



# TURKEY, LOOKING BEHIND AND BEFORE

Edited by William H. Taylor

*ACIP*

# TURKEY, LOOKING BEHIND AND BEFORE

Edited By  
William Taylor

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## **TURKEY, LOOKING BEHIND AND BEFORE**

"Looking Behind and Before" is one of the descriptions applied to the figure Janus of Roman mythology. This collection of essays from over 40 significant Turkish academics does exactly this. How the present is shaped by the past, and how the future is moulded by the present are the key themes of these important interdisciplinary articles in the fields of architecture & design, art & cinema, literature, social sciences, and linguistics & etymology.

All identities - personal, corporate and national - are partially defined by the past and, at the same time, constantly changing. This is no less true for Turkey than any other nation, and at times the dichotomy between past and present can be seen as a sharp polarity, as in the case of contemporary Turkey.

The articles presented in this volume offer important contributions to the question of Turkish identity in original and significant ways, through the different and complementary disciplines of architecture, art, literature, language, and social sciences. They are presented for the first time in English to reach a wider readership, as they so richly deserve.

I am grateful to each and every author for their stimulating and important contributions, and warmly commend this volume to all who wish Turkey well in the twenty-first century, as it looks behind to its Ottoman past and before to its rightful place amongst the community of nations.

William Taylor, London, 2016.

# Turks in The Thousand and One Nights

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**Abstract.** The Thousand and One Nights is one of the best tales of Arabic Literature. Living its maturity in the period of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, in approximately 8th century, The Thousand and One Nights is a product of common comprehension of nations near Baghdad like Chinese, Persian, Indian, and Turk etc. Among the tales which have been translated into almost all languages there are also widely known tales such as Aladdin and His Magic Lamp, and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. The Thousand and One Nights, having a rich heritage of Arabic language, includes nations given above and mentions about Turks in most parts of the tales.

In this study, The Thousand and One Nights will be evaluated in terms of Arabic Language and the traces of Turks will be pursued.

Keywords: Turks in the Thousand and One Nights, The Thousand and One Nights.

## 20. Arabian Nights (One Thousand and One Nights) and Its Historical Evolution

“Arabian Nights” is an Arabian folktale corpus with its unique narration, tone and interesting contents, which is full of entertaining legends adorned with giants and dwarves, and consisting of at least one thousand and one stories.

In these stories where time and space are intertwined, the adventures of giants, fairies, ifrits, dwarves, thieves and highwaymen, along with the history, tradition, lifestyle of emperors, and other people are narrated. These stories narrate mostly the socio-cultural and political life of the Abbasid era. In addition, they narrate the socio-cultural condition of locations such as Baghdad, Egypt, Damascus, etc., in history. One of the reasons why these stories are named “One Thousand and One Nights” is that they have emerged in the course of a long period, and that there is a “lucky meaning” attributed by Arabs to the number “elf/thousand”. The fact that these stories centralize on the reign of Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid and in the vicinity of Baghdad is among the reflections of Arabic life and Arabic imagination on Arabian Nights.<sup>23</sup>

Most of these tales are in the form of fables, and all events have been narrated by the animals subject to anthropomorphism.

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<sup>23</sup> Nihâd Sâmî Banarlı, Resimli Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 1/131.

## 21. The Origin of Arabian Nights

It is not correct to say anything exact pertaining to the origin and the author of the “Arabian Nights”. It seems that these stories did not originate from a single person or at a specific time. Because, we encounter various narrative styles and time spans when we review these tales. This shows us that these stories and tales have not been collected in a book by the narration of a single storyteller. Besides, different tones and scientific depths indicate this very clearly. People studying on the “Arabian Nights” have divided these tales into four groups:

**1st Group:** Core period of the “Arabian Nights”. This period, which is also labeled as the mythological period and in which tales are Indian and Persian tales, is the one in which tales are in their core form. These tales, which are also called “Hezar efsane/A Thousand Stories” and to which night conversations have constituted an origin, have been created and made up during this period. These are tales which have been written with the translations from Persian, Indian and Greek or made up by the people staying by the sultan. The original of these tales introduced into the Arabic as the “Arabian Nights” is the “hezar efsane/a thousand tales” in Persian.<sup>24</sup> On this subject, on

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<sup>24</sup> Mes‘udî, Murûcu’z-Zeheb, 2/260.

the other hand, Ibn Nedim (d. 385) states that Persians are the first to collect these tales from the language of animals, and that Arabian scholars have adapted them according to the characteristics of the Arabic and categorized, and gave aforementioned tales a novel identity. Moreover, Ibn Nedim argues that Alexander is the first person to organize night conversations for the first time.<sup>25</sup>

