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Christian Arabic and Garšūnī Versions of *Sindbad the Sailor*: An Overview

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Abstract

Although the story of "Sindbad the Sailor" is one of the best-known tales of the *Arabian Nights*, many readers are still unaware of the fact that this story was not originally part of the *Arabian Nights* and the oldest Arabic versions we know were preserved in independent manuscripts often circulated within the Arabic Christian milieu. This article aims to present six Garšūnī (Arabic Christian) versions of *Sindbad* hitherto neglected (i.e. MSS Mardin CFMM 306, ff. 65b–109a; Gotha HB 2652, ff. 8b–35b; Aleppo SOAA 124 M, ff. 85b–162a; Birmingham Mingana syr. 146, ff. 45a–65a; Birmingham Mingana syr. 463, ff. 79a–121b; and London British Library Or. 4437, ff. 109–169), as well as an overview of the Arabic corpus of the independent versions of the story. The study is part of the research project entitled "La formazione del romanzo in area vicino-orientale nel periodo post-classico (1200–1800): i Sette Viaggi di Sindbād il marinaio", carried out at the University of Turin.

Keywords: *Sindbad the Sailor, Arabian Nights, Garshuni, Arabic Christian literature, Antoine Galland, Pétis de la Croix, Hanna Diyab, Louis M. Langlès*

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The story of Sindbad the Sailor is one of the best-known tales of the *Arabian Nights*. Not only does it enjoy widespread fame thanks to its many translations and adaptations in literature, cinema and even in cartoons, but it has also been intensively studied by scholars of various disciplines. Since the late nineteenth century and more consistently over the twentieth century, the geographical, ethnographic and folkloric value of the story has been pointed out and its remarkable literary links with travel literature, both Arabic and Greek, have raised great interest. However, despite the fame of *Sindbad*, many readers are still unaware of the fact that the story was not originally part of the *Arabian Nights* and the oldest Arabic versions we know were preserved in independent manuscripts often kept and circulated within the Arabic Christian milieu. This article deals with these independent Arabic versions of *Sindbad* and aims to highlight the links between their manuscript transmission and the Near Eastern Christian communities, especially in Syria. In particular, six Garšūnī manuscripts hitherto neglected will be presented, as well as a recapitulation of the actual corpus of the independent Arabic versions of *Sindbad*. This study is part of an ongoing research project entitled "La formazione del romanzo in area vicino-orientale nel periodo post-classico (1200–1800): i Sette Viaggi di Sindbād il marinaio", carried out at the University of Turin (coordinator Francesca Bellino,[1] Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici). The project is aimed to check and study the textual transmission of the independent *Story of Sindbad the Sailor* in Arabic, Garšūnī and Neo-Aramaic (Ṭurōyō) versions, and its circulation among Christian communities in the Near East.

1 Reading Sindbad: the oldest translations (1701–1814)

The fame of the genre known as "contes de fées" – fairy tales – in Europe originated in the seventeenth century in France, when fantasy stories and folk tales reached the level of a literary genre, thanks especially to Charles Perrault (1628–1703). However, the appearance of the *Arabian Nights* from 1704 sparked a further development in this genre, modelling fantasy in the shape of exoticism. This baffling and stunningly new perspective would go

[1] I wish to thank prof. Francesca Bellino for her helpful advice and the valuable exchanges of views we had on this topic.

on to seduce literary salons and popular audience and inspire writers and artists for more than a century.

1.1 Galland's Nights (1704–1717)

In 1704 the first volume of *Les Mille et une Nuits*[2] translated by Antoine Galland (1646–1715) was published in France. In his dedication of the book to "Madame la marquise d'O, Dame du Palais de Madame la Duchesse de Borgogne", the daughter of the Comte de Guilleragues, Galland made clear that he did not want to publish a scholarly translation of the Arabic texts, since the purpose of his work was to instruct his readers in the manners and customs of the Orient and provide them with lessons in morality. On such a basis, it would be unwise to look for verbatim translation in a work whose purpose is admittedly different, so much so that the author took many liberties with the text in order for his work to find the court's favour and scholars' approval.

From the correspondence of Galland, however, we learn that he started his task from an independent Arabic manuscript of the tale of Sindbad the Sailor that was unrelated to the collection of the *Arabian Nights*. Actually, Galland had no knowledge of that collection of tales at the time and he was told by a correspondent in Syria that the Sindbad's story was part of the far larger collection named *Alf layla wa-layla* ("a thousand and one nights") only shortly before his work went to the press. Since Galland could not find copies of such a work in France, he asked a friend to get the manuscripts for him from Aleppo.[3] This three-volume Arabic collection, divided into two hundred and eighty-two "nights" and containing around thirty-five stories, would become the primary source for Galland in arranging the beginning books of his voluminous work. The Arabic originals, now commonly called the "Galland manuscript" and preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (BnF arabe 3609, 3610 and 3611), have been dated to about the fifteenth century or maybe earlier in the fourteenth.[4] If the date is correct, this manuscript would

[2] *Les mille et une nuit. Contes arabes traduits en français par M. Galland.* Paris: Chez la veuve Claude Barbin, 1704.

