the two brothers are introduced after the figure of their father, a Sassanid king. It is important to note that the character of Shāhzamān is absent in the accounts of the plot of the frame story offered by Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Mas'ūdī, as well as in the *A Hundred and One Nights* (see the end of this paragraph). Scholars hypothesise that the latter may have been based on a pre-15th century version of the AN, as there is no evidence of Shāhriyār's brother in the oldest manuscript of the collection, that is G (Thomann 2020, 25).

<sup>94</sup> Secondly, in the episode where Shāhzamān goes back to his castles and accidentally finds his wife with a kitchen boy (Syrian version)/black slave (Egyptian version) there are different reasons for his unexpected return. Specifically, in the Syrian recension Shāhzamān wants to take leave of his wife, while in the Egyptian one he has forgotten something.

weakened by his suffering. However, one day while being hosted in Shāhriyār's castle, he sees his brother's wife, the queen, having sex with a black slave in the garden. As a result, Shāhzamān realizes that his brother's misfortune is greater than his, and this helps him recover from sadness. Shāhriyār observes the positive change in his brother's state of body and mind and wants to know the reason for the sudden recovery, therefore, Shāhzamān is forced to tell him about the queen's betrayal in the garden of the palace. The unexpected episode deeply shocks Shāhriyār to the extent that he decides to depart with his younger brother to start a frantic search, and they would not return until they find someone with a misfortune greater than their own. On their travels, however, they encounter exactly what they are escaping, namely an unfaithful and desperate woman who has been kidnapped by a jinn (i.e., a supernatural creature of Arabic and Islamic folklore). The woman informs them that she makes a habit of betraying the jinn in order to avenge her imprisonment (being boxed by the jinn), but the two men understand neither her misfortune nor the desperation that has brought her to these actions. When she forces the kings to have sex with her in order to achieve her goals, Shāhriyār's already fragile mental equilibrium collapses, since all his beliefs and terrible reverie about women's infidelity seem to be confirmed. The shocked king goes completely insane and becomes a bloodthirsty assassin;<sup>95</sup> once back in his country, he decides to marry a maiden every night and kill her the following day, and thus his reign crumbles into chaos. What reverses this terrible cycle of death is Shahrāzād, a virtuous and intelligent woman who tries to interrupt the chain of violence by marrying the brutal king also with the help of her younger sister Dīnārzād.<sup>96</sup> Shahrāzād ignores her father's attempt of dissuasion from the risky decision and follows a precise strategy she has in mind; each night she will tell her husband an incomplete story to be finished the next night, thus keeping herself alive due to the king's curiosity about the end of the story the day after. Years pass and Shāhriyār comes to his senses, having fallen in love with Shahrāzād, who in the meantime has given birth to three children, and "they all live happily ever after".

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<sup>95</sup> The woman kidnapped by the jinn asks the kings to give her their rings while showing them the rings she collected as a token from her previous lovers. These rings are ninety-eight in the manuscripts of the Syrian branch of and five hundred and seventy in the Egyptian branch.

<sup>96</sup> This is the spelling I use throughout when I refer to Shahrāzād's younger sister in this thesis.

As previously emphasised in 1.1, part I, the frame story of the AN was translated from Persian into Arabic. However, some of its themes and motifs originally came from the Indian narrative tradition and were subsequently absorbed, modified and reshaped by the Persian tradition with which they mingled. Ibn al-Nadīm testifies to the peculiar position of the AN as being in between the two literary cultures, and in the eighth *maqāla* of his *Fihrist* mentions the AN together with other books, such as the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and *The Book of Sindbād the Saviour*,<sup>97</sup> whose journeys to the Arab world also started in India, passing through Persia. Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 304) affirms that these latter literary works were said to be of dubious origin, for some people believed them to come from India and others from Persia. He believes that they were composed in India, so since he considers the AN of the same genre as *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and *The Book of Sindbād the Saviour*, it is possible to extend his remarks about the Indian origin of these works also to the AN.

Many themes and motifs of the frame story, such as female treachery, can undoubtedly be tied to the ancient Indian literary tradition. The latter is rich in terms of narratives about unfaithful women related by both human beings and animals and giving instruction by apologues. For example, the *Kathā sarit sâgara* [Ocean of the Streams of Story] and the *Sukasaptati* [Seventy Tales of the Parrot], the Indian source of the Persian *Tutinama* [The Book of the Parrot] by Nakhshabī (d. 1350), contain tales which have narrative elements in common with the frame story of the AN. The *Kathā sarit sâgara* was written in Sanskrit by Somadeva in the 11th century and is a work very similar to the *Panchatantra*, the Indian antecedent of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, as well as to *Kalīla wa-Dimna* itself (Deslongchamps and Dr. Hermann 1840, 261). The *Kathā sarit sâgara* is divided in eighteen books and twelve sections, and comprises many tales that revolve around the story of a king and his son, whose marriages with women from the earth or of spiritual origin are at the heart of the narrative. Some of the tales in this collection span themes such as the infidelity of treacherous women, female insatiable sexual appetite, imprisonment as a means to avoid female unfaithfulness and female disloyalty versus female virtue. From these themes derives

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<sup>97</sup> The *Book of Sindbād the Saviour* is of Indian origin, according to al-Mas‘ūdī, and of Persian origin, according to others (Deslongchamps and Dr. Hermann 1840, 234–35).

a series of motifs which echo the frame story of the AN quite explicitly, as is demonstrated below.

To begin with, the motif of a supernatural being imprisoning a woman, like the jinn and the boxed woman in the frame story, is found in two tales of the *Kathâ sarit sâgara*. The first one, entitled *Yaśodhara and Lakshmīdhara and the Two Wives of the Water Spirit* (Penzer 1924, 5:120–23),<sup>98</sup> is the story of two twin brothers, sons of a Brahman, who after a long journey decide to stop at a lake and climb up a tree to have some rest. Suddenly, a divine creature<sup>99</sup> emerges from the lake and pulls out of his mouth his two wives, then he falls asleep. One of the women profits from the sleep of the creature to tempt the two men, showing them her hundred rings as proof of all her betrayals. The men, however, refuse so the lady wakes up her husband who wants to kill them, but then the virtuous wife points at the rings of the unfaithful consort and speaks the truth. The creature embraces the good wife and drives away the treacherous one, cutting her nose. As is evident, in this tale the motif of the boxed woman is offered with some variations, such as the fact that the female creatures are imprisoned in the spirit's body, not in a box as in the episode found in the frame story. Rajna (1903, 183–84) points to another change in the tale of *Kathâ sarit sâgara*, namely the addition of the motif of the double wife as a further moralization of this tale. Female treachery is, therefore, made more serious by the presence of the faithful woman whose virtue contrasts with the wickedness of the other – although in the AN there is the same juxtaposition of characters, the figure of Shahrāzād being the good example to be set before the wicked women told of in the rest of the collection. Moreover, infidelity is punished by the cut of the nose and not by death, which makes the epilogue less violent. The second tale (number 146) with a similar theme is to be found in chapter LXIV of the *Kathâ sarit sâgara*, namely *The Two Thieves, Ghaṭa and Karpara* (Penzer 1924, 5:142–52). In a section of this tale there is narrated the episode of a man who is taking rest under a tree when suddenly a creature with human form comes out of the

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<sup>98</sup> Burton also points to the resemblance between the frame story of the AN and this tale. In 1870 he translates *Vikram and the Vampire*, eleven tales taken from an Indian collection, the *Vetala panchavinsati* [Twenty-five Tales of a Demon]. As for his translation of the AN, also in this case Burton modifies the language of the tales and adds many descriptions of practices and customs of India.

<sup>99</sup> Lane (1979, 1:34, note 91) indicates that the creature coming out of the sea is a Yakaha, a genie.

sea. This supernatural being pulls out of his mouth a bed with a woman and immediately falls asleep. The woman, instead, gets up and goes to the man under the tree to force him to have sex with her, showing her ninety-eight rings which testify to her former lovers. Nevertheless, the divine creature wakes up, sees the couple and turns it to ashes.<sup>100</sup> It is interesting to note that a similar tale with some variations (ninety-eight knots instead of rings, and a charmer instead of a supernatural being) is also found in the *Tutinama* (Rajna 1903, 182). In addition, in the story of *Samugga-jātaka* [The Box Jātaka] included in the *Jātaka* [Birth] – a collection of tales about the previous lives of Buddha dated between 300 BC and 400 AD and with a didactic aim – there is another tale with the same motif, although strongly modified. In this case, a demon kidnaps a beautiful woman, puts her in the box and swallows her to preserve the woman only for himself. However, she manages to substitute herself with someone else in the box, and when the demon discovers the trick frees her saying that if he could not control her, no one can (Rajna 1903, 185).

The theme of the overt unfaithfulness of women, which is present in all the Indian collections above mentioned, is usually associated with the motifs of the inexplicable love of a beautiful woman for an ugly man, or for a man of inferior status, and the punishment of the woman because of her infidelity. In the *Tutinama* (night 22) the reaction of the man to the unfaithful wife who has fallen in love with a druid is to kill her and her lover, while in the *Sukasaptati* (night 5-9), the betrayed king kills the lover of his wife, a druid, but only casts out the woman (Rajna 1903, 176–79). In addition, three tales interwoven in the story of *The Two Thieves, Ghaṭa and Karpara* in the *Kathā sarit sâgara* also revolve around the infidelity of women who, for unknown reasons, give themselves to monstrous, deformed or filthy men (Penzer 1924, 5:142–52). Likewise, the *Jātaka* contains a tale with the same narrative feature and which, according to Rajna (1903, 189), can be considered an indirect source of the frame story of the AN. This tale, the *Kuṇāta-Jātaka* n.536 (Cowell 1990, V–VI:234–36), tells the story of a king betrayed by a woman who has an affair with a lame, wicked man; she is so fond of her lovers that she allows him to treat her badly. When the ruler

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<sup>100</sup> Lane (1979, 1:34, note 91) points out that the rings in question are ninety-nine, and that the creature that comes out of the sea is a Naga, a snake-god.

discovers the liaison between his queen and the man, he wants to kill her, but the chaplain tells him not to be angry because this is the nature of women and they are all the same. To demonstrate this, the chaplain invites the king to disguise himself and they will set off together in order to see how other women behave in the world. The truth is proved by the fact that the king can easily tempt a young woman, demonstrating female flightiness and unreliability, then the ruler goes back to his kingdom and marries another woman. This tale shows a strong resemblance to the frame story of the AN, especially in what concerns the interest of the woman for an allegedly less attractive man, whose offences she bears with equanimity, and the resolution of the king who departs and hopes to find answers to what happened to him somewhere else. The conclusion of the tale of the *Kuṇāta-Jātaka* n.536, instead, is less cruel than that in the frame story of the AN, for the man lets the woman go and does not kill her. This is one of the main differences between the Indian tales and the frame story (see above for the tales of *Yaśodhara and Lakshmīdhara and the Two Wives of the Water Spirit* in the *Kathā sarit sâgara*), for in the former women are generally not killed for their betrayal (Rajna 1903, 196).

Other connections between the frame story and the Hindu fiction are worth mentioning with regard to the character of the female storyteller. In the story of *Paccekabuddha nagai*,<sup>101</sup> there is the tale of Jitaçatru, King of Kṣitipraṭiṣṭhita, who is captivated by the intelligence and beauty of a girl of poor origin, Kanakamanjarī, and marries her (Pavolini 1903, 160–61). The king already has other wives and enjoys their company in rotation. When the turn of Kanakamanjarī arrives, she devises a plan with her maid, Madanikā, as soon as the king rests on the bed with her, the maid will ask Kanakamanjarī for a story, so that the man can hear it. The maid follows the instruction and Kanakamanjarī replies that she waits for the king to fall asleep before narrating the story. The king hears the conversation between the two women and pretends to fall asleep, since he wants to listen to the narration. Kanakamanjarī begins telling an enigma but, when she reaches the explanation, she puts forward the pretext that she is tired, and she will give the solution to the enigma the following night. The king, being

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<sup>101</sup> Jacobi (1886) produced a critical edition of a selection of stories taken from Devendra's commentary on the *Uttarādhyayana-sūtra*, a Jain work which contains, among many other tales, the legend of the four kings who became *paccekabuddha* (Wiltshire 1990, 119–20).

curious to hear the explanation, spends the next night again with Kanakamanjarī, instead of another of his wives. The same thing happens every night for six months, until the king falls in love with the woman and does not want to see any others. It is interesting to note that the storytelling here is not implemented to save lives, as is the case of the frame story of the AN, nevertheless, the subsidiary aim is somehow the same.

Narration is a smart, industrious way for a woman to be given the opportunity to be seen in her reality beyond the marital duties, to which the king would otherwise relegates her. The presence of the maid Madanikā is another element of strong similarity with the frame story of the AN and the figure of Dīnārzād, which is said to be a nurse also in the *Fihrist* (Ibn al-Nadīm 1872, 304) and in the *Murūj al-dhahab* (al-Mas‘ūdī 1914, 90).<sup>102</sup> In addition, female-storytelling is present in the first frame story of the *Nonthouk pakaranam* [The Stories of Nonthouk], an ancient collection of Indian stories, in which a girl of ten narrates tales, bewitching the king with her words. Przulusky (1924, 131–33) emphasises the connection between the two frame stories of the *Nonthouk pakaranam* and of the AN, and hypothesizes that the so-called theme of Bluebeard, the story of a king who becomes a cruel despot, is a late addition to the Indian tales. Consequently, according to Przulusky, Shāhriyār’s cruelty towards females represents a subsequent change in the Indian concept of *svayamvara* (an ancient practice in which a woman can choose her husband), a symbol of female freedom.

An important aspect of the frame story of the AN, together with the question of its origin and similarities with other works of literature of the same genre, is the matter of the variations among manuscripts, recensions and printed editions of this narrative. Interestingly, the plot of the frame story contains no substantial changes concerning its development among the different versions of the text. There are some differences, however, in the narrative passages, as well as in the language, which will be analysed in depth in part II. In this respect, an issue deserving special attention is

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<sup>102</sup> In the 9th-century fragment of the AN Dīnārzād, (or Dīnāzād, as is found in this fragment), addresses Shahrāzād in a manner – *yā maladhdatī* or *mulidhdhatī* (my delectable one) – that was typical of personal maids towards their mistresses at that time (Abbott 1949, 152–53). Dīnārzād is a maid also in the so-called manuscript Reinhardt.

the epilogue of the frame story and its variations. In truth, no original ancient manuscripts that contain an end of the frame are available. The most famous and known happy ending, with Shahrāzād giving birth to three children, comes from the later ZER manuscripts of the AN, and is included in both the Bulaq (1835) and Calcutta II (1839-1842) editions of the Arabic text, while the Syrian manuscript on which Galland based his translation does not have any ending. The ending with Shahrāzād giving birth to three children, therefore, must have been added later, during the 19th century, when ZER was compiled. However, in the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm accounts for the conclusion of the frame story by saying that Shahrāzād has delivered one child:

“This happened to her for a thousand nights, during which time he [the king] had intercourse with her, until because of him she was granted a son, whom she showed to him, informing him of the trick played upon him. Then, appreciating her intelligence, he was well disposed towards her and kept her alive” (Dodge 1970, 713–14).

Another collection that is a sibling to the AN, the *A Hundred and One Nights*, contains a frame story holding a similar epilogue, namely the female storyteller continues the narration of stories until she is pregnant. The AN and the *A Hundred and One Nights* are the only two compilations of stories known so far being characterized, despite some differences, by a very similar narrative frame structure. The *A Hundred and One Nights* was produced in Maghreb or in Spain, that is the Western part of the Arab world. The most ancient manuscript of this work seems to go back to the middle of the 13th century, according to the colophon in the miscellaneous code to which the collection belongs (Ott 2017, 30). Some narrative features of the frame story of the *A Hundred and One Nights* seem to confirm it to be a more ancient version than the frame story of the AN (Chraïbi 2016, 51–58). Moreover, the similarity of the

conclusions of the frame stories of the two collections adds plausibility to Ibn al-Nadīm's account of the (happy)ending of the frame story of the AN.<sup>103</sup>

Grotzfeld is the scholar who has better analysed the question of the ending of the frame story in a pivotal article he published in 1985 and in which he highlights that, if the famous conclusion of the frame story in the ZER versions is the most known, this does not mean that it is the only existing one. Moreover, Grotzfeld argues in favour of ZER, which has been considered for a long time as a fake, or at least a narrative construction invented by the Western and non-Western copyists of the 19th century. Comparisons among manuscripts belonging to different branches have demonstrated that certain features in ZER are more ancient than in other non-ZER manuscripts and have been better preserved. In addition, as the ending of the frame story in ZER echoes the conclusion in the *Fihrist*, the former may not be entirely a

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<sup>103</sup> The most ancient manuscript of the *A Hundred and One Nights*, ms Canada Toronto Aga Khan Museum 00513, is incomplete – like another manuscript, ms France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3662 – and ends at night 85. There are seven manuscripts of the *A Hundred and One Nights* in circulation. Three manuscripts are at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (ms arabe 3660, 3661, 3662); two are at the *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya al-tūnisiyya* in Tunis (ms 18260, ms 04576); the most ancient existing manuscript (dating 1234) is at the Aga Khan Museum (ms 513); the Algerian manuscript probably compiled by al-Ḥājj al-Bāhī al-Bunī in 1841 was edited by Shuraybiṭ Aḥmad Shuraybiṭ with the title *Mi'at layla wa-layla wa-ḥikāyāt ukhrā* [A Hundred and One Nights and other stories] – and published in Algeria in 2005. This latter manuscript is identical to that of ms arabe 3661 (Fudge 2016a, XXX).

The ending mentioning the pregnancy of Shahrāzād is to be found in two manuscripts, ms France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3661, which is undated, and an Algerian manuscript which is in Algeria in a private collection (Lerner 2018, 213), dated 1841 according to Fudge (2016a, XXX) and 1836 according to Ott (2017, 28). Ott states that the two manuscripts are coincident in this point. Two other manuscripts, instead, have a different conclusion in which it is Dīnārzād who sleeps with Shāhriyār and becomes pregnant at the end of the story, while Shahrāzād only relates tales: ms France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3660 (undated) and ms Tunisia Tunis *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya al-tūnisiyya* 04576 (dated 1852). They belong to the second group of manuscripts, according to Fudge's division (2016a, XXX–XXXI), and “contain the core stories, but in different order, and with additional tales interspersed among them (rather than added at the end, as with the first group).” The first group of manuscripts includes, instead, the remaining five manuscripts. Fudges (2016a, XXIII) believes that the second group is more ancient than the first, as in the latter the conclusion is “clumsier and it does look like the figure of Dīnārzād has been deprived of her original role and left with little to do”.

19th-century invention. Calcutta I and Mahdi's edition have no ending and break sharply in the middle of the narration (the former after 200 nights, while the latter breaks at night 282). In Bulaq and Calcutta II, instead, the conclusions, which are identical, come after the tale of *Ma'rūf the Cobbler*, and can be summarized as follows. After having narrated the last tale, Shahrāzād, who in the meantime has given birth to three male children, goes to the king and says that she is his servant, and has told him tales and lessons from the ancients for a thousand and one nights. Now she has a request for the king and, before formulating it, she lets their three male children in: one walks, one crawls and the youngest is a nursling. Shahrāzād shows them to the king and asks to be spared her life, otherwise the children will grow up with no mother to look after them and ensure their education. The king cries, then embraces the babies and replies that he had already freed Shahrāzād, as he has seen that she is an honest, pure, noble and pious woman. Shāhriyār shows his joy by bestowing gifts on his vizier, the functionaries and the soldiers and embellishing his cities for thirty days, during which there are parties and ceremonies, and no one has to pay for anything.

In Breslau the ending of the frame story is taken from Ibn al-Najjār's manuscript, the so-called Tunisian Recension, but being in truth of Egyptian origin, according to Macdonald (1909, 688).<sup>104</sup> The conclusion of the frame story offered by Breslau does not refer to children, and Shahrāzād is granted freedom only because of her intelligence and skills in storytelling. In this version, before the closure of the frame story Shahrāzād narrates a tale in which the characters are not given a name, but which resembles the story of Shāhriyār. The king, in fact, recognizes himself in this commentary and comes to his senses (Fleischer 1843, 12:394). Subsequently, Shahrāzād tells the Shāhriyār that chaste women also exist, and recounts two other tales, *The Concubine and the Caliph* and *The Concubine of al-Ma'mūn*, to demonstrate to the king that he is not alone in his experiences (Grotzfeld 1985b, 80). As per Breslau, eventually Shāhriyār organizes his own wedding with Shahrāzād and also that of

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<sup>104</sup> Macdonald (1909, 688) affirms that "when we consider the two volumes of this material which distinctly belong to the Nights, it is plain that one is a descendant of the Galland MS and that the other, the closing volume, is of Egyptian origin. The 'Story of the Merchant of Cairo and the Favourite of the Khalifa al-Ma'mūn' (*Breslau*, vol. XII, pp. 402 ff.) shows far too great familiarity with the topography of Cairo to have taken final shape elsewhere".

Dīnārzād with Shāhzamān, and the two couples manage to live together.<sup>105</sup> The two brides are displayed in different and beautiful dresses, like in a fashion show, then the king orders his historians and scribes to write down the events between him and Shahrāzād, and they produce a work in thirty volumes that is stored in the regal library (this is the very end of the frame story). Grotzfeld (1985b, 83) demonstrates that the story of *The Two Kings and the Vizier's Daughter*<sup>106</sup> in Breslau has many features in common with the frame story of manuscript G,<sup>107</sup> and this should testify to an early origin of this separate recension of the AN (to which belong three more manuscripts)<sup>108</sup> in which the conclusion does not mention any children.

Lastly, there is the epilogue in the so called ms Reinhardt, ms Ar 19 France Strasbourg Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire 4278-4281, which is different from any other recension.<sup>109</sup> In this conclusion, after the story of *Harun al-Rashid and Abu Hasan the Merchant of Oman*, Shahrāzād tells the story of *The Two Kings and the Vizier's Daughter*. Shāhriyār understands this was his own story, and when he sees his children he declares his love for Shahrāzād. Subsequently, he sends a letter to his brother to communicate to him the happy conclusion of events. This is the only version of the frame story in which one finds the ending of the opening narrative anticipated by Shahrāzād in a tale and also the element of the three children to whom she gives birth (1985a, 85).

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<sup>105</sup> The same conclusion is to be found in ms Ar 16 Turkish Kayseri Raşid Efendi Kütüphanesi 674; ms Ar 18 Germany Berlin Staatsbibliothek We.662; ms Ar 17 France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3619, and ms Egypt Cairo *al-Maktaba al-azhariyya şād* 9483/‘ayn 133413 *adab*. All these manuscripts, as well as Breslau, show variations (Thomann 2020, 28).

<sup>106</sup> This is the title given by Burton to the tale which resembles the plot of the frame story. Burton (1886, 2:263-275) inserts this tale into the second volume of his *Supplemental Nights*.

<sup>107</sup> An important variation, instead, is that “the lover of the younger brother's wife is [...] ‘a strange man’ (*rajul ajnābī*, H)” (Grotzfeld 1985, 84).

<sup>108</sup> See note 44 and 45.

<sup>109</sup> This recension has variations even in the prologue, “the seats of the two kings have been exchanged; the younger brother is deceived by his chief concubine, the elder by his wife; the number of slave girls and male slaves who accompany the queen into the garden has been raised to eighty; Shahrāzād is the younger of the two daughters of the wazir” (Grotzfeld 1985, 85, note 35).

As for the most famous translations of the AN, it is important to remember that Galland used a conclusion very similar to that in Breslau and in the other independent manuscripts, while Burton overtly relied on Breslau (Grotzfeld 1985, 81, note 21). Payne and Lane adopted the ZER conclusion. Mardrus followed Breslau, with a variation, namely, the king gives the order to write down his own story and not only does he want to preserve the text in his library, but he also requires many copies of it to be spread throughout his kingdom.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Kilito (1994, 31-33) underlines that this variation is to be found in both Breslau and Mardrus' translation, and he analyses it in light of its narrative value.

### 3. Otherness

#### 3.1 An enlarged world

As already explained in the introduction, this thesis wants to propose an original approach to the reception of the frame story of the AN, and specifically of the relationship with the other sex within the frame story, via a critical analysis of the scholarship which has been produced since the late 1970s and which has focused on this specific aspect of otherness. In this chapter, a review of familiar materials and concepts is proposed mainly – but not exclusively – in the field of literary theory, which are functional to the enquiry into the notion of otherness and its application in relation to the frame story of the AN and to the scholarship related to it. With this brief and in no way exhaustive overview, it is only intended to provide adequate context for the argument of this thesis as per its limited scope.

In the late 1970s, socio-culturally, psychologically and politically oriented readings of the frame story of the AN appear for the first time. These original approaches to the text are in line with new movements and schools of thought in literary theory which had arisen globally starting from the end of the Second World War, reflecting the changes in the political, socio-economic and cultural balances following that dramatic conflict.<sup>111</sup> This novel critical enterprise, which negotiates its concepts and analytical categories across disciplines in the field of humanities and social sciences, is involved in a transformative process of reception that refuses to see literary texts as a-historical units built on abstract, often binary, models or systems – as the structuralist approach formerly suggested, instead bringing attention to larger

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<sup>111</sup> The list of analytical approaches which intend to challenge previous views on literary works is quite long. It includes psychoanalytic criticism, feminist criticism and “reborn” Marxist criticism (1960s); poststructuralism and forms of criticism historically oriented (1970s); postcolonialism (1980s); postmodernism and gender studies (1990s) (Barry 2009, 32). I use the term “postcolonialism”, without the hyphen, to indicate the critical analysis of colonialism in the field of the humanities and social sciences. By contrast, the word “post-colonialism” (hyphenated) describes the historical period found after the end of colonialism and has been criticised because it seems to stress the rupture between colonialism and what has followed, which, according to some scholars, is still imbued with a colonial legacy. See Sharp (2009, 3).

categories/“archetypal resonances” (Barry 2009, 39). On the contrary, modern criticism intends to unveil the intricate network of the potentially infinite connections which are established between the literary text and the present, because of which literature becomes “a vehicle for one’s own expression”, as well as for the expression of certain groups of voices”, embodying their “aspirations, feelings and self-validations” (Coetzee 2001). Modern literary criticism, therefore, benefits from the integration of its explanatory methods of inquiry with concepts and considerations borrowed from disciplines rooted in the social realm and which include the diverse spheres of human experience.

After the Second World War, the contemporary world seems to become “much bigger”, since it is a world in evolution (politically, economically and technologically speaking), more and more interconnected, plural, complex and diverse, and where many countries gain their independence. In this post-colonial world other voices come “closer”, claiming equal spaces from which to follow their own narrative meaning-making trajectories. These voices are often recognized as belonging to “subalterns” (Spivak 1985), namely minorities, women, alternative and popular cultures and the unrepresented categories. Their instances are brought into the field of literary analysis in particular in the late 1970s-beginning of the 1980s, when literary theories expand their traditional boundaries and begin to extensively look at the non-Western world. In these years, literary criticism, therefore, also opens itself to languages and literatures which had been ignored before and that challenge the dominant Western-centered representations of history, economic relations, questions of power and dominion and, more generally, human interactions. At the same time, in keeping with this spirit of renewal, both contemporary works of Western literature and classics are reread according to new perspectives which, by emphasising the importance of marginal and peripheral voices, make the literary discourse more pluralistic. As a result, texts are put in what one can refer to as being in “engaged proximity” to contemporaneity, namely in close connection with the variety of singular and collective human experiences which call for a broader and more truthful vision of mankind, and which the multi-interpretation prone nature of literature may provide with adequate representations and imagery.

The rising awareness, throughout this time, of the importance of interactive dialogue between plural voices and plural literatures – which do not have to be necessarily “foreign” on the geographical and cultural level, but can also be “domestic”, that is, dwelling within a national community/a country/a society – call into play a crucial concept that is part of the process of elaboration of differences and diversities, namely otherness. Otherness indicates both the actual view(s) on the other as bearer of difference and diversity, and the potential entanglement that this process of perceiving and envisioning the other may have on the understanding of an individual who is separate from – and is other than – the self. In this respect, literature clearly offers a plural space in which to negotiate representations of the self, and also of difference and diversity, and in which to experiment with new ways of relating otherness while creating alternative – or, conversely, stereotyped – images of the other. In like manner, literary criticism is engaged in the discussion of how otherness is dealt with in works of fiction. This operation of critique is, however, not “neutral”, but is highly influenced both by the theoretical framework in which the specific analysis is inscribed and by the critic’s positioning, as postcolonial studies have greatly stressed (Said 1983, 24–25).

In the light of the above, and returning to the subject of this thesis, the vast body of scholarship on the frame story of the AN that has been produced since the late 1970s testifies to a variety of new, positioned perspectives on how to understand this text. To investigate the reception of the frame story within such a wide range of studies this thesis, therefore, makes use of the concept of otherness both as a theme in the scrutiny of the text itself (linguistic and textual analysis), and as an analytical category that guides scholars’ critical readings in the discussion of literary criticism (critical analysis). Being incarnated in the rapport between the two protagonists, as well as between the other couples within the frame story, the relationship with the other, and specifically the other sex, is the main leitmotif that allows for the development of the plot. The whole textual structure of this piece of narrative is built around the depiction of the intrinsically dialectical nature of the relationship with the other, who is visibly characterized by physical difference and, at the same time, is bearer of a diversity which is not limited to the physical. Its complexity and criticalities are portrayed through the representation of supremacy, treachery and possession, as well as of

entrepreneurship, fascination and trust, within marital and extra-marital ties. Otherness, particularly in its sexual and gendered meaning (see 3.3, part I), runs, therefore, throughout the text like a recurring theme, giving homogeneity to the scenes and triggering the narrative events. Moreover, it also permeates the form of the text, being embedded in the dialogic dimension which naturally implies an intrinsic connection between (at least) two interlocutors, i.e., the self and the other(s) (Cassarino 2011, 21). Notwithstanding its thematic and analytical importance, within the academic literature on the frame story of the AN otherness is very rarely addressed explicitly. Nevertheless, a more in-depth analysis reveals that most of the readings refer to this concept indirectly as they focus on the relationship with the other sex, providing for plenty of interpretations of the paradigmatic couple Shāhriyār-Shahrāzād. These readings oscillate between two main positions, namely Shahrāzād as successful in her endeavor, so that the entire narrative is entrusted to a positive dialectic with the other sex; or Shahrāzād as unsuccessful, the whole story being a depiction of a conservative system of relationships among the sexes. Hence, critical interpretations make use of Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād – and of the narrative images of man and woman the two characters incarnate – to support certain views on the dynamics between male and female, dynamics which are grounded in specific critical frameworks and are representative of peculiar socio-cultural instances. For all these reasons, a thorough critical study of the frame story of the AN and its scholarship cannot ignore otherness both as a theme and an analytical category with all its different outcomes. But how many ideas of otherness are there? The following paragraph offers a brief overview of the development of otherness as a concept and its contribution to the different research areas within and outside literature.

### **3.2 The concept of otherness**

Otherness is a concept that has been widely used in many areas of study in the social sciences and humanities, and which has taken on a variety of meanings. Also known as alterity – from Latin, *alter*, comparative of *alius*, “other, another, other of two” –, within the Western tradition of thought otherness indicates the condition of what is seen to be other-than-the-self. The study of otherness concerns both the explication of this condition and the problematic response to it as stigmatization of

difference,<sup>112</sup> based on how the self and the non-self come to be defined. The idea of the other and the elaboration of otherness as discursive constructions are dependent on a variety of multiple factors, in particular on the perception of difference and diversity, the comprehension of which also determines (and is determined by) the understanding of the notion of identity. Difference is mainly understood, on the one hand, as physical difference, which concerns sex, race, ethnicity, age, particular or abnormal physical features and, on the other hand, as non-physical difference, which encompasses gender, class, culture, nationality, religion, mentality and personality traits – i.e., the character aspects of a person.<sup>113</sup> From a visual perspective, physical difference is the first place in which the representation of the different other finds its most evident expression.<sup>114</sup> This is sometimes referred to as geographical otherness, that is the non-homogeneous geographical provenance of individuals and groups which is evidenced by different physical/phenotypical traits, as well as by language and culture, and that may be used to justify a hierarchy of civilisations. In this respect, physical differences

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<sup>112</sup> On the linguistic front, the relationship with the other is generally reduced to the rhetoric of the I/we against that of the you/they. As a discourse construction, this rhetoric of opposites ultimately conveys an idea of impossibility of deep understanding and genuine comprehension between very diverse others.

<sup>113</sup> As difference generally refers to quantitative/tangible elements and/or behavioural features, the resulting ideas of diversity are measured according to these evident characteristics, both physical and non-physical. What is usually not questioned in the critical discourse on otherness is the diversity between individuals at the non-conscious level, including the non-conscious dynamics and psychic mechanisms that are put into play at the moment of the encounter with the other and that shape the individual's reactions to him/her. The philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas sets the relationship with the other in the horizon of the unconscious – and, for this reason, it is not (only) a rational, cognitive relationship. However, as otherness resists “the grasp of consciousness” (Large 1996, 48), the “roots of ethics prior to any rationalisation [...] are buried in the unconscious” (1996, 50), meaning that they are ultimately unknowable. In the present research project, the psychological considerations and non-conscious aspects related to the question of diversity and otherness are left aside, not because they are less important, but because they are not part of the scope of this research.

<sup>114</sup> Oyěwùmí (1997, 9) argues that cultures which favour other senses over sight are less or in no way likely to conceptualise difference exclusively in terms of different physical (bio-anatomical) features: “[...] in culture where the visual sense is not privileged, and the body is not read as a blueprint of society, invocations of biology are less likely to occur because such explanations do not carry much weight in the social realm”.

and non-physical differences overlap and intersect in many ways and with various outcomes, resulting in a range of images being attached to the idea of diversity, which are also derived from contrasting feelings towards the other as bearer of the unfamiliar and the unknown. The definition of diversity is greatly indebted to another concept which is essential within the discourse on otherness, i.e., identity. The notion of identity – which would deserve a separate discussion – oscillates between the idea of a social category and that of a personal dimension. The first focuses on broader definitions and indicates “a set of people designated by a label (or labels) commonly given to, or used by, a set of people” (Fearon 1999, 13) – and in this respect, minorities and individuals who are considered to belonging to these minority groups embody the other. The second dimension refers to “those predicates of a person such that if they are changed, it is no longer the same person, the properties that are essential to him or her being that person rather than being merely contingent” (Fearon 1999, 12). These essential predicates are to be meant both as physical and non-physical – personal traits –, in a fusion (combination) of intrinsic aspects distinguishing each individual.<sup>115</sup> The negotiation of meanings to be attributed to diversity and identity presupposes the recognition of a common dimension of humanity, to be meant as the universal condition shared by all humans as such. This universal, or universalistic, perspective is clearly not the hegemonic tendency to establish *a priori* truths which neglect multiplicity and diversity while reproducing the views of the dominating culture to which the others need to conform. Any ideological definitions of human nature as a totalitarian and monolithic condition of sameness which is defined and imposed by those who hold the power must be rejected. Throughout history, however, comprehending the apparent oxymoron of a condition of equality within diversity, namely of someone who is equal (human) and diverse (another human) at the same

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<sup>115</sup> A long philosophical tradition, as well as Freudian and Freud-based psychoanalytical theories, consider identity construction and the formation of the self to be the result of the recognition of the individual through the other ('s gaze). Consequently, the existence of an otherwise fragmented and/or powerless self is bestowed upon the other. The theoretical consequences deriving from this idea of the formation (of the consciousness) of the self-depending on the other have been many, especially in terms of relationships of power and desire. These theoretical consequences have also invited strong criticism in recent times.

time, has been a recurrent issue arising from the confrontation between identities and from the relationship between others. Todorov (1984, 249) also refers to this matter when he states that “to experience difference in equality is easier said than done”. Two positions seem to be prevailing in this dispute; on the one hand, the irreducible notion of diversity has been taken as an intrinsic, absolute (monadic) fact that cannot be subject to rational analysis and remains, all in all, an unsolvable, unknown, condition. On the other hand, the other has been made the subject of discourse construction aiming to deal with difference and diversity through categorisation and, frequently, hierarchisation. Within this scenario, the representation of the other may fail to picture the actual reality of the subject, while saying more about its producer than about the person whose existence stimulates the production of the representation (Todorov 1989, 32). Otherness, therefore, often becomes an instrument for rhetoric (Kilani 2004, 88); this unveils the intention of controlling and dominating the other through language, policy and his/her confinement to a peripheral position, as representative of the non-familiar, the new and the unknown, in other words, as a deviation from the standard identity – whatever may be represented as standard identity. The difficulty in relating to diversity can go as far as annulling it and its “bearer”, effectively non-recognizing as truly human the human being perceived as diverse. Postmodernist scholars suggest that the real problem lies with the conceptual issue related to the idea of difference, which is somehow intrinsically classificatory and judgemental. In their view, difference marks the contrasts between people: in other words, it emphasises what separates subjects and exposes the physical and non-physical “gaps” that need to be “filled” in order reduce the distance between persons (Pioletti 2020, 6). Jullien (2018, 29) proposes the word *écart* (divergence, deviation, distance), which only refers to the distance between the self and the other creating neither a hierarchy nor identification but creating a tension between separate subjects, leaving space for the emergence of new possibilities. Other scholars call for non-dualistic and non-oppositional views of the individual, according to which the subject is seen as non-unitary and having multiple belongings that make him/her resist a condition of “sameness, cultural essentialism and one-way thinking” (Braidotti 2014, 181).

The discourse on otherness is generally traced back as far as ancient Greece where the other par excellence was to be found in the stranger/foreigner and first

defined according to language, or, to express it better, rationality defined by language. People other than the Greeks, i.e., the Barbarians (from the onomatopoeic “bar-bar”), namely they who cannot speak Greek properly, were considered of an inferior status. This distinction, which first originated from geographical distance and civilization, became a question of language, culture and of recognising different levels of humanity. In other words, since the *logos* – in ancient Greek “reason, speech, word, discourse” – was the property of rational people (men) capable of speaking the language (Greek), those who could not or were not judged able to do it were considered bereft of *logos* and, therefore, not fully human. Foreigners, women, children and slaves were included among the category of the less human. As for the relationship with foreigners, the Greeks distinguished between the barbarian, namely the non-Greek foreigner – whose incomprehensible, i.e., non-Greek, language makes them different on a human, ontological level –, and the *xenos*, namely the inner-foreigner or the Greek foreigner, coming from another Greek city. The barbarian always remained a diverse and inferior being in Greek society, and both dramatists and philosophers – Aristotle in the *Politics*, in particular – of the archaic (until the end of the 6th century BC) and classical period (6th-4th century BC) supported this view (Lévy 1984; Stella 2002). Things partially changed with Hellenism following Alexander the Great’s conquest of many Asian territories between 334 and 324 BC, when Greek culture finally merged with and received from the different cultures of the East.

In the Roman empire, instead, the hostility against the other/barbarian was, overall, less fierce than in the Greek world, for the Romans had interest in holding together the diverse people of the conquered territories. The Latin word that substituted the Greek term *xenos* was *hostis*, meaning both host and enemy; the *hostis* was a peer who could become an enemy through war. The Romans had specific regulations (within the *ius gentium*) to define the position of the stranger, as an individual with certain rights, yet subject to restrictions (Stella 2002, 41–42). Then, with the spread of Christianity, the other was much less a linguistic or ethnic being, and “the official conversion of the empire to Christianity added a further dimension to this [Roman] sense of superiority” (Heather 1999, 236). Non converted subjects and pagans incarnated the other and were meant to be excluded from the eschatological and divine project of Christendom, so they had no rights of rulership. The image of the other,

therefore, earned a more negative connotation because non-Christians were thought to lack (rational) control, being subject to senses without the moral guidance of the Christian monotheist faith.<sup>116</sup>

In the Arab-Islamic world, the other was frequently described using stereotypes, as is the case with civilizations of the ancient world, though views and perspectives varied. Generally speaking, the Arabs did not establish fixed, hierarchical cultural boundaries, and neither Arabism nor Islam represented a sharp dividing line between civilisation and non-civilisation because it was always possible to find signs of a more progressed reality outside of the Islamic borders (al-‘Azma 1991, 220–21). Ethnic, tribal or ideological belonging were quite relative in the face of the Arab-Islamic unity of the *umma* (community), and this facilitated the relativization of other peoples’ diversity, which was not contraposed to the Arabs as less human or non-human (al-Ṭāhir 2006, 49–51).<sup>117</sup> In the mid-9th century al-Jāḥiẓ (1964) devoted a whole essay, *Kitāb fakhr al-sūdān ‘ala al-bīdān* [The Boasts of the Blacks over the Whites] to contrast the common views of the black people. Another author, al-Tawḥīdī, in the sixth night of his *Kitāb al-imtā‘ wa-al-mu‘ānasa* offered some examples of the common Arab view of the people surrounding the Arab-Islamic world (the Byzantines, the Persians and the Indians), as well as of counter-narrative on the representation of the Arabs by other peoples (Cassarino 2011). The term used in classical Arabic for stranger/foreigner initially was *a‘jamiyy*, which means “against the Arabs”, “non-Arab”. This word was used with regard to the Persian (the collective noun *‘ajam*), who were the immediate other of the Arabs at the beginning of the rise of Islam and the formation of the caliphate. *A‘jamiyy* means “he who cannot speak the Arabic language” – as it is defined by the *Kitāb al-‘ayn* by al-Khalīl, the most ancient Arabic dictionary (2003, 3:105). The nexus between otherness and the different idiom

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<sup>116</sup> It is to be noted here the similarity with the idea of the barbarian as a non-rational, therefore inferior, being in archaic and classical Greece. However, the lack of rationality which characterized the other in the ancient Greek world was a matter of language and, by extension, thinking, and not a question of religion.

<sup>117</sup> An exception in this respect is the attitude towards black people, who were considered the least among the civilizations and often depicted negatively through stereotypes which remained throughout centuries (al-Ṭāhir 2006, 80).

was, therefore, present in classical Arabic as in ancient Greek. Subsequently, another word was introduced in Arabic to mean stranger/foreigner, i.e., *ajnabiyy*, which comes from the root *j - n - b* and indicates proximity – that is, someone who is one’s neighbour but belongs to other people. Interestingly, the word “stranger” in English and in other languages in which this term derives from Latin (*extraneus*) also indicates a spatial relation with the other like the Arabic *ajnabiyy*. Nevertheless, “stranger” takes on the idea of something external, from the Latin *extra*, namely “out of”, reflecting an idea of the other as distant – geographically and mentally – and placed on the margin. The same holds valid for the word “foreigner”, from the Latin *foris*, meaning “out”, which also shows semantic emphasis on externality.

It is, however, in modern times that the idea of otherness has been revitalized, taking on the meaning(s) by which we know it today. In the first half of the 20th century, following a trail of revindication by black people which had started in the United States with the Harlem Renaissance, a new reading of the colonial experience was proposed within radically new critical frameworks. The intellectuals of the *Négritude*, such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Gontran Damas faced in their writings the oppression of the Western cultural colonization which accompanied political and economic control, and in doing so they gave a voice to the black, and often victimized, other. Likewise, the French West Indian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon pointed out white colonizers’ distorted gaze on the non-white colonised, who were seen as inferior and lesser creatures. Following the Second World War and the end of colonialism and imperialism, as well as the tragic events of the Holocaust, the ontology and ethics of the other were called into question again in order to meet the necessities of a changing world. With the rise of the postcolonial movement otherness was further redefined,<sup>118</sup> and the concept was often associated with the discourse of power relations by Michael Foucault. Edward Said in *Orientalism*, published in 1978, called attention to the construction of a fantasized and exotic Orient, as well as stereotypical, which aimed at supporting the colonial and imperialistic system in the Middle East by 19th-20th Western powers. Said (1993), the father of

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<sup>118</sup> The term postcolonial is to be found for the first time in *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, published for the first time in 1989.

post-colonial theory, saw the Oriental other as the product of ethnocentricity within a framework of relationships based on inequality and power, including cultural power. As a result, there was the urgency to renegotiate individual and group identities, mainly meant as relations of belonging – to a specific nation/state, race,<sup>119</sup> class, culture, religion, etc. – and to renegotiate them between individuals and by the individuals themselves (Maalouf 2000).

From a philosophical perspective, the discourse on otherness in the modern era goes as far back as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his idea of the master-slave dialectic, as a dichotomous relation that enables the self and the other to define their own being/identity. In the second half of the 20th century, this concept was also used by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, developing in the idea of the self that defines himself/herself, i.e., his/her identity, exclusively by the gaze of the Other (Gingrich 2006, 10–11). Furthermore, otherness often came to incarnate the intangibility of difference. The other was not to be understood – that is, it was not to be made into an object to be comprehended by ontology or metaphysics – but to be recognized and welcomed in his/her otherness in order “to dissolve [otherness] into a play of differences just to be celebrated or remedied” (Muhr 2008, 181). For example, in the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas’ view, the other ceases to be a source of fear, conflict and anguish and becomes the possibility of ethical action. This, in turn, allows the subject to recognise their identity without taking power away from the other, thus opposing the natural potentially racist approach of one human being towards another (Hofmeyr 2016). According to Lévinas, otherness is absolute, namely it precedes the differences which make diversity, and is also transcendent – it is “otherwise than being”.<sup>120</sup> Hence, since it is intended as beyond human knowledge and other than

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<sup>119</sup> “Race” is a concept which, biologically speaking, does not exist. It is, therefore, a historical, social, cultural, and political construction that makes use of physical differences and ethnic traits, particularly the skin colour, to claim for a genomic diversity which should be responsible for a different (physical, mental, cognitive) functioning of human beings – so that some human ethnic groups/categories/races would be more human than others, and also superior to all others.

<sup>120</sup> This comes from the title of one of Lévinas’ books, namely *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, first published in 1974. However, the phrase “otherwise than being” can be problematic when applied to the question of the definition and representation of the other for two main reasons. On the one hand, looking at the “otherwise than being” represents the attempt to integrate a sort of universality

being, the relationship with the other is saved from possible reductions to sameness, to which the logocentrism of the discourse, instead, wants to bring it back. Lévinas' work influenced another philosopher who discussed otherness with regard to narrative texts, i.e., Jacques Derrida. Proposing a deconstructionist reading of the text, Derrida affirms that otherness within the text can emerge only when logocentric conceptuality is left out of the reading process. In other words, since logocentrism is, all in all, an attempt to dominate otherness by tracing it back to fixed, normative categories, otherness lies in "that-which-cannot-be-thought" and comprehended (Critchley 1989, 95).

Beginning in the 1960s, the first feminist analyses identified the notion of the other with the female subject. Feminists claimed that if (Western) thinking was essentially a male process produced by and referred to male beings, the other par excellence could not be but the woman. Women, who have always been forced into a subservient and marginalized role in the society throughout history, have been seen as the negative part, the fairer sex, namely that segment of mankind which has endemically lacked something in relation to the male counterpart. At the same time, males have defined themselves and their "superior status" by means of considering females their other. As a consequence, men have always been the "essentials" because they have compared themselves with women, meant as the "inessentials", the others" (Beauvoir 1949). Within the field of literary criticism, feminist approaches have claimed that language and, consequently, literature are fundamentally a masculine discourse, so not only has narrative excluded female voices, but it has offered only male representations of women. Moreover, feminist voices have often intersected with other questions, such as gender, class, patriarchy, colonialism. Black feminists, for example, have pointed out the risks of using straightforward, absolutist categories that tend to bring feminist declarations to a unity in which differences, as well as the specificity of cultures and minorities, disappear. In the same vein, female scholars

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(we are all human beings) into the individual diversities but without placing the origin of this universal condition in the realm of human nature (which is a reality). On the other hand, it implies an ultimate abstract/transcendent dimension of the human being to which the living/actual reality of the individual – and the living/actual reality of the dynamics among the individuals – submits, and in doing so, it shifts the question of diversity from the horizontal plane of mankind to the vertical one of otherworldliness.

working across the feminist/postcolonial theory have called for the intersectionality of otherness, and therefore, have analysed race,<sup>121</sup> class, gender, and sexuality not in isolation but based on their mutual interdependence. In this respect, Spivak (1985) coined the word “othering” to refer to the role that the other has in the definition of the identity of colonized subjects; the gaze of the colonizer/empire becomes, therefore, the only place in which the subaltern subject gains identity. Ahmed (2006), instead, discusses the phenomenology of race indicating that orientation and being orientated towards someone is a way to deal with whom is other-than-me, who in turn reflects one’s own positioning and consolidates the self. For this reason, being oriented towards the other means, in truth, to be orientated around oneself, and Ahmed applies this statement to the Western gaze which, although it is turned towards the orient, it is still orientated around the West. Gender and queer theories explore the issue from a different perspective, breaking down the opposition masculine-feminine and investigating the diving space in-between these two. Because of this, the question of identity is separate from that of the biological sexual difference and is considered a cultural and social construction, namely of power dynamics within society (Butler 1990). As a result, otherness is embodied in an idea of identity which is fluid and that challenges the binary division of the sexes, causing a split between mind and body – a body from which the mind originates.

To conclude this very brief overview on the concept of otherness, a few words must be said about the study of the literary representations of the other undertaken by imagology. Moving from a position which is supranational and more neutral compared to that of postcolonial theory, imagology is a branch of comparative literature which examines the imageries produced by a given literary culture regarding another culture. As a result of this process of observation, description and reflection through the lens of the other, a culture produces “images” and “mirages” (meaning illusions due to misreading) and defines itself within the literary space. Nevertheless, although a full comprehension of the other and the other’s imagery is almost impossible, imagology sees in this tense encounter with a diverse literary horizon the possibility for literary cultures to become enriched and be innovated (Moll 2002, 200). In this scenario, the individual writer is the one who proposes his/her own views of the other, a view that

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<sup>121</sup> See note 119.

can be either in line with (reinforces) or in contrast with (opposes) the socio-cultural perspective on otherness (2002, 194).

### 3.3 Otherness in the frame story

As already stated elsewhere, the words “other” and “otherness” are very rarely mentioned with regard to the frame story of the AN and/or the critical readings associated with it.<sup>122</sup> This is perhaps not surprising if one considers that the concepts of other and otherness have developed in contemporary social sciences and humanities as an intersection of multiple dimensions and often non-binary juxtapositions, while within the frame story the other is principally – but not exclusively – the opposite sex. Focusing on only one of the many aspects embodied in the notion of otherness, therefore, may have seemed reductive to critics approaching the opening narrative of the AN. Nevertheless, without in any way limiting otherness to dichotomous logics that would simplify the complex perceptions defining human diversity,<sup>123</sup> in terms of literary analysis, assuming a sexual and gendered point of view within the horizon of otherness may prove useful to bring forth certain layers of meaning (among the many possible ones) within the opening narrative of the AN. This dimension of otherness that focuses on the representations of man and woman and the relationship between them can be referred to as sexual and gendered otherness. Sexual and gendered otherness stands for the diversity between the sexes due to both physical and psychic difference (sexual otherness), as well as for the cultural, social and political construction of male and female roles through which both physical and psychic difference is understood (gendered otherness). In this respect, the woman becomes the

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<sup>122</sup> I can think of only one academic article that contains the word “otherness” in the title: *Otherness and Otherworldliness: Edward W. Lane's Ethnographic Treatment of The Arabian Nights* by Schacker-Mill (2000).

<sup>123</sup> Postcolonial, poststructuralist and postmodern approaches have strongly criticized binary thinking of any sort, as well as dialectical relationships, which they understand as a reproduction of dichotomy. Ahmed (2002, 570) says that the problem is already within the couple self-other, so she refers to “this person-another person” to avoid any othering of the individual in front of us: an individual, who, however, ceases to be fully present in his/her particularity to make space for all “other others” he/she has met and that have become part of him/her.

(female) other,<sup>124</sup> the subaltern subject that is the misperceived, misunderstood and, eventually, misrepresented by male eyes. As for the frame story, the two protagonists, namely King Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād, Shāhzamān and his wife, the queens and their respective lovers and the boxed woman and the jinn,<sup>125</sup> all these couples carry a story in which both parties are situated according to a sexual and gendered juxtaposition – Ghazoul calls it “binarism” (1980, 24).

On the narrative level, the way in which the relationship with the other sex is expressed and represented is in line with the conventions of the genre, that of fictional tales (or *märchen*), to which the frame story can be assimilated. This implies that this relationship is not made explicit through convoluted dialogic exchanges or careful characterization of the figures. Sexual and gendered otherness is, so to speak, an “empirical” element, it is measured by deeds and interwoven in the folds of language used to describe these deeds. As Todorov (1977) states, the AN – as well as other fictional works that he mentions, such as the *Odyssey*, the *Decameron*, and the *Saragossa Manuscript* – is characterized by a sort of a-psychologism. It means that stories are made up of intransitive actions, which are important in and of themselves, and generally give no indications of the character’s traits or emotional status; character and deed are almost equivalent, both being linked by a causal relationship (if X does this, Y will certainly happen) (Todorov 1977). Along the sex continuum, therefore,

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<sup>124</sup> The issue of the “female other” is briefly mentioned in the article *Narrative and Performance: Shahrāzād’s Storytelling as a Ritual Act* by Van Leeuwen (2007a, 363), who, however, does not expand on the concept of otherness.

<sup>125</sup> I leave out of this list the couple who are the protagonists in the tale of *The Merchant and His Wife*. This tale is enframed within the frame story and lies on a different narrative level because it is told to Shahrāzād by her father as a moral admonishment, but it does not directly influence the development of the main plot. The tale could be removed, or substituted, and still the frame story would stand. Some scholars think that this tale, together with that of *The Donkey and the Bull with the Farmer*, are subsequent additions to the frame story. To substantiate this fact, it can be said that in Bulaq and Calcutta II, whose frame stories have preserved much older versions than the text edited by Mahdi in many places, the two enframed tales are dismissed by Shahrāzād very quickly. One simple sentence bridges the tale with the main plot, *fa-lammā sama ‘at ibnat al-wazīr māqālat abīhā (mā qāla abūha) qālat lahu lā budda min dhālika* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:6; Macnaghten 1839, 1:9), while in Mahdi’s edition (2014, 1:71) the narrative passage that acts as a link between the enframed tales and the frame story is somehow better structured as it would have been adjusted.

male and female characters act while standing opposite one another. The plain plot leaves the text open to many interpretations searching for meanings that eventually point to attitudes, situations, feelings and experiences rooted in spheres of human activity, and which are explained with “the help of fantasy” through the “human images” of the story (Vico 1911, 2:248).<sup>126</sup> In the frame story characters, therefore, embody clusters of human characteristics rather than being portraits of individuals. In line with Todorov, also Suhayr al-Qalamāwī (1976, 298) rightly suggests that, when referring to the AN, the word “character” should not be construed as it normally is in literary criticism. Characters are, instead, types, namely the incarnation of models and images, being devoid of the physical and, above all, psychological traits that normally distinguish the protagonists of novels. Consequently, the representation of the dynamics occurring between the parties is expressed via actions and minimalistic descriptions. This also implies that otherness as a theme cannot be separated from a linguistic and textual analysis that endeavors to make the relationship with the other visible through the scrutiny of words, phrases and sentences, namely through the micro-linguistic elements of the discourse.

The plot of the frame story offers adequate ground for an argument on the centrality of the relationship with the other sex; nevertheless, the events occurring between many opposite-sex couples are intertwined with a variety of other elements relevant to the formation of otherness. First of all, the relationship between the sexes is interwoven with social roles and issues of class at different levels (Ghazoul 2014, 37), so matters of the “heart” are mixed with questions of control, possession, and courtly protocols. It is the motif of betrayal, in particular, that focuses attention on (the representation of) social and class differences as a means to cross social and gender boundaries, and in doing so, it threatens the established order within the hierarchy of otherness.<sup>127</sup> Treachery within the frame story has been seen in many ways. Firstly, as a means of possibly disrupting the patriarchal system within the court; secondly, as a welcome escape from a situation of profound injustice and subjugation, and thirdly as

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<sup>126</sup> My translation.

<sup>127</sup> The frame story of the AN is set during the Sassanid period. However, the motif of the “betrayal is found more repeatedly in Pre-Islamic Arabic literature” than in classical Persian literature (Ghabool and Ravansalar 2016, 77).

females' lust resulting in conduct that is attuned to the pleasure principle. Furthermore, the motif of the betrayal is developed at various levels of intensity and explicitness depending on the different versions of the story, thus generating diverse perceptions of it (Denaro 2015, 44–45). Although the reader/receiver is not directly requested to make a judgment about the value and effectiveness of betrayal in promoting change either at personal or social level, the admonishment with which the frame story begins, as well as the progression of the plot, reveal the disruptive influence of treachery. Being the symptom of a compromised system of relations based on subjugation, the motif of the betrayal is the trigger mechanism for a development of the narrative which seems to be based on gender and social vindication. For this reason, queens prefer slaves as lovers rather than their regal partners, making treachery an even more severe insult to the kings, while the jinn kidnaps a woman “nobly born” on her wedding night (within the episode of the boxed woman), cruelly snatching her from a bright, promising future (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:26). As for the two kings and their wives, although they are on an equal footing in terms of class, the unbalanced distribution of powers and of freedom of action highlight the profound inequality that exists between the two groups. A similar image is also portrayed through the distribution of public spaces, as social and outdoor areas are reserved to men, while women are found within rooms, boxes and the castle, namely always in enclosed spaces.

On closer reading of the frame story, it becomes clear that some of encounters between the couples are often shaped by an additional layer of otherness that concerns the relationships with the stranger/foreigner. This type of cultural otherness, indicated by the presence of the cultural other (an individual representing another culture), is embodied in the ethnicity/race of some of the male characters. In the frame story, one comes across white people and black people; ethnicity and race are clearly indicated and play a key role in the definition of otherness and of sexual characterization, which cannot be considered separately (Butler 1990, 39–40). In particular, an affinity can be found in the way otherness is represented and approached in relation to both women and strangers/foreigners within the opening narrative of the AN. To further explain this point, it might be useful to refer to the work of the Egyptian anthropologist

Sharawi (2008), who analyses the notions of other and otherness with special attention to the Arab world in a diachronic perspective. Sharawi highlights a

correlation within the Arab world between women's issues and the question of cultural diversity, that is between two elements that occupy a key position in the formation of the notion of otherness – an connection that does not only apply to Arab culture: it can be relevant for any culture. Within the frame story, the relationship with the other is a matter of opposite sexes, as well as of gendered roles, inscribed within the narrative setting of regal courts ruled by kings. Nevertheless, confrontation between sexual identities and between gendered positions is often reinforced by the motif of foreignness/strangeness that adds a further tier of “outer” otherness to the “inner” otherness already embedded in the difference (physical and non-physical) between man and woman (Sharawi 2008, 92).<sup>128</sup> Female characters are subjected to males who are often depicted as foreigners and black, and who consequently stand out as alien bodies within the community. It is believed that these women are light-skinned<sup>129</sup> because if they had been of black origin this would have been recorded – as is the case with black men. Hence, the text purposely creates a contrast between the different skin colours, as well as between males and females, and this is a phenomenon which is described by scholars as blackness entwined with sexuality (Thorn 2002, 153).

To conclude this brief account of otherness within the frame story of the AN, it is to be noted that the women's lovers, even when they are not explicitly referred to

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<sup>128</sup> Sharawi's (2008, 92) use of the words “inner” and “outer” is mainly spatial. The pair of adjectives refers to otherness within the context of a country/community/society and outside it, respectively. The horizon in which the Egyptian philosopher ascribes these two aspects of otherness is defined by community boundaries – i.e., boundaries which delineates one community whose members have a resembling understanding/making sense of human relationships and the world. Then, Sharawi adds that the representation of the other has been the subject of a complex dialectic in the history of the Arabs, oscillating between acceptance and exclusion. He points out that Arab societies have always elaborated their identities (and, consequently, their idea of otherness) through literary production. During the Middle Ages, identity models were represented within different genres of literature, such as popular epic, popular narrative – to which the AN belongs – and *adab*. However, I believe that referring to “inner” and “outer” otherness may be slightly misleading. This terminology is already employed by many Western epistemologies which link women with interior, private, domestic and nature, and men with exterior, public, political and culture, limiting diversity to binary/dichotomous logics that simplify and impoverish the complexity of human beings. To not generate misunderstandings, I use sexual and gender otherness on the one hand, and cultural otherness on the other.

<sup>129</sup> These women's skin colour is not specified in the text.

as black, are always of an inferior social position (slaves and servants). All these males are subjected to the will of kings – non-black, Eastern kings – to which also the female characters are subjugated. Male rulers are, therefore, at the top of the chain of dominion and power, and this clearly indicates that cultural otherness and the question of subalternity are very closely interlinked within the plot of the story. In one example a woman is imprisoned by a supernatural being, i.e., the jinn, who is granted a status of strangeness similar to that of the male strangers and yet he is also feared by kings because of his magical powers. The jinn embodies a further representation of the other that places him on a non-human/otherworldly plane, and which is associated with the colour black (“a black column”) in some versions of the frame story (see 2, part II). As Denaro (2015, 43) explains, the control of black men’s abnormal sexual power is a trope within medieval Arabic literature. Likewise, the couple, comprising of a black slave and a non-black Eastern woman of high rank, is another common motif of this type of literature representing a serious threat that can overturn traditional systems of power. Eventually, what is at stake within this hierarchical – and patriarchal – community are female actions, and the (diverse) consequences of these actions for both sexes. Otherness and the relationship with the other sex in their thematic dimensions need, therefore, to be captured somewhere in between the micro-level of language and the macro-level of plot development, paying special attention to the intersections between the two tiers in which meanings are produced.

## PART II

### Linguistic and textual analysis of the frame story of *The Thousand and One Nights*

#### 1. Sources, scope of the analysis and selection criteria

As Pinault observes (1987), literary criticism of the AN principally concerns the macro-level of this work, namely textual and genetic history, main themes/motifs, genetic connections with other literary texts, and studies of selected stories. The micro-level of language and textual variations is, however, much less explored. Pinault (1986) himself is one of the few scholars who has undertaken a comparative analysis of the different versions of some of the tales within the collection, bringing attention to differences in vocabulary and style.<sup>130</sup> Before Pinault, in the introduction to his critical edition of the AN, Mahdi had also examined passages taken from Bulaq and from manuscript G, focussing on their linguistic features and differences (Mahdi 2014, 1:40-51). In keeping with the spirit of following a similar contrasting approach to Pinault and Mahdi, this part of the thesis affords a scrutiny of the microstructure of the frame story of the AN through a detailed analysis of three out of the five printed Arabic versions of this collection. In particular, the investigation undertaken in this section focuses on the linguistic and textual variations occurring between the different versions, closely examining all passages in which the relationship with the other sex takes places and/or is mentioned.

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<sup>130</sup> Some scholars, such as Sallis (1998) and Denaro (2015), have undertaken contrastive analyses of different versions and translations of single portions of the frame story, as well as of other tales within the AN. Denaro (2015, 39) also emphasizes the importance of the question of the diverse versions of the AN, suggesting that this factor must be taken into consideration in the literary scrutiny of the collection due to its multiple repercussions on the interpretative, textual and narrative level. A recent study by Thomann (2020) analyses the “long” ending of the frame story in ms Ar 16 Turkish Kayseri Raşid Efendi Kütüphane 674 – which is the same as that in Breslau and that inserted by Burton in his translation – and reflects on its interconnections with the opening narrative in manuscript G. One of these Turkish manuscripts also contains an abridged version of the long ending which is found in Breslau and ms Ar 16 Turkish Kayseri – and also in Burton’s translation of the final part of the frame story, which is based on Breslau.

Linguistic and textual changes are responsible for conveying distinct meanings that affect the way in which sexual and gendered otherness as a theme is construed. These changes are sometimes intentional and sometimes the result of random substitutions by copyists first, and then by editors, such as in the passages in which the original source was lacking or corrupted. As for the copyists' lack of diligence in reproducing the exact content of the oral and/or written tales of the AN circulating, it must be remembered that, as popular literature, the collection was mainly penned not to preserve its authenticity in written forms, but rather for reasons of "consumerism" and production of entertaining narrative (al-Musawi 2004, 334). The outcomes of these modifications depend on the loci in which they occur, if they fit the plot of the story well, and how much they change the meaning of the text. For example, the substitution of a key verb around which the deed is construed, or the use of one type of phrase instead of another, may cause important semantic alterations and, consequently, result in different interpretations. The analysis carried out in part II of the present study is, therefore, embedded within a broader thematic horizon in which linguistic features are seen in light of their significance for the representation(s) of otherness.

From a methodological perspective, the scrutiny which is offered in this section relies on three printed Arabic editions of the AN, i.e., Bulaq, Calcutta II and Mahdi, whilst the editions of Calcutta I and Breslau have been considered only if strictly necessary. The reason for excluding Calcutta I and Breslau from this examination is that these two editions are the result of a significant number of interpolations, additions and manipulations (see 1.3, part I). Moreover, since they are clearly construed and extensively modified versions, critics have generally not taken them into consideration for their literary analyses. This renders Calcutta I and Breslau less useful for the purposes of the present inquiry, and specifically for the examination of the academic readings of the frame story that seem not to have relied upon them (see part III). As regards the Bulaq printed edition, it has been not possible to access either the edition

published in 1835<sup>131</sup> or that published in 1836<sup>132</sup> by the *Maṭba‘at Būlāq* in Cairo. Two subsequent editions of Bulaq have, therefore, been consulted, namely the two-volume lithographed reprint of the Bulaq edition of 1836 published in 1964 by the *Maktabat al-muthannā* in Baghdad, and the second edition published by the Cairene *al-Maṭba‘a al-‘āmira al-sharfiyya* in 1888-1889 (first edition published in 1884-1885).<sup>133</sup> The versions of the frame story in these two texts are almost identical; they present only twelve variations, four of which are worth mentioning. The first two of these consist of the titles that introduce the story of Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār and the tale of *The Donkey and the Bull with the Farmer*, which are to be found only in the Bulaq edition published by *al-Maṭba‘a al-‘āmira al-sharfiyya*. The third one is a list of nouns indicating the beauty of the vizier’s daughters (*ḥusn, jimāl, bahā’, i’tidāl*) which is included in the 1888-1889 edition. The fourth difference lies in the names of the two kings, which, as also Lane observes (1979, 1:22), are erroneously transcribed in the Bulaq edition of 1836 reprinted in 1964 – Shāhriyār is misspelled as Shahribāz, and

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<sup>131</sup> Al-Sharqāwī, al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Ṣafatī, 1835. *Alf layla wa-layla* [The Thousand and One Nights]. 2 vols. Cairo: Bulaq. This edition is to be found in only three libraries in Europe (Leiden University Library, the Central Library of Zurich and The Spanish National Research Council of Madrid) – refer to the Worldcat online database – and also in two other libraries in Egypt, i.e., *Maktabat al-ma‘had al-faransiyy li-l-āthār al-sharqiyya* (IFAQ) item n.18, and *Dār al-kutub al-maṣriyya bi-al-Qāhira* item n.13523 “zā” (Akel 2016, 434–35).

<sup>132</sup> Al-‘Adawī, al-Shaykh Muḥammad Qaṭṭa, 1836. *Alf layla wa-layla* [The Thousand and One Nights]. 2 vols. Cairo: Bulaq. In truth, al-‘Adawī is the editor of the second edition of Bulaq published in 1863. This is a mistake that was not correct in the following Lebanese and Egyptian editions, as Akel (2016, 436) points out. Al-Musawī (2003, 72) seems not to be aware of this error in his book *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* in which he refers to the Bulaq edition which he states was prepared in response to the enormous European interest in, and overt intention to appropriate, the tales, noting that “Shaykh Muḥammad Qaṭṭah al-‘Adawī put his name on the title page as the one who carried out the editorial work of double checking and proofreading, ‘muqābalah wa-taṣḥīḥ,’ could well indicate the desire of the Press to render the edition acceptable to the rising elite”. According to the Worldcat online database, this edition is available in five libraries (The University of Oxford, Harvard College Library, Cleveland Public Library, Hathi Trust Digital Library, and The University of California).

<sup>133</sup> Akel (2016, 436) indicates that this edition has four volumes, but the one I had accessed had only three – and the ending of the frame story is to be found in volume 3. This edition had some success in literary circles at the end of the 19th century (Chauvin 1892, IV:18).

Shāhzamān as Shāhramān. Since the Bulaq edition published by the *Maktabat al-muthannā* in Baghdad in 1964 seems to add less information than the 1888-1889 edition, it has, therefore, been selected for the analysis in this part of the study. With regard to Calcutta II, this study relies on the digital copy of the original 1839-1842 edition in four volumes, edited by William Hay Macnaghten, and printed in Calcutta by W. Thacker & Company. Finally, the last edition considered is the paperback reprint of Mahdi's classical edition in three volumes (1984-1994), published by Brill in Leiden in 1995 in two volumes. The first tome of this edition includes the Arabic text of the AN and an introduction in which Mahdi talks about the four Arabic printed editions prior to his own, how he proceeded to critically edit manuscript G, and discusses linguistic issues. The second volume entails the critical apparatus and a detailed account of the correspondences between the manuscript G and the manuscripts of the Egyptian branch.

In this scrutiny, the frame story of the AN has also been compared with that of the *A Hundred and One Nights*,<sup>134</sup> the other Arabic collection of tales produced in the Maghreb and characterized by a similar frame story – with the protagonists being King Shāhriyār and the vizier's daughters, Shahrāzād and Dīnārzād (Chraïbi and Marzolph 2012). The *A Hundred and One Nights* seems to be older than the AN, and its most ancient existing manuscript probably dates back to the 13th century (see 2.2, part I). It is, therefore, possible to make comparisons between the opening narrative of *A Hundred and One Nights* and that of the AN in those places where their plots converge. This operation facilitates the analysis of narrative passages the interpretation of which is widely discussed among the critics, for the latest versions of the story may contain

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<sup>134</sup> I use Fudge's critical edition published in 2016, which is based on a manuscript dated to 1776. As Fudge (2016a, XXXIII) explains, it is very difficult to make a critical edition of the *A Hundred and One Nights*, and he, therefore, decides to edit just one of the manuscripts of this work, namely ms France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3662, which he believes has "the most inclusive and most colorful renditions of the individual tales". Fudge, however, takes the very last part of the frame story from another manuscript, ms Tunisia Tunis *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya al-tūnisiyya* 04576, because it contains – together with another manuscript, i.e., ms France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3660 – a variation which he believes testifies to an older version of this story (see also note 103). In this version both sisters are given to the king, and it is Dīnārzād who sleeps with him while Shahrāzād only narrates the tales.

narrative elements which were included in the oldest redactions and that were preserved. This holds true, for instance, in the example of King Shāh zamān and his circumstances for returning home and accidentally discovering his wife's betrayal; other examples refer to the number of slaves in the scene of the orgy in Shāhriyār's palace and to the reason for Shahrāzād's decision to offer herself to the king (Grotzfeld 1985a; Mahdi 2014; Chraïbi 2016).<sup>135</sup> It must be said the plot of the frame story of the *A Hundred and One Nights* also presents a number of important variations if compared to that of the AN. For example, it is the futile motif of being the most beautiful of the reign which sets the entire story in motion. Moreover, Shāh zamān is substituted by the figure of the young and handsome Indian man; Dīnār zād, Shahrāzād's sister, is only briefly mentioned in some manuscripts, and Shahrāzād does not always devise a ruse with her sister to let the king fall in the enchanting trap of the storytelling,<sup>136</sup> nor does she insist on being married with the king when talking with her father. Moreover, the embedded tale of *The Donkey and the Bull with the Farmer* is absent from the *A Hundred and One Nights*.

In the linguistic analysis undertaken in this part of the study, the texts of the Arabic printed editions are accompanied by their translations in English. This is because since the AN has been known and read for long time only through its translations, the latter have been very influential for the meaning-making of the stories in this collection and cannot be ignored. In this respect, translated texts negotiate between the semantics of two linguistic systems, connecting the textual dimension (language-language) with the supra-textual dimension (reception of meanings). Special attention is to be given to the semantic phenomena that come into play in this process during the transition from language to the level of themes and discourse that

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<sup>135</sup> Mahdi (2014, 2:12) includes the *A Hundred and One Nights* in the list of the sources on which he bases his work of critical editing. In particular, he quotes the edition by Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna, published in Tunis in 1979. This edition is mainly based on ms France Paris BnF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) 3662.

<sup>136</sup> For example, in the most ancient manuscript of the *A Hundred and One Nights* Shahrāzād does not devise a ruse with Dīnār zād, but she herself asks the king if he wants to hear a story. Conversely, in the manuscript used by Fudge (2016a, 21) for his critical edition of this collection Shahrāzād is asked by her sister to begin storytelling but without any mention of a previous agreement between them.

emerge from the text, generating further meanings and interpretations. In the present analysis, the English translations which have been used are the following: Lane's work for Bulaq;<sup>137</sup> the famous translation by Burton for Calcutta II and the rigorous Malcolm Lyons and Ursula Lyons' translation published by Penguin in 2008, and finally Husain Haddawy's translation for Mahdi's edition. Considering that "the significance of the choice of a text – a manuscript, an edition, or a particular translation – is [...] not negligible" (Chraïbi 2004, 150), two different translations have been considered with regard to Calcutta II to evidence how dissimilar translation's styles and approaches have resulted in two very different English versions of the frame story.

The scope of the textual and linguistic analysis offered in this part of the current work is a microlevel study, which is a scrutiny of "the wording of individual scenes [...] governing a particular passage" within the story (Pinault 1987, 126), where micro-linguistic features are investigated in their morphological, syntactic and stylistic aspects, and which are also examined from a semantic perspective. This does not mean that grammatical and syntactical features are not considered if needed to identify discrepancies at the word, phrase and/or sentence level.<sup>138</sup> However, the main aim of

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<sup>137</sup> In the preface to Lane's translation (1979, 1:XI) of the AN, it is stated that the translator relied on "the Cairo edition lately printed; it being greatly superior to the other printed editions". The edition Lane accessed was that edited by al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Şafatī al-Sharqāwī, which also included additional notes about the Arabic language added by Muḥammad 'Iyād al-Ṭantāwī, pupil of al-Sharqāwī, in 1839 (Akel 2016, 435; Lane 1979, 1:XI–XII). Lane (1979, 1:XII) affirms that al-Ṭantāwī's notes were useful to him, while most corrections to the text made by the latter were overly copious, so he simply highlighted a few of them although he was tempted to "do otherwise in order that Arabic scholars might be assisted to judge of the fidelity of my version by comparing it with the text of the Cairo edition". Furthermore, Lane (1979, 1:XI) clarifies that the Cairo edition of Bulaq appeared almost identical to the manuscript on which Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, an Austrian orientalist, based his translation, and which was the first manuscript containing an ending of the AN. However, both the manuscript and the French translation by Von Hammer-Purgstall are lost, while a German translation of the French one was published in 1825 and still survives. An English translation from German – a selection of the tales – was made in 1826 under the title *New Arabian Nights Entertainments, selected from the original Oriental manuscript by Joseph von Hammer, and now first translated into English by the Rev. George Lamb*, in three volumes.

<sup>138</sup> This also implies that I do not dispute the changes in the linguistic registers (middle Arabic, classical Arabic), or the linguistic and grammatical features in the different versions. Much has been already said

this scrutiny is to undertake a semantic inquiry of linguistic elements and focus on the types of changes that have occurred linguistically in order to discuss the consequent modification of meanings. By contrasting these meanings and the semantic values of language in the different versions of the frame story, the diverse combinations and variations that have shaped the depictions of characters and the description of scenes around otherness and the relationship with the other sex can emerge in their entirety. Ultimately, the analysis is inevitably brought to the higher macro-level of signification and discourse construction, facilitating the investigation on the different semantic implications of the relationship with the other sex in the various Arabic versions of the text.

The structure that has been implemented to decide what to include within the scope of this analysis is the following:

#### THE CHARACTERS' DESCRIPTION AND INTERPLAY BETWEEN THEM

- a) Male: Shāhriyār; Shāhzamān; the queens' lovers; the jinn.
- b) Female: Shahrāzād; the princess prisoner of the jinn.

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MALE ILLNESS, as a result of female betrayal or the alleged feminine sexual power (perceived as so).

The first point concerns the depiction of the characters as the primary place where the representation of the other sex is situated. The depiction of the relationship with the other sex is made tangible through the selection of words, as well as phrases and expressions, that accompany the character as a list of epithets. Moreover, the thematic dimension of otherness emerges in the dialogic sequences in which characters interplay, and for this reason, their actions and dialogues become particularly relevant for the development of the plot. In addition, a separate table (see 2.2, part II) is provided focusing on the vocabulary used to describe sexual intercourse. Additional layers of otherness that concern further elements contributing to the formation of the image of the other, such as cultural otherness (see 3.3, part I), are also scrutinized when

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in this respect, especially concerning the language of manuscript G, which Mahdi (1994, 1:37–51) discusses after having critically edited this text.

they occur within the text, and are incorporated in the evaluation of the relationship with the other sex. The second point of the above structure is the motif of male illness due to female infidelity or alleged feminine sexual power, whose phenomenology is made visible in the physical description of the characters. Moreover, the male characters also verbally express their despair at having been betrayed, unveiling their thoughts in a type of stream of consciousness (see 2.3, part II).

As for the graphical organization of the scrutiny, the comparison between the texts of the printed editions of the AN is facilitated by the fact that the three texts in Arabic are divided into sections and then grouped together in motif-units (I, II, III, IV...), which are sequentially clustered around the two points noted above. Each Arabic text is immediately followed by its respective translation(s) in English – made by Lane (LA), Burton (BU), Lyons and Lyons (LY) and Haddawy (HA). In addition, each motif-unit is equipped with an apparatus of notes which follows both the Arabic texts and the English translations. Finally, chapter III includes a discussion section.

## 2. Linguistic and textual analysis

### 2.1. The characters' description and interplay between them

#### 2.1.1. Male characters: Shāhriyār, Shāhzamān, the queens' lovers, the jinn

##### 2.1.1.1 Shāhriyār

###### I

###### Bulaq

صفحة ٢(١): وكانا له ولدان أحدهما كبير والأخر صغير وكان فارسين بطلين وكان الأكبر افرس من الأصغر وقد ملك البلاد وحكم بالعدل بين العباد واحبّه اهل بلاده ومملكته وكان اسمه الملك شهر باز [...].