According to these things mentioned above, “Arabian Nights” originates from the series of tales named “hezar efsane”, which is of Persian origin. However, with the influx of tales that are known among the Arabs and that of Arabic origin in time, these tales have been named “a thousand and one tales” instead of “hezar efsane/binbir masal”. Likewise, there are tales in the Persian “hezar efsane” which are not of Persian origin, and they are thought to be of Indian, Greek or Arabic origin. Whichever origin they are of, these folk tales, whether in verbal or written form, have been introduced into the Arab Literature in the Abbasid period, and collected in books in several versions by Arab scholars in a period from 4th to 10th century according to hijri calendar. These collected tales form the core, in other words, the seed of the “Arabian Nights”, and this seed will develop with the time passing. These tales have emerged in two variants: Egypt variant and Baghdad variant.

**2. Baghdad Group:** These tales we encounter as a corpus consist of old Arabic folktales that have been passed on through generations, created especially by Muslims that have lived in the Abbasid era, and that dwell on the historical persona and events that have occurred during that era. These tales mostly exhibit the characteristics of the Harun al-Rashid period (786-809). Ibn Nedim states that the tales which are called “thousand nights”, which do not have any kind of connection in between, and which have been transferred and compiled from the Arabs, Persians, Greeks and other nations by Cehşiyari (d. 331/942-43) consist of 480 tales, that each tale consists of 50 leaves, and that Cehşiyari added tales until the number of them have counted up to a thousand, and continues: “There were a group of people before, making up stories from the voices of people, animals and birds. They are Abdullah b. el-Mukaffa’, Sehl b. Harun ve Ali b. Davud.<sup>26</sup> In addition,

Ibn Nedim mentions the titles of many books on this subject.

Stories mentioned in this group have been brought together in 4th and 5th centuries in hijri calendar. With the centuries passing and events taking place in the Muslim world, names of famous sultans and scholars have also occupied space in these tales. It is possible to encounter quotes from Qur’an and Sunnah as well in these tales which include the epic events of Muslim people. It might be stated that tales of this period have had an Islamic form compared to old Persian and Greek tales.

**3. Egypt Group:** Researchers state that the “Arabian Nights” have assumed a new form, and have reached the greatest extent in terms of content in this era that corresponds to the mid-span of the 5th century in hijri calendar. In this era, changes in the names of characters are encountered along with repeated stories in the corpus, and stories that had recently been made up have also been included in these tales. Stories that had been created in Egypt and Damascus, and that carry the characteristics of the Fatimid, the Mamluk and the Ottoman eras have been added to the book. These stories which have been formed between the 5th and the 10th centuries in hijri calendar consist of Islamic traditions and oriental legends. Tales that fall into the Egypt group are assessed in two groups: The old section that ends by the 8th century in hijri calendar and the new section that ends by the 10th century in hijri calendar. The old section tales have a nice tone and include characteristics such as morals, compassion, mercy, etc. The new section, which is the second one, consists of tales crowded with cheat, deception, lie, etc., being weak in its tone.

Today, the book named “Elf leyle ve leyle/One Thousand and One Nights” has been formed with all the variants aforementioned being brought together. Indeed, there are editions of this book that are different, great or small in terms of its volume, but the book mentioned hereby is the one containing one thousand and one tales and having different editions in two volumes in the Arab world. Moreover, the most famous one of these tales is “Sindibad”.

Researchers state that this book has the following characteristics:

The book consists of folktales and this entertains the audience.

<sup>25</sup> İbn Nedîm, el-Fihrist, p.436.

<sup>26</sup> İbn Nedîm, see ibid, 2/260-261.

Stories in the book express the socio-cultural condition of various societies in various time spans.

The character named “Scheherazade” and the events she goes through are at the center of the book.

The book is not one to be considered as a literary example by the people interested in literature; however, it is worth considering in respect of interesting events it contains.

The exaggerated narration of the tales and the relationship between the nature and the characters are worth considering.

## **22. The Tone of the Book**

22.1. The tone of the book varies between different parts. There are numerous differences especially between the introduction part and the Baghdad part. This is observed in the use of expressions, secis (rhymes within sentences), unnecessary words and phrases, and in characterizations. In Egypt part, on the other hand, the use of masculine wording, morally inappropriate wording, and inverted and sleazy sentences are present. Besides, the general tone of the book is nice, comprehensible and clear. These tales, in which the use of Fusha and colloquial language variations of the Arabic could be observed, are far from vanity and obliqueness.

22.2. Use of poems in the book stands out frequently. These poems are mostly comprehensible poems. It is possible to run into poems prosodies of which are flawed among these poems that are flawless in respect of aruz wezni. Included poems are ones in accordance with the theme of the subject.