[3] P. Casanova, *Notes sur le voyages de Sindbad le marin*, p. 113–198; Abubakr Chraibi, *Galland et les Mille et une nuits and Chronologie et contenu de la 1ère édition des Mille et une nuits de Galland (12 vol., 1704–1717)*, p. 81–91 and p. 164–168.

[4] Zotenberg dated the manuscript to the second half of the fourteenth century on the basis of palaeographic arguments (Cfr. H. Zotenberg, *Notice sur quelques manuscrits des Mille et une*

be the oldest manuscript of the Nights known so far,[5] while the only dated Arabic manuscript of the *Nights* prior to the publication of Galland's work is the MS Vatican ar. 782, which was copied in Syria from the Galland manuscript in the year 1592/93.[6] As for the so-called "Sabbagh's manuscript", it had been regarded for a long time as a faithful copy of a Baghdad manuscript dated 1703 and made by Michel Sabbagh (1775?–1816), scribe and keeper of the Arabic manuscripts at the Bibliothèque du Roi, for the French Arabist Jean-Jacques Caussin de Perceval (1759–1835). As Muhsin Mahdi postulated in his study on the sources of the *Nights*, however, that alleged source was actually a forgery created by Sabbagh himself, who compiled a new collection on the basis of the text of Galland, with additional material from other manuscripts.[7]

1.2 Galland's *Sindbad* (1701)

As Galland himself attested in his correspondence, he came across an independent Arabic version of *Sindbad*, translated it into French by early 1701,[8] and included it in his major work without a change since Galland's Arabic three-volume original of the Nights did not contain a version of the story of Sindbad. Actually, there is no manuscript evidence of an Arabic written edition of the Nights including *Sindbad* prior to the work of Galland. On the contrary, a number of Arabic manuscripts shows the Sindbad tale as an independent story circulating in a distinct form and often included in

nuits et la traduction de Galland, p. 167–320). However, Nöldeke questioned this date in his review of Zotenberg's book and maintained that it was too early. (Cfr. Th. Nöldeke, *Review of Zotenberg*, p. 168–173. Much more recently, H. Grotzfeld, *The Age of the Galland Manuscript of the Nights: Numismatic Evidence for Dating a Manuscript?*, p. 105–121, stated that the Galland manuscript was copied around or after the mid-1400s because of the mention of the coin ashraf, first issued in 1426.

[5] In 1949 Nabia Abbot found a dated paper fragment of the late ninth century rendering the introductory passage of the framing narrative (N. Abbot, *A Ninth-Century Fragment of the Thousand Nights. New Light on the Early History of the Arabian Nights*, p. 129–164). The first documentary evidence for the title *Alf laila wa-laila* comes however from a notebook of a Jewish book dealer from Cairo around the year 1150 (U. Marzolph, R. van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, p. 511).

[6] U. Marzolph, *Relocating the Arabian Nights*, p. 158.

[7] M. Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights: From the Earliest Known Sources*. Vol. 3. *Introduction and Indexes*, p. 61–70.

[8] Galland himself gave this information to his friend Daniel Huet in a letter written February 25, 1701, and now kept in the MS BnF fr. 6138, ff. 130–143. See Casanova, op. cit., p. 126–127.

collections of marvellous tales, hagiographic stories and paradigmatic lives. Galland did not provide exact information of his manuscript source, while testifying that he had translated a stand-alone version of the story. According to many scholars,[9] he based his work mainly on two Arabic manuscripts in his possession and now preserved at the Bibliothèque National of Paris: the isolated MS BnF ar. 3645, 42 ff., entitled *Ḫabar al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa al-Hindbād al-ḥammāl fī zamān al-ḫalīfa*; and the miscellany (containing only two stories) MS BnF ar. 3646 (ff. 1–72a: *Haḏihi qiṣṣat al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa mā ǧarā lahu fī al-sabʿa safarāt*). Both these manuscripts are undated and do not contain useful information to track their origin and authorship. However, both of them show a variant of a religious formula that recurs in almost all independent copies of *Sindbad*, and which both Langlès and Casanova agreed was uncommon in Muslim literary practice.[10] The MS 3645, in particular, ends explicitly with the word *amīn* (f. 42b).

