

Fall 2020 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
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Shahrazad, (Vanishing) Superhero of the *1001 Nights*

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Shahrazad (Scheherazade/Sherazade/Sheherazad): Storyteller of the *1001 (Arabian) Nights*.

Dinarzad (Dunyazade): Shahrazad's sister. Accompanies her to Shahrayar's palace and requests a story each night once her sister and the king have finished dallying.

Shahrayar: King of India and Indochina. Alerted by his brother to his wife's betrayal, he subsequently determines that all women are treacherous and begins to marry a virgin each night and put her to death the following morning. Later, Shahrazad's husband

Shahzaman: King Shahrayar's brother and king of Samarkand. About to depart on a visit to his older brother, he catches his wife in the arms of another and falls into a funk until he sees his brother betrayed in an even more elaborate manner.

A few key dates in the complex textual history of Shahrazad and her stories:

10th Century: First recorded mentions of Shahrazad and the *1001 Nights* in two sources: Bagdadi book trader and bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim's catalogue of extant books, the *Kitab al-Fihrist* (938) and historian and geographer al-Masudi's universal history *Meadows of Gold* [*Muruj al-dhahab*].

14th Century: Century to which the earliest extant Arabic manuscript of the *Nights* has been dated. Held in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, it was purchased in Aleppo and is incomplete. It inspired the first European language translation, the Frenchman Antoine Galland's *Les milles et une nuits*.

1704-1717 Antoine Galland publishes the first European-language translation of the *1001 Nights* in twelve volumes. In them, King Shahrayar renounces his plan of vengeance after Shahrazad has told him stories for 1001 Nights. They live happily ever after.

1885 Richard F. Burton publishes his (in)famous version of the *Nights*, *A Thousand Night and a Night*, allegedly inspired by an Egyptian manuscript. In Burton's translation, King Shahrayar renounces his vengeance after he notices that Shahrazad has borne him three sons. He marries her in an elaborate ceremony and her sister Dinarzade marries his brother Shahzaman.

1990: Husain Haddawy publishes an English translation of the 14th century Arabic manuscript that influenced Galland. Haddawy bases his translation on the 1984 Arabic edition of the manuscript by Muhsin Mahdi, known as the Leiden edition. In this non-literal rendition of a *1001 Nights*, Shahrazad keeps talking until, presumably, King Shahrayar comes to his sense.

Suggested Reading:

Suzanne Gauch, Preface, *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

Ferial Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996).

Husain Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2008).

Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991)

Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).