English translation: Edward William Lane (1979) – henceforth, LA

[...] And he had two sons; one of whom was a man of mature age; and the other, a youth. Both of these princes were brave horsemen; but especially the elder, who inherited the kingdom of his father, and governed his subjects with such justice that the inhabitants of his country and whole empire loved him. He was called King Shahriyār [...] (1: 2).

###### Calcutta II

صفحة ٢(١): وكانا فارسين بطلين وكان الأكبر افرس من الأصغر وقد ملك البلاد وحكم بالعدل في الرعيّة واحبّوه اهل بلاده ومملكته وكان اسمه الملك شهر يار [...].

English translation: Richard Francis Burton (1897) – henceforth, BU

[...] One in the prime of manhood and the other yet a youth, while both were Knights and Braves, albeit the elder was a doughtier horseman than the younger. So he succeeded to the empire; when he ruled the land and lorded it over his lieges with justice so exemplary that he was beloved by all the peoples of his capital and of his kingdom. His name was King Shahryār [...] (1:2).

English translation: Malcolm Lyons and Ursula Lyons (2008) – henceforth, LY

Although both of them were champion horsemen, the elder was better than his brother; he ruled over the lands, treating his subjects with justice and enjoying the affection of them all. His name was King Shahriyār [...] (1:24).

### Mahdi's edition

صفحات ٥٦-٥٧: وكان الكبير شاهريار فارساً جبار وبطل مغوار لا يصطلى<sup>139</sup> له بنار ولا يخمد له تار و لا يقعد عن اخذ الثار، و قد ملك من البلاد اقاصيها و من العباد نواصيها، و قد داننت له البلاد واطاعت له العباد [...] [واقام هو] في الهند و صين الصين [...].

English translation: Husayn Haddawy (2008) – henceforth, HA

The older, Shahrayar, was towering knight and a daring champion, invincible, energetic, and implacable. His power reached the remotest corners of the land and its people, so that the country was loyal to him, and his subjects obeyed him [...] Shahrayar himself lived and ruled in India and Indochina [...] (5).

### Notes on the Arabic text<sup>140</sup>

#### Bulaq

افرس: فارسين بطلين: Shāhriyār is defined as a brave knight (like his brother), and yet he is “a better horseman than his younger brother”. The comparative of majority *afras*, “the best”, derives from the same root of the word *firāsa*, namely “insight, perception, capability to perceive the internal qualities of human beings”, as well as of *farāsa*, “to be an horseman” (Lane 1968, 2368).

شهرياز: name misspelt, “Shahribāz”, for Shāhriyār.

حکم بالعدل بين العباد: literally, “he governed with justice among the servants of God”. *Ibād* is the plural of *‘abd*. Here the word *‘abd*, which comes from the Quran, means “male slave” – the feminine is rendered as *ama*. *‘Abd* can also refer to every human being regardless of sex, both slave and non-slave, yet all bound to the Creator; the term has

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<sup>139</sup> Both in Bulaq and Mahdi's edition the letter “yā” at the end of a word is always written without dots, therefore looking like an *alif maqṣūra* (restricted alif), which is normally transliterated using the symbol “ā”. Here I always transliterate dotless “yā” at the end of ta word by using “t̄”.

<sup>140</sup> As Mahdi's edition is written in middle Arabic, I choose not to transliterate case endings and, occasionally, also verb endings. Bulaq and Calcutta II also present some spelling mistakes.

different plural forms, such as *‘abīd*, a rare form of feminine that means “slaves”, and *‘ibād*, meaning “servants of God” and, by extension, “mankind” (1935). In particular, the latter has a strong religious connotation – the Muslim concept of the *‘ibāda* (submission to God) derives from the same root *‘ - b - d* – and differs from the term *mamlūk* that indicates a slave owned by another human being.<sup>141</sup> In his *Kitāb al-‘ayn*, al-Khalīl (2003, 3:83) indicates that this word can mean both “a free man” (*insān ḥurr*, *‘abd allah*) and “a male slave” (*al-‘abīd al-mamlūkīna*), and also that the common people agreed on what would distinguish *‘abd* as a free man from *‘abd* as a bondsman. “In early classical usage, it [*‘abd*] means ‘slave,’ irrespective of race or color; by the High Middle Ages” it seems that the term becomes almost exclusively associated with the idea of black slave and, in doing so, undergoes a semantic switch (Lewis 1985, 93). Therefore, *‘abd* was no longer a marker of socio-juridical status, but it was considered an indicator of a specific ethnic group (Meouak 2012, 25–26). Lane (1968, 1935) explains that *‘abd* was used in his time for a “black slave”,<sup>142</sup> while the word *mamlūk*<sup>143</sup> was used for a white slave<sup>144</sup> – the Ottoman slave system had the distinction between black and white slaves, this “two-tier” nature of slavery being inherited by other Arab countries, such as Tunisia, under Ottoman rule (Scaglioni 2020, 121). The

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<sup>141</sup> *Fī man subīya min al-‘arab fī al-jāhiliyya wa-adrakahu al-islām* (The one who was taken prisoner by the Arabs in the period before the advent of Islam and after it), see Ibn Manẓūr (1984, 3:270).

<sup>142</sup> *Ansuba al-‘abd ilā al-ābā’ihī aswād al-jilda min qawm ‘ubud* (The slave owes his status to his fathers; the skin of slaves is black), see al-Jawharī (1865, 1:243).

<sup>143</sup> As regards the institution of the slave armies, namely the mamluks (from the Arabic *mamlūk*, “a man who is owned”), in the Medieval Arab world, see Crone (2003, 74–75). The mamluks, she says, were characterised by alien origins (Arabic, Persian or Turkish) and servant status. The first mamluks from Northern Africa appeared between 800-820, but it was with al-Mu‘taṣim that slave armies became an institution.

<sup>144</sup> There are few exceptions in which the term *mamlūk* is used to refer to black slaves. One example of this is a letter written by the Moroccan Alaouite sultan Mawlāy ‘Ismā‘īl (1672-1727) to the jurists of al-Azhar mosque in Cairo. In this letter, the sultan asks about the legitimacy of the forced enrolment of black people, most of whom were of slave origin while others were free persons, in order to form the mercenary army of ‘Abīd al-Bukhārī, which would protect the Muslim community from its enemies (Botte 2012, 236).

word *mamlūk* is found in the Quran (sura 16, verse 75) as an adjective (“who is owned”), and then has become a noun.

## Calcutta II

فارسين بَطْلِين، افرس من الاصغر: the same as for Bulaq.

حكم بالعدل في الرعيّة: “he ruled with justice over the people”. The word for “people” is الرعيّة, also, “pastured cattle”, from the root r - ‘ - y (to pasture/guard).

شهر يار: “Shahriyār”. This is the spelling to be found in Calcutta II.

## Mahdi’s edition

شاهريار: Mahdi says the name is written *Shāh yār*, or *Shāh riyār*, in manuscript G (Mahdi 2014, 2:34-35).

فارساً جبار: “towering knight”.

وبطل مغوار: “audacious champion”.

لا يصطلى له بنار: one cannot warm himself with his fire, and cannot approach him “because his fire is inflamed with rage [...] especially in fight” (Lane 1968, 1722). This phrase is first found in *Tāj al-luḡha wa-ṣiḥāḥ al-‘arabiyya* [The Crown of the Language and the Correct Arabic]: *wa-fulān lā yuṣṭalā bi-nārihi idhā kān shajā’an lā yuṭāq*, to be referred to someone who is so courageous that no one can cope with him (al-Jawharī 1865, 2:506).

لا يخمد له تار: “his revenge is not extinguished”. *Tār* is *tha’r*.

لا يقعد عن اخذ الثار: “he does not abstain from taking revenge”.

اطاعت له العباد: “his subjects obeyed him”. The Arabic word for “subjects” here is *‘ibād*. الصين الصين: “China”.<sup>145</sup> This is found in manuscript G and in two other manuscripts of the Egyptian branch, whilst the information is missing in Bulaq and Calcutta II. Mahdi indicates that manuscript *tā’*, which also belongs to the Syrian group of manuscripts, has *al-‘ajam* (the non-Arabs, especially the Persians) instead of *Ṣīn al-Ṣīn* to refer to Shāhriyār’s kingdom; likewise, other manuscripts of the Egyptian branch (*ṣad*, *ḍād*, *fā’*, *qāf*) also read *al-‘ajam* (Mahdi 2014, 2:34). In Bulaq and Calcutta II, it is

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<sup>145</sup> It is usually translated simply as China, although the term “China” is repeated twice in the Arabic. Ibn al-Wardī (2008, 131), in his *Kharīdat al-‘ajā’ib wa-farīdat al-gharā’ib* [The Pearl of Wonders and the Uniqueness of Strange Things] defines *Ṣīn al-Ṣīn* in the following way: *ammā Ṣīn al-Ṣīn fa-hiya nihāyat al-‘imāra fī al-mashriq, wa-laysa warā’ illā al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (China of China is the last inhabited land in the East, and there is nothing behind it but the ocean).

Shāh zamān who is the ruler of *Samarqand al-‘ajam* (which is called only *Samarqand* in Mahdi’s version). Interestingly, in Calcutta I it is the opposite, so Shāhriyār (which is spelt here as Shahriyār) governs *Samarqand al-‘ajam* and Shāh zamān (spelt as Shāh zamān) rules over *al-Šīn*. Always in Calcutta I, it is Shāh zamān who is considered brighter than his brother (*aṣḥā dhihnan*), and not the reverse (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:3).

#### Notes on the English translation

##### **Bulaq**

“Who inherited the kingdom of his father”: this is Lane’s understanding of the Arabic text, which literally says “and he was the ruler of the country” (وقد ملك البلاد) without specifying which country it is – and this second translation is the one given by Gabrieli (2006, 1:44) in his Italian translation of the AN based on Bulaq. However, given the fact that Mahdi’s edition explicitly affirms that Shāhriyār is the King of India and China, Lane’s rendition of the passage is probably sound. Moreover, a line before this passage it is said that the father of the two kings rules *bi-jazā’ir al-Hind wa-al-Šīn*, namely over the peninsulas of India and China. Probably, the copyist of the manuscript on which this edition is based jumped a line and did not repeat the name of the two countries that were the dominion of King Shāhriyār. This is in line with the tendency to shorten passages in Bulaq (and Calcutta II).

“And governed his subjects with such justice that the inhabitants of his country and whole empire loved him”: “such” is Lane’s emphasis, it is not to be found in the text (وحكم بالعدل بين العباد واحبه اهل بلاده ومملكته). A plainer translation would be: “He governed with justice and his people and the whole empire loved him”.

##### **Calcutta II**

The interpretation of this passage is slightly different in BU and LY. The former ascribes the possession of the empire (India and China) to the elder brother because he is braver, although this is not explicitly mentioned in the text. Conversely, LY sticks to what the text says, without making any inferences: “he ruled over the lands”. There is no mention here of the inheritance of the kingdom by the elder brother because of his merits. Moreover, in BU the subjects love King Shāhriyār because he is a very just ruler. In LY, instead, there is less emphasis on the people’s affection for the king due to his wise conduct.

### **Mahdi's edition**

The adjectives “energetic” and “implacable” are substituted for the more convoluted periphrasis in Arabic. Mahdi's text explicitly indicates the lands over which Shāhriyār rules, that is *Ṣīn al-Ṣīn*, translated by Haddawy as Indochina.

## **II**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٢(١): ولم يزل الامر مستقيما في بلادهما وكل واحد منهما في مملكته حاكم عادل في رعيه مدة عشرين سنة في غاية البسط والانشراح ولم يزال على هذه الحالة فعند ذلك اشتاق الملك الكبير الى أخيه الصغير [...].

LA:

[...] The administration of their governments was conducted with rectitude, each of them ruling over his subjects with justice during a period of twenty years with the utmost enjoyment and happiness. After this period the elder king felt a strong desire to see his brother [...] (1: 2).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٢(١): ولم يزالا مستمرين في بلادهما وكل واحد في مملكته حاكم عادل في رعيه مدة عشرين سنة في غاية البسط والانشراح ولم يزال على هذه الحالة فعند ذلك اشتاق الملك الكبير الى أخيه الصغير [...].

BU:

These two ceased not to abide in their several kingdoms and the law was even carried out in their dominions; and each ruled his own realm with equity and fair-dealing to his subjects, in extreme solace and enjoyment; and this condition continually endured for a score of years. But at the end of the twentieth twelvemonth the elder king yearned for a sight of his brother and felt he must look upon him once more (1:2).

LY:

For ten years both of them continued to reign justly, enjoying pleasant and untroubled lives until Shahriyār felt a longing to see Shah Zaman [...] (1:24).

### **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٥٧: ولم يزل على هذه الحال عشر سنين. واشتاق الى الملك اخوه شاهريار [...].

HA:

Ten years went by, when one day Shahrayar felt a longing for his brother the king [...] (5).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

ولم يزل الامر مستقيما: “they governed with rectitude”. The word *mustaqīman*, “straight”, indicates the uprightness of the two kings in reigning over their countries.

حاكم عادل في رعيته مدة عشرين سنة: “they governed with justice for twenty years”. The length of time reported in this passage is the same as in Calcutta II and Breslau. There is no indication of the time in Calcutta I.

اشتاق الملك الكبير الى: *ishtāqa ilā*, Shāhriyār longs for his brother.

#### **Calcutta II**

ولم يزالا مستمرين في بلادهم: *lam yazālā mustamirrīna fī bilādihim*, “they continued to rule”. The word *mustaqīman*, to be found in Bulaq, is replaced here by *mustamirrīna*, “continuing”. Neither of the two terms is to be found in Mahdi’s edition – in which, however, the meaning of the corresponding sentence is closer to that given by Calcutta II. Breslau, instead, reads *wa-lam yarā* (*yara* in classical Arabic) *al-istimrār fī bilādihim*, “they continued to rule over their territories” (Habicht 1824, 1:6).<sup>146</sup> Hence, even in this case, the text conveys an idea of continuity of government.

مدة عشرين سنة: the length of time reported in this passage is twenty years, namely the same as in Bulaq and Breslau. There is no indication of the time in Calcutta I.

اشتاق الملك الكبير الى أخيه الصغير: this passage is the same as in Bulaq.

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

ولم يزل على هذه الحال عشر سنين: here the meaning is expressed in a more condensed way than in Bulaq and Calcutta II. The length of time that indicates how many years the two kings ruled peacefully before meeting each other is ten years.

واشتاق الى الملك: the verb *ishtāqa ilā*, “to pine for”, is the same in the three versions.

### Notes on the English translation

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<sup>146</sup> *Lam yarā* (*yara*, in classical Arabic) “he did not see”, is probably an error of the copyist because the verb does not fit the meaning of the sentence. It should be *lam yazal*, as in Bulaq.

## Calcutta II

BU and LY are very different from each other in length and style. BU is much longer and convoluted; meanings are repeated more than once only to stress the same concepts. LY, instead, is simpler and more direct. BU makes use of obsolete words, such as “twelvemonth”.

In LY, the phrase “twenty years” in the Arabic text is translated as “ten years”: the translators probably considered “twenty” to be a mistake of the copyist in the manuscript on which Calcutta II is based and preferred to adopt the number of the years that is found in Mahdi’s version.

## III

### Bulaq

صفحة ٣(١): ففرح اخوه بقدمه ثم خرج اليه ولاقاه وسلم عليه وفرح به غاية الفرح وزين له المدينة وجلس معه يتحدث بانسراح [...].

LA:

Shahriyār, rejoicing at the tidings of his approach, went forth to meet him, saluted him, and welcomed him with the utmost delight. He then ordered that the city should be decorated on the occasion, and sat down to entertain his brother with cheerful conversation [...] (1: 4).

### Calcutta II

صفحة ٢(١): فخرج اليه ولاقاه وسلم عليه وفرح به غاية الفرح وزين له المدينة وجلس معه ويتحدث وينسرح [...].

BU:

[...] And Shahryar came forth to meet him with his Wazirs and Emirs and Lords and Grandees of his realm; and saluted him and joyed with exceeding joy and caused the city to be decorated in his honour (1:4).

LY:

[...] And Shahriyār came out to meet him and greeted him delightedly. The city was adorned with decorations and Shahriyār sat talking happily with him, [...] (1:25).

### Mahdi’s edition

صفحة ٥٧: وخرج الملك الى لقيائهم. فلما وقعت عينه عليهم عانق اخوه وقربه وانزله بقصرٍ من جوار قصره [...].

HA:

When Shahrayar met them, he embraced his brother, showed him favors, and treated him generously. He offered him quarters in a palace adjoining his own [...] (6).

#### Notes on the Arabic text:

##### **Bulaq**

وفرح به غاية الفرح: ففرح اخوه [...]: there are as many as three words in this sentence that belong to the root *f - r - h*, “to be cheerful about something”, conveying King Shāhriyār’s happiness in seeing his younger brother.

وزين له المدينة: “he decorated the city for him”. This phrase is to be found in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

بانشرأح: from *insharaḥa*, “his bosom became dilated [...] with joy” (Lane 1968, 1530).

##### **Calcutta II**

وفرح به غاية الفرح: here the words belonging to the root *f - r - h* are only two. In Bulaq there is probably a repetition due to a copyist’s error.

##### **Mahdi’s edition**

وقعت عينه عليهم، عانق، قرب، انزل: “he suddenly saw him, embraced him, came close to him and accommodated him”. Shāhriyār’s joy is expressed using verbs which are different from those found in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

#### Notes on the English translation

##### **Bulaq**

Before the mentioned passage, there is a long paragraph which is not to be found in Bulaq but is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:4–5) – as Lane (1979, 1:23) explains in note 9. This paragraph entails information about the vizier as a messenger between the two brothers, as well as about his mission. It includes five notes in which Lane (in the section “Notes to the Introduction”) describes in great detail and with examples taken from the *hadith* tradition the act of giving presents on the occasion of paying a visit, the habit of sending letters through a messenger and that of sending forth a deputation, and rules of hospitality and obedience in Arab-Muslim societies.

## Calcutta II<sup>147</sup>

“With his Wazirs and Emirs and Lords and Grandees of his realm”: this is Burton’s translation of a phrase in Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:7). Likewise, before this point Burton inserts in his translation a long paragraph about the vizier’s preparation for his journey to Shāh zamān’s land, which he also takes from Calcutta I (in the same manner as Lane). In this passage, two elements deserve special attention with regard to Burton’s translation choices, i.e., the question of the three days of hospitality and the list of gifts that Shāh zamān prepares for Shāhriyār. As for the first point, Burton (1897, 1:3, note 1) explains in a note that “This three-days term (rest-day, drest-day and departure-day) seems to be an instinct-made rule in hospitality. Among Moslems it is a Sunnat or practice of the Prophet”. Burton, like Lane, also feels the need to provide an explanation for the readers about Arab-Muslim customs with which they might be unfamiliar. The second point concerns the presents that Shāhriyār would send to his brother, among which there are “horses with saddles of gem-encrusted gold; Mamelukes, or white slaves; beautiful handmaids, high-breasted virgins and splendid stuffs and costly” (1897, 1:3). “White slaves” and “high-breasted” are two expressions added by Burton; the latter, in particular, shows the translator’s extravagant tendency to distort the original text by including stereotyped images and motifs. In this way, an imaginary and exotic representation of the Orient enters the narrative text mingling fictional elements with (alleged) non-fictional ones. Very often Burton relies on Calcutta I for his translation; however, he never indicates the passages taken from the first printed edition of the AN, neither in the notes nor anywhere else (Shamma 2014, 65).

## IV

### Bulaq

صفحة ٣(١): فتعجب من ذلك وقال ياخي كنت اراك مصفر اللون والوجه والان قد ردّ اليك لونك فاخبرني بحالك [...] اقسمت عليك بالله ان تخبرني بسبب رد لونك فاعاد عليك جميع ما راه [...] .

LA:

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<sup>147</sup> From this point on, I explicitly indicate when I refer to Lyons and Lyons’ translation of Calcutta II by using the abbreviation LY. Otherwise, my comments on the English text of Calcutta II are to be read as related to Burton’s translation.

[...] He was surprised, and said, O my brother, when I saw thee last, thy countenance was sallow, and now thy colour hath returned to thee: acquaint me with thy state [...] I conjure thee by Allah that thou acquaint me with the cause of the return of thy colour [...] (1:6).

## Calcutta II

صفحات ٣-٤ (١): فقال له اخوه الملك الكبير يا اخي كنت أراك مصفرّ اللون والوجه والآن قد ردّ اليك لونك فاخبرني بحالك [...] قال له اقسمت عليك بالله ألا ما اخبرتني عن ردّ لونك فاخبره جميع ماراة [...].

BU:

[...] King Shahryar turned to his brother and said, “My mind is overcome with wonderment at thy condition. I was desirous to carry thee with me to the chase but I saw thee changed in hue, pale and wan to view, and in sore trouble of mind too. But now Alhamdulillah – glory to God! – I see thy natural colour hath returned to thy face and that thou art again in the best of case. It was my belief that thy sickness came of severance from thy family and friends, and absence from capital and country, so I refrained from troubling thee with further questions. But now I beseech thee to expound to me the cause of thy complaint and thy change of colour, and to explain the reason of thy recovery and the return to the ruddy hue of health which I am wont to view. So speak ought and hide naught!” [...] Said Shahryar, who was much surprised by these words, “Let me hear first what produced thy pallor and thy poor condition.” [...]

Shahryar shook his head, marveling with extreme marvel, and with the fire of wrath flaming up from his heart, he cried, “Indeed, the malice of woman is mighty!” The he took refuge from them with Allah and said, “In very sooth, O my brother, thou hast escaped many an evil by putting thy wife to death, and right excusable were thy wrath and grief for such mishap which never yet befel crowned King like unto thee. By Allah, had the case been mine, I would not have been satisfied without slaying a thousand women and that way madness lies! But now praise be to Allah who hath tempered to thee thy tribulation, and needs must thou acquaint me with that which so suddenly restored to thee complexion and health, and explain to me what causeth this concealment.” [...] “That were but a better reason” quoth Shahryar “for telling me the

whole history, and I conjure thee by Allah not to keep back aught from me” [...] (1:6-7).

LY:

“You were pale, brother,” Shahriyār said, “but now you have got your colour back, so tell me about this” [...] Shahriyār, however, pressed him to do this [...] (1:25).

### Mahdi's edition

**صفحات ٦٠-٢١:** وتميز الملك شاهريار حالة أخيه وما كان فيه وما صار اليه فبقى في قلبه من ذلك. ثم خلا به يوماً من بعض الأيام وقال له يا أخى شاهزمان اريدك تقضى في خاطرى حاجه وتفرج ما بقلبي، واسالك عن شئ تجبني عنه بصحه. [...] قال قد رايتك اول قدومك على وقعودك عندي وانت كلما يمر عليك يوم تنقص في عيني حتى تغير وجهك واستحال لونك وقصرت همتك، ولم تزل على هذه الحاله فضننت ان الذى اصابك لاجل فراقك لاهلك وملكك فامسكت عن سوالي لك وصرت كلما رايتك في نقص وتغيير اكنم عنك ذلك، فلما ان سافرت انا الى الصيد واتيت رايتك قد انصلح حالك ورد لونك اليك، فاشتهدى ان تخبرنى عن هذه الامر وتقول لي ما السبب في تغييرك عندي اول مره وما سبب رجوع لونك اليك، ولا تكتمنى من امرك شيئاً [...] فعجب السلطان من كلام أخيه تعجباً عظيماً وانطلقت في قلبه النيران وقال لا بد تخبرنى بهذا، ولكن هات الساعه وحدتنى السبب الأول .

[...] فلما سمع الملك هذا الحديث هز راسه وتعجب غايه العجب من مكر النساء واستعداد من شرهم وقال يا أخى والله لقد افلحت بقتل زوجتك والرجل، وانت معدور ادا لحقك الهم والوسواس وتغير حالتك، والذى جرى عليك ما اضنه جرى على احداً غيرك، والله لو كنت انا ما كفانى اقتل اقل من مائة امراه او الف امراه او الف امراه وكنت اتجنن واخرج مجنون، والان فالحمد لله الذى سلاك همك وحزنك، فاخبرنى ما سبب الذى سلاك عن همك ورد عليك لونك. [...] فقال لا بد من ذلك. [...] قال الملك وكيف ذلك يا أخى، ما بقيت ارجع عن سماع الحديث [...].

HA:

King Shahrayar noticed his brother's condition, how we used to be and how he had improved, but kept it to himself until he took him aside one day and said, “My brother Shahzaman, I would like you to do something for me, to satisfy a wish, to answer a question truthfully.” [...] “When you first came to stay with me, I noticed that you kept losing weight, day after day, until your looks changed your health deteriorated, and your energy sagged. As you continued like this, I thought that what ailed you was your homesickness for your family and your country, but even though I kept noticing that you were wasting away and looking ill, I refrained from questioning you and hid my feelings from you. Then I went hunting, and when I came back, I found that you

had recovered and had regained your health. Now I want you to tell me everything and to explain the cause of your deterioration and the cause of your subsequent recovery, without hiding anything from me.” [...] The king was greatly astonished at his brother’s reply and, burning with curiosity, said, “You must tell me. For now, at least, explain the first cause.”

[...] When King Shahrayar heard his brother’s explanation, he shook his head, greatly amazed at the deceit of women, and prayed to God to protect him from their wickedness, saying, “Brother, you were fortunate in killing you wife and her lover, who gave you good reason to feel troubled, careworn, and ill. In my opinion, what happened to you has never happened to anyone else. By God, had I been in your place, I would have killed at least a hundred or even a thousand women. I would have been furious; I would have gone mad. Now praise be to God who has delivered you from sorrow and distress. But tell me what has caused you to forget your sorrow and regain your health?” [...] Shahrayar said, “You must.” [...] Shahrayar asked, “How could that be, brother? I insist on hearing your explanation.” (9-10).

#### Notes on the Arabic text

##### **Bulaq**

فتعجب من ذلك: “he was surprised”. The sudden recovery of Shāhzamān causes Shāhriyār’s astonishment.

I should spend a few words on the concept of the *‘ajīb*, “the astonishing”. Chraïbi (2016, 42–50) affirms that the motifs of the *‘ajīb*, namely of the surprising and astonishing (or supposed to be so), and the *a‘jab min*, “more astonishing than”, serve to attract the attention of both the fictitious audience (the recipient of the storytelling within the plot) and the real one. *‘Ajīb* and/or *a‘jab min* can be considered a dramatic technique that creates narrative tension within the tale, and Chraïbi (2016, 47) makes clear that this technique is a mark of later and islamicized versions of the AN because the *‘ajīb* was legitimized by the *hadith* tradition. In some hadiths, in fact, the prophet asks travelers to tell him about incredible things they saw and then states that such stories are to be believed. The *hadith* tradition guarantees the truthfulness – or at least the legitimacy – of the *‘ajīb*.

اقسمت عليك بالله ان تخبرني: “I invoke the blessing of God on you, tell me [...]”.

## Calcutta II

فقال له اخوه الملك الكبير: there is no sense of astonishment as a result of King Shāhzmān's recovery, since there is no use of either *'ajiba* or *ta'ajjaba* in this passage in Calcutta II. This might indicate that this part of the frame story is older (or, at least, less modified) in Calcutta II than in Bulaq and Mahdi's editions, according to Chraïbi (2016, 54–55).

اقسمت عليك بالله ألا ما اخبرتني: "I invoke the blessing of God on you, tell me [...]".

## Mahdi's edition

وتميز الملك شاهريار [...] تكتمنى من امرك شيئاً: the whole paragraph, which includes an explanation of Shāhriyār's feelings towards his brother after having observed the deterioration in his health and the subsequent recovery, is absent both in Bulaq and Calcutta II. Conversely, a very similar paragraph is to be found in Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:12–13).

اريدك تقضى في خاطرى حاجه وتفرج ما بقلبي: "I want you to (help me) put an end to something I have in mind and relieve myself of something I have in my heart". This sentence, pronounced by Shāhriyār is not to be found in Calcutta I.

لاجل فراقك لاهلك وملكك: Shāhriyār attributes the cause of the deterioration in his brother's health to homesickness.

فعجب السلطان من كلام *'ajīb*: here there is the verb *'ajība*.

فلما سمع الملك [...] واخرج مجنون: this passage does not exist either in Bulaq or Calcutta II. It is, however, to be found in a very similar way in Calcutta I, *ta'ajjaba ghāyat al-'ajab*, "and he was very astonished" (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:14), after having heard the story of the betrayal of King Shāhzmān's wife. The use of *ta'ajjaba* is in line with what has been said before with regard to the *'ajīb* technique.

مكر النساء واستعداد من شرهم: women bring *makr*, "tickery", and *sharr*, "evil". In Calcutta I, this sentence reads *inna makr al-nisā' li-'azīm* (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:14), in the same way as a sentence to be found in another section of the frame story – *inna kaydakunna 'azīm* (Mahdi 2014, 1:64).

وانت معدور: *wa-anta ma'dūr (ma'dhūr)*, "you are excusable".

الوسواس: “anxiety” but also “a talk destitute of good”, “an evil idea”, “what deprives the mind of reason”, and a name of the devil which occurs in the last sura of the Quran as *al-waswās al-khannās*, “the retreating whisperer” (Lane 1968, 2940–41).

اتجنن واخرج مجنون: the idea of losing one’s own mind is repeated twice in *atajannanu* and *majnūn*, both meaning “to be mad”.

والان فالحمد لله الذى سلاك همك وحرزتك: “God who relieves you of grief and sorrow”. There are two other religious formulae before in the text (واستعداد من شرهم ، والله لو كنت انا).

وقال لا بد تخبرنى بهذا: here the phrase *aqsamtu ‘alayka bi-allah* is absent. There is, instead, *lā budda*, “it is necessary”, which is a more simplified – and, therefore, perhaps a more ancient – and a less islamicised expression. This might indicate a greater antiquity of this part of the text in Mahdi’s edition than in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

### Notes on the English translation

#### **Calcutta II**

Burton translates this passage from Calcutta I and not from Calcutta II, which is the reason why it is very long, as well as very similar to Mahdi’s. Some emphasis is put on the expression “So speak ought and hide naught”, but overall, the translation is faithful to the original.

## V

#### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣(١): فقال شهر ياز لآخيه شاه رمان مرادى ان انظر بعينى [...].

LA:

“I would see this, said Shahriyār, with my own eye” [...] (1:6).

#### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٤(١): فقال شهر يار لآخيه شاه رمان مُرادى ان انظر بعينى [...].

BU:

When King Shahryar heard this he waxed wroth with exceeding wrath, and rage was like to strangle him; but presently he recovered himself and said, “O my brother, I would not give thee the lie in this mater, but I cannot credit it till I see it with mine own eyes” (1: 8).

LY:

“I want to see this with my own eyes,” said Shahriyar” [...] (1:26).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

**صفحة ٦١:** فلما سمع الملك شاهريار كلام أخيه وما جرا له غضب غضبا شديدا حتى كاد ان يتقطر دما. تم قال يا اخي انا ما اصدقك فيما تقول الا ان نظرت بعيني. وزاد به الغيظ.

HA:

When King Shahrayar heard what his brother said and found out what had happened to him, he was furious, and his blood boiled. He said, “Brother, I can’t believe what you say unless I see it with my own eyes” (10).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

غضب غضبا شديدا، يتقطر دما، زاد به الغيظ: “he became extremely angry”, “his blood boiled”, “his anger grew”. These three clauses that describe anger as an emotional state mounting in the king after hearing the account of his wife’s betrayal are to be found only in Mahdi’s edition. This climax helps one anticipate what comes next and prepares the audience/reader<sup>148</sup> for Shāhriyār’s subsequent overreaction when seeing the scene of the betrayal. Conversely, in Bulaq and Calcutta II there is no trace of the word “angry”, and the king replies to what Shāhzmān tells him by simply declaring that he wants to see it with his own eyes. It seems that Bulaq and Calcutta II offer a plainer and much simpler construction of this scene – and, therefore, probably an older one – that can be labelled as “sentiment-free”, namely devoid of any psychological thickness. Likewise, with regard to the scene when Shāhzmān discovers his wife with

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<sup>148</sup> From this point on, I use only the term “reader” as the printed editions of the AN are written texts read silently and based on other types of written texts, namely manuscripts. However, given the fact that the stories of the collection were also recited for a long time – in different forms – oral elements are to be found in the various versions of the AN. Manuscript G clearly maintains the formulas with which the storyteller presents himself and switches from different narrative levels, and that Mahdi has included in his critical edition (Ott 2003). Leaving aside the still open discussion on the possible oral origin of the AN, oral traces are evidently preserved in the written versions of the collection; for this reason, talking about “audience” and “reader” at the same time may be appropriate here.

another man, the king reacts with anger only in Mahdi's edition. On the contrary, in Bulaq and Calcutta II the term "angry" and/or one of its synonyms are not used, but a more "visual" and material metaphor is given, "the world turned dark for him" (see below in Shāhzamān, III).

#### Notes on the English translation

##### **Calcutta II**

As the whole passage is absent in Calcutta II, Burton possibly translates it from Calcutta I. "And rage was like to strangle him" is his rendition of *kāda an yamūta min-al-ghaḍab*, "he nearly died from anger".

## VI

##### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣(١): فلما رأى الملك شهريار ذلك الامر طار عقله من رأسه وقال لآخيه شاهزمان قم بنا نساغر الى حال سبيلنا وليس لنا حاجة بالملك حتى ننظر هل جرى لاحد مثلنا أولا فيكون موتنا خيرا من حياتنا [...].

LA:

When King Shahriyār beheld this occurrence, reason fled from his head, and he said to his brother Shāh-Zemān, Arise, and let us travel wither we please, and renounce the regal state, until we see whether such a calamity as this have befallen any other person like unto us; and if not, our death will be preferable to our life (1: 7).

##### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٤(١): فلما رأى الملك شهريار ذلك الامر طار عقله من راسه وقال لآخيه شاهزمان قم بنا نساغر على حالنا ولا لنا حاجة بالملك حتى ننظر احداً جرى له مثلنا والا موتنا خير من حياتنا [...].

BU:

When King Shahryar saw this infamy of his wife and concubines he became as one distraught and he cried out, "Only in utter solitude can man be safe from the doings of this vile world!" By Allah, life is naught but one great wrong." Presently he added, "Do not thwart me, O my brother, in what I propose;" and the other answered, "I will not." So he said, "Let us up as we are and forthright depart hence, for we have no concern with Kingship, and let us overwander Allah's earth, worshipping the Almighty

till we find some one to whom the like calamity hath happened; and if we find none then will death be more welcome to us than life” (1:8-9).

LY:

Shahriyar was beside himself and told his brother: “Come, let us leave at once. Until we can find someone else to whom the same kind of thing happens, we have no need of a kingdom, and otherwise we would be better dead” (1:26).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

صفحات ٦٢-٦٣: ولما راء السلطان شاهريار ما جرى من زوجته وجواره خرج من عقله وقال "ما سلم احداً من هذا الدنيا، هذا يجري في قصرى وملكى، تباً للدنيا وللدهر، ما هدى الا مصيبة عظيمة". تم اقبل على أخيه وقال تريد تطو عنى على ما افعل. [قال نعم.] قال له قم ندع ملكنا ونسيح في حب الله تعالى ونهج على وجوهنا، فان وجدنا من هو مصيبته اعظم منا رجعنا، والا نحن نخترق البلاد ولا حاجة لنا بالملك.

HA:

When King Shahrayar saw the spectacle of his wife and the slave girls, he went out of his mind, and when he and his brother came down from upstairs, he said, “No one is safe in this world. Such doings are going on in my kingdom, and in my very palace. Perish the world and perish life! This is a great calamity, indeed.” Then he turned to his brother and asked, “Would you like to follow me in what I shall do?” Shahzaman answered, “Yes. I will.” Shahrayar said, “Let us leave our royal state and roam the world for the love of the Supreme Lord. If we should find one whose misfortune is greater than ours, we shall return. Otherwise, we shall continue to journey through the land, without need for the trappings of royalty” (11).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

طار عقله : “his reason fled”.

فيكون موتنا خيرا من حياتنا : “and our death will be better than our life”. If they do not succeed in their mission, the kings will not bear the shame and would prefer to die.

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

تباً للدنيا وللدهر : “perish the world and (this) era”.

نسيح في حب الله تعالى : “we have faith in the love of God the almighty”. In Mahdi’s edition one comes across many religious formulas, as previously mentioned.

والا نحن نخترق البلاد ولا حاجة لنا بالملك “we will continue our journey and have no need to come back”. This solution seems to be gentler than that suggested by Bulaq and Calcutta II. If the two kings fail to find someone whose misfortune is greater than their own, they will not return home, but they will not pay with their life for their unsuccessful attempt.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Calcutta II**

This passage is taken, as said, from Calcutta I. The word “infamy” is Burton’s choice for *mā jarā*, “what happened” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:17), which is much less colorful and negative than the term used by Burton. Likewise, the sentence “Only in utter solitude can man be safe from the doings of this vile world!” can be more plainly translated as “no one is safe from the affliction of this world, things like this happen everywhere” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:17–18).

## VII

#### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٤ (١): فقالا لها بالله عليك ان تسامحينا من هذا الامر [...] فمن خوفهما قال الملك شهريار لآخيه الملك شاهرمان يا اخي افعل ما امرتك به فقال لا افعل حتى تفعل انت قبلي واخذا يتغامزان على نيكها [...] فلما سمعا منها هذا الكلام تعجبا غاية التعجب وقالوا لبعضهما اذا كان هذا عفريت وجرى له اعظم مما جرى لنا فهذا شيء يسلينا [...].

LA:

They answered her, We conjure thee by Allah that thou excuse us in this matter [...] So, being afraid, they came down to her; [...] When the two Kings heard these words from her lips, they were struck with the utmost astonishment, and said, one to the other, If this is an ‘Efreet, and a greater calamity hath happened unto him than that which hath befallen us, this is a circumstance that should console us: [...] (1:9).

#### **Calcutta II**

صفحات ٥-٦ (١): فقالا لها بالله عليك اعني عنا من هذا الامر [...] فمن خوفه قال الملك شهريار لآخيه الملك شاهرمان يا اخي افعل ما امرتك به فقال لم افعل افعل انت قبلي واخذا يتغامزان على نيكها [...] فلما سمعا

الملكان منها هذا الكلام تعجبا غاية العجب وقال بعضهما بعضاً اذا كان هذا عفريتاً وجرى له اعظم مما جرى علينا وهذا شيء لم يجر لاحد [...].

BU:

They were in a terrible fright when they found that she had seen them and answered her in the same manner, "Allah upon thee and by thy modesty, O lady, excuse us from coming down!" [...] They said to her, "Our lady, we conjure thee by Allah, let us off this work, for we are fugitives from such and in extreme dread and terror of this thy husband. How then can we do in such a way as thou desirest?" [...] Whereupon out of fear King Shahryar said to King Shah Zaman, "O my brother, do thou what she biddeth thee do;" but he replied, "I will not do it till thou do it before I do." And they began disputing and demurring [...] Hearing these words they marvelled with exceeding marvel [...] So they fared forth saying either to other, "Allah! Allah!" and, "There be no Majesty and there be no Might save in Allah, the Glorious, the Great; and with Him we seek refuge from women's malice and sleight, for of a truth it hath no mate in might. Consider, O my brother, the ways of this marvellous lady with and Ifrit who is so much more powerful than we are. Now since there hath happened to him a greater mishap than that which befel us and which should bear us abundant consolation, so return we to our countries and capitals, and let us decide never to intermarry with womankind and presently we will show them what will be our action" [...] (1:10-12).

LY:

"For God's sake, don't make us do this," they told her, [...] Shahriyar said fearfully to his brother: "Do as she says." But Shah Zaman refused, saying: "You do it first." They started gesturing to each other about this [...] When the two kings heard this, they were filled with astonishment and said to each other: "Jinni though he may be, what has happened to him is worse than what happened to us and it is not something that anyone else has experienced" [...]. (1:27-28).

### **Mahdi's edition**

**صفحات ٦٤-٦٥:** فلما عرفوا انها راتهم خافوا وتضرعوا وتوسلوا لها برفع السما ان تعفيهم من النزول. [...] فاشاروا اليها "وهادى الذى راقده هو عدو الانس، فبالله دعينا". فقالا لها يا سيدتنا بالله عليكى لا تفعلنى، ونحن الساعه في اشد الخوف من هذا العفريت والفرع، فاعفينا من هذه الامر. [...] فلما سمع الملكان شاهريار

وشاهزمان كلام الصبييه تعجبوا عجباً عظيماً ومالوا من الطرب وقالوا الله الله، لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلى العظيم، "ان كيدكن عظيم".

[...] واقبل شاهريار على أخيه وقال له يا اخى شاهزمان، انظر الى هذه المصبيه، هذا والله اعظم من مصيبتنا، هذا جنى وخطف صبييه ليلة عرسها وجعلها في صندوقه الزجاج وقفل عليها بالاربع اقفال واسكنها في وسط البحار، زعم انه يصونها من القضاء والقدر، وهادى قد رايت انها جامعت تمانيه وتسعين رجلاً وانا وانت تمام المايه، فارجع بنا يا اخى الى ملكنا ومدننا و نحن ما بقينا نتزوج بالمرأة قط، واما انا فسوف أريك ما اصنع [...].

HA:

When they realized that she had seen them, they were frightened, and they begged her and implored her, in the name of the Creator of the heavens, to excuse them from climbing down. [...] They motioned to her, saying, "This sleeping demon is the enemy of mankind. For God's sake, leave us alone" [...] They replied, "For God's sake, mistress, don't do this to us, for at this moment we feel nothing but dismay and fear of this demon. Please, excuse, us." [...] When Shahrayar and Shahzaman heard what the young woman said, they were greatly amazed, danced with joy, and said, "O God, O God! There is no power and no strength, save in God the Almighty, the Magnificent. 'Great is women's cunning.'" [...] Then Shahrayar turned to his brother and said, "My brother Shahzaman, look at this sorry plight. By God, it is worse than ours. This is no less than a demon who has carried a young woman away on her wedding night, imprisoned her in a glass chest, locked her up with four locks, and kept her in the middle of the sea, thinking that he could guard her from what God had foreordained, and you saw how she has managed to sleep with ninety-eight men, and added the two of us to make a hundred. Brother, let us go back to our kingdoms and our cities, never to marry a woman again. As for myself, I shall show you what I will do" [...]. (12-13).

Notes on the Arabic text

### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

these two phrases testify to the brothers' great fear of the *'ifrit*, and presumably of the woman altogether. In Calcutta II, the first phrase is slightly different but maintains the same meaning, بالله عليك اعني عنا من هذا الامر، بالله عليك اعني ان تسامحينا من هذا الامر. فعل ما امرتك به فقال لا افعل حتى تفعل انت قبلى: "you go first", "no, you". The two kings are so scared that they cannot agree on whom should be the first to lie with the woman.

تعجبا غاية التعجب: *ta 'ajjabā ghāyat al-ta 'ajjub*, “they were greatly astonished”. This is another example of the use of the *'ajīb* technique, as previously mentioned.

عفريت: the *'ifrīt* is a type of jinn, a creature made of fire by God. In the “Notes to the Introduction” of his translation, Lane (1979, 26–33) writes a long comment on the different types of beings which are neither human nor angels, yet they are intelligent creatures, namely the jinns. He clarifies that the species of jinns are five, the *'ifrīt* being the second most powerful of them.

فهذا شيء يسلينا: *yusallīnā*, “and this thing frees us from grief”. In Calcutta II the sentence is slightly different: هذا شيء لم يجر لاحد, *lam yajri li-aḥad*, “this thing has never happened to anyone else”. The version in Bulaq adds a sense of relief to this sentence, as the kings are aware that the jinn’s misfortune is greater than theirs, and this comforts them somehow. In Calcutta II, instead, the idea of consolation is implied in the meaning of this sentence.

### **Mahdi’ edition**

وتضرعوا وتوسلوا لها برفع السما ان تعفيهم: “they became submissive and implored her in the name of God who created the heavens”. The same plea to God, *rāfi ' al-samā*, is put in the mouth of Shahrāzād a few lines later in the same passage.

فيالله دعينا [...] يا سيدتنا بالله both sentences entail an invocation to God. Here the woman imprisoned by the jinn is invoked as “our lady”, *sayyidatunā*. Further on in the same passage, she is addressed as *ṣabiyya*, namely “young female”, usually indicating she who is not married yet. *'Aduw al-ins*, “the enemy of the human beings”, is an expression that is found only in this version.

ونحن الساعه في اشد الخوف: “now we are very frightened” (by the *'ifrīt*). This passage conveys a strong sense of fear by the two brothers.

تعجبوا عجباً عظيماً ومالوا من الطرب: *ta 'ajjabū 'ajaban 'aẓīman*, “they were greatly astonished”, is coupled with *mālū min al-ṭarab*, “they became affected with emotion”. The word *ṭarab* indicates an intense emotion/excitement due to either joy or grief. This is another example of the use of the dramatic technique of the *'ajīb*.

وقالوا الله الله، لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم، ان كيدكن عظيم: “no power and strength but in God, their guile is great”. The second part of the sentence is a Quranic quote from the sura of Joseph (sura 12, verse 28) that establishes a comparison between Shāhriyār and the religious character of Joseph who, having been tempted by a woman (Zulaykhā),

rejects all of her advances (Denaro 2015, 40). The word *kayd* means “deceit, stratagem, trick”. While the term *makr*, “trickery” is more mischievous (one tries to conceal his/her evil acting by pretending to be the opposite), the *kayd* is clearly recognizable (Lane 1968, 2639).

زعم انه يصونها من القضاء والقدر: “he thought he could be preserved from that which has already been decided and his destiny”. *Al-qadā’ wa-al-qadar* is “the divine decree and the predestination/divine power”, according to Islam and, specifically, Sunnism.

نحن ما بقينا نتزوج بالمرأة قط،: “we should never marry a woman (*imrā*) again”.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

Lane cuts short the passage as soon as the text comes closer to the sexual request of the boxed woman and the subsequent hesitation of the two men.

#### **Calcutta II**

“They were in a terrible fright”: this is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:20).

“Allah upon thee and by thy modesty, O lady, excuse us from coming down!” [...]

They said to her, “Our lady, we conjure thee by Allah, let us off this work, for we are fugitives from such and in extreme dread and terror of this thy husband. How then can we do in such a way as thou desirest?”: this is also taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:20–21). The adjectives “extreme” and “terrible” are Burton’s addition, in line with his tendency to exaggerate in order to impress the reader.

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

“This is no less than a demon [...]”: “no less than” is inserted by Haddawy. The Arabic text says “this is a demon”.

## VIII

#### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٤(١): ورجعا الى مدينة الملك شهر باز ودخلا قصره ثم انه رمى عنق زوجته وكذلك اعناق الجوارى والعبيد وصار الملك شهر باز كلما يأخذ بنتا بكرا يزيل بكارتها ويقتلها من ليلتها ولم يزل على ذلك مدة ثلاث سنوات فضجت الناس وهربت بناتها ولم يبق في تلك المدينة بنت تتحمل الوطئ ثم ان الملك امر الوزير ان يأتيه ببنت على جرى عادته فخرج الوزير وفتش فلم يجد بنتا فتوجه الى منزله وهو غضبان مقهور خائف على نفسه من الملك [...].

LA:

As soon as they had entered the palace, Shahriyār caused his wife to be beheaded, and in like manner the women and black slaves; and thenceforth he made it his regular custom, every time that he took a virgin to his bed, to kill her at the expiration of the night. Thus, he continued to do during a period of three years; and the people raised an outcry against him, and fled with their daughters, and there remained not a virgin in the city of a sufficient age of marriage. Such was the case when the King ordered the Wezeer to bring him a virgin according to his customs; and the Wezeer went forth and searched, and found none; and he went back to his house enraged and vexed, fearing that the King might do to him (1:9-10).

## Calcutta II

صفحة ٦ (١): ورجعا الى مدينة الملك شهريار فدخل قصره ورمى عنق زوجته والجواري والعبيد وكان الملك شهريار كل ليلة يأخذ بنتا بكرا يأخذ وجهها ثم يقتلها مدة ثلث سنوات فضجّ الناس وهربوا ببنااتهم ولم يُبق في تلك المدينة بنتا تتحمل الوطي ثم ان الملك امر الوزير ان يأتيه ببنتٍ على جري عادته فخرج الوزير وفتش فلم يجد بنتا فتوجه الى منزله وهو مغبون مقهور خائف على نفسه من الملك [...].

BU:

Thereupon they rode back to the tents of King Shahryar, which they reached on the morning of the third day; and, having mustered the Wazirs and Emirs, the Chamberlains and high officials, he gave a robe of honour to his Viceroy and issued orders for an immediate return to the city. There he sat him upon his throne and sending for the Chief Minister, the father of the two damsels who (Inshallah!) will presently be mentioned, he said, "I command thee to take my wife and smite her to death; for she hath broken her plight and her faith." So he carried her to the place of execution and did her die. Then King Shahryar took brand in hand and repairing to the Serraglio slew all the concubines and their Mamelukes. He also swore himself by a binding oath that whatever wife he married he would abate her virginity at night and slay her next morning to make sure of his honour: "for," said he, "there never was nor is there one chaste woman upon the face of earth." Then Shah Zaman prayed for permission to fare homewards; and he went forth equipped and escorted and travelled till he reached his own country. Meanwhile Shahryar commanded his Wazir to bring him the bride of the night that he might go to her; so he produced a most beautiful girl, the daughter of one

of the Emirs and the King went unto her at eventide and when morning dawned he bade his Minister strike off her head; and the Wazir did accordingly for fear of the Sultan. On this wise he continued for the space of three years; marrying a maiden every night and killing her the next morning, till folk raised an outcry against him and cursed him, praying Allah utterly to destroy him and his rule; and the women made an uproar and mothers wept and parents fled with their daughters till there remained not in the city a young person of a sufficient age for marriage. Presently the King ordered his Chief Wazir, the same who was charged with the executions, to bring him a virgin as was his wont; and the Minister went forth and searched and found none; so he returned home in sorrow and anxiety fearing for his life from the King (1:11-12-13).

LY:

They left the girl straight away and went back to Shahriyar's city, where they entered the palace and cut off the heads of the queen, the slave girls and the slaves. Every night for the next three years, Shahriyar would take a virgin, deflower her and then kill her. This led to unrest among the citizens; they fled away with their daughters until there were no nubile girls left in the city. Then, when the vizier was ordered to bring the king a girl as usual, he searched but could not find a single one, and had to go home empty-handed, dejected and afraid of what the king might do to him (1: 28).

### **Mahdi's edition**

**صفحات ٦٥ - ٦٦:** و امر بالدخول الى المدينة فدخلوا وطلع الى قصره و امر وزيره الأكبر - أبو الجاريتين دينارزاد وشهرزاد الاتى ذكرهما - وقال له خذ هدى زوجتى واقتلها. تم دخل اليها وربطها واعطاها الى الوزير فخرج بها وقتلها. و اخذ الملك شاهريار سيفه وسله ودخل الى قصره ومقاصيره وقتل كل جارية عنده وغير بدالهم وآلا على نفسه ان لا يتزوج قط الا ليلة واحدة ويصبح يقتلها حتى يسلم من شرها ومكرها، وقال "ما على وجه الأرض امرأة حرة قط ابدا" [...]. وجلس شاهريار [على سريرته] و امر وزيره - أبو الجاريتين - ان يزوجه بواحدة من بنات الامر. فخطب له واحدة من بنات الامرا ودخل عليها شاهريار وقضى شغله منها. فلما اصبح الصباح امر الوزير بقتلها. تم اخذ بنتاً غيرها من بنات اجناده تلك الليلة وجامعها واصبح امر الوزير بقتلها، فما قدر يخالفه فقتلها. تم اخذ تالت ليلة بنتاً من بعض تجار المدينة ونام معها الى الصباح وامره ان يقتلها فقتلها. ولم يزل الملك شاهريار ياخذ كل ليلة بنتاً من أولاد التجار وبنات العامه وبيات معهم ويصبح يقتلهم حتى فنيت البنات وتباكت الأمهات وضجت النسوان والابا والوالدات وصاروا يدعوا على الملك بالافات وشكوه الى خالق السماوات ويستغيثوا لسماع الأصوات ومجيب الدعوات.

HA:

Then at his command everyone returned to the city, and he went to his own palace and ordered his chief vizier, the father of the two girls Shahrazad and Dinazard, who will be mentioned below, and said to him, “Take that wife of mine and put her to death.” Then Shahrayar went to her himself, bound her, and handed her over to the vizier, who took her out and put her to death. Then King Shahrayar grabbed his sword, brandished it, and, entering the palace chambers, killed every one of his slave-girls and replaced them with others. He then swore to marry for one night only and kill the woman the next morning, in order to save himself from the wickedness and cunning of women, saying, “There is not a single chaste woman anywhere on the entire face of the earth.” [...] Shahrayar sat on his throne and ordered his vizier, the father of the two girls, to find him a wife from among the princes’ daughters. The vizier found him one, and he slept with her and was done with her, and the next morning he ordered the vizier to put her to death. That very night he took one of his army officers’ daughters, slept with her, and the next morning ordered the vizier to put her to death. The vizier, who could not disobey him, put her to death. The third night he took one of the merchant’s daughters, slept with her till the morning, then ordered his vizier to put her to death, and the vizier did so. It became King Shahrayar’s custom to take every night the daughter of a merchant or a commoner, spend the night with her, then have her put to death the next morning. He continued to do this until all the girls perished, their mothers mourned, and there arose a clamor among the fathers and mothers, who called the plague upon his head, complained to the Creator of the heavens, and called for help on Him who hears and answers prayers (14).

Notes on the Arabic text:

**Bulaq**

رمى عنق زوجته وكذلك اعناق الجوارى والعبيد: this is a peculiar expression, “he threw the neck of his wife, as well as of the female slaves and the male ones”. *Jawārī* is the plural of *jāriyya*, the present participle of the verb *jarā*, which means “to move smoothly”, “to run”. *Jāriyya* is a young woman because she can move fast/she can run, and is the

equivalent of *ghulām*,<sup>149</sup> “he whose mustache grew forth” (*al-ṭārru shāribuhu*) (al-Muṭarrizī 1979, 1:141). However, *jāriyya* and *ghulām* commonly means “female slave” and “male slave” respectively (*yusta ‘ārāni li-l-‘abd wa-al-ama*) (1979, 2:111). يزيل بكارتها ويقتلها: “he cancelled her virginity and killed her”. The term *bikr*, “virgin”, is the opposite of *thayyib*, “deflowered”.

مدة ثلاث سنوات: “three years passed” and [...]. This number is to be found only in the manuscripts of the Egyptian branch (ms *sīn, ṣād, dād, fā*), as well as in the first printed edition of Bulaq (*qāf*) (Mahdi 2014, 2:39).

ضجت الناس وهربت بناتها: “the people cried and fled with their daughters”. In Bulaq and Calcutta II people decide to flee, while in Mahdi’s edition this detail is not found.

### **Calcutta II**

See Bulaq.

يأخذ وجهها ثم يقتلها: “he took her face and killed her”.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

أبو الجاريتين دينارزاد وشهرزاد الاتى ذكرهما: the vizier is depicted as “the father of the two young girls, Dīnārzād and Shahrāzād, who have been mentioned earlier”. Considering the high status of the two women as the daughters of the vizier, in this passage the term *jāriyya* probably means “young female”, instead of “female slave”, as previously indicated. However, it is also possible that *jāriyya* recalls here the ancient role of Dīnārzād as is found in both the *Fihrist* and the *Murūj al-dhahab* (see 2.2, part II). The names of the vizier’s daughters appear for the first time at the beginning of the frame story (Mahdi 2014, 1:57).

واخذ الملك شاهر يار سيفه: “the king took his sword”. This detail is mentioned in this version of the frame story, as well as in Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:24) and Breslau (Habicht 1824, 1:14), and explicitly indicates that the king executes his female slaves himself. In the other versions, that is Bulaq and Calcutta II, it is not clear if Shāhriyār

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<sup>149</sup> “It is also likely that converted Persians introduced the idea of *ghilmān* (sing. *ghulām*) into the Muslim military. The word originally meant “page”. In the Umayyad period they were largely used for menial tasks, supplying water, looking after equipment, rather than as front-line soldiers. However, *ghilmān* were occasionally armed and sent into battle [...]” (Kennedy 2001, 36). Mernissi (2001, 140) observes that the term *ghulām* “carries clear homosexual connotations”.

kills them with his hands or orders them to be put to death – as the king does with his wife in Calcutta I, Breslau and Mahdi’s edition.

وقتل كل جارية: the king kills his female-slaves only, unlike Bulaq and Calcutta II in which he executes both male and female bondservants (*‘abīd/jawārī*).

وآلا على نفسه ان لا يتزوج قط الا ليلة واحدة ويصبح يقتلها حتى يسلم من شرها ومكرها for one night and then kill my bride so that I’ll be free from her malice (*sharr*) and her trickery (*makr*)”. This is a promise Shāhriyār makes to himself, and which is absent in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

ما على وجه الأرض امرأة حرة قط ابدا: “there is no noble woman on the earth”. *Ḥurra* here means “noble”, “gentle” – i.e., *karīma* and *‘aqīla*, see al-Zabīdī’s *Tāj al-‘arūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs* [The Bride's Crown from the Pearls of the Dictionary] (1965, 1:581). فما قدر يخالفه: “he could not contradict him”. This sentence indicates that the vizier tries to make the king desist from his dramatic conduct. This passage is to be found only in Mahdi’s edition.

تم اخذ تالت ليلة: the number three is to be found only in Mahdi’s edition.

وصاروا يدعوا على الملك بالافات وشكوه الى خالق السماوات ويستغيتوا لسامع الأصوات ومجيب الدعوات: “people called curses down on the king and prayed to God to listen to their voices”. The curses upon the king and the invocations to the piety of God are unique to this edition of the frame story.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

Lane (1979, 1:35, note 28) wonders whether Shāhriyār’s cruelty is only a narrative construct. He says that, although the frame story might seem to be just a fictional story, there have been acts of “equal cruelty” among the Arab princes. He describes an episode taken from the *History of Egypt* by al-Ṣuyūṭī (d.1505), in which the caliph of Egypt al-Zāhir orders the killing of thousands of female slaves.

#### **Calcutta II**

The translation of this passage is based on Calcutta I. It is quite faithful to the original, except for the following examples. Firstly, in Calcutta II the names of the viziers’ daughters are not mentioned – “two damsels who (Inshallah!) will presently be mentioned” –, yet they are in Calcutta I. Secondly, the Mamelukes do not appear in

Calcutta I – “slew all the concubines and their Mamelukes” – , whilst they do in Calcutta II (*al-‘abīd*) and in Bulaq . As regards this second example, Breslau, instead, offers two terms both meaning “concubines”, namely *al-jawār*, spelt without the final *ī*, and *al-sarārī* (Habicht 1824, 1:14).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

“Who will be mentioned below”: the literal translation is “who we already mentioned”, because the names of the vizier’s daughters were already mentioned at the very beginning of the frame story (Mahdi 2014, 1:57).

## **IX**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦٠ (١): [...] فلما رآه فرح وقال اتيت بحاجتى [...]

LA:

[...] Who, when he saw him, was rejoiced, and said, Hast thou brought me what I desired? (1:14).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ١٠ (١): [...] فلما رآه فرح وقال اتيت بحاجتى [...]

BU:

The King wondered with exceeding wonder; for he had made an especial exception of the Wazir’s daughter, and said to him, “O most faithful of Counsellors, how is this? Thou wettest that I have sworn by the Raiser of the Heavens that after this night I shall say to thee on the morrow’s morning: – Take her and slay her! And, if thou slay her not, I will slay thee and her stead without fail.” “Allah guide thee to glory and lengthen thy life, O king of the Age,” answered the Wazir, “’tis she who hath so determined: all this have I told her and more; but she will not hearken to me, and she persisteth in passing this coming night with the King’s Highness.” So Shahriyar rejoiced greatly and said, “Tis well; go get her ready and this night bring her to me” (1: 21).

LY:

[...] who was pleased to see him and said: ‘Have you brought what I want?’ (1:31).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

صفحة ٧١: فتعجب الملك وقال أيها الوزير وكيف سمحت بابنتك لي، وأنا والله وحق رافع السما ما اصبح أقول لك اقتلها، وان لم تقتلها والا قتلتك. فقال يا مولانا السلطان هكذا عرفت وأوضحت لها، ما قبلت و ارادت الليلة تكون عندك ففرح الملك وقال له انزل اصلح امرها وايتيني بها اول الليل.

HA:

The king was astonished and said to him, “Vizier, how is it that you have found it possible to give me your daughter, knowing that I will, by God, the Creator of heaven, ask you to put her to death too?” He replied, “My King and Lord, I have told her everything and explained all this to her, but she refuses and insists on being with you tonight.” The king was delighted and said, “Go to her, prepare her, and bring her to me early in the evening” (20).

#### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

فرح : *fariḥa*, “he was happy”.

بحاجتى : “want, need, necessity”, an “object of want/need/business” (Lane 1968, 663).

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

فتعجب : this is another example of the dramatic technique of the *‘ajīb*.

والله وحق رافع السما : “by God the creator of the heaven”. In this passage, the invocation to God reinforces the sense that Shāhriyār’s actions are guided by constraint. The king is forced to do what he does by something inside him which the text, through this invocation, seems to bring back to a divine, inevitable destiny.

ارادت الليلة تكون عندك : *arādat*, “she wanted”. Shahrāzād makes her own decision to be married to the king.

فرح : *fariḥa*, “he was happy”.

#### Notes on the English translation

#### **Bulaq**

“Desired”: “Object of need/business” seems to be a more suitable translation for *ḥāja*. What the king does with the virgins has nothing to do with a dimension of intimate desire, nor can his behaviour resemble a form of love. Shāhriyār’s tragic plan is carefully designed ahead of time, as he says to his brother when they leave the boxed woman. *Hāja* is, therefore, an irrepressible (and sick) need that cannot be pushed back.

## Calcutta II

Burton's translation is, once again, based on Calcutta I. It is quite a literal translation, except for the use of old-fashioned words such as "slay" and "hearken".

"not hearken to me, and she persisteth": *lām tamna* ' , *lām tarja* ' , *arādat an takūna ma'aka hādhihi al-layla*, literally, "she did not take a step back, she wants to be with you tonight" (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:40).<sup>150</sup>

## X

### Bulaq

صفحة ٦ (١): فلما سمع الملك ذلك الكلام وكان به قلق فرح بسماع الحديث [...].

LA:

And the King, hearing these words, and being restless, was pleased with the idea of listening to the story [...] (1: 14).

## Calcutta II

صفحة ١٠ (١): فلما سمع الملك منهما ذلك وكان قلقاً فرح لسماع الحديث فاذن لها [...].

BU:

"Tell on," quoth the King who chanced to be sleepless and restless, and therefore was pleased with the prospect of hearing her story (1:22).

LY:

The king was restless and when he heard what the sisters had to say, he was glad at the thought of listening to a story and so he gave his permission to Shahrazad (1:32).

## Mahdi's edition

صفحة ٧٢: قال نعم [...].

HA:

He replied, "Yes," [...] (21).

## Notes on the Arabic text

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<sup>150</sup> In Calcutta I, this passage contains two verbs whose meanings are very similar, i.e., *lām tamna* ' and *lām tarja* ' , while in Mahdi's edition there is only one verb, *mā qabilat*, meaning "she did not accept".

## **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

With regard to this passage, Bulaq and Calcutta II are almost identical. The king is described as *qaliq*, “restless”, and is happy (*fariḥa*) to listen to Shahrāzād. However, Calcutta II explicitly indicates that the king is the one who gives the woman the permission to talk.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

This version is much shorter than that of Bulaq and Calcutta II. No mention of the king’s reaction to Dīnārzād’s request to hear a story from her sister is given.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Calcutta II**

Burton repeats the same concept twice using two terms, “sleepless and restless”, while in the Arabic text there is only one word that conveys the idea of being awake. Shamma (2014) writes extensively on the use of repetition by Burton.

## **XI**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦١٩ (٢): فقال لها الملك تمنى تعطى يا شهرزاد [...] فعند ذلك بكى المالك وضم الاولاده الى صدره وقال يا شهرزاد والله انى قد عفوت عنك من قبل مجيء هولاء الأولاد لكونى رأيتك عفيفة نقية حرة نقيه بارك الله فيك وفي ابيك و امك و اصلك وفرعك واشهد الله علىّ انى قد عفوت عنك من كل شيء يضرك [...].

LA:

And the King answered her, Request: thou shalt receive, O Shahrāzād. [...] And thereupon the King wept, and pressed his children to his bosom, and said, O Shahrāzād, by Allah, I pardoned thee before the coming of these children, because I saw thee to be chaste, pure, ingenuous, pious. May God bless thee, and thy father and thy mother, and thy root and thy branch! I call God to witness against me that I have exempted thee from every thing that might injure thee (3:671-672).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٧٣٠ (٤): فقال لها الملك تمنى تعطي يا شهرزاد [...] فعند ذلك بكى الملك وضم اولاده الى صدره وقال يا شهرزاد والله انى قد عفوت عنك من قبل مجيء هولاء الأولاد لكونى رأيتك عفيفة نقية حرة نقيه بارك الله فيك و في ابيك امك واصلك وفرعك واشهد الله علىّ انى قد عفوت عنك من كل شيء يضرك [...].

BU:

He replied, “Ask, O Shahrazad, and it shall be granted to thee.” [...] When the King heard this, he wept and straining the boys to his bosom, said, “By Allah, O Shahrazad, I pardoned thee before the coming of these children, for that I found thee chaste, pure, ingenuous and pious! Allah bless thee and thy father and thy mother and thy root and thy branch! I take the Almighty to witness against me that I exempt thee from aught that can harm thee”. [...] “Since there befel the Kings of the Chosroes more than that which hath befallen me, never, whilst I live, shall I cease to blame myself for the past. As for this Shahrazad, her like is not found in the lands; so praise be to Him who appointed her a means for delivering His creatures from oppression and slaughter!” (8:51-52).

LY:

“Ask and your wish will be granted,” [...] At that, the king shed tears and, gathering his sons to his breast, he said to her: “Even before the arrival of these children, I had intended to pardon you, as I have seen that you are a chaste and pure woman, freeborn and God-fearing. May God bless you, your father and mother, and your whole family, root and branch. I call God to witness that I have decided that no harm is to come to you” (3:671-672).

#### Notes on the Arabic text

##### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

عفوت عنك: from *‘afā*, “to erase”, and “as some say, *‘afā allah ‘anka*, i.e., *May God efface [for thee thy sin, &c.; meaning may God absolve thee]*” (Lane 1968, 2093).

عفيفة نقية حرة تقيه: “abstinent, pure, virgin, pious”.

بارك الله فيك واشهد الله عليّ: two religious formulas, “God bless you”, and “By God I testify”.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Calcutta II**

The translation of this part is quite literal both in Burton and Lyons and Lyons. However, from this point on – to be more precise, after two sentences from this point – Burton stops relying on Calcutta II and translates from Breslau, informing the reader

about this change in a note. The ending of the frame story in Burton’s translation becomes, therefore, much longer than in either Lyons and Lyons or Lane. This is because Breslau offers a different and lengthier conclusion to the AN in which not only is Shahrāzād married to Shāhriyār, but Dīnārzād becomes Shāhzamān’s wife. The preparation for the double engagement is related in detail; the two brides are displayed in different and beautiful dresses, like in a fashion show, and the description of the whole event is accompanied by poetic verses. Finally, in Breslau, King Shāhriyār orders his scribe to write down his own story in a book in thirty volumes called *Alf layla wa-layla*. Subsequently, a king who comes after the death of the two brothers finds the collection, reads and enjoys it, so he communicates it to his people, who re-name the book *Gharā`ib Alf layla wa-layla* [The Marvels and Wonders of The Thousand and One Nights].

“Since there befel the Kings of the Chosroes [...] His creatures from oppression and slaughter!”: this passage is taken from Breslau (Fleischer 1843, 12:413), in which it is preceded by a similar declaration made by Shahrāzād. The Arabic word for “blame” is *alwam* (more blamable).

## XII

### Bulaq

صفحة ٦١٩ (٢): واصبح المالك مسرورا وبالخير مغمورا فارسل الى جميع العسكر فحضرروا وخلع على وزيره ابي شهرزاد خلعة سنية جلييلة وقال له سترك الله حيث زوجتني ابنتك الكريمة التي كانت سببا لتوبتي عن قتل بنات الناس وقد رأيتها حرة نقية عزيزة زكية و رزقني الله منها بثلاثة أولاد ذكور والحمد لله على هذه النعمة الجزيلة [...].

LA:

The King rose in the morning happy, and with prosperity inundated; and he sent to all the soldiers, who came; and he conferred upon his Wezeer, the father of Shahrāzād, a sumptuous and magnificent robe of honour, saying to him, May God protect thee, since thou hast married to me thy generous daughter, who hath been the cause of my repenting of slaying the daughters of the people, and I have seen her to be ingenious, pure, chaste, virtuous. Moreover, God hath blessed me by her with three male children; and praise be to God for this abundant favour! (3:672).

## Calcutta II

صفحة ٧٣١ (٤): واصبح المالك مسرورا وبالخير مغمورا فارسل الى جميع العسكر فحضرورا وخلع على وزيره اب شهرزاد خلعة سنوية جليلة وقال له ستترك الله حيث زوجتني ابنتك الكريمة التي كانت سببا لتوبتي عن قتل بنات الناس وقد رأيتها حرة نقية عزيزة زكية و رزقني الله منها بثلاثة أولاد ذكور والحمد لله على هذه النعمة الجزيلة [...].

BU:

When the morning morrowed the King went forth, and sitting down on the throne of the Kingship, summoned the Lords of his lands; whereupon the Chamberlains and Nabobs and Captains of the host went in to him and kissed ground before him. He distinguished the Wazir, Shahrazad's sire, with special favour and bestowed on him a costly and splendid robe of honour, and entreated him with the utmost kindness, and said to him, "Allah protect thee for that thou gavest me to wife thy noble daughter, who hath been the means of my repentance from slaying the daughters of folk. Indeed, I have found her pure and pious, chaste and ingenuous, and Allah hath vouchsafed me by her three boy children; wherefore praised be He for his passing favour" (8:52).

LY:

In the morning, the happy king, overwhelmed by his good fortune, summoned his troops and when they came he presented a splendid and magnificent robe of honour to his vizier, Shahrazad's father. 'May God shelter you,' he said, 'because you gave me your noble daughter as a wife, and it is thanks to her that I have turned in repentance from killing the daughters of my subjects. I have found her noble, pure, chaste and without sin; God has provided me with three sons by her and I give thanks to Him for this great good fortune' (3 672).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta**

مسرورا وبالخير مغمورا: "happy and overwhelmed by his fortune".

وقال له ستترك الله حيث زوجتني ابنتك الكريمة: the king speaks to the vizier and expresses gratitude to the man for having let his noble (*karīma*) daughter marry him by saying "God felicitate you".

لتوبتي عن قتل بنات الناس: thanks to Shahrāzād, the king repents and stops killing the daughters of his people.

حرة نقية عزيزة زكية: these four adjectives are used by Shāhriyār to describe Shahrāzād. She is virtuous, pure, honorable and intelligent.

رزقني الله منها بثلاثة أولاد ذكور والحمد لله على هذه النعمة الجزيلة *razaqanī allah minhā bi-thalāthat awlād dhukūr wa-alḥamdu lillah ‘alā hādhihi al-na‘ma al-jazīla*. God is called upon twice to thank for the three male children that Shahrāzād has given to the king.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Calcutta II**

“... and sitting down on the throne of the Kingship, summoned the Lords of his lands; whereupon the Chamberlains and Nabobs and Captains of the host went in to him and kissed ground before him”: this passage is translated mainly from Breslau, as the remaining part of the ending of the frame story – with some pieces still taken from Calcutta II. Burton’s translation of the ending of the frame story is, therefore, much longer than the original Arabic text of Calcutta II. This means that it entails more parts in which King Shāhriyār talks about his recovery due to Shahrāzād’s wise action. According to the closure in Breslau, the two sibling kings marry the two sisters, and the two couples live together during Shāhriyār’s reign, each king “ruling a day in turn” (Burton 1897, 8:52) – this is the closure of the frame story according to Breslau.

#### **2.1.1.2 Shāhzamān**

##### **I**

#### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٢(١): وكان اخوه الصغير اسمه الملك شاهرمان وكان ملك سمرقند العجم ولم يزل الامر مستقيما في بلادهما وكل واحد منهما في مملكته حاكم عادل في رعيته مدة عشرين سنة وهم في غاية البسط والانشراح [...]

LA:

[...] His younger brother was named Shāh-Zeman, and was King of Samarqand. The administration of their governments was conducted with rectitude, each of them ruling over his subjects with justice during a period of twenty years with the utmost enjoyment and happiness. (1:2).

#### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٢ (١): وكان اخوه الصغير اسمه الملك شاهزمان وكان ملك سمرقند العجم ولم يزال مستمرين في بلادهما وكل واحد في مملكته حاكم عادل في رعيته مدة عشرين سنة وهم في غاية البسط والانشراح [...].

BU:

[...] And he made his younger brother, called Shah Zaman, Lord of Samarcand in Barbarian-land. These two ceased not to abide in their several kingdoms and the law was ever carried out in their dominios; and each ruled his own realm with equity and fair-dealing to his subjects, in extreme solace and enjoyment and this condition continually endured for a score of years (1:2).

LY:

[...] While his younger brother, who ruled Persian Samarkand, was called Shah Zaman. For ten years both of them continued to reign justly, enjoying pleasant and untroubled lives [...] (1:24).

### **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٥٦: [...] والصغير يقال له شاهزمان. [...] فملك اخوه شاهزمان بلاد سمرقند وجعله فيها سلطان، واقام بها.

HA:

[...] The younger Shahzaman. [...] while to his brother he gave the land of Samarkand to rule as king (5).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

شاهرمان: *Shāhramān*: Shāhramān's name is misspelt in Bulaq, and this is probably due to the absence of the diacritical points, as Lane highlights in his "Notes to the Introduction" (Lane 1979, 1:22).

سمرقند العجم: he was the king of Samarkand "*al- 'ajam*", namely Samarkand ruled by the foreigners/the Persians. On this geographic indication refer to what is said as regards Shāhriyār in block II (2.1.1.1., part II).

#### **Mahdi's edition:**

شاهزمان : Shāhzamān is spelt in different ways in manuscript G (and also in manuscript *bā*'),<sup>151</sup> *Shāhratān* (or *Shāhritān*), *Shāh ratān* (or *Shāh ritān*), *Shāh zanān*, *Shāhriyān*, *Shāhranāz* (or *Shāhrināz*) (Mahdi 2014, 2:34-42).

## II

### Bulaq

صفحة ٢ (١): فاجابه بالسمع والطاعة وتجهز للسفر واخرج خيامه وجماله وبغاله وخدمه واعوانه واقام وزيره حاكما في بلاده وخرج طالبا بلاد اخيه [...]

LA:

[...] And answered by expressing his readiness to obey the commands of his brother. But, said he (addressing the Wezeer), I will not go until I have entertained thee three days. Accordingly, he lodged him in a palace befitting his rank, accommodated his troops in tents, and appointed them all things requisite in the way of food and drink: and so they remained three days. On the fourth day, he equipped himself for the journey, made ready his baggage, and collected together costly presents suitable to his brother's dignity. These preparations being completed, he sent forth his tents and camels and mules and servants and guards, appointed his Wezeer to be governor of the country during his absence, and set out towards his brother's dominions (1: 4).

### Calcutta II

صفحة ٢ (١): فاجابه بالسمع والطاعة وتجهز للسفر واخرج خيامه وجماله وبغاله وخدمه واعوانه واقام وزيره حاكما في بلاده وخرج طالبا بلاد أخيه [...].

BU:

“I hear and I obey the commands of the beloved brother!”, adding to the Wazir, “But we will not march till after the third day's hospitality.” He appointed for the Minister fitting quarters in the palace; and, pitching tents for the troops, rationed them with whatever they might require of meat and drink and other necessaries. On the fourth day he made ready for wayfare and got together sumptuous presents befitting his elder brother's majesty and stablished his chief Wazir viceroy of the land during his absence.

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<sup>151</sup> For more information about the spelling of names in the manuscripts used by Mahdi, see Mahdi (2014, 2:18)

Then he caused his tents and camels and mules to be brought forth and encamped, with their bales and loads, attendants and guards, within sight of the city, in readiness to set out next morning for his brother's capital (1:3-4).

LY:

Shah Zaman agreed to come and made his preparations for the journey. He had his tents put up outside his city, together with his camels, mules, servants and guards, while his own vizier was left in charge of his lands. He then came out himself, intending to leave for his brother's country [...] (1:25).

### **Mahdi's edition**

**صفحة ٥٧:** وسمع بوصوله شاهزمان الى بلاد سمرقند فخرج الى لقيائه في جماعة من خواصه، وترجل له وعانقه وساله عن اخبار أخيه الملك الكبير شاهريار فاخبره انه طيب وانه قد ارسله في طلبه، فامتثل امره. [...] حتى تجهز للسفر عشرة أيام وخلا موضعه في الملك بعض الحجاب. واخرج قماشه وبات تلك الليلة عند الوزير [...] .

HA:

When Shahzaman heard of the vizier's arrival, he went out with his retainers to meet him. He dismounted, embraced him, and asked him for news from his older brother, Shahrayar. The vizier replied that he was well, and that he had sent him to request his brother's request and proceeded to make preparations for the journey. [...] For ten full days he prepared himself for the journey; then he appointed a chamberlain in his place and left the city to spend the night in his tent, near the vizier [...] (6).

### Notes on the Arabic text:

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

اجابه بالسمع والطاعة: "I hear and obey", this is a formulaic expression to indicate submission. It is also found in the *A Hundred and One Nights* (Fudge 2016a, 11).

#### **Mahdi's edition**

له وعانقه وساله عن اخبار أخيه الملك الكبير شاهريار: *ānaqahu wa-sālahu 'an akhbār akhīhi*, "he embraced him and asked about his brother". In this version, there is plenty of information about Shāhzamān's reaction to the request of his brother.