1.3 Pétis de la Croix's *Sindbad* (1701)

François Pétis de la Croix translated into French a *Histoire arabe de Sindabad le marin* in the same year in which Galland completed his version of the story. Pétis's translation, dated 1701, was never published[11] and the author did not provide any information on the Arabic original he used. Nevertheless, he translated the whole colophon from the manuscript: "Ainsi est achevée la copie de l'histoire de Sindabad le Marin le vendredi dixsettiéme Juin de l'an de grace 1672 par les mains du pauvre Aslan, fils du diacre Fathallah, de la maison d'Aoün". As in the case of the *Sindbad*'s copyist in the MS BnF 3667, the openly Christian appointment of "deacon" shows that this text was translated from a further independent Arabic version coming from a Near Eastern Arab Christian milieu. Although the Arabic original has not been found to date, there is another manuscript copy of the work of Pétis, now preserved at the Cleveland Public Library, Ohio. This manuscript (156 leaves) was preserved in the collection of Auguste Chardin and sold in Paris to the book

[9] Mahdi, op. cit. p. 190, n. 52; M. Abdel-Halim, *Antoine Galland. Sa vie et son œuvre*, p. 265; Zotenberg, op. cit., p. 169–70. According to Casanova, op. cit., p. 128–129, the MS BnF 3646 was the first manuscript acquired by Galland, and maybe copied at his request.

[10] L. M. Langlès, *Les Voyages de Sind-bad le marin et La ruse de femmes. Contes arabes, Traduction littérale, accompagnée du texte et de notes*, p. 145; Casanova, op. cit., p. 129–130.

[11] The original French MS Cod. gall. 799 is now preserved at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

collector Sir Thomas Phillipps, on 9 February 1824. It contains the Arabic text with interlinear translation into Latin on rectos and French translation on facing pages, followed by an Arabic-Latin word list (*Dictionarium verborum omnium quae inveniuntur in Historia Sindabadis Nautae Arabico Latinum*). This seems to be the draft created by Pétis in his preparatory work of translation, while the manuscript stored at Monaco and containing just his French version could be a nice copy to be read by other people.[12]

1.4 Langlès' s *Sindbad* (1814)

According to Mahdi, since Galland himself attested that *Sindbad* came in his work through a different way, likewise Sabbagh did not insert this tale in his fake of the *Nights* in the early 1800s.[13] However, Sabbagh apparently did not shelve the story but assigned to *Sindbad* the same fate as the other tales. This seems to emerge by reading the preface by L. M. Langlès to his book *Les voyages de Sind-bad le marin, et La ruse des femmes*, published in 1814.[14] In the introduction, Langlès listed the Arabic manuscripts he consulted and mentioned "une copie très exacte de la main de Michel de Sabbagh"; two texts coming from the Bibliothèque du Roi ("cotés 641 Arabe" and "81 Traductions"); "une copie en style grammatical et cadencé" made available by Dom Raphaël and which he barely used, since it "diffère en beacoup d'endroits de celui que j'ai adopté"; and finally "trois manuscrits rapporté d'Egypte", one of which had belonged to the Carmelites of Aleppo, the second was also "grammatical et cadencé", and the third was useless because it differed completely from the others.[15] Ultimately, it seems that Langlès based his version on four major sources, i.e. the Sabbagh's copy, an Aleppinian manuscript formerly preserved by the Carmelites, and two manuscripts from the Bibliothèque du Roi.

About the unidentified copy made by Sabbagh, Mahdi had no doubts and commented: "The extremely exact manuscript of *Sindbad* published by

[12] I have not yet had the opportunity to personally check this manuscript.

[13] Mahdi, op. cit., p. 64–65.

[14] The same text of Sindbad had already been published by Langlès the previous year under the title *Récit de Sindebad le marin*, as an appendix to the volumes by C. E. Savary, *Grammatica linguae arabicae aulgaris necnon litteralis, dialogus complectens*, p. 471–523.

[15] Langlès, op. cit., xxiii–xxiv.

Langlès and incorporated in first Calcutta[16] was the work of Sabbagh."[17] This being the case, the accuracy praised by Langlès would lie in its great accordance with the Galland's version.

The Aleppinian *Sindbad* formerly preserved in the Carmelite library could plausibly be identified with the current MS BnF ar. 3667 (ff. 31b–61b: Qiṣṣat al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa al-Hindbād al-ḥammāl fī zamān al-ḫalīfa Hārūn al-Rašīd), dated 1069 H = 1658 AD or 1089 H = 1678 AD.[18] However, since this manuscript is a collection of stories and fairy tales grouped under the title *Al-Ḥikāyāt wa-al-Siyar*, "Tales and Legendary Lives",[19] and it already belonged to the Bibliothèque du Roi in the late seventeenth century, it seems odd that Galland could have neglected it or even ignored its existence. This manuscript undoubtedly comes from a Christian *milieu*, since the copyist – Naṣr Allāh ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ Niʿma, known as Ibn al-Mubayyiḍ – claimed to be a disciple of the deacon (*tilmīḏ al-šammās*) Niʿmat Allāh al-Manṣūr.