22.3. It is also likely to observe verses and hadith in tales. These verses and hadith that have been propounded in accordance with the development of the subject are included to reinforce the subject.

## **23. Contents of the Book**

23.1. In “Arabian Nights”, disputes between people, mythology and the old culture are included. However, this book does not constitute a historical document. Because there are many references in this book to imaginary events which do not comply with the reality by mentioning mythological scenes as well as ifrits, giants, genies and fairies. Most of the book consists of superstitions and legends. There are maxims and hadith as well as didactic and entertaining tales.

23.2. Ifrits and genies have been mentioned in the book often. While the genie of His Holiness Suleiman has a distinguished position, and ifrits undertake the mission of love, magic and entertaining the people, genies are to perform rather spectacular and evil activities.

23.3. Women assume an active role in many respects in the book, and plays the most distinct role in love and affinity. In addition, there is an emphasis on that women have an outstanding intelligence.

#### **24. The Role of Arabian Nights in World Literature**

24.1. It is not correct to relate the “Arabian Nights” only with the Arab literature. Although these tales have exhibited a development in the Arab world, the origin of these tales are Persian, Indian and Greek cultures. Moreover, these tales have been translated into different languages and brought in to the world literature.<sup>27</sup> The first person to translate this book in the Western world was the French orientalist Antoine Galland (1646-1715). Later on, German Max Habicht (1775-1839) and French Jean Charles Mardrus (1868-1949) have introduced certain parts of the book by translating them. Again, as much as we could identify, the following scientists have grown an interest in the “Arabian Nights”: Henry Ternes, Richard Burton, Krymski, Enolittman, McNaughton...

24.2. Ahmed Nazîf, Selâmi Münir Yurdatap, Raif Karadag, Alim Serif Onaran have been the prominent figures among those introduced these tales into the Turkish world. Nevertheless, certain parts of the book have been translated into Turkish in various periods by other people.

#### **25. Turks in the Arabian Nights**

26. Many nations have been mentioned in the Arabian Nights. This is closely related to the locations these tales have originated at. Although most of these tales embody mythological characteristics in terms of time, location and people, locations at which these tales have come to life have given different identities to these tales. The leading reason among those triggering it is the locations at which these tales have been narrated and narrators of them. These narrators, who are mostly of Arabian descent, are narrators aware of the Islamic world and the neighboring nations. Thus, it is possible to encounter the names of many nations in these tales which have developed in locations such as Baghdad, Egypt, Damascus, which are Islamic centers. One of these nations is the Turkish nation. Turks are mentioned in tales mostly when the name of Anatolia have been called. However, there is another reason for Turks to have their name on these tales; that is, Turks adopting Islam in masses during the Abbasid era and having a say in the administration of the Abbasid state.

26.1. It is also likely to encounter Turkish words in the Arabian Nights. It is claimed that these words have been introduced into these tales through Mongols.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For detailed information on this subject, see, Süleyman Tülücü, “Binbir Gece Masalları Üzerine”, A.Ü.İ.F. Dergisi, p.22, v.7.

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<sup>28</sup> The book One Thousand and One Nights, (The inlet section of the book), 1/11.

26.2. As much as we could have identified, Turks are mentioned in several parts of the Arabian Nights. Turks have been mentioned in the 88th, 89th, 90th, 95th, and 96th night tales. These are the ones including the adventures of King Omar Ben En-Numan and his two children, Sherkan and Zoul-mekan. The endeavors of Muslims to conquer Constantinople are narrated in these tales. Hereby, armies have moved into the Anatolia from the Arab world and thus, Turks have been encountered. While Turks are sometimes narrated as the supporting forces for the Islam armies, they have fought on the opposite flank from time to time. At certain points, it is possible to encounter the name Turk and Turkish people in accordance with the narration of the tale. In addition, the names Anatolia and Constantinople/Istanbul have been called many times, and rivers such as Seyhun, Ceyhun and Fırat have been mentioned.

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## 27. Conclusion

27.1. Tales of A Thousand and One Nights has occupied an important position in Arab literature, despite being a mutual work of the Middle East and Far East nations. Mythology and life are intertwined in these tales. These tales, adorned with giants, dwarfs, genies, fairies, etc., are claimed to be made up by Scheherazade. It is possible to encounter Arabic poem along with verses and adages in these tales, in which we observe the traces of the Harun al-Rashid era mostly. These tales of Arabic origin in the form of two voluminous books have been translated into many languages of the world today. Turks, as well as many other nations, have been mentioned in these tales.

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