حتى تجهز للسفر عشرة أيام: Shāhzamān's preparations for his journey take ten days. In Calcutta I this is not specified, but it is said that on the fourth day Shāhzamān encamps outside his city with the vizier in order to depart the day after.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Bulaq**

The whole paragraph is translated from Calcutta I, as indicated by Lane in a note that refers to the passage immediately preceding this one (1979, 1:23, note 9). It should be noted that the symbolism of the number three is quite frequent in Calcutta I. For instance, it takes three days for the organization of the vizier's journey to Shāhzamān, there are three days during which the minister is entertained by other kings along the way, and he is hosted by Shāhzamān for three days. Both Lane and Burton insert this long digression in their translations, and the former also devotes a long note to the question of the time in relation to hospitality (Lane 1979, 24–25). The account both of the regal protocols and of the key role played by the vizier are elements to be found only in Calcutta I. In this version, King Shāhriyār sends many gifts to his brother, and also writes him a letter which is given to Shāhzamān by the vizier after a long trip, which is accurately described. Lane devotes five notes (10 to 15) of his "Notes to the Introduction" to explain this passage; he goes even further and talks the reader through the Arabs' customs with regard to exchanging presents, writing letters, sending forth ambassadors, hosting guests, showing obedience, and understanding letters. Moreover, in note 16 Lane comments on the sentences *wa-qara'ahu*, *wa-fahima rumūzahu*, which are to be found in Calcutta I and literally mean "he read and understood its signs" (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:5). Since "the style of Arabic epistolary compositions, [...] differs considerably from that of common conversation", Lane (1979, 1:25, note 15) feels the need to highlight the fact that Shāhzamān reads and interprets the request of his brother correctly.

##### **Calcutta II**

Like Lane, Burton also relies on Calcutta I for the translation of this passage.

### III

##### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٢ (١): في نصف الليل تذكر حاجة نسيها في قصره فرجع ودخل قصره [...] فلما رأى هذا اسودت الدنيا في وجهه وقال في نفسه اذا كان هذا الامر قد وقع وانا ما فارقت المدينة فكيف حال هذه العاهرة اذا غبت عند اخي مدة ثم انه سل سيفه وضرب الاثنيين فقتلتهما في الفراش ورجع من وقته وساعته وامر بالرحيل [...].

LA:

At midnight, however, he remembered that he had left in his palace an article which he should have brought with him; and having returned to the palace to fetch it [...] On behold this scene, the world became black before his eyes; and he said within himself, If this is the case when I have not departed from the city, what will be the conduct of this vile woman while I am sojourning with my brother? He then drew his sword, and slew them both in the bed: after which he immediately returned, gave orders for departure, and journeyed to his brother's capital (1:4).

## Calcutta II

صفحة ٢ (١): فلما كان في نصف الليل تذكر حاجة نسيها في قصره فرجع ودخل قصره [...] فلما رأى هذا الامر اسودت الدنيا في وجهه وقال في نفسه اذا كان هذا الامر قد وقع وانا ما فارقت المدينة فكيف حال هذه الملعونة لما اغيب عند اخي مدة ثم انه سحب سيفه وضرب الاثنيين وقتلتهما في الفراش ورجع من وقته وساعته وامر بالرحيل [...].

BU:

But when the night was half spent he bethought: him that he had forgotten in his palace somewhat which he should have brought with him, so he returned privily and entered his apartments [...] When he saw this the world waxed black before his sight and he said, "If such case happen while I am yet within sight of the city what will be the doings of this damned whore during my long absence at my brother's court?" So he drew his scimitar and, cutting the two into four pieces with a single blow, left them on the carpet and returned presently to his camp without letting anyone know of what had happened (1:4).

LY:

He then came out himself, intending to leave for his brother's country, but at midnight he thought of something that he had forgotten and went back to the palace. [...] The world turned dark for him and he said to himself: 'If this is what happens before I have even left the city, what will this damned woman do if I spend time away with my

brother?’ So he drew his sword and struck, killing both his wife and her lover as they lay together, before going back and ordering his escort to move off [...] (1:25).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

**صفحة ٥٧:** [...] الى نصف الليل وعبر الى المدينة وطلع الى قصره يودع زوجته. [...] فلما راهما شاهزمان اسودت الدنيا في عينيه وحرك راسه زمان وقال في نفسه "هدى وانا لسعى ما سافرت، وانا مقيم ظاهر بلدي، فكيف يكون اذا سافرت الى الهند اخی، وكيف يكون الحال بعدی، ولكن النساء ما عليهم اعتقاد". تم انه اغتاض غيضاً ما عليه مزيد وقال "بالله اذا كنت انا الملك وحاكم بلاد سمرقند ويجرى على هذا وتخونني وزوجتي ويتم على هذا الامر". تم زاد عليه الغيظ فجرد سيفه وضرب الاتنين – الطباخ وامراته – وجر برجليهما ورماهما من قصره الى اسفل الخندق وخرج على حاله الى ظاهر المدينة الى عند الوزير وامر في السفر بذلك الوقت.

HA:

At midnight he returned to his palace in the city, to bid his wife good-bye. But when he entered the palace [...] When he saw them, the world turned dark before his eyes and, shaking his head, he said to himself, “I am still here, and this is what she had done when I was barely outside the city. How will it be and what will happen behind my back when I go to visit my brother in India? No. Women are not to be trusted.” He got exceedingly angry, adding, “By God, I am king and sovereign in Samarkand, yet my wife has betrayed me and has inflicted this on me.” And his anger boiled, he drew his sword and struck both his wife and the cook. Then he dragged them by the heels and threw them from the top of the palace to the trench below (6).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

تذكر حاجة نسيها: “he remembered having left something (*ḥāja*) he had forgotten”. Shāh zamān goes back to his castle in order to collect something unspecified he has forgotten there.

اسودت الدنيا في وجهه: “the world became black (*iswadda*) on his face”, namely Shāh zamān’s face became black, the expression of grief.

العاهرة: from *‘ahara*, “to fornicate with a woman, free or slave, at any time”. The present participle indicates “a woman who commits adultery”.

سل سيفه وضرب الاتنين فقتلها في الفراش: “he killed the two of them in their bed with his sword”.

## Calcutta II

الليل تذكر حاجة نسيها في: see Bulaq.

اسودت الدنيا في وجهه: see Bulaq.

هذه الملعونة: “this damned (woman)”, from *la ‘ana*, “to condemn” or “to curse”.

ثم انه سحب سيفه وضرب الاثنين وقتلها: see Bulaq.

## Mahdi’s edition

يودع زوجته: “he wanted to bid farewell to his wife”. Here, the reason because of which Shāhzamān goes back to his castle is not that he has forgotten something, but to take leave of his wife. In the critical apparatus following the edited text of the AN, Mahdi gives the different versions of this passage in the manuscripts he collates. He highlights that all the manuscripts belonging to the Syrian branch point out Shāhzamān’s farewell to his wife, while those belonging to the Egyptian branch have the same version as is found in both Bulaq and Calcutta II (see above). It is interesting to notice here that the passage mentioning the king’s intention to take leave of his wife is also present in a manuscript that Mahdi (2014, 2:34) believes belongs to the Egyptian branch, namely manuscript *shīn* (ms Ar 18 Spain Madrid Real Academia de la Historia Gayangos 49)<sup>152</sup>. On the contrary, Macdonald (1924, 391), who also studied the same manuscript, indicates that it is not of Egyptian origin, rather it is part of “a group of widely scattered MMS. [...] which appears to be fragments of a recension in which the long Story of ‘Umar bin an-Nu‘mān was introduced at a much later point than in ZER. [...] This MS. is modern and of Christian origin”.

In the *A Hundred and One Nights* the two elements – i.e., the farewell and the forgotten thing – seem to be combined: *thumma anna al-fatā lammā tawadda ‘a min ibnati ‘ammihī nasiya fī dārihi ba ‘da ḥawāyjihi*, “But then, having bid [...] his wife farewell, he realized that he had left behind something he needed” (Fudge 2016a, 8–9).<sup>153</sup>

اسودت الدنيا في عينيه: “the world became black before his eyes”.

وحرك راسه زمان: Shāhzamān shook his head”. Mahdi (2014, 2:35) indicates that the term *zamān* (probably, a corrupted form for Shāhzamān) is found only in manuscript G.

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<sup>152</sup> According to Akel’s classification (2016, 85).

<sup>153</sup> Fudge translates *ibnati ‘ammihī* as “his father and his wife”, but I cannot find the term “father” anywhere in the text in Arabic.

More details are given in this version of the frame story about the reaction of the man to his wife's unfaithfulness than in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

وكيف يكون الحال بعدى: "what will be behind my back". This is a repetition of the concept expressed in the preceding sentence, namely *kayfa yakūnu idā sāfartu ilā Hind akhā*, "what will happen when I go to visit my brother in India?".

ولكن النساء ما عليهم اعتقاد: "women cannot be trusted".

اغتاظ غيضاً ما عليه مزيد: he was extremely angry". Another sentence that serves to stress the extreme reaction of Shāhzamān to his wife's betrayal. Nevertheless, this sentence is misspelt – *ightāḍa ghayḍan* – , the correct form being *ightāza ghayzan*, with *zā* instead of *ḍād*. Here the internal object, i.e., the direct object deriving from the same root and form of the transitive the precedes it, is used to intensify the action, and literally means "he got angry with anger".

بالله ادا كنت انا الملك وحاكم بلاد سمرقند ويجرى على هذا وتخوننى زوجتى: this sentence reiterates the idea of Shāhzamān's inability to compute the fact of having been betrayed. The regal position held by Shāhzamān makes the woman even more guilty in his eyes, as she dares to betray a king. Moreover, this sentence contains the verb "to betray" (*takhūnūnī*) which is explicitly mentioned only in this version of the frame story and is not found either in Bulaq or in Calcutta II.

وجر برجليهما ورماهما من قصره الى اسفل الخندق: "he grabs their legs and throws them out of the palace". A good number of details are given in this version of the frame story to describe the cruel way Shāhzamān disposes of the bodies.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

"At midnight": in a note, Lane (1979, 1:25, note 16) explains that "the party travelled chiefly by night, on account of the heat of the day". This comment seems to be superfluous. Nowhere in this text – or in any other Arabic version of the frame story – there exist a reference to the fact that Shāhzamān and his soldiers would leave at night because of the heat. In Bulaq, as well as Calcutta II, Shāhzamān readies his tents, camels, servants, etc., in preparation for his travel and then, at midnight, he remembers something he has forgotten in the castle. In this version of the frame story this passage is short and not entirely clear, as something seems to be missing – and probably is.

Mahdi's edition, instead, provides a more complete version of this section. The vizier, who has arrived with news from Shāhriyār, camps on the outskirts of the city where Shāhzamān lives. Meanwhile, the latter is preparing for his journey to visit his brother and after ten days he is ready to depart. Shāhzamān leaves his city and decides to spend the night in the camp where the vizier is resting, then, at midnight he returns to his castle to say goodbye to his wife. In Mahdi's edition, Shāhzamān appears not to travel at night, contrary to what Lane states. This also seems to be the case in Bulaq, even though it lacks some narrative connections which are, nevertheless, preserved in Mahdi's edition. In Calcutta I, on which Lane bases a significant portion of his translation of the frame story, one finds *lammā kānat laylat al-raḥīl*, "on the night of the departure", to indicate the moment in which Shāhzamān goes back to his castle in order to take leave of his wife before the departure (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:6). This may allow one to think of a more conscious decision by King Shāhzamān to travel at night. Lane translates 'āhira, "female adulterer", as "vile woman."

### **Calcutta II**

Burton translates 'āhira as "damned whore", in doing so negatively intensifying Shāhzamān's thoughts on his wife.

"Cutting the two into four pieces with a single blow": in Calcutta II there is no allusion to the "four pieces with a single blow", which is a phrase taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:6). Moreover, the couple are murdered in their bed, and are not "left on the carpet", as Burton indicates in his translation.

## **IV**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦ (١): ورجعا الى مدينة الملك شهر باز ودخلا قصره [...]

LA:

[...] And returned to the city. As soon as they had entered the palace, Shahriyar [...] (1:9).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٢ (١): ورجعا الى مدينة الملك شهر يار فدخل قصره [...]

BU:

Thereupon they rode back to the tents of King Shahryar, which they reached on the morning of the third day; [...] Then Shah Zaman prayed for permission to fare homewards; and he went forth equipped and escorted and travelled till he reached his own country (1:12-13).

LY:

[...] And went back to Shahriyar's city, where they entered the palace [...] (1:28).

### **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٦٥: تم انهما رجعا على اعقابهما. [...] وامر بالدخول الى المدينة فدخلوا [...] تم انه جهز اخوه شاهزمان وارسله الى بلاده وارسل معه هدايا وتحف واموال وغيره. وودعه و سافر الى بلده.

HA:

Then the two brothers headed home [...] Then at his command everyone returned to the city [...] Shortly thereafter he provided his brother Shahzaman with supplies for his journey and sent him back to his own country with gifts, rarities, and money. The brother bade him good-bye and set out for home (13-14).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

ورجعا [...] ودخلا [...] : the two verbs are in dual form, meaning that they refer to both Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān. However, in the sentence that follows all the verbs go back to the third person singular – it is probably a copyist's error –, and Shāhzamān is not mentioned anymore, so his departure is omitted. Mahdi's edition is more complete in this respect (see below).

#### **Calcutta II**

ورجعا [...] فدخل : here is the same as for Bulaq. However, the second verb of this sentence, *dakhala*, is already in the third person singular (he entered) – unlike Bulaq.

#### **Mahdi's edition**

فدخلوا : after this verb, *dhakhalū* (they entered), which is third person plural, the remaining verbs of the paragraph are put in third person singular referring to Shāhriyār only.

this: انه جهز اخوه شاهزمان وارسله الى بلاده وارسل معه هدايا وتحف واموال وغيره. وودعه و سافر الى بلده version – as well as Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:24) and Breslau (Habicht 1824, 1:14) – mentions Shāhzamān’s departure.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Bulaq**

Lane offers a very literal translation of this passage. Although the Arabic text shows a sudden jump from the third person plural to the third person singular with no explanation for that, Lane does not try to amend the incongruity. As a result, Shāhzamān simply disappears from the story.

##### **Calcutta II**

Burton feels the need to indicate what happens to the character of Shāhzamān and, since Calcutta II omits the passage describing the king’s departure, he borrows it from Calcutta I.

#### **V**

##### **Breslau**

صفحات ٤١٥-٤١٦ (١٢): وقال انى اريد ان اتزوج انا الاخر باختها الصغيرة لنصير نحن اخوين شقيقين لاختين شقيقتين وانهم يكونوا معنا كذلك الاختين لان مصيبتى كانت سببا لظهار مصيبتك وان مدة هذه الثلاث سنين لم استلذ انا بامرأة الا انى انام عند جارية ملكى ليلة واحدة واصبح اقتلها وانى قد اشتهيت ان اتزوج باخت زوجتك دينارزاد [...].

BU:

“Fain would I take her younger sister to wife, so we may be two brothers-german to two sisters-german, and they on like wise be sisters to us: for that the calamity which befell me was the cause of our discovering that which befell thee, and all this time of three years past I have taken no delight in woman, save that I lie each night with a damsel of my kingdom, and every morning I do her to death; but now I desire to marry thy wife’s sister Dunyazad” (8:53).

#### Notes on the English text

Although Breslau is not the direct subject of the present analysis for the reasons mentioned in chapter 1, part II, it is relevant here to point out on which text Burton

bases his translation of the passages mentioning the character of Shāh zamān in the conclusion of the frame story. In this specific quote, which is faithfully translated by Burton from Breslau, Shāh zamān is said to have behaved in the same cruel way as his brother. This is something unique to this edition of the AN; nowhere else is there an indication of King Shāh zamān having become a murderer like Shahriyār. In Breslau itself before this passage there are no preceding clues that might allow one to think of this correspondence between the destinies of the two brothers. In fact, when Shāhriyār reveals to Shāh zamān that he will marry a virgin every night to kill her the day after, the text of Breslau only indicates *fa-qāma ḥālan akhūhu Shāh Zamān wa-ṭalaba al-safar fa-hajjazahu akhūhu wa-sāfara ḥattā waṣala ilā bilādihi* (And Shāh zamān asked his brother permission to leave; the latter prepared his journey and Shāh zamān departed and arrived in his kingdom) (Habicht 1824, 1:16). Likewise, in Calcutta I and Mahdi’s edition after the encounter with the boxed woman Shāh zamān goes back to his elder brother’s kingdom and sits on the throne with him while Shāhriyār kills his wife and slaves. Then, the latter “provided his brother Shāh zamān with supplies for his journey and sent him back to his own country with gifts, rarities, and money. The brother bade him good-bye and set out for home” (Mahdi 2014, 1:14). Mahdi’s edition, as well as Calcutta I, does not have a conclusion to the frame story. In Bulaq and Calcutta II, instead, Shāh zamān is said to return to Shāhriyār’s kingdom, and, together with his brother – the verbs are dual – he “entered the palace and cut off the heads of the queen, the slave girls and the slaves” (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:28). Later, Shāh zamān simply vanishes from the stage and, therefore, in the ending of the frame story in both Bulaq and Calcutta II there is no mention of him.

## VI

### Breslau

صفحة ٤١٧ (١٢): هو الذى كان فى خاطرى لاننى ما بقيت اريد ان افارقك ساعة واحدة واما الملك فان الله تعالى يرسل له من يختاره وانا ما بقى لى غرض فى الملك [...].

BU:

“Indeed, this is what was in my mind, for that I desire nevermore to be parted from thee one hour. As for the kingdom, Allah the Most High shall send to it whomso He chooseth, for that I have no longer a desire for the kingship” (8:53).

### Notes on the English text

This passage is taken from Breslau and is to be found only in this version of the frame story. It describes Shāhzamān's desire to spend the rest of his life alongside his brother.

#### **2.1.1.3 The queens' lovers**

##### **I**

#### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٢ (١): فوجد زوجته راقدة في فراشه معانقة عبدا اسود من العبيد [...].

LA:

[...] he there beheld his wife sleeping in his bed, and attended by a male negro slave, who had fallen asleep by her side (1:4).

#### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٢ (١): فوجد زوجته راقدة في فراشه معانقة عبدا اسود من بعض العبيد [...].

BU:

[...] where he found the Queen, his wife, asleep on his own carpet-bed, embracing with both arms a black cook of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime (1:4).

LY:

[...] it was to discover his wife in bed with a black slave (1:25).

#### **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٥٧؛ فلما دخل الى القصر وجد زوجته نايمة والى جانبها رجلا من صبيان المطبخ متعانقه هي واياه.

HA:

But when he entered the palace, he found his wife lying in the arms of one of the kitchen boys (6).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

في فراشه "in his bed". The unfaithful couple was found in King Shāhzamān's bed.

معانقة عبدا اسود من العبيد / عبدا اسود من بعض العبيد: *mu'ānaqa*, namely “embracing by putting the arms around the neck”. She embraced a black ‘*abd*, namely a black slave (‘*abd min al-‘abīd*, “a slave of the slaves”). In Calcutta I, the queen’s lover is indicated as *ṭabbākh al-muzdarā* (i.e., *al-muzdariyy*) *al-hay’a*, namely “a cook of detestable aspect” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:6).<sup>154</sup> In Breslau, instead, the phrase is the same as in Calcutta II (‘*abd aswad min ba‘ḍ al-‘abīd*) (Habicht 1824, 1:7). Finally, in the *A Hundred and One Nights*, the man discovers his young spouse lying in his bed with a black man who, however, is not said to be a slave (Fudge 2016a, 8).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

رجلا من صبيان المطبخ متعانقه هي واياه: *rajulan min ṣibyān al-maṭbakh*, “he is a male from the kitchen servants”. In his critical apparatus following the edited text, Mahdi shows the different versions of this passage in all the manuscripts he has used for the editing of manuscript G. Interestingly, the version in manuscript G, i.e., *rajulan min ṣibyān al-maṭbakh*, which is characteristic of the manuscripts belonging to the Syrian branch, is also to be found in two manuscripts of the Egyptian branch, namely manuscripts *sīn* (*ghulām min ghilmān al-maṭbakh*) and *shin* (*rajul min ghilmān al-maṭbakh*) – the latter being of dubious origin, as already mentioned (Mahdi 2014, 2:34).

متعانقه هي واياه: “they were embracing each other”. See Bulaq and Calcutta II above as regards the participle *muta‘āniqa*.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

“A black slave” is translated as “a male negro slave”.

#### **Calcutta II**

Burton describes the man sleeping with the queen using adjectives and phrases taken from different versions of the frame story. For instance, “black”, as the lover’s skin colour, is to be found in Calcutta II; “cook of loathsome aspect” comes from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:6), and “foul with kitchen grease and grime” seems to be,

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<sup>154</sup> This is the same version to be found in manuscript *tā’*, on which manuscript *tā’l* – the direct source of Calcutta I – is based, *al-ṭabbākh al-zarā* (namely, *al-zariyy*) *al-hayh* (namely, *al-hay’a*) *bi-al-awsākh*, “the cook with a miserable, filthy aspect” (Mahdi 2014, 2:34).

instead, Burton's addition.<sup>155</sup> Once again, this reflects his attempt to deform and worsen the aspect of the lover in order to make the woman/queen's behaviour appear very disgusting.

### **Mahdi's edition**

Here the queen's lover is a kitchen boy (servant).

## **II**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣ (١): وقد خرج منه عشرون جارية وعشرون عبدا [...] واذا بامرأه الملك قالت يا مسعود فجاءها عبد اسود [...].

LA:

[...] A door of the palace was opened, and there came forth from it twenty females and twenty male black slaves; [...] The King's wife then called out, O Mes'ood! and immediately a black slave came to her [...] (1:5).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٣ (١): وخرج منه عشرون جارية وعشرون عبدا [...] واذا بامرأة الملك صاحت يا مسعود فجاءها عبد اسود [...].

BU:

[...] Swung open and out of it came twenty slave girls [...] then they stripped off their clothes and behold, ten of them were women, concubines of the King, and the other ten were white slaves. Then they all paired off, each with each: but the Queen, who was left alone, presently cried out in a loud voice, "Here to me, O my lord Saeed!" and there sprang with a drop-leap from one of the trees a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight. [...] when the men resumed their disguises and all, except the negro who swarmed up the tree, entered the palace and closed the postern-door as before (1: 5-6).

LY:

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<sup>155</sup> This seems to be the case, unless Burton had access to manuscript *tā'*, which does contain a reference to the filthy aspect of the cook.

[...] A door opened and out came twenty slave girls and twenty slaves, They came to a fountain where they took off their clothes and the women sat with the men. “Mas‘ud,” the queen called, at which a black slave came up to her [...] (1: 25-26).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

**صفحة ٥٩:** وهي بين عشرين جاريه [عشره بيض وعشره سود] [...] ولا زالو يتمشوا حتى وصلوا الى تحت القصر الذى فيه شاهزمان – من حيث لا يروه – وهم يعتقدون انه سافر مع اخوه الى الصيد. فجلسوا تحت القصر وقلعوا تيابهم وادا قد صارت العشره عبيد سود والعشره جوار، وصاحت الست يا مسعود يا مسعود، فنظ عبد اسود من فوق الشجره الى الأرض [...] واما مسعود فانه نظ من حيط البستان صار خارج الطريق. وتمشوا الجوار وستهم بينهم حتى وصلوا باب سر القصر فدخلوا وغلوا باب السر من عندهم ومضوا الى حال سبيلهم.

HA:

[...] With twenty slave-girls, ten white and ten black. While Shahzaman looked at them, without being seen, they continued to walk until they stopped below his window, without looking in his direction, thinking that he had gone to the hunt with his brother. Then they sat down, took off their clothes, and suddenly there were ten slave-girls and ten black slaves dressed in the same clothes as the girls. [...] while the lady called “Mas‘ud, Mas‘ud!” and a black slave jumped from the tree to the ground, rushed to her, [...] Then the ten slaves put on the same clothes again, mingled with the girls, and once more there appeared to be twenty slave-girls. Mas‘ud himself jumped over the garden wall and disappeared, while the slave-girls and the lady sauntered to the private gate, went in and, locking the gate behind them, went their way (7-8).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

منه عشرون جارية وعشرون عبدا: There are twenty male slaves and twenty female ones in this version of the frame story – as well as in Breslau (Habicht 1824, 1:8). No skin colour is specified here. In the *A Hundred and One Nights*, there are forty slaves, and they are all females (*arba ʿīna jāriyya*), and no skin colour is mentioned here as well (Fudge 2016a, 12)

يا مسعود فجاءها عبد اسود: Mas‘ūd, which means “happy” or “made happy”, as Lane (1979, 1:26) explains in note 20, is the proper name of the lover of Shāhriyār’s wife. In

Calcutta I, he is called *ya sayyidī Sa‘īd* (my lord Sa‘īd), Sa‘īd meaning “happy” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:10). In the *A Hundred and One Nights*, the name of the lover is not mentioned.<sup>156</sup> Mas‘ūd is said to be a black slave (*‘abd aswad*) in all the versions of the frame story. In the *A Hundred and One Nights*, he is just a black man (Fudge 2016a, 12); however, the version of the frame story in this collection is slightly different: there is a short dialogue between the black man and the queen, in which the woman tells him that she wants to get rid of the king. The black man is depicted as very rude to the woman (Fudge 2016a, 14).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

[عشره بيض وعشره سود] عشريين جاريه: in this version, there are only twenty people accompanying the queen in the palace garden. Ten of them are black, and the other half is white, and they are initially said to be all *jāriyya*, namely female slaves. In Calcutta I the number of the *jāriyya* is also twenty, yet when they take their clothes off they become ten male and ten female – no skin colour is indicated (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:9–10).

من حيث لا يروه: the text of Mahdi’s edition gives a detailed description of the scene in the garden (unlike Bulaq and Calcutta II), including of Shahzamān’s hiding place from which he can observe the scene undisturbed.

وقلغوا تيابهم وادا قد صارت العشره عبيد سود والعشره جوار: “they undressed and they became ten male black slave and ten female slaves”. This is the passage that reveals the disguise of the male slaves as females, and it is unique to this version of the frame story.

يا مسعود، فنظ عبد اسود من فوق الشجره الى الأرض: the queen calls Mas‘ūd, who is referred to as a black slave.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

“Twenty male black slaves”: the skin colour is not specified in the Arabic text, but it is put in the translation. In his Arabic-English dictionary, Lane (1968, 1935) states that *‘abd* means “black slave”, that is probably why he translates *‘ashr‘ūna abdan* as

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<sup>156</sup> Perhaps this is due to the fact that in the *A Hundred and One Nights* the queen does not call her lover to come to her, but simply beats “the ground with her foot”, and a black man comes out of a trapdoor (Fudge 2016a, 13).

“twenty black slaves”. However, in other parts the Arabic text has the adjective *aswad*, “black”, before the word *‘abd*, as if this would either specify or stress the skin colour.

## **Calcutta II**

“[...] Out of it came twenty slave girls [...] ten of them were women, concubines of the King, and the other ten were white slaves”: this part is taken from Calcutta I which, however, does not entail any indication of skin colour (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:9). The text of Calcutta I simply indicates the “gender division” between the slaves. It is Burton who inserts the adjective “white” before the word *dhukhūr*.

“A big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight”: this part is also taken from Calcutta I, *wa-idhā bi-‘abd aswad ṭumṭumāniyy baṣṣās qabīḥ al-manẓar* (a black slave who does not speak Arabic well, with glistening eyes and bad-looking) (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:10). If one compares the two texts, namely the original in Arabic and the English translation, it is evident that Burton exaggerates the ugliness of the character. The word “blackamoor” is quite an offensive term used to refer to dark-skinned persons (Thorn 2002, 163). Something must be said as regards the word *ṭumṭumāniyy*, to be found in Calcutta I, which means “not speaking Arabic correctly”, and by extension, “a foreigner or uneducated”. Both in the *Tāj al-‘arūs* (al-Zabīdī 1965, 32:26-27), as well as in the *Tāj al-luġha wa-ṣiḥāḥ al-‘arabiyya* (al-Jawharī 1865, 2:309), it is mentioned a verse by ‘Antara (d. 615) in which the word *ṭumṭumāniyy* is used together with the term *a‘jam*. Lane (1968, 1878) indicates that this line by ‘Antara describes an Abyssinian shepherd who cannot speak (Arabic) correctly, and, despite this, his herd goes to him like young ostriches follow a male ostrich. Lane clarifies that the comparison between the shepherd and the male ostrich is based on their blackness and “want of speech”.

Finally, Burton (1897, 1:5, note 2) inserts a misogynistic and quite racist note regarding Mas‘ūd, indicating that “debauched women prefer negroes as lovers”. This is a judgement by the translator that has nothing to do with the original text and, therefore, only reflects his personal convictions.

### **2.1.1.4 The jinn**

## **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣ (١): وطلع منه عامود اسود [...] واذا بجنى طويل القامة عريض الهامة واسع الصدر والقامة [...].

LA:

[...] And there arose from it a black pillar [...] and behold, it was a Jinnee, of gigantic stature, broad-fronted and bulky, [...] (1:8).

## **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٤ (١): وصعد منه عمود اسود [...] واذا بجنى طويل القامة عريض الهامة واسع الصدر [...].

BU:

[...] And from it towered a black pillar, [...] And behold, it was a Jinni, huge of height and burly of breast and bulk, broad of brow and black blee [...] (1:9).

LY:

[...] And from it emerged a black pillar, [...] What then appeared was a tall jinni, with a large skull and a broad breast, [...] (1:26).

## **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٦٣: وطلع منه عامودا اسود [...] واذا هو عفريت اسود [...].

HA:

[...] And there emerged a black pillar [...] it was a black demon [...] (11-12).

## Notes on the Arabic text

### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

عامود اسود: "a black column".

بجنى طويل القامة عريض الهامة واسع الصدر والقامة: "a tall jinn, with a large head and a wide chest". The word for the supernatural being is jinn, an umbrella term for different types of supernatural creatures.

### **Mahdi's edition**

عامودا اسود [...] عفريت اسود: the adjective "black" is repeated twice in this version. No physical description of the creature, which is referred to as 'afrit (a special type of jinn) is given. The episode of the boxed woman and the jinn is absent in the *A Hundred and One Nights*.

## Notes on the English text

### **Calcutta II**

“And black blee”: this is an addition by Burton, in which he stresses the colour of the creature’s complexion.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

The word *ifrīt* is rendered in English with the neutral – not culturally characterized – term “demon”.

## **2.1.2 Female characters: Shahrāzād, the princess prisoner of the jinn**

### **2.1.2.1 Shahrāzād**

#### **I**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣ (١): وكان الوزير له بنتان الكبيرة اسمها شهرزاد والصغيرة اسمها دنيازاد وكانت الكبيرة قد قرأت الكتب والتواريخ وسير الملوك المتقدمين واخبار الأمم الماضيين قيل انها جمعت الف كتاب من كتب التواريخ المتعلقة بالأمم السالفة والملوك الخالية والشعراء فقالت لابيها مالى اراك متغيرا حامل الهم والاحزان وقد قال بعضهم فى المعنى شعر  
قل لمن يحمل هما \* ان هما لا يدوم  
مثل ما يفنى السرور \* هكذا تفنى الهموم

LA:

Now the Wezeer had two daughters; the elder of whom was named Shahrāzād; and the younger, Duniyāzād. The former had read various books of histories, and the lives of preceding kings, and stories of past generations: it is asserted that she had collected together a thousand books of histories, relating to preceding generations and kings, and works of the poets: and she said to her father on this occasion, Why do I see thee thus changed, and oppressed with solicitude and sorrows? It has been said by one of the poets: –

Tell him who is oppressed with anxiety, that anxiety will not last [...] (1:10).

As happiness passeth away, so passeth away anxiety.

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٦ (١): وكان الوزير له بنتان الكبيرة اسمها شهرزاد والصغيرة اسمها دنيازاد وكانت الكبيرة قد قرأت الكتب والتواريخ وسير الملوك المتقدمين واخبار الأمم الماضين قيل انها جمعت الف كتاب من كتب التواريخ المتعلقة بالأمم السالفة والملوك الخالية والشعراء فقالت لابيها مالي اراك مغبونا حامل الهم والاحزان وقد قال بعضهم فى المعنى

قل لمن يحمل هما \* ان هما لا يدوم  
مثل ما تفنى المسرة \* هكذا تفنى الهموم

BU:

Now he had two daughters, named Shahrāzād and Dunyāzād, of whom the elder had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples, and instances of by-gone men and things; indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antiques races and departed rulers. She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy, and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred. Now on that day she said to her father, “Why do I see thee thus changed and laden with care and care? Concerning this matter quoth one of the poets: –

Tell whoso hath sorrow, grief never shall last:

E'en as joy hath no morrow, so woe shall go past (1:13).

LY:

This man had two daughters, of whom the elder was called Shahrāzād and the younger Dunyāzād. Shahrāzād had read books and histories, accounts of past kings and stories of earlier peoples, having collected, it was said, a thousand volumes of these, covering peoples, kings and poets. She asked her father what had happened to make him so careworn and sad, quoting the lines of a poet:

Say to the careworn man: ‘Care does not last,

And as joy passes, so does care’ (1:28).

### **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٦٦: وكان الوزير الذى يقتل البنات له بنت كبيرة اسمها شهرزاد والصغيرة دينارزاد. وكانت الكبيرة شهرزاد قد قرأت الكتب والمصنفات والحكمه وكتب الطبييات وحفظت الاشعار وطالعت الاخبار وعلمت اقوال الناس وكلام الحكماء والملوك، عارفه لبيبه حكيمة ادبيه، قد قرأت ودرت [...] .

HA:

Now, as mentioned earlier, the vizier who put the girls to death, had an older daughter called Shahrazad and a younger one called Dinarzad. The older daughter, Shahrazad, had read the books of literature, philosophy, and medicine. She knew poetry by heart, had studied historical reports, and was acquainted with the sayings of men and the maxims of sages and kings. She was intelligent, knowledgeable, wise, and refined. She had read and learned (14-15).

#### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

The texts of Bulaq and Calcutta II are almost identical, with some little differences in spelling occasionally resulting in different words – such as *mutaghayyar*, “moody”, in Bulaq, and *maghbūn*, in Calcutta II, “aggrieved”.

دنيزاد, شهرزاد : The names of the two sisters are spelt “Shahrazād” and “Dunyāzād”, and the same spelling is to be found in the frame story of Calcutta I. In a note, Burton says that Galland prefers “Dinarzade”, and wonders from where this spelling comes. It must be said that also Mahdi’s edition has the same spelling,<sup>157</sup> namely “Dīnārzād”, which is found in manuscript G together with “Shahrazād”/”Shahzād” (Mahdi 2014, 2:34). Other manuscripts belonging to the Egyptian branch and that Mahdi accessed for his critical edition – i.e., manuscripts *sīn*, *shin*, *ṣād*, *ḍād*, *fā*, *qāf*, the latter being the manuscript on which the Bulaq edition of 1835 is based – have the spelling “Dīnāzād”.<sup>158</sup> In Bulaq –both in the 1836 edition republished in 1964 by the *Maktabat al-muthannā* in Baghdad and in the 1888-1889 edition published by the Cairene *al-Maṭba‘a al-‘āmirā al-sharfiyya* – one finds “Dunyāzād”. In the manuscript used by Fudge for the conclusion of the first part of the frame story of the *A Hundred and One Nights*, the name of the younger sister is spelt as Dīnārzād (2016a, 20).<sup>159</sup> The spelling “Dunyāzād” appears to be, therefore, a later introduction which is not found in the oldest manuscripts (Thomann 2020, 26). Similarly, Ibn al-Nadīm (1872, 304) in the *Fihrist* spells the names of the two sisters as “Dīnārzād” and “Shahrāzād” respectively, while al-Mas‘ūdī (1914, 4:90) uses Dīnāzād and Shīrāzād.

<sup>157</sup> In Breslau, the two names are spelt as “Shāhrazād” and “Dīnārzād”.

<sup>158</sup> Also the 9th-century fragment of the AN studied by Abbot has the same spelling. See note 103.

<sup>159</sup> Ott (2017, 45), in her translation of ms Canada Toronto Aga Khan Museum 00513 of the *A Hundred and One Nights* into German, spells the name as Danīzād.

قد قرأت الكتب والتواريخ وسير الملوك المتقدمين واخبار الأمم الماضيين قيل انها جمعت الف كتاب من كتب  
التواريخ المتعلقة بالأمم السالفة والملوك الخالية والشعراء: this is the only description of Shahrāzād  
one can come across in the entire book of the AN. “Shahrāzād read many books,  
annals, life stories of previous kings, and accounts of nations from the past. It is said  
that she collected a thousand books of stories related to past nations, kings and to the  
poets”.

مالى اراك متغيرا حامل الهم والاحزان: “what’s up, I see you changed and worried”. This  
passage, which is absent in Mahdi’s edition, seems to give a more complete version of  
the scene in which Shahrāzād happens to know from her father about the cruelty of  
King Shāhriyār. It provides a better context for the Shahrāzād’s next step, i.e., her  
offering to sacrifice herself in order to save the women of the kingdom.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

قرات الكتب والمصنفات والحكمه وكتب الطبييات وحفظت الاشعار وطالعت الاخبار وعلمت اقوال الناس وكلام  
الحكما والملوك، عارفه لبيبه حكيمة ادبيه، قد قرت ودرت: “She read books and worktexts of  
wisdom, as well as books of medicine, she learnt poetry by heart, knew the historical  
accounts and was acquainted with the sayings of the people and the discourses of the  
wise men and kings. She was knowledgeable, intelligent, wise, cultured, she read and  
learned”. Shahrāzād’s description here is slightly different from that in Bulaq and  
Calcutta II, as her knowledge appears to be more comprehensive. She is portrayed  
through four adjectives, namely *‘arīfa*, *labība*, *ḥakīma*, *adība*. No mention of  
Shahrāzād’s interest in her father’s status is given in this version.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Calcutta II**

“Shahrāzād”: Burton (1897, 1:13, note 1) says in a note that he restores this name as  
“it should be”, namely Shahrāzād, from the Persian, “city-freer”.<sup>160</sup>

“She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied  
philosophy, and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and

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<sup>160</sup> And also, “she whose realm or dominion is noble”, “born in the city” and/or “of noble lineage. From  
Shirzād, an older form of the name, derives “lion-born”.

polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred”: this part is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:25).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

“Dinarzad”: Haddawy transliterates the name of Shahrāzād’s sister as Dinarzad.

## **II**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦٥-٦٦ (١): فقالت له بالله يا ابني زوجني هذا الملك فاما ان أعيش واما ان أكون فداء لبنات المسلمين وسببا لخلاصهم من بين يديه [...] فقالت له لا بد من ذلك [...] فلما سمعت ابنة الوزير مقالة ابيها قالت له لا بد من ذلك [...].

LA:

[...] Upon which she said, By Allah, O my father, give me in marriage to this King: either I shall die, and be a ransom for one of the daughters of the Muslims, or I shall live, and be the cause of their deliverance from him. [...] but she said, It must be so. [...] When the Wezeer’s daughter heard the words of her father, she said to him, It must be as I have requested. (1:10, 13).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٧ (١): فقالت له بالله يا ابنت زوجني هذا الملك فاما ان أعيش واما ان أكون فدي لاولاد المسلمين وخالصهم من بين يديه [...] فقالت له لا بد من ذلك [...] فلما سمعت ابنة الوزير مقالة ابيها قالت له لا بد من ذلك [...].

BU:

Thereupon said she, “By Allah, O my father, how long shall this slaughter of women endure? Shall I tell thee what is in my mind in order to save both sides from destruction?” [...] “I wish thou wouldst give me in marriage to this King Shahrar; either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine.” [...] “Need must thou,” she broke in, “make me a doer of this good deed, and let him kill me and he will: I shall only die a ransom for others” [...] “O my father it must be, come of it what will!” [...] But she answered him with much decision, “I will never desist, O my father, nor shall this tale change my purpose. Leave such talk and tattle. I will not listen to thy words and, if

thou deny me, I will marry myself to him despite the nose of thee. And first I will go up to the King myself and alone, and I will say to him: – I prayed my father to wive me with thee, but he refused, being resolved to disappoint his lord, grudging the like of me to the like of thee”. [...] and she answered, “Even more so” (1:13-14, 21).

LY:

[...] at which she said: “Father, marry me to this man. Either I shall live or else I shall be a ransom for the children of the Muslims and save them from him.” [...] She insisted that it had to be done, [...] Shahrazad listened to what her father had to say, but she still insisted on her plan [...] (1:29-30).

### **Mahdi's edition**

**صفحات ٦٦-٦٩-٧١ :** فقالت لابيها يوما من الأيام يا ابتاه انى مطالعتك على ما فى سرى. [...] قالت اشتهى منك ان اتزوجنى الى الملك شاهريار، اما اننى اتسبب فى خلاص الخلق واما اننى اموت واهلك ولى اسوة بمن مات وهلك. [...] قالت له يا ابتاه لا بد ان تهدينى اليه ودع يقتلنى. [...] قالت يا ابتاه لا بد ان تهدينى له، قولا واحدا وفعلا جازما. [...] فقالت يا ابتاه لا بد ما اطلع الى هذا السلطان وتهدينى له. [...] فقالت لا بد من فعله. [...] فقالت والله ما ارجع وما هذه الحكايات تردنى عن طلبى، ولو اشتيهت احكيت مثل هذا كثير، واخر هذا ان لم تطلعنى للملك شاهريار من داتك والا طلعت انا من وراك وقوال له انك ما سمحت بى لمثله وبخلت على استادك بمتلى. [...] قالت نعم.

HA:

One day she said to her father, “Father, I will tell you what is in my mind.” [...] “I would like you to marry me to King Shahrayar, so that I may either succeed in saving the people or perish and die like the rest.” [...] She said, “Father you must give me to him, even if he kills me.” [...] She said, “Father, you must give me to him. This is absolute and final.” [...] She replied, “Father, I must go the king, and you must give me to him.” [...] She insisted “I must.” [...] She said, “Such tales don’t deter me from my request. If you wish, I can tell you many such tales. In the end, if you don’t take me to King Shahrayar, I shall go to him by myself behind your back and tell him that you have refused to give me to one like him and that you have begrudged your master one like me.” [...] She replied, “Yes, I must.” (14-15, 17,20).

### Notes on the Arabic text

### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

بِاللّٰهِ فَمَا اِنْ اَعِيْشَ وَاِمَا اِنْ اَكُوْنَ فِدَاءَ لِبَنَاتِ الْمُسْلِمِيْنَ وَسِيْبًا لِّخَلَا صِهْمٍ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدِيْهِ “ By God, I will live, or I will be the ransom/sacrifice/scapegoat for the daughters of the Muslims, and the cause of their liberation from him”. There is an open discussion regarding the translation of this sentence whose interpretation seems to be tortuous. “I will live” is in opposition to being “the ransom for the daughters<sup>161</sup> of the Muslims” (meaning Shahrāzād will die), as the Arabic syntax *ammā/immā...wa-ammā/immā* (either...or) would suggest. It is difficult to imagine how Shahrāzād could save the other women of the kingdom if she dies.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, Sallis (1998, 163) suggests that the second part of the sentence, “or I will be the ransom”, implies that the woman is ready to take the king’s life with hers if he decides to kill her. Conversely, Chraïbi (2016, 57) points out that this passage testifies to a process of Islamisation of the text because of which the original meaning has been changed. The invocation to God at the beginning of the sentence and the reference to the daughters of the Muslims, in fact, clearly place this passage into an Islamic framework. Chraïbi (2016, 57) compares this section to the corresponding passage in the *A Hundred and One Nights*, in which Shahrāzād’s decision to offer herself to the king is due to her determination, in a much less eschatological perspective (Fudge 2016a, 20).

لَا بَدَّ مِنْ ذَٰلِكَ: “it must be so”. This formulaic expression is repeated twice and indicates Shahrāzād’s strong will to accomplish her mission. Chraïbi (2016, 56) believes that this short reply belongs to an ancient version of the text – that is, to a version older than manuscript G –, as it is very concise and less Islamised than the corresponding passage in Mahdi’s edition.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

لَا بِيْهَا يَوْمًا مِنَ الْاَيَّامِ يَا اَبْتَاهُ اِنِّيْ مَطَالَعْتُكَ عَلٰى مَا فِيْ سُرِّيْ : “One day she said to her father ‘I will tell you what is in my mind’”. Here, the reason because of which Shahrāzād decides to offer herself and be married to the king is not very powerful. No explanation is given for her action, as if something was missing in the text; moreover, the issue of saving

<sup>161</sup> In Calcutta II, the Arabic word is *awlād*, “sons”.

<sup>162</sup> One may have the impression that there is something missing in the original, as there is no explanation of how it could be that Shahrāzād’s death might be beneficial to her people. Perhaps “self-sacrifice” could be a better translation for *al-fidā*, so that the sentence would become “either I will live or I will self-sacrifice for the virgin daughters of Moslems.”

her and her sister is replaced by the transformation of Shahrāzād's behaviour into a (religious) mission (Chraïbi 2016, 57).

اما اننى اتسبب فى خلاص الخلق واما اننى اموت واهلك ولى اسوة بمن مات وهلك  
“I will either cause the end of this disaster or die and perish as the others”. This version is different from Bulaq and Calcutta II, for the two scenarios – to live or to die – that Shahrāzād outlines to her father are clearly separate. The idea of death as a ransom, *al-fidā'*, is not mentioned here, so if she dies, she will just be another of the king's victims. Conversely, if she survives – the idea is implied in this sentence – she will rescue her people. Taking into account this version may alleviate some criticism (Sallis 1998) against Lane's choice to translate the corresponding passage in Bulaq as “I shall die, and be a ransom for one of the daughters of the Muslims”. In both Mahdi's edition and Lane's translation the idea is that if the heroine perishes, her death will make her equivalent to any other woman (see below).

لا بد ان  
this formulaic expression occurs four times in the dialogue between Shahrāzād and her father. Overall, Mahdi's edition gives a longer and more detailed account of the discussion between father and daughter – except for the contextualization concerning what brings Shahrāzād to sacrifice herself to the king, which, instead, is only found in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

والله ما ارجع وما هذه الحكايات تردنى عن طلبى، ولو اشتهيت احكيك مثل هذا كثير، واخر هذا ان لم تطلعنى  
للملك شاهريار من داتك والا طلعت انا من وراك وقوال له انك ما سمحت بى لمثله وبخلت على استادك بمتلى  
Shahrāzād resolutely affirms that she has already listened to stories similar to those the vizier tells her, so she cannot be dissuaded from her plans. In addition, Shahrāzād threatens her father by saying that she will go to the king herself and reports that the vizier opposes her will to marry him.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Bulaq**

“Either I shall die, and be a ransom for one of the daughters of the Muslims, or I shall live, and be the cause of their deliverance from him”: Lane (1979, 1: 35 note 29) illustrates that he deviates from the original text as the latter seems not to be entirely logical. The original recites: “*fa-immā an a'isha wa-immā an akūna fidā' li-banāt al-muslimīna wa-sababan li-khalāṣihim*”. Saying that if Shahrāzād dies she will rescue

her people means that even if the woman perishes, she has a contingent plan in mind that would prevent the king from killing other females again. Lane points to this solution in a note, which, in turn, he takes from the editor of Bulaq. However, Sallis (1998, 163) suggests that Lane’s translation is problematic in that Shahrāzād becomes, in his words, a ransom only “for one of the daughters of the Muslims”, and in doing so he disempowers her.

## Calcutta II

“By Allah, O my father, how long shall this slaughter of women endure?”: this sentence is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:25–26).

“Shall I tell thee what is in my mind in order to save both sides from destruction?”: this is taken from Calcutta I. “Both sides” is the translation of *al-farīqayni*, “the two parts/groups”, which is to be found in the original sentence, *anā alān uṭli ‘uka ‘alā mā fī ḍamīrī li-ukhalliṣa al-farīqayni min al-halāk* (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:26). It probably refers to the virgins killed by the king, and also to Shahrāzād as the next possible victim on the one hand, and to Shāhriyār on the other.

“Either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine”: this sentence is not taken from Calcutta I, unlike the rest of the passage in which it is embedded. Perhaps Burton thought that the text of Calcutta I was modified, but evidence seems to suggest that the editor of Calcutta I, al-Shirwānī, took this sentence from his Syrian source manuscript, for also Maḥdi’s text has the same passage.<sup>163</sup> In his translation of the sentence “Either I shall live [...] for his hands and thine” Burton (1897, 1:14, note 1) inserts a note, with which he tries to explain the unclear meaning of this sentence and which is explicitly misogynistic. He says that Shahrāzād, who acts as “Judith”,<sup>164</sup> is one of those learned and clever young ladies who “are very dangerous in the East”. This comment is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, a female character is judged as if she were a real woman, and this clearly shows Burton’s failure to grasp the symbolic value of the

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<sup>163</sup> *Wa-aṣīru sababan li-khalāṣ al-khalq wa-law annī amūtu wa-ahlaku fa-akūnu qad ṣirtu mithla al-banāt alladhīna qutilū*: “I will become the one who saves the people, or I will die and perish as the other women” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:26).

<sup>164</sup> The reference here is to the myth of Judith in the Old Testament, a beautiful young widow who kills the terrible Holofernes and saves herself from the violence of the man.

narrative. Secondly, it implies a sexist judgement on educated women, who are considered a threat specifically because they come from the East. Burton's misogynist attitude towards women is very explicit in this note and compounds this racist mindset. "Make me a doer of this good deed, and let him kill me and he will: I shall only die a ransom for others": this is taken from Calcutta I, and is a repetition of the concept expressed in the previous point.

"I will never desist [...] grudging the like of me to the like of thee": this sentence is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:27).

### III

#### Bulaq

صفحة ٦ (١): فجّهزها وطلع الى الملك شهريار وكانت قد اوصت اختها الصغيرة وقالت لها اذا توجهت الى الملك ارسل اطلبك فاذا جنّت عندي ورأيت الملك قضى حاجته مني فتولي يا اختي حدثيني حديثا غريبا نقطع به السهر وانا احثك حديثا يكون فيه الخلاص ان شاء الله [...].

LA:

So he arrayed her and went to king Shahriyār. Now she had given directions to her young sister, saying to her, When I have gone to the King, I will send to request thee to come; and when thou comest to me, and seest a convenient time, do you say to me, O my sister, relate to me some strange story to beguile our waking hour: – and I will relate to thee a story that shall, if it be the will of God, be the means of procuring deliverance (1:13).

#### Calcutta II

صفحات ٩ – ١٠ (١): فجّهزها وطلع الى الملك شهريار وكانت قد اوصت اختها الصغيرة وقالت لها اذا توجهت عند الملك ارسل اطلبك فاذا جنّت عندي ورأيت الملك قضى حاجته مني فتولي يا اختي حدثيني حديثا وكلاما نقطع به الليل والسهر وانا احثك حديثا يكون فيه ان شاء الله تعالى الخلاص [...].

BU:

But Shahrazad rejoiced with exceeding joy and gat ready all she required and said to her younger sister, Dunyazad, "Note well what directions I entrust to thee! When I have gone in to the King I will send for thee, and when thou comest to me and seest that he hath had his will of me, do thou say to me: – O my sister, an thou be not sleepy, relate to me some new story, delectable and delightsome, the better to speed our

waking hours; and I will tell thee a tale which shall be our deliverance, if so Allah please, and which shall turn the King from his blood-thirsty custom” (1:21).

LY:

[...] And so he decked her out and took her to King Shahriyar. She had given instructions to her younger sister, Dunyazad, explaining: “When I go to the king, I shall send for you. You must come, and when you see that the king has done what he wants with me, you are to say: ‘Tell me a story, sister, so as to pass the waking part of the night.’ I shall then tell you a tale that, God willing, will save us” (1:31).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

صفحة ٧١: ففرحت شهرزاد فرحا شديدا واصلحت امرها وما تحتاجه. واقبلت على اختها الصغيره دينارزاد وقالت لها يا اختاه افهمي ما اوصيكي به، انا ادا طلعت الى السلطان ارسل وراكي فادا طلعتي ورايتي الملك قضا حاجته قولى لى يا اختاه ان كنتى غير نايمه فحدثيني حدوته، فها انا احدتكم فهى سبب نجاتى وخلص هذه الامه واخرج الملك عن سنته.

HA:

She was very happy and, after preparing herself and packing what she needed, went to her younger sister, Dinarzad, and said, “Sister, listen well to what I am telling you. When I go to the king, I will send for you, and when you come and see that the kings has finished with me, say, ‘Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us a story’. Then I will begin to tell a story, and it will cause the king to stop his practice, save myself, and deliver the people” (20-21).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

فجهزها وطلع الى الملك شهريار: “he prepared her and took her to the king”. See Calcutta II. فتولى: the correct spelling is *fa-taqūlī*.

: حدثيني حديثا غريبا: “tell me a strange story”. This version is unique to Bulaq. The adjective *gharīb*, “strange”, meaning a story which is unfamiliar and exceptional, reminds us of the title of another collection of tales, *al-Hikāyāt al-‘ajība wa-al-akhbar al-gharība* [The Tales of the Marvellous and the Accounts of the Strange]. This anonymous work probably written in the 14th century gathers marvellous and curious stories, some of which are the same as the AN’s.

In the *A Hundred and One Nights*, the adjective used in the corresponding passage together with the word *ḥadīth* (story) is *ḥisān*, “pleasant”, which is the plural of *ḥasan* – the adjective is plural because it is associated with the plural of *ḥadīth*, namely *aḥādīth* (Fudge 2016a, 20).<sup>165</sup> It is important to note that the two adjectives *gharīb* and *ḥasan* are also used together with the term *ḥadīth*, meaning the sayings of the Prophet, to indicate the presence of uncommon words in a *ḥadīth* (*gharīb al-ḥadīth*) and a good/reliable tradition. However, in the AN *aḥādīth* simply means stories with no religious indication.<sup>166</sup>

الله حديثا يكون فيه الخلاص ان شاء الله : “in this”, i.e., in the act of telling stories, “there is the end”, namely the conclusion of all of it – that is of the killing of the virgins by the king. The sentence ends with an invocation to God.

## Calcutta II

فجهزها وطلع الى الملك شهر يار : “he prepared her daughter, and then he took her to the king”. In this version, as well as in Bulaq, it is the vizier who dresses his daughter and takes her to the king.

حدثيني حديثا وكلاما : “tell me a story”. The word “story” is repeated twice by two similar words, *ḥadīth* (account/story) and *kalām*, literally meaning “talking” and, therefore, “story in spoken words”.

يكون فيه ان شاء الله تعالى الخلاص : this sentence is the same as in Bulaq, though the word order is slightly different here. The invocation to God is enforced by the adjective *ta‘ālā*, “the almighty”.

## Mahdi’s edition

<sup>165</sup> Fudge uses ms 04576 for the conclusion of the first part of the frame story of the *A Hundred and One Nights*. This manuscript is dated 1852 and is preserve in the *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya* in Tunis.

<sup>166</sup> Chraïbi (2016, 51–53) demonstrates that the expedient *gharīb/aghrib min* (strange/stranger than) is a later evolution of the dramatic technique of the *‘ajīb*, and/or *a‘jab min* (astonishing/more astonishing than), and sets the point of reference for this equivalence between the two expressions in the title of the book *A‘jā‘ib al-makhluqāt wa-gharā‘ib al-mawjūdāt* [Marvels of Creatures and Strange Things Existing] by al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283). Moreover, Chraïbi explains that ms Tunisia Tunis *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya al-tūnisīyya* 04576 of the *A Hundred and One Nights* is the only one which contains an example of the *gharīb/aghrib min* technique and, therefore, can be considered the more Islamised among the manuscripts of this collection (which, overall, shows less religious marks and *aghrib min/a‘jab min* tools than the AN).

ففرحت شهرآزاد فرحا شديدا “and she was extremely happy”. Shahrāzād becomes excited upon receiving the news that she will be married to the king and, therefore, will be able to pursue her objective. No signs of joy are to be found in either Bulaq or Calcutta II.

واصلحت امرها وما تحتاجه: “Shahrāzād gets ready and prepares what she needs”. In this version, it is Shahrāzād herself who makes the preparation, while in both Bulaq and Calcutta II it is her father who undertakes this task.

ان كنتى غير نايمه فحدثينى حدوته: “if you are not sleeping, tell me a little story”. *Hadūta* (correct spelling *aḥdūtha*) means “something which is narrated”. It generally means “marvellous story”, or a story not to be believed, though this is not always the case (Lane 1968, 529).

فهى سبب نجاتى وخلص هذه الامه واخرج الملك عن سنته. “and this will be my salvation, end of it for the people and the possibility for the king of getting out this vicious circle”. In this version, Shahrāzād’s storytelling is seen as a strategic means of salvation for herself, for the people of the kingdom and for the king. Mahdi’s edition is the only one that explicitly considers Shahrāzād’s action as an act of liberation also for the male character Shāhriyār.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Bulaq**

“To beguile our waking hour”: in a note, Lane (1979, 1:36-37, note 41) illustrates that the king wakes up early in order to accomplish his religious obligations. According to this interpretation, Shahrāzād tells stories to Shāhriyār while he is waiting for the dawn prayer since he is “strict with regard to religious exercises”. At a narrative level, there is no reference to any religious practices performed by Shāhriyār in Bulaq, neither is there in Calcutta II nor in Mahdi’s edition. It, therefore, seems, more likely that Shahrāzād and Dīnārzād are awake because they want to spend their last night together as part of their plan against the king. In addition, Lane (1979, 1:36-37, note 41) indicates that the combination of the king’s religious fervor and of his will to murder young women should not be surprising, for “such conduct is consistent with the character of many Muslims”. He presents two examples relating to events that happened during the time he was in Egypt, one of which is concerns a general who

recited the Quran before killing his allegedly unfaithful wife. Lane’s personal interpretation, which is judgmental and stereotyped, makes use of an old literary text to demonstrate the actual barbarism of a foreign society. Personal accounts and fictional stories are overlapped to draw comparisons between fanciful stories and real-life events, without making any distinction between the fictional and non-fictional level.

## Calcutta II

“and gat ready all she required”: this version is taken from Calcutta I, in which Shahrāzād *aṣṣaḥāb amrahā wa-jamī‘ mā taḥtāju ilayhi* (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:40).

“Which shall turn the King from his blood-thirsty custom”: this is taken from Calcutta I (*wa-khalāṣ al-malik min-dam al-nās*) (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:40).

LY: “I shall then tell you a tale that, God willing, will save us”: here the translator renders *yakūnu fī-hi* [...] *al-khalāṣ*, “this will put an end to it”, as “this will save us”, giving a more intimate feature to the original sentence.

## IV

### Bulaq

صفحة ٦ (١): فقالت أيها الملك ان لي اختا صغيرة اريد ان اودعها [...] فقالت حبا وكرامة ان اذن لي هذا الملك المهذب [...].

LA:

She answered, O King, I have a young sister, and I wish to take leave of her. [...] Most willingly, answered Scheherazade, if this virtuous King permit me (1:14).

### Calcutta II

صفحة ١٠ (١): فقالت أيها الملك ان لي اختا صغيرة واريد ان اودعها [...] فقالت حبا وكرامة ان اذن لي هذا الملك المهذب [...].

BU:

She replied, “O King of the Age, I have a younger sister and lief would I take leave of her this night before I see the dawn.” [...] “With joy and goodly gree,” answered Shahhrazad, “if this pious and auspicious King permit me.” [...] So Scheherazade rejoiced [...] (1:21-22).

LY:

She told him: “I have a young sister and I want to say goodbye to her.” [...] “With the greatest pleasure,” replied Shahrazad, “if our cultured king gives me permission” (1:32).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

صفحات ٧١ – ٧٢: قالت ان لى اخت وأريد ان اودعها الليلة وتودعنى قبل الصباح. [...] قالت شهرزاد للمالك شاهريار دستورك احدث. [...] فرحت شهرزاد وقالت اسمعى.

HA:

[...] She replied, “I have a sister, and I wish to bid her good-bye before daybreak.” [...] Shahrazad turned to King Shahrayar and said, “May I have your permission to tell a story?” [...] Shahrazad was very happy and said, “Listen” (21).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

حبا وكرامة: *ḥubban wa-karāma* is a typical courtesy reply. The expression was used in the past among the Bedouins and meant the offering of a jar of water and its cover so that one could drink in the desert and quench his thirst.

ان اذن لى هذا الملك المهذب: “if the courteous king allows me”. *Muhadhdhab* also means “a man of integrity”, “free from faults”, but obviously this is not the case with Shāhriyār. This might be a subsequent addition to the text, or simply an invocation of great respect to a king.

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

قالت شهرزاد للمالك شاهريار دستورك احدث: “Shahrāzād said to King Shāhriyār”. This version looks simpler than that given by Bulaq and Calcutta II. In the phrase *dustūrak aḥdat* (right spelling in classical Arabic *ahdathu*), “do I have the permission to talk”, the word *dustūr*, a Persian term meaning “register” and/or “code”, refers to “asking for permission”. According to the *Tāj al-‘arūs*, this was a particular use of the word by the common people (al-Zabīdī 1965, 16:293).

فرحت شهرزاد: in Mahdi’s edition, Shahrāzād is happy (*faraḥat*) to have the possibility of telling a story. On the contrary, in Bulaq and in Calcutta II it is King Shāhriyār who expresses cheerfulness because he can listen to Scheherzade’s storytelling.

## Notes on the English text

### **Calcutta II**

“Before I see the dawn”, “So Scheherazade rejoiced”: these two sentences are likely taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:41).

“With joy and goodly gree”: this is an addition by Burton.

## V

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦١٩ (٢): وكانت شهرزاد في هذه المدة قد خلفت من الملك ثلاثة أولاد ذكور فلما فرغت من هذه الحكاية قامت على قدميها وقبلت الأرض بين يدي الملك و قالت له يا ملك الزمان وفريد العصر والوان اني انا جاريتك ولي الف ليلة وليلة وانا احثك بحديث السابقين ومواعظ المتقدمين فهل لي في جنابك من طمع حتى اتمنى عليك امنية [...].

LA:

Shahrazād, during this period, had borne the King three male children; and when she had ended these tales, she rose upon her feet, and kissed the ground before the King, and said to him, O King of the time, and incomparable one of the age and period, verily I am thy slave, and during thousand and one nights I have related to thee the history of the preceding generations, and the admonitions of the people of former times: then have I any claim upon thy majesty, so that I may request of thee to grant me a wish? (3: 671).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٧٣٠ (٤): وكانت شهرزاد في هذه المدة قد خلفت من الملك ثلاثة أولاد ذكور فلما فرغت من هذه الحكاية قامت على قدميها وقبلت الأرض بين يدي الملك و قالت له يا ملك الزمان وفريد العصر والوان اني انا جاريتك ولي الف ليلة وليلة وانا احثك بحديث السابقين ومواعظ المتقدمين فهل لي في جنابك من طمع حتى اتمنى عليك امنية.

BU:

Now during this time Shahrazad had borne the King three boy children: so, when she had made an end of the story of Ma'aruf, se rose to her feet and kissing ground before him, said, “O King of the time and unique one of the age and the tide, I am thine handmaid and these thousand nights and a night have I entertained thee with stories of

folk gone before and admonitory instances of the men of yore. May I then make bold to crave a boon of Thy Highness?” (8:51).

LY:

During this period Shahrazad had had three sons by the king and when she finished the story of Ma‘ruf, she got to her feet before kissing the ground in front of the king. “King of the age and unique ruler of this time,” she said, “I am your servant and for a thousand and one nights I have been telling you stories of past generations and moral tales of our predecessors. May I hope to ask you to grant me a request?” (3:671).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

ثلاثة أولاد ذكور: “Three sons”. In this version of the frame story Shahrāzād is said to have given birth to three sons.

In Breslau, as previously said (see 2.2, part I), it is King Shāhriyār who, after having listened to the last story, *istafāda mā qālathu fa-aḥḍara dhihnaḥu wa-ṣaffā qalbahu wa-radda ‘aqluhu wa-raja ‘a ilā allah ta ‘ālā* (benefited from what she told him, he came to himself, he cleared his heart, he restored himself to his senses and went back to God the Almighty). Shahrāzād does not ask for grace, but the king simply realizes that *mā yūjadu mithlahā fī bilād* (there is no one like her) (Fleischer 1843, 12:413).

قامت على قدميها وقبلت الأرض بين يدي الملك: “She stood on her feet and kissed the ground before the king”. According to Bulaq and Calcutta II, Shahrāzād’s behaviour is a sign of submission towards the king (see 2.2, part I).

انا جاريبتك: *Anā jāriyyatuka*, “I am your bondwoman”.

ولي الف ليلة وليلة: “I spent a thousand and one nights”. In Bulaq and Calcutta there is a clear indication of the number of nights Shahrāzād has been telling stories to the king. It is important to note that in ms Tunisia Tunis *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya al-tūnisiyya* 04576 of the *A Hundred and One Nights* also there is the same time indication (Fudge 2016a, 22).

بحديث السابقين ومواعظ المتقدمين: “Stories of the people from the past and warnings from the ancestors”.

اتمنى عليك امنية: “I hope you can grant me a desire”.

## Notes on the English text

### **Calcutta II**

“She had made an end of the story of Ma’aruf”: both Burton and Lyons and Lyons feel the necessity to remind the reader what the last story is, and insert the title of the tale here.

## **VI**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦١٩ (٢): [...] وقبلت الأرض وقالت يا ملك الزمان هؤلاء اولادك وقد تمنيت عليك ان تعتقني من القتل اكراما لهؤلاء الأطفال فانك ان قتلتنى يصير هؤلاء الأطفال من غير ام ولا يجدون من يحسن تربيتهم من النساء [...].

LA:

[...] And, having kissed the ground, said, O King of the age, these are thy children, and I request of thee that thou exempt me from slaughter, as a favour to these infants; for if thou slay me, these infants will become without a mother, and will not find among women one who will rear them well (3:672).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٧٣١ (٣): [...] وقبلت الأرض وقالت يا ملك الزمان هؤلاء اولادك وقد تمنيت عليك ان تعتقني من القتل اكراما لهؤلاء الأطفال فانك ان قتلتنى يصير هؤلاء الأطفال من غير ام ولا يجدون من يحسن تربيتهم من النساء [...].

BU:

[...] Again kissed ground and said, “O King of the Age, these are thy children and I crave that thou release me from the doom of death, as a dole to these infants; for, an thou kill me, they will become motherless and will find none among women to rear them as they should be reared” (8:51).

LY:

Then she kissed the ground again and said: “King of the age, these are your children and my wish is that as an act of generosity towards them you free me from sentence of death, for if you kill me, these babies will have no mother and you will find no other woman to bring them up so well” (3:671).

## Notes on the Arabic text

### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

عليك ان تعتقني من القتل اكراما لهؤلاء الأطفال: “my wish is that you absolve me from my death sentence as an honorable/generous gesture towards these children”. This sentence contains Shahrāzād’s “official” expedient to ask for her rescue, namely the very existence of the children she has had with the king and their future upbringing and education. However, from the answer of the king we know that he has already changed his mind about the woman, and about all women, before seeing his offspring.

In keeping with the spirit of discussing Shāhriyār’s repentance and his decision to spare the life of his spouse, it is interesting to note that as regards the *A Hundred and One Nights*, the conclusion of the frame story is not to be found in all the extant manuscripts. Fudge uses the text of ms Tunisia Tunis *al-Maktaba al-waṭaniyya al-ṭūnisiyya* 04576 for the ending of the first part of the frame story. Ms 04576 is one of the two manuscripts in which it is Dīnārzād who sleeps with the king and becomes pregnant. Here a couple of sentences are enough to put an end to the story and tell about the “clemency” of the king towards the woman: *fa-a‘tāha al-amān wa-baṭṭalat Shahrāzād al-ijtimā‘ bi-hi* (he gave her security and she stopped coming to him) (Fudge 2016a, 22).

## VII

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٦١٩ (٢): فقبلت يديه وقدميه وفرحت فرحا زائدا وقالت له اطال الله عمرك وزادك هيبة ووقارا.

LA:

So she kissed his hands and his feet, and rejoiced with exceeding joy; and she said to him, May God prolong thy life, and increase thy dignity and majesty! (3:672).

### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٧٣٠ (٤): فقبلت يديه وقدميه وفرحت فرحا زائدا وقالت له اطال الله عمرك وزادك هيبة ووقارا.

BU:

So she kissed his hands and feet and rejoiced with exceeding joy, saying, “The Lord make thy life long and increase thee in dignity and majesty!” presently adding, “Thou marvelledst at that which befell thee on the part of women; yet there betided the Kings

of the Chosroës before thee greater mishaps and more grievous than that which hath befallen thee, and indeed I have set forth unto thee that which happened to Caliphs and Kings and others with their women, but the relation is longsome, and hearkening groweth tedious, and in this is all-sufficient warning for the man of wits and admonishment for the wise” (8:51-52).

LY:

At this, she kissed his hands and feet in her delight, exclaiming: “May God prolong your life and increase your dignity and the awe that you inspire!” (3:671).

Notes on the Arabic text:

### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

فقبلت يديه وقدميه: “She kissed his hands and feet”. This is a sign of great submission.

فرحت فرحا زائدا: There is an emphasis here on Shahrāzād’s happiness for the king’s decision to spare her life. There are no signs of a similar reaction of Shahrāzād in the *A Hundred and One Nights*, at least according to the manuscript used by Fudge for the conclusion of the frame story, as well as the text of the Algerian printed edition (based on a manuscript dated 1836 and preserved in Algeria) edited by Shuraybiṭ Aḥmad Shuraybiṭ and the manuscript 3661 in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Notes on the English text

### **Calcutta II**

“presently adding, [...] admonishment for the wise”: This part, as also Burton highlights in a note (1897, 8:51, note 3), is taken from Breslau. Specifically, this is the statement with which Shahrāzād concludes the last tale she relates to the king (Fleischer 1843, 12:412–13).

## **VIII**

### **Breslau**

صفحة ٤١٦ (١٢): فقالت يا مالك الزمان ونحن نطلب منه شرطا واحدا وهو انه يسكن عندنا فاني ما اقدر على فراق اختي ساعة واحدة لأننا تربينا سوا ولا نقدر نفارق بعضنا بعضا فان قبل هذه الشرط فهي جاريتته  
.[...]

And she said: “O king of the ages we have only one condition, that we live together because I cannot be divided from my sister if only for one hour because we were brought up together and we cannot be separated from each other. This is the condition, then she can be his bondwoman.”<sup>167</sup>

#### Notes on the Arabic text

This passage is found only in Breslau and refers to Dīnārzād’s marriage with Shāhzamān. Shahrāzād tells King Shāhriyār that this marriage is possible only on the condition that the two couples will live together, so that the sisters will not be separated from each other.

#### **2.1.2.2 The princess prisoner of the jinn**

##### **I**

#### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣ (١): فخرجت منها صبية غراء بهية كانها شمس مضيئة كما قال الشاعر  
اشرقت في الدجى فلاح النهار \* واستنارت بنورها الاشجار  
من سناها الشموس تشرق لما \* تتبدى وتخجل الاقمار  
تسجد الكائنات بين يديها \* حين تبدو وتهتك الاستار  
واذا اومضت بروق حماها \* هطلت بالمدامع المصار

LA:

[...] And there came forth from it a young woman, fair and beautiful, like the shining sun (1:8).

#### **Calcutta II**

صفحة ٤ (١): فخرجت منها صبية بقامة هيفاء بهية كانها شمس مضية كما قال واحسن الشاعر عَطِيَّة  
اشرقت في الدجى فلاح النهار \* وانارت من فوقها الاشجار  
من سناها الشموس تشرق لما \* تتجلى وتخجل الاقمار  
تسجد الكائنات بين يديها \* حين تبدو وتهتك الاستار  
واذا اومضت بروق حماها \* هطلت بالمدامع الامطار

BU:

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<sup>167</sup> My translation.

[...] And out of it a young lady to come was seen, white-skinned and of winsomest mien, of stature fine and thin, and bright as though a moon of the fourteenth night she had been, or the sun raining lively sheen. Even so the poet Utayyah hath excellently said: –

She rose like the morn as she shone through the night, \* And she gilded the grove with her gracious sight:

From her radiance the sun taketh increase, when \* She unveileth and shameth the moonshine bright.

Bow down all beings between her hands \* Ans she showeth charms with her veil undight.

And she flooded cities with torrent tears \* When she flashed her look of leven-light (1:9-10).

LY:

[...] out came a slender girl, as radiant as the sun, who fitted the excellent description given by the poet ‘Atiya:

She shone in the darkness, and day appeared

As the trees shed brightness over her.

Her radiance makes suns rise and shine,

While, as for moons, she covers them in shame.

When veils are rent and she appears,

All things bow down before her.

As lightning flashes from her sanctuary

A rain of tears floods down (1:26-27).

### **Mahdi's edition**

صفحة ٦٣: [...] واخرج منه امرأة تامة القامة، صبيبه مليحة القوام حلوة الابتسام بوجه كانه بدر التمام [...].

HA:

[...] A full-grown woman. She had a beautiful figure, and a face like the full moon, and a lovely smile (12).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

صبيية غراء بهية: “a beautiful, glowing young woman”. The word *ṣabiyya* means a “young female” who has no children yet (al-Jawharī 1865, 2:503). The masculine, *ṣabiyy*, is a synonym of *ghulām*, “youth”, “before he becomes a young man” (Lane 1968, 1650). *Gharrā* stands for “radiant”, “shining” – and also “fair-complexioned”, “of white skin”, particularly in the forms *agharr* (masculine singular), meaning “white”, and *ghurr* and *ghurrān*, both meaning “white people”.

كَمَا قَالَ الشَّاعِر: “as the poet said”. The name of the poet is not given.

The poem is the same as in Calcutta II, but there are three small variations: واستنارت , بنورها “[The trees] were illuminated by her light”, تتبدى, “she showed herself”, and “المصار”, “cities”.

### **Calcutta II**

صبيية بقامة هيفاء بهية: “a young female with a beautiful body/slender”.

كَمَا قَالَ وَاحْسَنَ الشَّاعِر عُطَيَّة: “how said the poet ‘Uṭayya in the best way possible”. The text of Calcutta II has this vocalization of the proper name عُطَيَّة ; however, the correct name should be ‘Aṭiyya, from Jarīr bin ‘Aṭiyya (d.728), a poet who lived during the Umayyads (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:986).

The poem is the same as in Bulaq, but there are three small variations: , وانارت من فوقها: “the trees shed light over her”, تتجلى, “she became manifested”, الامطار, “rains”.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

منه امرأة تامة القامة، صبييه مليحه القوام حلوة الابتسام بوجه كانه بدر التمام  
perfect figure, a beautiful body, a nice smile and a face like a full moon”. In this version the poem offers a physical description of the boxed woman.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

Lane omits the poem.

#### **Calcutta II**

“White-skinned”: Burton translates *gharrā* as “white-skinned”. This is not incorrect, since this adjective also means “radiant”, “bright” and, therefore, it can be linked to brightness/splendor instead of to skin colour. In this specific case it is, therefore, difficult to say if Burton’s choice of mentioning the colour “white” is due to his racist attitude, which is so explicit in other parts of the text.

“And she gilded the grove with her gracious sight”: in this case, it is not the woman who illuminates the trees but the other way round. LY gives the correct translation, “as the trees shed brightness over her”.

“She unveileth and shameth the moonshine bright”: here, instead, Burton’s rendition seems to be more appropriate than that of LY’s, “her radiance makes suns rise”. The verb *tatajallā* may be translated as “she appeared/showed up”.

“Bow down all beings between her hands”: this seems to be a literal translation. “Before her” would be a better solution.

“And she flooded cities with torrent tears”: in a note, Burton (1897, 1:10, note 1) clarifies that he prefers to translate *amṭār* (rains) as “cities”, namely the Arabic *amṣār* – which is the term to be found in the edition of Bulaq used in this analysis –, admitting his inclination for exaggeration since “cities” instead of “rain(s)” results in a more effective metaphor.<sup>168</sup> In LY, however, the passage is faithfully translated from Calcutta II.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

“A full-grown woman”: Haddawy’s choice to translate *tāmmat al-qāma* as “full-grown” is disputable, as the English term indicates “someone who has reached maturity” and “someone who has reached his/her full adult size”. However, here the adjective *tāmma* refers to an idea of perfection, harmony and beauty, and not to biological maturity.

## **II**

### **Bulaq**

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<sup>168</sup> In this note Burton (1897, 1:XXVIII) indicates that in the Bulaq edition of 1835 that he uses for his translation he finds the word *amṭār*. However, in the text of Bulaq I rely on for the present linguistic analysis, namely the reprint of the Bulaq edition of 1836 published in 1964 by the *Maktabat al-muthannā* in Baghdad, I have found the word *amṣār*. The Bulaq edition published by the Cairene *al-Maṭba‘a al-‘āmira al-sharfiyya* in 1888-1889, which is the other edition I occasionally quote, contains the term *amṭār*. Whether Burton takes *amṣār* from the Bulaq edition of 1835 and whether the Bulaq edition of 1836 differs from it with regard to the term *amṭār/amṣār* I cannot say, as I could not access the first Bulaq edition of 1835.

صفحة ٤ (١): فقالت لهما بالإشارة انزلا ولا تخافا من هذا العفريت [...] فقالت لهما بالله عليكم ان تنزلا والا نبهت عليكم العفريت فيقتلكما شر قتلة [...] فقامت لهما وقالت ارصعا رصعا عنيفا والا انبه لكما العفريت [...] فقالت لهما ما لي اراكما تتغامزان فان لم تتقدما وتفعلا والا نبهت لكما العفريت [...].

LA:

[...] As though she would say, Come down, and fear not this 'Efreet. [...] But she said, I conjure you by the same that ye come down; and if ye do not, I will rouse this 'Efreet, and he shall put you to a cruel death. (1:9).

## Calcutta II

صفحة ٥ (١): وقالت لهما بالإشارة انزلا ولا تخافا من العفريت [...] فقالت لهما ان لم تنزلا نبهت عليكم العفريت يقتلكما شر قتلة [...] فقامت لهما وقالت ارصعا رصعا عنيفا والا انبه لكما العفريت [...] فقالت لهما ما لي اراكما تتغامزان فان لم تتقدما وتفعلا نبهت لكما العفريت [...].