Regarding the manuscripts Langlès found in the Bibliothèque du Roi, the text marked "641 Arabe" is now missing. Since the Slane's *Catalogue*[20] listed an eighteenth century "Vies des saints et des soufis" under the same ancient call number as early as the second half of the nineteenth century, the loss of the manuscript should date back to Langlès or a few decades later.

On the contrary, the manuscript known by Langlès as "Traductions 81" is now MS BnF 5176 (ff. 1–55a: *Qiṣṣat al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa al-Hindbād al-ḥammāl fī zamān al-ḫalīfa Hārūn al-Rašīd*). The copy of the Arabic text is followed by a French translation made by Victor Choquet in 1735 with the title "Aventures arrivées à Baghdad au temps des khalifes et aventures d'un roi de Perse, le tout traduit de l'arabe avec le texte, par Choquet, interprète du roi à Seyde (Sidon), en 1735".[21] Also this text shows variants of the same religious formula found in the manuscripts of Galland, and the Arabic original ends with the word *amīn*.

[16] Calcutta I or First Calcutta is the name commonly used to indicated the edition by Uhmud bin Moohummud Shirwanee, *Alf Layla wa-Layla or The Arabian Nights Entertainments in the original Arabic*, p. 378–458.

[17] Mahdi, op. cit., p. 96.

[18] Casanova, op. cit., p. 132.

[19] In addition to *Sindbad*, the manuscript contains: the Story of the King Solomon; the Story of the Kurdish man and his bag; the Story of the intendant, the woman interpreter and the daughter of the King; the Story of the sparrow and the hunter; and the Story of the merchant and the King. Cfr. G. Vajda, *Notices de manuscrits arabes*.

[20] W. M. G. de Slane, Catalogue des Manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque nationale.

[21] E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes des nouvelles acquisitions: 1884–1924*.

All the Arabic manuscripts translated by Galland, Pétis de la Croix, and Langlès have in common the same version of the story, and none of them is included in the *Nights*' collection.

During the eighteenth century, neither the ambiguous relationship between *Sindbad* and the *Nights*, nor the absence of a traceable manuscript tradition seem to be a problem to scholars and readers. The purpose of reading and studying these stories was admittedly to learn about the culture and the costumes of the Arabs. Only Langlès, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, cared to report its sources and provide a first edition of the text in the original language.

2 Tracing *Sindbad*: the manuscripts

During the nineteenth century, the development of historical and philological studies allowed scholars like Zotenberg,[22] Macdonald,[23] and De Goeje[24] to explore the features of the original manuscripts of the *Nights*. Soon in the case of *Sindbad*, it became necessary to distinguish between two different textual traditions, which De Goeje designated as "Version A" and "Version B".[25]

The best known version of *Sindbad* is now the B-version, i.e. the story included in the most popular editions of the *Nights*, both in Arabic and in any translated form. The A-version, on the other hand, is the version Galland first included in the *Nights*, although it originates from independent manuscripts that are unrelated to that popular Arabic collection.

2.1 A-version and B-version

The B-version differs both in terms of style and content from the A-version. As it is usual in the literary composition of the *Nights*, the B-version of Sindbad's seven journeys is inserted in Shahrazad's long narrative and segmented into numbered "nights". With regard to the style, it appears to have been elab-

[22] Zotenberg, op. cit., p. 167–320.

[23] D. B. Macdonald, *Lost Manuscripts of the Arabian Nights and a Projected Edition of Galland*, p. 219–226; *A Preliminary Classification of Some Mss. of the Arabian Nights*, p. 304–321; *The earlier History of the Arabian Nights*, p. 355–397.

[24] M. J. De Goeje, *De Arabische Nachtvertellingen*, p. 385–413.

[25] Idem, *De Reizen van Sindebaad*, p. 278–313.

orated by a relevant number of amplifications and descriptive developments, so as to assume a feature of imaginative storytelling. As to the content, B deviates from A entirely at the end of the sixth voyage, in the whole seventh voyage, and in the closing episode of the framework.

The B-version is attested by Egyptian manuscripts of the Nights and sanctioned by the main printed Arabic editions, i.e. the Bulaq edition (1835),[26] the Calcutta II edition (1893–42),[27] and the later Arabic printed editions in general. On these collections are usually based the most popular Western translations.[28]

The A-version, on the other hand, is an independent tale without the fragmentation into "nights". It is divided in seven chapters usually called *ḥikāya* or *safar*, "voyage", each framed by the story of the encounter between Sindbad the Sailor and Hindbad the Porter. Whereas the B-version is a long and somewhat convoluted text, the independent tales are generally shorter and plainer, and follow a more logical and consistent development of the story. Furthermore, the interlocutor of Sindbad the Sailor is Hindbad the Porter in all manuscripts attesting the A-version, while the two characters bear the same name Sindbad in the *Nights*' version of the story.

The A-version is found in the works of Pétis de la Croix (1701), Galland (1701), and Langlès (1814); the Calcutta I Arabic edition (1818) – that, actually, adds *Sindbad* as a story apart and places it after the two hundredth night; and a good number of isolated Arabic manuscripts still unedited, mainly written in Syria. Among these manuscripts, BnF arabe 3615 is the only Arabic volume

[26] *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. Cairo, 1835.

[27] W. H. Macnaghten (ed.), *Book of the Thousand and One Nights Commonly Known as the "Arabian Nights Entertainments" Now for the First Time Published in the Original Arabic*.

[28] To name only the best known Western translations, the English version by E. W. Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights commonly called, in England, The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, p. 1–117, follows the *Nights*' version about to the ending of the sixth voyage; then it shifts to the standalone version's text at the end of the sixth voyage and for the whole seventh voyage. R. Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night translated from the Arabic*, p. 343–420, follows the B-version until the end of the sixth voyage and puts the different passages in the notes, while shifts to the A-version for the seventh voyage, thereby combining the two texts. The German translation by E. Littmann, *Die Erzählungen aus den Tausendundein Nächten: Vollständige deutsche Ausgabe in sechs Bänden*, p. 97–215, follows the B-version to its conclusion and then adds the ending of the A-version as a variant. The recent English version by M. C. Lyons, *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, p. 453–516, is based on the Macnaghten edition (Calcutta II), but in the case of Sindbad, the Galland's ending translated from French by Ursula Lyons is added.

of the *Nights* (nights 1–211) including the independent version of *Sindbad* known so far.[29]

2.2 The Arabic manuscripts of the independent version of *Sindbad*

From a codicological point of view, we have no evidence of an Arabic version of *Sindbad* included in the *Nights* before the eighteen century.[30] On the other hand, we have at least four manuscripts of the isolated version of Sindbad older than Galland's work, namely the MSS BnF arabe 3645 (14th–15th cent.) and BnF arabe 3646 (late 17th cent.); the Pétis de la Croix's original (1672 AD); and the MS BnF arabe 3667 (1658 or 1678 AD). In addition to these texts, we can list a number of undated or later manuscripts as well, preserved both in Western and in Eastern libraries.[31]

Beside the manuscripts used by Galland and Langlès, three isolated Arabic copies are preserved in Paris: the MS BnF arabe 3647, 40 ff. without an ending, entitled *Qiṣṣat al-Sindbān al-baḥrī wa al-Hindbān al-ḥammāl wa mā ǧarā baynahumā min al-ḥikāyāt ʿalā al-tamām wa al-kamāl*; MS BnF arabe 3648, 49 ff., *Hāḏā kitāb qiṣṣat al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa al-ḥammāl ʿalā al-tamām wa al-kamāl*; and the MS BnF arabe 3649, 14 ff. without an ending, *Ḫabar al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa al-Hindbād al-ḥammāl fī zamān al-ḫalīfa*, written by a western hand and probably a copy of BnF arabe 3645.

Other independent Arabic texts of Sindbad are preserved in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, in isolated manuscripts or included in anthologies of tales.

[29] Casanova, op. cit., p. 132–133.

[30] A collection of tales arranged into nights is contained in the Ottoman MS BnF turc 356, where *Sindbad* appears in vol. 5, ff. 42–61 (nights 465–475). This collection includes eleven volumes, but volumes 2–10 are part of a same work (incomplete), while volumes 1 and 11 have been added later. As for volume 11, it belonged to Galland, while the others had been bought around 1660 for the library of Mazarin and then brought to the Bibliothèque du Roi in 1668 (Zotenberg, op. cit. p. 187–192). Volumes 1, 2 and 11 contain different versions of the beginning of the *Nights* (Vol. 1, Introduction and Nights 1–55; Vol. 2, Introduction and Nights 1–47; Vol. 11, a fragment of a first volume of the *Nights* including the text of the first eighteen folios of vol. 1). Volumes 2–10 are dated 1046 H = 1636 AD. According Pinault, BnF turc 356 begins by reproducing the titles contained in Galland, and then follows up with another miscellany of tales drawn from independent sources, such as *Sindbad*. (D. Pinault, *Story-Telling Tecniques in the Arabian Nights*, p. 7–8).