BU:

[...] Signed to the Kings, Come ye down, ye two, and fear naught from this Ifrit. [...] But she rejoined by saying, "Allah upon you both that ye come down forthright, and if ye come not, I will rouse upon you my husband, this Ifrit, and he shall do you to die by the illest of deaths;" and she continued making signals of them. [...] And she rose before them, and urged them, saying "Do this without stay or delay, otherwise will I arouse and set upon you this Ifrit who shall slay you straightway." [...] Leave this talk: it needs must be so," quoth she, and she swore them by Him who raised the skies on high, without prop or pillar, that, if they worked not her will, she would cause them to be slain and cast into the sea. [...] Then quoth she to the twain, "How is it I see you disputing and demurring; if ye do not come forward like men, I will arouse upon you the Ifrit" (1:10-11).

LY:

[...] Before gesturing to them to come down and not to fear him [...] but she replied: 'Unless you come, I'll rouse him against you and he will put you to the cruellest of deaths.' [...] and she then said: 'Take me as hard as you can or else I'll wake him up.' [...] They started gesturing to each other about this and the girl asked why, repeating: 'If you don't come up and do it, I'll rouse the jinni against you' (1:27).

## Mahdi's edition

صفحة ٦٣: [...] وأشارت اليهم بيدها "انزلوا قليلا قليل الى عندي" [...] فقالت لا بد من نزولكم الى عندي.  
[...] فقالت لا بد من نزولكم، وان لم تنزلوا عندي والا نبهت العفريت وادعه يقتلكم. تم اشارت الهم والحت  
عليهم [...] فرقدت على ظهرها ورفعت رجليها وقالت جامعوني واقضوا غرض والا نبهت العفريت يقتلكما.  
[...] فقالت الصبييه لهما لا بد من ذلك. والحت عليهم وحلفت لهم: والله رافع السما لين لم تفعلوا والا نبهت اعفيت  
زوجي لكما وامره ان يقتلكما ويغرقكما في هذا البحر.

HA:

[...] And motioned to them with her hand, as if to say, "Come down slowly to me."  
[...] She replied, "You must come down to me." [...] She replied, "You must come  
down, and if you don't, I shall wake the demon and have him kill you." She kept  
gesturing and pressing [...] Then she lay on her back, raised her legs, and said, "Make  
love to me and satisfy my need, or else I shall wake the demon, and he will kill you."  
[...] She replied, "You must," and insisted, swearing, "By God who created the  
heavens, if you don't do it, I shall wake my husband the demon and ask him to kill you  
and throw you into the sea" (12).

#### Notes on the Arabic text

##### **Bulaq**

وقالت لهما بالإشارة انزلا "she gestured to them to come down".

بالله عليكم ان تنزلا "by God you must come down". This is the second request made to  
the two kings by the boxed woman. In this version, there is an invocation to God which  
is absent in Calcutta II.

وقالت ارسعا ارسعا عنيفا: "and she said copulate with me strongly". *Raṣi'a aṣ'ān*, i.e.,  
*saḥada*, "to have sexual intercourse" (Ibn Manẓūr 1984, 8:125).

والانبهت لكما العفريت / والا انبه لكما العفريت / لانبهت عليكم العفريت فيقتلكما شر قتلة  
threatens to wake up the bloodthirsty *ifrit* on three occasions.

##### **Calcutta II**

The text of Calcutta II is almost identical to that of Bulaq, except for the absence of  
the invocation to God and the subsequent sentences, which have the same meaning but  
present a slightly different grammar structure: تفعلنا نبهت لكما / ان لم تنزلا نبهت عليكم العفريت  
. العفريت .

##### **Mahdi's edition**

فقال لا بد من نزلوكم، وان لم تنزلوا عندي /فقال لا بد من نزلوكم الى عندي / لا بد من ذلك *lā budda min*, “it must...”, is found three times in this version, while it is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II. As mentioned above, this close, which is very simple and free of religious connotations, seems to testify to a more ancient version of the text. The request to climb down from the tree is made by the boxed woman three times.

والله رافع السما لين لم تفعلوا والا نبهت اعفيت زوجي / والا نبهت العفريت يقتلكما / والا نبهت العفريت: the boxed woman threatens to wake up the *‘ifrīt* on three occasions, as in Bulaq and Calcutta II. One of these three sentences has a quite long invocation to God (*wa-allah rāfi‘ al-samā*), and also includes the term *zawjī*, “my husband”, which the boxed woman uses to refer to the *‘ifrīt* in this version.

تم اشارت الهم والحت : “she gestured and insisted”. Both verbs appear twice, though the second time separately, in this passage.

فرقدت على ظهرها ورفعت رجليها وقالت جامعوني واقضوا غرض: here the boxed woman’s sexual request is made explicit by an description of her deeds. The verbs which describe her will to make love to the two kings are *jāmi‘ unī*, “have sex with me”, and *iqḍū gharad*, “accomplish [my] desire”.

ويغرقكما في هذا البحر: *yughriqukumā fī hādā (hādhā in classical Arabic) al-baḥr*, “he causes you to die in water in this sea”. This is to be found only in this version.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

Lane omits the translation of the passage in which the woman’s sexual request is explicitly made, and also when the two brothers discuss with each other who should lie with her first. He limits the whole scene to one sentence which is bereft of any sexual innuendo: “and, after they had remained with her as long as she required” (Lane 1979, 1:9).

#### **Calcutta II**

“You my husband, this Ifrit”: the phrase “my husband” is not found either in Calcutta II or in Calcutta I, so it has to be taken from Breslau (Habicht 1824, 1:13).

“And she continued making signals of them”: this is taken either from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:20) or Breslau (Habicht 1824, 1:13).

“Leave this talk: it needs must be so”: this is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:20).

From “And she swore them by Him who raised the skies on high, without prop or pillar, that, if they worked not her will, she would cause them to be slain and cast into the sea”: this seems to be taken from Calcutta I, although the phrase “who raised the skies on high” is not found in this edition (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:20), but it is in Breslau, *bi-rāfi‘ al-samā* (Habicht 1824, 1:14).<sup>169</sup> This swearing is also present in Mahdi’s edition. In a note, Burton says that “this introducing the name of Allah into such a tale is essentially Egyptian and Cairene” (Burton 1897, 1:10, note 4).

“If ye do not come forward like men”: this request for the sexual intercourse is rendered in a more innocent way compared to the original. This seems to be in accordance with Burton’s comment (1897, 1:XXV) in his *The Translator’s Foreword* regarding his attempt to preserve “[...] all possible delicacy where the indecency is not intentional; and, as a friend advises me to state, not exaggerating the vulgarities and the indecencies which, indeed, can hardly be exaggerated. For the coarseness and crassness are but the shades of a picture which would otherwise be all lights”.

LY: Lyons and Lyons’ translation is very faithful to the original.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

“She lay on her back, raised her legs, and said, “Make love to me and satisfy my need, [...]”: Haddawy offers a translation conforming to the original with regard to the passage where the boxed woman raises her request.

## **III**

### **Bulaq**

**صفحة ٤ (١):** فقالت لهما افيقا واخرجت لهما من جيبها كيسا واخرجت لهما منه عقدا فيه خمسمائة وسبعون خاتما فقالت لهما تدرن ما هذه [...] فقالت لهما أصحاب هذه الخواتم كلهم كانوا يفعلون بي على غفلة قرن هذا العفريت فاعطيني خاتما كما انتما الاثنان الاخوان [...] فقالت لهما ان هذا العفريت قد اخطفني ليلة عرسى ثم

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<sup>169</sup> Another possibility could be that Burton read this phrase in one of the manuscripts circulating at the time. These manuscripts are either partially or indirectly based on a manuscript of the Syrian branch, such as ms Ar 18 England Oxford Bodleian Library Bodl. Or 550-556 and the so-called Wortley-Montague manuscript, which Burton (1897, 1:XXI) presumably knew and which seems to be similar to manuscript G, though Zotenberg considers it of an independent recension (Akel 2016, 84).

انه وضعنى في علبة وجعل العلبة داخل الصندوق ورمى على الصندوق سبعة اقفال وجعلنى فى قاع البحر  
العجاج المتلاطم بالامواج ولم يعلم ان المرأة منا اذا ارادت امرا لم يغلبها شيء كما قال بعضهم  
لا تأمنن الى النساء \* ولا تثقن بعهودهن  
فرضاؤهن وسخطهن \* معلق بفروجهن  
يبدين وذا كاذبا \* والغدر حشو ثيابهن  
بحديث يوسف فاعتبر \* متحذرا من كيدهن  
او ما ترى ابليس اخرج آدم من اجلهن  
وقال بعضهم  
كف لوما غدا يقوى الملوما \* ويزيد الغرام عشقا عظيما  
ان اكن عاشقا فما آت الا \* ما انتة الرجال قبلى قديما  
انما يكثر التعجب ممن \* كان من فتنة النساء سليما

LA:

[...] She took from her pocket a purse, and drew out from this a string, upon which were ninety-eight seal-rings; and she said to them, Know ye what are these? [...] – The owners of these rings, said she, have, all of them, been admitted to converse with me, like as ye have, unknown to this foolish ‘Efreet; therefore, give me your two rings, ye brothers. [...] and she then said to them, This ‘Efreet carried me off on my wedding-night, and put me in the box, and place the box in the chest, and affixed to the chest seven locks, and deposited me, thus imprisoned, in the bottom of the roaring sea, beneath the dashing waves; not knowing that, when one of our sex desires to accomplish any object, nothing can prevent her. In accordance with this, says one of the poets: –

Never trust in women; nor rely upon their vows;

For their pleasure and displeasure depend upon their passions.

They offer a false affection; for perfidy lurks within their clothing.

By the tale of Yoosuf be admonished, and guard against their stratagems. Dost thou not consider that Iblees ejected Adam by means of woman?

And another poet says:–

Abstain from censure; for it will strengthen the censured, and increase desire into violent passion.

If I suffer such passion, my case is but the same as that of many a man before me:

For greatly indeed to be wondered at is he who hath kept himself safe from women's artifice (1:9).

## Calcutta II

صفحات ٤-٥ (١): فقالت لهما افيقا واخرجت لهما من جيبها كيسا واخرجت لهما منه عقدا فيه خمسمائة وسبعين خاتما فقالت لهما ا تدررون ما هؤلاء [...] فقالت لهما اصحاب الخواتم كلهم ناكوني على قرن العفريت فاعطيناني خاتميكما الاثنين الاخوين [...] فقالت لهما ان هذا العفريت قد اخطفني ليلة عرسي ثم انه وضعني في علبة وجعل العلبة داخل الصندوق ورمى على الصندوق سبعة اقفال جلي وجعلني في قاع البحر العجاج المتلاطم بالامواج ولم يعلم ان المرأة منا اذا ارادت شيئا لم يغلبها شيء كما قال بعضهم  
لا تأمنن على النساء \* ولا تثق بعهودهن  
فرضاؤهن وسخطهن \* معلق بفروجهن  
يورين ودا كاذبا \* والغدر حشو ثيابهن  
بحديث يوسف فاعتبر \* ستجده بعض خدوعهن  
او ما ترى لايبيك آدم \* خروجه من اجلهن  
وقال بعضهم  
وبك ان الملام يقوى الملوما \* ليس جرمي كما نشأت عظيم  
ان اكن عاشقا ف لم أت الا \* ما اتته الرجال قبلي قديما  
انما يكثر التعجب ممن \* كان من فتنة النساء سليما

BU:

She then took from her pocket a purse and drew out a knotted string, whereon were strung five hundred and seventy seal rings, and asked, "Know ye what be these?" [...] Then quoth she, "These be the signets of five hundred and seventy men who have all embraced me upon the horns of this foul, this foolish, this filthy Ifrit; so give me also your two seal rings, ye pair of brothers." [...] she said to them, "Of a truth this Ifrit bore me off on my bride-night, and put me into a casket and set the casket in a coffer and to the coffer he affixed seven strong padlocks of steel and deposited me on the deep bottom of the sea that raves, dashing and clashing with waves; and guarded me so that I might remain chaste and honest, quotha! That none save himself might have connexion with me. But I have embraced as many of my kind as I please, and this wretched Jinni wotteth not that Destiny may not be averted nor hindered by aught, and that whatso woman willeth the same she fulfilleth however man nilleth.  
Even so saith one of them:—

Rely not on women; \* Trust not to their hearts,  
Whose joys and whose sorrows \* Are hung to their parts!  
Lying love they will swear thee \* Whence guile ne'er departs;  
Take Yūsuf for sample \* Ware sleights and ware smarts!  
Iblis ousted Adam \* (See ye not?) thro' their arts.

And another saith:—

Stint thy blame, man! 'Twill drive to a passion without bound; \* My fault is not so heavy as fault in it hast found.

If true lover I become, then to me there cometh not \* Save what happened unto many in the by-gone stound.

For wonderful is he and right worthy of our praise \* Who from wiles of female wits kept him safe and kept him sound” (1:12-13).

LY:

[...] She told them to get up. From her pocket she then produced a purse from which she brought out a string on which were hung five hundred and seventy signet rings. She asked them if they knew what these were, [...] she told them: “All these belonged to lovers of mine who cuckolded this jinni, so give me your own rings.” [...] She went on: “This jinni snatched me away on my wedding night and put me inside a box, which he placed inside this chest, with its seven heavy locks, and this, in turn, he put at the bottom of the tumultuous sea with its clashing waves. What he did not know was that, when a woman wants something, nothing can get the better of her, as a poet has said:

Do not put your trust in women

Or believe their covenants.

Their satisfaction and their anger

Both depend on their private parts.

They make a false display of love,

But their clothes are stuffed with treachery.

Take a lesson from the tale of Joseph,

And you will find some of their tricks.

Do you not see that your father, Adam,

Was driven out from Eden thanks to them?

Another poet has said:

Blame must be matched to what is blamed;  
I have grown big, but my offence has not.  
I am a lover, but what I have done  
Is only what men did before me in old days.  
What is a cause for wonder is a man  
Whom women have not trapped by their allure” (1:27-28).

### **Mahdi's edition**

**صفحات ٦٣ - ٦٤ - ٦٥:** تم أخرجت من بين اتوايها كيس صغير وفتحته ونكتت ما فيه فخرجت منه تمنيه وتسعين خاتم مختلفات الألوان والصياغات، وقالت لهم اتدرون ما هذه الخواتم. [...] قالت أصحاب هذه الخواتم كلها جامعوني وكل من جامعني اخدت منه خاتم، وها قد جامعتموني أيضا فاعطوني خواتمكما حتى اضيفهما الى هذه الخواتم ويتكلمون مائة خاتم ويكون قد اكتشفني مائة رجل على قرن هذه العفريت الاذنس الاقرن الدى حبسنى في هذه الصندوق وقل على باربع اقفال واسكنى وسط هذه البحر العجاج المتلاطم الامواج، وصاننى وارادنى ابقا حره او منصانه ولم يعلم ان المقادير لم ترد ولا يمنعها شى وادا ارادت الامراه شيا لا يقدر احدا ان يردها. [...] واشارت اليهما "روحا الى حال سبيلكما والا نبيته لكما".

HA:

[...] She said to them, "Give me your rings," and, pulling out from the folds of her dress a small purse, opened it, and shook out ninety-eight rings of different fashions and colors. Then she asked them, "Do you know what these rings are?" They answered, "No." She said, "All the owners of these rings slept with me, for whenever one of them made love to me, I took a ring from him. Since you two have slept with me, give me your rings, so that I may add them to the rest, and make a full hundred. A hundred men have known me under the very horns of this filthy, monstrous cuckold, who has imprisoned me in this chest, locked it with four locks, and kept me in the middle of this raging, roaring sea. He has guarded me and tried to keep me pure and chaste, not realizing that nothing can prevent or alter what is predestined and that when a woman desires something, no one can stop her." [...] and motioned to them, "Go on your way, or else I shall wake him" (13).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

خمسمائة وسبعون خاتما: Bulaq, Calcutta II and many manuscripts belonging to the Egyptian branch indicate the number of the rings that the boxed woman possesses as 570.

كلهم كانوا يفعلون بي على غفلة قرن هذا العفريت *yaf‘alūna bī*, “they did to me”, namely, “they made love to me”.

ولم يعلم ان المرأة منا اذا ارادت امرا لم يغلبها شيء: “he did not know that when a woman, one of us, wants something nothing can stop her”. *Yaghlibuha shay’* means “nothing subdues her”.

There are five variations within the poems between Bulaq and Calcutta II: يبدين, “they appear to be”; متحذرا من كيدهن, “be careful of their tricks”; ابليس اخرج آدما من اجلهن, “Iblis brought Adam out [of the paradise] using a woman”; كف لوما غدا يقوى الملوما, “do not censure because this will make the censured stronger”, and ويزيد الغرام عشقا عظيما, “it transforms desires into a great passion”.

بحديث يوسف فاعتبر : it is the boxed woman who recites the poem – here and in Calcutta II – and refers to an episode in the sura 12 in the Quran, in which the prophet Joseph is tempted by a woman but he resists her, so she eventually accuses him to harass her. Mahdi’s version does not contain poetry in this part of the frame story, yet it does make reference to the same episode. The two brothers’ exclamation “the malice of women is great” in reaction to the boxed woman’s confession of her betrayals against the *ifrīt* is taken from sura 12, verse 28 (see Shāhriyār VII).

A similar poem is also to be found in the *A Hundred and One Nights*, though it is recited by the Indian man (the alter ego of Shāh zamān) after discovering that his wife has betrayed him. However, in this case there is no reference to the episode in sura 12; and the blame for women’s infidelity rests equally on women, who pretend to be chaste but they are not, and on the hungry dogs, i.e. men, around them (Fudge 2016a, 15).

## Calcutta II

كلهم ناكوني: the verb here is *nākūnī*, “they had sex with me”.

خمسماية وسبعين خاتما: “five hundred and seventy rings”.

There are five variations within the poems between Calcutta II and Bulaq: بورين, “they make a false display of love”; ستجده بعض خدوعهن, “you will find their deceits”; ابليك آدم, “your father Adam he was ejected because of them [the women]” – here there is no mention of Iblis, so women are not explicitly compared to the devil; وبك انّ الملام يقوى الملوما, “consider that a censure makes the censured even stronger”, and ليس جرمي كما نشأت عظيما, “my crime has not grown as I have”.

## Mahdi’s edition

تسعين وخاتم: “ninety-eight rings”. Mahdi (2014, 2:38) highlights that some manuscripts of the Egyptian branch also quote the number ninety-eight, for example ms *sīn*, *shīn* and *ṣād*.

كلها جامعوني وكل من جامعني: the verb that points to the sexual act is *jāma ‘unī*, “made love to me”.

حتى اضيفهما الى هذه الخواتم ويتكلمون مائة خاتم ويكون قد اكتشفتني مائة رجل على قرن هذه العفريت الادنس الاقرن : “I can add your rings to the others and reach a hundred, so that a hundred men have had sex with me under the horns of this dirty ‘*ifrīr*”. Here the “betrayal” of the boxed woman is stressed by the fact that she repeats twice the number of men she lays with.

in this version, ولم يعلم ان المقادير لم ترد ولا يمنعها شى وادا ارادت الامراه شيا لا يقدر احدا ان يردها : there is no poetry at this point of the story. A single sentence encloses the concepts which are extensively explained in the two poems that are found in Bulaq and Calcutta II, namely women are dangerous and female desire is uncontrollable. In the above sentence, the word *maqādīr* means “what is predestined”, or an event that has its “course by the decree of God” (Lane 1968, 2495), and conveys the idea of the irreversibility of female wills which, nevertheless, is part of a higher blueprint and obey a divine and preordained destiny.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Bulaq**

“Ninety-eight seal-rings”: although Bulaq mentions five hundred and seventy rings, in a note Lane (1979, 1:34, note 25) explains that he prefers to use a less extraordinary number. He clarifies that his decision to make the number of rings ninety-eight is also due to the fact that the same number of rings is found in two tales from the *Kathā sarit sâgara* (see 2.2, part I), which show similarities with the episode of the boxed woman. This attitude seems to be the opposite of Burton’s who, conversely, usually chooses the most extreme version for the sake of emphasis.

“The owners of these rings, said she, have, all of them, been admitted to converse with me, like as ye have”: Lane translates *yaf‘alūna bī*, “they made love to me”, as “they conversed with me”, in order to avoid any reference to the sexual act.

“For their pleasure and displeasure depend upon their passions”: *furūjihinna*, “their vaginas”, is translated as “their passions” for the same reason above explained.

Lane (1979, 1:34, note 27) devotes a quite long note to explain the concept of the wickedness of women among the Arabs. He specifies that deficiency in judgement, a superior degree of cunning and general depravity are seen as undeniable female features by the Arabs, and supports his statement with examples taken from Arabic books, as well as from his personal experience in Arab countries.

## **Calcutta II**

“Five hundred and seventy seal rings”: this is the number of rings to be found in Calcutta II. In a note Burton (1897, 1:11, note 1) clarifies that, although some manuscripts indicate the number of rings as “ninety”, he prefers “the greater number as exaggeration is a part of the humour”. If one remembers Lane’s note about the same issue and compares it with that of Burton, it seems that the latter intends to counter each point made by the former to somehow demonstrate the superiority of his translation.

“That none save himself might have connexion with me. But I have embraced as many of my kind as I please, and this wretched Jinni wotteth not that Destiny may not be averted nor hindered by aught”: this passage is translated from Breslau, which is the only version that, like Mahdi’s edition, employs the word *maqādīr* (Habicht 1824, 1:14). Calcutta I uses *makā`id*, “machinations” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:22).

“Iblis ousted Adam”: this verse, which mentions Iblis, seems to be taken from Bulaq. LY: “Blame must be matched to what is blamed; I have grown big, but my offence has not”: Lyons and Lyons translate this verse differently from Burton.

## 2.2 Sexual intercourse: vocabulary

Bulaq	Calcutta II	Mahdi's edition
<b>Shāhzamān's wife with her lover</b>		
صفحة ٢: معانقة عبدا اسود	صفحة ٢: معانقة عبدا اسود	صفحة ٥٧: متعانقه هي واياه
<i>Mu'ānaqa 'abdan aswad:</i> she was embracing the black slave.	<i>Mu'ānaqa 'abdan aswad:</i> she was embracing the black slave.	<i>Mu'ānaqa hiya wa- iyyāh:</i> they were embraced.
<b>The king's wife and Mas'ūd</b>		
صفحة ٣: فعانقتها وعانقته وواقعها	صفحة ٣: فعانقتها وعانقته وواقعها	صفحة ٥٩: وشال سيقانها ودخل بين اوراكها ووقع عليها
<i>Fa-ānaqahā wa-ānaqathu:</i> he embraced her and she embraced him. <i>Wa-wāqa'ahā:</i> he made love to her.	<i>Fa-ānaqahā wa-ānaqathu:</i> he embraced her and she embraced him. <i>Wa-wāqa'ahā:</i> he made love to her.	<i>Wa-shāla sayqāniha [sāqayhā] wa-dakhala bayna awrākihā wa-wāqa'a 'alayhā:</i> he raised her legs, went between her thighs, and had sex with her.
صفحة ٣: فى بوس وعناق ونيك ونحو ذلك	صفحة ٣: فى بوس وعناق ونيك ورحاق	صفحة ٥٩: وصارت العشره على العشره ومسعود فوق الست
<i>Fī būs, wa-'ināq wa-nayk wa-nahū dhālika:</i> kissing, embracing and making love in this way.	<i>Fī būs, wa-'ināq wa-nayk wa-ruḥāq:</i> kissing, embracing, making love and drinking.	<i>Wa-ṣārat al-'ashara 'alā al-'ashara wa-mas'ūd fawqa al-sitt:</i> the ten went on the ten and Mas'ūd mounted the lady.
-	-	صفحة ٦٢: استانقت على ظهرها ووقع العبد عليها وقضى شغل منها <sup>170</sup>
		<i>Istalaqat 'alā zahriha wa-wāqa'a al-'abd</i>

<sup>170</sup> *Qadā shughla minhā, qadā ḥājatahu and qadā gharaḍahu* can be translated as: “he finished his job with her”; “he satisfied his needs”/“he finished what he had to do”, and “he accomplished his mission/he satisfied his desire”. All these meanings, though slightly different, are very close to each other and can be associated with an idea of the sexual act as a need and/or a goal.

		<i>'alayhā wa-qaḍā shughl minhā:</i> she lay on her back, so the slave mounted her and finished his job with her.
<b>The boxed woman with the two kings</b>		
صفحة ٤: ارضعا رصعا عنيفا	صفحة ٥: ارضعا رصعا عنيفا	صفحة ٦٣: فرقدت على ظهرها ورفعت رجليها وقالت جامعوني واقضوا غرضي
<i>Irṣi 'ā raṣa 'an 'anīfan:</i> “copulate with me strongly”.	<i>Irṣi 'ā raṣa 'an 'anīfan:</i> “copulate with me strongly”.	<i>Fa-raqadat 'alā zahrihā wa-rafa'at rajlayhā wa-qālat jāmi 'ūnī wa-iqḍū gharadī:</i> she lay on her back and raised her legs, saying “make love to me and accomplish my intent”.
صفحة ٤: فعلا ما امرتهما به	صفحة ٥: استقفاها الاثنان	صفحة ٦٣: فجامعهما الكبير تم الصغير
<i>Fa 'alā mā amarathumā bihi:</i> they did what she ordered them to do.	<i>Istaqafāhā al-ithnāni:</i> the two took her from behind.	<i>Fa-jāma 'ahumā al-kabīr tumma al-ṣaghīr:</i> the older made love to her first, then the younger.
صفحة ٤: كانوا يفعلون بي	صفحة ٥: كلهم ناكوني	صفحة ٦٣: كلها جامعوني
<i>Kānū yaḥ'alūna bī:</i> “they made (love) to me”.	<i>Kulluhum nākūnī:</i> “they all had sex with me”.	<i>Kulluhā jāma 'ūnī:</i> “they all copulated with me”.
<b>King Shāhriyār with his one-night wives and Shahrāzād</b>		
صفحة ٤: يأخذ بنتا بكرا يزيل بكارتها	صفحة ٦: يأخذ بنتا بكرا يأخذ وجهها	صفحة ٦٥: قضى شغله منها
<i>Ya 'khudhu bintan bikran yuzīlu bakārataha:</i> he would take a virgin and take (literally, cancelled) her virginity.	<i>Ya 'khudhu bintan bikran wa-ya 'khudhu wajhahā:</i> he would take a virgin and also her dignity (literally, her face).	<i>Qaḍā shūghluhu minhā:</i> he satisfied his needs with her / he finished his job with her.

صفحة ٤: بنت تتحمل الوطئ	صفحة ٦: بنتا تتحمل الوطي	صفحة ٦٦: يأخذ كل ليلة بنتا [...] وبيات معهم
<i>Bint tataḥammalu al-waṭī`:</i> a girl to have sex with.	<i>Bint tataḥammalu al-waṭī`:</i> a girl to have sex with.	<i>Ya`khudhu kulla layla bintan [...]</i> <i>wa-yabātu ma`ahā:</i> he takes a woman every night [...] and sleeps with her.
صفحة ٦: قضى حاجته	صفحة ٩: قضى حاجته	صفحة ٧١: قضا حاجته
<i>Qaḍā ḥājatahu:</i> he satisfied his needs.	<i>Qaḍā ḥājatahu:</i> he satisfied his needs.	<i>Qaḍā ḥājatahu:</i> he satisfied his needs.
صفحة ٦: فقام الملك واخذ بكارتها	صفحة ١٠: فقام الملك واخذ بكارتها	صفحة ٧١: قضى الملك من اخذها عرضه
<i>Fa-qāma al-malak wa-akhadha bakāratāhā:</i> the king got up and deflowered her.	<i>Fa-qāma al-malak wa-akhadha bakāratāhā:</i> the king got up and deflowered her.	<i>Qaḍā al-malik min ukhtihā gharaḍahu:</i> the king accomplished his goal with her sister.

### 2.3. The phenomenology of male illness

#### I

##### Bulaq

**صفحة ٣ (١):** فتذكر الملك شاهرمان ما كان من امر زوجته فحصل عنده غم زائد واصفر لونه وضعف جسمه فلما رآه اخوه على هذه الحالة ظن في نفسه ان ذلك بسبب مفارقتة بلاده وملكه فترك سبيله ولم يسأل عن ذلك ثم انه قال له في بعض الأيام يا اخي انى اراك ضعف جسمك واصفر لونك فقال له يا اخي انا في باطنى جرح ولم يخبره بما رأى من زوجته فقال انى اريد ان تسافر معى الى الصيد والقنص لعلك ينشرح صدرك فابى ذلك فسافر اخوه وحده الى الصيد [...].

LA:

[...] But the mind of King Shāh-Zemān was distracted by reflections upon the conduct of his wife; excessive grief took possession of him; and his countenance became sallow; and his frame, emaciated. His brother observed his altered condition, and, imagining that it was occasioned by his absence from his dominions, abstained from troubling him or asking respecting the cause, until after the lapse of some days, when at length he said to him, O my brother, I perceive that thy body is emaciated, and thy countenance is become sallow. He answered, O brother, I have an internal sore:— and he informed him not of the conduct of his wife which he had witnessed. Shahriyār then said, I wish that thou wouldest go out with me on a hunting excursion; perhaps thy mind might so be diverted: — but he declined; and Shahriyār went alone to the chase (1:4-5).

##### Calcutta II

**صفحات ٢-٣ (١):** فتذكر الملك شاهرمان ما كان من امر زوجته فحصل عنده غم زائد واصفر لونه وضعف جسمه فلما رآه اخوه على هذه الحالة ظن في نفسه ان ذلك بسبب مفارقتة بلاده وملكه فترك سبيله ولم يسأل عن ذلك ثم انه قال له في بعض الأيام يا اخي انى اراك قد ضعف جسمك واصفر لونك فقال له يا اخي انا في باطني جرح ولم يخبره بما رأى من زوجته فقال انى اريد ان تسافر معى الى الصيد والقنص لعل ان ينشرح خاطرك فابى ذلك فسافر اخوه وحده الى الصيد [...].

BU:

When, however, the brothers met, the elder could not but see the change of complexion in the younger and questioned him of his case whereto he replied, “This is caused by the travails of travel and wayfare and my case needeth care, for I have suffered from

the change of water and air! but Allah be praised for reuniting me with a brother so dear and so rare!" On this wise he dissembled and kept his secret, adding, "O King of the time and Caliph of the tide, only toil and moil have tinged my face yellow with bile and hath made my eyes sink deep in my head." [...] and, after a time, seeing his condition still unchanged, he attributed it to his separation from his country and kingdom. So he let him wend his own ways and asked no questions of him till one day when he again said, "O my brother, I see thou art grown weaker of body and yellower of colour." "O my brother," replied Shah Zaman, "I have an internal wound: still he would not tell him what he had witnessed in his wife." Thereupon Shahryar summoned doctors and surgeons and bade them treat his brother according to the rules of art, which they did for a whole month; but their sherbets and potions naught availed, for he would dwell upon the deed of his wife, and despondency, instead of diminishing, prevailed, and leach -craft treatment utterly failed. One day his elder brother said to him, "I am going forth to hunt and course and to take my pleasure and pastime; maybe this would lighten thy heart." Shah Zaman, however, refused, saying, "O my brother, my soul yearneth for naught of this sort and I entreat thy favour to suffer me tarry quietly in this palace, being wholly taken up with my malady" (1:4-5).

LY:

[...] But Shah Zaman remembered what his wife had done and, overcome by sorrow, he turned pale and showed signs of illness. His brother thought that this must be because he had had to leave his kingdom and so he put no questions to him until, some days later, he mentioned these symptoms to Shah Zaman, who told him: 'My feelings are wounded,' but did not explain what had happened with his wife. In order to cheer him up, Shahriyar invited him to come with him on a hunt, but he refused and Shahriyar set off by himself (1:25).

### **Mahdi's edition**

**صفحات ٥٧-٥٨:** والملك شاهزمان في قلبه ناراً لا تطفى ولهبها لا يخفى لاجل ما جرى عليه من جهة زوجته وكيف خانتها واستبدلت به رجلاً طباح [...] الا انه لما اختلا بنفسه واقتكر ما جرا عليه مع زوجته من المحن فتنفس صعدا واخفى امره كمداء، وقال "ادا كنت انا ويجرى على هذه المجرا والبلا العظيم"، وصار يقتل في روحه ويتغبن ويقول "ما جرا لاحد ما جرا الى" فيتسوس خاطره، وقل من اكله وركبه الصفار وتغيرت حالته من همه وبقى كلما له الى ورا حتى نحل جسمه وتغير لونه. ولما راى الملك شاهريار الى أخيه وكلما مر عليه

يوم ينقص فى عينه ويرق ويمتلح وقد اصفر لونه وتغير كونه فظن انه من فراق ملكه وأهله وتغريبه عنده، فقال فى نفسه "اخى ما طابت له هدى الأرض، لكن اريد اجهز له هدية حسنه وارسله الى بلاده". واقام السلطان يعبى لاخوه شاهزمان الهدايا مدة شهر. تم ان الملك شاهريار احضر اخوه شاهزمان وقال اعلم يا اخى انى اريد ان اسرح سرحة الغزلان واسير اتصيد عشرة أيام واعدو اجهزك للسفر، فهأك ان تسافر معى تتصيد. فقال له يا اخى انى منقبض الصدر ومنغص خاطر، فدعنى وسافر انت على بركة الله وعونه.

HA:

[...] While Shahzaman's heart was on fire because of what his wife had done to him and how she had betrayed him with some cook [...] But whenever he found himself alone and thought of his ordeal with his wife, he would sigh deeply, then stifle his grief, and say, "Alas, that this great misfortune should have happened to one in my position!" Then he would fret with anxiety, his spirit would sag, and he would say, "None has seen what I have seen." In his depression, he ate less and less, grew pale, and his health deteriorated. He neglected everything, wasted away, and looked ill. When King Shahrayar looked at his brother and saw how day after day he lost weight and grew thin, pale, ashen, and sickly, he thought that this was because of his expatriation and homesickness for his country and his family, and he said to himself, "My brother is not happy here. I should prepare a goodly gift for him and send him home." For a month he gathered gifts for his brother; then he invited him to see him and said, "Brother, I would like you to know that I intend to go hunting and pursue the roaming deer, for ten days. Then I shall return to prepare you for your journey home. Would you like to go hunting with me? Shahzaman replied, "Brother, I feel distracted and depressed. Leave me here and go with God's blessing and help" (6-7).

#### Notes on the Arabic text

##### **Bulaq and Calcutta II**

فتذكر: "and he remembered". The conscious memory of what happened to him is the trigger for the deterioration in his health.

فحصل عنده غم زائد واصفر لونه وضعف جسمه: "and he fell into growing sadness (*ghamm zā'id*), he became pale (*aşfarra lawnuhu*) and he lost weight (*da'ufa jismuhu*". *Aşfarra* literally means "to become yellow" and, by extension, "to become pale". The Arabs referred to the Greeks/the Byzantines – and, later on, to Christian princes and Europeans in general – as "yellow" and/or "pale" (*banū al-aşfar*). Also black people

were occasionally qualified as *aşfar* (al-Jawharī 1865, 1: 348);<sup>171</sup> for example, some Arab philologists, as well as Quranic commentators, attributed to *aşfar* the meaning “black” (Morabia 1964, 80–81). It is interesting to note that *al-şufra*, the condition of yellowness/paleness, indicates someone who is inflicted by madness, because madness was said to be cured by a remedy made from saffron. The root *ş - f - r* is also linked to an idea of poverty – *aşfara al-rajul*, namely *iftaqara*, “he became penniless” –, and to a possible disease in the belly that can be caused by yellow water accumulating in the stomach or by a serpent that bites the person when it is hungry, resulting in pain.

ذلك بسبب مفارقتة بلاده ومملكه فترك سبيله  
 “this must be due to the separation from his country and kingdom”. The explanation that Shāhriyār gives himself to justify his brother’s emaciation is his longing for his home country.

يا اخی انا فی باطنی جرح  
 “I have a wound inside me”. The words used here are *jarah*, “wound”, and *bāṭin*, “hearth”, “mind”, “the interior”, and this indicates that the betrayal is associated with an inner wound. The word *bāṭin* is particularly relevant within the Islamic tradition, especially within Shiism and Sufism, as elements are said to have both a superficial/visible (*ẓāhir*) and an inner/invisible (*bāṭin*) nature. *Ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* are, therefore, theological and philosophical terms; in the Quran God is said to be both *al-ẓāhir wa-al-bāṭin*, namely he has perfect knowledge of all things (sura 57, verse 3).

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<sup>171</sup> As per the colours used to refer to different ethnic groups, the Persians were said to be red because *al-shuqra aghlabu al-alwān ‘alayhim* (fairness/blondeness is the most widespread colour among them) (al-Jawharī 1865, 1:209). The collective name *al-ḥamrā’* (those who are red) was used to indicate white people and, more generally, foreigners, as an antonym of *al-sūdān* (the blacks), by which the Arabs usually referred to themselves (Morabia 1964, 82). *Al-ḥamrā’* people were considered lighter than *al-sūdān* and darker than *al-bīdān* (the whites); these latter were subsequently called *banū al-aşfar* to avoid confusion, as the term *abyaḍ* (white) also meant leper (Meouak 2012, 34). The *şaqāliba*, i.e., “Slavs” and/or “Central and Eastern European slaves” , were also said to be red – as well as white (2012, 42–43). It is interesting to note that in the *Tāj al-lughā wa-şihāḥ al-‘arabiyya* al-Jawharī (1865, 1:348) explains that the two “yellow things” (*al-aşfarān*) that ruin women are gold (*al-dhahab*) and saffron (*al-za‘farān*) – which also refers to the dye plant (*wars*) –, meaning that love for jewellery and spices corrupt women. Al-Jawharī (1865, 1:209) also indicates that the red elements that ruin men are meat (*lahm*) and wine (*khamr*). In the *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Ibn Manẓūr (1883, 6:286) illustrates that according to other scholars, gold and saffron are the two yellow things that corrupt men, water (*mā’*) and milk (*laban*) the two white things, and the moon (*qamar*) and water (*mā’*) the two black things.

لعلك ينشرح صدرك “maybe this will lighten your heart”. The idea here is that doing something enjoyable like going hunting may help Shāhzamān think less about his concern. In Calcutta II, this sentence is slightly different, *la'allaka yanshariḥu ṣadrūka*, or *khāḥirūka*, “the bosom becomes dilated with joy” (Lane 1968, 1530).

### Mahdi's edition

في قلبه نارا لا تطفى ولهيبا لا يخفى “there was fire in his heart that could never die and a flame that could never go out”. In this version of the frame story Shāhzamān's distress is described in greater detail. The reaction to his wife's betrayal is like a flame and a fire, namely something that burns him from within. The concept is repeated twice in the two sentences, which are almost identical, *fī qalbihi nāran lā tuṭfā' (tuṭfa'a)/lahīban lā yakhfā*.

كيف خانتها واستبدلت به رجلا طبّاخ “how she cheated on him and substituted him with a kitchen boy”. Mahdi's edition is the only text which explicitly mentions the question of being betrayed (*khānathu*). In all the other versions, the episode of the treachery is simply indicated as *mā jarā*, “what happened”.

لما اختلا بنفسه وافكر ما جرا عليه “If he was alone he would think of what had happened to him”. Solitude is tied to remembering and, therefore, suffering. In this respect, Mahdi's edition offers a more nuanced version of the frame story than that of Bulaq and Calcutta II.

فتنفس صعدا واخفى امره كمداء “he breathed with an expression of sorrow and was very sad”. Shāhzamān is in despair because he thinks that despite “I am who I am”, ادا كنت انا, namely a king, a great calamity befell him. Moreover, his grief is more intense because he thinks he is the only one who has undergone this terrible experience: ما جرا لاحد ما جرا لي.

فيتسوس خاطره، وقل من اكله وركبه الصفار وتغيرت حالته من همه وبقي كلما له الى ورا حتى نحل جسمه “he was distressed, ate less, became pale and his appearance changed because of his concerns. Then he stopped talking, his body became emaciated and changed colour”.

فطن انه من فراق ملكه وأهله وتغريبه عنده “And he thought the sickness was due to the fact of being far from his country and people, and of feeling too distant (*taghrīb*), from them while with him”. *Taghrīb*, which indicates a sense of alienation/estrangement due to being far from one's own home country, is not to be found either in manuscript G –

which uses the word *تَعَبَّرَ بِهِ* (“he reproached it”, i.e., the fact of being far from his reign) or in manuscript *bā’*, which uses the term *لِتَغْيَرَهُ* (“his change”, for being far from his reign). It seems the variations are due to copyists’ errors in writing diacritic marks and copying letters correctly (Mahdi 2014, 2:35).

أخي ما طابت له هدى الأرض، لكن أريد أجهز له هدية حسنه وأرسله إلى بلاده here, I want to make him gifts and send him back to his country”. In this passage Shāhriyār invites his brother to go hunting but without suggesting to him that this could help relax him and ease his mind.

أخي اني منقبض الصدر ومنغص خاطر، فدعني “my heart is sore, my mind is disturbed, leave me alone”. Shāhzamān’s heart and mind are stricken by sadness. This idea is repeated many times in this version of the frame story.

على بركة الله وعونه: this is a plea to God to wish someone a good trip that is to be found only in this version.

#### Notes on the English text

##### **Calcutta II**

“When, however, the brothers met, [...] my eyes sink deep in my head.”: this passage is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:7–8). Sallis (1998, 164) states that this passage is problematic because it is extremely unlikely that Shāhriyār is able to recognise a change in his brother’s appearance since they have not seen each other for a long time.

“Thereupon Shahryar summoned doctors and surgeons and bade them treat his brother according to the rules of art, which they did for a whole month; but their sherbets and potions naught availed, for he would dwell upon the deed of his wife, and despondency, instead of diminishing, prevailed, and leach -craft treatment utterly failed”: this is taken from Calcutta I, where, however, it is found in a slightly different position, namely after Shāhzamān’s justification of his status – “O King of the time and Caliph of the tide, only toil and moil have [...] – and before Shāhriyār’s comment on the separation from his land as a reason for his sickness (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:8).

“My malady”: this expression is not included in the original Arabic text, in which Shāhzamān’s condition is never directly referred to as illness.

##### **Mahdi’s edition**

“While Shahzaman’s heart was on fire”: in the Arabic version this concept is repeated twice in two almost identical sentences. Haddawy decides to avoid redundant repetition here.

“Depressed”: this modern term is probably not appropriate to translate either *munqabiḍ al-ṣadr* or *munaghghiṣ al-khāṭir*.

## II

### Bulaq

صفحة ٣ (١): فلما رأى ذلك أخو الملك قال في نفسه والله ان بليتني اخف من هذه البلية وقد هان ما عنده من القهر والغم وقال هذا اعظم مما جر الى ولم يزل في اكل وشرب و بعد هذا جاء اخوه من السفر فسلمنا على بعضهما ونظر الملك شهر باز الى أخيه الملك شاهرمان وقد ردّ لونه واحمرّ وجهه وصار ياكل بشهية بعدما كان قليل الاكل [...].

LA:

When Shāh-Zemān beheld this spectacle, he said within himself, By Allah! my affliction is lighter than this! His vexation and grief were alleviated, and he no longer abstained from sufficient food and drink. When his brother returned from his excursion, and they had saluted each other, and King Shahriyār observed his brother Shāh-Zemān, that his colour had returned, that his face had recovered the flush of health, and that he ate with appetite, after his late abstinence [...] (1:5-6).

### Calcutta II

صفحة ٣ (١): فلما رأى ذلك أخو الملك قال في نفسه والله ان بليتني اخف من هذه البلية وقد انفاك ما عنده من الغير والغم وقال هذا اعظم مما جرى لي ولم يزل في اكل وشرب و بعد هذا جاء اخوه من السفر فسلمنا على بعضهما ونظر الملك شهر يار الى أخيه الملك شاهزمان راه ردّ له لونه واحمرّ وجهه وصار يأكل بنهجه بعد ما كان قليل الاكل [...].

BU:

Now, when Shah Zaman saw this conduct of his sister-in-law he said in himself, “By Allah, my calamity is lighter than this! My brother is a greater King among the kings than I am, yet this infamy goeth on in his very palace, and his wife is in love with that filthiest of filthy slaves. But this only showeth that they all do it, and that there is no woman but who cuckoldeth her husband; then the curse of Allah upon one and all and upon the fools who lean against them for support or who place the reins of conduct in

their hands.” So he put away his melancholy and despondency, regret and repine, and allayed his sorrow by constantly repeating those words, adding, “This is my conviction that no man in this world is safe from their malice!” When supper-time came they brought him the trays and he ate with voracious appetite, for he had long refrained from meat, feeling unable to touch any dish however dainty. Then he returned grateful thanks to Almighty Allah, praising Him and blessing Him, and he spent a most restful night, it having been long since he had savoured the sweet food of sleep. Next day he broke his fast heartily and began to recover health and strength, and presently regained excellent condition. His brother came back from the chase ten days after, when he rode out to meet him and they saluted each other; and when King Shahryar looked at King Shah Zaman he saw how the hue of health had returned to him, how his face had waxed ruddy and how he ate with an appetite after his late scanty diet (1:6).

LY:

When Shah Zaman saw this, he told himself that what he had suffered was less serious. His jealous distress ended and, after convincing himself that his own misfortune was not as grave as this, he went on eating and drinking, so that when Shahriyar returned and the brothers greeted one another, Shahriyar saw that Shah Zaman’s colour had come back; his face was rosy and, following his earlier loss of appetite, he was eating normally (1:25).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

**صفحات ٥٨-٥٩-٦٠: [...]** ونظر الى الاطيار والأشجار وافنكر زوجته وما فعلت فى حقه فاطهر كمدا وتنفس صعدا. فبينما هو فى فكرته وحرقتة ومحنته يرمى الى السما وينظر الى البستان [...] لما راء شاهزمان الى فعل زوجة أخيه الملك الأكبر ، وقد تميز ما صنعوه وقد نظر الى هذه المحنة العظيمة والمصيبة التى عند اخوه فى قصره [...] وتامل زوجته والعبد مسعود، فافرح ما كان به من الهم والوسواس وقال " هذا حالنا، واخى ملك الأرض والحاكم على طولها والعرض وقد عدى عليه فى ملكه، فى زوجته وسراريه، والمصيبة عنده فى البيت، فما هدى كثير فى حقى انا، وانى كنت اظن ان لم أصيب الا انا، ما ارى الا الناس كلهم اصبوا، ووالله ان مصيبتى اهنون من مصيبة اخى". تم صار يتعجب ويدم الزمان الذى ما سلم من محنته احدا. تم انه نسى همه وسلى مصيبتة واتاه العشا فاكل بنهمه ومسره واتاه الشراب فشرب بنهمه. وانجلا ما كان فى خاطره فاكل وشرب ولد وطرب وقال "بعد ما انا ممن بلى بهذه المصيبة وحدى، فانا طيب". واقام يلكل ويشرب مدة عشره ايام. واتى اخوه الملك شاهريار من الصيد فاستقبله شاهزمان فرحان ووقف فى خدمته وبش فى وجهه. [...]

واقام شاهزمان ياكل ويشرب وذهب عنه الهم والفكر واحمر وجهه وقويت همته ودار الدم فيه ورد لونه وسمن

ورجع الى حالته الأولى واعظم. [...] قال قد رايتك اول قدومك على وقودك عندى وانت كلما يمر عليك يوم تنقص فى عينى حتى تغير وجهك واستحال لونك وقصرت همتك، ولم تنزل على هذه الحالة فضننت ان الذى اصابك لاجل فراقك لاهلك وملكك [...].

HA:

After his brother's departure, Shahzaman stayed in the palace and, from the window overlooking the garden, watched the birds and trees as he thought of his wife and what she had done to him, and sighed in sorrow. While he agonized over his misfortune, gazing at the heavens and turning a distracted eye on the garden [...] When he saw this spectacle of the wife and the women of his brother the great king – [...] and what Mas'ud did with his brother's wife, in his very palace – and pondered over this calamity and great misfortune, his care and sorrow left him and he said to himself, "This is our common lot. Even though my brother is king and master of the whole world, he cannot protect what is his, his wife and his concubines, and suffers misfortune in his very home. What happened to me is little by comparison. I used to think that I was the only one who has suffered, but from what I have seen, everyone suffers. By God, my misfortune is lighter than that of my brother." He kept marvelling and blaming life, whose trials none can escape, and he began to find consolation in his own affliction and forget his grief. When supper came, he ate and drank with relish and zest and, feeling better, kept eating and drinking, enjoying himself and feeling happy. He thought to himself, "I am no longer alone in my misery; I am well." For ten days he continued to enjoy his food and drink, and when his brother, King Shahrayar, came back from the hunt, he met him happily, treated him attentively, and greeted him cheerfully. [...] As time went by, he continued to eat and drink with appetite, and became ruddy, and his body gained weight, as his blood circulated and he regained his energy; he was himself again, or even better. [...] "When you first came to stay with me, I noticed that you kept losing weight, day after day, until your looks changed, your health deteriorated, and your energy sagged. As you continued like this, I thought that what ailed you was your homesickness for your family and your country" [...] (7-8-9).

Notes on the Arabic text

**Bulaq and Calcutta II**

قال فى نفسه: "he said to himself". In Mahdi's edition one finds "he said".

فلما رأى "and when he saw". The change in Shāhzamān's physical and mental status begins when he witnesses the betrayal of his brother's wife taking place in front of his own eyes.

والله ان بليتى اخف من هذه البلية: "By God my affliction is lighter than this". Shāhzamān realizes that what happened to him is less serious than what is taking place in a garden in the public eye.

هان ما عنده من القهر والغم: "grief and sorrow were reduced". Shāhzamān scales down what he previously experienced after having witnessed the betrayal of his brother's wife. In Calcutta II one finds الغم instead of القهر, but the meaning is the same. القهر والغم: "the non-satisfaction and sadness", *al-ghamm*, "sadness", derives from the root *gh-m-m*, "to conceal", by extension "what conceals happiness".

هذا اعظم مما جر الى: "this is bigger than what happened to me". Another consideration of the same kind as that in the second point.

لم يزل فى اكل وشرب: "he resumed eating and drinking". Shāhzamān's physical improvement is expressed in one simple sentence, so in a more concise manner than in Mahdi's edition (see below).

وقد ردّ لونه واحمرّ وجهه وصار ياكل بشهية بعدما كان قليل الاكل: "he went back to his natural colour, his face recovered the flush of health, and his appetite was restored after a long period without eating". Shāhriyār notices the changes in his brother's appearance. In Calcutta II there is a slight variation, وصار يأكل بنهجه, but the meaning of the sentence remains the same.

### **Mahdi's edition**

ونظر الى الاطيار والأشجار واقتكر زوجته وما فعلت فى حقه فاطهر كمدًا وتنفس صعدًا: "he saw the birds, and the trees while thinking of his wife and what she did to him and feeling grief and sorrow". Shāhzamān's sadness is depicted in detail in this version. This represents an exception, as the frame story mainly consists of deeds and usually does not include visual portrayals of either characters or locations.

وقد تميز ما صنعوه: "he distinguished what they did", namely he thought about what they did. There is a sense of reflection and pondering on the facts that happened in the garden which is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II.

الى هذه المحنة العظيمه والمصيبه “this huge affliction/calamity, this disaster”. In this passage words with the same meaning are repeated to strengthen the sense of affliction they convey.

وتأمل زوجته والعبد مسعود: “he reflected on his wife and the slave Mas‘ūd”. A sense of pondering on the facts that happened in the garden is conveyed by this sentence.

فأفزع ما كان به من الهم والوسواس: “concern and what deprives the mind of reason”. The term *al-waswās*, “what deprives the mind of reason”, is also to be found later in this version (see above in Shāhriyār, IV).

واخي ملك الأرض والحاكم على طولها والعرض وقد عدى عليه في ملكه، في زوجته وسراريه: in this sentence, Shāhzmān makes an important consideration regarding the events that occurred in the palace garden. The fact that his brother is a king over a vast land has not prevented him from being a victim of betrayal by his wife and female slaves.

“وانى كنت اظن ان لم أصيب الا انا، ما ارى الا الناس كلهم اصابوا، والله ان مصيبتى اهن من مصيبة اخي: “I used to think that I was the only one experiencing such a thing; instead, my brother’s misfortune is greater than mine”. After seeing the scene in the garden, Shāhzmān reflects upon his condition again and realizes that someone else has suffered an insult more severe than his.

تم صار يتعجب: “and he was astonished”. The concept of the *‘ajīb*, implied in the verb *ta‘ajjaba*, is used here to express marvel. After having witnessed the queen’s betrayal and having reflected upon it, Shāhzmān is surprised. One would expect the state of surprise/wonder to be a spontaneous reaction preceding the reasoning upon the event. Here, instead, it is the other way round: Shāhzmān thinks first, then he wonders. The astonishment experienced by the character contributes to making the narrative more dramatic.

ويدم الزمان الذى ما سلم من محنته أحدا: “he swore at the time, which never spares anyone from its affliction”. This refers to a condition of eschatological suffering, which is to be found exclusively in this version.

فاكل بنهمه ومسرره واتاه الشراب فشرب بنهمه: “and he resumed eating and drinking vigorously”. Shāhzmān’s change of habits testifies to his recovery.

بعد ما انا ممن بلى بهده المصيبه وحدى، فانا طيب: “I am no longer the only one suffering, so I am fine”. The idea of sharing the pain with others comforts Shāhzmān, and is repeated twice – this is the second time – in this version of the frame story.

ياكل ويشرب وذهب عنه الهم والفكر واحمر وجهه وقويت همته ودار الدم فيه ورد لونه وسمن ورجع الى حالته الأولى واعظم: “he ate and drank, he was no longer concerned, his face got back its natural colour, he gained weight, his blood circulated and he went back to his previous state and even better”. This detailed description of Shāh zamān’s physical recovery is more accurate than that of Bulaq and of Calcutta II.

تنقص فى عينى حتى تغير وجهك واستحال لونك وقصرت همتك: “you lost weight, your face changed, you turned a funny colour and you lost ardor”. This is a portrait of Shāh zamān’s changed appearance because of what his wife did to him.

لأجل فراقك لاهلك وملكك: “because you were distant from your people and kingdom”. This is what Shāhriyār thought was the cause of Shāh zamān’s sickness when he first saw him losing weight and changing complexion.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Calcutta II**

Burton’s translation of this passage is based on Calcutta I, and this is the reason because of which it is very long and contains elements that are not to be found in Calcutta II. It should be noted that in Calcutta I the word for “calamity” is *miḥna* (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:10), namely the same term used in Mahdi’s edition.

“By Allah, my calamity is lighter than this! [...] when he rode out to meet him and they saluted each other;”: this part is taken from Calcutta I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:10–11). “The filthiest of filthy slaves” is the translation of *al-waghd al-awghad*, “the most depraved of the slaves”.

“...And his wife in love with that filthiest of slaves”: Burton renders *al-waghd al-awghad*, “the most wicked”, as “the filthiest”, in doing so moving the meaning from a purely moral plane (wickedness) to a more aesthetic one (filthiness). In Burton’s translation, therefore, dirtiness becomes a feature of the slave’s body. This is in line with his attitude to describing the queens’ lovers as ugly and dirty in order to make women’s betrayal appear absurd, immoral and reprehensible.

“But this only showeth that they all do it, and that there is no woman but who cuckoldeth her husband...”: this sentence is taken from Calcutta I, in which, however, the main idea – i.e., all women are unfaithful – is not repeated twice. The original sentence is *qad tabayyana lī bi-anna akthara al-nisā’ khā’ināt azwājihinna*, “this

shows that most women are unfaithful to their husbands” (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:10). Burton changes “most women” to “they all” and “there is no woman but...” and, in doing so, he exaggerates the meaning in Arabic.

### **Mahdi’s edition**

“Your homesickness for your family and your country”: Haddawy translates *ahlika* as “your family”, although a better translation would be “your people” or “your subjects”, as connections to family members are never indicated with regard to Shāhzamān within the frame story.

“As a result I forgot my care and sorrow”: by using the verb “to forget”, Haddawy offers a free interpretation of this phrase. The verbs in the Arabic text are *infaraja*, “to lessen in tension”, *zāla*, “to come to an end”, *insharaḥa*, “to become dilated” (said of the bosom).

## **III**

### **Bulaq**

صفحة ٣ (١): اما تغير لوني فاذكره لك واعف عني من اخبارك برد لوني [...] يا اخي اعلم انك لما أرسلت وزيرك اليّ يطلبني للحضور بين يديك جهزت حالي وقد برزت من مدينتي ثم اني تذكرت الخرزة التي اعطيتها لك في قصرى [...] وجئت اليك وانا متفكر في هذا الاسر فهذا سبب تغير لوني وضعفى واما ردّ لوني فاعف عني من ان اذكره لك [...] فاعاد عليه جميع ما راه [...] فقال له اخوه شاهرمان اجعل انك مسافر للصيد والقنص واختف عندى وانت تشاهد ذلك وتحققه عيانا [...].

LA:

As to the change of my natural complexion, answered Shāh-Zemān, I will inform thee of its cause; but excuse my explaining to thee the return of my colour. [...] Know then, O my brother, he answered, that when thou sentest thy Wezeer to me to invite me to thy presence, I prepared myself for the journey, and when I had gone forth from the city, I remembered that I had left behind me the jewel that I have given thee; I therefore returned to my palace for it [...] but my mind was occupied by reflections upon this affair, and this was the cause of the change of my complexion, and my weakness: now, as to the return of my colour, excuse my informing thee of its cause. [...] so he repeated to him all that he had seen. [...] Then, said Shāh-Zemān, give out that thou art going again to the chase, and conceal thyself here with me, and thou shalt witness this conduct, and obtain ocular proof of it (1:6).

## Calcutta II

صفحات ٤-٣ (١): اما تغير لوني فاذكركه لك واعف عني من اخباري لك برد لوني [...] يا اخي اعلم اني لما أرسلت وزيرك اليّ يطلبنني للحضور بين يديك جهّزت حالي وقد برزت بزّ مدينتي ثم اني تذكرت الخرزة التي اعطيتها لك في قصرى [...] وجئت اليك وانا متفكر في هذا الامر فهذا سبب تغير لوني وضعفي واما ردّ لوني فاعف عني ان اذكركه لك [...] فاخبره جميع ما راه [...] فقال له اخوه شاهزمان اجعل انك مسافر للصيد والقنص واخفف عندي وانت تشاهد ذلك وتحققه عيانا [...].

BU:

“I will tell thee what caused my complaint and my loss of colour; but excuse my acquainting thee with the cause of its return to me and the reason of my complete recovery: indeed I pray thee not to press me for a reply.” Said Shahryar, who was much surprised by these words, “Let me hear first what produced thy pallor and thy poor condition.” “Know, then, O my brother,” rejoined Shah Zaman, “that when thou sentest thy Wazir with the invitation to place myself between thy hands, I made ready and marched out of my city; but presently I minded me having left behind me in the palace a string of jewels intended as a gift to thee. [...] yet my thoughts brooded over this business and I lost my blood and became weak. But excuse me if I still refuse to tell thee what was the reason of my complexion returning.” [...] “O King of the Age, again I pray thee excuse my so doing!” [...] I fear, O my brother, lest the recital cause thee more anger and sorrow than afflicted me.” [...] Thereupon Shah Zaman told him all he had seen, from commencement to conclusion, ending with these words, “When I beheld thy calamity and the treason of thy wife, O my brother, and I reflected that thou art in years my senior and in sovereignty my superior, mine own sorrow was belittled by the comparison, and my mind recovered tone and temper: so throwing off melancholy and despondency, I was able to eat and drink and sleep, and thus I speedily regained health and strength. Such is the truth and the whole truth.” [...] “An thou wouldst look upon thy calamity,” quoth Shah Zaman, “rise at once and make ready again for hunting and coursing, and then hide thyself with me, so shalt thou witness it and thine eyes shall verify it.” (1:7-8).

LY:

“I’ll tell you why I lost colour,” his brother replied, “but don’t press me to tell you how I got it back.” [...] When you sent your vizier to invite me to visit you, I got ready and had gone out of the city when I remembered a jewel that was intended as a present for

you, which I had left in my palace. [...] “I was full of concern about the affair and this was why I became pale and sickly, but don’t make me say how I recovered.” [...] and so Shah Zaman finally told him all that he had seen. [...] Shah Zaman suggested that he pretend to be going out hunting again and then hide with him so that he could test the truth by seeing it for himself (1:26).

### **Mahdi’s edition**

**صفحات ٦٠ - ٦١ - ٦٢ (١):** فلما سمع شاهزمان كلام الملك شاهريار اطرق الى الأرض. تم قال أيها الملك اما السبب الذى اصلح حالى فلا اقدر ان اخبرك به واشتهى ان تعفينى من ذكره. [...] فاحكى له ما جرى عليه من زوجته ليله سفره من المبتدا الى المنتها وقال يا ملك الزمان، فيقبت عندك كلما اتفكر فيما جرى لى والمصيبه الذى اصابتنى يلحقنى الهم والوسواس والفكر فتغيرت حالتى وهذا سبب ذلك. [...] فقال يا ملك اشتهى عليك ياالله ان تعفينى من ذلك. [...] قال فاخشى عليك من الهم والوسواس اعظم مما جرى على. [...] فاحكى له ما رآه من سبائك القصر، والمصيبه الذى فى قصره – وهم عشر عبيد في زى عشر جوار ينامون عند سراريه وحريره بالليل والنهار – واحكى له من المبتدا الى المنتها، وليس فى الاعاده افاده –: ولما رايت ما انت فيه من المصيبه سليت انا وقلت لنفسى "اذا كان هذا اخى ملك الأرض وجرا عليه هذا المصيبه عنده فى بيته"، فانفرج همى وزال ما عندى وانشرحت واكلت وشربت، وهذا سبب فرحى ورد لونى. [...] فعندها قال له شاهزمان ان كنت تريد ترى مصيبتك بعينك حتى تصدقنى قوم اعزم الى الصيد، واخرج حاله وندخل انا وانت سرأ الى المدينه وتطلع معى الى قصرك وتصبح تنظر بعينك.

HA:

When Shahzaman heard what King Shahrayar said, he bowed his head, then said, “As for the cause of my recovery, that I cannot tell you, and I wish that you would excuse me from telling you.” [...] Then Shahzaman related to his brother what happened to him with his own wife, on the night of his departure, from beginning to end, and concluded, “Thus all the while I was with you, great King, whenever I thought of the event and the misfortune that had befallen me, I felt troubled, careworn, and unhappy, and my health deteriorated. This then is the cause.” [...] “King, I wish that for God’s sake you would excuse me from telling you.” [...] “I fear that you will feel even more troubled and careworn than I.” [...] Shahzaman then told him about what he had seen from the palace window and the calamity in his very home – how ten slaves, dressed like women, were sleeping with his women and concubines, day and night. He told him everything from beginning to end (but there is no point in repeating that). Then he concluded, “When I saw your own misfortune, I felt better – and said to myself, My

brother is king of the world, yet such a misfortune has happened to him, and in his very home. As a result I forgot my care and sorrow, relaxed, and began to eat and drink. This is the cause of my cheer and good spirit.” When Shahzaman saw that his brother was in a rage, he said to him, “If you do not believe me, unless you see your misfortune with your own eyes, announce that you plan to go hunting. Then you and I shall set out with your troops, and when we get outside the city, we shall leave our tents and camp with the men behind, enter the city secretly, and go together to your palace. Then the next morning you can see with your own eyes” (9-10).

### Notes on the Arabic text

#### **Bulaq**

يا اخى اعلم انك لما: *yā akhī a ‘lim annaka*, “My brother, then you know that when you”. In Calcutta II there is a variation, see below.

من مدينتى: *min madīnatī*, “out of my town”.

انى تنكرت الخرزة: “I forgot a gem”, the word for gem is *kharaza* – in Breslau the word is spelt as *khawdha*, but is probably wrong (Habicht 1824, 1:10). In this version of the frame story, Shāhzamān is said to have simply forgotten something (*hāja*) without mentioning what exactly it is. التى اعطيتها لك, “that I have given you”: there is no previous indication of a precious stone given by Shāhzamān to his brother in Bulaq.

وانا متفكر فى هذا الاسر: “And I was thinking of that”. There is a spelling mistake in this sentence as “that”, *amr*, is spelt as *asr*, which makes no sense here.

فاعاد عليه جميع ما رآه: “He repeated (*a ‘āda*) [the description of] what he saw to him”.

وانت تشاهد ذلك وتحققه عيانا: “you witness it, so you will see that with your own eyes”.

#### **Calcutta II**

يا اخى اعلم انى: in Bulaq one finds *annaka* instead of *annī*.

وقد برزت برّ مدينتى: in Bulaq one finds *min madīnatī* instead of *barra madīnatī*. The meaning is the same.

فاخبره جميع ما رآه: “he told him (*akhbaruhu*) all he had seen”. Bulaq uses *fa-a ‘ada ‘alayhi* instead of *akhbaruhu*.

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

اطرق الى الأرض: “He bent down his head”; this close, which is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II, is the first of a series of detailed indications of the scene in which

Shāhriyār, coming back from hunting, is surprised by the restored health of his brother and forces him to give explanations for this change. This narrative sequence is richer in detail in Mahdi's edition than in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

والمصيبة الذى اصابتنى يلحقتى الهم: unlike Bulaq and Calcutta II, in Mahdi's edition the reminder of what happened to Shāhzamān the first night of travel to his brother's kingdom is glossed over and limited to the formula "he told him the whole thing from start to finish". Subsequently, there is a reflection on Shāhzamān's mental state as a reaction to the betrayal of his wife: الهم والوسواس اعظم مما جرى على, "this misfortune befell me and I was affected by distress and concern".

قال فاخشى عليك من الهم والوسواس اعظم مما جرى على: this is a further comment on the gravity of the events that happened in the palace garden, which is to be found only in Mahdi's edition. This statement helps contextualise King Shāhriyār's subsequent violent reaction to his wife's infidelity.

وهم عشر عبيد في زى عشر جوار ينامون عند سراريه وحريره بالليل والنهار (ziyy, namely "the appearance")<sup>172</sup> like women sleep with his concubines and the women under his protection night and day". The word *ḥarīm/ḥurma* (pl. *ḥuram*) indicates both a man's household/servant and his partner, *ḥuram al-rajul: 'iyāluhu wa-nisā'uhu wa-mā yaḥmī* (Ibn Manzūr 1984, 12:123). Specifically, *ḥarīm/ḥurma* indicates all the women under the protection of a man. This passage is a brief recall of the orgy led by Shāhriyār's wife, i.e., the *muṣṭaba* (misfortune), which is only shortly summarized here because the text says وليس فى الاعاده افاده, "there is no need to repeat it". The recollection of the facts that happened in the palace is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II.

ولما رايت ما انت فيه من المصيبة سليت انا وقلت لنفسى "اذا كان هذا اخی ملك الأرض وجرا عليه هذا المصيبة عنده فى بيته: this is a repetition of Shāhzamān's thoughts on his misfortune compared to that of his brother, yet this time he thinks out loud and speaks directly to King Shāhriyār.

فانفرج همى وزال ما عندى: "So I was relieved and the pain disappeared". This provides an explanation for Shāhzamān's quick recovery.

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<sup>172</sup> *Fa-al-ziyy al-hay'a wa-al-manzar wa-al-'Arab taqūlu qad zayyaytu al-jāriyya ayy zayyantuhā wa-hayya 'tuhā* (and the appearance is the aspect and the look, and the Arabs say I embellished and adorned the bondwoman) (Ibn Manzūr 1984, 14:366).

ان كنت تريد ترى مصيبتك بعينك / وتصيح تنظر بعين  
 “Look (*tanzūru*) with your own eyes“,  
 “look at your misfortune with your own eyes”. The word *muṣība* is repeated five times  
 (plus the verb *aṣābat*, which derives from the same root) in the whole passage, as if to  
 underline the gravity of the episode in the palace garden, and perhaps in order to justify  
 Shāhriyār’s subsequent cruel reaction. The betrayal of King Shāhriyār’s wife, as well  
 as of both King Shāhzamān and the jinni’s partners, is seen as a *muṣība*, namely an  
 adversity or an affliction. The female betrayal resembles, therefore, a natural calamity  
 that must be prevented by any means. It should also be highlighted that the term *muṣība*  
 is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II, in which the betrayal is referred to as *mā jarā*,  
 “what happened”, using a vaguer and less morally determined phrase.

### Notes on the English text

#### **Bulaq**

Lane’s translation is very faithful to the original text.

#### **Calcutta II**

“I will tell thee what caused my complaint and my loss of colour; but excuse my  
 acquainting thee with the cause of its return to me and the reason of my complete  
 recovery: indeed I pray thee not to press me for a reply”: this translation relies on both  
 Calcutta I and Calcutta II. The first part, “I will tell thee what caused my complaint  
 and my loss of colour but excuse my acquainting thee with the cause of its return to  
 me and the reason for my complete recovery” is taken from Calcutta II, with the  
 addition of some repetitions which are not to be found in the original text – “my  
 complaint”, “the reason for my complete recovery”. Conversely, the second part seems  
 to rely upon Calcutta I – although this is not clearly indicated by Burton –, *wa-altamisu  
 minka an tu fīnī min-hu wa-min dhikrihi* (I plead with you to spare me from telling and  
 remembering it) (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:13).

“O King of the Age [...] Such is the truth and the whole truth” is taken from Calcutta  
 I (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:14–15).

#### **Mahdi’s edition**

“When Shahzaman saw that his brother was in a rage, he said to him,”: this sentence  
 results from the combination of two different clauses which are not put in a cause-

effect tie in the original text. It is not known whether Shāhzamān noticed the anger that was building in his brother.

#### IV

The following table compares the spontaneous reactions to female betrayal by Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān in the three main versions of the frame story:

Bulaq	Calcutta II	Mahdi's edition
<b>Shāhzamān</b>		
صفحة ٢: اسودت الدنيا في وجهه	صفحة ٢: اسودت الدنيا في وجهه	صفحة ٥٧: اسودت الدنيا في عينيه وحرك راسه
<i>Iswaddat al-dunyā fī wajhihi:</i> the world became black before his face.	<i>Iswaddat al-dunyā fī wajhihi:</i> the world became black before his face.	<i>Iswaddat al-dunyā fī 'aynayhi wa-ḥaraka rāsahu (ra'sahu):</i> the world became black before his face and he shook his head.
		صفحة ٥٧: تم انه اغتاض غيضا ما عليه مزيد
		<i>Tumma (thumma) annahu ightāḍa (ightāza) ghayḍan (ghayzan) mā 'alayhi mazīd:</i> then he became extremely angry.
		صفحة ٥٧: تم زاد عليه الغيظ
		<i>Tumma (thumma) zādha 'alayhi al-ghayz:</i> he became even more angry.
		صفحة ٥٧: في قلبه نارا لا تطفى ولهيبا لا يخفى

		<p><i>Fī qalbihi nāran lā tuṭfā (tuṭfa`a) wa-lahīban lā yakhfā:</i>  there was fire in his heart that could never die and a flame that could never go out.</p>
<b>Shāhriyār</b>		
		<p>صفحة ٦١: غضب غضبا شديدا حتى كاد ان يتقطر دما [...] وزاد به الغيظ</p>
		<p><i>Ghaḍaba ghaḍaban shadīdan ḥattā kāda an yataqaṭṭaru daman [...] wa-zāda bihi al-ghayḍ (al-ghayz):</i>  his angriness mounted until his blood was almost boiling [...] he became even more angry.</p>
صفحة ٣: طار عقله من رأسه	صفحة ٤: طار عقله من رأسه	صفحة ٦٢: خرج من عقله
<i>Ṭāra `aqluhu min ra`sihi:</i> he lost his mind.	<i>Ṭāra `aqluhu min ra`sihi:</i> he lost his mind.	<i>Kharaja min `aqlihi:</i> he lost his mind.

### 3. Discussion

The linguistic and textual analysis in the previous chapter has shown that variations between the different versions of the frame story of the AN are numerous; these changes are of various degrees of significance, and occur at the morphological, syntactic, stylistic and semantic levels. It is to be remembered that in this scrutiny questions of morphology, syntax or style have not been addressed directly, but micro-linguistic features have been taken into account only when causing relevant modifications of meaning within the multilayered thematic horizon of otherness. Following a contrastive approach, the analysis in chapter 2 has specifically focused on the semantic aspects of language concerning the representation of the relationship with the other sex, exploring the effects of the variations of these aspects upon the plot. Each Arabic edition taken into consideration presents certain semantic choices, most of which are due first to the copyists' and then to editors' conscious and/or non-conscious manipulation of the original sources throughout time, resulting in the production of multiple texts and additional meanings. Likewise, changes and modifications that also occur in the main English translations of the AN have been compared with their originals. By exploring the semantic relations between altered and/or changed words, clusters of words, phrases, and sentences in the various versions of the text and in its translations, a more comprehensive picture of the frame story has gradually taken shape.

Discussing the main findings emerging from this scrutiny, it is important to begin with the widely known consideration that there are fairly great differences between the text of the frame story in Bulaq and Calcutta II on the one hand, and that of Mahdi's edition on the other hand. As already indicated in this first part of the present study, the reason lies in the fact that these editions are based on manuscripts belonging to different branches, Bulaq and Calcutta II drawing on manuscripts of the Egyptian family of texts, and Mahdi's edition being based on manuscript G, which is of Syrian origin (see 1.2 and 1.3, part I). In particular, with regard to the frame story Bulaq and Calcutta II are almost identical in every respect, therefore, when variations between the two texts occur, they usually do not result in a significant change at the semantic level. For instance, differences may concern single terms while leaving practically unchanged the meaning of the sentences in which these terms are embedded

and, consequently, of the whole narrative passage: *mustaqīman* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:2)/*mustamirrīna* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:2), *min madīnatī* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:3)/*barra madīnatī* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:4), *mutaghayyar* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:3)/*maghbūn* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:2), *gharrā'* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:3)/*hayfā'* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:3), *fa-a'āda 'alayhi* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:3)/*fa-akhbarahu* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:4); or simple syntactic structures, such as: *yā akhī a 'lim annaka* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:3)/*yā akhī a 'lim annī* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:3), *bi-allah 'alayki an tusāmiḥīnā min hādhā al-amr* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:4)/*bi-allah 'alayki a fī 'annā min hādhā al-amr* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:5), *wa-illā unabbihu li-kumā al- 'ifrīt* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:4)/*nabbahtu 'alaykumā al- 'ifrīt* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:5), *yuzīlu bakārataha* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:4)/*ya'khudhu wajhahā* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:6). The same holds true also for the poems within the frame story (see The princess prisoner of the jinn I, III), in which word substitutions between Bulaq and Calcutta II do not result in the shift of meaning. Occasionally, lexical differences and/or variations at the morphological and syntactic level between these two editions may result in slightly different meanings, as is the case with *fa 'alā mā amarathumā bi-hi* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:4)/*istaqafāhā al-ithnāni* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:5), and *fa-hādhā shay' yusallīnā* (al-Adawī 1964, 1:4)/*hādhā shay' lam yajri (yajrī) li-aḥad* (Macnaghten 1839, 1:6). Nevertheless, although words sporadically change, are omitted and/or added, the overall narrative structure and semantic texture of Bulaq and Calcutta II remain approximately the same and, therefore, in this discussion the two editions are examined together.

The first apparent difference between the frame story in Bulaq and Calcutta II on the one hand, and in Mahdi's edition on the other hand is in length; the latter is, in fact, much longer than the first two versions – a fact that is easily noticeable if one looks at the number of pages that the story occupies in the various editions.<sup>173</sup> There

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<sup>173</sup> This is particularly true of the frame story and of the tales which are thought to belong to the oldest part of the collection, i.e., the first five narrative cycles that follow the story of Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār. However, the idea that the Egyptian versions of the AN are necessarily more abridged than those belonging to the Syrian redaction is not always convincing when considering the remaining stories of the collection (Pinault 1987, 157). Pinault (1986) devotes his whole PhD thesis to demonstrating how Mahdi's assumption that manuscript G is the only original and the best version of the AN is wrong and

are two main reasons for this question. Firstly, it is a matter of language structure, syntax and style since Mahdi's edition, unlike Bulaq and Calcutta II, makes extensive use of reiterations at the word, phrase, and sentence levels and is, therefore, the lengthiest. These reiterations are probably due to copyists' errors in the transcription of the text, though in some cases they seem to indicate an alleged more ancient oral dimension of the text, the traces of which may still be visible in the abundance of formulaic repetitions and in the reiteration of linguistic patterns. Whatever the case, in Mahdi's edition many sentences are lengthened by the copious use of lexemes, as well as of synonyms and periphrases, as the following examples illustrate: *al-miḥna al-ʿaẓīma/al-muṣība* (Mahdi 2014, 1:59), *al-hamm/al-waswās* (1:59), *al-hamm/al-fakr* (1:60), *al-ṣayd/al-qanṣ* (1:58), *ʿarīfa/labība/ḥakīma/adība* (1:66), *qarat (qaraʿat)/darrat (darasat)* (1:66), *fārisan jabbār/wa-baṭal mighwār* (1:56), *lā yuṣṭalā lahu bi-nār/wa-lā-yakhmudu la-hu tār (thaʿr)/wa-lā yaqʿudu ʿan akhd al-thār (al-thaʿr)* (1:56), *dānat la-hu al-balād (balad)/wa-aṭāʿat la-hu al-ʿibād* (1:56). Also sentences are sometimes either repeated or rephrased: *wa-qad shāhada dalika (dhālika)/lammā raʿā* (1:59), *fa-mā hadā katīr (kathīr) fī ḥaqqī anā/wa-wallahi an muṣībatī ahwan min muṣība akhī* (1:59), *tumma (thumma) annahu ightāda (ightāza) ghayḍan (ghayzan)/tumma (thumma) zādha ʿalayhi al-ghayz* (1:57), *ghaḍaba ghaḍaban shadīdan/wa-zāda bihi al-ghayḍ (al-ghayz)* (1:61), *fa-qālat lā budda min nuzūlikum ilā ʿanda (ʿandī)/fa-qālat lā budda min nuzūlikum* (1:63).