[31] For a comprehensive overview of the Arabic manuscripts of *Sindbad* and the studies devoted to them, see F. Bellino, *I Sette Viaggi di Sindbād il marinaio: romanzo arabo medievale*, p. 101–129.

The isolated copy in MS Berlin 9181, 56 ff., entitled *Hāḏā qiṣṣat al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa al-Hindbād al-ḥammāl*, is dated to about 1800, as well as the anthological MS Berlin 9182, containing the *Ḫabar al-Sindbād al-baḥrī wa mā ǧarā lahu min al-ḥikāyāt wa-hiya sabʿa ḥikāyāt* (ff. 1–25).[32]

More Arabic anthologies are preserved in the Universitätsund Forschungsbibliothek (ex-Herzogliche Bibliothek) of Gotha. The undated MS Gotha Or. 2651 contains only two stories, including one *Qiṣṣa Sindbād al-baḥrī wa Hindbād al-barrī* (ff. 1–112a), whereas MS 2653 is an anthology (dated 1775 AC) containing two long stories – *Sindbad* (ff. 58b–76b) and the *Story of the King Azādbaḫt* – some short tales, and anecdotes.[33] An ownership note dated 1798 attests that this manuscript belonged to a Christian or a Jew, called Mūsah ibn Yūnis Ṣabbāʿ (?).[34]

The Christian milieu is undoubtedly attested by the *Sindbad* version preserved in the Garšūnī anthological MS Gotha 2652, as well as five more Garšūnī texts of *Sindbad* still unpublished.

2.3 The Garšūnī manuscripts of *Sindbad*

The six Garšūnī versions of *Sindbad*[35] currently known are MSS Mardin 306, ff. 65b–109a; Gotha 2652, ff. 8b–35b; Aleppo 124 M, ff. 85b–162a; Birmingham Mingana syr. 146, ff. 45a–65a; Birmingham Mingana syr. 463, ff. 79a–121b; and London British Library Or. 4437, ff. 109–169. All the manuscripts but BL Or. 4437 are written in Western Syriac script and come from the area of Aleppo, Syria, and Mardin, Tur Abdin. The relationship of the *Sindbad*'s versions held in the Gotha's manuscript and in MS Mardin 306 is apparent, although one does not depend on the other. *Sindbad* on MS Mingana 463could have been copied on Mingana 146, and it belongs to the same family of the version preserved in MS Aleppo 124, although not directly dependent on it.

[32] W. Ahlwardt, *Die Handschriften-verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, p. 152.

[33] W. Pertsch, *Die arabischen Handschriften der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Gotha*, p. 406–7.

[34] F. Bellino, *The Garshuni Dimension of the Nights. Circulation and fortune of the Arabian Nights among Christians*, Communication at the Conference *The Thousand and One Nights: Sources, Transformations, and Relationship with Literature, the Arts and the Sciences*, held in Cambridge, MA, April 16–17, 2015.

[35] Unlike Arabic texts, the Garšūnī name of the hero never appears preceded by the article ("al-Sindbād") and it shows unusual spelling variations: "Sindbāb" in MS Gotha and "Sindbāt" in both Mingana manuscripts.

2.3.1 MS Mardin 306, ff. 65b–109a

This complete text, now kept in the Church of the Forty Martyrs, Mardin, is entitled *Ḥadīṯ Sindbād al-baḥrī wa mā ǧarā lahu fī al-sabʿa safarāt* (ܚܕܝܬ ܣܢܕܒܐܕ ܐܠܒܚܪܝ ܘܡܐ ܓܪܐ ܠܗ ܦܝ ܐܠܣܒܥܗ ܣܦܪܐܬ).[36] The manuscript (202 ff.) is probably not later than the eighteenth century. It has been restored in modern times since many of the original folios that had been scattered appear to have been replaced and copied by a different and more recent hand. Maybe a third hand added few pages at the beginning (in purple-blue ink) and at the end of the manuscript in 192(6?). Besides *Sindbad*, it contains a number of pseudo-biographic, hagiographic and legendary tales, namely the story of Ḥayqār, the story of the Persian King Sābūr, the story of the King Azādbakht and his ten viziers; the story of Suleymān Shāh and his son; the life of St. Jacob; the life of St. Barbara; and the story of a "monk of China".