Beyond the micro-level of words and sentences, in Mahdi's edition repetition also works at the macro-level of the plot. Reiteration as a narrative device endows the narrative sequences with more plasticity and also creates an echo effect, namely a synesthetic reverberation, of the scenes within the storyline (Thompson 1946, 456). This is particularly evident with regard to the motif of female betrayal, which is very much developed through the mechanism of reiteration. In the version of the frame story given by Mahdi, the numerous scenes describing women's treachery are recalled through memories, through the display of feelings and through further descriptions by the characters. Repetition, therefore, serves to emphasise how severely hit by grief and discomfort men are because of females' unfaithful nature, reinforcing the rhetoric

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shows how other tales, such as the tale of *The First Lady* or the tale of *The Two Viziers*, are thematically more developed in the texts belonging to the Egyptian branch.

about women's lust and about males as both victims and controllers of female sexual appetite (Thorn 2002, 155). For example, Shāh zamān continually thinks about what his wife has done to him: "while Shahzaman's heart was on fire because of what his wife had done to him [...]. But whenever he found himself alone and thought of his ordeal with his wife [...]" (Haddawy 2008, 26);<sup>174</sup> "ten slaves dressed like women, were sleeping with his women [...]" (2008, 10). Likewise, Shāhriyār widely comments on the boxed woman's condition, retracing her story according to the jinni's, as well as his, chauvinist and dominant point of view: "This is no less than a demon who has carried a young woman away on her wedding night [...]" (2008, 13). Beyond the motif of the betrayal, another example of repetition of scenes is to be found in the two dialogues between Shahrāzād and her sister. The first time Shahrāzād gives instructions to Dīnār zād so that she can enact her plan: "Sister, listen well to what I am telling you. When I go to the king, I will send for you, and when you come and see that the king has finished with me, say, Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us a story" (Haddawy 2008, 20–21). Then, the second time Dīnār zād asks Shahrāzād to narrate a story: "Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your beautiful stories [...]" (2008, 21). In this case, almost identical words are pronounced by Shahrāzād and Dīnār zād twice, producing an effect of "quasi visual" reiteration of the narrative actions. In the above examples repetition does seem to impact on the plot and to reinforce its main motifs, to the point that it could be considered a structural narrative element of Mahdi's edition. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that reiteration is not always a storytelling technique, but it can also be caused by incidents that have occurred during the process of manuscript transcriptions. In many other places, one has very much the impression that reiteration is caused by single terms and lines that have been copied by the copyists more than once. It is, therefore, very difficult to distinguish when repetition is on purpose and when it is due to accidental circumstances.

The second element that makes the difference in length between the editions of Bulaq and Calcutta II on the one hand, and that edited by Mahdi on the other hand, is the abundance of detail which the latter provides (Denaro 2015, 41). Mahdi's edition includes more elaborate descriptions of places, protocols, actions and scenes, so for this reason it is thought to have a "better plot structure" (Pinault 1986, VI). These

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<sup>174</sup> I use Haddawy's translation when I need to give the meaning in English.

supplementary details do not add new content, yet they give cohesion to the text and help preserve the logical ties that ensure the concatenation of the events “by way of foreshadowing” (Pinault 1986, 45). Some examples are provided to help clarify this point. When the vizier visits Shāhzamān at the beginning of the story to tell him about King Shāhriyār’s request to see his brother, the encounter between the two men resolves in a few sentences in both Bulaq and Calcutta II: “[...] after he had travelled safely to Shah Zaman, he brought him greetings and told him that his brother wanted a visit from him” (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:24).<sup>175</sup> Conversely, Mahdi’s edition depicts the meeting between the vizier and Shāhzamān in greater detail: “[...] he went out with his retainers to meet him. He dismounted, he embraced him, and asked him for news from his older brother, Shahrayar. The vizier replied he was well [...] He sent him what he required of food and fodder [...] For ten full days he prepared himself [...]” (Haddawy 2008, 5–6). Likewise, in Mahdi’s edition one finds a precise description of the palace where Shāhzamān is hosted by his brother: “ he offered him quarters in a palace adjoining his own, for King Shahrayar had built two beautiful towering palaces in his garden, one for the guests, the other for the women and members of his household” (2008, 6), while this is absent in Bulaq and Calcutta II. The same difference in the number of narrative details is to be found in the passage that discusses the stratagem that Shāhriyār uses to see with his own eyes if his wife truly cheats on him. As for Mahdi’s edition, the text unfolds as follows: “then he and his brother disguised themselves and entered the city in the dark. They went directly to the palace where Shahzaman resided and slept there till the morning. When they awoke, they sat at the palace window, watching the garden and chatting, until the light broke, the day dawned, and the sun rose” (Haddawy 2008, 10). This description is greatly reduced both in Bulaq and Calcutta II.

One final example regarding the difference in the number of narrative details offered by the various versions of the frame story is the scene that describes Shāhriyār’s return to his palace after the encounter with the boxed woman. In Bulaq

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<sup>175</sup> For the sake of simplicity, in this chapter I use Lyons and Lyons’ translation of Calcutta II also when I refer to Bulaq, since in all the passages that I quote there is no significant difference in meaning between the version given by Bulaq and that of Calcutta II. My focus here is on the variations between the Arabic texts of Bulaq and Calcutta II on the one hand, and Mahdi’s edition on the other.

and Calcutta II the king's violent revenge is fulfilled very quickly: "they left the girl straight away and went back to Shahriyar's city, where they entered the palace and cut off the heads of the queen, the slave girls and the slaves" (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:28). Conversely, in Mahdi's edition the same passage is described in more detail: "then the two brothers headed home and journeyed till nightfall. On the morning of the third day, they reached their camp and men, entered their tent, and sat on their thrones. The chamberlains, deputies, princes, and viziers came to attend King Shahrayar, while he gave orders and bestowed robes of honor, as well as other gifts. Then at his command everyone returned to the city, and he went to his own palace and ordered his chief vizier, the father of the two girls Shahrazad and Dinarzad, who will be mentioned below, and said to him, 'Take that wife of mine and put her to death.' Then Shahrayar went to her himself, bound her, and handed her over to the vizier, who took her out and put her to death" (Haddawy 2008, 13). Moreover, Mahdi's edition is the only one that specifically mentions Shāhzamān's departure to his kingdom once the encounter with the woman prisoner of the jinn comes to an end, and in doing so allowing the character to leave the scene. On the contrary, in Bulaq and Calcutta II Shāhzamān simply disappears and is no longer mentioned in the text after the episode of the boxed woman (see Shāhzamān IV). This is possibly due to a corruption of the manuscripts on which Bulaq and Calcutta II are based since they have excluded the passage describing Shāhzamān's return to his home country.<sup>176</sup>

Beyond a more cohesive concatenation of the events, the increased number of narrative details in the text edited by Mahdi affects the way in which characters are outlined. The texts of Bulaq and Calcutta II on the one hand, and that of Mahdi's edition on the other, indicate a different process of characterization. This is particularly interesting for this discussion because it implies that characters are shown under a different light in the various versions of the story, and can, therefore, be perceived diversely. It should be remembered that in the frame story of the AN characters never present a subjective or intimate dimension (see 3.3., part I), so their emotional statuses

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<sup>176</sup> In the *A Hundred and One Night* – specifically, in the oldest manuscript of this collection translated by Ott (2017, 44) and in the manuscript dated to 1776 and used by Fudge (2016a, 21) – the farewell of the young man from Khorasan, who is the alter ego of Shāhzamān, is quoted: he is allowed to leave the scene.

are embedded in their actions and into dialogues. Moreover, there are no psychological causes that induce a change in them; they are described by means of attributes which revolve around social roles – i.e., the two kings are brave knights and are said to rule with justice, whilst Shahrāzād is the vizier’s daughter who has collected and read books and stories. However, in the text edited by Mahdi the higher number of narrative details seems to add something to the character’s temperament. It would be improper to say that this version of the frame story equips its characters with psychological qualities, as they do not show their emotions – perhaps except for Shāhzamān’s lamentation and suffering –, and yet characters seem to emerge with more emphasis over the course of the story. One element that clearly contributes to characterization is the greater use of direct speech one can find in Mahdi’s edition. Speech acts in the first person referring to individual situations and dialogic interactions allow traditional representations of character to assume an individuality which grants them subjectivity. More generally, in the frame story almost all encounters between characters are complemented by dialogues: Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān, the two brothers and the boxed woman, Shahrāzād and her father, the vizier and the king, Shahrāzād and her sister Dīnārzād, and that between Shahrāzād and the king. In this respect, the dialogue in Mahdi’s edition are often longer and more complex than those in Bulaq and Calcutta II, and the following examples are given to prove this. Firstly, when Shāhriyār wants to know from Shāhzamān about the recovery of his brother’s health status, in the version edited by Mahdi the older king makes a long speech in order to both contextualise his request, “now I want you to tell me everything” (Haddawy 2008, 9), and comment on the betrayal of his brother’s wife (see Shāhriyār IV). To the contrary, in Bulaq and Calcutta II Shāhriyār’s argument only consists of a couple of sentences. Moreover, in these two versions Shāhriyār says nothing in reply to Shāhzamān’s account of his terrible experience, while in the text edited by Mahdi he comments on women’s infidelity: “Brother, you were fortunate in killing your wife and her lover, who gave you good reason to feel troubled, [...]” (Haddawy 2008, 9). By the same token, in the scene where King Shāhriyār sees what his own wife is doing in the garden with the slave Mas’ūd, there is an exchange of opinions between the two brothers before they decide “to roam the world” (Haddawy 2008, 11) which is more articulated in Mahdi’s edition than in the other two versions. King Shāhriyār makes a remark that

highlights the anger and discomfort caused to him by the vision of the orgy in the garden and, therefore, provides a stronger rationale for his subsequent brutal change (see Shāhriyār VI).

The episode of the boxed woman and the jinn represents a small exception with regard to the number of dialogues between the female prisoner and the two kings for it is almost equal in all the three versions of the frame story taken into account in this analysis.<sup>177</sup> However, this does not mean that the three texts describe the episode in the same way. On the one hand, Mahdi's edition includes Shāhriyār's moral judgements on women, as well as invocations to God and references from the Quran (see Shāhriyār VII). On the other hand, in Bulaq and Calcutta II two poems by unknown poets are substituted for King Shāhriyār's reflections on the female sex (see The princess prisoner of the jinn III and also below). In these two editions the whole passage opens with poetic verses that describe the beauty of the woman imprisoned by the jinn (see The princess prisoner of the jinn I), whilst in the text edited by Mahdi poetry is omitted and the woman's characteristics are enclosed in the narrative flow in a more concise manner. There are a few more dialogic interactions to be mentioned because of their relevance for this study. In Mahdi's edition, in the scene where Shahrāzād asks to be married to the king in order to save her people (see Shahrāzād II), the vizier's answer to his daughter's words is articulate and rather angry:

“Foolish one, don't you know that King Shahrayar has sworn to spend but one night with a girl and have her put to death the next morning? If I give you to him, he will sleep with you for one night and will ask me to put you to death the next morning, and I shall do it since I cannot disobey him [...] What has possessed you that you wish to imperil yourself? [...] Daughter, ‘He who misbehaves, ends up in trouble,’ and ‘He who considers not the end, the world is not his friend.’ As the popular saying goes, ‘I would be sitting pretty, but for my curiosity.’” (Haddawy 2008, 15).

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<sup>177</sup> In Bulaq and Calcutta II there is a short conversation between the two brothers to decide who should go first and make love to the boxed woman, while in version edited by Mahdi, Shāhriyār directly goes first and then goes Shāhzamān without any discussion between the two.

Conversely, in Bulaq and Calcutta II the vizier replies very briefly to Shahrāzād: “By God,’ he exclaimed, ‘you are not to risk your life!’” (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:29).<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, in Mahdi’s edition after having heard her father’s admonishing tales, Shahrāzād makes her argument to achieve her goal: “Such tales don’t deter me from my request. If you wish, I can tell you many such tales. In the end, if you don’t take me to King Shahrayar, I shall go to him [...]” (Haddawy 2008, 20). This undoubtedly helps emphasise Shahrāzād’s will and self-determination and, as a result, her risky decision to offer herself to the bloodthirsty king becomes sufficiently contextualised. On the contrary, in Bulaq and Calcutta II Shahrāzād simply replies *lā budda min dhālika*, “it must be so” (see Shahrāzād, II). Finally, in Mahdi’s edition just a few lines later there is a discussion between the king and the vizier about Shahrāzād which is absent in Bulaq and Calcutta II: “Vizier, how is it that you have found it possible to give me your daughter, knowing that I will [...] ask you to put her to death too?” (Haddawy 2008, 20). Shāhriyār’s words speak of the man’s awareness of his actions and of the consequences of his cruelty. This self-reflection is a rare example of a character’s consciousness that goes beyond the a-psychological characterization within the frame story as an intrinsic feature of the narrative.

Direct speech can be either in the form of dialogic interactions or, when the character talks to himself/herself, in the form of soliloquy (usually introduced by *qāla*, *qāla fī nafsihi*). As for the use of soliloquy, there are many examples one can find especially in Mahdi’s edition. Firstly, in the scene where Shāhzamān thinks out loud after having seen his wife sleeping with another man, his reflections directly address the question of both women’s infidelity and female outrage against men as power holders: “No. Women are not to be trusted. [...] By God, I am king and sovereign in Samarkand, yet my wife has betrayed me and has inflicted this on me” (Haddawy 2008, 6). Conversely, in both Bulaq and Calcutta II, Shāhzamān’s comments are limited to the facts between him and his wife, without generalizing to all women or mentioning questions of (gender) roles: “if this is what happens before I have even left

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<sup>178</sup> For the sake of completeness, it must be remembered that in Mahdi’s edition it is Shahrāzād who, without any apparent reasons, goes to her father and asks to be married to the king. In Bulaq and Calcutta II, instead, Shahrāzād sees her father worried and concerned and, after he tells her why, she decides to offer herself to Shāhriyār and try to save the other women. See Shahrāzād, II.

the city, what will this damned woman do if I spend time away with my brother?” (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1: 25). Secondly, in Mahdi’s edition Shāhzamān declares that the betrayal has happened “to one in my position” (2008, 6), emphasizing that he is deeply outraged because it is an insult to his status. Furthermore, when he sees the orgy in the garden he comments by saying that “this is our common lot. Even though my brother is king and master of the whole world, he cannot protect what is his, his wife and his concubines [...]” (2008, 8). But in Bulaq and Calcutta II Shāhzamān speaks to himself and simply observes that what happened to him is less serious than the betrayal at the expense of his brother. It is, therefore, possible to note that references to gender roles and to power relations between man and woman are more evident and explicit in the text edited by Mahdi. Thorn (2002, 155) also notes that in this version of the frame story there is an “overt preoccupation with gender, which itself is the more charged as the social status of men – what they have to lose – increases”.<sup>179</sup> Other examples can be given to prove this. After the woman imprisoned by the jinn shows the rings she has collected from her previous lovers, the two brothers speak about the malice of all women, which is seen as an endemic and eschatological affliction: “O God, O God! There is no power and no strength [...] Great is women’s cunning” (Haddawy 2008, 13). A few lines later, Shāhriyār continues to comment on female wickedness and says that a man cannot guard [a woman] “from what God had foreordained [...]” (2008, 13). Contrarily, in Bulaq and Calcutta II the two kings are “filled with astonishment” and merely declare that someone has been afflicted by a misfortune greater than theirs (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:28).

The two preceding examples suggest that Mahdi’s edition seems to build a “more moral” discourse since characters appear to have a flicker of will, or rather a stronger and more personal motivation for their deeds. This augmented level of personality within the narrative, which is boosted by the use of direct speech and, in particular, of soliloquy, sets the plot within a moral horizon of eschatological and religious type. This is in accordance with Chraïbi’s belief (2016, 56–57) that manuscript G offers the most islamised version of the frame story, for it has the greatest number of Islamic references, such as: “leave me here and go with God’s blessing and

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<sup>179</sup> It is important to note that Thorne relies on Haddawy’s translation of the text edited by Mahdi.

help” (Haddawy 2008, 7); “[...] complained to the Creator of the heavens, and called for help on Him who hears and answers prayers” (2008, 14), and many others. The presence of Islamic marks, as well as the use of the *‘ajīb* technique, is “the result of a later transformation” due to “the text’s interaction with contemporary literature”, namely with Medieval Arabic literature, and this testifies to the fact that many portions of the frame story in manuscript G are, therefore, more recent than in Bulaq and Calcutta II (Chraïbi 2016, 58). What is more, the increased number of religious references within the text edited by Mahdi adds a further semantic layer to the narrative. The genre-based absence of characters’ subjectivity, typical of imaginative/fictional tales, is partially replaced by the power of destiny, meaning an eschatological force of divine origin that becomes increasingly central. For instance, when Shāhriyār asks the vizier why he is willing to marry his daughter to him, knowing what the dramatic consequences will be, he replies: “[...] knowing that I will, by God, the Creator of heaven, ask you to put her to death too?” (Haddawy 2008, 20); the plea to God reinforces the idea that the king’s actions are guided by constraint, that is by a destiny already written. Noticeably, the greater the number of religious/eschatological references to contextualise characters’ actions, the more the allusions to the different nature of the sexes and, by extension, to gender roles.

Chraïbi (2016, 56) indirectly touches upon this aspect when he comments on the passage of the frame story in which Shāh zamān goes back to his castle and finds his wife in bed with another man. In this respect, the version offered by the text edited by Mahdi indicates that the reason because of which Shāh zamān decides to return home is to bid farewell to his wife, while in Bulaq and Calcutta II he has simply forgotten something. Chraïbi (2016, 56) affirms that Bulaq and Calcutta II offer the plainest and, therefore, the oldest version of this episode – which the *A Hundred and One Nights* also contains –, while the text of manuscript G is interesting “from a literary point of view, as it creates an antithesis between the behaviour of the husband [...] and the behaviour of the wife”. Unfortunately, Chraïbi (2016, 56) confines himself to this reference without further elaboration, and yet his idea of “misogynistic antithesis” does seem to find its *raison d’être*. In the version of the frame story based on Mahdi’s edition, every time the religious substratum is prevalent sexual and gender roles find sharper crystallization. Moreover, moral judgements about women become

more frequent – “the deceit of women” (Haddawy 2008, 6), “women are not to be trusted” (2008, 9) (see Shāhriyār IV, Shāhzamān III) – and destiny plays a larger role in the events between males and females. Here are some examples of what has just been indicated.

In Mahdī’s edition, Shāhriyār makes a relevant reflection on the wickedness of women after having taken the terrible decision of marrying a virgin every night and killing her the day after, which is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II: “There is not a single chaste woman anywhere on the entire face of the earth” (2008, 14). Just slightly before, Mahdī’s edition clearly indicates the reason because of which Shāhriyār has decided to become so violent against his spouses: “in order to save himself from the wickedness and cunning of women” (2008, 14). In this case, the text provides a moral explanation for the character’s behaviour as one could hear an omniscient author making a judgement. Of similar nature is the use of the *‘ibra*, “lesson”, as an admonition to be learnt from the story. The idea of the *‘ibra*, which is typical of wisdom literature (*ḥikma*), as well as of both the *adab* and popular folktales, is embedded into the didactic purpose of the frame story. Denaro (2015, 50) highlights that Mahdī’s edition offers a more convincing *‘ibra* regarding uses and abuses of power, aiming at criticizing the *mālik* (king) when he is not just towards his subjects. But the *‘ibra* is also addressed to all women who, apart from Shahrāzād and her sister whose education has preserved them pure and honest, must not forget about their potential unfaithful nature. Women are naturally prone to use *kayd* (trick), and this is made explicit by referring to sura 12 in the Quran and to the idea of fate as divine destiny (*al-qadā’ wa-al-qadar*) (see Shāhriyār VII). In Mahdī’s edition, therefore, the *‘ibra* appears to be more effective since the dangers and evils of human misbehavior are inserted in an eschatological perspective and are often accompanied by a plea to God. On the contrary, in Bulaq and Calcutta II – as well as in the *A Hundred and One Nights* –, while the moral judgement upon human actions is equally present, it is less convincingly brought back to an eschatological order and, therefore, less imbued with a sense of (religious) morality. The quranic episode in sura 12, for instance, is also quoted in these two versions, but the reference is indirect and is ironically put in the mouth of a woman, i.e., the boxed woman (see The princess prisoner of the jinn III), and expressions such as “women are not to be trusted” (Haddawy 2008, 9) are absent.

Therefore, in Bulaq and Calcutta II the moral lesson offered by the story appears to be more of a laic and popular nature, and less of religious significance.<sup>180</sup>

The last aspect concerning the linguistic and textual variations between the different versions of the frame story is the question of male illness as a result of female infidelity. It is possible to note that descriptions of physical and behavioural changes with regard to Shāhzamān, whose suffering as a consequence of his wife's betrayal is the only condition clearly explored within the narrative, are abundant in the text edited by Mahdi.<sup>181</sup> For instance, Shāhzamān's mounting anger is underlined by using three different clauses: *tumma (thumma) annahu ightāda (ightāza) ghaydan (ghayzan) mā 'alayhi mazīd; tumma (thumma) zādha 'alayhi al-ghayz, and fī qalbihi nāran lā tufā (tufā 'a) wa-lahīban lā yakhfā* (see The phenomenology of male illness IV). Another example is Shāhzamān's reasoning about his experience within the dialogues and, above all, within soliloquy, a fact that contributes to building a more complete picture of male reaction to female betrayal: "I used to think that I was the only one who has suffered, but from what I have seen, everyone suffers"; "He thought to himself, 'I am no longer alone in my misery; I am well.'" (Haddawy 2008, 8). Through the depiction of feelings of anger, suffering, distress and consolation, the text edited by Mahdi, therefore, offers a more definite characterization of Shāhzamān. In addition, in the text edited by Mahdi Shāhzamān refers to female betrayal as a *muṣība*, a calamity (see The phenomenology of male illness III), namely using a term that conveys an idea of a fate naturally and eschatologically inescapable. The word *muṣība* is, however, not found either in Bulaq or Calcutta II, in which the betrayal is referred to as *mā jarā*, "what happened", that is by using a generic and less morally determined statement.

The scrutiny in the preceding chapter is not limited to the original texts in Arabic but also includes a contrastive analysis of the most widespread English

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<sup>180</sup> In this respect, Heath (1988, 6) considers the use of religion as a *deus ex machina* to be a characteristic of the tales added to the AN during the Mamluk period.

<sup>181</sup> As for Shāhriyār, there is no description of either his physical or behavioural changes, except for a couple of sentences (see The phenomenology of male illness IV and Shāhriyār V). Nevertheless, when he returns to his kingdom after having met the boxed woman, the description of his violent turn resulting in the practice of marrying a virgin every night and then killing her the day after is more detailed in the text edited by Mahdi than in Bulaq and Calcutta II (See Shāhriyār VIII).

translations through which the story is known to both general readers and critics. The last portion of this current discussion is, therefore, dedicated to a commentary on Lane, Burton, Lyons and Lyons, and Haddawy's translations. The scope of this part is to highlight some traits or recurrent patterns in the translations of the frame story that, by adding a further layer of interpretation to the original text, have induced a certain type of understanding otherness and the relationship with the other sex. It is understood that translating is a socio-cultural enterprise which is embedded within a certain literary culture and, more generally, within the social and cultural scenario of a given country/a linguistic community. In order to produce good, honest and efficacious translations, the translator is required to establish a relation of sympathy with the text, according to the etymological meaning of this term, "being affected by like feelings", "sharing another's emotion" (Gobetti 1919). The translator should be capable of feeling and grasping the sense in order to achieve a level of deep understanding of the original text, namely of the – known or unknown, individual or collective – writer and/or poet's intimacy of expression that allows the translator to develop the potentialities of the narrative (Gobetti 1920). Translation is not, therefore, a matter of choosing between "beautiful infidels" and "ugly faithful" interpretations in search of the exact form and style within a second language (Croce 1990, 87). Conversely, the translator needs to sympathise with the original voice/voices and make it/them closer to people speaking another language without cancelling the space in between the two linguistic communities, and this is what enables the reader to still perceive the original thoughts within the translated text. Nevertheless, this has not always been the case, and specifically in certain historical periods or under the influence of particular cultural phenomena and movements, such as Orientalism, socio-cultural and political circumstances have affected translation practice, modifying its aims. In this scenario, translation may become a mission to appropriate a literary culture through the adequation of its voices to the socio-cultural and political needs of another – very often the introductions to these translations and the translators' forewords clearly describe these intents.

When examining the works of two orientalists such as Lane and Burton, it is necessary to remember the peculiar historical circumstances during which they appeared (Ali 1981, 115). The political, social and cultural elements characterizing

Victorian England during its colonial and imperial mission, as well as its relations with the East, had a fundamental impact on the two translators' approaches to the AN (Knipp 1974; Ali 1977; 1980; 1981; Kabbani 1986; Wazzan 1993; Schacker-Mill 2000; Thorn 2002; Rastegar 2005; 2010; Regier 2010; al-Absi 2018). In those years, literary works coming from an Eastern literary culture such as the AN were often translated into Western languages and sometimes manipulated on behalf of a "higher" objective. Translators used to extrapolate judgements and morals from the original text and convey them to the audience by making certain choices in terms of style and language that included manipulations, omissions and additions. As for Lane and Burton, they undertook their enterprises having their Victorian audiences in mind and, therefore, produced translations which tried to satisfy the requests and expectations of these audiences. Lane (1979, 1:XIV) wanted to "set the work in its proper light" before his countrymen as a manual of manners and customs of the Arabs (Egyptians, in his view), without shocking his readers with something that may have disturbed them; he, therefore, omitted all those passages referring to sexual intercourse. Burton (1897, 1: XXIV, XXVI), on the contrary, intended to show what he thought to be the true nature of the AN, regardless of the fact that he could have possibly irritated the "British ear" or offended the "perfect hypocrisy" of Western morals because of his "un-English" and "un-pleasant" translation. Nevertheless, despite his emphasizing the qualities of the "Muslim mind", which he extensively describes in his *Terminal Essay*, Burton (1897, 1:XXXI) eventually considered the AN to be a source of information that his fellow-countrymen could have used to deal successfully with the East. If, on the one hand, he seems to sympathise with the Arabs to whom he felt connected as he considered himself an "outsider" in his own country – as he himself admits (1897, 1:XX) –, on the other hand, Burton makes his real thought clear in the footnotes "that constantly remind the reader to detach from the tales. Here Arabs are cast as intermediaries between the valued elite (Burton and his readers) and the bestial 'blackamoors' to whom he grants no potential humanity" (Thorn 2002, 165). In the light of the above, when approaching the translations of the AN one needs to be aware of the peculiar background that characterizes both Lane's and Burton's works, and that was so influential in their translating choices (Ali 1981).

Taking a closer look at the linguistic and textual characteristics of the translations in relation to the original Arabic texts, the translation of Bulaq offered by Lane is, generally speaking, faithful to the original although it is incomplete (Knipp 1974, 50). The reason is clearly indicated by Lane (1979, 1:XIII) in the preface to the first edition of his translation: “I have thought it right to omit such tales, anecdotes, &c., as are comparatively uninteresting or on any account objectionable. [...] I insert nothing that I deem greatly inferior in interest to the tales in the old version”. He, therefore, considered it appropriate to remove those parts that do not reflect, in his view, these characteristics. Given this declaration of intent, in the frame story Lane specifically operated two types of omissions, i.e., poetry<sup>182</sup> and scabrous scenes, so he left out many passages that he considered indecent. Hence, he did not include the first of the three lyrics which are found in Bulaq, being determined to preserve only some of the lyrics of the original text depending on their literary “merits” or “because required by the context” (Lane 1979, 1:XIII). Moreover, he expunged all the references to sexual intercourse and replaced them with more vague indications. For instance, in the scene in the garden where King Shāhriyār’s wife betrays her husband the verbs indicating sexual intercourse are substituted by Lane (1979, 1:5) with others meaning “to embrace” and “to revel”. The same scene is referred to a second time in Bulaq, but Lane (1979, 1:7) relates it in a summary form so as to avoid describing again the orgy in the garden. Likewise, in the episode of the boxed woman Lane (1979, 1:9) the whole scene, including the phrase *irši ‘ā raṣa ‘an ‘anīfan*, “copulate with me strongly”, (see 2.2, part II), are summarized in the sentence “they had remained with her as long as she required”. In the same scene, the dialogue between the boxed woman and the two kings, which entails negotiations to decide who will first lie with her, is also dropped by Lane (see Shāhriyār VII and The princess prisoner of the jinn II). Subsequently, a few lines later, when the boxed woman shows her rings to the kings and says that they belonged to all the men who made love to her, Lane (1979, 1:9) translates this part as “the owners of these rings, said she, have, all of them, been admitted to converse with me”. In this case, the sexual reference is replaced by the verb “to converse”, which

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<sup>182</sup> Lane (1979, 3:681) states that poems in the AN are very few and not particularly valuable because they abound “with false metres and other errors”. This likely determined Lane’s reluctance to insert poetry in his translation.

completely changes the meaning of the sentence and is detrimental to its semantic impact. Other examples of the omission of sexual details are: in the second poem included in the episode of the princess prisoner of the jinn, where “*mu‘allaq bi-furūjihinna*” is translated as “depend upon their passions” instead of “depend upon their private parts”; at the end of the first part of the frame story, when Shahrāzād instructs her sister about the request for a story, and when Dīnārzād asks for a tale sitting near the foot of the bridal bed. In the two scenes Lane (1979, 1:13-14) uses the periphrases “and when thou comest to me, and seest a convenient time” and “a proper opportunity” to avoid speaking explicitly about Shahrāzād’s defloration.

Another element which characterises Lane’s translation is that it contains passages which are longer than the text of Bulaq, namely they add information which is not found in the original source in Arabic. For instance, at the beginning of the story Lane, (as well as Burton, see below), inserts a very long digression on the visit of Shāhriyār’s vizier to Shāhzamān that includes detailed descriptions of the preparation for the journey and of the regal duties and protocol of hospitality. In truth, Lane took this part from Calcutta I (see Shāhriyār III) and accompanied it with five notes (from note 10 to 15) about manners and customs of the Arabs, and specifically about presents, letters, deputations, rules of hospitality and obedience. His decision to include this digression, therefore, may have been due to the will to expand on these topics, rather than to narrative purposes, such as to improve a poor-quality plot. Lane (1979, 1:XIII) was interested in the “fulness and fidelity” of a translation that could render “faithful pictures of Arab life and manners”, so the digression he made may have served his intentions to talk directly (through the notes), as well as indirectly (through the narrative), about Arab-Muslim socio-cultural matters. In this respect, Lane admitted that he sometimes manipulated the text for the sake of preserving (his understanding of) the Arab manners and feelings, but overall tended to retain the original language. Knipp (1974, 50) clarifies that Lane opts for a literal translation which, however, is not “*merely* ‘literal’, but reflects its author’s conscious efforts to echo biblical style”. This is particularly visible in those passages where the language abounds with words, especially adverbs and adjectives, which are not found in the original text to offer a more personal understanding of a certain passage: “[...] and governed his subjects with *such* justice *that* the inhabitants of his country and whole

empire loved him” (see Shāhriyār I; italics mine); “when Shāh-Zemān beheld this *spectacle* [...]” (see Shāhzamān IV; italics mine); “[...] twenty females and twenty male *black* slaves” (See The queens’ lovers II). More generally, however, Lane avoided to manipulating the text to ameliorate the narrative flow; for example, he did nothing to justify Shāhzamān’s sudden disappearance from the story and offered a faithful rendition of the closure of the frame story according to Bulaq.

In the textual and linguistic analysis in the previous chapter, two translations have been offered for Calcutta II, the first of which is Burton’s. Burton’s translation is particularly lengthy, as it incorporates several passages taken from other versions of the frame story, i.e., Calcutta I and Breslau, to the original text.<sup>183</sup> The first of these additions, which is taken from Calcutta I, is the same as that found in Lane’s work, namely the detailed description of the journey of Shāhriyār’s vizier to Shāhzamān’s land with all its regal protocols and norms of hospitality. Subsequently, the scene in which Shāhzamān visits his brother contains other interpolated sentences taken from Calcutta I, such as Shāhzamān’s accusations against women and the description of Shāhriyār’s special attention to his ill brother upon their first encounter (see The phenomenology of male illness I). A further addition, once again taken from Calcutta II (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:12), is to be found in the scene where Shāhriyār returns after having been hunting and describes the two kings who go horse riding and eating. Later, when Shāhzamān confesses about his wife’s betrayal, Shāhriyār’s reaction is the same as that found in Calcutta I. From Calcutta I Burton also derives: the passage in which Shāhriyār reflects on his encounter with the boxed woman; the passage relating to Shāhzamān’s departure and his exit from the story (Burton 1897, 1:13); the scene in which Shahrāzād asks her father to be married to the king (1897, 1:13), and Shahrāzād’s answer to her father who does not want to satisfy her request (1897, 1:21). The most numerous digressions are to be found, nevertheless, in the conclusion of the frame story, which Burton takes entirely from Breslau. This ending, which is the

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<sup>183</sup> In his Foreword, Burton (1897, 1:XXVIII) illustrates that he first worked on the Bulaq printed in Cairo in 1835 together with his friend Steinhäuser, but then found it incomplete, so he decided to use Calcutta II because he thought it was “the least corrupt”. He also states that he knew Calcutta I, without clearly indicating that he borrowed from it for his translation, and that he occasionally refers to Breslau, which was “wretchedly edited from a hideous Egyptian MS.”

longest among the printed editions of the AN, does not indicate any children, and includes a curious description of Shahrāzād and Dīnārzād's display of dresses following their marriage with Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān respectively (Burton 1897, 8:51-58).

The type of language used by Burton is rarely sober and plain, but rather extravagant. Burton does not hesitate to create new words, as he admits himself, and the result is a convoluted prose full of periphrases and repetitions (Shamma 2014). Moreover, he has a clear tendency towards sensationalism and exaggeration, as is seen in the following examples: “the damned woman” in the original text becomes “a damned whore” (see Shāhzamān III); “he nearly died from anger” is transformed into “rage was like to strangle him” (see Shāhriyār V); “they were scared” becomes “they were in a terrible fright” (see Shāhriyār VII), and “they were afraid” is rendered as “extreme dread and terror” (see Shāhriyār VII). Burton tends to opt for the most colorful and ornate solution which overemphasises elements and makes the normal seem abnormal. For instance, in the passage “cutting the two into four pieces with a single blow, left them on the carpet” (see Shāhzamān III), the first part of the sentence is taken from Calcutta I, while the second part, “left them on the carpet”, is added by Burton as a gruesome detail. In another passage, “all had satisfied their passions” (Burton 1897, 1:5), the original meaning – *bāqā al-'abīd fa'alū bi-al-jawārī* (and the male slaves continued doing what they were doings with the female slaves) – is exaggerated by a sense of uncontrollable pleasure, as a sort of atavistic force that cannot be governed and, therefore, causes disruption. Where Burton's language becomes particularly prone to exaggeration is in the passages that describe women with their foreign lovers.

In his *Terminal Essay*, Burton indicates that the women – and not “female characters” – within the AN differ in nature generally being fickle, perfidious and lustful, though there are also more positive examples, such as Shahrāzād. Nevertheless, in a note he classifies the female heroine of the AN as one of the women who “are very dangerous in the East” because she is young and intelligent and, as the Biblical figure of Judith, is capable of beheading the king (Burton 1897, 1:14 note 1). Clearly, there are no references anywhere in the frame story to the fact that Shahrāzād could kill Shāhriyār, but Burton seems to see her effort to change the king's violent attitude

towards women as a potential threat. His judgmental view on women is also evident in his considerations on the differences in male-female relationships in both the East and the West. In his *Terminal Essay*, Burton (1897, 8: 173) also states that Europeans think Eastern women are secluded and forced to accept polygamy, but this is the result of their superficial judgement because the truth is different. Arab women are granted an exceptionally high legal status and enjoy their lives; they “over delight in restriction which tend to their honour”, “do not desire a liberty [...] which they have earned to regard as inconsistent with their time-honoured notions of feminine”, and “would think very badly of a husband who permitted them to be exposed [...] to the public gaze” (Burton 1897, 8:177). The main question for Burton, however, is not women’s wellbeing, but rather the comparison between Eastern males who lock females up as precious jewels because they do not want them to be stolen by others, and Western males who place their wives in public view, making them objects of seduction and temptation – an unwise practice, in Burton’s view. It is evident that women remain, “what men make” of them, namely passive beings whose sexuality is always decided upon by their male counterparts (Burton 1897, 8:173). In this respect, the extra-marital love encounters within the frame story are, therefore, often described with sensationalism, as in the following examples: the lover of Shāhzamān’s wife is said to be “foul with kitchen grease and grime” (see *The queens’ lovers I*), a detail which is not found in the original text and is used here only to accentuate his repulsive appearance; Shāhzamān’s comment on his own wife’s betrayal, “most women are unfaithful” – which is taken from *Calcutta I* – is turned into “there is no woman but who cuckoldeth her husband” (see *The phenomenology of male illness II*) in order to extend his “verdict” to womankind in its entirety. Additionally, in a note Burton (1897 1:5, note 2) illustrates why the king’s wife prefers a black slave over her husband by making a judgment on her sexual preferences which is extended to all women: “debauched women prefer negroes as lovers”. In some editions of Burton’s translation of the AN, including that which is used in this current study, this note finishes as previously indicated. Nevertheless, the original note is longer as Burton provides a thorough explanation of women’s lust for black men: “debauched women prefer negroes on the size of their parts. I measured one man in Somali-land who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is a characteristic of the negro race and of

African animals [...]”. As Thorn (2002, 163) highlights, Burton’s words clearly encourage a “visceral revulsion at the ‘blackmour’” in the reader. It may also be added that they seem to recall the condemning tone which is found in the acts released by assemblies and courts in America in the 17th century against “the lascivious and lustful desires” of freeborn English women who would fornicate and/or intermarry with “negroes” (Jordan 2012, 79).

There are many other similar examples in which women’s sexuality is blamed by deforming and deteriorating the image of the foreign lover, i.e., of the cultural other. Sexual and gendered otherness is interlaced with the condition of being a stranger which, in turn, is defined by race and ethnicity. Thus, Burton depicts Mas‘ūd, the secret lover of Shāhriyār’s wife, as having “rolling eyes which showed the whites” to exaggerate his ugliness, instead of using “glistening eyes” as is found in the original text (see *The queens’ lovers II*). In another passage Burton states that Mas‘ūd is “the filthiest of filthy slaves,” rather than “the most wicked”, changing the meaning from a moral to a physical connotation in order to stress the perversity of women in choosing wretched lovers (see *Shāhzamān IV*). Moreover, the dreadful description of Mas‘ūd is contrasted with that of Shāhriyār’s wife, who is depicted as “wondrous fair, a model of beauty and comeliness and symmetry and perfect loveliness and who paced with the grace of a gazelle which panteth for the cooling stream” (Burton 1897, 1:5). This portrayal of female beauty is, nevertheless, also exaggerated. Burton, in fact, blends the text of *Calcutta II* (“wondrous fair, a model of beauty”) with that of *Calcutta I* (“who paced with the grace of a gazelle”) (al-Shirwānī 1814, 1:9), and then adds further sentences in the same passage to produce an effect of exaggeration of female perfection against Mas‘ūd’s abysmal appearance. Likewise, in a different scene the jinn that kidnaps the boxed woman is said to have a “black blee”, this is a detail added by Burton in which he stresses the colour of the jinn’s complexion (see *The Jinn I*). By contrast, the original text merely indicates that a black column emerges from the sea, without explicitly mentioning the skin colour of the creature. In all these examples, Burton seems to draw a parallel between being a foreigner and being a slave (someone of inferior status) on the one hand, and physical and moral stain on the other hand. His translation becomes “increasingly racial specific” (Nussbaum 2007, 161) to the point that the love affair is “charged as if it were interspecies” (Thorn 2002, 163). Not only

does Burton emphasize and exacerbate the negative language concerning physical differences based on skin colour, but he also always chooses the version of the frame story that stresses these differences, and in doing so often diverging from Calcutta II. A brief digression concerning the male characters' skin colour can help clarify this point. In the frame story there are no references to Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān's physical appearance. By contrast, the lover of Shāhzamān's wife is, instead, described as black in Bulaq and Calcutta II – and also in the *A Hundred and One Nights*, in which, however, he is not a slave –, while he is described as a kitchen boy in Calcutta I and Mahdi's edition. As for Mas'ūd, he is a black man in all the versions of the story, i.e., Calcutta I, Breslau, Bulaq, Calcutta II and Mahdi's edition, while the group of slaves who accompany the queen in the palace garden consists of twenty male and twenty female slaves whose complexion is unknown in Bulaq, Calcutta II and Breslau.<sup>184</sup> Conversely, in Mahdi's edition the slaves who form this group are ten black men and ten white women – in Calcutta I the number of slaves is the same but no indication of skin colour is provided. Lastly, Mahdi's edition reveals that the jinn is black, while the other versions of the frame story limit themselves to describing a black column emerging from the sea – whatever the case, this underlines an association between strangeness and monstrosity, and blackness (Nussbaum 2007, 161). With regard to the English translations, Lane and Burton indicate the skin colour of the group of slaves and concubines in the scene of the palace garden even though the versions they rely on, namely Bulaq and Calcutta II respectively, are silent in this respect. On the contrary, all the other references to complexion made by the two translators find their *raison d'être* in the original Arabic texts.

Going back to Burton's translation, in his work the most exaggerated passages are generally derived from the text of Calcutta I, and then accentuated. It is possible to hypothesise that Burton abandoned Calcutta II and used Calcutta I in all those places where it affords crueller and unfavorable elements towards women and their foreign lovers that better reflect Burton's own attitude towards these two categories of people. Despite all of the above, Burton's translation has greatly influenced writers, critics,

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<sup>184</sup> In the *A Hundred and One Nights* there are forty female slaves. The same number is to be found in one of the stories in the 14th-century Arabic collection of tales *al-Ḥikāyāt al-'ajība* [Wonderful Stories], i.e., the story of *The Forty Girls*. This tale is also present in the AN (Marzolph 2004).

and general readers. His work has often been considered the best translation because it is generally accurate and respectful of the original rhymed prose, yet it is very debatable because of the changes/distortions he imposes on the text.<sup>185</sup>

A very different case is that of Lyons and Lyons' translation of *Calcutta II*, which is very faithful to the original text. Their work adopts a plain style which omits repetitions and internal references in order to "speed up the pace of the narrative" and make it "simplified and accelerated" (Lyons and Lyons 2008, 1:17–18), resulting in a smooth and light prose which comfortably balances the popular style of the narrative (Regier 2010). The difference between the translation by Lyons and Lyons and that by Burton is, therefore, immediately evident; in all the places where Burton adds emphasis, convoluted sentences or odd vocabulary, Lyons and Lyons' work always offers a sober, yet efficacious, language which never attempts to modify the original meaning. Self-reflections and soliloquy, are, however, sometimes substituted with indirect speech provoking a decrease in the sense of subjectivity which the use of the first person usually confers on the characters. Except for this latter questionable choice, great attention is paid by Lyons and Lyons to the accuracy of their translation, and the result is a text which preserves the spirit and the flavour of the original.

The last translation to consider is that of Haddawy. Being written in a modern style, this work is, overall, a reliable translation of Mahdi's edition, yet it tends to avoid some of the repetitions in the Arabic text. This tendency to dislike reiteration appears to lie at the basis of the substitution of periphrases with more concise adjectives that seem to limit the semantic power of the original meaning. As an example, the three adjectives "invincible, energetic, and implacable," (Haddawy 2008, 5) replace three sentences that function as epithets, namely "one cannot warm himself with his fire", "his revenge is not extinguished", and "he does not abstain from taking revenge" (see *Shāhriyār I*), resulting in the loss of their metaphorical sense. Additionally, Haddawy

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<sup>185</sup> In *Dreams of Trespass* Fatima Mernissi (1994), who has criticized the corrupted Western approach to the text, affirms that Burton's translation is, nevertheless, beautiful. On the other hand, Ghanim (2018, 3) states that Burton's work, which is unexpurgated, has created a more inclusive sexual discourse in the rigid Victorian period. He calls Burton's use of the AN subversive and affirms that it "could be an inspiration for Middle Easterners who still live in a sexual and gender reality not very different from nineteenth-century Europe".

occasionally uses very modern terms that appear to be inappropriate in this context; this is the case with the adjective “depressed” (see The phenomenology of male illness I) and the phrase “I forgot my sorrow” (see The phenomenology of male illness II) – both point to an overtly intimate and conscious elaboration of the character’s condition which is absent in the original text. More generally, however, Haddawy’s translation maintains the original structure of the Arabic text on which it is based and, for this reason, distortions like those operated by both Lane and Burton, who “never question” their attitudes towards their works, are absent (El-Ariss 2018, 22).<sup>186</sup> Haddawy (2008, 24–25) himself declares that he has been “as faithful as possible” and has respected the spirit of the AN, which is “a collection of tales told to produce aesthetic pleasure in the Arabic reader”. Nevertheless, he has been accused of having perpetrated a type of “vendetta” at the expense of the other versions of the AN<sup>187</sup> to promote Mahdi’s edition as the only one that “redeems all others from general curse” (Haddawy 2008, 14). In the introduction to his work, Haddawy actually blames the English translations preceding his for being inaccurate and, therefore, unsuccessful. Some scholars, however, have suggested that Haddawy’s work tends to neglect the transcultural and non-exclusively Arabic nature of the AN (Habegger-Conti 2011).<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> This comment on Lane’s and Burton’s approaches to the AN is by the Egyptian writer and scholar Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, one of the most important figures in the Arab *nahḍa* (awakening), in his *Kashf al-mukhabba’ ‘an funūn ūrubbā* [Revealing the Hidden in European Arts]. In *The Saturday Review*, a London weekly newspaper, critical comments appeared on the pointlessness of Burton’s attitude to including ethnographic notes in the translation of a work of literature such as the AN for they were considered “out of place, to say the least of it, in the translation of a great literary” (Schacker-Mill 2000, 176).

<sup>187</sup> This accusation is by Norris (1992) who adds that Haddawy, in the introduction to his translation of the AN, unveils his claims for Arab nationalism by declaring its aversion to the Ottoman period, which he sees as a period of decline.

<sup>188</sup> Habegger-Conti (2011) believes that the same absolutist and pro-nationalistic purpose also belongs to Mahdi and, therefore, considers Haddawy and Mahdi as being united in their mission of erasing, covering, and ignoring “the actual history of the Nights” (Habegger-Conti 2011, 1). Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to find evidence of Mahdi’s political and nationalistic (panarabistic) intent in his edition of the AN.

### PART III

#### Academic readings of the frame story of *The Thousand and One Nights*

##### 1. An overview of English and Arabic literary criticism of *The Thousand and One Nights* and its frame story

She could not stop herself from crying, and he said gently, “Weep, Shahrzad, for weeping is better than lying.” “I cannot,” she exclaimed, “lead a life of ease and comfort after tonight.” “The palace is yours,” he said in protest, “and that of your son who will be ruling the city tomorrow. It is I who must go, bearing my bloody past.”

Mahfouz, *Arabian Nights and Days* (1995)

The third part of this thesis is devoted to the academic readings of the AN in English and Arabic that concentrate on otherness and the relationship with the other sex within the frame story. Before discussing individual contributions in detail, in this chapter it would be useful to briefly outline the history of the literary criticism of the AN in these two languages to see how the reception of this collection changed over the years and prior to the 1970s, when a significant shift in its literary appraisals occurred and profoundly modified the academic approach to the text. This very concise evaluation is in no way an exhaustive account of all the various responses that reviewers, scholars and critics published in literary magazines, journals and books after the “rediscovery” of the AN at the beginning of the 1700s due to Galland’s translation. The present overview, therefore, focuses attention on the variety of contributions that scholarly reception has produced in relation to the collection, relying on different versions and translations of the text and drawing on heterogeneous approaches within the field of literary criticism. Ali (1977; 1980; 1981) has already extensively discussed the scholarly interest in the AN within English criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries. He has also widely explored how the nature and type of scholarship, as well as the research interests and objectives of the academic studies on the collection and its frame story, varied and therefore one finds many references to his work in the current evaluation. Nevertheless, no equivalent study has previously analysed and compared the academic reception of the AN in other languages or has

thoroughly scrutinised the production of scholarship written in Arabic addressing the collection. It is possible that this has been caused by the fact that the Arab world is perceived to have long ignored the AN or to have dismissed it as a poor-quality piece of literature, the collection being written in middle Arabic (so it is not part of classical Arabic literature) and including themes often regarded as obscene. In this respect, the present succinct account also briefly touches upon the response of Arab scholars to the AN after the revival of world interest in it.

Following Galland's translation of the AN (1704-1717) and the subsequent translations of Galland's work into English, the so-called Grub Street translation (1706),<sup>189</sup> the first Western appraisals of the AN began to appear. In English criticism in particular, the literary reviews and studies of the 18th century mainly centred on the popularity of and the engagement with the AN, the value of the collection as a work of literature and the question of its positioning within the narrative tradition of both the East and the West. Although general readers showed great appreciation for the book, as the copious translations, adaptations and imitations produced in those years testify, the very first reaction to the AN by (Early Victorian, neoclassical) English critics and men of letters was unfavourable. As Ali (1981, 17) suggests,<sup>190</sup> this is no surprise since in the first half of the 18th century neoclassical attitudes, generally

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<sup>189</sup> By 1713 there were four editions of the AN in English; in 1723 the *London News* began a serialization of the tales of the collection (Ali 1981, 11). See Macdonald (1932) for a study of the first versions of the AN in Europe, and Nishio (2012).

<sup>190</sup> Ali (1981) has widely studied the reception of the AN in scholarship written in English from 1704 to the late 1970s and offers a detailed bibliography of book-length studies, comments, periodical articles, reviews and notes on the AN (until 1910), as well as of critical studies on the collection, both published and unpublished (such as dissertations). Sallis (1999, 65–84) has also evaluated the question of Western criticism on the AN. In particular, she recognizes three different ways of interpreting the AN: the exotic experience, according to which the AN becomes the other, the interest in the study of manners and customs, because of which the text is forced into a scientific and unnatural dimension, and the study of the tales for their own sake, regardless of their non-homogeneity. The main point Sallis wants to put forward is the bias against Islam, which she thinks is the result of the fact that belonging to a culture considered opposite to the one that produced the text may generate preconceptions and prejudices. In the case of the AN, the collection was subject to pre-constituted European approaches that perpetrated a binary stereotyped division between East and West – “each of them wearing a mask” (Sallis 1999, 69).

hostile to works of imaginative fiction that were labelled as immature, extravagant and lacking both equilibrium (in form and content) and morality, were still prevailing in literary and academic circles. In truth, Galland's "fairy-tale-like" translation – as well as the Grub Street translation, and its various reprints and imitations –, would have hardly been able to offend the standards of decency of the time because it had been expurgated and, therefore, any references to sexual episodes had been removed (Thorn 2002, 165).

Nevertheless, until the 1750s the question of the ethical value of the AN was an open debate; pseudo-oriental tales were written during that time to imitate the exotic taste of the stories within the collection, yet they were devoid of sexual references overly licentious elements. Subsequently, however, as a result of the shift in critical reception following the search for new ways of writing fiction that privileged the interest in the marvellous and the importance of feelings and passions, a renewed enthusiastic appraisal of the AN arose (Ali 1981, 19). By the end of the 18th century this new romantic approach would become predominant, contributing to the increase of aesthetic interest in the AN, which was selected as a source of pure and amusing imagination by many writers and critics. At the same time, the collection was regarded by many Western critics (Hole 1797; Weber 1812)<sup>191</sup> as a wealth of information about Eastern societies and customs, in line with both biblical and oriental studies of the time that focussed on the sociocultural context and the material culture behind the production of literature (Schacker-Mill 2000), reflecting an "ethnographic" intent. If, on the one hand, this led to an increase in attention towards Eastern countries and the Arab world, then, on the other, it also generated erroneous beliefs, sayings and stereotyped images of these territories and their people. It should be noted that throughout this time many Western travellers and tourists wrote accounts of and notes on their voyages to the East, creating an illusion that daily life of countries like Egypt was the incarnation of the events narrated in the AN (Gregory 1999, 139). As narrative overlapped reality, or, at least, the portions of it they (allowed themselves to) experience, these travellers projected their readings into real life. The AN was often

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<sup>191</sup> Hole and Weber also speak in favour of the ultimate European roots of the AN, and in doing so they try to demonstrate its alleged classical origins bringing back the alien, foreign character of the collection to a more familiar literary tradition – i.e., a Western literary tradition.

associated with other texts, such as Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, published in 1838-41, and Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (117). Lane (1979, 1:IX–XIV) himself compared the AN with his life experience in Cairo and associated these two elements without making any distinction, saying that it was in the modern Egypt that one could see “the people, the dresses, and the buildings, which it [the AN] describes”. He was persuaded that the “Arab manners and customs as they existed in the age of the Arabian Nights could be studied” by observing modern Egyptian society, since they had remained unchanged (1979, 1:X). This process of “de-historicisation”, because of which the actual reality is not experienced but deduced from literary materials which are approached as documents with historical value regardless of their fictional character,<sup>192</sup> coexisted with the idea that the collection had a “social function” and could meet the request for an “authentic knowledge of the orient” (Rastegar 2010, 45). The construction of the Orient as a result of the process of the exoticization and creation of a common Western imaginary in which Eastern cultures and peoples were positioned, therefore, inevitably falsified the experience of the encounter between the East and the West both in the literary or the extra-literary field.

As Ali (1981, 26) suggests, therefore, at the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries the two critical approaches to the AN, namely the literary appraisal of romantic nature and the interest in the text as a source of information on Arab-Muslim societies, coexisted. With increased attention being paid to the collection, however, the request for new, more accurate translations became increasingly urgent. Following the printed Arabic editions of the AN in the first half of the 19th century, works of literary criticism of it proliferated and included new analyses related to the history of the text, its manuscripts, its sources,<sup>193</sup> the genetic connections of the AN with other literary works (philological and genetic criticism), the “semantics of the Nights” and

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<sup>192</sup> The same attitude is also found in Burton, and particularly in his comments about the harem, which are derived from “from medieval or pre-Islamic sources”, given that he was unable to have direct access to the private world of Middle Eastern females. Lane also relies on other sources, that is on female travelers' accounts, to talk about Egyptian women and their private spaces (Melman 1992, 74).

<sup>193</sup> One of the first philological studies is that of Silvestre De Sacy (1829b), *Recherches sur l'origine du recueil des contes intitulés les Mille et une nuits*.

the “single themes and motifs.” (Ali 1980, 202). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Western philologists such as Nabia Abbott , René Basset, Michael Jan De Goeje, Duncan Macdonald and Hermann Zotenberg investigated the history of manuscripts, while others, such as Emmanuel Cosquin, Josef Horovitz, Enno Littmann, Johannes Oestrup and Theodor Nöldeke evaluated the origin, as well as the main themes of the collection and the single stories.<sup>194</sup> It is not until the 20th century, however, that scholars focussed on the study of more specific narrative and technical aspects of the collection, as well as on the storytelling technique and its didactic aims – among the most important are Elisseeff (1949), Gerhardt (1963), Todorov (1970, 1977) and Hamori (1974). These academic works are, however, still “pre-feminist” and “pregender conscious” (Malti-Douglas 1991, 13).<sup>195</sup>

The crucial change in the literary criticism of the AN occurred in the late 1970s. In those years, as a result of the lowering of rigid barriers between academic disciplines, new critical approaches targeting modern and contemporary literature, as well as classics, arose boosting “the connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events” (Said 1983, 5). These new approaches refused to perceive works of fiction simply as the subject of textual and structural analyses, existing in a non-context. Instead of looking to the past, the text was felt as capable of dialoguing with the present, offering symbols and images that

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<sup>194</sup> Some of the main studies on the AN by the scholars mentioned in this paragraph are: De Goeje (1886), Zotenberg (1887b; 1887a), Macdonald (1909; 1922; 1924; 1932), Abbott (1949), Nöldeke (1888), Cosquin (1922), Oestrup (1925), Horovitz (1927), Chauvin (1892), Basset (1894; 1895; 1920), but this list is not exhaustive. For a more complete bibliography of the scholarship on the AN refer to the entry ‘*Alf layla wa-layla*’ in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition (Littmann 1986), the entry ‘*Arabian Nights*’ in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition (Marzolph 2007a), the representative selection of research works listed online by Marzolph (2020), and the review by Cassarino (2009) of the works on the AN from 2004 to 2009 (in connection with older studies).

<sup>195</sup> As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the focus of the present study is to analyse academic readings written in English and Arabic that suggest interpretations on the relationship with the other sex within the frame story of the AN. I, therefore, do not concentrate on scholarship that engages with the study of other aspects of the collection, nor with literary criticism in other languages. Nevertheless, in this brief review of the reception of the AN and its frame story I consider it advisable to also include references to both general scholarship and scholars who have written in other Western languages in order to provide a comprehensive understanding.

could successfully embody aspects of human life in the contemporary world. Starting with the late 1970s, therefore, also the studies on the AN began to focus greater attention on the thematic lines threading through the narrative, and within the frame story in particular, that could offer a space for further reflection on socio-political-cultural issues. Capezzone (2012, 96) believes that the renewed awareness in the literary criticism of the AN was anticipated by the attention paid to the text by writers both from the Arab and non-Arab world. Specifically, Mahfouz was the first amongst modern authors to suggest, in his *Layālī alf layla* [Arabian Nights and Days] published in 1979, a socio-critical interpretation of the frame story of the collection that “either satirize[s] the real or criticize[s] it obliquely” (al-Musawi 1995, 77).<sup>196</sup> Al-Musawi (2003, 71–78) points to the fact that the growing popularity of the AN in the second half of the 19th century corresponds to the rise of a new type of fiction within Arabic literature dealing with postcolonial themes. He states that the Arab authors were stimulated by the subversive power of this piece of popular narrative, which is seen as a challenge to elitist conceptions of literature, and who produced decentring and more inclusive forms of fiction countering centripetal ideologies of nationalist, colonialist and/or religious matrix.<sup>197</sup> In this respect, one should note that this is also the year in which Edward Said published *Orientalism* criticising the often distorted and fantasised

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<sup>196</sup> *Layālī alf layla* by Mahfouz (Maḥfūz 1979) begins where the AN ends. It is the dawn of the night 1001, the sun is about to rise. The vizier walks toward the castle, expecting his daughter to be executed. But, with considerable surprise, the king has changed his mind. Now that one man, as cruel as King Shāhriyār, has changed, what about all the others? Have all the other men also been saved? Despite the gentle beginning, *Arabian Nights and Days* is harsh and pitiless. The book opens with the rape and murder of a ten-year-old child by a pious man under a jinn’s evil influence. The scenario depicted is much worse than that of the frame story, for violence is directed against a child. The role of magic and wonder seems to be reversed in Mahfouz’s novel: it is no longer fantasy, but delusion fed by superstition and beliefs. Shāhriyār has changed but the kingdom has fallen into chaos; maybe worse than that, Shahrāzād does not really believe the change she has so strongly contributed to. The king feels misunderstood and hopeless, and the couple separate because real communication between the sexes can never be achieved.

<sup>197</sup> Other critics believe, instead, that this reuse of the image of Shahrazad by Arab authors was not sufficiently supported by a reappropriation of their traditional literary heritage, and that this resulted in a partial failure to exploit the full potential of the female protagonist, facilitating a romantic/exotic Westernised view of her (Abd al-Ghanī 1985, 59).

Western view on the East, and its cultures and literatures. Each of these elements: renewed awareness in literary criticism of the AN; new attention by writers to this text, and growth of postcolonial Arabic fiction, are therefore deeply linked one to the other, indicating a profound change of socio-cultural and literary perspectives on the value of the collection for both the Arab and the non-Arab world, as well as for the study of the relationship between the two dimensions in literary and cross-literary terms. In light of this, since this period of time, modern and contemporary readings of the AN and of the frame story have drawn attention to the interpretation and significance of this piece of narrative in relation to socio-cultural, psychological and postcolonial issues, as well as to questions of class, sex and gender. As Ali (1980, 212)<sup>198</sup> highlights, “the main current in the twentieth-century English criticism of the Nights” has not been adequately assessed yet, but some of the most important pieces of this critical production are analysed in the following chapter.

What about the history of Arab literary criticism after Galland’s “rediscovery” of the AN?<sup>199</sup> It is known that generally Middle Eastern critics (and writers) have neither paid attention to nor appreciated the text very much. Some scholars, such as Ghanim (2018, 1–9), consider the lack of interest in this work, which has often been regarded by the Arab world as contrary to moral standards and public decency, as a sign of the decadence of social and democratic values within a society

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<sup>198</sup> As stated, in the introduction to this thesis, this study only centres on literary criticism in English and Arabic, although the socio-cultural-political approach to the AN that appeared in the late 1970s has also involved scholarship produced in other (mainly Western) languages. Studies written in French would include the names of André Miquel, Jamel Eddine Bencheikh and Edgar Weber who evaluate the question of desire in the AN in psychoanalytic terms. Malti-Douglas (1991, 12), however, considers these readings pre-gender conscious because they see Shahrāzād simply as a healer and in doing so they disempower her image.

<sup>199</sup> Studies on the Arab reception of the AN are quite rare. As far as I am concerned, the main contributions are by al-Musawi (1995; 2003) and Rastegar (2005; 2010) who examine the overall response to the collection by intellectuals, scholars and general audience. Larzul (2014), in her article *Arab Receptions of the Arabian Nights: Between Contemptuous Dismissal and Recognition*, briefly evaluates the attitudes towards the collection of such diverse figures as Kabbani (an intellectual and writer), Khawam (a translator), Mahdi (a philologist), Bencheikh (a literary critic) and Chraïbi (an expert in the history of manuscripts and in the relation of the AN with other works of Arabic literature).

that cannot appreciate the product of its own culture. Others believe that this scarce interest in the collection is due to the Arabs’ – and specifically the Arab elite’s – lack of appreciation of popular and folk literature and to their distaste for its themes, artistic value and use of non-standard language (Khoury 2016, 23; Starkey 2006, 17–22). In truth, the AN has never been completely ignored in the Arab world; from the oldest 9th century fragment to modern times, the collection has always continued to circulate in the East in various forms. The references to the AN by scholars of the Medieval period (see 2.1, part I) are clear signs of its transmission and diffusion over a period of about one thousand years, although outside of the canonical literary circuit and generally – but not exclusively – in oral form.<sup>200</sup> In the 19th century the AN officially reappeared in the Arab world in four printed Arabic editions, the latter being essentially the “Arab answer” to the Western request to decide upon a definitive version of the collection. However, it was not until two hundred years after the publication of Galland’s translation that it gained full recognition as a work of literature among Arab readers and scholars (Grotzfeld 2004); the first reactions to the popularity of the collection in the West appeared in Arabic periodicals and journals, such as *al-Hilāl* (Rastegar 2005, 280–81), *al-Muqataṭaf* and *al-Siyāsa al-usbū’iyya* (al-Musawi 2003, 82–83). These earliest critical comments were non-homogeneous; those which were sceptical about the literary value of the AN questioned matters of morals and decency, as had been the case in Europe for more than a century following Galland’s translation. For example, the *nahḍa* intellectuals, who explored the legacy of classical Arabic literature to lay the groundwork for the construction of “an indigenous modernity” (El Shamsy 2020, 5), mainly disliked the exaggerated and disproportioned style of the storytelling. The *nahḍa* (awakening) phenomenon, which occurred between the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century,

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<sup>200</sup> The collection also circulated in languages other than Arabic, such as Turkish (Vania Proverbio 2016). Nevertheless, the popular narrative of the AN, which was written in middle Arabic and, therefore, was considered of minor or no importance at the time, condemned this work to oblivion. It should be remembered that classical Arabic literature was strictly canonical, namely it rigidly defined literary genres and the texts that would fall within these literary categories. The author’s individuality was secondary to his adherence to the genre, and it was the latter which determined the value of the former (Capezzone 2000, 395).

testified to a series of important socio-cultural and literary developments that paved the way for the formation of new, “modern”<sup>201</sup> forms of Arabic literature. This was partly as a result of the large-scale process of book printing, which made available many classical texts that were otherwise in manuscript form and, therefore, very difficult to find (Pedersen 1984, 137–38). The literary developments included the translation of European works into Arabic, the incorporation/assimilation/adoption of both Western genres of literature and analytical categories, and also a renewed interest in classical Arabic literature. Hence, being triggered by the encounter with Western literature and consisting of different aims and approaches that sometimes were “in direct opposition to one another” (Alkabani 2020, 114; El Shamsy 2020, 5), the *nahḍa* process eventually led to a reformulation of the Arabic literary canon. Within this process of reconfiguration in a modern way, many non-exclusive literary factors played a crucial role, such as the problematic relationship with Western literature in the years of European imperialism and orientalism, and the anti-Ottoman and Arab nationalistic discourse (Alkabani 2020, 114–15). The AN was also included in this movement of recanonisation although the process was uneven, as it will be shown below. Some criticism during the *nahḍa* period, therefore, showed an aversion to the AN and to fictional narrative in general that went as far as to reject it as a work of literature. In other cases, the AN was considered light and frivolous and, therefore, only suitable for women. This negative association between the collection – judged to be of low value and merely entertaining – and women’s light-headed literary experience was destined to change with time to become, in the eyes of postmodern and postcolonial intellectuals and writers, an example of subaltern resistance.<sup>202</sup>

Lukewarm responses were, however, interwoven with more positive ones. In 1901, a brief article about the publication of a new book appeared in the journal *al-Hilāl* in which the AN was described as one of the most beautiful books ever written,

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<sup>201</sup> For the problematic nature of the expression “modern Arabic literature”, refer to Starkey (2006, ix–x). As per the more general question of how to periodise the Arabic literary tradition, see al-Bagdadi (2008, 453–55).

<sup>202</sup> Both the image of Shahrāzād and the disrupting power of popular fiction would be used in future writing as a means to defy patriarchal and authoritative conventions and assumptions within the literary, cultural and social realms in Arab-Islamic society (al-Musawi 2003, 85).

and also as a text which was capable of embarrassing cultured men and virgin women because of its sexual and overtly scandalous contents (Rastegar 2005, 281).<sup>203</sup> This latter aspect unveils a shared belief that frequently occurred in the responses to and appraisals of the collection during the first phase of its reception in the Arab world, namely the AN also being seen as a compendium of “habits, morals and manners of people during the medieval Islamic period” rather than a work of fiction (*al-Hilāl* 1901, 446). This type of “anthropological” value which was attributed to the AN seems to resemble that assigned to the collection by the Western translators and orientalist of the 18th and 19th centuries. As far as these matters of ethics and decency are concerned, one might find a similarity between the general Western attitude<sup>204</sup> that rejected the “excessive” sexuality of the AN and that of some Arab intellectuals who wanted to expurgate this text to make it correspond to the same standards of decency and politeness.<sup>205</sup> In this respect, there is, however, one relevant difference. For the Arab critics, the AN was clearly a glimpse into the life of the Arab-Muslim world in the Middle Ages and its sociological significance was perceived as useful to shed light on the Eastern societies of the past, while for the Western scholars the collection reflected daily life in the East in the present.

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<sup>203</sup> In this respect, an expurgated edition of the AN was prepared in Beirut by *al-Maṭba‘a al-adabiyya* (1882-1880) to be suitable for chaste young women – *li-yalīqa waḍ‘uha bayna ayādī banāt al-‘iffa* (Akel 2016, 440).

<sup>204</sup> There are some illustrious, yet also problematic, exceptions to this, such as Burton, whose attitude towards female sexuality was ambiguous and not devoid of misogyny – as has been explained in part II of this thesis.

<sup>205</sup> Alkabani (2020) explains how the European intellectual concern about questions of morality and decency at that time and their rejection of motifs relating to overt sexuality and homosexuality within works of literature were internalised by the *nahḍa* intellectuals. According to the scholar, the latter assimilated Western critical approaches and tools and began dispraising classical texts of Arabic literature that treated sexual themes, deeming them as indecent and obscene, whilst they had in fact always been part of, and accepted by, the Arab-Islamic literary culture. What Alkabani does not illustrate is why there was such an immediate, unquestioned absorption of Western critical categories by the Arab intellectuals. Since this change of perspective was not forcefully imposed by the West, the shift in the attitude towards sexual themes – from acceptance and tolerance to the complete censorship of them – was most likely set in a specific cultural horizon, and not in a vacuum. This shift would be of particular importance and would merit further investigation.

This concept of the double nature of the AN, as half fiction and half anthropological essay, evolved over the years until the former became increasingly more important than the latter, eventually leaving space for purely literary discussions about the text. In particular, in the 1930s and the 1940s Arab critics began to pay considerable attention to the frame story, following the growing interest by Arab authors in the narrative possibilities of the frame device (al-Musawi 2003, 98). Rewriting the tales, particularly the story of Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār, motivated writers to produce an increasing volume of fiction, and the frame story was often used as a point of departure to produce diverse narratives that attribute new, innovative roles to the two protagonists. Two of the most important examples are Tawfiq al-Hakim (al-Ḥakīm 1974), who wrote his play *Shahrazād* [Shahrāzād] in 1934,<sup>206</sup> and Taha Hussein (Ḥusayn 1951), who published the novella *Aḥlām Shahrazād* [Shahrāzād's Dreams] in 1942-1943.<sup>207</sup> These two leading figures in modern Arabic literature had already worked together on the novel *al-Qaṣr al-maṣhūr* [The Enchanting Castle], published in 1936, which concerns some of the main elements of al-Hakim's play and has Shahrāzād as one of its protagonists (Bešková 2016). They also played an important role in favouring the otherwise problematic reintroduction of the AN into the Arab literary canon. Especially Taha Hussein praised the literary value of the collection, which had previously been considered non-high literature, both within the horizon of Arabic literature and in terms of world literature. This helped the AN receive domestic appreciation in the context of a process that was almost entirely of "exogenous canonisation" (Benigni 2011, 134). It was, in fact, in the West that the literary value of the collection was first recognised in the modern era, although very often through its modified, non-faithful translations. Taha Hussein was also the supervisor of Suhayr al-Qalamāwī, the first Arab scholar deeply involved in the analysis of the AN who brought the collection to the attention of Arab academia. Al-Qalamāwī's thesis,

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<sup>206</sup> This is not the only work for which al-Hakim takes inspiration from the character of Shahrāzād and the frame story, and also from other tales of the AN. He was very fascinated with her and by the collection generally, to which his mother had previously introduced him (Kobzošová 2014, 181).

<sup>207</sup> The representation of Shahrāzād in both works, as well as in Mahfouz's *Layālī alf-layla*, is regarded by the critic 'Abd al-Ghanī (1985) as being deeply influenced by European romanticism and orientalism, resulting in an estrangement and alienation of this female character due to her Arab cultural background.

published in 1943, is a critical analysis of the oral and popular nature of the text, and includes an introduction by Taha Hussein in which the writer expresses high appreciation for the AN (al-Qalamāwī 1976, 8).

In her work, she considers different topics, among which is the role played by the AN in the formation of a Western image of the Orient and attitudes towards the book by Western scholars. Al-Qalamāwī strongly criticized the feminist approach by Lahy-Hollebecque (who published in 1927 *Le féminisme de Schéhérazade: La révélation des Mille et une nuits* [Shahrāzād's Feminism: The Revelation of The Thousand and One Nights], possibly providing the first feminist reading of the frame story ante litteram):<sup>208</sup>

“It could take too long to analyse these studies, and many of them are not of interest, like the study of M. Lahy Hallemeque on *Le féminisme de Scheherazade*, which was part of a collection called *Le cahiers de la femme*, published in 1937.<sup>209</sup> Lahy Hallemeque states that Shahrāzād organizes her storytelling according to a specific technique and a certain goal, which is ultimately psychological and aims at gradually healing the king from his own hatred of women. The author starts with a certain thought, then looks at the opposing point of view and eventually begins to support a new idea. We will not discuss this, but we mention it only to highlight how banal is certain research on *The Thousand and One Nights*” (al-Qalamāwī 1976, 63).<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Lahy-Hollebecque's work, republished in 1987 with the title *Schéhérazade ou l'Éducation d'un roi* [Shahrāzād and the King's Education], is the first study in literary criticism of the AN that proposed a reading, namely an interpretation on the narrative level, of the frame story. Her critical analysis is, however, not very well argued and filled with overgeneralizations; moreover, it is mainly based on Mardrus' fancy translation of the AN into French (Jullien 2016, 147).

<sup>209</sup> This is probably al-Qalamāwī's mistake, since *Le féminisme de Shéhérazade: La révélation des Mille et une nuits* was published in Paris in 1927.

<sup>210</sup> My translation.

It is possible that the analysis undertaken by al-Qalamāwī anticipated the structuralist inquiry by Todorov (1970, 1977), for she highlights the fact that figures in the AN are not characters in the modern sense of the term, but are models which act according to certain patterns (what Todorov calls “actions”, see 3.3, part III) that can only be changed by narrative variations in the concatenation of the events (al-Qalamāwī 1976, 300). Al-Qalamāwī also concentrates on female characters and divides them into two groups, the first of which is inspired by middle class women who actually lived in medieval times, while the second group consists of fictional characters modelled on examples of ordinary women, such as slaves, wives of merchants and housemaids (al-Qalamāwī 1976, 300–301). A further observation made by al-Qalamāwī (1976, 37–38) concerns the AN and its genre; she observes that the experience of many orientalists, such as Lane, who travelled and lived in the Arab world may not be enough to truly comprehend the spirit of popular culture permeating the collection. Since lengthier and deeper acquaintance with local populations is required to fully understand their way of life, the East may be more successful than the West in achieving this.

Following al-Qalamāwī’s work, in the post-*nahḍa* period scholarly work to the AN took a different approach. In those years, fictional narrative, imaginary tales and storytelling, which had been previously despised, broke through the boundaries that separated canonical-classical and non-canonical literature. Popular narratives, such as the AN, began to be seen as a precious source of materials for writers who intended to support with their work, and from a literary perspective, the construction of national and socio-cultural consciousness of their own countries still in the process of development and/or involved in national and identity-making transformations in response to Western occupations. This shift was caused by historical events that considerably changed Arab societies from the second half of the 20th century, and particularly from the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. As a result, an increasing interest in a type of literature committed to social matters emerged. Intellectuals such as Salāma Mūsā, who believed that high literature was elitist and monarchist, anticipated this situation some years before, and called for a literature for the masses which would consider their daily problems (Khoury 2016, 28). One of the concerns of this

committed social, and also socialist,<sup>211</sup> literature was the question of Arabic diglossia and, consequently, of writing literature in a colloquial language that would have been closer to the common people.<sup>212</sup> Hence, writers discovered in works of fiction and tales, such as the AN, descriptions of everyday persons or people from lower classes, which were an ironic and indirect way of depicting the coeval political situation and of criticising governments and regimes through the creative process of rewriting.<sup>213</sup> In particular, beginning in the 1970s and following the success of Mahfouz's *Layālī Alf layla*, belletrists recognise in the anti-canonical and out-of-canon positioning of the AN within classical Arabic literature a perfect setting for their own stories describing the uneasiness of ordinary lives and particularly of subaltern categories. They make use of the subversive power of the marvellous and the astonishing characterising imaginative/fictional tales and fairy tales.<sup>214</sup> Then, the collection is understood as

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<sup>211</sup> As a result of the growth of socialist parties in the Arab World during the 1950s, socialist ideas widely circulated and reached writers and poets.

<sup>212</sup> The debate also involved Taha Hussein, who was attacked for his idea of a literature for the few by Rā'if Khūrī in an article published in the Lebanese journal *al-Ādāb* in May 1955 and entitled *al-Adīb yaktubu li-l-kāffa* [The Writer Writes for the Masses], in which the latter stresses the need to make literature accessible to everyone (Khoury 2016, 58).

<sup>213</sup> Mahfouz's *Layālī alf-layla* (Maḥfūz 1979) and El Saadawi's *Suqūt al-imām* [The Fall of the Imam] (Sa' dāwī 1987) are the first among the modern rewritings of the frame-story and, probably, also the most famous. Nonetheless, there are many other novels and stories that have been inspired by the frame story of the AN after Mahfouz's and El Saadawi's masterpieces, such as *Ombre sultane* [A Sister to Shahrāzād] (1987) and *Oran, la langue morte* [The Tongue's Blood Does Not Dry] (1997) by Assja Djebbar, Leïla Sebbar's *Sherazade 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* [Shahrāzād: Missing, Aged 17, Dark Curly Hair, Green Eyes] (1982), Hāla Kamāl's *Ḥikāyat alf layla wa-layla* [The Tale of The Thousand and One Nights] in *Qālat al-rāwiya* [The Female Storyteller Said] (1999), *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2003), a collection of poems by Mohja Kahf. See Gauch (2007), Morsy (2008), Faten (2008) and Sabry (2011, 7–11) for a more exhaustive list of rewritings of the AN in contemporary Arab literature – mainly written by women. It should be remembered that in recent years also non-Arab writers, such as Salman Rushdie, have been inspired by AN in the production of their own works of literature and have reinterpreted the ideas in their writings from a socio-political perspective – see *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990).

<sup>214</sup> See Todorov (1973) for the question of the supernatural as insurgent, seen as something that challenges the status quo of an established, superimposed system.

having the capacity to speak about groups of people, such as women, foreigners, minorities and the poor, who had never previously been afforded attention in literature (al-Musawi 2003, 114–15). Also female Arab writers, and specifically female diasporic authors, find in *Shahrāzād* a symbol of political resistance with which to denounce the oppression of their homelands by Arab political elites (al-Samman 2015, 5). Subsequently, the renewed interest in the AN by novelists and writers is also shared by scholars who begin to adopt new socio-political approaches to the collection. From then on, many critical readings addressing the collection and its frame story in particular have been produced, often within the field of postcolonial studies. This scholarship varies, in the sense that it includes positive and/or enthusiastic views on the plot of the frame story, and also disapproval of *Shahrāzād*, who has been seen as a misogynistic figure produced by males that only depicts women as inferior and lacking agency – and this is particularly true of Western males’ view of foreign women (Kabbani 1986; Haddad 2010).