2.3.2 MS Gotha 2652, ff. 8b–35b

This copy of Sindbad is acephalous and defective in several places. Although the text matches the story published by Langlès, according the description written by W. Pertsch in his *Catalogue*,[37] this text is not a "Garšūnised" copy of the Langlès's version. The relationship of the text in Gotha 2652 with the previous MS Mardin 306 is apparent, although the two versions are not directly dependent on each other. This Gotha manuscript comes from Aleppo and has been dated to the late eighteenth century. It only contains animal tales and pseudo-biographical stories, whereas most of the Arabic Christian collection of stories also includes hagiographical or apocryphal narratives.[38]

2.3.3 MS Aleppo 124 m, ff. 85b–162a

This complete Garšūnī copy of *Sindbad* is entitled *Qiṣṣa Sindbād al-baḥrī mā ǧarā lahu fī sabʿa safarāt* (ܩܨܗ ܣܢܕܒܐܕ ܐܠܒܚܪܝ ܡܐ ܓܪܐ ܠܗ ܦܝ ܣܒܥܗ ܣܦܪܐܬ).

[36] This manuscript has been digitised at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (CFMM 306) in Collegeville, MN.

[37] Pertsch, op. cit., p. 404–405.

[38] Pertsch lists the Tale of the wolf ("koch", according to Pertsch) and the fox; the Tale of the sparrow and the hunter; the Story the King Solomon, son of David; the Story of Ḥayqār; the Tale of the warlock and the cook of Baghdad; the Story of the King Kalaʿād and his vizier Šimās; the Story of the King Azādbakht and his ten viziers; the Story of the Persian King Sābūr and what happened to him with the three wise men; the Story of Hārūn al-Rašīd and the blacksmith Basīm.

The volume (162 ff.), undated and defective in several places, comes from the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo.[39] It lacks page numbering, but the mark consisting in four dots arranged in lozenge appears on the right-hand corner of the top margin on the verso of each folio. In ff. 9a–9b–10a and then from f. 13a until the end of the volume every title, rubric and diacritical point – sometimes rather ambiguous – are marked in red ink, although the handwriting and the layout are not particularly elegant. There are at least two scribes for the manuscript, and they seem to alternate oddly several times throughout the book. The content also appears to be unusual. Besides *Sindbad* and an untitled religious text, we also find a story of David, King of the Mount *rqdh* (?), in Syriac; the story of Moses and his conversation with God; a memra by St. Ephrem; the story of Sibyl, the Prophetess; the story of Job (Ayyūb), the Virgin Man; and a narrative on Julian Petrus to whom Our Lord revealed Himself on the Mount of Olives.

2.3.4 MS Mingana syr. 146, ff. 45a–65a

Mingana titled the text: "The story of Sindbad the sailor of the *Arabian Nights*". Since the beginning of the story is missing, we do not know the actual title. Ff. 46–52 are written by a later hand, but the remaining pages (ff. 53–65) are "in a clear West Syrian hand of about AD 1700".[40] The colophon men-

[39] This manuscript has been digitised at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (SOAA 124 M) in Collegeville, MN.

[40] A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library*, col. 328. This large Garšūnī manuscript (300 leaves) is a miscellaneous volume of various treatises written by different West Syriac hands, all of them of about AD 1700, according to Mingana. It contains a number of hagiographical lives (Abbot Mark of Egypt; St. Michael and his sister Siras from Iconium; St. Shamuni and her seven children; St. Cyriacus and his mother Julitta; St. Behnam and his sister Sarah; St. Jacob, the Intercisus; the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste; the Apostle St. Thomas; St. Barbara and Juliana; St. Onesima; decollation of John the Baptist; St. Malke; St. Ashirshanah [Liciana] daughter of King Licianus of Megeddon; St. Alexius "the man of God"; and St. Tatus, martyr in Rome); some miracles by the Virgin and various saints; a number of monastic tales (the monk who used to cover his face; a priest excommunicated; story of a monk who had been calumniated); narratives of paradigmatic figures (Joseph who became Christian in Rome; one Theophilus under the reign of Emperor Theodosius; Arsenius king of Egypt, known as "the Skull"; the Story of the seven sleepers, also known as Yamlikha and his companions; the Story of the boy whose parents wished to kill); and some secular narratives (the Story of a Persian King and his ten viziers; the Story of Sindbad the sailor, the Story of the merchant of Tegrit; and the Story of the sparrow from the *Nights*).

tions the name of the copyist, the *šammās* (deacon) Dāwud ibn Rafō Benūḥ (ܕܐܘܕ ܐܒܢ ܪܦܘ ܒܢܘܚ).