Although in this brief overview the responses to the AN belonging to the Arab world have been separated from those written in English, it should be highlighted that in the 20th and 21st centuries literary criticism has become much more cosmopolitan, and a precise demarcation line between the two groups cannot be drawn. Today, scholars travel around the world disseminating their knowledge easily and using similar theoretical frameworks of reference, which are often of Western origin. Leaving aside the question of legitimacy and efficacy of the application of (exclusively) Western literary criticism to (non-Western) narrative, the cosmopolitanism that characterizes the academic reception of the AN nullifies any attempts at approaching modern and contemporary scholarship from a national or language-based perspective. A more comprehensive discourse is, therefore, required given that “with the collapse of cultural frontiers, it is no longer tenable to speak of a particular English or American response” (Ali 1980, 203). Any discussions regarding the academic reception of the AN and its frame story should always take into consideration the internationalist and cosmopolitan dialogue between texts, their authors and their critics, and in doing so attempting to break down the boundaries that still organize academic criticism into strict compartments – linguistic, national and cultural. For all these reasons, the following chapter offers a detailed analysis of the

academic readings of the AN that disregards the geographic, national or linguistic origin of the critical contributions. The scrutiny focusses on cross-border variables and is organized according to two analytical criteria, namely the version and/or translation of the AN taken into consideration, and the theoretical framework(s) adopted in each study. These two elements are intersected with regard to the main objects of investigation of this thesis, that is the understanding of otherness and, specifically, of the relationship with the other sex within the frame story. Within each academic contribution the process of reception, interpretation and meaning-making of sexual and gendered otherness with all its nuances is, therefore, evaluated in light of the version of the frame story chosen and the critical theory that informs the scholar's perspective. In this respect, and to conclude, it should be remembered that in any process of reception the critic's personal involvement is inevitable because "to understand the text he must be inside it" (Miller 1970, VIII). Nevertheless, personal and subjective responses to the text, which are integral to the formation of one's own critical interpretation, are not directly addressed in the investigation in the following chapter. The delicate scrutiny of the non-specific factors, which is the domain of other disciplines such as psycholinguistics, sociology, statistics, philosophy and cognitive studies, would deserve a separate discussion and is, therefore, out with the scope of this linguistic and literary research project. The two criteria which have been selected to undertake the analysis that follows is intended to guarantee two objective viewpoints – however, two among many – from which to approach and evaluate the variety of interpretations concerning the relationship with the other sex within the frame story of the AN.

## 2. Academic readings in English: profiles

### I

**Title:** *Infidelity and Fiction: The Discovery of Women's Subjectivity in "Arabian Nights"*.

**Author and year of publication:** Grossman, Judith (1980).

**Journal:** *Georgia Review*, 34(1), 113–126.

**Literary criticism:** feminist criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Freudian theory; Frank Kermode (1967) – with regard to the analysis of myth and fiction.

**Language:** English.

#### **Author's thesis**

The frame story places itself in a narrative tradition according to which fiction is functional for the recognition of female subjectivity within male-dominated cultures (114). The opening tale describes a series of deceits, as well as sexual disloyalty, used by women as tools to affirm their identity. Like a child who responds to and escapes from the parents' coercive control by lying (according to the Freudian theory), a woman, who is subordinated to men within a patriarchal society, has no other options but to be unfaithful. Grossman observes that in the frame story sexuality is separated from procreation, as is the case with non-monogamic societies; for this reason, Shāhriyār is relieved of thinking about heirs and can "concentrate" on female tricks and unsanctioned sexuality, which is the main theme of the narrative. The king, however, does not recognise women's subjectivity and tends to objectify them. Moreover, he discovers that even if the body can be imprisoned, the self remains free, and this means that females can never be truly owned. Shāhriyār's reaction is, therefore, to destroy this independent self/subjectivity, and for this reason, whenever he sees "the appearance of interiority in his wife, he respond[s] by abolishing it" (124). In this scenario, mutual recognition of sovereign selves between man and woman "through negotiation and mutual agreement" (125) proves the mythology of female

evil, which Shāhriyār evidently shares, to be wrong. Female reality, of which Shahrāzād is the best example, can be a full, empowered self. The heroine, who makes use of a type of Odyssean trick to carry out her plan of salvation (121), shows that a degree of security in a love relationship can be reached if an equal status is ascribed to both partners (121). Through her storytelling she demonstrates that lack of traditional fixed modes of behaviour and roles within the construct of the heterosexual couple may not be a threat for men if they have the chance to experience a trustworthy female reality. In this respect, the other stories within the AN are not a “random collection of entertaining tales” but have a thematic contiguity with the frame narrative (122).

In Grossman’s view, the frame story does not contemplate “apocalyptic passion for death and endings” (126), but its conclusion is a hymn to life and to the possibility for men and women to happily live together. The ending (that of Burton’s translation) demonstrates that both same-sex<sup>215</sup> and opposite-sex couples can live through accommodation and mutual agreement (125).

**Keywords in the text:** autonomous selfhood, sexual disloyalty, deceitfulness, self, female subjectivity, security in a love relationship, mythology of female evil.

**Version of the frame story:** Burton’s translation (Calcutta II).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(114) “It has been widely recognized that prose fiction as a genre is historically associated with the development and fortunes of the differentiated (or detribalized) individual consciousness. Typically, fiction has first arisen in urban environments where individual mobility and social freedom were expanded, and where interchange between different cultures enabled a new perspective.” It may be not entirely correct to state that the stories of the AN are the expression of an arising individual consciousness. These tales belonged to a tradition of prose narrative which had a predominant social and collective function, for stories of this genre were used both at the courtly level (mirror for princes and/or courtly gatherings) and at the popular level (oral narrative for a popular audience) – and the AN that is known today is in the form

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<sup>215</sup> It should be remembered that at the beginning of the story the two kings live separately, and this seems the only viable solution to preserve the harmony between them.

of popular narrative. Within this type of fiction, characters are not the expression of individualities but rather role models/representations of mankind's variety.

(116) “What they saw can be redefined as women demonstrating their capacity for autonomous life by making passionate love with their black slaves. But why are the women doing this, at the grave risk of their lives? That is a question posed by one of the injured husbands and never answered directly since the wives are not permitted to speak”. It is quite difficult to say with certainty that the women of the frame story make “passionate” love with their black slaves, as nowhere in the tale there is overt expression of love or passion. In this respect, if one takes into consideration *the A Hundred and One Nights*, Shāhriyār’s queen is mistreated and even beaten (*thumma ḍaraba bi-yadihi ‘alā al-jāriyya*) by the slave, to whom she seems to be completely submissive (Fudge 2016a, 14). Infidelity might be simply a matter of revenge, although this consideration is not anchored anywhere in the text and is subjected to one’s own personal interpretation of the narrative. Finally, not all the slaves are black in some versions of the frame story, yet Grossman relies on Burton’s translation of *Calcutta II* for her analysis.

(117) “[...] ‘And if we find none death will be more welcome to us than life.’ If, he says, these betrayals are unique offenses against themselves as individuals, they will be unbearably shameful (reflecting discredit on the victims as insufficient)”. This comment on the shame experienced by the two kings is made out of Burton’s translation of *Calcutta II*. However, in Mahdi’s text there is no mention of an intention to die by the two rulers because of the impossibility of their bearing what they have experienced (See Shāhriyār VI).

(117) “Here we should briefly note the narrowed emphasis in the *Nights* on disloyalty and deceit, separate from the issue of sexual fidelity as a guarantee of the paternity of heirs. Such a separation may perhaps be related to the Islamic practice of polygamy that almost guaranteed a choice of suitable heirs to the patriarch (whereas Western monogamous men staked everything on one contract); suspected bastards might be destroyed along with the guilty wife, without putting the succession in jeopardy. And this is a clarifying factor in the situation with which we are dealing; King Shahryar can ignore the matter of paternity entirely and focus on women's capacity for guile and for unsanctioned sexual choice”. Grossman’s reference to polygamy seems to be out of

context here, since relationships between men and women are always monogamous in the frame story. It seems, therefore, unlikely that the absence of references to heirs is due to the implementation of the Islamic practice of polygamy which allows one to separate the question of sexual infidelity from that of the guarantee of paternity. Shāhriyār kills a woman every morning and, for this reason, he cannot have successors, nor does he have heirs resulting from secret or illicit love relationships.

(120) “The Destiny cited in this passage which cannot be hindered or averted is surely the familiar and inexorable cycle of coercion and revenge. The Jinni began the cycle by treating this woman as an object, kept in a box except when needed, and ignoring her status as a self. She is therefore unimpressed with the Jinni's attractions, even though he is black, ‘foul’ and ‘filthy’ like the blackamoor slaves whom the wives of the kings had loved [...]”. The word “destiny” is absent in Calcutta II, in which the idea of the “cycle of coercion and revenge” is tied to innate female infidelity rather than to a divine destiny. By contrast, this term is used in Mahdi’s edited text, as well as in Burton’s translation (See *The princess prisoner of the jinn*, III).

As for the adjectives “foul” and “filthy”, they are Burton’s additions to the original text and are used by Grossman to compare the jinn with the slaves with whom the queens betray their husbands (see *The queens’ lovers I* and *The phenomenology of male illness II*). A point is made here in relation to the fact that despite the same level of “filthiness” between the jinn and the queens’ slaves, the women involved behave differently. On the one hand, the queens fall under the spell of the perverted slaves as an act of rebellion to affirm their selves against their husbands and, for this reason, the “filthier” their partners are, the greater the shame for the betrayed kings. On the other hand, the imprisoned woman is not attracted by the abnormal characteristics of the jinn because he treats her like an object. As a consequence, his “abnormality” cannot represent for her a way of rebelling against the patriarchal system, while it seems a possibility for the two queens who, as Grossman appears to imply, were probably treated better by their slaves. The entire argument is based on a comparison drawn on Burton’s supplements to the original text – namely, on Burton’s addition and/or propensity for exaggeration. Grossman’s reading is, therefore, strongly influenced by Burton’s florid language, which is often the result of his opinions, prejudices, racism and chauvinism.

(120) “Shahryar has misread the experience he was offered, and failed to understand his own part in it – for he himself has cuckolded the Jinni just as the slave had cuckolded him, and all are contributors to the dynamic of coercion and revenge”. This statement is not entirely clear because the position of the slave, who chooses to cuckold the king, is not the same as that of Shāhriyār, who is forced to have sex with the boxed woman under threat of death. That being the case, the king has not misread his experience in the sense that Grossman suggests.

(125) “The household of the two Kings and their wives thus becomes a model of mutual recognition and accommodation between same-sex as well as different sex pairs”. Grossman states that an important achievement by Shahrāzād is to show the king that “sovereign selves” can enjoy living together. As previously evidenced, this fulfilling condition is met only if there is a former mutual recognition of the other’s self (between man and woman, and also between members of the same sex). Grossman underlines that at the beginning of the story the mutual recognition between King Shāhriyār and King Shāhzamān, namely between two men of equal value and power, is possible provided that they live separately, so the distance between their two kingdoms serves to guarantee enough space for each of the two “sovereign selves”. Conversely, at the close of the frame story Shahrāzād makes the condition of celebrating a double wedding (her own with Shāhriyār, and that of Dīnārzād’s with Shāhzamān), demanding that the two couples would live close to each other. Thereby, she demonstrates that mutual acknowledgement of each other’s identities is possible even if the autonomous selves are in close proximity – and not only when they live apart. Grossman’s consideration is built upon the ending of the frame story which Burton takes from Breslau and which he inserts in his translation.

## II

**Title:** *Madness and Cure in the 1001 Nights*.

**Author and year of publication:** Clinton, Gerome (1985).

**Journal:** *Studia Islamica*, 61, 107-125.

**Literary criticism:** psychoanalytic criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Jungian theory; Bruno Bettelheim (1976), for a Freudian interpretation of fairy tales;<sup>216</sup> narrative analysis: Gerhardt (1963), Grossman (1980) and Ghazoul (1980).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

The author's intention is to close the gap in the academic literature on the frame story of the AN by proposing an original psychoanalytical reading. Since the tale is, in Clinton's view, a story of cure, it is the critic's task to focus on the implicit diagnosis and consequent healing process that represent its main motifs, and adequately evaluate them.

According to the scholar, the principal aim of the frame story is to show how a man who has experienced suffering in love can develop highly violent attitudes against females. The episode of the woman imprisoned by the jinn turns out to be vital to the interpretation of the whole tale although, Clinton argues, little attention is generally paid to it. This episode, which opens with a jinn and a woman emerging from the sea as they come out of the unconscious mind (113), reveals that King Shāhriyār's obsession with women cannot be defended by the injustice he has previously experienced. The abuse suffered by the woman kidnapped by the jinn on her wedding night is intended to offer the two kings the opportunity to reflect on their own women's betrayals at the beginning of the tale. Thus, the queens' infidelity can also be

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<sup>216</sup> Shāhriyār represents the Id, namely a person dominated by instincts, while Shahrāzād is the Ego or the Super-Ego that can re-establish that state of mental stability which the king has lost due to his weak Id.

understood as a possible reaction to dignity violation by their husbands such as that undergone by the boxed woman at the hands of the jinn. However, the kings are only capable of seeing the jinn in the same situation as themselves, i.e., males who have lost their “exclusive sexual control” of their women (113). Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān identify with this supernatural being because in their eyes the jinn is simply a victim of the treacherous woman and, in doing so, they reverse the reality by humanising him and dehumanising her. Having been obliged to have sexual intercourse with the imprisoned woman, Shāhriyār feels vulnerable and deprived of his identity, so much so that he undergoes a violent transformation and experiences what Clinton “diagnoses” as a psychosis. The scholar provides explanations for Shāhriyār’s dramatic change which are based on the king’s childhood trauma with his mother and the subsequent loss of *anima* – in the Jungian theory, the unconscious feminine side of a man – in his adulthood. In this view, Shahrāzād is introduced to restore the lack of female figures (or the lack of positive female figures) in Shāhriyār’s life.

In the final part of his contribution, Clinton analyses the frame story in light of both the two interwoven tales told by the vizier to his daughter, and the first cycle of stories after the frame narrative (*The Merchant and the Jinn*). Refuting the argument that the interwoven tales have little relation to the plot of the frame story, Clinton states that they convey, instead, an important message, that is how irrelevant stories lead to nothing. In this respect, Shahrāzād must choose the most suitable pieces of fiction if she wants her cure for the king to be successful. Additionally, the cycle of *The Merchant and the Jinn* reinforces Shahrāzād’s message as it centres around the fact that violence can come from either men or women and that the vengeance is acceptable only if proportional to the crime. Shahrāzād, whom Clinton often contrasts with her father to underline his flaws compared to her perspicacity, knows how to treat the “patient” (119) and restores his feminine, non-murderous side. This side seems to be still present in Shāhriyār, as when he unexpectedly shows compassion for Shahrāzād and agrees on her request to see her sister and, in doing so, he unintentionally provides the woman with the possibility to implement her plan.

**Keywords in the text:** madness, cure, restoration, wholeness, identity, unconscious, childhood trauma, feminine presence.

**Version of the frame story:** Bulaq (reprint of the first Bulaq edition of 1836, offset in Baghdad by Qāsim Muḥammad al-Rajab).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(109-110) “Infidelity, and particularly the manner of it, tells us a good deal. Shahriyar's wife has chosen not only to cuckold him, an act of tremendous hostility by itself, but also to do so with a man who is as opposite and inferior to him as Islamic court society can provide, a black slave. She has made her act of infidelity a kind of rite of the harem by involving forty of her male and female slaves”. Clinton highlights the fact that the queen’s betrayal is an extremely insulting act to the king because it involve a man who is socially inferior to him, namely a black slave. The number of forty slaves, which leads Clinton to compare the scene in the garden palace to a harem, appears in Bulaq and Calcutta II, but not in Mahdi’s edition.

(114) “By whatever psychoanalytic theory we prefer, we can reasonably assume that the source of this fear and rage is a childhood trauma that involved his mother and which included the essential elements of the later trauma that so disordered his wits”. Using medical language, Clinton undertakes a psychoanalytical examination of the character’s behaviour as if Shāhriyār were a real human being, and states that the king’s tragedy is the result of trauma in his infancy, especially with his mother. However, the text never refers to the character’s past, nor is it a piece of modern fiction that allows for the psychological thickness of its protagonists. Clinton’s psychoanalytical reading of the frame story leads him to process Shāhriyār’s intentions on the basis of the character’s alleged personal trauma.

(116): “There is an ambiguity in Shahriyar's continuing to seek at least sexual connection with women. On the one hand it provides him with the opportunity of exercising his control over them, and, not incidentally, of punishing the courtiers who knew of his humiliation. Their daughters are the first murdered. On the other, it indicates that he still desires, somehow, to form a bond with the feminine”. It is questionable whether the repetitive pattern of killing a virgin every night can be seen as an indication of an attempt to establish a rapport with the opposite sex, but rather it seems to be a way for men to erase women from existence by killing them on a nightly basis.

(118) “These are amusing but undistinguished stories. What strikes one most on reading them is how poorly they fit the occasion. [...] Whatever their virtues as tales, in this context they function principally to demonstrate what we have already suspected, that the vizier is inept and will be unable to cure the king and save the realm on his own.” This comment is made with regard to the two interwoven tales told by the vizier to Shahrāzād. Clinton tries to make sense of their morals in relation to the plot of the frame story, and explains that since they are irrelevant tales that cannot dissuade Shahrāzād from her purpose, they serve to demonstrate the opposite, namely that only good stories can save lives – and the vizier’s futile storytelling clearly cannot. On the one hand Clinton suggests that the vizier’s tales do not fit the plot of the frame story, while on the other he attempts to justify their presence within the narrative (they are irrelevant stories, told by an inept person who indirectly “teaches” Shahrāzād what an ineffective storytelling is, so that she can avoid it). Clinton’s explanation, however, seems to be quite unrealistic, as Attar and Fischer (1991, 13) also suggest.

(120) “At least one commentator finds Shahrizad's choice of these tales tactless and painful to the king. Bettelheim has shown however, that children troubled by a particularly painful problem, such as the death of a parent, prefer stories that deal directly with the problem, especially when they suggest that there is a means of resolving it successfully. And this, as we shall see, is precisely what Shahrizad's tales do.” With these few lines, Clinton begins to explain his understanding of the narrative link between the frame story and the other tales in the collection, particularly with the three tales of the cycle of *The Merchant and the Jinn*. He analyses the meanings of the three stories in relation to Shahrāzād’s aim at healing the king. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that there might be no effective connection between the two narrative parts because, although it is true that the narrative cycle of *The Merchant and the Jinn* seems to belong to the oldest nucleus of the AN, it is impossible to say with certainty whether there was a clear intention by the author/copyist to maintain narrative contiguity with the frame story. Therefore, no “thematic and psychological” (124) correspondence between Shahrāzād’s message and the lessons within the other tales can be effectively proved.

### III

**Title:** *Romance as Genre in "The Thousand and One Nights": Part II.*

**Author and year of publication:** Heath, Peter (1988).

**Journal:** *Journal of Arabic Literature* 19(1), 1-26.

**Discipline/research field:** genre analysis; structuralist approach.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Todorov (1973).

**Language:** English.

#### **Author's thesis**

Heath argues that the AN, as well as its frame story, has three main aims: to entertain, to satisfy curiosity – including coping with the audience's ambivalence towards the object of curiosity, which both appeals and frightens –, and to serve as a warning/lesson for the reader (16-17). The didactic element is reflected in Shahrāzād's storytelling, as well as in the traditional instructive genres to which many of the tales in the collection belong, i.e., fables, exempla, romances and anecdotes. The informative aspect of the AN is directly called into question at the very beginning of the frame story, where it is said that the tales in the collection are about earlier cultures and intend to provide lessons for subsequent generations (17). According to Heath, however, critics have greatly concentrated on Shahrāzād's use of words to postpone her death, namely on the mechanism of procrastination, drawing attention away from the didactic character of her instructive storytelling (18). By contrast, the true aim of Shahrāzād's narration is to show Shāhriyār that his conceptions about women are faulty, and subsequently to change them. In other words, Shāhriyār is the "main protagonist" (18). The king's behaviour deeply threatens the stability of the entire social community because of the repeated killings of its women, and this is something which his people may eventually decide to rebel against. In this scenario, Shahrāzād intervenes to save not only other females, but also the king himself (19). The female storyteller's purpose is, therefore, not time-gaining aiming at helping Shāhriyār to forget his crisis and anger, but to show him that his worldview is ill-formed (19). The result of this change is evident in the conclusion of the frame story, where the king has already decided to spare Shahrāzād's

life before seeing their children because he has realized that she is a pious woman, i.e., “a fitting damsel with whom to fall in true love (19).

**Keywords in the text:** didactic intent, instruction, entertaining, curiosity, procrastination, right conduct.

**Versions of the frame story:** principally Bulaq (edition of 1835 reprinted by *Maktabat al-muthannā* in Baghdad, n.d.); occasionally Breslau, Calcutta II and Mahdi’s edition.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(19) “In other words, a fitting damsel with whom to fall in true love”. In this statement Heath discusses love, although this term is not found in the frame story of either Bulaq or Calcutta II. He supports this interpretation by referring to the “fuller” and more embellished ending in Breslau – which is inserted and romanticized by Burton in his translation of Calcutta II (see *Shahrāzād VII*).

## IV

**Title:** *Promiscuity, Emancipation, Submission: The Civilizing Process and the Establishment of a Female Role Model in the Frame-Story of 1001 Nights.*

**Author and year of publication:** Attar, Samar and Fischer, Gerhard (1991)

**Journal:** Arab Study Quarterly, 13(3/4), 1-18.

**Literary criticism:** structuralist analysis; gender criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** structuralist analysis: Gerhardt (1963), Elisseff (1949) and Ghazoul (1980); psychoanalytical and sociological reading: Sullerot (1976), Firestone (1971), Sabbah (1984) and Clinton (1985).

**Language:** English.

### **Authors' thesis**

The frame story consists of three narrative and thematic blocks:

- the story of the two kings and of the captive woman and the Jinni, whose main themes are infidelity and promiscuity;
- the relationship between the vizier and his daughter, which revolves around emancipation and obedience;
- the relationship between Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār with regard to the question of submission and power.

According to the authors, the plot of the frame story has a well-constructed pattern and a very solid structure, and they disagree with Gerhardt (1963), who discusses its structural inconsistency and elusiveness, and also with Ghazoul (1980), who cannot clarify what is the true unifying element between the opening narrative of the AN and the remaining tales. In Attar and Fischer's view, instead, the narrative strength of the collection lies in its incisive sociocultural message that is skilfully encapsulated in the frame story, which is that if a society wants to achieve harmony and a higher level of civilization, it must order, control and civilize love relationships. The ordered society comes, nevertheless, at a cost because civilizing means that men are responsible for controlling women's sexual demoniac instinct which, otherwise, would spread chaos and disorder. Female sexual drives, therefore, must be overcome and substituted by a

mature identity, and also promiscuity and free feminine sexuality need to be restrained as they are a threat to the stability of the social (patriarchal) order. In this respect, the frame story aims to set a “positive” feminine model for any society claiming itself to be civilized but which, in truth, entails a loss of freedom, spontaneity and enjoyment in women’s sexual life (if not a total denial). Behind the appearance of a fictional romantic love between the king and Shahrāzād there is, therefore, the reality of the subjugation of women and of their domestic confinement, while male sexuality is presented as moderate and never questioned (6). This is a clear proof that the society described within the frame story is construed from the perspective of men.

Attar and Fischer suggest that the didactic and moral dimension of the frame narrative is to be found in the original role of “filter” played by the female narrator. The character of Shahrāzād is positioned between the reader and the work of fiction to create a distance between the text and the audience, so that readers are aware that what they are going to read may be “immoral”, but it exists for a (didactic) reason. With her pure, immaculate presence, not only does Shahrāzād substitute for the dangerous and dissolute behaviour of the boxed woman a safer and more respectable model, but she also dissipates the many bad, tempting and lascivious examples of women whose stories she tells. According to Attar and Fischer, this peculiar role of Shahrāzād is similar to that of the Arab compilers who paid great attention to adapting the frame story, as well as many other non-Arab and non-Muslim literary works, to Muslim values and softening any immoral and “uncivilized” elements in it. The feminist trait of the boxed woman was, therefore, preserved in order to be contrasted with Shahrāzād, whose relative emancipation embodies the ideal of the perfect woman who is always virtuous and eventually subjected to men through her role of mother and wife. Coming from a heterogeneous cultural and narrative background, when the AN entered the Arab-Islamic world it contained various pagan elements that, however, were not expurgated but rather integrated into the new Muslim horizon. The civilizing role of Shahrāzād is inscribed within a narrative frame with its own narrator which serves to emphasise the didactic aim of the whole collection and to create a sense of detachment from the often-scabrous content of the tales presented. Shahrāzād finds its parallel in the civilizing mission of the Arabic-Islamic caliphates during the Golden Age, which also introduced pre-Islamic elements into the moral norms of the new

Islamic society. Finally, Shahrāzād's submission to the male power symbolises submission to Islam, as the main founding principle of the emerging caliphate.

**Keywords in the text:** promiscuity, emancipation, submission, power, property, cultural paradigm of femininity, pattern of male-female relationship, civilization, patriarchal society.

**Versions of the frame story:** mainly Calcutta II, the Bulaq edition published in 1836 in Cairo, Littman's translation and Burton's translation (occasionally consulted).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(5) "Even more shocking, perhaps, would be the realization that the Box Woman's quest for sexual fulfilment is an end in itself, located exclusively in the domain of the pleasure principle, and that she does not and will not accept the repressive modification of her instinctual drive by acknowledging socio-cultural restraints or, for that matter, the pressure imposed on women to limit their sexuality to their procreative function". Attar and Fischer interpret the episode of the boxed woman and the jinn as a feminist demonstration against the patriarchal system of ancient times, namely, "as a vital force of nature breaking all bounds and limitations" (4). By disregarding the procreative function, a woman is no longer a reproductive "machine" and, therefore, seeks men just for pleasure and sexual gratification. The very feminist understanding of this episode is also favoured by the version of the frame story on which this article relies, namely Calcutta II, which stresses the enormity of the boxed woman's sexual revenge indicating that she had 570 partners, as proof of – according to the authors' words – her insatiable sexual appetite. Other critics have a completely opposite perspective relating to the question of the boxed woman; Clinton (1985), for example, sees in her sexual revenge the desperate attempt to resist against the dehumanisation and objectification of her female identity. By contrast, Attar and Fischer read this episode, as well as the whole frame story, in the light of a "challenge" to the social system of the time according to which females act for sexual fulfilment and the pleasure principle, perhaps ignoring the fact that the boxed woman does not merely seek pleasure but wants revenge for her violated dignity. It is a fact that she does not freely choose to conduct a life attuned to sexual gratification, rather she is a prisoner and,

therefore, finds herself in such a desperate situation that the only remaining instrument for her to avoid complete submission to the jinn is to betray him. The two scholars believe, instead, that the captive woman represents a challenge to the patriarchal system because she refuses motherhood which “precludes her ‘being civilized’” with her unbound sexuality (5).

(9) “If emancipation is understood as the free development of all of one’s potential as a human being, then clearly Scheherazade’s role as the submissive woman who subjugates her sexual desire to that of the man shows the limitations of her emancipation”. However, no mention of Shahrāzād’s sexual desire is actually found within the Arabic versions of the frame story. The tale says nothing in this respect, so any addition to the text may be risky and, above all, forced.

(10) “Scheherazade, on the other hand, stays at home to await his return”. This comment is used to highlight the limitations imposed on women by the patriarchal system. Nevertheless, the frame story does not reveal anything concerning Shahrāzād’s daily and social life, so this statement may seem an addition to the text instead of comment on what can be effectively found within the narration.

(16) “Shahrazad’s submission to the authority of the king finds its last justification in the concept of submission [Islam] itself, the very principle on which this civilisation is founded”. This seems to be a personal remark which is neither supported by any evidence within the text nor justified by Attar and Fischer.

**Title:** *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*. Chapter 1, Narration and Desire: Shahrazād.

**Author and year of publication:** Malti-Douglas, Fedwa (1991).

**Publisher:** Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**Literary criticism:** feminist and gender criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Irigaray (1974), Phelps (1981), Sedgwick (1985) and Weber (1987).

**Language:** English.

#### **Author's thesis**

Malti-Douglas's study focuses on the question of desire and its problematic aspects within the frame story of the AN. Shāhriyār's sexual desire, which is improper and harmful, is "redirected" by Shahrāzād (11) who makes use of her body and words to transform it first into narrative desire, and finally into a "healed" and no longer destructive sexuality. According to the scholar, at the very beginning of the story desire is found only in the brothers' couple (who want to see each other); the pairing of Shāhriyār-Shāhzmān is, however, homosocial – i.e., it is a desire for a social relationship "between two individuals of the same gender" (15)<sup>217</sup>– and stands in opposition to the heterosexual couple that is in "a state of crisis" (16). The homosocial couple, Malti-Douglas contends, is central to the narration because it sets in motion the plot, and all the events are triggered by what the two men do. The male couple is also tied to the motif of the voyage, which is very relevant for the discovery of women's infidelity. In particular, the second journey made by both kings is the catalyst for Shāhriyār's change, which results in his violent behaviour towards women.

As for the episode of the boxed woman, Malti-Douglas underlines the fact that it is central to the interpretation of the frame story because it is the moment in which the

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<sup>217</sup> Here Malti-Douglas uses the word "gender", but "sex" would be more appropriate as she is talking about two men. Likewise, the word "desire" is used indifferently and without distinguishing it from longing. The term "homosocial" is coined by Sedgwick (1985).

male protagonists cast their negative judgement upon all females and, in doing so, they begin the chain of violence. Moreover, this episode also highlights the link between sex and death, which is continuous throughout the narrative. The kings are forced to have sex with the lady imprisoned by the jinn under the threat of death and then Shāhriyār follows a similar, yet much more aggressive, pattern when he marries a woman every night and kills her the following morning. Malti-Douglas advises that the boxed woman shows Shāhriyār how to take full revenge of what has been done to him by establishing the cycle threat of death-copulation-end of relationship, which becomes totally dominated by death in the king's version (20). Death after the sexual act seems to reflect the *petit mort* of the orgasm, so desire “never has the opportunity to develop in time, cut off by death/orgasm” (p. 21) and becomes the representation of an immature sexual behaviour. In this scenario, Shahrāzād is the only woman capable of reversing this dramatic trend; she is not simply a physical being or merely a “vagina” (22), but rather an “intellectual wonder” (21) that can transform impetuous sexual desire into a narrative desire that continues “from night to night” (22) and that belongs to the “more distant and more malleable world of the text” (22). This extension of desire over time, which is similar to the female classical pattern of prolonged desire, breaks the cycle of satisfaction, end of relationship and subsequent death, allowing for the consolidation of the instructive relationship within which Shahrāzād can show the king a different way of experiencing sexuality (22). Although this desire entails a degree of trickery, it cannot be associated with the negative *kayd* (wilyness) of the other treacherous women who come before Shahrāzād within the frame story for it is a pedagogical tool with an instructive function.

Malti-Douglas clarifies that confining Shahrāzād to the role of the healer/object of desire diminishes the strength of her personality and overlooks the importance of male-female power dynamics within the narrative. By manipulating Shāhriyār's desire, Shahrāzād is able to re-establish the heterosexual couple on to a more solid foundation, as well as to avoid the formation of the male/homosocial couple again – “it is not coincidental that Shahzaman, we are told, has been dispatched to his own kingdom” (23). The new equilibrium is, however, always under the control of male power, and at the end of the story Shahrāzād is returned to her original bodily dimension – after having been represented by words, while being a narrator – in the perfect shape of

mother and lover. Therefore, she is not a genuine feminist, nor is she a real revolutionary, and this is possibly due to the fact that the AN has been penned by men and thus promotes their sexist point of view. In this respect, it is important to remember within the frame story the question of men's voyeuristic activity, which functions as an attempt to dominate, at least visually, within the heterosexual couple. The betrayals, however, seem to suggest that women are the real active elements, and male insistence to be witnesses to their wives' infidelity (such as in the scene in which Shāhriyār wants to see with his own eyes what his wife does with the slave) reveals another aspect of their immature desire. It is another sense, namely the sense of hearing, which eventually guides men towards a new equilibrium in relationships which, however, always maintain women in a position of subordination – they are accepted if they behave as good mothers and wives. Malti-Douglas highlights that the closure of the frame story is, however, in contrast with the feminist claim it seems to boost at the beginning of the narrative, and offers a more traditionally moralistic ending that sees women as objectified and men in control of their sexuality once again. This is particularly visible in the ending related by Burton, according to which the two sisters are displayed with their elaborate dresses as objects before men's eyes.

**Keywords in the text:** desire, sexual desire, narrative desire, sex and death, homosocial couple, heterosexual couple, manipulation.

**Versions of the frame story:** Mahdi's edition, Bulaq (1835) and Burton's translation (Calcutta II).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(16) "The repeated use of the Arabic *dunyā* is not without significance. Etymologically the basest of places, it represents the world negatively, as the opposite of spirituality, and is often associated, again negatively, with sex and the female". The term *dunyā* (world) is repeated twice in Mahdi's edition, but it is not found either in Bulaq or in Calcutta II – "no one is safe in this world. Such doings are going on in my kingdom, and in my very palace. Perish the world and perish life" (see Shāhriyār VI). Malti-Douglas's statement needs, therefore, to be seen in light of the actual occurrence of the word *dunyā* within the different Arabic versions of the AN.

(19) “The univocal response is crucial: no doubt can be cast on the nature of the male judgment of the situation. ‘*Inna kaydakunna ‘azīm*’ is a Quranic quote from the twelfth chapter, the sura of Joseph”. This quranic quote is taken from Mahdi’s edition and is absent from the other versions of the AN. The phrase is functional to Malti-Douglas’ interpretation of the homosocial couple for it represents the climax of the coupling between the two kings and the very moment in which they cast their condemnation against women together, as a single male voice. The scholar’s reading of the whole passage does not necessarily hold true for other versions of the frame story, which, unlike Mahdi’s edition, do not entail the above quranic quote (see Shāhriyār IV).

(21) “Her desire is initially expressed to her father: she wishes him (*ashtahī minka*) to marry her to the king”. The use of the expression *ashtahī minka*, from the root *sh – h – y* (to be desirous of something) is found only in Mahdi’s edition. However, this is more a request than a desire in either sexual or narrative terms according to Malti-Douglas’ use of this word in her study.

(21) “The latter is happy (*fariha*) and tells the vizier to bring her that night. The vizier then tells Shahrazād, who is also very pleased (*farihat*)”. Malti-Douglas says that the use of the same verb (*fariha*) in two places puts the two characters on “an equal footing”, so that a narrative relationship between the partners can be established. The repetition of the verb *fariha* is found only in Mahdi’s edition, while in Bulaq and Calcutta II it appears only once (see Shāhriyār IX and Shahrāzād III).

(23) “It is no coincidental that Shāhzmān, we are told, has been dispatched to his own kingdom. The danger of another male couple forming a threatening the Shāhrazād-Shāhriyār heterosexual duo has been averted”. This explicitly refers to Mahdi’s edition, that is to the only version of the frame story in which Shāhzmān is said to return to his reign (see Shāhzmān IV).

(24) “When Shāhzmān reveals to his brother the queen's infidelity, he speaks of ‘the misfortune he saw’”. The term “misfortune”, in Arabic *muṣība*, is absent in both Bulaq and Calcutta II (see The phenomenology of male illness II, III).

(25) “Two versions for the closure of Shahrazād's Nights exist, a shorter one and a longer one. In both versions, Shahrazād has meanwhile given birth to three sons”. This is not correct. There are more versions for the ending of the frame tale and one of them does not contemplate any children (see 2.2, part II).

(26) “The sexual act has been transformed from one linked with death to one leading to creation. She has, after all, given birth to three sons”. Again, this statement is based on one version of the frame story and cannot, therefore, hold valid for other versions of it.

(27-28) “Even the male homosocial couple is recreated, since, at Shahrazād's request, Shāhzamān and his bride will live with Shāhriyār and Shahrazād”. This is an event that occurs only in Breslau and is inserted by Burton in his translation (see Shāhzamān V).

(28) “She may have narrated the stories, but it is Shāhriyār who has them written down, to be eventually copied and distributed by his male successor”. As for the above point, this is an event that occurs only in Breslau and is inserted by Burton into his translation.

## VI

**Title:** *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context*. Chapter 2, Narrative Dialects; Chapter 3, Discursive Significance.

**Author and year of publication:** Ghazoul, Ferial J. (1996).

**Publisher:** Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

**Literary criticism:** linguistic and textual analysis; comparative literature.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** structuralist approach (Todorov 1971; Propp 1975).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

The matrix of the frame story, i.e., “the unit of discourse around which the text is built both semantically and stylistically” (33), is the pair rupture-healing, which by its very nature equips the tale with a dialogical narrative structure. This pair is thematically represented by Shāhzmān’s internal sore on the one hand, and Shahrāzād’s salvific storytelling on the other. The narrative matrix is, therefore, developed within the frame-story through codes, meaning the “combination of thematic elements that constitute a sub-language” (36). The first of these codes, the erotic, concerns the relationship between slaves and queens, namely between two opposite groups within society which, however, are both subaltern and subjected to male power. Both categories of people have no proper names within the frame story except Mas‘ūd which, however, in the medieval Arab world was a stereotypical name for people who had black complexion. In the Arab-Islamic society of the time, black persons were considered alien/outsider yet, at the same time, they were famous for having incredible physical energy and prowess, a fact that would make them desirable lovers for women. Within the frame story, relationships outside the union of marriage symbolise the search for love as a natural, chaotic and primitive force outside social constrictions; in particular liaisons with slaves embody the chaos and the instinct of death that intrude upon life, for they are directly responsible for the queens’ deaths, and also indirectly culpable for all the virgins killed by Shāhriyār (38). The liaisons with slaves are not

represented as producing children and are, therefore, an obstruction to life, while that between Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād results in three sons and, therefore, generates proliferation of both narrative and life (39).

The second thematic element mentioned by Ghazoul, namely the rhetorical code, concerns the act of narration. Shahrāzād tells stories to keep herself alive; since silence means death and destruction, narration becomes the incarnation of the struggle for life against entropy. The type of stories offered by her are lessons, in Arabic *‘ibra*, from the root ‘ - b - r originally meaning “to cross”, a word that Ghazoul believes to be very suitable to describe the collection and its frame story, as it symbolises “a rite of passage where an ordeal leads to an ultimate and radical transformation” (42). The last thematic element, i.e., the numerical code, is related to the narrative function of numbers which serve to expand the structure of the frame story. In particular, the mechanism of binarism permeates the whole narrative at different levels. For example, in the first part of the story, the pair Eros and Thanatos is expressed by the series of betrayals which lead to very unpleasant conditions and end with killing, while in the second portion of the frame narrative Shāhriyār’s murderous cycle combines two extreme poles, that of procreation/development of the sexual act and death. Defloration is both the symbol of procreation and of condemnation to death for the virgins inseminated by Shāhriyār (30). Reversals and parallelisms serve to implement the binary structure of the text and are expressed through pairing, inversions and antithetical meaning; for instance, the king chooses virgins because “his mental virginity, has been wounded and he is making up for it by inflicting wounds” (30). Furthermore, there is a binarism of colours according to which blackness signifies night, illicit relationships, challenge to power and death, while brightness/whiteness indicates happiness at the end of the story (29).

Ghazoul highlights the fact that Shahrāzād’s storytelling transforms women from objects of sex to objects of sexual fantasy narratives and, in doing so, it substitutes acts (sacrifices) with symbols (rituals). The female protagonist of the AN also reverses the power relation between man and woman and makes the latter the active partner within the couple as the possessor of discourse. In other words, Shahrāzād becomes the dictator, from the Latin *dicere*, “to say”, and is no longer the passive subject. Nevertheless, as Ghazoul notes, Shahrāzād is “an exceptional person in her own right”

(26) but also “technically helpless” because she is under the threat of death and, therefore, her status is ambivalent (26). Likewise, Shāhriyār shares the same ambiguous condition of strength and lack of power, for “there is something of the empowerment associated with Shahrayar in Shahrazad, and something of her helplessness in him” (27). This binary nature of the story leads to “radical changes but not to growth” as its “constituent units remain essentially the same”.

**Keywords in the text:** matrix, erotic code, rhetorical code, numerical code, life, death, slave, outsider, narration.

**Versions of the frame story:** Bulaq; Lane’s translation of Bulaq; Mahdi’s edition (occasionally).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(38) “The woman is clearly not satisfied with socialized sex and seeks a more primitive, or natural, kind of eroticism. It is a sharp image of the instincts of death intruding on the instincts of life”. This interpretation is acceptable, yet disputable. Within the frame story, the women’s search for extramarital relationships can also be seen as an escape from a mortal conjugal routine under the patriarchal oppression of their husbands.

(39) “It should be recalled that the deliverance of Shahrazad from the threat of death not only occurs after a thousand nights of storytelling, but also after bearing the king three sons”. Here Ghazoul refers to Bulaq (and Calcutta II), but it should be remembered that other versions of the frame do not mention any offspring. Moreover, some critics have commented that Shahrāzād is granted mercy by the king before showing him their children.

(42) “The key word in this section is *‘ibra*, which Lane translates as ‘lesson’”. This word is to be found in Bulaq (and Calcutta II), but it is absent in Mahdi’s edition.

## VII

**Title:** *Men's Theories, Women's Laughter: The Thousand and One Nights and Women's Comic Pleasures in Medieval Literature.*

**Author and year of publication:** Perfetti, Lisa R. (1998).

**Journal:** *Exemplaria*, 10(2), 207-241.

**Literary criticism:** feminist criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** feminist criticism: Malti-Douglas (1991) and Mernissi (2001); the Freudian theory with regard to the concepts of joke and lie.

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

(Only the author's view on the frame story) – Shahrāzād's storytelling testifies to "women's manipulation of language" (220) and also to her own survival strategy which is meant, nevertheless, to save not only her own life but also that of all women in the kingdom. Her presence is remembered by the words she repeats at the end of each night, so that the reader cannot forget about her as a storyteller. The reader also realizes that her plan is based on feminism, since her narrative endeavour aims to change the structure of the relationship between male and female. Hers is a form of resistance against misogyny, and, at the same time, an attempt to revert the "homosocial" (221) bound that prevents men from seeing, understanding and establishing a rapport with women – both the two kings, in fact, say that they will never remarry after having experienced their wives' betrayals and having been victims of the boxed woman's violence. Shahrāzād, therefore, tries to broaden Shāhriyār's very narrow experience of women by relating him stories that describe the variety of mankind and womankind; her accounts are anecdotal life-stories, which in the middle ages were often mixed with historical commentaries (*akhbār*).

Perfetti explains that Shahrāzād's narrative strategy is a ruse which she implements to challenge the male perspective on female cunning, considered as the worst of women's devices, together with their lust and monstrous sexual appetite. Shahrāzād's deceit is, in truth, closer to the idea of *dhakā*' (intelligence) than of *kayd* (guile) and can be read

as a “revision of the misogynist cliché about women's cunning that appropriates it as a source of women's strength” (223). The storytelling is triggered by Dīnārzād, Shahrāzād's sister, whose dual purpose is to ask the first story and to remind the reader of the AN that the audience within the text is gendered – i.e., there is man, the king, and a woman, her (221). Shahrāzād's use of both language and the narrated word intends to show Shāhriyār that his alleged knowledge of women is partial and failing because it is based only on the sense of sight. Under the male gaze, women become passive objects, namely they are judged for their acts while their personal reasons and stories are completely erased – this is the way in which Shāhriyār and his brother observe their respective wives in the act of betrayal and also the boxed woman emerging from the sea with the jinn. But the gaze is particularly important within the medieval Arab-Muslim world because through it that female beauty can bewitch the male, so women must be hidden and their bodies should be veiled in order to prevent the *fitna*, i.e., temptation in which faith can succumb and that generates chaos (228). Conversely, this art of narration and, consequently, of entering into a dialectic with men mastered by Shahrāzād returns women to their active role in the dynamics between the sexes. By moving attention from the threatening female body and sexuality to female narrative, Shahrāzād reminds the king that women are much more than their physical appearance and, consequently, she can break the spell that transforms females into dangerous demons in the man's mind.

**Keywords in the text:**

Joke, trick, guile, spell, deceit, *fitna*, female demon.

**Versions of the frame story:** Mahdi's edition; Haddawy's translation of Mahdi's edition.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(220) “Readers are reminded of Shahrazad's presence at the end of each night [...]”. This holds true for Mahdi's edition, but the presence and structure of night breaks are different in the various versions of the AN. Moreover, sometimes night interruptions are not consistent even throughout the same manuscript, while in other cases they have been reduced to fixed formulas which serve to nothing but the suspension of the

narrative peace and have lost the connection with the narrative level of the frame story (Marzolph, Van Leeuwen, and Wassouf 2004, 1:373-374).

(221) “Later, when the brothers encounter a woman who has cuckolded her *‘ifrīt* (demon) captor, they both conclude that no woman can be trusted, and they pledge never to remarry, a pledge that unites them in a ‘homosocial’ bond against women”. This version is that given by Mahdi’s edition, while in Bulaq and Calcutta II there is no promise never to marry a woman again by either of the kings (see *Shāhriyār VII*).

## VIII

**Title:** *Sheherazade/Shahrazād: Rereading the Frame Tale of the 1001 Nights*.<sup>218</sup>

**Author and year of publication:** Sallis, Eva (1998).

**Journal:** *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature*, 1(2), 153-167.

**Literary criticism:** postcolonial criticism, feminist criticism, psychoanalytic approach.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** narrative analysis: Ghazoul (1980) and Naddaf (1991); gender approach: Malti-Douglas (1991); psychoanalytic approach: Bettelheim (1976) and Clinton (1985).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

Sallis believes that Shahrāzād's story has been often misread and so she offers her own interpretation "to open up the endless possibilities of new readings" and "free the tale from the chains of persistent misconceptions" (154). In her view, the relationship between the two protagonists is a question of equilibrium, disequilibrium and, again, equilibrium to be recreated by Shahrāzād. Harmony, which is to be found in marriage at the beginning of the narration, is, in fact, destroyed by infidelity and betrayal – as the worst things that a woman can inflict on a man. Hence, disequilibrium proliferates and is expressed by "violence and abuse, victimization, imprisonment and death, a disorder, indeed a national disaster lasting a term of 3 years" (154). The episode of the betrayal experienced by Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān causes their trauma, "resulting in withdrawal and depression" because it is an "assault on their identity" (154). Departing from traditional fairy tales in which the protagonists are usually forced to overcome a series of external obstacles to be reconciled, the frame story has its dramatic tension in the crisis that takes place within the interiority of the protagonists. Reconciliation, therefore, cannot be achieved by the intervention of external factors but it is the result

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<sup>218</sup> This article has also been published as a chapter (chapter 5) in Sallis' book *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass: The Metamorphosis of the Thousand and One Nights* (1998).

of internal change. The plot of the frame story, Sallis observes, is constructed upon the happening of this intimate event. But can a person recover from such a serious illness? Infidelity seems to be a continuing pattern, “a wheel of eternal disfunction” (155), while the male-female relationship is a chain of “endless trauma and revenge” (156), as the episode of the jinn and the boxed woman also appears to confirm. In this respect, instead of blaming the monstrous creature for kidnapping the bride on the day of her wedding, Shāhriyār is shocked by the woman’s excessive behaviour, which somehow anticipates his own vindictive and violent conduct against the opposite sex. Sallis points out that in the king’s misreading of the imprisoned woman’s story one may recognize the first differentiation between male and female views on love relationships.

In this scenario, Shahrāzād is the one in charge of restoring the equilibrium between the sexes through storytelling, which helps defer violence and makes room for healing acts (163). The heroine is not a figure but a “force” (162) that manipulates a desire (the king’s desire) which is no longer sexual, yet it is transformed into another type of desire, such as the desire for knowledge. The virgins to be killed by the king are, therefore, substituted with stories, and Shāhriyār fully participates in the ritual of the storytelling, which opening formulas at the beginning of every night function as the “trance induction” (156). At the end of the frame story balance and vital equilibrium between man and woman are eventually re-established; Shahrāzād, who initially was the weaker element in the couple, becomes stronger, while the king’s violence is neutralized by the healing process that occurs by means of the exploration of different human attitudes within the tales. The increasingly powerful position gained by Shahrāzād throughout the story guarantees her the freedom (and the narrative authority) to explore those human attitudes which can be regarded as vicious or unpleasant.

As regards literary criticism on the frame story, Sallis indicates three common mistakes that may occur in the interpretation of it. The first is the fact that Shahrāzād’s life is spared because she has borne three children to the king (161). This is incorrect, Sallis says, because the heroine had already been recognized as a virtuous woman (in other words, the king had already recovered his senses and, at the same time, appreciated her before seeing his offspring). Secondly, Shahrāzād is not an exceptional

woman, contrary to Western opinion, but she is a female model of intelligence and virtue that represents all women (161). Conversely, if she had been the exception, Shāhriyār would have been justified in hating all the other women, and this is clearly not the message of the frame story. Thirdly, Shahrāzād is never described in physical terms in the original Arabic texts even though some European translations, such as that of Galland, emphasize her beauty and, in doing so, appear to diminish her intelligence (163).

**Keywords in the text:** infidelity, betrayal, disequilibrium, balance, loss of mental health, trauma, force, equilibrium, Western expectations.

**Versions of the frame story:** almost all. Galland's translation, Galland's translation into English, Forster's translation, Breslau, Bulaq, Lane's translation, Calcutta II, Payne's translation, Burton's translation, Mardrus' translation, Littman's translation, Mathers' translation, the Beirut edition published in 1981 by *Al-thaqāfiyya*, Mahdi's edition, Haddawy's translation (Sallis 1998, 166). All quotes are from Payne's translation.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(154) "Harmony between man and woman initially represented in marriage is destroyed by betrayal". It is impossible to say if there was a real harmony within the marriages of the two main royal couples before the discovery of the betrayals since the text does not make any reference to the previous relationship between the kings and their wives. Likewise, the status of being married cannot be directly associated with a condition of serenity and equilibrium, particularly in the case of the women who manifest, through infidelity, their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Marriage, therefore, could also represent an established social convention which has nothing to do with feelings of love and/or affection between the parties.

(154) "The rectifying and regaining of equilibrium take a further term of nearly 3 years, and then equality and balance are again attained, in the version paraphrased above, in the image of a harmonious and loving relationship". It should be remembered that the word "love" is not found in the frame story, so any classification of the relationship between Shahrāzād and the king as "loving" is always meant to be the result of the critic's personal consideration.

(155) “[...] it is only a return to physical well-being and both kings remain emotionally and socially dysfunctional. They emerge from their depression no longer participants in harmonious human society, and from this position they are opponents to women in absolute terms”. The “return to physical well-being” only concerns Shāhriyār; moreover, he is the only one who shows symptoms of what it is possible to recognize in modern terms as depression, and who likely does not “remain emotionally and socially dysfunctional”. Shāhzamān, in fact, seems to recover from his desperation after having seen the orgy in the palace garden. The story says nothing about an alleged similarity between his behaviour and Shāhriyār’s – except for one odd reference to be found in the Breslau version of the frame story, translated by Burton (see Shāhzamān V) –, and in Mahdi’s edition he simply returns to his home country.

(155) “ ‘We seek the aid of God against the malice of women, for indeed their craft is great’ (p.7). At this point of the story the kings have indicated the extreme nature of their rejection of women; seeking refuge with Allah is the equivalent of praying for protection from a supernatural evil”. This sentence, with its reference to sura 12, verse 28, of the Quran exists only in Mahdi’s edition (see *The princess prisoner of the jinn* III).

(156) “However, the great number of her infidelities to her captor and the threefold repetition of her story testify to her revenge and the depth of her sense of injury”. The story of the boxed woman is mentioned three times within that episode only in Mahdi’s edition.

(163) “Remember that Sheherazade tells her father that either she will live or ransom the daughters of the country with her life. This is deliberately mistranslated by Lane as ‘either I shall die, and be a ransom for one of the daughters of the Muslims, or I shall live and be the cause of their deliverance from him,’ [...]”. Sallis says that Lane misinterprets this passage because he wants to disempower Shahrāzād. In truth, in a note the translator (Lane 1979, 1:35 note 29) explains that he deviates from the original text because the Arabic sentence seems to indicate that the woman has some stratagem in mind to prevent the king committing other murders in case she dies. This idea of Shahrāzād having a “contingency plan”, however, is not mentioned in the Arabic text, unless one infers that something in this passage has been dropped. A comparison of

this passage with Mahdi's edition, nevertheless, may provide a kind of rationale for the otherwise quite odd explanation by Lane (See *Shahrāzād II*).

(164) "One minor but noticeable piece of careless storytelling or refabrication is that Shahzaman weakens physically and emotionally from his depression on the journey to see his brother and the tale teller has Shahriyar notice this change upon their first meeting. Given that in this text it is 20 years since the brothers have set eyes on each other, the reader feels a little disbelieving at Shahriyar's perspicacity". Shāhriyār's perspicacity is not an invention by Burton, but he takes this passage from *Calcutta I*. (See *The phenomenology of male illness I*).

(164) "It is an addition of Burton's that the black slave in the embrace of Shahzaman's queen is 'of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime' (p. 4), and also that Shahriyar's wife's lover Mas'ud is 'a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight' (p. 6)". It is worth remembering that some parts of this passage are not Burton's additions, but they are taken from *Calcutta I* (See *The queens' lovers I, II*).

## IX

**Title:** *Reading – and Enjoying – "Wiles of Women" Stories as a Feminist.*

**Author and year of publication:** Najmabadi, Afsaneh (1999).

**Journal:** *Iranian Studies*, 32(2), 203-222.

**Literary criticism:** feminist criticism, gender criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Freudian theory, mainly through the works of Bouhdiba (1985); gender criticism: Malti-Douglas (1991).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

Many tales of the AN, including the frame story, fall within the narrative category of the "wiles of women" stories, a very common genre in high and low, written and oral Arabic literature. At the core of these stories lies the concept of women's insatiable sexual appetite as the main principle of chaos and disorder (207). According to Najmabadi, this form of fiction is not so much a source of "images of reality" as a depiction by males of all their fantasies and anxieties (207) and should, therefore, be considered with "an eye for gender representation" in order to analyse how masculinity and femininity were shaped in the medieval Arab world, namely within their own cultural and historical context. Being built upon the sequence "seduction-temptation-resistance-rejection-vengeance" (213), the "wiles of women" stories served "to produce heteronormative male homosociality" and to disavow "the world of women" (213) which, during childhood, represented the sole universe for both males and females.

As for the frame story of the AN, its heroine Shahrāzād is both a healer and a powerful storyteller. However, as previously noted, the stories she narrates are focussed on tricks and wiles that describe women not as they really are, but as male fears depict them. Considering that narrating misogynistic tales is part of the king's cure, Shahrāzād becomes an active part of the narrative tactic she implements. Since these tales are intended to generate masculine paradigms, she is complicit with the male mechanism producing patriarchal and misogynistic models, so much so that she herself

is a female trope of homosocial production. Shahrāzād, therefore, cannot be a symbol of any feminist claims. Although it seems that she can have some power to confront male dominance when she bewitches the king through her storytelling, in truth she does not change “gender power configurations”, and her movements and influences are always temporary and confined to the night intimacy of the bedroom space. For this reason, the soothing ending of the frame story is reassuring only for men for the ultimate message it carries is that “the only safe woman for a man to marry is the complicit woman” (214). What is more, Najmabadi argues that the comforting, non-threatening conclusion of the frame story is the worst of Shahrāzād’s tricks perpetrated against women because under the cover of a happy ending there is her transformation into a mother and a wife, namely into a figure who is subject to patriarchal paradigm and control.

In the final part of her study, the author questions what type of interest women could have developed towards stories that eventually intended to paint them in a negative light and, above all, control them by proposing unbalanced relations of power between the sexes. She provides three different explanations. First, women may find it reassuring to identify with the female character who instinctively follows her heart and, full of good intentions, eventually “live[s] happily ever after” (218). Second, the female receiver of these stories may take pleasure in being both “a desiring agent” and “the figure being desired by the other in the text” (218). Finally, these tales introduce questions which are very relevant in women’s lives, and that is why they have been so popular over the centuries. Specifically, they discuss female sexual appeal over men and relations of control between men and women, as well as between husband and wife. In this respect, the episode of the boxed woman can be interpreted as the representation of a woman who has been forced to marry someone whom she did not love, and has, therefore, lost her true lover (220).

**Keywords in the text:** wiles, guiles, homosociality, insatiable appetite, male fantasies, complicit woman, reassuring closure.

**Version of the frame story:** /.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(218) “How could the female reader/listener, to paraphrase de Lauretis, ‘be entertained as subject of the very movement that places her as its object, that makes her the figure of its own closure?’”. In making this assertion, Najmabadi does not take into consideration the hypothesis that in their oral form these stories may have been modified by women who would change their endings in order to reverse gender roles within the narrative, as Mernissi suggests (2001).

**Title:** *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harem.*

**Author and year of publication:** Mernissi, Fatema (2001).

**Publisher:** New York: Washington Square Press.

**Literary criticism:** feministic criticism; sociological analysis.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** occasional references to Bencheikh (1998), literary critic.

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

Mernissi contrasts her Arab-Muslim female interpretation of Shahrāzād with that produced by the mainly male segment of Western society offering a narrative, as well as a sociological, reading of the frame story of the AN and its reception. She explains that the frame story has a political dimension because it speaks of “female self-determination” (68), but that this fundamental aspect has been lost in the readings and reinterpretations formed by the Western world, for it has failed to recognise female intelligence and enterprise. The betrayal at the beginning of the frame story represents an attempt to reverse the relationship between master and slave, an attempt that is more accurately depicted in the scene in which “Mas‘ūd was on top of the first lady” (45). The “war between the sexes” (46), nevertheless, quickly evolves from a private event into a political one the moment Shāhriyār begins to kill a virgin every day, an act which brings chaos and disorder to his people.

In this respect, Shahrāzād’s action truly represents an “extraordinary achievement” (47), a mission that she successfully accomplishes by virtue of three main skills. The first skill is her vast knowledge, while the second is her capacity to transform the king’s violent mindset. Since Shāhriyār never talks to Shahrāzād, it could be inferred that her strategy is based on her ability to read the man’s facial expressions to speculate his thoughts. Lastly, Shahrāzād possesses a “cool-blooded capacity to control her fear” (48), which allows her to ponder the complexity of the situation and possible solutions. At the close of the story Shahrāzād triumphs because she alone has managed to change

the king's attitude towards women. Mernissi emphasises that the king's unequivocal admission of Shahrāzād's capability to change his mind has ensured that many Arab writers recognized the woman as a "civilizing agent" (50); she also suggests that this idea of the female protagonist of the AN as a civilizer reveals the existence of a deep link between humanism and feminism. In other words, a woman like Shahrāzād possessing these three skills can be the creator of a "new/renovated" man. Feminism is, in turn, intrinsically tied to the question of pluralism, women being the true other and stranger who need to be acknowledged and granted equal status by their male counterpart. The dialectics between Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād is a symbol of both the struggle for pluralism and a more equal society and, since the fight is carried out through words, also of the power of reason over violence (51). Intelligence is not an additional quality for a woman, rather it is an essential characteristic, without which none of her claims can be successful. Nevertheless, although women are extremely intelligent – and, for this reason, men fear them – their secret art is not rationality but imagination, an element which, Mernissi says, is as important as reason. If reason establishes what is true, then imagination creates fiction and, as in the case of Shahrāzād's storytelling, has the capacity to corrode the male established and imposed "truth". Furthermore, since Shahrāzād is a knowledgeable person in the traditional sciences which are usually dominated by men, the frame story seems to propose an attempt at reconciliation of the atavistic chasm between truth and fiction within the Arab-Muslim world.

**Keywords in the text:** harem, intellectual capacity, femininity and feminism, politics, imagination, difference, stranger.

**Versions of the frame story:** *Hikāyāt alf layla wa-layla*, 4 vols., Beirut: *al-Maktaba al-sha'abiyya*,<sup>219</sup> Burton's translation of Calcutta II; Mahdi's edition, Haddawy's translation of Mahdi's edition.

**Highlights and critical points:**

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<sup>219</sup> It seems to be the edition of Calcutta II published in 2000 (Akel 2016, 444).

(45) “In Arabic the sentence ‘Mas‘ud was on top of the first lady’ (*wa mas‘ud fawqa a-sit*) seems to sum up the entire harem tragedy [...]”. This sentence is found only in Mahdi’s edition (see 2.2, part II).

(49) “During the first six months of her storytelling, he keeps silent and listens without uttering a word”. This observation appears to be related to the specific Arabic version which Mernissi uses.

(49) “Ultimately, the King both renounces his macabre project of beheading his brides at dawn, and – through Scheherazade’s subtle influence on his beliefs, motivations, and inner psyche – acknowledges that he was completely wrong in being angry with women.” Mernissi states that this refers to the tale of *The Birds*, which is found in the Arabic edition used for her research, but which does not exist in Mahdi’s edition. The tale also seems to be absent from Bulaq and Calcutta II. Nevertheless, a similar awakening of King Shāhriyār is to be found in the tale of *The Two Kings and the Wazir’s Daughters* in Breslau, and in the relative translation of this tale by Burton which he inserts in the second volume of his *Supplemental Nights* (Grotzfeld 1985b, 79–80).

(54) “Her knowledge includes much history and an impressive mastery of the sacred literature, including the Koran, Shari’a, and texts of various schools of religious interpretation”. In all of the main Arabic versions of the frame story there is no mention of Shahrāzād’s knowledge of either the Quran or any other religious text.

## XI

**Title:** *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and death in The 1001 Nights*. Chapter 3, King Queen Master Slave.

**Author and year of publication:** Beaumont, Daniel (2002).

**Publisher:** Madison [NJ]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

**Literary criticism:** psychoanalytic criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Lacanian and Freudian theories; Kojève (1969).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

Sexuality and violence are the two main themes in the frame story which have earned it so much interest over the years. Generally speaking, feminist and psychoanalytic readings have interpreted the pair sex-violence respectively in terms of “patriarchal rage” (57) and revenge, and desire. By positioning himself within the psychoanalytic tradition, Beaumont attempts to offer an interpretation of the frame story that focuses on the figure of the slave, as an individual who lacks something (in Lacanian terms), and its role within the male-female power relationships in the AN. In particular, the critic's explanation of the relationship between Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād is based on two main points. The first one is the gaze, which can be considered the main feature of quite a high number of passages within the frame narrative – King Shāhzamān's visible illness, the need to disguise in order to discover the betrayal of the queen in the royal garden, going hunting as an activity which requires the function of the gaze, the kings that flee being camouflaged, the kings that see the jinn emerging from the sea with the imprisoned woman. The act of gazing transforms the one who sees (i.e., the gazer) into a helpless object, the impotent witness of terrible facts, and in doing so it allows for the reversal of roles and the establishment of new dynamics. Secondly, Beaumont believes that the relationship between the opposed sexes (between all the couples, not only between the two protagonists) is to be read as a master-slave dialectic, as per Hegel. The struggle between master and slave for one's own

recognition by the other is initially dominated by the master, who dares to risk his life beyond any instinct of preservation in order to protect his right for recognition. This rapport, which represents the initial phase of the master slave-dialectic, is, according to Beaumont, the leitmotif of the AN and, he suggests, also the prevailing form of human relation both in “late medieval Ottoman and Mamluk cultures” (52) and in the Christian one. However, within the frame story Shāhriyār “becomes a slave because he submits to his own fear of death” (53); likewise, women are subjugated to men in the manner of slaves since the relationship between the sexes is not symmetrical. Female reaction to this injustice in love/conjugal relationships brings about a “voracity of the female sexual appetite”, as the appropriation by the boxed woman of the phallus, i.e., the black column which symbolizes the jinn, as well as the rings that she collects from her lovers (an explicit metaphor of Muslim circumcision, according to Beaumont) seems to testify.

King Shāhriyār’s response to his unfortunate experience with the boxed woman is directly linked to his perception of women’s alleged abnormal and uncontrollable sexuality. Beaumont explains this in the light of Lacan’s concepts of the mirror stage and alienation, and in doing so he disentangles the king’s crisis from matters of patriarchy and gender (57) to draw it back to the essence of human nature. Quoting from Lacan, Beaumont affirms that if in the mirror stage the human being perceives himself/herself as in a unity with the other, at the same time he is alienated because he cannot conceive himself without the other. This produces a tension of which the only outcome is to destroy the other, insofar as he/she supports the subject’s desire. At this point, Beaumont mingles the Lacanian explanation with that of Freud, saying that king Shāhriyār experiences an oedipal crisis, which he does not accept, due to the fact that he discovers that he lacks what the others (the women) desire. The king, therefore, reacts with “a radical aggression” (57), as a paranoid, in order to make the other, who supports his desire, disappear. The rupture of this chain of violence is owing to a special version of the *fort/da* game described by Freud in *Beyond the principle of Pleasure*, which allows the king to master the thing/object of his desire (i.e., the woman) by making it disappear and reappear, in other words, he becomes “the original murder of the thing” through the disappear-reappear mechanism (58). The use of symbolization made by Shahrāzād through the act of storytelling teaches the tyrant a

“less bloody version of the fort/da” (58), as she destroys the object to substitute it with the symbol, which she makes appear and disappear. By means of transference, the king is forced to transform objects of his imaginary into the symbolic circuit (and it is the absence of narration, namely the fact that the storyteller interrupts the narration, that brings about this possibility for the king). When the desire is no longer an object but has become symbol and language, it is eternal. Beaumont concludes by affirming that Shahrāzād, however, is not a feminist and will eventually “end up with a marriage, and in that marriage Shahriyar’s position as husband and her position as wife will still correlate – to a degree – with that of master and slave” (61).

**Keywords in the text:** desire, fort/da, lack, master-slave relationship, symbol, language, death.

**Versions of the frame story:** Calcutta II and Mahdi’s edition (occasionally).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(44) “In any case, after the death of the father, the older brother Shahriyar inherits a vast kingdom, because he is older, no doubt – but perhaps also because, being *afras*, he is worthier? [...]. No children are mentioned either – more significantly, no sons.” The author makes a sophisticated conjecture about the meaning of the word *afras* (more knightly), because of which King Shāhriyār would have inherited a wider kingdom compared to his brother’s. The word *afras*, which refers here to chivalry, is brought back by Beaumont to the concept of *firasa* (from the same root of *afras*), namely to the capacity to see beyond the surface. This feature was assessed in slaves for sale in the medieval Arab-Muslim world, and Beaumont suggests that this sense of the term might be implied also in the frame story given the importance of the role of slaves within this tale. However, the explanation provided is not entirely convincing because it is not clear what the ability to “see the invisible” has to do with the character of Shāhriyār, who proves nowhere in the frame story to be perspicacious (as also Beaumont is forced to admit).

(54) “The size of her collection also points to one of the ‘truths’ of The Thousand and One Nights and medieval Muslim-Arab culture, the voracity of the female sexual appetite [...].” The author refers to Calcutta II, in which the number of rings collected by the boxed woman is very high and so exaggerates female voracity. Moreover,

Beaumont affirms that the rings symbolise circumcision and, therefore, the woman who possesses them metaphorically becomes the “appropriator of the phallus” (54). (56-57) “And yet Shahriyar does not simply kill each wife. Before he does that, we are told quite precisely what he does to each virgin: *ya ’khubhu wajhahā*, that is literally, ‘he takes her face.’ If love, as imaginary passion, as infatuation with the image, is one pole of the imaginary relation, hate is the other pole”. Inspired by the phrase *ya ’khubhu wajhahā*, which is found only in Calcutta II, Beaumont suggests that Shāhriyār tries to resolve the cause of his distress by literally eliminating the women’s face, as both the visual source of love and the site of alienation of the king’s own desire (see 2.2 part II).

(62) “I don’t know if this one has been noted; Shahrazad at this point expresses a desire to *see* her sister that correlates with Shahriyar’s desire to *see* his brother which set everything in motion in the first place”. Beaumont affirms that the desire to see gives way to the triadic relation of the symbolic, because of which the mirror (dyadic) stage can be overcome. However, no verb “to see” is present in any of the three versions of the frame story in relation to the above passage. The verb used to express Shahrāzād’s will to meet Dīnārzād is *wadda’a* (say goodbye), so it has very little to do with vision, all the more that this a trick played by the storyteller to carry out her plan for salvation and not a real “desire” (see Shahrāzād IV).

## XII

**Title:** *Shahrazād Is One of Us: Practical Narrative, Theoretical Discussion, and Feminist Discourse*

**Author and year of publication:** Enderwitz, Susanne (2004).

**Journal:** *Marvels & Tales*, 18(2), 187-200

**Literary criticism:** postmodern criticism, feminist criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** mainly Malti-Douglas (1991); Sallis (1998; 1999) and Karahasan (2002).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

Enderwitz offers an overview of some of the most common readings of the frame story, confronting textual and philological approaches with postmodern literary studies, as well as with contemporary narrative rewritings of Shahrāzād's story. She begins with a consideration of the narrative cohesion of the AN and states that the frame story is, (psycho)logically speaking, in harmony with the other tales in the collection, so much so that the heroine's inclination "to include all kinds of stories [...] should be appreciated as the integrative ability of a woman" (195). Drawing on Ghazoul (1980), Naddaf (1991) and Karahasan (2002), the scholar stresses the link within the frame story between narrative and life, and consequently between "biological and mental procreation" (195), highlighting the fact that Shahrāzād's time-gaining storytelling and her struggle to learn/instruct the king (195) are interrelated aspects, or, in other words, two sides of the same coin. However, this interpretation of Shahrāzād's action has been changed by postmodern criticism that has shifted the focus to the question of desire. Sexual desire is turned into literary desire, namely into a lighter, less dangerous longing which allows for the reconciliation between the sexes. At the end of the story the heroine regains her corporality, though her body is that of a mother and lover, and in doing so she loses something of her initially revolutionary and subversive drive that promised to reverse traditional male and female roles within the heterosexual couple (197). Nevertheless, the understanding of the conclusion of the frame story is greatly

due to the version one looks at, and whether the given version stresses either the importance of Shahrāzād's skills or her motherhood.

**Keywords in the text:** fertility, life and death, time-gaining, didactic aim, desire, corporeality, feminine storytelling.

**Version of the frame story:** /.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(190) “The king spares her life, not only because she has given birth to his children who would otherwise lose their mother, but because he has fallen in love with her for her purity, virtue, and piety”. None of the versions of the frame story has the word “love” and/or talks about love explicitly. The king is only said to be moved by the woman, or to incline towards her.

### XIII

**Title:** *Narrative and Performance: Shahrāzād's Storytelling as a Ritual Act*. In *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture. In Honour of Remke Kruk*, edited by Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk.

**Author and year of publication:** Van Leeuwen, Richard (2007).

**Publisher:** Leiden: Brill.

**Literary criticism:** narratological analysis.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Schilbrack (2004) – as for the analysis of ritual.

**Language:** English.

#### **Author's thesis**

Van Leeuwen believes that Shahrāzād's storytelling can be associated with preserving the function and the aim of a ritual act and, therefore, relating stories serves to create a new system of symbols and meanings producing an imaginative reality which has the capability of dialoguing with the real world and, in doing so, it makes the latter an object of experience through which human relationships are successfully redefined. Storytelling is a performative action; the body is involved in the process of producing fiction orally, and through the bodily presence eroticism is conveyed together with words (364). In this respect, Shahrāzād incarnates her own storytelling to which she gives a precise rhythm as in a genuine ritual. First, she has to suspend the normal "temporal and spatial laws" in order to create a new "regime", within which she can undo "the strict schedule of sexuality and death" characterizing Shāhriyār's (daily) life (368). Taking advantage of the night-time, which offers a suspension of social life with all its tasks and duties, Shahrāzād uses her stories to create an "alternative reality" (368), or a type of parallel reality that does not immediately remind the king of his fears and unpleasant feeling deriving from the fact that he has been betrayed. The night narrative offers examples, rules, lessons and a variety of situations that inspire within Shāhriyār a sense of order and stability so that the night, which had become a moment of disruption and disorder due to his wife's treachery, is now transformed into a positive experience. The presence of Shahrāzād creates a sense of reality in the new

dimension generated by the storytelling; the woman is “the living proof” that what she narrates can influence real life because she is both the producer of fiction and, at the same time, part of the fiction itself, for she will die if her storytelling becomes ineffective (369). Nevertheless, the king cannot see Shahrāzād’s ploy because this combination of physical presence and fictionality makes it difficult for him to recognize where reality truly lies.

Van Leeuwen highlights the fact that the fleshy aspect of the storytelling is directly linked to the question of sexuality; both the narration of the stories and the sexual act are, in fact, involved in the reproduction process, they both emerge from the body and are both part of “the realm of desire” (370). This means that storytelling, like sexuality, is a source of pleasure and gratification, though there is an important difference because sexual desire is usually immediately gratified through sex intercourse, while the narration of stories affords the possibility to defer and postpone one’s desire. In other words, storytelling offers a way to manage the criticalities derived from experiencing desire and ensures its continuation by preventing its fulfilment. As “the existence/preservation of desire is the essence of life” (370), guaranteeing a status of perpetual desire by deferring its satisfaction is what protects life and, at the same time, retains authority. In fact, within the frame story the management of desire is clearly a sign of power which Shāhriyār loses after enduring the betrayal, yet his attempt to re-establish authority by implementing a regime in which desire is immediately fulfilled ends up with violence, death and chaos. On the contrary, authority can be better preserved and ensured through the delay of desire’s satisfaction and the control of the dialectic between desire and gratification.

Finally, Van Leeuwen focuses on Shahrāzād’s storytelling as a cognitive process supporting the formation of a habit that provides Shāhriyār with the opportunity to learn how to behave in a variety of different situations (by means of repetition and night interruptions that force the internalization of what is heard). Hence, the tales contain signs, meanings, models, examples and human images that demonstrate to the king the complexity of humanity and restore his broken relationship with others which had deteriorated because of the traumatic experience of the betrayal. Following the discovery of his wife’s unfaithfulness, Shāhriyār tries to “heal” himself by establishing his own ritual to restore a “sense of order” (373). Nevertheless, this ritual lacks the

cognitive function which is fundamental to enact the individual's transformation and excludes any form of continuation and reproduction for it is based on violence (the act of killing). All in all, violence cannot teach anything, nor can it convey any cognitive benefit. The king perpetrates repeated murders in the desperate attempt to remove what he thinks is the cause of his tragedy, but the result is a catastrophe. The only solution to this situation is a counter ritual which substitutes violence with “a constructed, total vision of life and the world (375)” and has the capacity to transform the bloodthirsty king into a good husband by offering him a new symbolic system through which human behaviour can be monitored. Within this new system, the “interaction between female and male components of the self” is maintained, together with “the dialectic between the imaginative mind and reality” (375). In this way, the society, whose destiny is deeply linked to that of Shāhriyār, can also be preserved from violence and destruction.

**Keywords in the text:** ritual act, counter-ritual, physical presence, process of initiation, repetition, interruption, alternative reality, night-day, cognitive function, symbol.

**Version of the frame story:** /.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(369) “Because of the adultery of his spouse, for Shahriyār the night has become a time of uncertainty, disorder and disruptive forces, which could only be tamed by the use of force”. This statement is disputable. The betrayal of Shāhriyār's wife takes place after dawn and not at night: *ilā an ṭala 'a al-nūr wa-aḍā (\*aḍā 'a) al-nahār wa-ashraqat al-shams*, as per Mahdi's edition (2014, 1:62), while in Bulaq and Calcutta II there is no time indication.

(376) “But most of all, rituals are indispensable for producing transformation and change, making the preservation of cognitive processes and of forms of authority within social structures possible”. Van Leeuwen states that storytelling as a ritual act heals and transforms Shāhriyār who becomes a “civilized husband” and ruler (375) and, at the same time, allows him to retain power and authority. Positive change and developmental transformation, which produce prosperity, fertility and stability happen, according to the scholar, in the path of patriarchal dominance and supremacy.

The idea of a “far-reaching transformation, a reconstruction of Shahriyār’s vision of reality and the establishment of a new equilibrium between himself and his female ‘other’” (363) promoted by Van Leeuwen at the beginning of his article contrasts with the assumption that Shāhriyār’s “authority within social structures” (376) is eventually re-established.

## XIV

**Title:** *Exploring the Frame Story in The Arabian Nights: Gender and the Question of Authority.*

**Author and year of publication:** El-Naggar, Nehal (2017).

**Journal:** International Journal of Social Science and Business, 2(1), 19–28.

**Literary criticism:** gender criticism; feminist criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** gender criticism: Erikson (1984), Kandiyoti (1988), Mead (2001) and others. Feminist criticism: Ghazoul (1980) and Sallis (1999).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

The frame story is an “extremely sophisticated text” (p. 27) and offers a revolutionary perspective on gender roles and the possibility of reversing patriarchal tradition. The story opens with the rupture of ethnic and class boundaries, as well as of marital barriers (20), by the two queens who seek alternatives to the status quo, though in “unlawful manners” (22). The two women dare to challenge their husbands’ power by betraying them within their own palaces, namely in the places of private male authority that now they seem to challenge. Moreover, the queens have sex with men at the opposite pole of the social hierarchy and who also belong to an ethnic group deemed as inferior, a fact that is shocking and humiliating for the kings. The men’s response to their wives’ infidelity is the decision to undertake a journey which is meant to guide them towards “spiritual and mental development; bildungsroman” (22). Nevertheless, their experience with the boxed woman transforms the kings into the slaves with whom their wives had betrayed them.

In this respect, Shahrāzād challenges two established authorities, namely that of her father (although she does not rebel against him) and of Shāhriyār. Although her character is seemingly passive, in truth she mounts a “potentially active form of resistance; the act of storytelling” (p. 26). She challenges the dominant paradigm and defies social gender constructs and, by means of the power of words, she is capable of tricking the king and reversing the relationship of authority and control – she becomes

the master who controls Shāhriyār through her spellbinding words (26). Shahrāzād refuses social structures and imposed forms of behaviour that establish a priori how men and women must act (26) and through her captivating stories makes the king do what she wants, bringing him closer “to the meaning of humanity” (26).

**Keywords in the text:** gender, authority, emancipatory, social class, ethnicity, tradition, patriarchy, reversal, revolutionary, resistance, active speaker.

**Version of the frame story:** Haddawy’s translation of Mahdi’s edition.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(22) “This journey signifies the need for a change within their lives; it implies spiritual and mental development; bildungsroman”. However, the kings’ journey does not induce changes towards a dimension of development and emancipation in them, but it is rather a step back which can hardly be claimed as a “bildungsroman”.

(25): “Shahrazad was able to trick him and take over the authority because she became in charge and made him do what she wanted”. In truth, nowhere in the text are there signs of Shahrāzād usurping authority. It might be more correct to say that the king goes through an inner change, whose results are visible in the interruption of the chain of violence, as well as in the long-term relationship he is capable of establishing with Shahrāzād.

(26): “Shahrayar did not end her life because he fell in love with her and had children with her”. This is El-Naggar’s personal interpretation because no mention of love is found within the frame story.

(26): “The fact that both the wives of Shahzaman and Shahrayar cheat on their husbands with black servants reflects the foundations on which these two concepts rest”. Nevertheless, in Mahdi’s edition the lover of Shāhzamān’s wife is simply a kitchen boy and is not said to be black.

## XV

**Title:** *Women and Slaves: Gender Politics in the Arabian Nights*.

**Author and year of publication:** Shamma, Tarek (2017).

**Journal:** *Marvels & Tales*, 31(2), 239–260.

**Literary criticism:** feminist criticism and gender studies.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Malti-Douglas (1991) and Najmabadi (2000).

**Language:** English.

### **Author's thesis**

The central dynamic of the narrative is an interpretative strategy to manage the disturbing idea of female sexuality and consequent loss of masculine power. Patriarchal anxieties about women's sexual empowerment are due to the following causes: fear of losing control over women's bodies; fear of other men's superior sexual potency (so that alleged super-masculinity of other men, specifically black men, is dismissed as grotesque and unnatural), and fear of active female sexuality.

The homosocial order is a response to the dread of women's sexual empowerment, and in this respect Shāhriyār's behaviour is more a "cautionary measure" than a revenge (244); nevertheless, it is very destructive and risks to banishing women from the world. This cannot be, as women are essential for the reproductive cycle, therefore a solution is needed "to the impossible dilemma in which men find themselves: their inability to trust women and their need for them, and women's potential threat to the social order and their absolute necessity to it" (245). Thus, Shahrāzād becomes a "complicit woman" (240) who restores a patriarchal order by reassuring/appeasing the king. She "appeases the male psyche" (240). The AN is a male portrait of females and their sexuality, but women's emancipation is temporary and illusory. In truth, men preserve their authority and patriarchal dominion over the opposite sex, while the tales have both a cathartic and instructional function as they teach males how to face their fear of female sexuality, and how to control women.

**Keywords in the text:** female sexuality, restoration, marriageable women, patriarchal order, women's loyalty, triumph of civilization, super masculinity, *'ibra*.

**Versions of the frame story:** Calcutta II, Breslau.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(240) “Moreover, to view the Nights from Shahrazād’s perspective is to disregard the actual conditions under which the tales were produced and transmitted by male authors, redactors, and narrators to male auditors and readers, who were determined exclusively by the regulations of a male-dominated society”. The AN spread in a variety of forms, and “mirror for princes” stories and written versions (closer to the original Persian source) circulated together with oral and more popular versions of the tales, each influencing the other (Chraïbi 2016, 16–19). It is important to remember that the oral versions were not the exclusive prerogative of the male audience.

(241) “The story opens with the patriarchal commonwealth of royal dominion, justice, and harmony between monarch and subjects”. The scenario of the frame story is read here in terms of socio-political structures of power. It might be disputable to apply a sociological or political reading to a fairy tale without considering the metaphorical use of the language which is peculiar to this genre. Political critique in fictional tales is usually implicit; it may be expressed through the invitation to apply common sense or the denunciation of its absence, the teaching of morals and ethics or the account of human affairs that, when unbalanced, unjust or violent, have unpleasant consequences. Within fairy tales and fictional tales, inequality and abuse of power are generally denounced through characters’ actions, their ordinary or non-ordinary deeds that have repercussions in the relationships among individuals (friendship, love stories, relationships of child or offspring to parent, work relations, etc.). Therefore, stories represent the micro-level of human relationships rather than a certain type of political and sociological system within a given society. Narrative is set in an indefinite context where nationhood, and geographical and historical connotations are of secondary importance, while the narrative focus is on the exchanges between individuals, as well as on the representation of people’s similarities and differences and of (recurring) human dynamics.

(245) “Thus Shahrazād’s answer to the original problem, and one consistent with the proper interpretation of the examples of the frame tale, is that ‘not all women are alike,’ as the people of the city acknowledge at the end”. This part, which is taken from Breslau and also inserted by Burton in his own translation, allows the critic to reinforce

his hypothesis about the reformist action of Shahrāzād, whose ultimate aim would be to point out to the king the presence of good, namely submissive and marriageable, women. In other words, Shahrāzād tells stories to demonstrate that there are also women who are respectable. This interpretation by Shamma is crucial and influences his criticism in the rest of the essay – at least, in the part dedicated to Shahrāzād. The phrase “not all women are alike” is to be found in Breslau (and in other three manuscripts, among which ms Ar 16 Turkish Kayseri Raşid Efendi Kütüphanesi 674) within the tale told by Shahrāzād before the ending of the frame story and resembling the prologue, namely her own story with Shāhriyār; after listening to this tale, the king finally understands what he has done. Some lines after this phrase there is a quote from sura 33, verse 35, which states that chaste women, namely women who are obedient, patient and faithful, are the only ones to be forgiven and rewarded by God (Grotzfeld 1985b, 80). Both the phrase “not all women are alike” and sura 33, verse 35, support the idea that women are judged more or less “good” according to their level of loyalty, obedience and faithfulness, endowing the frame story with a strong religious and eschatological connotation. Shamma acknowledges this interpretation when he says that Shahrāzād aims at providing examples of women (including herself) who appease the male psyche with regard to their inevitable power over females. In other words, she is a complicit woman who internalizes “patriarchal codes” and “the law of the family” (258) which, in Breslau, are ultimately brought back to the values cited in sura 33 – and which, it must be said, apply to men and women in this sura.

(245) “Finally, when the king ceases his bloody actions for good, the people are jubilant: ‘Joy spread in the palace, then passed through the city’ (4: 730–31)”. Shamma proposes a logical connection between Shahrāzād’s actions and their repercussions in the kingdom based on the epilogue to the frame story as found in ZER (i.e., Bulaq and Calcutta II). ZER entails descriptions of the celebration after Shāhriyār’s restoration and his decision to marry Shahrāzād. Shamma, who in this case relies on Calcutta II, wants to highlight the urban dimension of the frame story – the concept of the urban dimension in the AN is also illustrated by Irvin (2004). The scholar puts the royal wedding at the centre of Shahrāzād’s social mission to save the entire society and the kingdom through the restoration of order. The sociologically-based interpretation is further supported by the mention of a passage taken from the closing of the frame story

in Breslau, in which Shahrāzād explicitly advises the king to be just to his soldiers and subjects. At this point (251), Shamma recalls the fact that Shahrāzād is the proof that not “all women are alike”, as she embodies the “good” example, the controllable woman. Therefore, in Shamma’s eyes Shahrāzād undertakes only a restoration (257) of the previous, male-dominated order (258).

### 3. Academic readings in Arabic: Profiles<sup>220</sup>

#### I

**Title:** *Shakhsiyyat Shahrāzād al-muftarā ‘alayhā* [Shahrāzād, the Character Who Has Been Slandered]

**Author and year of publication:** Khidr, ‘Abbās. (1985).

**Journal:** *al-Dūḥa* (Qatar), 11, November, 124-126.

**Literary criticism:** general analysis.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** not indicated.<sup>221</sup>

**Language:** Arabic.

#### Author’s thesis

Shahrāzād decides to risk her own life to redeem those of the many women who have been killed by Shāhriyār. She is very determined, her heart is brave (*qalb ḥadīd*). Furthermore, she possesses knowledge, wisdom and sophistication which she uses as weapons to confront Shāhriyār. The king has become wicked (*sharr*) following the terrible crime (*jarīma shan ‘ā’*) committed by his wife, because of which he has killed both her and her lover (the slave, *‘abīd*). The character of Shahrāzād intervenes to tame the beast (*waḥsh*) inside Shāhriyār, the bloodthirsty tyrant, whose violence is the result of the shocking events he has witnessed. She is said to be intelligent and educated because she has read several books; her stories are never ridiculous, yet they are amusing – in other words they are serious and entertaining at the same time according to the notion of *al-jidd wa-al-hazl*, “jest and earnest”, which is typical of *adab*

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<sup>220</sup> All magazine articles have been found on the website of *al-Arshīf* (*al-Archīf li-l-majallāt al-‘arabiyya wa-al-thaqāfiyya* n.d.).

<sup>221</sup> This means that the author does not include references to the works of other critics, intellectuals and/or writers in his/her article.

literature.<sup>222</sup> Shahrāzād's aim is to change the king's negative attitude and modify his view on women, so she recounts a multitude of tales curing him and restoring his mind. After having summarized the plot of the frame story, Khidr begins to question Shahrāzād's actions and words, and he is quite critical of her. The female storyteller eventually cures the king, but how do people see her, a woman described in such a positive way and, on the other hand, who uses this obscene language? How does she manage to address Shāhriyār using the arguments that made him furious and, consequently, led him to regularly kill a virgin each day? From where does Shahrāzād take stories that insult modest and pudency by promoting licentiousness through provocative images? Khidr states that storytellers and minstrels added supplementary materials to the AN, some of which were mediocre, obscene pieces of narrative that mixed within the tales. In Egypt,<sup>223</sup> therefore, the police and the judicial authorities sequestered a copy of the AN that contained such perverse images and fined the publishers in accordance with the public decency law. Some writers and journalists angrily protested against what they considered a violation of their tradition and freedom, yet many of them had never read the AN or other works belonging to the tradition of Arabic literature. In this respect, the author emphasizes what he considers to be a contradiction, namely that these writers opposed films and videos which presented questions of sexuality because they were seen as perverted, but, at the same time, they accepted obscenity within literary tradition, including the AN. In other words, they damaged the image of the collection because they considered obscenity to be a part of the original nucleus of the AN and they defended this, while the truth is that the original text is devoid of vulgarity. The authorities in Egypt permitted polished copies of the AN, one edited by Aḥmad Rushdī Ṣāliḥ and another one published by *Dār al-hilāl*, which were not censured.

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<sup>222</sup> The antonymic couple *jidd* and *hazl* is both a moral and literary concept which was very widespread in the Medieval Arab-Muslim world. Specifically, it is common in *adab* literature and indicates the mixture of seriousness and joking which is typical of this literary genre (Jan van Gelder 1992).

<sup>223</sup> The reference here is to an event which happened in Egypt in 1985, when 3000 copies of an unexpurgated edition of the AN were banned by a judge because they were said to contain obscene words and passages.

These writers defending licentiousness and corruption in literature also extended their battle to other texts, such as amusing libertine stories and poetry like *Akhhbār Abī Nuwās* [The Stories of Abū Nuwās] by Ibn Manẓūr (1232-1311). They justified this defense by arguing that these forms of narrative were nothing more than amusing mottos. Khidr, however, observes that this “entertaining” narrative goes back to a time when very few people could read it, on the contrary today books are printed and are circulated very easily, making them accessible to everyone. It is no longer possible to decide who can and who cannot read them, and it is, therefore, crucial that they are not corrupted, in a similar way to immoral films or videos. In addition, Khidr comments on the fact that some writers based their defense of licentiousness and licentious narrative on the quranic verses 23-24 within sura 12, which refer to sexual intercourse, but actually these verses disavow depravity and encourage chastity. Moreover, the examples which are found within the Quran are objective, serious and written in a polished language, such as works that belong to *fiqh* (philosophy of law) or the natural sciences where there is nothing that can allude to temptation or indecency. Today children in school study fecundation in natural sciences (*fī al-nabāt wa-al-ḥayawān*), but this is done in an objective, scientific way which has no references to sexual excitement. Instead, the AN and other books from the tradition include perverted expressions, deviant tales and dissolute words which can be assimilated to those within the book *Rujū‘ al-shaykh ilā ṣibāhi* [The Return of the Sheikh to His Youth],<sup>224</sup> whose circulation is prohibited by the laws which preserve the genre of popular literature and protect the society from the dangers of depravity and dissoluteness. Khidr concludes his article by thanking the (Egyptian) police and the judicial authorities for protecting people, then greets those who, unjustly and with ignorance, interpolated the innocent text of the AN and imputed their obscene additions to an excellent female writer, namely Shahrāzād.

**Keywords in the text:** *ḥayā’* (modesty), *turāth* (tradition), *ithāra* (provocation), *fuḥsh* (obscenity), *mujūn* (licentiousness), *fasād* (corruption), *al-jidd wa-al-hazl* (seriousness and joking).

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<sup>224</sup> By Aḥmad bin Sulaymān bin Kamāl Bāshā (1468–1536).

**Version of the frame story: /**

## II

**Title:** *Balaghanī anna al-‘ālim qad waqa ‘a fī ‘ishq al-amīra Shahrāzād* [It Has Come to My Knowledge That the World Has Fallen in Love with Princess Shahrāzād].

**Author and year of publication:** Suwaylam, Aḥmad (1985).

**Journal:** *al-Qāhira* (Egypt), 15, May, 16-17.

**Literary criticism:** socio-narratological approach.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** not indicated.

**Language:** Arabic.

### **Author’s thesis**

The author begins his article with a discussion on the absurdity of banning books, as is the case with fatwas that prohibit Muslims from reading certain texts,<sup>225</sup> because even when they concern matters of morality and ethics books are always a by-product – the most refined by-product – of the mind and do not serve to satisfy physical needs. The AN, as a work of folklore which belongs to popular heritage and includes different types of popular narrative, such as fictional tales, legends, exempla, enigmas, jokes, life stories, songs and folk songs, is naturally associated with fiction. Throughout the years, storytellers have added to and/or removed from the stories within the collection various narrative elements according to the different historical epochs and socio-political scenarios; as a result, the AN has been greatly modified, yet it has never lost its ground-breaking value. Manuscripts of the AN are numerous and very distinct from each other; there is no correct or unique version of this text for it is comprised of stories that were related orally and were subsequently penned. The collection is a book with no author, nor does it belong to just one culture, but it can be considered a creation of the East since it entails Indian, Persian and Arabic tales which have reached us by word of mouth through reciters and storytellers. Ancient people generally were very familiar with the figure of a narrator, long before the invention of writing. Subsequently, with the arrival of Islam, this role became much more important considering that the Quran was initially recited and transmitted orally. Narrators recited the stories of the prophets

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<sup>225</sup> See note 225.

that are found in the Quran to the people in the mosques; those in power soon discovered the potentialities of the art of storytelling and its great influence on the mind, so they began to use it as propaganda to rouse public opinion. The first who did this in order to defeat his opponents was the caliph Mu'awiya, and after him many others adopted the same tactic. At this point, Suwaylam offers several examples to demonstrate that storytellers and preachers played a key role in the politics of the Arab world at that time.

The AN is a mix of popular stories told by more than one narrator. Different social tiers and classes with their desires, behaviours, needs and relationships are represented within the collection and, whatever the dissimilarities between the versions of the AN, Shahrāzād, an exceptional (*ma'shūqa nādira*) yet sad (*ḥazīna*) lady who regrets her fate, is always its main narrator. King Shāhriyār, in fact, following the discovery of his wife's betrayal (*iktashafa khayānat zawjatihī*) has decided to kill a woman every night. Using her intelligence, Shahrāzād intends to challenge the king's insatiable thirst for murder; she has read a thousand books on history, the stories of ancient people and their kings, and many other works, but her knowledge (*ma'rifa*) does not simply lie in the fact that she tells stories until the break of dawn and, in doing so, arouses Shāhriyār's desire to continue listening to them the following night. Rather, Shahrāzād's intelligence is hidden in the many narrative details that form the texture of the stories. For example, at the moral level Shahrāzād encourages people to be content with little (*qanā'a*), to abstain from material things (*al-'uzūf 'an al-dunyā*), to indulge with moderation in pleasure (*i'tidāl fī al-lidhā*) and to use prudence. In other parts, however, she supports selfishness (*anāniyya*) and mercilessness (*qaswa*). Sometimes she refers to both sensuous pleasure and immoderate amusement (*al-lahū al-jāmiḥ*), in a way that the mind can contemplate only in the form of fiction. As for matters of society and politics, in her tales Shahrāzād inclines towards a world governed by kingly power, even within the animal kingdom, including a wedding in every city she mentions.

Generations of Arabs have shared this way of producing knowledge and educating people, as Suwaylam notes, so it is difficult to understand what should be condemned in relation to texts like the AN, or why they have to be removed from popular literature and tradition. The Arabic thought, specifically the Islamic thought, considers sex

education an integral part of knowledge.<sup>226</sup> For example, in the imam al-Ghazālī's book *al-Adab fī al-dīn* [Etiquette in Religion], one can find discussions on many topics related to sexuality and the sexual intercourse. Suwaylam suggests that perhaps Islam is more open towards human innate desires (*al-dawāfi' al-faṭriyya*) than other religions, and he quotes sura 3, verse 14, where physical pleasures, pleasures derived from material goods and human reality are to be found in this part (*yajma'u al-qurān*). Furthermore, the Quran, the hadiths and the books of *fiḥq* (philosophy of law) mention the names of the sex organs and sexual intercourse in full. In the Muslim intellectual arena, one does not find a different trend regarding sexual matters; al-Tawḥidī, the 11th century author of *al-Imtā' wa-al-mu'anasa* [Enjoyment and Conviviality], affirms that the human being has three souls, the rational soul, the irascible soul and the sensual soul. Furthermore, in the Arabic poetry which was recited in entertaining gatherings (*majālis al-mujūn wa-al-sharāb*), as well as in social and political satire produced by poets such as al-Mutanabbī, the level of licentiousness is the same as that of the AN, yet all generations have learnt their poems as part of universal knowledge. Nevertheless, although the Arabic thought has always regarded sexuality as an important element of the sciences, Arab culture has not accepted it and has prevented the circulation of books that considered this subject. For this reason, Shahrāzād has never been allowed to undertake her bold enterprise in the AN.

When the AN arrived in the West, people were astonished by its novelty, and many studies and analyses were produced targeting the collection, which also became one of the main factors that led to the rise of the Romantic movement. However, most of these interpretations were erroneous since they regarded Shahrāzād simply as a pretty girl (*ghāniyya*) who beguiles the king for a period of a thousand nights, seducing him by means of her beauty, body and stories. Suwaylam states that Shahrāzād is much more than that, and that the last page of the frame story may suffice to counter the misleading interpretation of the woman promoted by the Western world. At the close of the opening narrative, Shahrāzād has given birth to three children and asks Shāhriyār to spare her life so that she can raise them. The king replies that he has already pardoned her because she is *'afīfa, naqiyya, ḥurra, taqiyya* (chaste, pure, freeborn and God-

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<sup>226</sup> See Shamma (2007).

fearing), adjectives that affirm her virtues – the same virtues that describe Shahrāzād the first time she appears in the frame story. This means that the storyteller has been able to infuse Shāhriyār with knowledge relying on her intelligence, erudition, knowledge and freedom; she is very well informed about the events of the world, and about life, the secrets of the mind, sexuality and education. All these elements are part of what is generally meant as knowledge and culture, and if one of them is omitted the comprehension of the world becomes incomplete and partial. For all these reasons, it is evident that the West has failed to understand Shahrāzād because she is simply viewed as a beautiful woman who seduces the king and satisfy his libido.

Finally, the author concludes that Shahrāzād has fascinated people in the East and the West and has been able to offer the type of knowledge and wisdom they have sought in her stories. Nevertheless, as the heroine of the AN, she has been a victim of defamation by people who have accused her of using words that would offend decency. This has happened, Suwaylam notes with regret, in the middle of an era when everyone finds so many things that do offend decency just by looking at videos and dirty pictures in low-cost songs.

**Keywords in the text:** *ma'rifā* (knowledge), *'aql* (intelligence), *ḥikma* (wisdom), *jins* (sexuality), *tarbiyya* (education), *taṣawwur khāṭi'* (misrepresentation).

**Version of the frame story:** Bulaq (1836 edition).

**Highlights and critical points:**

(17) “Eventually she is chaste, freeborn and God-fearing, qualities which also Shāhriyār acknowledges in her and that indicate intelligence, purity and freedom all together”. In this passage, the adjective *ḥurra*, “free”/“freeborn”, as well as “pure”, is associated by Suwaylam to an idea of *ḥurriyya*, “freedom”. It is worth noting that Lane and Burton prefer to translate this adjective as “ingenuous”, and in doing so they seem to deprive Shahrāzād of one of her most important attributes while they depict her as naive and uncomplicated – facets which may not be an accurate portrayal of her character (See Shāhriyār XI).

### III

**Title:** *Shahrāzād: imra'at al-layālī al-'arabiyya* [Shahrāzād: The Woman of the Arabian Nights].

**Author and year of publication:** al-'Aṭṭār, Sulaymān (1993).

**Journal:** *Fuṣūl* (Egypt),<sup>227</sup> 4, October, 166-171.

**Literary criticism:** feminist/gender-based criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** not indicated.

**Language:** Arabic.

#### **Author's thesis**

Al-'Aṭṭār provides his intricate interpretation of the frame narrative of the AN. He believes that behind the figure of the educated professor that Shahrāzād incarnates *prima facie* there is a courageous (*muḥāriba*) woman deriving from the models of matriarchal society, whose traces are still visible today in some tribes in Amazonia, Africa and Australia. Specifically, Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār embody the two poles of the historic and sempiternal dispute between males and females which has been given special attention by Arabic popular literature. As part of the popular narrative genre the AN immortalizes the moment in which the man, following his victory over the courageous woman/mother, intensifies his "love" (*ḥubb*) and also his hostility to such an extent that it can only end in her death and, as a result, he takes revenge on the subjugation that the woman imposed on his ancestors at the time of the matriarchate. In this view, Shāhriyār is the homicidal lover (*al-muḥibb al-qātil*); his wife's betrayal with a black slave represents the spectre of truth in relation to the memory of his libido. Shāhriyār is, in fact, the "new" king in the "new" patriarchate, and he replaces the leading role that the queen held in ancient matriarchal society. The Arabs incorporated both the matriarchal and the patriarchal models, for it seems that during the *jāhiliyya* (the pre-Islamic era), a transitional period from matriarchy to patriarchy, both men and

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<sup>227</sup> *Fuṣūl* was founded by the Egyptian establishment in 1980 "to restore the image of the [Sadat] regime" (Hafez 2017, 37), and introduced structuralist, formalist, post-modern and deconstructionist analyses to Arab literary criticism.

women shared power. Al-‘Atṭār states that there is little evidence in this respect because scholars have seldom analysed this question, hence he prefers not to explore it further and simply recalls a very famous episode about a conflict between two mothers, Kulthūm and Hind. Each of the two women aspired to take power over the other, so they involved their sons in the battle which culminated with the death of Hind’s son and the end of his mother’s glory. This short story highlights the fact that two of the most powerful men among the Arabs were controlled by their mothers, not their fathers, and it was the mothers who manipulated the dispute between them. Likewise, most Arab tribes were based on a matriarchal model and had female names; sometimes, the males belonging to these tribes were called by their mothers’ names. This historical period, which is believed to have lasted quite long, prepared Arab society to embrace the Indian narrative core of the AN which was, subsequently, arabicised and modified; the text underwent changes and this conferred on the collection its unique character which, to some extent, reflects the moment of reconciliation – the armistice (*hudna*) – between man and woman that the latter strives to prolong as much as possible using her culture, education and knowledge. The defeated woman, namely the woman who has lost her predominant role in the patriarchal era, is confronted by male power and has, therefore, two paths in front of her – either the path of Shahrāzād or that of the boxed woman, who has been kidnapped by a jinn. Shahrāzād is the representation of hope and goodness, while the woman imprisoned by the jinn embodies the way of desperation and wickedness. Since the boxed woman has been kidnapped and subjugated, she has lost all hope and has, therefore, chosen to deceive the jinn, in spite of the fact that he is a powerful supernatural being and may easily discover what she is doing. Without being seen, the boxed woman forces men to satisfy her sexual impulses and, as a result, she takes revenge (*intiḡām*) on males. She also demonstrates that no-one else can control her, and that men’s power, particularly that of the father and the “new” king, turns against them if they try to use it to dominate women. Al-‘Atṭār comments that this is undoubtedly the path of desperation and wickedness, whereas Shahrāzād takes a different, yet wise, direction and behaves with the king, who is all muscle and sword, as if she is the actual ruler (*al-ḡākima al-ḡaḡīyya*). He also states that this characterization of Shahrāzād is possible due to the acknowledgement, within Arab

society, of the woman's role in the education of children, including the teaching of the principle of equality (*musāwā*) between the sexes, and the rising of girls who subsequently have to instruct boys and men in the culture of egalitarianism.

The AN includes hundreds of tales whose stories remain incomplete each day, but which are finalized the following night. The motif of the pending narration takes on a variety of meanings, one of which is the idea that a man's life is incomplete without a woman (167). This feeling of lack on the part of the male figure is a persistent desire that leads Shāhriyār to keep Shahrāzād alive and allows her to make up for this lack or need by completing the story and beginning another. However, with a new story Shāhriyār discovers a new lack and another desire so, again, he must spare Shahrāzād's life for her to complete the story the following night because it is only her who can fulfil this need, something she does through the "creation", of another, new lack.

The narrative journey of Shahrāzād is triggered by a considered act that paves the way for subsequent events within the frame story. First, the disaster that has fallen upon Shāhriyār and his kingdom extends for three years (a thousand and one days) before Shahrāzād intervenes to resolve the situation; second, the general crisis becomes a private one, so the injustice perpetrated by Shāhriyār (the father and the patriarch) no longer affects only women, but also men. Third, the climax, i.e., the point where the balance of the narrative breaks, is reached when the vizir seems unsure what to do. Should he offer his eldest daughter to the king because she is the last virgin remained in the city, or, alternatively, he can flee with her along with the other inhabitants? The crisis ends when the daughter takes the responsibility to find a solution. The restoration of the balance between the vizier and Shahrāzād leads, however, to the break of another equilibrium, that belonging to Shāhriyār. Al-ʿAṭṭār suggests that his terrible crisis is transformed into many smaller ones – represented by the incomplete tales – by the female storytelling. Furthermore, Shahrāzād's narrative action, which can be associated with "childhood" and fertility, benefits the king, who becomes increasingly curious, and also Dīnārzād (the girl, and the future mother), who learns an important lesson from her sister while witnessing the sempiternal battle between the sexes. The frame story is, in fact, a paradigm of this struggle for liberation between man and woman, during which Shahrāzād intends to correct (*tahdhīb*) the initial bestiality of Shāhriyār and force him to cope with it (169). It is possible to say that the stories of

the AN are a form of popular female education that aims to rectify male thinking, beginning in early childhood, by teaching principles of equality between the sexes and, in particular, how to persuade men to accept this. The character of Dīnārzād incarnates the young lady who learns how to instruct her male counterpart through the examples of and comparisons between males and females within the tales. Furthermore, according to al-‘Aṭṭār, the art of storytelling is also associated with the idea of the freedom of narration, which has always been the case with mothers and grandmothers in the Arab world. In addition, the AN dates back to a historical period when there was a shift from matriarchal to patriarchal society, as previously stated, and this moment of transition is represented within the frame story by the figure of the black slave with whom the woman betrays her partner. The black slave is the defeated man under the power of the mother who eventually breaks free like a beast, disgraces the woman through the act of betrayal and kills many females.

The author states that Shahrāzād is the one who paves the way for the encounter with her partner, and that for the first time in the history of ancient literature, it is a woman who courts a man (*tataghazzalu*). Today men think that the best qualities in a woman are beauty and flirting, but what distinguishes females is, instead, courage and strength. In this respect, the stories of the AN offer many examples of women as strong as Shahrāzād who behave like soldiers, executioners and kings, as they are capable of competing with men in each of these roles. Women possess great intelligence, wisdom and education, and even if some tales introduce wretched and wicked female characters, Shahrāzād has a convincing and prepared answer to that.

In al-‘Aṭṭār’s opinion, the focus on the female question testifies to a “dangerous” value of the AN, something that is not found in literature produced by men (*adab al-rijāl*). This value consists in the limitless freedom of expression which is exercised by the women within the narrative, and which discloses the most sincere and deepest female sentiments. For this reason, the AN is an insight into the inner human reality and specifically into female intimacy which, nevertheless, remains a partially unexplored field by male writers. Men, in fact, are unable to fully understand female sentiments, and for this reason the woman (Shahrāzād) uses enigmas. The feminist character of the AN, as well as the depiction of oriental and Arab women as being powerful, has ensured international fame for the collection.

**Keywords in the text:** *ṣirāʿ bayna al-jinsayni* (the battle of the sexes), *mātriyārkiyya* (matriarchate), *bātriyārkiyya* (patriarchate), *umūmiyy* (matriarchal), *iktimāl* (completeness), *naqṣ* (lack), *musāwā* (equality), *namūdaj* (model).

**Versions of the frame story:** Bulaq/ Calcutta II.

**Highlights and critical points:**

(167-168) “[...] Or he can escape – if possible – as the rest of the people”. The author suggests that the vizier could have had the option to escape with Shahrāzād to rescue her from Shāhriyār’s fury, as did the other inhabitants. However, the flight of the population is mentioned only in Bulaq and Calcutta II, while in Mahdi’s edition people merely complain and Shāhriyār kills all the virgins in the kingdom.

## IV

**Title:** *Limādhā sakatat Shahrāzād ‘an al-kalām al-mubāḥ?* [Why Did Shahrāzād Stop Expressing What She Was Allowed to Say?]

**Author and year of publication:** Maḥmūd, Ibrāhīm (1994).

**Journal:** *al-Ādāb* (Lebanon),<sup>228</sup> 8-9 August, 38-40.

**Literary criticism:** feminist criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Kilito (Kīlītū 1988).

**Language:** Arabic.

### Author’s thesis

Shahrāzād, who is beautiful, fascinating (*muthīra*), very knowledgeable and a great storyteller, is married to King Shāhriyār, the women’s murderer (*saffāḥ al-nisā’*). She personally asked her father to become Shāhriyār’s wife after having heard that the ruler has been killing a woman every night for three years and, at the end of the frame story, she gives birth to three children. Maḥmūd, however, points to the fact that there is little information available about Shahrāzād within the frame story, so he asks if it is possible to draw a clear picture of this character from such a small amount of data. Maḥmūd believes that a good starting point from which to answer this question is to pose another question, i.e., why does Shahrāzād stop expressing what she is allowed to say every morning at the break of dawn?

Shahrāzād is not a simple, average woman, and her character has specific features associated with a certain type of social relationship and with a certain type of thinking. Shahrāzād’s main traits are as follows:

Shahrāzād is the eldest (*al-kubrā*) daughter. This definition may not be of particular interest, yet the idea of “*al-akbar*” (“older than”/ “the oldest”) plays an important role

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<sup>228</sup> *Al-Ādāb*, which was first published in 1953, hosted contributions by the most important writers and intellectuals from different Arab countries. Throughout the years, it promoted new literary trends and perspectives, and helped circulate Western criticism – in particular French existentialism, Marxist and psychoanalytical criticism (Hafez 2017, 27–28).

in the definition of social dynamics (*ḥarkiyyat al-‘alāqāt al-ijtimā‘iyya*). Being the eldest daughter often has an important value at the level of community and of discourse, and great hopes are placed on her as she is seen differently in both word and deed.

Shahrāzād is a beautiful, handsome and well-formed woman, and being beautiful has a moral value in Arab society – the expression “God is beautiful and loves beauty” is rooted in history. Beauty is external and exteriority is taken into great consideration, and for this reason, a beautiful person would be given social privileges when he/she is among other people and when he/she speaks. When a beautiful woman is communicating, others are immersed in the “sound” (*ranīn*) of her beauty and pay attention to her. Beauty, therefore, colours and embellishes words, and has the power to attract. If Shahrāzād had not been beautiful (*jamīla*), she would not have been in a position to ensure her safety and Shāhriyār would not have listened to her.

Shahrāzād is very intelligent, and this is the most important element about her that emerges from the text. She has the capability to use captivating words in order to manipulate the listener and reach her objective. The phrase “a thousand books” probably indicates a large quantity, and not the actual number of books on a variety of relevant subjects that Shahrāzād has read. Moreover, she masters the art of speech and communicates things that are of interest for society.

Shahrāzād is well-bred and, because of her high status, she has privileged access to the king; she is the daughter of the vizier, a man who knows the secrets of the royal palace and is very close to the king.

Shahrāzād feels compelled to marry the king in order to rescue the women of the kingdom from Shāhriyār and, at the same time, liberate him from his problematic aversion (*ghaḍḍ*) towards the opposite sex (*al-jins al-ākhar*). Her action must be understood from an Islamic perspective as an enterprise that is based on strong religious conviction, i.e., she will be either a ransom for the Muslim women – and in this case she will not accomplish her mission – or she will be successful and will stop the tyrant (the king).

Maḥmūd explains that, generally speaking, one listens to another person for many reasons, such as: to hear what concerns him/her directly; to listen to what concerns him/her indirectly; to listen to what shakes him/her from the within, and because

listening is a common social activity and the scenario of discourse. In like manner, Shahrāzād's words are still fascinating today because she describes a human calamity which can befall anyone, and she does so in a way that allows the reader to experience the stories with her. Moreover, the catastrophe she faces is universal (*muṣāb 'āmm*), and this makes her character closer to the reader. Is Shahrāzād real or fictional? Maḥmūd answers this question and states that the creator (*wāḍi'*) of the tales within the AN seems to have been aware of the importance of balance among the stories in order to ensure audience attention. In this respect, the image of Shahrāzād is made present (*māthila*) before the eyes, but the task she has to accomplish transforms her into a symbol (*ramz*). In fact, the truth about her is revealed in the sequence of the stories she recites. Each tale contains a secret about her, so providing that she advances in the narration, her image is gradually completed. Shahrāzād is a combination of both the real and the unreal, dimensions which also intersect with other psychological, social and historical elements in her stories.

The stories of Shahrāzād cover a thousand nights and every morning at sunrise she interrupts her storytelling. However, on the final night Shahrāzād does not stop talking as she normally does –she has finished the last story – because the king has pardoned her and is now happy and cheerful as he previously was. This means that the thousand books Shahrāzād had collected correspond to a thousand nights, and that the last night should not be considered because it is the end of the AN and the beginning of the couple's married life. Shahrāzād's words are not ordinary because they have the power to make the king forget his condition and defer her execution, and for this reason, she has more time to liberate (*tahrīr*) him from his own violence and despotism. As a representative of Eve (a negative role model par excellence), Shahrāzād is aware of her own role and knows the importance of her task. Prose is a texture, a snare that captures the prey, i.e., the listener, and eradicates evil thoughts from the king's mind (Kīlītū 1988, 40). But what are the words in which Shahrāzād takes refuge? Maḥmūd replies that the storyteller uses marvellous words which allow the king to avoid his present situation and which also challenge his way of thinking. Shahrāzād here is stronger than Shāhriyār. The wondrousness (*'ajā'ibiyya*) of Shahrāzād's stories, which is something irrational (*lā-'aqlāniyya*), also seems to be "rational" (*'aqlāniyya*) when it is confronted with the irrational thinking of Shāhriyār. Her storytelling penetrates

the strangeness (*gharā'ibiyya*) of Shāhriyār's practices through an analogous form of strangeness, namely through a timely narration. Storytelling begins, in fact, when Shāhriyār is ready to kill his prey, namely after midnight, the moment when the world goes silent, when everyone falls asleep and darkness becomes a perfect scenario for narrating marvellous and strange things (*gharīb wa- 'ajīb*). Conversely, the interruption of the storytelling indicates that words have lost their influence because the night has come to a close. Shahrāzād, therefore, surrenders to sleep only to wake up again the following night, ready for another battle (*ma' raka*). This means that her silence is never complete, but it embodies the search for a new story with which to fight the king after her victory the previous day – she is still alive, and this means that she has been successful.

At this point, Maḥmūd poses a list of questions: does Shahrāzād equate to silence here? Is she permitted to say certain words? How did Shahrāzād begin telling stories? How did the king give her permission to narrate such stories? What attracted Shāhriyār to her? Does she tell the stories in his bedroom or in his sitting room? Is her sister by her side? Is it possible that the king does not know about his three children over a period of a thousand and one night? Maḥmūd states that these questions remain unanswered as popular tales, such as the frame story, have a simple textual structure that immediately shows their narrative goals and does not explore them further. Thus, he continues to discuss Shahrāzād using the narrative elements he can extrapolate from the text. The heroine of the AN is, obviously, a woman and, as with all women, she has to stay silent because speaking concerns only the man, who is the authority – and when male authority speaks others must listen to him. Shahrāzād overcomes this because she chooses a type of narration which drives Shāhriyār to let her speak but, oddly, in her tales she depicts the woman as betrayer (*khā'ina*), temptress (*sāhira*), deceiver (*la'ūba*) and the like. She appears, therefore, to stand against women, as if she were fighting against them and not for them, and as if she were communicating what Shāhriyār was demanding to hear. Her behaviour, as well as the fact that she has three children with the king, confirms this. As a result, instead of being pro-women Shahrāzād seems to be “the man's representative” (*bayān al-rajul*) against them; her victory is only “biological” (*bīwlūjiyyan*), while she loses as a female symbol and in terms of human value (*qīma insāniyya*).

In this respect, Maḥmūd suggests that the narrator of the AN might have been a patriarch so he created a character like himself (Shāhriyār) and made him a symbol who is still alive in people's collective memory and imagination; likewise, the woman within the AN is represented as egoist, evil, foolish and weak according to Shāhriyār's conception. If a male character had spoken on behalf of a woman, no one would have been interested in the AN and no one would have known about the collection today. The protagonist of the AN must have been a woman, yet the product of a certain historical period and predominantly the result of masculine imagination. Shahrāzād's survival, therefore, is not for the sake of other women, but only to produce children and to become witness of this paradigmatic situation.

Maḥmūd concludes by saying that the use of a female character such as Shahrāzād is a politicized masculine lapse (*falta dhukūriyya musayyisa*) because although she is not physically murdered, she does undergo a moral killing which is even more fatal to her. One, therefore, should not be content with the relationship between Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār and with her alleged victory, as the end of the frame story seems to suggest. Rather, the type of dictatorship embodied in the character of Shāhriyār acquires authority over women, while that of Shahrāzād becomes a curse (*la'na*) that has negative consequences for other females; her image of eventually being a subjugated woman becomes a burden for subsequent female representations. In conclusion, Shahrāzād stops expressing what she is allowed to say in order to nurture Shāhriyār's conception and to build, together with him, a negative female image.

**Keywords in the text:** *ḥusn* (magnificence), *jamāl* (beauty), *bahā'* (glamor), *qadd* (proportion), *i'tidāl* (moderation), *'ajā'ibiyya* (wondrousness), *gharā'ibiyya* (strangeness), *lā-'aqlāniyya* (irrationality), *bayān al-rajul* (man's manifest), *falta dhukūriyya musayyisa*

**Versions of the frame story:** *Alf layla wa-layla*, 4 vols. Beirut: *Dār al-'awda* (1979).<sup>229</sup> As for the frame story, the text of this edition is identical to that printed by *al-Maḥba'a al-'āmira al-sharfiyya* in 1884-1885. The latter presents some slight modifications compared to the Bulaq edition published in 1835.

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<sup>229</sup> This date is not found in Maḥmūd's article. See Akel (2016, 444).

### Highlights and Critical Points:

(38) *Wa-law lam takun Shahrāzād jamīla, lakāna min al-jā'iz an yataghayyara waḍ'ahā* [...] (If Shahrāzād had not been beautiful, she would have never modified her position). This comment is evidently based on the Lebanese edition of the AN which is used by the author. As regards Shahrāzād's description, the Lebanese text adds five nouns that are all related to her physical appearance (*ḥusn, jamāl, bahā', qadd, i'tidāl*) and that are not found in the versions of the frame story which are taken into account in this study, nor in the *A Hundred and One Nights*. Nevertheless, these nouns are also contained in the edition of the AN published in 1884-1885 by *al-Maṭba'a al-āmira al-sharfīyya* (see 1, part I).

(39) *Wa-la'alla 'ibārat "alf kitāb"* [...] (And maybe the expression "a thousand book"). Here the author refers to the fact that Shahrāzād has read a thousand books. This indication is to be found in Bulaq and Calcutta II, but not in Mahdi's edition (see Shahrāzād I).

(39) [...] *Immā an takūnu fidā' banāt al-muslimīna – idhā lam taflaḥ fī muhimmatihā* [...] (She will be either a ransom for Muslim women – and in this case she will not accomplish her mission). By saying that if Shahrāzād becomes a ransom for the daughters of the Muslims she will not accomplish her mission, the author seems not to take into consideration the original text in its entirety. The whole sentence in Bulaq and Calcutta II, as well as in the Lebanese edition which is used by the author, reads as follows: "Either I shall live or else I shall be a ransom for the children of the Muslims and save them from him". Therefore, according to the text in Arabic, the ransom seems to be a cause of deliverance (*ikhhlās*) and not the indication of the failure of Shahrāzād's mission. There remains, however, a certain illogicity in the overall meaning of the sentence, unless one thinks that Shahrāzād either has a contingency plan in mind or considers her own death a ransom (see Shahrāzād II).

(40) "[...] *Al-kalām alladhī yurādifu mā ba'da muntaṣaf al-layl*" (The discourse that takes place after midnight). This is a time indication which is not found in the Arabic text of the frame story.

**Title:** *Īzīs khalfā qinā` Shahrāzād. Asālīb fann al-qaṣṣ al-maṣriyy wa-ṭarā`iq intishārihi* [Isis behind the Mask of Shahrāzād. Forms of Egyptian Narrative and Modalities of its Dissemination].

**Author and year of publication:** Ṭalib, Ḥasan (1994).

**Journal:** *Fuṣūl* (Egypt), 1, January, 221-238.

**Literary criticism:** narratological analysis, comparative literature.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** Jungian theory; Frazer (1944).

**Language:** Arabic.

#### **Author's thesis**

Ṭalib's article focuses on ancient Egyptian tales and the figure of Isis, the most important female deity of the Egyptian pantheon, whom he compares with Shahrāzād. He begins his study with a lengthy description of this goddess who is known for being a devoted wife and a loving mother. Isis is said to have brought the light of civilization in order to tackle the darkness of obscurity and evil. She is the symbol of hope in any desperate situation, and, according to Egyptian mythology, she is the first one who leaves Egypt to overcome death, yet her memory has been preserved throughout time. Isis is an enchantress whose stratagems and fantasies are never exhausted; she can also transform her appearance through magic to achieve her goals. This goddess lives on earth where she propagates love and hope; in the sky, she becomes the bright star of Sirius that regulates the flooding of the Nile and, in doing so, fertilises the land. Isis embodies the protector mother goddess archetype, according to Jung. The ancient Greeks included Isis in their pantheon and associated her with the daughter of different gods, as well as with the figure of Demeter. The cult originating with Isis was also incorporated into the Christian tradition, in which it overlapped the worship of the virgin Mary.

Following his explanation about all the different "forms" that Isis assumed in the various mythological and religious traditions both in the East and the West, Ṭalib states that Shahrāzād is another mask (*qinā`*) of Isis or, in other words, her modern

camouflage (222). This parallelism between the Egyptian goddess and the heroine of the AN is based on the fact that Isis is considered to be the first model of a woman who faces difficulties and adversities in the name of security, truth and family reconciliation (*al-wi'am al-'ā'iliyy*). On the other hand, Shāhriyār is compared to Seth, the Egyptian deity of Asian origin who is generally associated with chaos and disorder. King Shāhriyār generates chaos every night and justifies his actions as a desire for vengeance but, according to Ṭalib, the actual causes behind his behaviour are excessive lust (*shabaq*) and his bloodthirstiness. Hence, the scholar suggests that the act of killing and the sexual act are aspects of the same destructive psychological intention because by executing a virgin every day Shāhriyār intends to destroy (*ifnā'*) mankind in its entirety. Killing all the women represents the preclusion of both marriage and reproduction, two elements which are crucial to the continuation of society. Shāhriyār's nihilist behaviour (*'adamiyy*) evokes the Egyptian legend of *The Destruction of Mankind*,<sup>230</sup> which illustrates how humans are naturally inclined to evil and to acts of vengeance, torture and violence towards each other whenever the occasion presents itself. In this account, the divine providence (*al-'ināya al-'ilahiyya*) of Ra saves humanity from the oppression of Hathor, whilst Shahrāzād, representing the mask of Isis, is sent by divine providence to save mankind from Shāhriyār's violence. What seems to be a miracle or, to be more precise, magic, is employed to save people whenever they are in danger of being destroyed. Isis is known for mastering the magical arts, which she uses to combat evil, and in like manner, her modern counterpart Shahrāzād makes use of a new type of sorcery which consists of marvellous stories and wondrous tales which fascinate everyone, including Shāhriyār (223). But how can a story be magic? Ṭalib replies that there is nothing strange in the idea of the magic which, according to Frazer, has two distinct forms, i.e., theoretical magic ("pseudoscience") and practical magic ("pseudo-art"). The ancient Egyptians had a strong connection with the magic and used to practice rituals which resulted in their spiritual world appearing very obscure to other peoples who only knew it in a superficial manner. Modern studies, however, have acknowledged the fact that their religious tales became widespread in the East throughout the centuries and underwent many changes for they were interpreted and compiled in various ways as a result of

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<sup>230</sup> This legend belongs to Egyptian mythology and is found in *The Book of the Heavenly Cow*.

the creativity of the people who received them. For this reason, Egyptian religious tales were eventually transformed into entertaining narrative.

Following a detailed discussion on the religious and fictional stories of Ancient Egypt, Ṭalib's main point explains that the textual structure of the AN with its frame story ultimately derives from ancient Egyptian narrative (232). The work from which the AN seems to specifically borrow its narrative architecture is the so-called *Westcar* papyrus, a text containing various tales which are embedded within a frame narrative involving a king from the fourth dynasty, Khufu, who equates with Shāhriyār. The *Westcar* papyrus is a method of political propaganda (*al-di'āya al-siyāsiyya*) to legitimise the Sun kings worshipping Ra who succeeded the fourth dynasty and whose ending is predicted in the text. For this reason, it is possible to say that the true recipient of the tales is the people, which is also the case with the stories of the AN, especially those that explicitly refer to the Abbasid caliphs. In the *Westcar* papyrus King Khufu's sons narrate two forms of tales, the first group being similar to the stories of *The Seven Sages*, while the second group resembling the tales of the AN. Even though in the AN Shahrāzād is the only principal narrator, in terms of the story line both the ancient Egyptian and the Arabic collection make use of storytelling for the same symbolic function. Shahrāzād, for example, tells stories to amuse Shāhriyār and, in the same way, in the *Westcar* papyrus King Amasis, following his intoxication the previous night, searches for a narrator of love stories. A further example found in the *Westcar* papyrus is *The Prophecy of Neferti*, in which King Snefru implores the preacher Neferti to entertain him with a story on a day he was feeling particularly sad.

The *Westcar* papyrus is not the only text belonging to ancient Egyptian narrative with an enframed narrative structure. For example, *The Eloquent Peasant* is a literary work that consists of nine speeches, one per day, which are inserted within a framing narrative. Other examples are the story of *Isis and Tefnut*, that presents the same framing structure which gathers several stories of animals (*qiṣaṣ al-ḥayawānāt*), and the tale of *The Shipwrecked Sailor*. This form of enframed narrative was greatly appreciated among the Egyptians who imitated and reproduced it, and the same textual structure is to be found in the AN. Ṭalib highlights the fact that in the Arabic collection the influence of the ancient Egyptian narrative tradition is evident, especially with regard to some narrative features such as the presence of standardised opening and

closing formulas at the beginning and the end of each story, and the fact that tales generally have a happy ending in which good triumphs over evil (233). By contrast, however, Shahrāzād interrupts her narration at dawn, whilst the Egyptian narrator usually begins his storytelling at that time. This difference is due to the symbolic value that the sun (symbolizing the deity of Ra) had for ancient Egyptians and that is not found in the Islamic context to which the AN belongs. In both the Egyptian narrative tradition and the AN there is, instead, the same symbolic reference to writing as a fatalist action.<sup>231</sup>

The framing narrative structure is not the only element inherited by the AN from ancient Egyptian narrative tradition, but other narrative features also converged into the Arabic collection. For example, some of the themes related to magic are clearly taken from Egyptian stories, such as: the motif of the griffon which rises from his ashes; the use of magic wands; the discourses between animals and human beings; the transformation of human beings into animals and the transformation of animals into human beings. Ṭalib stresses the importance of acknowledging the role played by the Egyptian narrative heritage in shaping the AN.

**Keywords in the text:** *qinā'* (mask), *al-qīṣṣa al-iṭāriyya* (framing narrative), *al-binā' al-qaṣaṣiyy* (narrative structure), *al-'ināya al-'ilahiyya* (divine providence), *siḥr* (magic), *namūdaj* (model).

**Version of the frame story:** /.

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<sup>231</sup> Ṭalib quotes here the sentence *law kutibat bi-al-ibar 'alā āmāq al-baṣar la-kānat 'ibra li-man yu'tabaru* (if it were written with needles on the inner corners of the eye it would be a lesson for all who can learn), which is to be found in some tales in the AN when characters begin to tell a story or have just finished recounting one, such as the example of the tale of *The Merchant and the Jinn*, amongst others. See Kilito (1994, 131).

## VI

**Title:** *Alf layla wa-layla, al-dhukūra wa-al-unūtha: taāluf am tanāfur?* [The Thousand and One Night, Masculinity and Femininity: Agreement or Disagreement?].

**Author and year of publication:** Ḥamīd, Ḥasan (2004).

**Journal:** *al-Turāth al-‘arabiyya* (Syria), 96, October, 85-98.

**Literary criticism:** feminist criticism; gender studies.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** al-Qalamāwī (1976), al-Sa‘dāwī (1977).

**Language:** Arabic.

### Author’s thesis

Ḥamīd states that the main theme concerning the AN and its frame story is the question of male-female relationships. Within the collection the critical confrontation between the sexes is sometimes portrayed as a battle and sometimes as a harmonious relationship; it can mean either presence or absence, cruelty or intimacy, a contented life or a life full of distress and worries. Whatever the case, love relationships are always an issue because if a relationship is successful, it would be appropriate to discover the reasons for that success and for its continuation yet, on the other hand, if the relationship is failing it is important to understand why this happens and what can be done to repair it.

Within the frame story of the AN the reasons that bring the partners into conflict, the gravity of the situation, its circumstances and the shock that has befallen the king due to the discovery of his wife’s betrayal with a black slave, all of these are extremely clear. The betrayal symbolises conflict (*khilāf*), separation (*al-qaṭi‘a*) and, finally, death (*mawt*) for the betrayer and also for all women as they are potential adulterous. Shāhriyār embodies the death because he has killed more than one thousand virgins, a deadly cycle that can be interrupted only by Shahrāzād’s words. She has, in fact, great influence on Shāhriyār and substitutes the daily spectre of death with the spirit of love (*rūḥ al-ḥubb*) and life, provoking a major change (*mughāyara*) in the king’s conduct (*sulūk*) and behaviour towards the women of his kingdom. Shāhriyār reacts positively to the talking cure (*‘ilāj*) provided by Shahrāzād, who presents examples, stories and

tales, as well as teachings (*durūs*) and warnings (*‘ibar*), each containing various types of people representing human society in its entirety. Shahrāzād is the symbol of consciousness (*al-wa‘ī*), the “I” (*al-anā*), who contrasts with unconsciousness/unawareness (*‘amā’an*), the “he”; she intends to awaken the collective consciousness, i.e., the consciousness of the society, as opposed to Shāhriyār’s blindness. Shahrāzād seems to be aware of the fact that a poor relationship between a man and a woman is not caused only by one of the partners. In other words, it is not because the woman is a woman, or the man is a man, namely it is not because of their inherent nature (*ṭabī‘a*), specificity (*khāṣṣiyya*) or original deficiency (*‘illa*) that the relationship falls apart. Responsibility for the disharmony within the couple lies with both of them who are, in turn, immersed in their socio-cultural context (that can convey ideas of coercion, exploitation, humiliation, etc.). Likewise, harmony, dialogue and love are created by both partners, who are influenced by cultural conventions (which inform their understanding of love, sadness, respect and other positive sentiments).

Ḥamīd believes that Shāhriyār experiences a form of homosexuality (*mithaliyya*), and for this reason he is away from his wife. The queen is only his official façade (*al-wājiha al-rasmiyya*), the public mask he needs to conceal the fact that he is homosexual, and this is perhaps the first cause of her unfaithfulness. Shāhriyār’s wife maybe understands that her husband will not satisfy her physical needs (*raghbāt jāsadiyya*), and perhaps she does not consider her relationship with the black slave as a genuine act of infidelity. Whatever the case, it appears that there is, among the people living in the royal castle, a secrecy pact regarding the queen’s treachery, which she had carried on for twenty years, and also concerning the king’s sexual orientation. The queen, however, is aware of her husband’s homosexuality because he does not make love to her. As a consequence of this terrible situation, the queen becomes a victim of her lust to satisfy her physical needs, while the king becomes mentally unbalance and kills a virgin each day because he is convinced that all women are treacherous so they will not remain pure for him until the second night (of marriage).

According to Ḥamīd, Shahrāzād’s aim is to bring masculinity back to its natural and ordinary realm; the woman betrays her partner if he is absent, namely if she feels marginalized, abandoned and, therefore, humiliated. Through her refined art of

storytelling Shahrāzād, having high integrity and great sexual consciousness, presents the king with a range of stories and tales that show him examples of both marginalized masculinity (*al-dhukūra al-muhammasha*) and ill masculinity (*al-dhukūra al-marīḍa*). In this way, Shāhriyār can learn how to have a happy life and achieve intimacy and conciliation with his partner, as well as learn about the importance of dialogue, kindness and female presence in his life. Shahrāzād modifies Shāhriyār's tendency to perceive the female body only as a source of very short-term pleasure, a body whose borders and movements he does not know because he excludes it from his desires, and in doing so he prevents himself from accessing the female spirit with all its beauty and gentleness. Hence, Shahrāzād's storytelling introduces the king into the world of women and femininity, a world which he has never known and has avoided prior to his wife's betrayal. Ḥamīd speculates that Shāhriyār's withdrawal from the world of women is due to the episode he witnessed as a child when he saw his mother being in a love relationship with a slave in his father's castle (87). The absence of the male-female relationship represents a form of alienation and also a catastrophe because women are necessary for the development and continuation of society. Shāhriyār breaks off his relationships with the virgins and destroys their lives because he cannot have a personal and social relationship with them. He is similar to an ascetic who rejects women and the material world, waiting for the afterlife. Ḥamīd underlines the fact that Shāhriyār's behaviour is, however, exceptional in the history of humanity, and this is demonstrated by the fact that he is eventually reconciled with the female universe.

As previously noted, many stories in the AN concern the relationship between men and women. In some tales the woman is the betrayer, while in others the man is the betrayer, yet overall there is a good balance between the two narrative models. Female figures are numerous, sometimes they are good and sometimes wicked, yet they are not to be meant as personifications either of sin (*ghawāyya*) or of the devil, in other words, they are not merely a copy of either Eve or Zulaikha. When a female character seems to act as a temptress, the reasons for her wicked behaviour cannot be attributed to her only, but there are two other factors that need to be taken into consideration, namely the man and the circumstances (of the betrayal). The woman (including a married woman) deceives her partner for a variety of reasons, for example, if the man

departs on a long journey and she does not hear from him anymore, or if she discovers that he lives with another woman. Other reasons may be if she is taken by force from his family and people (by him), or when the man depicts a friend of him to his wife in such a beautiful way that she eventually falls in love with the described man (and, in this case, the trigger for the betrayal is hardly the woman). Conversely, the woman in love is capable of doing the impossible to reach her beloved, or to liberate him (if he is in prison); she can bear all the difficulties because her partner's affection surrounds her, so she is not interested in anyone else. If the woman feels loved, she forgets her distress, her fear and harsh restrictions of her life. Shahrāzād is, however, relentless in her condemnation of females who are victims of their sexual appetite, who live a life of pleasure and who make love to men other than their lovers –female sexual appetite may also include animals on occasion. In all of these cases, according to Ḥamīd, the reasons for female unfaithfulness should be sought in the male misunderstanding of women's nature, as well as in the male egoism and in the belief that he is the only “doer” – namely, the only one who has the right to betray. Moreover, if a man does not sleep with his wife and does not consider her nature, she is naturally predisposed to seek someone else – also a slave, or even an animal – who can satisfy her needs. The examples of lustful women are used by Shahrāzād to label them as a deviation from normality, i.e., the normality of the female temperament and, in fact, lascivious female characters always come to a terrible end at the social level (they do not create a family), as well as the human level (they have sexual intercourse with animals), or they die.

Ḥamīd suggests that, by using her stories, Shahrāzād opens the road to a critical interpretation of patriarchal power within society, which the woman is forced to obey; the storyteller highlights the female condition, stories and wounds – which are deep, and of a different type than Shāhriyār's – at both the individual level and the collective level. Shahrāzād, however, does not intend to destroy the male community but simply aims to shake the patriarchal power and to demonstrate the consequences of their hostility against women. Unlike other women, who play many roles in an effort to defend themselves, for example they are procreators, they are objects of desire and entertainers, but they remain subjected to male power, Shahrāzād has the capability to play with the senses and their functions. She understands that Shāhriyār has been

wounded because he has seen his wife's betrayal, therefore she does not make use of the sense of sight, but of that of hearing to let him discover the existence of different people and stories. Within the tales told by Shahrāzād women never kill but, even in the worst-case scenario, they simply betray; the storyteller makes this clear to the king in order to demonstrate that, although he was originally a reasonable sovereign, he has abandoned the way of justice by beginning a chain of murders. Men and women do not have to live only to satisfy their pleasures because this leads to chaos and destruction, but they are individuals who are part of the human society, and their masculinity and femininity are simply two characteristics of this individuality, which influence their whole social representations. In other words, femininity is only one particular trait of the woman, and the masculinity is only one feature of the man.

At this point, Ḥamīd infers that Shahrāzād, who is learned and educated, has surely read books about the Greek theory of excess (*ifrāt*), renounce (*tafrīt*) and moderation (*al-wasīta*), the latter being also an Islamic value. As Shāhriyār decides to satisfy only his needs and, for this reason, he kills a virgin every night; his blind impulse prevents him from truly approaching the female nature and experiencing her kindness, as he reduces the woman to an object of pleasure. Hence, Shahrāzād offers the king true insights into women's nature and femininity and teaches him that knowledge is the only way to understand the other and achieve a desirable life. She also aspires to change Shāhriyār's belief that women are all adulterous and demonstrate that deviation is to be found in both men and women, although in men it can be more problematic. Males, in fact, are proud of their acts of treachery because they can count on their masculine authority in society, while women hide their unfaithfulness and do not even mention it for they know that it may cause their either social death or their physical death. Thus, the AN emphasises the hidden qualities of women, including the knowledge of magic, which generate fear in men who, conversely, have the ability to subjugate women only through visible means, namely through their body, power and position. The secrets of femininity dig a "defence trench" towards men's violence, which permeates culture and society. Ḥamīd concludes that Shahrāzād teaches equality between the sexes and the importance to overcome femininity and masculinity as social constructs because women and men are, first and foremost, individuals. After having saved herself and all the women of the kingdom she makes (*khalladat*)

Shāhriyār's memory eternal and restores the word its prior importance in society, infusing the people with true knowledge.

**Keywords in the text:** *dhukūra* (masculinity), *unūtha* (femininity), *khiyāna* (betrayal), *khawf* (fear), *mithaliyya* (homosexuality), *raghabāt jasiyya* (physical needs), *qaṭī'a* (separation/estrangement), *baṭrakiyya* (patriarchate).

**Version of the frame story:** Breslau.

## VII

**Title:** *Shakhṣiyyāt Alf layla wa-layla – min al-binā’ ilā al-tawzīf fī al-riwāya al-‘arabiyya* [Characters of The Thousand and One Nights – From Construction to Use in the Arabic Novel]. Chapter 1, *al-Shakhṣiyyāt al-ra’isiyya, al-mabḥath al-awwal* [The Main Characters, Study 1].

**Author and year of publication:** al-Dallī, Sūra Y. (2018).

**Publisher:** Amman: *Dār al-Khalīj li-l-nashr wa-al-tawzī’*.

**Literary criticism:** narratological analysis; psychoanalytic criticism.

**Theoretical framework of reference:** mainly Murtād (1993), Todorov (al-Ka‘bī 2005) and Hilāl (1983).

**Language:** Arabic.

### Author’s thesis

Al-Dallī focuses on the analysis of the relationship between the protagonists of the frame story, Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād. The two characters are deeply interconnected, so much so that Shahrāzād’s very presence in the narrative is determined by her counterpart, since she intervenes specifically to contrast the king’s violence towards females and to secure both her own existence and that of other women by means of magic, language and narrative. Within this relationship, Shāhriyār is the recipient (*mutalaqqin*), while Shahrāzād is the creator (*mubdi’a*) who cures the king through her stories over a period of a thousand and one nights. Shahrāzād is beautiful and highly educated, and she makes use of all the history and literature books she has read to accomplish the task of transforming Shāhriyār from a murderer into a more just and wiser sovereign. Embodying knowledge against power, Shahrāzād undertakes a clever form of storytelling, for she never completes the narration of a story in one night, rather she extends it until the following night so that she can remain alive yet. The protagonists’ names play an important role in describing who they are. Shāhriyār means “the governor of the city”/“the king”, while Shahrāzād means “daughter of the city” (*ibnat al-madīna*); both names contain the term *shahr* (city), then the noun *yār* in “Shahriyār” signifies “companion”, “helper”/“friend”, and the segment *zād* in

“*Shahrazād*” (Shahrāzād)<sup>232</sup> stands for “daughter”. Originally, these attributes depicted the characters’ description and have subsequently become their own names; similar traits are also listed by the (unknown) narrator of the frame story in the passages where he describes the positive aspects of both characters (34). Shahrāzād, the eldest daughter of the king’s vizier, is one of the citizens of Shāhriyār’s kingdom, a kingdom whose name is unknown in history. The author also highlights that neither Shahrāzād’s mother nor Shāhriyār’s mother are mentioned in the text.

Al-Dallī points to the fact that the relationship between the protagonists of the frame story is based on a form of dialogic exchange (*tarāsul*), which means that Shahrāzād tells stories to remain alive and to postpone death, the king listens to these stories to be entertained and in doing so, they acknowledge each other’s existence. Thus, this method of entertaining provides an opportunity to stay alive as long as the king is immersed in the enjoyable experience of listening to stories. The relationship between the protagonists is, therefore, built on a mechanism of delivery (*al-irsāl*) and reception (*al-talaqqī*) because the narrator exchanges stories for the king’s forgiveness (*‘afū*) and for her life (*muqāyada al-ḥikāya bi-al-ḥayāt*). The first night the couple spend together is decisive because Shahrāzād ignores Shāhriyār’s potential reaction to her strategy, yet if Shāhriyār agrees to listen to her during this initial encounter he will continue to do so for all the remaining nights (36). Shahrāzād – who symbolises hope after desperation, happiness after sadness, life after death – does not fear death, yet she must be very careful with the king if she wants to preserve her life. For this reason, she avoids disturbing Shāhriyār with direct exhortations and anecdotes and prefers to enthrall him with stories that may capture his interest. Every narration begins with one sentence, *ayyuhā al-malik al-sa’īd dhū al-ra’i al-rashīd* (oh auspicious and knowledgeable king), which is used by the storyteller to reassure the king that he retains control over time and, in doing so, she can disconfirm his bizarre idea that time betrays him. This sentence also represents the beginning of the king’s cure because it is a means to adjust and then to re-establish Shāhriyār’s equilibrium, as well as to allow him to regain the self-confidence he has lost after his wife’s betrayal and after the

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<sup>232</sup> The author spells the names of the two main characters of the frame story as “Shahriyār” and “Shahrazād” (33).

experience with the boxed woman. This formula, in fact, describes the king as joyful and knowledgeable – characteristics that he no longer has. Shahrāzād undertakes a psychological intervention aiming at changing Shāhriyār’s beliefs and convincing him that in the world there are both good and evil, life and death, happiness and sadness. Through her storytelling, Shahrāzād demonstrates to Shāhriyār that these elements are never absolute, rather relative and mutable, and that the world is larger than he imagines. Because of this, she displays before him a variety of characters representing a multitude of different people whom he can observe and from whom he can learn lessons and, for this reason, her stories are never arbitrary but propose themes which are relevant for Shāhriyār and nourish hope in him (38).

Al-Dallī illustrates that before being a storyteller Shahrāzād is herself an object of narration, as the opening formulas at the beginning of each night prove. The verbs she uses to introduce her speech, such as *balaghanī* (it has come to my knowledge), *haddathanī* (I have been told), *ruwiya* (someone told me), indicate the presence of an unknown narrator who informs the whole narrative structure, which consists of several second narrators. The author explains that Shahrāzād perhaps prefers to use the verb *balaghanī* (it has come to my knowledge) instead of *za ‘amū* (they allege) in order to gain Shāhriyār’s full attention by eliminating the fictitious and deceitful connotation which is found in *za ‘amū*. The use of *za ‘amū* creates the impression that she passively relates stories she has heard; by contrast, the use of *balaghanī* indicates that she has full control over the narration and skilfully weaves stories (Murtāḍ 1993, 89). In this respect, Dīnārzād, Shahrāzād’s sister, plays an important role in initiating the storytelling and, consequently, in deferring her female sibling’s death for she is the one who asks for a story and awakes a desire for narration in the king (*al-mutalaqqī al-mushawwiq*).

The interruption of Shahrāzād’s storytelling at dawn represents the possibility of beginning a new life the following night. She ceases to speak at an exciting point of her narration, and this makes the king delay his decision of killing her because he wants to hear the end of the story. Shahrāzād narration is, therefore, equivalent to life, in other words, to narrate is to live (39).<sup>233</sup> However, as the story concludes, Dīnārzād and Shāhriyār are immediately catapulted into another tale, so they become perpetual

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<sup>233</sup> Todorov is quoted by al-Dallī, although not directly. See al-Ka‘bī (2005, 88).

listeners (*al-sāmi 'ān al-dā'imān*) who are eager to hear more stories. In the meantime, the king's relationship with Shahrāzād grows and over a period of a thousand and one nights she gives birth to three children. At the end of the frame story, when Shahrāzād goes to Shāhriyār and begs for her life, the king replies in a way that resembles a confession (*ifṣāḥ*) of his murders. Al-Dallī points to the fact that in this part of the story there seems to be a paradox, since Shahrāzād uses her children as an excuse to be pardoned by the king and, in doing so, she is compliant with the masculine authority that believes her salvation to be exclusively due to the presence of the babies (without recognizing the importance of the storytelling). Shahrāzād appears to identify here with a common popular female mentality (*al-'aqliyya al-nisawiyya al-sha'abiyya al-'amma*) that wants to twist a man's arm by using "the tool" of his children and not by the power of discourse. Conversely, the king has already abandoned the male collective thinking (*al-'aql al-jam'iyy al-dhukūriyy*) because he has stopped killing as an act of revenge to defend his virility and has freed Shahrāzād.

The night scenario is an element that permeates the AN as a whole and suggests the best time to tell stories. During the day, Shāhriyār is occupied with his regal duties and with the business of government, while at night Shahrāzād can resist Shāhriyār's power through her stories, language and the conviction that dialogue and intelligence win over sword and force. The salvation of a character by means of words is common within popular literature and popular *sīra* (lengthy heroic narrative) where, for example, the protagonist must solve a riddle to escape death. In like manner, Shahrāzād seems to say, "I narrate, therefore I am", and her nightly storytelling resembles a type of devotional performance which she carries on in order to obtain the king's mercy.

Al-Dallī explores a further reading of the relationship between Shāhriyār and Shahrāzād as a rapport between patient and healer; in the case of the AN, however, instead of sitting in front of a doctor and explaining his worries and fears, the patient listens to his psychologist who cures him by telling stories which describe all human aspects, including the problem affecting the king, namely the question of women's unfaithfulness. Shāhriyār is the paradigm of the tragedy of a man whose love and masculinity are affected when he sees his wife with a slave (43), and it is also the tragedy of mankind in an endless effort to discover the unknown. Gradually, however, the psychotherapy has an effect, and the patient is cured by means of truth and fantasy

(42). Shahrāzād is able to transform the king's sexual (*jinsiyy*) pleasure – which was a vindictive pleasure and the result of fear following his wife's betrayal – into literary pleasure by showing him different models of women with their strength in terms of temper, intelligence and power. The female storyteller, therefore, occupies the place that male hero has in *siyār* (plural of *sīra*), where he fights to win battles, whilst in the AN the conflict is between the man's power and control and the woman's intelligence and cleverness. Shahrāzād uses the power of dreams, knowledge and wisdom to contrast her destiny and, for this reason, she becomes a heroine and a positive role example.

As for Shāhriyār, his continued listening to the stories represents his redemption, as well as an attempt to re-establish his equilibrium and regain faith in himself. In this respect, the fear that the past can take control over him again plays a key role because it drives the king to continue listening to Shahrāzād's words. On the other hand, Shahrāzād is also frightened by her future with Shāhriyār and wants to avoid her fate; according to al-Dallī, it is possible to say that she is a part of Shāhriyār (*ba'd min Shahrayār*), a fragment of him (*shaqaf*) and his mirror (44), through which he can see himself and acknowledge his existence. This existence, however, does not mean inertia, passivity, impossibility to change and absence of life, rather it is a dynamic existence of continuous transformation. Shāhriyār, in truth, undergoes major changes, the first one at the beginning of the story when he passes from happiness to sadness due to a terrible event befalling him (*al-sabab huwa sharr khārijīyy*), and the second when he experiences an inner change due to Shahrāzād and becomes a fair and just husband and father (44).

The first stories Shahrāzād narrates to Shāhriyār are about unfaithful women who do not hesitate to use magic and transformation in order to achieve their goals, such as the tale of the third sheikh within the cycle of *The Merchant and the Jinn*. In this piece of fiction, the sheikh discovers that he has been betrayed by his wife with a black slave while he was away on travel and is transformed by her into a dog. Shahrāzād, therefore, first offers examples of wicked women; then she proposes positive female images that contrast with the previous models, and this is how her storytelling functions. In the tale of the second sheikh within the story of *The Merchant and the Jinn*, the protagonist is betrayed by his two brothers for money, thrown by them into the sea and then saved

by his wife. In this tale the woman is a positive figure and balances the negative female character in the tale of the third sheikh. Hereby, Shahrazad re-establishes the internal equilibrium of Shāhriyār by means of calm and patience and without vengeance.

Al-Dallī concludes this chapter of her book by making her final remarks on how Shāhriyār goes from hate to love towards women, and how Shahrāzād shows him that his aggressivity (*'udwāniyya*) and his willingness to kill is not the truth about him, but it is only his answer to the discovery of the betrayal. Shahrāzād guides the king towards (the rediscovery of) his humanity and curbs his bestial instinct not using logic but passion; for this reason, she becomes the symbol of truth, a truth that a man can know through love and his feelings. This is also the meaning that today the figure of Shahrāzād has for Arab writers, who have endowed this literary figure with many issues, such as the celebration of the self, the corroboration of identity and the predilection for freedom, sentiments and intelligence in order to fight for the rights and to satirise those in power. All these elements are to be found in modern narrative and are used by writers to talk about themselves and the reality surrounding them.

**Key words:** *tarāsul* (correspondence) *mutalaqqin* (recipient), *talaqqin* (reception), *irsāl* (delivery), *shakhṣiyya muqābila* (antagonist), *ṣirā'* (conflict), *mu'ālaja* (dure), *ṭabīb nafsiyy* (psychiatrist), *al-'aql al-jam'iyy al-dhukūriyy* (male collective thinking), *al-'aqliyya al-nisawiyya al-sha'abiyya al-'amma* (common popular female mentality), *sulṭa* (power), *qaswa* (cruelty), *dhakā'* (cleverness).

**Version of the frame story:** not specified. As for the frame story, the text of this edition seems to be identical to that printed by *al-Maṭba'a al-'āmira al-sharfiyya* in 1884-1885, which is based on ZER.

### **Highlights and critical points:**

(34) “*Kāna li-l-wazīr bintāni dhātā ḥusn wa-jamāl wa-bahā'wa-qadd wa-i'tidāl [...]*” (The vizier had two beautiful daughters whose perfectly formed bodies were graceful and elegant). Al-Dallī does not specify from which version of the frame story she takes this quote, but it seems to belong to an edition whose text is identical to that printed by *al-Maṭba'a al-'āmira al-sharfiyya* in 1884-1885. In any case, the version used by the author contains a description of Shahrāzād's beauty which does not appear in the other versions of the frame story which are taken into account in this study.

(44) “[...] *Fa-yusīru zawjan wa-aban wa-ḥākiman ‘ādila*” (he becomes a right and just husband and father). This is a personal consideration by the author, because at the end of the frame story there is no explicit evidence of the positive behaviour and loving attitude that Shāhriyār displays towards his wife and children after pardoning Shahrāzād. It is true, however, that this can be inferred.

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis in the preceding chapter has focused on the critical perspectives adopted in literary criticism in relation to the question of otherness and particularly of sexual and gendered otherness within the frame story, namely concerning the elaboration of the imagery that is employed in the representation of the other sex. Twenty-two readings, fifteen of which are written in English and seven in Arabic, have been included in this scrutiny and presented in the form of a summary that highlights main arguments, keywords and critical points for each study in relation to the version and/or the translation of the AN taken into account and the theoretical framework(s) adopted. Most readings in English refer to Bulaq and Calcutta II, as well as to Burton's translation, while a few of them use Mahdi's edition and Haddawy's translation: the majority of the readings written in Arabic are based on Bulaq and, obviously, do not refer to the English translations.

The evaluation of the relationship with the other sex within the readings shows that the latter can be arranged into groups based on their view regarding the role of the female protagonist Shahrāzād. The way in which her behaviour is perceived and, consequently, the rapport she establishes with the king is read as crucial for the placing of the interpretations proposed by the critics. These readings essentially oscillate between two main positions which are opposed to one other, namely Shahrāzād as successful in the dialectic with the other (sex) and, therefore, carrier of a change and, on the other hand, Shahrāzād as unsuccessful, being a perpetrator of a conservative, patriarchal system. These positions are less determined by the version/translation of the frame story used by the critic and more by the type of critical approach that is applied to interpret the dynamics between sexual and gendered others. By saying this, one does not want to deny the importance of the source text in shaping critics' understanding, since interpretations may be influenced by episodes found exclusively in one of the Arabic texts and/or in its translations, as the scrutiny in the previous chapter reveals. For instance, when an argument is built on Burton's translation, certain elements appear to be more stressed and/or exaggerated if compared with the Arabic text and/or another version of the frame story, as is the case with the slaves' wickedness and with uncontrolled female sexuality. Another example is that Mahdi's edition contains more narrative details, and this provides an opportunity to analyse the

text from a different perspective bringing to light new aspects of the story and stimulating creative and original interpretations. By contrast, the theoretical framework adopted within the analysis does have the most prominent role in guiding the critic's understanding since it provides a critical lens that informs the process of reception in its entirety by offering its own perspective on the text. For this reason, feminist and psychoanalytic approaches tend to see Shahrāzād in a sympathetic light, while gender interpretations are almost all reluctant to adopt the female storyteller as a symbol of change and emancipation. When she is seen as a positive female image, Shahrāzād embodies hope and life, the power of female subjectivity, the healer and the desire for words, whilst when she is regarded negatively, she becomes a woman submissive to her husband and compliant to patriarchal system.

The representation of Shahrāzād is not the only field in which the elaboration of the concept of otherness finds application, and other elements contribute to the investigation of the relationship with the other sex. To begin with, among the readings written in English it is the importance attached to the episode of the boxed woman, as well as its interpretation, that clarifies the way in which the other sex is addressed and explained by the critic. The woman imprisoned by the jinn is seen in turn as a victim, a pleasure seeker, a bad example of treacherous woman, and a natural force which cannot be controlled. Likewise, the queens' behaviour and the identity of their lovers are also key points of discussion for the examination of sexual and gendered otherness; the argument on the number of lovers, their ethnicity/race, their class, and the way in which the betrayals are described within the different versions of the frame story reveal a lot regarding the meaning-making process of each reading. By contrast, the contributions written in Arabic generally do not comment either on the episode of the boxed woman or the foreignness of the male slaves – or, if they do, these two points are only briefly mentioned. Another key element for the definition of otherness is male reaction to female unfaithfulness which is investigated more or less attentively according to the importance attributed to the motif of the phenomenology of male illness. In this respect, readings in Arabic exclusively centre on the character of Shāhriyār and barely refer to Shāhzamān. Lastly, the conclusion of the frame story with Shahrāzād who is granted mercy because of either the children she delivers or the power of her storytelling is another element of discussion and divergence among the

readings. In view of this, the version of the ending found in the source text to which the critic refers is key to the type of interpretation suggested, though it is still possible to find differences even when the version used is the same. This is the case with the understanding of Shahrāzād's marriage with the king which, on the one hand, is considered as the completion of what has become, courtesy of Shahrāzād, a successful rapport, whilst on the other hand, is regarded as the failure of any struggles for equality between the two sexes which would emancipate women from their traditional roles of merely being mothers and wives.

Beginning with the discussion of the English readings of the frame story, the majority of them refer to Bulaq and Calcutta II (Grossman, Clinton, Heath, Attar and Fischer, Ghazoul, Mernissi, Beaumont, Sallis and Shamma), and usually rely on Burton's translation for the English since they generally predate the translation by Lyons and Lyons published in 2008. By contrast, Malti-Douglas, Perfetti and El-Naggar are mainly dependent on Mahdi's edition and Haddawy's translation, while the remaining studies do not specify the source text that has been used. All these readings can be classified into feminist and gender readings (Grossman, Attar and Fischer, Malti-Douglas, Perfetti, Sallis, Najmabadi, Mernissi, Enderwitz, El-Naggar and Shamma), psychoanalytic readings (Clinton, Perfetti and Beaumont), and narratological analysis (Heath, Ghazoul and Van Leeuwen). Within the first group, the feminist analyses generally attribute to Shahrāzād the merit of changing the king's mind and, therefore, see her as a symbol of female emancipation, whilst the gender approaches are usually sceptical regarding the effectiveness of Shahrāzād's feminist struggle. Psychoanalytic readings, the second group, consider the frame story as a story of cure and, consequently, bestow on the heroine the healing power of words. Finally, narratological analyses centre more on the narrative structure of the text and, therefore, tend to read Shahrāzād's behaviour in light of the literary function of her storytelling, which is seen: as a didactic tool to instruct both the king and the reader; as a powerful discourse that replaces deeds with symbols, and as a cognitive process supporting the formation of positive habits against male violence. All the readings are now reviewed individually.

Grossman (I), who proposes a feminist reading, identifies in the lack of recognition of female subjectivity the cause of the king's erroneous behaviour towards

women. The latter are not seen as autonomous selves, but simply as objects and/or as undifferentiated beings who, in turn, make use of deceptions and lies to defend themselves from males. Grossman believes this aptitude for deceitfulness to be an infantile means to develop an autonomous self, as per Freud, as well as the response of subaltern individuals or groups when one's own identity is threatened by others. Craftiness and infidelity become, therefore, the battlefield where the fight between the sexes can take place; in this respect, the boxed woman can exist only through her deceitful behaviour and cycle of sexual revenge. The reason because of which men neglect women's interiority is found for Grossman in the fact that males feel threatened by female presence and, therefore, try to both take ownership of them – although the boxed woman demonstrates that this is eventually impossible – and to destroy their existence over time, i.e., to kill them. Through the example of Shahrāzād, who acts at night when the king takes a break from his daily, royal duties, Shāhriyār can experience that females are not intrinsically evil and that safe, namely non-threatening, relationships for men are possible. The overt declaration of repentance quoted by Grossman, according to which the king promises he will never stop blaming himself for his previous cruelty against women, is based on Burton's translation (see Shāhriyār XI). This translation, which in turn relies on Breslau, presents Shahrāzād as “a messenger of God” who, according to Grossman's political reading (1980, 124, note 10) of this passage, serves to support the idea of a purified, renovated Arab-Islamic caliphate against “the ever-heretical Persian monarchy”. Shāhriyār, therefore, passes from objectifying and destroying women to the experience of a woman who is different and thus contrasts with his despotic view.

Grossman recognises in the double wedding at the end of the frame story a restored sense of mutual agreement and negotiation that allows for different selves, namely those gendered male or female as well as relationships between same-sex individuals – and here the scholar seems to equate sexual relationships and sibling relationships –, to coexist peacefully within a system of reformed relationships. Within this scenario, Shahrāzād is portrayed as an empowered woman who does not act merely to restore a good, traditional past, but shows the king the vastness of the world and that it is better to abandon extreme solutions and vengeance – and this goal is accomplished by the tales of the first cycle after the frame story. In Grossman's view,

the closure of the frame story is the result of a reconciliation between the partners and, therefore, does not need any apocalyptic conclusion because the two protagonists, courtesy of the power of fiction, have come to an agreement. Thus, Grossman talks about proximity and rapprochement between man and woman as a result of mutual recognition and understanding; Shahrāzād's force lies in her ability to narrate, mediate and reconcile, which Grossman believes to be her main strength through which she does propose a new reality and not the repetition of the past. How revolutionary this change is cannot be said, as the scholar only refers to reformed relationships and to the achievement of a balance.

Clinton (II) focuses on the psychological reasons behind Shāhriyār's wrong behaviour towards women. He believes that at the heart of the frame story there is the question of the "male wounding" and investigates the causes that provoke the king's obsession with women and the subsequent destruction of "the bond between men and women" (Clinton 1985, 108). His reading, therefore, centres on the male protagonists and also on the phenomenology of male illness that is explained by relying on the Jungian theory through which narrative symbols are interpreted in the light of their archetypal significance – that is, the garden symbolises the king's self and psyche, the sea represents the unconscious, the black slave is the sign of female defiance, etc. At the beginning of the frame story Shāhriyār does not show any signs of either madness or violence, rather he is described as a just ruler. For this reason, at first sight the apparent cruelty of female betrayals seems to be the mere result of women's natural wickedness, but, in truth, it is the king who fails to see women in their reality. Here, as in Grossman, there is the idea of objectification and dehumanisation of female beings, which in Clinton leads to a complete reversal of perspective. The jinn is human before Shāhriyār's eyes, while the boxed woman is not; as a consequence, the king fails to understand the situation and instead of blaming the jinn for having kidnapped a bride he accuses females of being evil and using their power against men. Clinton clarifies that Shāhriyār's erroneous perception is due to his psychosis, which is more serious than his brother's depression, and he explains that the latter has suffered some trauma with his mother during his childhood. The text says nothing in this respect, but Clinton considers the absence of female characters in the first part of the frame story as a proof of the king's conflicting rapport with women, and of the fact that he has not

created positive connections with the anima, namely the female qualities within himself – according to Jungian psychology. Shāhriyār, therefore, cannot bear his wife’s infidelity and when this feeling revives with the appearance of the boxed woman in the narrative, he loses his mind. Clinton recognises in Shāhriyār’s series of different women every night the attempt to establish a relationship with women, although this assertion may be confuted by the fact that his murderous cycle has very little to do with any kind of human bond – by contrast, it destroys relationships and lives. Shahrāzād has understood that the king is not in his right mind, and yet he still tries to connect with women, though in a violent, unsuccessful way. In Clinton’s view, a good, compassionate and feminine side is still present in the king, otherwise he would have not allowed Shahrāzād to narrate stories, and it is this part which she develops in him by applying her “talking cure” (Clinton 1985, 119). Inspired by Bulaq, Clinton finds other elements to sustain his opinion about the healing process implemented by Shahrāzād. The tales included in the first cycle after the frame narrative refer to the same questions that have shocked the king, namely the fact that virtuous women may accept guidance from men if there is solid protection within the relationship – in doing so respecting, in Clinton’s view, the Islamic creed. Moreover, the transformation of the husband who has discovered the unfaithful wife into a dog within the story of the third sheikh is a metaphor for how the queens have psychologically treated Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān, making them feel “the vilest creatures” (Clinton 1985, 122). The frame story is, therefore, read according to psychologic rules, contrary to Todorov’s a-psychological understanding of it and of other similar stories.

Heath (III) proposes a narratological reading that centres on the genre of the frame story and is, therefore, less focussed on its literary interpretation. Like Clinton, also Heath believes that the real protagonist of the frame story is Shāhriyār, whom Shahrāzād tries to educate through her storytelling. Her main goal is to convey her instructive message to the king and eventually change his mind, and not merely to gain time and procrastinate her execution. Shahrāzād, therefore, intends to save, together with hers and other women’s lives, also that of Shāhriyār because she knows that his people may soon decide to revolt against him forcefully – as both Mahdi’s edition and that of Bulaq indicate. Being a clever and pious woman, she is capable of restoring Shāhriyār’s “life-long commitment of marriage” and redeeming his wrong conduct

(Heath 1988, 18). When referring to the closure of the frame story, Heath talks about the restoration of the king's honourable conduct and of love as submitted to the law of social property and fate. In this respect, characters have to comply with the natural order of things that opposes the advancement of chaos and, for this reason, they seem to passively surrender to destiny. Ideas of change and complete transformation concerning either Shāhriyār or the regal system of the court, therefore, are not mentioned by Heath.

Attar and Fischer (IV) propose a gendered reading of the frame story which focuses attention on gender roles and their socio-cultural value in relation to the development of the plot. The textual structure of the opening narrative of the AN with its three thematic blocks – the story of the two kings, the rapport between Shahrāzād and her father, and that between Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār – is built around the representation of unbalanced power relationships between men and women. Gender inequality is scrutinised by Attar and Fischer through an examination of female characters' behaviour; the two unfaithful queens and the boxed woman represent stereotyped images of an alleged uncontrollable female nature as a reflection of male anxiety. If Clinton sees the ocean as the symbol of the unconscious, here the same natural element signifies women's sexuality, which is seen as a natural, unrestrained force driving female behaviour and eventually transforming women into the "aggressive partner[s]" (Attar and Fischer 1991, 5). The boxed woman undoubtedly is the worst example of this dangerous female attitude, as she acts merely for the fulfilment of her own pleasure – although one may confute this and note that her behaviour is the result of a situation of profound distress and injustice. By contrast, Shahrāzād accomplishes the civilising mission of showing how a positive female role model, namely an intelligent, chaste and noble woman who eventually becomes a loyal wife, ensures the continuation of an ordered society and frees it from chaos and disorder. However, Attar and Fischer find an ambiguity in this message as this alleged emancipative process costs women the loss of their natural and unbound experience of sexuality, which is the only source of real happiness for all human beings. They, therefore, tackle the ideas of harmony and romanticised love which are found at the end of the frame story and illustrate that behind the positive image of Shahrāzād as a faithful wife and loving mother there is the condemnation of free female sexuality. In

truth, *Shahrāzād* is the product of a patriarchal mentality which limits women's freedom and only acknowledges males' sexual satisfaction. It seems that Attar and Fischer discuss the importance of unbound sexual desire but, on the other hand, do not investigate what lies behind power relationships between men and women; they also do not clarify if totally free sexuality is enough to ensure good relations between the sexes. The image of the virtuous and pious female narrator incarnated by *Shahrāzād* symbolically eradicates chaotic and dangerous elements from the frame story; the model of a civilised and moderate woman is offered, in Attar and Fischer's view, to comply with the Arab-Muslim values and specifically with that of submission, which is at the core of this creed.

After finding that all the interpretations which had been proposed for *Shahrāzād* until that point were pre-feminist and pre-gender, Malti-Douglas (V) offers her own reading of male-female dynamics within the frame story – it must be remembered that Attar and Fischer's article, which also adopts a similar perspective, is published in the same year as Malti-Douglas'. Noticing that critics generally confine *Shahrāzād* to either the role of the healer or to being the "embodiment of speech", Malti-Douglas focuses on the relationships between the sexes and on the questions of desire and power (Malti-Douglas 1991, 13). She clarifies that other studies have already discussed desire as a motif within the frame story, but none of them have centred on the problematic aspect of a type of desire which is homosocial and which follows a wrong pattern. Although homosocial does not mean homosexual, this type of desire, which is represented by the couple *Shāhriyār-Shāhzamān*, highlights men's relational difficulties with the other sex, and is contrasted with desire within the heterosexual couple, which is also troubled. The male couple triggers the development of the narrative especially through the motif of the journey; specifically, the two kings' travel around the world in search of someone who has suffered a misfortune greater than theirs leads them to the encounter with the boxed woman. Malti-Douglas, as Attar and Fischer, also considers the narrative section of the woman imprisoned by the jinn as key to the interpretation of otherness and the other sex within the frame story. The boxed woman's uncontrollable behaviour is unacceptable and, although she clearly suffers great injustice, it cannot be justified in any way. She anticipates *Shāhriyār's* violent conduct, with the only difference that she does not kill her lovers but purely

puts them under threat of death. Relying on this passage in Mahdi's edition, Malti-Douglas analyses the narrative symbols within this episode that serve to prepare the reader for what will come next. Thus, the seashore where the jinn rests with his prisoner is *dunyā*, literally meaning "world" but coming from the root *d - n - '* (to be low) and therefore indicating the most promiscuous and corrupted of the places, as is actually the case – this term, however, is not found in either Bulaq or Calcutta II. Moreover, in the same scene the two kings climb down from a tree, as the slave Mas'ūd did, and Malti-Douglas recognises in this action a symbolic association of the male characters with animals (apes); the same idea is to be found also in Clinton's study with reference to the transformation of the female betrayal's witness into a dog in the tale of the third sheikh within the cycle of the *Merchant and the Jinn* as a metaphor for what Shāhriyār and Shāhzamān's wives psychologically did to their husbands. When Shāhriyār returns to his kingdom and begins to kill a virgin every morning, the normal rhythm of sexuality is broken and, for this reason, desire has no time to develop since all sexual intercourses end with death.

This problematic, immature and characteristically male type of desire which seeks immediate satisfaction needs to be substituted with a different sort of desire that is not interrupted and can continue over time. Sexual desire is, therefore, transformed into narrative desire which, in Malti-Douglas's view, is a pedagogical tool through which Shahrāzād shows the king a female mode of living pleasure which does not come to an end. This renovated desire, in which one can find an echo of psychoanalytical theories (particularly of Freud's and Lacan's thought), re-establishes the heterosexual couple and ensures the continuation of life, symbolised by the arrival of the three children. Malti-Douglas underlines that the feminist claim at the beginning of the frame story is betrayed by its conclusion, because Shahrāzād is eventually confined to the passive role of wife and males remain in power. The female protagonist of the AN is, therefore, merely a temporary feminist who, in the end, becomes the object of men's gaze. This is particularly visible in Burton's conclusion, which is taken from Breslau, and which Malti-Douglas describes as the "original" ending. In this closure, both the homosocial and the heterosocial couple are restored, the latter being "saved" by the presence of the heirs. Nevertheless, this conclusion is the result of Burton's mixing between the endings of Calcutta II and Breslau; by contrast, the long

ending in Breslau does not mention any children. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that the longest version of the frame story contains the oldest of its conclusions. Finally, Malti-Douglas bases her interpretation of the frame story partially on Mahdi's edition – particularly with regard to the episode of the boxed woman, as is shown – and partially on Burton's translation.

Ghazoul's study (VI) is a structuralist reading of the frame story based on codes and principles of duality and binarism. Characters and events are positioned within the text according to a dialogic combination (synonymy, antinomy and heteronomy) which, from a narrative perspective, eventually produces repetitions rather than plot expansion and development. The two poles of this binarism are rupture and healing, the story beginning with the metaphor of Shāhzamān's internal wound and finishing with salvation and deliverance. Shāhzamān's and Shāhriyār's stories are almost identical, and the two males are paired to produce, in Ghazoul's view, a kind of echo throughout the narrative; on the other hand, Shahrāzād is paired with her sister Dīnārzād. In this scenario, the antinomic pairs king-husband and slave-lover represent the contrast between social order, sovereignty and law and, on the other hand, anarchy, chaos and illicit relationships. The liaisons with the slaves are sterile and produce death, as Malti-Douglas also states, while Shahrāzād delivers three children and, in doing so, she defeats death with life – this is according to Bulaq on which Ghazoul principally relies. The episode of the boxed woman is not central within Ghazoul's interpretation that focuses, instead, on the identity of the slaves who make love to the queens. In this respect, blackness is used within the text as a label to identify a group which is meant to be the lowest on the social ladder and, therefore, contrasts with the regal status of the kings' wives. Moreover, the colour black is used as a “conceptual transformer” (Ghazoul 2014, 29), meaning that the night-time is no longer the scenario for erotic encounters but the moment in which sexuality leads to death – although it must be remembered that the scene of the orgy in the palace garden happens during the day.

Ghazoul describes Shahrāzād as vulnerable because her life is in the king's hands, but at the same time she is capable of reversing her condition becoming the possessor of discourse and subsequently transforming females from objects of sex to objects of sexual fantasy narratives. In this respect, Ghazoul follows Malti-Douglas's

idea that storytelling serves to change sexual desire into a symbolised type of desire. If for the latter this process of symbolisation moves desire from the sexual to the discursive level to make the king a longer for words, for Ghazoul it seems to transform a cruel act (the killing) into a ritual which allows for sexual intercourse to be turned into sexual fantasy. The most visible result of Shahrāzād's acting is the presence of the male children, who are the tangible sign of her ability to create both stories – she has managed to keep herself alive through her storytelling – and life. Hence, the rhetorical realm, in which Shahrāzād proves to be a successful and prolific storyteller, encounters the sexual realm in which she is also to be considered as a fertile woman. Nevertheless, Ghazoul notes that male children symbolise the continuation of lineage within patriarchal society and, therefore, indicate the restoration of traditional social order. This latter aspect is not further explored by the critic who highlights, instead, the fact that Shahrāzād fights the death instinct through her profane words; she resists against the annulling power of silence – as for her to stop talking means to perish – and preserves the cycle of life. The ending with the three children, together with the question of storytelling as time-gaining, are, therefore, key aspects in Ghazoul's interpretation, unlike in that of Heath who, instead, discharges the importance of the time-gaining device in favour of the didactic aim of the art of narrating.

Perfetti (VII) centres her reading of the frame story around the question of female trickery as a means to survive within a deeply misogynistic society. If in the medieval Arab world the use of ruse was considered as a despicable, natural female trait, in Shahrāzād's hands it becomes a strategy to reverse power relationships between men and women. Perfetti concentrates on the positive aspects of female trickery instead of underlying its negative sides, and specifies that Shahrāzād's ruse, which is implemented through her sister Dīnārzād's help, is to be considered more as a plot, namely a product of her intelligence, than as a *kayd*, that is an act of guile. In this respect, Shahrāzād's strategic manipulation of words serves to break the homosocial bound preventing men from establishing positive rapports with women. Moreover, since she aims not only to save her own life but also that of all women, it can be said that she undertakes “a feminist project”. Shahrāzād is, therefore, very different from the *topos* of the deceitful woman, which is so widespread within classical Arabic literature and which is represented by the boxed woman within the

frame story. Drawing on Malti-Douglas, Perfetti states that Shahrāzād tries to expand the kings' experience of the female universe and to convince them about male discriminatory treatment against women, which is the subject of many other tales within the AN. She also aims to amend men's knowledge of the other sex, which is a failure because it is based exclusively on the sense of sight. The question of the power of the gaze is found in many readings of the frame story, sometimes presented as a voyeuristic attitude (see Beaumont), and at other times as a force that objectivises and dominates the subject of the gaze, i.e., the woman. In her study Perfetti refers to this second option as also does Malti-Douglas and adds that this way of knowing by sight must be substituted by a knowledge which is acquired through the sense of hearing, and specifically through the listening to stories, in order to neutralise the power of the gaze. As a result of this paradigm shift implemented by Shahrāzād through her storytelling, the two kings abandon their homosocial attitude and gain trust in women, withdrawing from the idea that all females are to be condemned because naturally wicked. She has succeeded in fighting misogyny within patriarchal society through the power of the word.

Sallis (VIII) highlights that the narrative structure of the frame story consists of three separate phases which are built on the theme of infidelity: equilibrium, rupture of the equilibrium and achievement of a new equilibrium. This perspective is similar to that of Ghazoul, who speaks about rupture and healing, yet it includes a third point of reference, that of the original situation of balance, which precedes the other two phases, namely the peak of tension/the conflict and the resolution. Sallis states that the crisis/conflict described within the frame story is internal, namely it takes place within the interiority of the characters and even if it is not presented in psychological terms, it is reflected in their behaviour and actions. In a similar way to Grossman, the scholar emphasises the importance of the characters' inner dimension; in this respect, the experience of the betrayal, which is meant to be a recurrent pattern within the relationship between man and woman, becomes an assault on the kings' identity by the other sex. Shāhzamān expresses his damaged identity with the deterioration of his physical appearance and with his suffering, which are particularly evident in the version of the frame story used by Sallis, namely Mahdi's edition. Both he and his brother Shāhriyār fail to understand what has happened to the boxed woman, and the

scholar explains that their peculiar reaction to this episode shows how diverse men's and women's views on love relationships are. Likewise, the boxed woman is also a double of Shāhriyār since she shows him how to (violently) take revenge for an injustice suffered. In this scenario of sexual exploitation, vengeance and, subsequently, death due to Shāhriyār's killings, Shahrāzād's storytelling takes place, instead, in a calm and entertaining situation. Sallis points to the fact that when Shahrāzād begins to tell stories, that sense of threat and impending doom disappears and the emotional healing can be initiated. The scholar equates this therapy to a trance induction that brings the king into the parallel, narrative dimension of tales which are thematically connected with the frame story. Sallis, who is one of the few scholars who have provided an interpretation of the frame story based on the comparison of its different versions and translations, has a particular take on Shahrāzād. She believes that Western critics have often misperceived this character, offering a distorted image of her and clarifies that Shahrāzād should not be seen as an example of an exceptional woman but as the "true champion of women" (Sallis 1998, 162) – otherwise, one must imply that Shāhriyār's reaction to his wife's betrayal is justified by the fact that all women are treacherous, and Shahrāzād is the only exception. Sallis adds that this is due to translation problems, especially to Galland's and the English Victorians' translations which tend to exaggerate her physical and non-physical attributes and, in doing so, they miss the point of her struggle. This critique is correct as none of the Arabic versions of the frame story dedicate more than a few lines to the description of Shahrāzād, so they illustrate the heroine's virtues without idealising her, as is the case with translated texts. Moreover, these translations also disempower Shahrāzād because they provide a stereotypical image of her as a beautiful, "lovely" (Sallis 1998, 162) and pleasant woman and, in doing so, they overshadow her powerful intelligence and her female skills. Sallis also discusses the question of blackness, specifically with reference to Burton's disputable attitude towards black characters in his translation, and briefly touches upon the intersection between this trait of cultural otherness belonging to the queens' lovers and other types of otherness, such as class, wealth and benefits. She states that, despite "unimportant inconsistencies in the various copies", oppositions and antithesis are crucial for the economic balance of the plot.

Najmabadi (IX) discusses the question of how to read female trickery within the AN, which is also the subject of many other readings of the frame story, and she compares it with the wiles of women's literature, a genre which was very famous in Medieval Arab-Islamic literature. Najmabadi states that this specific literary genre describes women as insatiable beings who are capable of anything to the detriment of men in order to satisfy their lust and, in doing so, it urges males to despise and repudiate females. From a modern psychological perspective, men's distorted understanding of women originates during childhood. The male child is attached to his mother and the feminine universe of the hammam, which he is forced to leave when he reaches adulthood in order to enter the world of men; this makes him feel betrayed and deceived by women, and he never fully recovers from this traumatic event for the rest of his life. In this respect, the stories about the wiles of women, which in Medieval Arabic literature are a recurrent motif, as well as the frame story of the AN, support the creation of a homosocial society in which relationships with women are to be avoided because they are threatening and dangerous; therefore, even if men make love to women to ensure that they provide heirs, in truth they desire other men. This last statement is very similar to Malti-Douglas' idea of homosocial desire, which is also meant to be an obstacle to man-woman relationships.

In Najmabadi's gendered and psychoanalytical reading the reassuring image of Shahrāzād is criticised and held to be complicit with the homosocial male system in force. Shahrāzād is no longer a heroine, rather she implements the worst of the ruses at the expense of womankind because she relates tales full of misogynistic elements that are based on the chauvinist principle of the "wiles of women" stories. Najmabadi believes that the narrative structure of the frame story is built in such a way that this conservative aspect of Shahrāzād's action is obscured by the fact that she succeeds in healing the king and, for this reason, many critics and readers tend to interpret her endeavour from a feminist point of view. By contrast, Najmabadi offers her own perspective on the question of the thematic congruency between the frame story and the other tales within the AN and illustrates that there is no ambiguity between the message of the opening narrative and that of the remaining tales because they are all based on the motif of the wiles of women, which depict women as working against implementing a masculine, homosocial system of relationships. According to this

view, Shahrāzād cannot be considered a feminist since what she finally obtains is solely the role of queen and mother within a patriarchal society that she herself has helped to consolidate through her misleading storytelling. In addition, Najmabadi also suggests an original interpretation of the episode of the boxed woman, which she sees as a representation of the disastrous wedding night that many young women were supposed to experience at that time: the husband who is raised within a homosocial society and cannot truly connect with women becomes a type of monster, i.e., the jinn, in the eyes of his wife who can only defend herself through vengeance and trickery.

Mernissi's (X) understanding of the frame story is the opposite of that of Najmabadi described above. The Moroccan sociologist highlights the importance of Shahrāzād's feminist and political message and of her struggle for a fairer and more equal society, and illustrates that Shahrāzād is a civilising agent, a woman who is capable of restoring the balance of power between the sexes. The female heroine of the AN is seen as the carrier of a social change since she transforms an unequal and violent sexual relationship into a balanced rapport with the other sex, reversing the master-slave dynamic that usually occurs between man and woman. Mernissi thinks that the female heroine of the AN is remarkable in many ways and capable of extraordinary achievements, so much so that she succeeds in creating a new type of man and, therefore, she begins a new form of humanism. She accomplishes her mission because she is incredibly intelligent and masters the art of storytelling, which is built upon her impressive knowledge of many subjects, including the Quran – this last statement is Mernissi's personal interpretation for which there is no basis within the text. Moreover, she possesses the ability to change a male's mind and the power to control her own fear, two qualities that are key for the achievement of her goals. Mernissi, however, clarifies that Shahrāzād does not have only cleverness but also creative imagination, *wahm*, which is the most important feature that distinguishes females from rational males. Sexual and gendered otherness becomes in Mernissi's view a struggle between reason and emotion, law and desire, and also day and night, these pairs being metaphors for the diversity between men and women. In this scenario, the woman represents the stranger and the other within a male-dominated society which is afraid of and, therefore limits, her by not granting females equal rights. Women are feared for their supposed insatiable sexual appetite which, as

Mernissi (2011, 59) indicates, is “at the core of the Muslim concept of female sexuality”, and which puts men in *fitna*, namely in a situation where they are tempted and consequently lose their faith. As a result, active women’s sexuality is strictly controlled and regulated by men, contrary to the Western world’s thinking that the woman is the castrated, passive partner. Shahrāzād’s feminism, therefore, directly tackles the question of otherness for it aims to create a more pluralistic society. For Mernissi, Shahrāzād’s fight is a fight for human rights, namely for women’s right in the first place, and then for all subaltern categories, the revenge of which is represented within the frame story by the scene of the orgy in the garden palace with the black slave Mas‘ūd on top of the queen.

Beaumont’s (XI) psychoanalytical analysis focuses on the themes of power and desire in relation to the master-slave dialectic theorized by Hegel. All the connections within the frame story can be read in the light of this particular type of relationships: the queens and the kings, the queens and their lovers, the slaves and the kings, the boxed woman and the jinn – this woman being the jinn’s captive and not an adulteress, as other critics have stated –, the kings and the boxed woman, the virgins and Shāhriyār, and Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār. Being conscious of her situation and of the king’s condition, Shahrāzād is the only character who can emancipate herself because she refuses her role as a slave and risks her life to rise up against the master Shāhriyār. King Shāhriyār’s mental health is compromised owing to what Beaumont recognises as an oedipal crisis that begins when he realises that he lacks what his queen desires, and ultimately finds, in her lover. Beaumont explains the king’s crisis, and his subsequent misperception of the boxed woman’s behaviour, based on Lacan’s theorisation of the mirror stage; according to this psychological perspective, the individual needs to alienate himself/herself upon the other in order to perceive himself/herself as not fragmented. Alienation is a radical process and, if not accepted as is the case with Shāhriyār, it can lead to catastrophic consequences, such as the destruction of the other who is the source of the self’s tension. Moreover, in the frame story Shāhriyār’s crisis is made even worse by the fact that the king’s rival in love, i.e., the slave, is black. Beaumont states that this fact testifies to the overt racism of the text which is also either a direct or indirect critique of the social structure of the Arab-Muslim society of the time. Beaumont’s view of the relationship between sexual and

gendered others is, therefore, less focussed on matters of gender roles and more on the psychological mechanisms that determine how human beings perceive themselves and then behave. In this respect, the gaze plays a key role, because it has the power to make what is gazed at helpless and impotent, as Malti-Douglas and Perfetti also indicate; it is when Shāhriyār is exposed to the public gaze because of his wife's betrayal which takes place in the garden palace before everyone's eyes that he feels the shame of having been betrayed. The king loses his mind as a result of this betrayal and of what he experiences with the boxed woman; then Shahrāzād makes her entry into the story and reverses the rapport with the king substituting his object of desire, i.e., virgins, with language and words.

Beaumont explains this point by illustrating that Shahrāzād's storytelling transfers desire to the symbolic level. By killing his one-night spouses, the king was behaving according to a desire-death pattern, but then Shahrāzād replaces the king's concubines with tales and substitutes this violent pattern with a similar, yet symbolic, version. In this way, the real world, represented by real women, is substituted by fiction, or words, that belong to the realm of symbols and that, nevertheless, preserve the desire-death tie. To understand this part one has to refer to Lacan, on whom Beaumont draws. Lacan (1966) states that symbols manifest themselves in language and, in doing so, provoke the death of the objects which they represent. He believes that this process has its primal cause in the fact that the child, following the separation from his/her mother, aspires to be reunited with her in a union which is, however, impossible. The mother is part of the real, i.e., a state of nature that the new-born experiences and that represents the actual materiality of things, so the child tries to master the forced separation from her by means of symbols and repetitions – an example is Freud's *fort/da* game. Nevertheless, when he/she begins to talk, this separation becomes complete because the acquisition of language means the impossibility of being reunited with the mother, i.e., the real. This impossibility finds its *raison d'être* in the fact that within the symbol/word the tie between the thing and the referent is loose and arbitrary, meaning that words can mean only in relation to each other because the bond between language and real objects is lost (the echo here is of Saussure's theory). This means that language implies the death of things and, at the same time, the eternalisation of desire because the symbol prevents the subject

from being reunited with the object and, in doing so, it makes human desire eternal. Following this logic, according to Beaumont the king behaves according to a desire-death pattern because he repeatedly kills his one-night spouses, until Shahrāzād substitutes this paradigm with a similar, yet symbolic, version in which, however, the tie desire-death is maintained – all in all, words (and the desired for them) cause the death of the object, as per Lacan. As a result of this process, desire is eternalised through the never-ending dimension of storytelling. Hence, Shahrāzād controls and educates Shāhriyār's desire, which in the meantime has become a desire for narration, through her pending storytelling, according to which a story is left incomplete and finished the following day. In Beaumont's view, her narration can be compared to Freud's fort/da game, through which a child elaborates his mother's death by making disappear and reappear a wooden spool that symbolises her presence and absence, at will. Beaumont clarifies that Shahrāzād's endeavour, however, is not feminist; she moves within the master-slave dialectic, so in the end by becoming a wife she finds herself again in another type of master-slave relationship – but here Beaumont does not explain why, or to what extent.

Enderwitz (XII) presents a study which mostly concentrates on the rewritings of the frame story, also offering a few interpretative considerations of the character of Shahrāzād, whose principal role within the opening tale of the AN she acknowledges – unlike Heath, who considers Shāhriyār to be the main protagonist. Enderwitz discusses the question of the thematic unity between Shahrāzād's story and the remaining tales within the collection, and states that the incorporation of different types of narratives which sometimes contradict the moral of the frame story testifies to Shahrāzād's narrative fertility. The female heroine of the AN is not only capable of creating different types of stories, but she is also biologically productive, as she gives birth to three children, so she is an image of "biological and mental procreation" (Enderwitz 2004, 195). Her storytelling is both time-gaining and instructive; these two functions are equally present in Shahrāzād's action without standing in contradiction to each other, although critics have taken different positions in this respect (see Ghazoul and Heath). Enderwitz also reflects on some of the feminist interpretations of Shahrāzād, which claim that the AN is not the product of female compilers, otherwise

the frame story's ending would have been different and have possibly included Shāhriyār's death and also Shahrāzād's decision to write different versions of her tales.

Van Leeuwen (XIII) focuses more on the act of storytelling than on the narrative representation of both Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār. He affords an interpretation of the frame story based on the issue of desire which needs to be deferred in order to be experienced safely and to ensure life; desire has to become eternal, that is it must never be satisfied – as Malti-Douglas also indicates. Shahrāzād's storytelling is associated with sexuality because, as is the case with the latter, it is rooted in the body – i.e., it is a performance which includes the physical presence of the storyteller –, causes pleasure and is a reproductive process – it creates infinite stories. Storytelling is also connected to desire, both being an essential drive: as a matter of fact, storytelling is essential within the AN because life and death depend on it. This desire involves Shahrāzād's body, through which storytelling emerges and then becomes the object of Shāhriyār's desire, and also Shāhriyār's body, which is the place from where his own desire originates. In light of the above, Shahrāzād's storytelling has an important bodily aspect, and it is specifically this merger between fiction and body that permits her to influence the king. Furthermore, Van Leeuwen specifies that Shahrāzād exists as a storyteller who testifies through her presence that narration can change reality, as she is kept alive by her narrative skills. She risks her own life to demonstrate to Shāhriyār that the tales she narrates contain some truth which he does not know of yet. These truths, however, are embedded in fiction, and she needs to make him believe that despite the fictional aspect this parallel, imaginary reality will help him reconnect with the real world. According to Van Leeuwen, this complicated stratagem-for-good by Shahrāzād is successful because it combines in her figure the fictional and the non-fictional and, in doing so, impedes Shāhriyār from discovering her ploy.

But through her storytelling Shahrāzād also offers to the king the possibility to experience an alternative dimension, a parallel world in contrast to the commitments of daily life in which he can forget his trauma and slowly acquire a different worldview – as noted also by Sallis. The night represents a different temporal dimension and, for this reason, it is used as a symbol of otherness; in this respect, the pairs night-day, imagination-reality and woman-man represent the encounter between others, and recall Mernissi's division between female *wahm* (imagination) and male rational mind.

Within the parallel dimension of nocturnal storytelling, Shahrāzād provides Shāhriyār with mankind's knowledge and diverse ways of living, while she helps him preserve the connection with real life through her own presence and her endeavour, i.e., staying alive by means of narration. In order to change the king's experience, storytelling functions as a ritual mechanism which, by means of repetition, allows him to understand the complexity of humanity and also to learn how to behave in different situations. Van Leeuwen highlights that by killing a virgin every morning Shāhriyār had already attempted to treat himself through the implementation of a murderous ritual but, since a ritual cannot change someone if it does not imply a cognitive learning, it ended with violence. Finally, the healed Shāhriyār discovers a new equilibrium which he had never experienced before.

El-Naggar (XIV) discusses Shahrāzād's role within the frame story according to a gendered perspective but, unlike most of gender criticism which generally tends not to consider Shahrāzād as a real feminist, she suggests that the female heroine of the AN has an emancipatory project through which she challenges patriarchal authority. Relying on Mahdi's edition for her study, El-Naggar begins with some considerations on the queens' betrayals which she regards as acts of protest that aim to break marital, ethnic and class boundaries. King Shāhriyār's wife in particular has a liaison with a black slave, Mas'ūd, who represents not only the cultural other, but also "the other class"; ethnicity/race and gender, therefore, combine in this character and by choosing him as lover the queen expresses her necessity to defy patriarchy, although in a disputable way. For El-Naggar, all female characters within the frame story are committed to this mission, namely reacting against male power which tends to regard them as inferior and also keeps them under control. Nevertheless, the queens' and the boxed woman's behaviour need to be distinguished from that of Shahrāzād, who finds a more successful manner to undermine male authority. Her struggle against men's control begins in the moment in which she insists on being married with the king when talking to her father, a fact that shows that she is neither intimidated nor scared by the paternal words. As already stated, El-Naggar relies on Mahdi's edition that includes more comments by the kings and specifically by Shāhzamān about female betrayal. The scholar explains that the two men's thoughts evidence how much they are shocked by the fact that a woman, i.e., an inferior being, has dared to deceive them.

This reaction of astonishment and the incapability of explaining how such things have been inflicted on a man by a woman is read by El-Naggar as a denunciation of unequal gender roles within society at the time in which the AN was compiled. In this respect, Shahrāzād is the symbol of the fight against gender inequality, as she passes from the traditionally female passive role to the male role, the normal home of the active self, that is, she is no longer an object and becomes a subject. Through her storytelling Shahrāzād ceases to be subservient to men's authority and takes the role of the speaker and of the narrator, namely of the one who has the right to talk – a typical male privilege at the time. By representing women in a different light within her tales, Shahrāzād offers female images which are opposite to that produced by men and, in doing so, she empowers women of all social classes and ethnic groups.

Shamma (XV) also offers a gendered reading of the frame story and states that the representation of the other sex, namely the woman, reflects male fears and misunderstanding of a voracious and dangerous female sexuality – a motif highlighted also by Attar and Fischer and by Malti-Douglas. Shahrāzād herself is a male product, namely is an image of woman produced by male authors living in a society in which women were under male control. The tales she relates are destined for men who learn through them how they should behave when they are confronted with different types of women. In Shamma's view, the frame story centres round men's homosociality – which is a concept also explored by Malti-Douglas, Perfetti and Najmabadi – in response to the dangers of female sexuality. According to the author, the reason for this homosocial attitude is twofold. On the one hand, it testifies to the men's concern about controlling a woman's body and, on the other hand, to their phobia of confronting other men who are considered more powerful on a sexual level, thus the female betrayals within the frame story are seen, therefore, as metaphors for these fears. Nevertheless, the queens' black lovers are described in such denigrating way – not so much within the frame story as in the other tales – that they are dehumanised and their sexual potency is reduced. This process of disempowerment of the slaves who make love to the queens serves two functions. Firstly, to make female lust appear even more perverted and shameful because women prefer to have sex with foreign, subaltern men who are regarded as non-humans, and secondly, to control (the image of the) cultural other, i.e., the black slave, who embodies non-black men's fear of not

being capable of sexually satisfying their own women. In this scenario, women's lustfulness and unfaithfulness remain the main theme within the frame story. Shamma indicates that females are not outsiders as the slaves are, and for this reason, they cannot simply be removed from society. Women are needed for reproduction but, at the same time, they are a real danger to men's power. The solution to this issue is found in the character of Shahrāzād, who saves not only herself and all the other women but also the entire society from destruction; however, she does so because she is a woman who is compliant with male power, as well as with the rules of patriarchal society. Shahrāzād, therefore, does not challenge patriarchy, she merely restores "the law of the family" that is at the basis of a civilised society (Shamma 2017, 258).

The second part of this discussion concentrates on the readings of the frame story written in Arabic and taken into consideration in this study. It is possible to note that they present three noticeable characteristics. Firstly, they usually do not cite the Arabic text on which the study is based, and this is because most of these contributions are taken from literary magazines so they do not include bibliography and notes. Secondly, they often concentrate on the question of the decency/indecentcy of the text in relation to its reception in Arab countries, and thirdly, they use literary categories which are peculiar to Arabic literary tradition to discuss the frame story. As with scholarship written in English, these readings also can be divided into those which are appreciative of Shahrāzād's action (Suwaylam, al-'Aṭṭār, Ṭalib, Ḥamīd, al-Dallī), and those which are not (Khiḍr, Maḥmūd), and are now reviewed individually.

The first reading which has been scrutinised is by Khiḍr (I), who affords a rather negative perspective on this piece of fiction on the grounds of considerations which are not always accurately proved. In the scholar's view, Shahrāzād intends to domesticate the beast within Shāhriyār by helping him change his perception of women. Her storytelling is both amusing and instructive, according to the principle of *al-jidd wa al-hazl* which is found within *adab* literature. Khiḍr, however, states that the bounty of Shahrāzād's mission is contrasted with the indecentcy and licentiousness of the content of the remaining tales; he suggests that this is due to the additions to the AN by storytellers and compilers who modified the collection including poor-quality pieces of narrative. According to Khiḍr, the original text was devoid of vulgarity; this means that originally Shahrāzād embodied a very positive image of woman but then

she became a storyteller who relates indecent stories as a consequence of the modifications that have been made to the original Arabic version of the frame story. The critic says she has been betrayed, literally speaking, by those who had the power to change the AN.

By contrast, in his contribution *Suwaylam* (II) delivers a very positive judgement on *Shahrāzād*, defending her and the AN from the accusation of being a perverted book. The author clarifies that Medieval Arabic literature has many texts of similar kind which talk about sex, and this was never an issue at the time because this type of narrative was considered part of universal knowledge. *Suwaylam*, therefore, is critical regarding the reception of the AN by modern Arabs who have often censored the collection. Nevertheless, he is also disapproving of Western reception of the AN, although for a different reason, that is the fact that Westerners tend to consider *Shahrāzād* merely as a beautiful woman who seduces the king, and in doing so, they ignore her intelligence and skills – this echoes *Mernissi's* view. *Suwaylam* describes *Shahrāzād* as an exceptional woman who teaches the king to be moderate in pleasure and not to take satisfaction in the possession of material things. She accomplishes her mission using different types of fiction which occasionally refer to immoderate amusement, but *Suwaylīm* does not seem to find an irreparable contradiction between the ethics of the frame story and that of the other tales of the AN.

*Al-‘Aṭṭār* (III) presents an elaborate explanation for *Shāhriyār's* violent behaviour which he describes as that of a homicidal lover – this is in accordance with *Beaumont's* tie between desire and death. Men and women have always been at war, as history seems to confirm according to this scholar. With the end of the *jāhiliyya* which probably was a period of transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, men took power. *Shāhriyār* therefore, is the representation of a man who avenges males who, during matriarchate, were subjugated by women; the episode which makes him remember this historical wound inflicted by females is the betrayal of his wife, to which, therefore, he reacts very violently. In *al-‘Aṭṭār's* (pseudo historical) perspective, the defeated woman in the patriarchal era becomes either as *Shahrāzād*, a symbol of hope and virtuousness, or as the boxed woman, the representation of malice and wickedness. *Shahrāzād's* storytelling provokes the king's desire, which is described here as the perception of a lack as a result of the fact that a man's life is

incomplete without a woman. Therefore, in this reading desire seems to preserve a sexual connotation, unlike some Western readings which tend to explain this element with a complete transformation of Shāhriyār's sexual desire into a pure desire for words. Through her storytelling Shahrāzād teaches equality between the sexes; this holds true even for those tales that do not show women in a good light, and which Shahrāzād considers to be part of the healing process, surely having a convincing argument for making this choice. She fights for women's liberation and also for the freedom of narration, a type of freedom which women have defended through their oral storytelling tradition within the Arab world. In this respect, al-ʿAṭṭār believes that the AN speaks about female intimacy and women's sentiments, a fact that is unique within Medieval Arabic literature written by men who, nevertheless, can never completely penetrate female world. At the end of the story, men and women reconcile and negotiate an armistice, i.e., following an historical battle between the sexes and between patriarchy and matriarchy.

Maḥmūd (IV) offers a reading which is divided into two parts; the first section is enthusiastic about the character of Shahrāzād, whilst the second is very sceptical of her role, especially if seen from a feminist perspective. The critic begins with highlighting the virtues of the female heroine of the AN: she is the eldest daughter, which means that she plays an important social role within the community; she is beautiful, which is a moral value in Arab society – this is based on the Arabic version of the frame story which the author uses, i.e., the Beirut edition of 1979 –; she is intelligent; she is well-bred, and she has a strong religious belief that leads her to marry the king for the sake of all Muslim women. Maḥmūd also states that the tragedy which Shahrāzād faces is universal, it is a social catastrophe; the tales she relates are a snare to capture the king by means of her wondrous, strange, and both irrational and rational words – they are *ʿajīb* and *gharīb*. She is a fictional character, which is revealed through the various tales she recounts – and, therefore, no thematic division between the frame narrative and the other tales is found here – but, at the same time, she also speaks about psychological, social and historical elements that make her image relevant to the present. In the second part of his study Maḥmūd, nevertheless, specifies that Shahrāzād provides pictures of women as betrayers, temptresses and deceivers and, in doing so, she seems to stand against them. She portrays women as Shāhriyār

sees them, reproducing his masculine, deviant perception. Therefore, although she is apparently successful because she manages to stay alive, in truth she betrays womankind in a kind of moral destruction of the female struggle for freedom and equality. Maḥmūd believes that the frame story is a male product, and male compilers used a female character to catch readers' attention and, at the same time, circulate a negative female image.

Ṭalib's (V) analysis is mainly comparative. The scholar makes the original point that the frame structure of the AN is based on ancient Egyptian fiction, in particular on the so-called *Westcar* papyrus, which contains many tales embedded in a frame narrative. In this text, a king of the fourth dynasty, Khufu, is the equivalent to Shāhriyār, and his sons' storytelling has a symbolic function very similar to that found in the AN. Ṭalib clarifies that the *Westcar* papyrus was meant to address the real people because it was a tool of political propaganda to legitimise a certain dynasty, the Sun kings, and suggests that this latter political aspect also characterises the AN, as is evident in the tales which explicitly refer to the Abbasids. In addition, Ṭalib associates Shahrāzād with Isis, the most important goddess within the Ancient Egyptian pantheon who was said to be a devoted wife, a loving mother, a civiliser and an enchantress. All these qualities are indicated by the scholar to be also Shahrāzād's, as she is another mask of Isis and the image of a woman who fights for family reconciliation. Her weapon is storytelling; her marvellous stories are magical and can be considered a special type of sorcery with a ritual aspect. Instead of speaking simply of the power of fiction or of healing words, Ṭalib here prefers to classify Shahrāzād's storytelling as magic.

Ḥamīd's (VI) interpretation focuses on the relationship with the other sex, which is described both as a battle and as a harmonious rapport. The reason for the conflicting nature of heterosexual intercourse is that conciliation and love rest on both partners and on their capability of understanding each other correctly; nevertheless, they are immersed in a socio-cultural context which may influence the dialectic between the sexes negatively through the imposition of gendered and stereotypical roles that perpetrate inequality. Ḥamīd's sociological perspective of sexual and gendered otherness leads him to develop a different view on the motif of betrayal, which ceases to be a natural trait and/or a deficiency. In this respect, female betrayal

is not (only) owing to women's wicked behaviour but mostly to men's attitude towards them; this means that women betray their husbands when they are victims of either male misunderstanding or injustice, or if they feel abandoned and humiliated. Women, therefore, no longer symbolise sin and evil, and are not merely representations of Eve and Zulaykha. Ḥamīd acknowledges the female right for non-lustful bodily pleasure clarifying that while men are allowed to be unfaithful without being blamed for their behaviour, women have to encounter their lovers secretly. This does not mean, in Ḥamīd's view, that Shahrāzād is tolerant of the treacherous women who are found in the tales she relates; by contrast, she condemns these negative female images which are considered as a deviation from the norm. With this interpretation, the scholar seems to suggest that also the episode of the boxed woman, traditionally regarded as an unequivocal portrait of overt adultery, may be read differently and in a less judgemental way because it falls within the list of those situations that could justify female unfaithfulness. Shahrāzād, who is a virtuous young lady, is capable of substituting the unsuccessful pattern of betrayal with the spirit of love and, in doing so, she provokes the king's inner transformation through her talking cure based on teachings and warnings. In Ḥamīd's view, the relationship between sexual and gendered others is an encounter between the "I", consciousness, who faces the "he", unconsciousness. Thus, Shahrāzād, the conscious "I", is committed to inspiring enlightened awareness in the community as a substitution for the blindness that seems to guide Shāhriyār, the unconscious "he". The scholar also states that Shāhriyār is homosexual, and that is the reason why his queen has betrayed him, because he probably did not satisfy her on the sexual level. His marriage is only a trick to conceal his true sexual orientation, for this reason, the queen's unfaithfulness cannot be considered a proper betrayal because she is allowed to obtain from another man what her husband does not give to her. Both the king's homosexuality and the queen's adultery are kept secret within the space of the castle. Ḥamīd offers a curious explanation for Shāhriyār's behaviour towards women and illustrates that the king has probably witnessed a scene similar to that of his wife in the garden palace when he was a child, the protagonist of which at the time was his mother; this fact must have irreparably shocked him and this is why now he hates females. In this scenario, the tales that Shahrāzād recounts to Shāhriyār show him examples of ill and marginalised

masculinity, introducing the king to the world of women that he has neglected for a long time. It is interesting to note here that Ḥamīd focuses attention on male models and characters within the stories of the collection, whilst critics generally see Shahrāzād's fiction as a collection of female images. Shahrāzād recognises Shāhriyār's suffering and acts in order to reconcile the king with the female universe, showing him the true nature of women. Ḥamīd clarifies that Shahrāzād's intention is to criticise patriarchal power within society and to fight for equality between the sexes, which means to end the disparities caused by the division of gender roles.

Al-Dallī (VII) offers an interpretation of the relationship with the other sex as an exchange of messages in which there is a recipient, the man, and a creator, the woman, who uses her storytelling to cure the king. This relationship is, therefore, built on a mechanism of delivery and reception, according to which stories are exchanged for forgiveness and life. These tales, which are never arbitrary, are part of a psychological intervention that aims to restore the king's mind through an improvement in his knowledge and experience of human beings, particularly of women. Shahrāzād is a beautiful woman and symbol of hope, happiness, life and truth, she approaches Shāhriyār using special sentences that permit her to hold his attention and yet to not be perceived as a potential threat. Her storytelling technique functions as follows: she first presents negative female models to show Shāhriyār that he is understood in his rage against womenkind, and then, once the king has complete trust in her, she reverses his perspective offering positive images of women. This narrative method justifies, in al-Dallī's view, the alleged thematic contradiction between the ethical message of the frame story and that of the remaining tales within the AN. The scholar states that Shahrāzād occupies the place of the hero in popular *sīra* because she fights with her words to defeat a system of male power – “I narrate, therefore I am”. Shahrāzād's storytelling reveals to the king that he is not truly a murderer but that his behaviour was the wrong reaction to the discovery of his wife's betrayal. In this way, Shāhriyār uses Shahrāzād as a mirror in which he can see his image and, consequently, acknowledge his existence, eventually learning that love is better than to hate and regaining his equilibrium.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, all the readings of the frame story which have been analysed in the current research can be roughly divided into two main

groups based on their positive or negative view of Shahrāzād's action, although the division is not always sharp.<sup>234</sup> The categories of the positive and of the negative within these studies refer to the outcomes of Shahrāzād's behaviour in the light of either her compliance or lack of compliance with a feminist endeavour, in other words, with a revolutionary struggle for equality between man and woman aiming to change the status quo. The favourable or unfavourable opinion regarding Shahrāzād's enterprise is mainly shaped by the theoretical framework of reference used by the critic to approach the text. Shahrāzād is in general regarded as intelligent, virtuous and educated, and for this reason, she is not governed by her lust; she uses her knowledge, wisdom and narrative skills to change the king's mind and save the kingdom. Some readings consider her as a feminist revolutionary, a woman capable of completely transforming Shāhriyār and the system of power relationships between man and woman in force, creating a new equilibrium (Grossman I, Clinton II, Sallis VIII, Mernissi X, Van Leeuwen XIII, El-Naggar XIV, Suwaylam II, al-‘Aṭṭār III, Ṭalib V, Ḥamīd VI, al-Dallī VII). By contrast, in some contributions, Shahrāzād is less perceived as an innovator and more as a reformist; therefore, she cures/treats the king to restore the status quo, that is the equilibrium prior to his crisis (Heath III, Ghazoul VI, Beaumont XI, Enderwitz XII). Other readings hold a completely opposite view, so Shahrāzād is seen as a female image produced by a patriarchal and chauvinist system with which she is complicit because at the end of the frame story she accepts to become wife and mother and to be subjected to her husband's authority (Attar and Fischer IV, Malti-Douglas V, Perfetti VII, Najmabadi IX, Shamma XV, Maḥmūd IV).

The discussion in the present section reveals that within the frame story there are several motifs that contribute to the definition and development of the macro-themes of otherness and of the relationship with the other sex, and which are widely exploited by the readings mentioned above: female betrayal, power relationships, male

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<sup>234</sup> For instance, El-Naggar's reading falls within the category of gender-based criticism and yet suggests that Shahrāzād challenges and then reverses the dominant paradigm; conversely, Beaumont's psychological reading clearly states that the female heroine of the AN is not a feminist. Moreover, some contributions are particularly enthusiastic with regard to Shahrāzād's revolutionary message, such as that of Mernissi, while others are extremely negative, such as Attar and Fischer's.

violence against and control over women, wiles of women, female uncontrollable sexuality, vengeance, the healing power of words, the alleged formidable sexuality of black men, class division, female unfaithfulness, and male fellowship. For each of these motifs, otherness is modulated according to the meaning that the critic attributes to the relationship with the other sex. Then, the way in which each study links these motifs one to the other suggests the viewpoint from which the story needs to be read, tracing the route for an original interpretative journey. Despite their differences, the contributions analysed in the previous chapter present recurrent patterns in their approach to sexual and gendered otherness and to the character of Shahrāzād. These common critical tendencies are investigated below.

Firstly, Shahrāzād's storytelling is generally regarded as either a time-gaining device or an educative and entertaining tool. In the first case, the attention is focussed on the female heroine and her need for salvation, while in the second case on Shāhriyār as the main protagonist of the frame story. Storytelling is also associated with a ritual act that takes place at night and creates a kind of parallel and imaginative dimension which is opposed to the rhythms and protocols of daylight – as is the case with Van Leeuwen's study (XIII). Another point of discussion is the connection and homogeneity between the morality and themes of the frame narrative and those of the remaining tales of the AN. Critics seem to agree on the fact that the collection is not merely a container of stories; Sallis states (1998, 154) that “reading Sheherazade is the starting point of a reading of the tales”, and this clearly evidences the thematic cohesion of the whole collection. Sometimes the reason for this homogeneity is less clear, for example, al-‘Aṭṭar indicates that Shahrāzād must have a convincing reason for including all sorts of stories in her narration, and that one only needs to trust her. Conversely, the alleged thematic incongruity and the presence of tales which seem to propose a worldview contradictory of that suggested by the frame story is explained in many ways, for example, as a sign of Shahrāzād's narrative fertility, and also as a means to show the king the variety of human behaviour and prove to him that different types of women exist. Furthermore, the inclusion of narratives with content which appears to be in opposition to the mission of the AN's female protagonist is employed as a technique to earn Shāhriyār's trust and promote positive female models. Alternatively, these narratives are meant as a terrible ruse by Shahrāzād at the expense

of women to elevate the image of a submissive female, who is a wife and a mother and, therefore, naturally accepts patriarchal rules.

In many readings, storytelling is also related to desire, and it is this analogy between the longing for more stories, namely the desire for words, and sexual desire that permits the substitution of the latter and more dangerous with the former and less dangerous type of yearning. In this respect, the term “desire” is used by the critics in the meaning of an attainment or possession of an object; therefore, they generally do not distinguish between a feeling of love – which is not about possession – and “desire” as an appetite which must be satisfied by any means, including violence, as is the case with Shāhriyār’s killings. Behind this concept there is an idea of uncontrollable sexuality, as a hunger which never ceases because it is part of human nature and, therefore, can only be limited and/or tamed – in view of this, al-‘Aṭṭar, indicates that Shāhriyār’s desire is provoked by his lack of a woman, because a man’s life is always incomplete without his female partner. Directly related to the idea of desire there is the question of uncontrollable female sexuality, of which the queens and the boxed woman are perfect examples, and that is considered an intrinsic characteristic of womankind and also, from an eschatological perspective, their destiny. In this respect, it must be noted that the episode of the woman kidnapped by the jinn, which is key to many readings written in English, is usually ignored by those written in Arabic – one exception to this perspective is Ḥamīd’s idea that external circumstances and overt injustice could justify female betrayal.

What about the morality of the frame story regarding the conclusion of the opening narrative for those readings which are not based on Mahdi’s edition? In most cases, the solution to a troubled relationship with the other sex is a successful liaison which ends with marriage and children as symbols of fulfilment and attainment. Love is generally not mentioned in the Arabic versions of the frame story, yet some critics speak about love relationships. The reason for this is twofold: they have either based their interpretations on translations which stress the romantic element modifying the original texts or they have perceived the liaison between Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār as a love story (El-Naggar 2017, 26; Ghazoul 1980, 27) – also Haddawy, the translator of Mahdi’s edition, believes the frame narrative to be a story of love (Haddawy 2008, XII). In this regard, Mernissi’s perspective is one of the most positive since she sees

the possibility for a true conciliation and mediation between the sexes as incarnated by the couple Shahrāzād-Shāhriyār – a conciliation which is achieved, nevertheless, only because of women’s capacity to understand and appease men. Also Ṭalīb believes the outcomes of Shahrāzād’s endeavour to be very successful, so much so that the storyteller is associated with a goddess, Isis. Others talk about a reconciliation that “runs along traditional lines” and, therefore, does not introduce a radical change into the status quo (Enderwitz 2004, 196). By contrast, some readings express a negative judgement of Shahrāzād’s endeavour, which is seen as the failure of any feminist struggle with regard to the conquest of women’s freedom and to any possibility of dismantling a social order based on male power. Sometimes, the unsuccessful rapport between man and woman is counterweighted by the presence of the homosocial couple, namely by a system of relationships and solidarity among men which excludes women, as Shamma, Malti-Douglas, Najmabadi and Perfetti highlight. Maḥmūd overtly condemns Shahrāzād for being a submissive woman who accepts male power and, therefore, a curse on all women, her image being a burden from which they cannot free themselves and that has affected subsequent female representations. Khiḍr also provides a very negative opinion of Shahrāzād, based on the indecency of her language and tales. His emphasis on the ethical “purity” of the collection and on its subsequent deterioration due to the additions of copyists and storytellers, though starting from different premises, seems to echo the *nahḍa* scholars. The latter mostly believed that the degeneration of Arab literature, which was represented by themes relating to deviant sexuality and/or of prohibited activities which would offend their sense of decency, was to be attributed to non-Arabs, and that the original Arabic literature was, instead, devoid of immorality. For this reason, the *nahḍa* discourse developed a “tendency to eliminate references to what came to be seen as ‘deviant sexuality’” (Alkabani 2020, 127); a similar attitude can also be found in some modern Arab critics, including Khiḍr, who states that the sex scenes within the AN are a mark of gross indecency. In this respect, Suwaylam denounces this prudery by modern Arab intellectuals who are willing to accept sexual themes if found within classical Arabic literature, but label them as obscene when belonging to popular works, such as the AN.

As already noted in the introduction to this thesis, within the frame story sexual and gendered otherness is intersected with other tiers of otherness, and specifically

with cultural otherness. This means that the cultural other is read in connection with the other sex, i.e., the woman, both being regarded as objects which are subjugated to male dominant authority. Within the readings written in English, the cultural other is the symbol of chaos, disruption, turmoil, subversion. By male dominant authority is meant the male characters in power, namely the two kings – and also, to some extent, the jinn – all of whom represent those belonging to the dominant group members who hold, and also believe they have the right to hold, power. These male characters are the non-foreigners, namely they were perceived as similar to the authors/the culture which produced the frame story and they were probably white men, although not necessarily as white as Westerners because they were of Arab/Eastern origin; nevertheless, they were certainly non-black, otherwise the text would have not stressed the different complexion of the black slaves. In any case, the stranger/foreigner is associated with the woman since they are allies in a sexual partnership against the dominant males; however, they are bound together by a liaison that is mortal because it leads both partners to death and also spreads chaos and disorder within society. As some readings suggest, it is a relationship which does not produce children, i.e., it does not ensure the continuation of life. The frame story, therefore, seems to cast a negative judgment on this type of illicit and very transgressive relationship, removing any possibility to interpret it as an attempt by women, and also by foreign and subaltern men, to escape oppression and find love/freedom wherever they want to. However, the text hardly leaves room for this hypothesis as the queens' behaviour is depicted in such a way that the search for love seems to be the most unlikely of the reasons for their unfaithfulness. Undoubtedly, the written versions of the frame story as they stand today seem to lead the reader to seek in anger, vengeance, wickedness, trickery and destiny the reasons for women's treachery, using the image of the cultural other as the embodiment of an erroneous relationship. It would be interesting, although impossible, to know whether the oral versions of the frame story at the time suggested a different interpretation of female treachery, and how the view regarding the cultural other, as well as the liaison with him, changed if related by a woman.

Curiously, the readings written in Arabic do not focus attention to the questions of foreignness and of the association of blackness with strangeness. For instance, al-'Aṭṭār explains that the character of the black slave represents the transition from the

matriarchal to the patriarchal society according to his very particular historical point of view. He is the man who is under mother's power and then liberates himself by humiliating the woman through the betrayal and the subsequent killing of many other females. In this perspective, the black man is not the other of the white man/man in power, as the only opposition in force here is that between the sexes. It should be remembered that within pre-modern Arabic literature, the image of the black person has varied, sometimes being overtly stereotyped and sometimes being counterbalanced with positive black heroes (Nussbaum 2007). This has reasons which, before being literary, are social and cultural, and are connected with problematic views of black people in the history of the Arab-Islamic world which have oscillated between inclusion and exclusion (Sharawi 2008). Since the very beginning of the Islamic caliphate, the position of black people in society was complex. For example, the pre-Islamic conflicts with the Abyssinians conquering the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula left their mark in the Arabs' memory. Likewise, the turmoil due to the presence of a community of black slaves (the *Zanj*) in south Iraq represented a threat to the stability of the caliphate. In addition to this, the burden of the (Jewish, Christian and also Islamic) exegetical tradition relating to Noah's curse of his son Ham, the progenitor of the dark races, whose black skin was considered a punishment by God, relegated these people to the lower echelons of society (Bashear 2021, 14–16). Notwithstanding all of this, in the course of time there have been attempts to reduce the stigma against blacks for the sake of the egalitarian status that characterises all the members of the Islamic umma (community), whatever their ethnic or geographical provenance, and because of this “unlike the historical experience of slavery and post-slavery in North America, no distinct de jure colour divide ever developed” in the Islamic world (Scaglioni 2020, 120). In light of the above, the omission of the delicate theme of the perception of blackness, as well as of racism, within the readings written in Arabic may be directly or indirectly linked to the question of the othering of the black person within Arabic literature.

To conclude this discussion, it could be important to highlight a few more points. Given that the division between English and Arabic readings is almost exclusively linguistic, that some critics writing in English are Arab, and that Arab authors often rely on Western theoretical frameworks, a sharp distinction between the

two groups along the lines of the linguistic, geographical and cultural background is neither admissible nor meaningful. Contributions have been contrasted in relation to the literary theories which they have adopted, to the versions of the frame story which they have used, to their positioning towards Shahrāzād and the relationship with the other sex, and to the narrative themes and motifs which they have treated. However, it is possible to notice a tendency which seems to be unique to the readings written in Arabic; one has the impression that some Arab critics feel the necessity to justify the presence of the AN within Arabic literature, as if it were an alien body in it, or as if it would not entirely correspond to the canons of that tradition. This sense of unfamiliarity that appears to surround the AN is due to its themes (sometimes deemed as immoral), to its language, to its convoluted textual history and also to the fact that the text was “rediscovered” and, to some extent appropriated, by the Western world, and this has possibly produced a kind of detachment or simply a feeling of increased extraneousness towards the collection in the Arab readers –at least, for its written versions. To this feeling, in their readings critics have responded in many ways: by stressing the connections of the AN with pre-modern Arabic literature, and particularly with a literature seen as pure and devoid of immorality even when concerning sexual matters (Khiḍr I, Suwaylam II); by offering historical (or pseudo historical) perspectives about matriarchy and patriarchy (al-‘Aṭṭār III), and by placing the collection within the tradition of Ancient Egyptian literature (Ṭalib V). These perspectives, which seem to reveal an uncomfortable position occupied by the AN within Arab-Islamic culture, alternate with feminist and gender-based contributions which stress the fact that the AN is a product of male writers and, therefore, offers a male representation of Shahrāzād and the other female characters (al-‘Aṭṭār III, Maḥmūd IV). In this respect, the idea of the betrayal by Shāhriyār’s wife as a response to his alleged homosexuality is one of the critics’ attempts to explain her conduct and provide a less negative depiction of womanhood (Maḥmūd IV). Likewise, Shahrāzād’s noble aim is offered as a justification for the disputable tactic she employs, considering that she offers the king stories containing negative images of women which seem to justify his fears about them (Ḥamīd VI). Upon closer examination, the contributions by the Arab critics reveal, therefore, a multifaceted relationship with the AN that reflects the complex collective reception of the collection in the Arab world, and

particularly the question of its collocation within the Arabic literary heritage. The fact that the AN has become popular as a result of the attention paid by the West to it and by means of the many translations in Western languages through which it has circulated, has clearly influenced the approach to the text within Arabic criticism. In this respect, the various responses provided by Arab critics regarding how this work found its way into medieval Arabic literature and what place the AN has today in Arabic literature are to be seen as part of a critical process of reappropriation of this piece of world literature and of its reinsertion, under new premises, within the horizon of Arabic literature.

## Conclusion

“Is it possible to recover the true meaning of the ‘Arabian Nights?’” This is the title of a short essay that appeared in 1868 in which Bernard Cracroft discusses the interpretation of the AN and of any work of literature the creation of which is separated from the present by a considerable time interval. In his contribution, Cracroft (1868, 2:73) ponders the possibility of understanding the sense of literary texts, as well as of looking at them in the same way as their contemporary readers did, if the “superficial glaze” of that literature is no longer transparent due to the passage of time. He poses the question about whether it is any easier for those who belong to a society from which a certain text emanates/emanated to get closer to its original meaning than for others, and considering that time is a barrier affecting both descendants and non-descendants of a certain literary culture in the same way. In the field of hermeneutics, the search for the correct meaning within the text meant for a long time only to find what Cracroft (1868, 2:78) calls “true mark of the author[s]”, often resulting in the neglect of the reader’s understanding of and lively response to the literary work. Only with the advent of post-modern theories, has the idea of an absolute and a-priori (i.e., prior to reading) truth within the text, as well as of the centrality of the author’s intention in defining meanings, been put aside, and attention has been paid to the reception process and to the production of numerous interpretations. Multiple interpretations are generated, on the one hand, by the so-called natural “ambiguity”<sup>235</sup> of a literary text, i.e., its intrinsically original use of language that produces extra meanings (Eco 1997, 292). On the other hand, “the question of how people know what is going on in a text is a special case of the question of how people know what is going on in the world at all” (De Beaugrande 1980, 30), and this means that the reader is placed in a specific time and context and is equipped with certain knowledge, expectations and sensitivity which inform his/her response to the text.

Reading/listening, understanding and interpreting are the three cognitive activities at the basis of the process of reception, resulting in the subject’s representation and signification of a text. As representation implies the translation and

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<sup>235</sup> Ambiguity indicates linguistic and literary phenomena having more than one possible interpretation or meaning (Bode 1991, 73).

transformation of a thing/object into something else, i.e., an icon, a sign, a symbol, an image,<sup>236</sup> the understanding that one has of language, that is of the relationship between sign/symbol and its origin (the thing/reality), is crucial to form and define meanings (1998). The language of literary works is primarily symbolic and metaphorical, in other words, it is “ambiguous”, i.e., it conveys messages which are inventive and which consider the greater possibilities of meaning compared to those generally recognised by normative use (Eco 1997, 292). Metaphorical language, therefore, “suspends the logic [*of grammar*]”, as well as of denotation (literal meaning), and this allows the reader to explore the polysemy of words and sentences by proposing new referents (De Man 1979, 6–7).<sup>237</sup> In this respect, literary criticism, through its various schools and theories, is born as a field of research to suggest new paradigms according to which the “potentially unlimited” possibilities of signification of a text, namely its different readings, can be revealed (Eco 1994, 6,11).

Different readings are deemed important because they disclose different ways of seeing one text, and this has crucial social and human implications because, as Pollock (2016, 27) states, reading “differently means, potentially, learning to be different” – perhaps, a better phrase here would be “becoming different” to imply a process of transformation within the reader which is not merely rational but also includes one’s own sensitivity and perception. The relationship between who receives and who has/have produced the text is a living one because alive is the reader who is stimulated by the reading, and alive is the author’s/authors’ thought within the text, being still thought-provoking. In this respect, and to offer a more modern view compared to Cracroft’s assumptions, it is useful to quote once more Pollock’s words (2016, 24) regarding the real aim of philology, the goal of which is not to establish which interpretation is true or closer to an eternal truth, but “to understand it in its

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<sup>236</sup> These terms change among authors and the various semiotic theories. For example Peirce, who made great contributions in logic and the philosophy of language, distinguishes between icons, indices and symbols, although he considers the first two of second philosophical importance (Atkin 2013).

<sup>237</sup> Metaphorical language has the characteristic of representing many simultaneous ideas. Metaphors are intrinsically daring (*ardite*), namely, non-exact (Leopardi 2017, 2417; 2468), and yet they are coherent (Berto 2017).

existence as such and in relation to the text that produced it.” He states that “if we accept the fact of how we actually do read, we will have to temper the absolutist notion of truth (that there is only one meaning and I have found it)” (2016, 25). This also indicates that one must consider what the text meant for its contemporaries and embrace both ancient and modern understandings as part of the multifaceted process of the meaning-making of literary texts.

This research project has explored literary criticism in relation to the frame story of the AN not to seek the true mark of its author – as one author presumably never existed – nor its true meaning, but rather to show the complexity and heterogeneity of the interpretations that have emerged from this piece of narrative. In order to achieve this goal, this study has attempted to answer three main questions: how has the relationship with the other sex at the core of the frame story of the AN been interpreted in academic literature since the late 1970s? How has the opening narrative of the AN been reshaped by a pluralist literary criticism which intends to provide topical interpretations of the frame story? Where are the academic readings situated in relation to each other? Whether this current study has reached, at least partially, its objectives or not, it has ventured to propose an original path of investigation for the scrutiny of otherness and specifically of the relationship with the other sex within the frame story the AN, combining theoretical reflection, bibliographical research and textual experience. As previously indicated, despite the huge number of studies on the opening narrative of the AN research on its criticism, i.e., on the “criticism of the criticism”, is lacking, and this makes the scrutiny of the principal interpretative proposals of the frame story a difficult process. Moreover, particular attention must be paid to the fact that literary analyses rely on one or more versions and/or translations of the frame story for their investigation and, therefore, do not encompass all the variations of this piece of narrative. This is especially relevant for a work such as the AN, the convoluted textual history of which requires the critic to always consider multiple readings as endemic in the reception of the text and built upon the absence of an original, unique version.

This current study has offered a compendium of a selected number of modern and contemporary readings which scrutinise otherness and the relationship with the other sex within the opening narrative of the AN. As previously discussed, following

a major turn in literary criticism in the 1970s, this research field became more socio-political, namely more attentive to questions of culture and knowledge production, and, consequently, more interdisciplinary. As a result, the scholarship on the AN and its frame story has also produced new readings concerning socio-cultural, psychological, political (postcolonial), psychological, feminist and gender issues. In order to discuss and map the positioning of these contributions in relation to each other and to the thematic focus of this research, the present work has been divided into three parts. Part I has discussed the history of the AN, its many versions and translations, the question of its literary genre and its connections with other works of the same period. Additionally, part I has also included a chapter on the concept of otherness and its development in history in order to theoretically frame the meanings that this notion has acquired over the course of time, and to explain the way in which it is used in this research project. Part II has offered a linguistic and textual analysis based on a contrastive approach that aims to show how the relationship with the other sex is practically represented in the different Arabic versions of the AN and in its main English translations. As the investigation in part II has evidenced, the different Arabic versions of the frame story can be considered as the first level of textual interpretation. In this respect, at the micro-linguistic level variations in the vocabulary testify to diverse interpretative choices of the subject of discourse that is named using different terms and, consequently, may convey slightly different meanings. In some instances, these differences appear to be due to conscious decisions, while in others they seem to be the result of copyists' errors in the manuscripts, all accounting for a sharp distinction between the text(s) of Bulaq and Calcutta II on the one hand, and of Mahdi's edition on the other. Other important variations between these two groups generally concern the number of narrative details, the characterization of male and female figures, and the presence of eschatological and religious elements within the plot. Particularly relevant are the differences relating to the description of female unfaithfulness, to Shahrāzād's motivations for marrying the king, to the space dedicated to the phenomenology of male illness and to the kings' reply to female unfaithfulness. All these variations, therefore, draw attention to certain narrative elements, and this may result in various interpretations of otherness and of the relationship with the other sex. Likewise, translations also add a further interpretative

tier to the frame story, and specifically those of Lane and Burton, who greatly altered the text according to their own vision of the Arab world.

Finally, part III has presented a detailed scrutiny of a sample of readings of the frame story both in English and Arabic, which have been investigated in light of the type of literary criticism applied to discuss otherness, and also in relation to the version of the frame story used – if indicated. Most of the contributions provided have focused on Shahrāzād, discussing who she is, what she represents and how this female literary image dialogues with the present and with the events, challenges and feelings generated by the modern era. The critical interpretations which have been analysed in this study are included in a wider discussion regarding the heroine of the AN and which also involves writers from both the Arab and the non-Arab world. Khoury (2016, 122–24) describes the four main tropes according to which writers have generally rewritten and modelled Shahrāzād in their works: the skillful manager; the sacrificing woman; the odalisque sold to slavery, and the seducer with her eloquence. In this respect, there are some extreme opinions – both positive and negative on Shahrāzād’s role –, especially by female Arab writers. Mernissi (2001), as previously indicated, has a very high regard of Shahrāzād and of her capability of establishing a true, emancipative rapport between the sexes. Also the American born writer Alia Yunis believes that Shahrāzād is a feminist *ante litteram*, and well ahead her Western equivalents, “Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel [who] were self-absorbedly waiting around to be rescued” (2013, 398). By contrast, the Lebanese writer Joumana Haddad is very critical of Shahrāzād’s feminism because “It does not teach women resistance and rebellion, as is implied when the character of Scheherazade is discussed and analysed. It rather teaches them concession and negotiation over their basic RIGHTS” (2010, 142). Whatever the case, considering that the AN in its written forms is surely the product of male writers and compilers, it should not be forgotten that the representation of Shahrāzād is influenced by the male mentality of the time, as well as by the socio-cultural-religious context in which the AN emerged. This means that oral versions of the stories may have circulated in completely different forms, as Mernissi (2001, 1–20) suggests when she refers to the tale of *The Lady with the Feather Dress* – found in Bulaq and Calcutta II – in the version told to her by her grandmother Yasmina, who changed its ending to speak of female independence against male will

to control women through marriage. Nevertheless, the rewritings of the frame story and their interpretive revision have not been considered here, for these narrative reinterpretations fall out with the scope of this current project.

This study has evidenced that sexual and gendered otherness, as the principal thematic focus of the frame story, is expressed in the rapport between Shahrāzād and Shāhriyār, and also in all the other sexual relationships between men and women within the opening narrative of the AN. Far from being limited to this aspect, otherness, however, intersects with other types of alterity, as it is a concept that can be applied to all those realities and circumstances in which human differences are perceived and diversity is acknowledged. In many cases, and certainly within the frame story and its academic literature, the idea of diversity that is linked to otherness is less concerned with the individual's subjectivity and more with the human categories that persons (are supposed to) represent. In other words, if at the individual level diversity is embodied in the unique development of one's own story and subjectivity, at the collective level the single person becomes the representative of a group whose members are perceived and then represented as others. In this way, identity is reduced to a list of (often fixed) characteristics and belongings, while diversity may become a tool that serves to divide people into groups and to classify them according to categories which establish their values and importance, as well as their higher or lower social level. It has, therefore, been demonstrated that within the frame story sexual and gendered otherness compounds other types of otherness concerning class, culture, foreignness/strangeness and race/ethnicity, the latter two pairs being included in what has been referred to in this study as cultural otherness. These elements contribute to define and represent the images of the man, the woman, the king, the slave, the foreigner/stranger, who in this particular case is the black person. These representations have provoked reactions, responses and interpretations that are due to the way in which they have been understood and in which language has been decoded within the literary text(s).

It must be remembered that the present research has many limitations, as previously noted in the introduction to this work, the most important of which is possibly the fact that the sample size of the readings which has been analysed is small. Fifteen studies in English have been included, these being fairly representative of the

main interpretative trends within the literary criticism of the AN written in English since the late 1970s. By contrast, the readings in Arabic are minimal if compared to the high volume of contributions that have appeared mainly in literary magazines from the Arab world during the same period of time and which are still unexplored. In this respect, one should note that the aim of this study was not to include as much academic literature on the topic as possible, but to offer an original research method that could be applied not only to the AN but to any work of literature. This contrastive method of analysis combines a textual and linguistic scrutiny of the original text (or texts) with a critical investigation of its literature to embrace multiple aspects involved in the process of meaning-making in which interpretations originate. The current research has proved this alternative model of analysis to be successful with texts characterised by such a complex textual history as the AN, and may, therefore, be used to approach other literary texts with a similar structure and of which several translations and, therefore, interpretations, are available.

To conclude, the implications of this research are many and can be expanded in several directions. Firstly, it is to be noted that this study is “unfinished” because there are still so many readings that could be included in it; further investigations of the academic literature on the frame story could offer additional perspectives on the various responses to this text, specifically concerning literary criticism in Arabic, which remains still understudied by critics. Secondly, a subsequent research endeavour may concentrate on the relationship between the East and the West as it is perceived through the lens of the AN, the textual history of which is deeply interconnected with the cultural phenomenon usually named Orientalism. In this respect, although the role of Orientalism in translating, disseminating and perceiving the AN in the West has been extensively analysed, its influence on the Arab critics’ perception and reception of this collection has not been adequately assessed, and further research could be done in this direction. Thirdly, the representation of the other, and specifically the other sex, within the frame story that is known today was almost certainly produced by male compilers and authors; however, it is recognised that the AN also circulated orally, although it is difficult to say whether the collection first appeared by word of mouth. If it is not possible to discover how the frame story developed in its non-written forms in the medieval Arab world, an investigation of the transformations of the theme of

otherness in the modern oral versions of the frame story could highlight how male and female storytellers have changed the representation of the other sex profiting from the ephemeral nature of the spoken word. Lastly, the critical compendium which has been offered here may support the academic<sup>238</sup> and non-academic teaching of the AN and its frame story to discuss a variety of topical subjects, such as the power of female voices, female agency, cultural differences, intercultural dialogue. Most importantly, it could be used as a text that helps dismantle the “us-versus-them”, as well as the East-West, mindset (Talahite-Moodley 2016, 114).

An important lesson to learn from the study of the frame story of the AN and of its literary criticism is that otherness has several nuances, and this is something that this research has revealed and allows the reader to fully experience. For this reason, it seems to me that the use of sexual and gendered otherness both as a theme and an analytical concept in no way risks to reduce otherness to merely a binary opposition. This holds true even when there are only two individuals (a man and a woman) involved in a relationship because the elements that come into play and influence this rapport supersede its two participants – there are two individuals, there is the relationship and there is the (real, external, social) context in which this relationship is immersed. For all these reasons, I hope to continue with this research and to further develop the contrastive approach described in this study which proves, at least in part, to be an original contribution to the scholarship on the frame story of the AN.

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<sup>238</sup> See Samatar (2015) and Talahite-Moodley (2016) for the teaching of the AN in academic contexts.

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