2.3.5 MS Mingana syr. 463, ff. 79a–121b

Mingana titled the text: "The story of the seven journeys of Sindbad the Sailor, of the *Arabian Nights*".[41] Actually, no mention to the *Nights* is found in the original title *Qiṣṣa Sindbād al-baḥrī wa-mā ǧarā lahu fī sabʿa safarāt* (ܩܨܗ ܣܢܕܒܐܕ ܐܠܒܚܪܝ ܘܡܐ ܓܪܐ ܠܗ ܦܝ ܣܒܥ ܣܦܪܐܬ). This text could have been copied on Mingana 146 or a close recension. An inscription at the end of the manuscript (f. 122a) mentions the name of the copyist, Mattā, and the date, Thursday, 15th May, 2130 of the Greeks / 1234 H = 1819 AD. According to Mingana, another inscription on f. 122b showed the full name of the copyist (Mattā Ibn ʿAbd al-Sayyīd) and the date 2134 of the Greeks (1824 AD).[42]

2.3.6 MS British Library Or. 4437, ff. 109–169

This copy of Sindbad, entitled *Qiṣṣa Sindbāt al-baḥrī* (ܩܨܗ ܣܢܕܒܐܬ ܐܠܒܚܪܝ) has been appended to a volume of religious tracts of the Monophysite Church and answers on theological matters.[43] The volume, dated A. Gr. 2157 = 1846 AD (f. 108b), is among the acquisitions of the British Museum purchased in the areas of Urmia, Mosul and Alqosh, Iraq. Therefore, it is the only Garšūnī copy of *Sindbad* in Eastern Syriac script currently known, whereas all the five Garšūnī manuscripts coming from Syria and Tur Abdin are written in Western Syriac script.

[41] Mingana 1934, col. 828. This manuscript (122 leaves) is written in a clear West Syrian hand and also contains five other works in Garšūnī, namely a qaṣīda on bishops who deviate from the path of truth, by Patriarch Meletius; a memra on St. Mary, the penitent, by Ephrem; the Story of the seven sleepers; the Story of St. Isaiah of Aleppo (incomplete); and the Story of Salomon, son of David.

[42] Unfortunately, the copy I had access to does not show that page of the manuscript.

[43] G. Margoliouth, *Descriptive List of Syriac and Karshuni Mss. in the British Museum acquired since 1873*. London: British Museum, 1899: 43. I have not yet had the opportunity to personally check this manuscript.

3 Telling *Sindbad*: preservation and transmission of the tale

The areas of Aleppo and Mardin have consistently been two of the main centres for the preservation of the Near Eastern Christian heritage, as evidenced by the amount of manuscripts written there and kept in Western and Eastern libraries, as well as the writing and learning activities that monasteries and churches have continued to the present day. Since culture in the Syriac and Arabic Christian milieu manifested almost exclusively in monastic scriptoria and was kept in ecclesiastic libraries, the dependency on religious centres acted as a filter in determining which text had to be copied and preserved and which topic should instead be excluded and forgotten. However, unexpected treasures can be sometimes found, as in the case of *Sindbad* and a few other titles that seem far removed from the canons of religious interest. These kinds of texts often represent remarkable examples of the interchange and mutual influence between European and Arabic Christian culture, connected by a fascination with captivating stories.

3.1 Was *Sindbad* meant to be an uplifting book?

Although *Sindbad* is not an edifying text, its attestations in the Christian milieu are surprisingly sizeable. Adventurous and wonderful stories, of course, were familiar to the Christian readers in the Near East, and so were the *Nights*, as attested by the "Galland manuscript" itself. A number of ownership notes written in the manuscript by Christians in Hama, Aleppo, and Tripoli between 1505 and 1680, in fact, shows the circulation of this genre among the Christians of Syria.[44] However, no Christian library has retained copies of the *Nights*, and only a few tales from that collection were communicated by Arabic Christian manuscripts. The fact that *Sindbad* is part of this small number gives us some clues to guess how this tale was perceived.

Since it would appear to be more than obvious that all the tales related by Christian manuscripts were readings intended for a Christian community, their purpose was not only to entertain and amuse the readers, but also to educate people and illustrate God's will through a sense of wonder. Consequently, what would be the message conveyed by an adventure story such

[44] L. Daaïf, M. Sironval, *Marges et Espaces Blancs dans le Manuscrit Arabe des Mille et Une Nuits d'Antoine Galland*, p. 85–126.

as *Sindbad* from the Christian perspective of that period? Surely it was not a depiction of a character who was looking for adventure per se, pursuing wealth or displaying shrewdness amid worldly trials. These topics, which are usually typical of modern literary interpretations of the story, were probably not included among the priorities of edifying literature. The focus and purpose of Sindbad's narrative seems instead to revolve around the acceptance of suffering in order to accomplish the fate decreed by God. Seen in this light, the desire for travel and adventure seems to be a demerit and a human flaw rather than a virtue of the hero. In the Christian versions, the primary cause of Sindbad's adventures is the dissipation of family wealth rather than his need for trade.[45] Every new journey begins with an allusion to the debauchery and moral weaknesses of the main character, who forgets too easily the pains suffered[46] and allows his lust and greed for worldly vanities to guide him.[47] Only at the end of the story, from the seventh journey, does Sindbad change his attitude and reveal that he is tired of the hardships endured and afraid of further danger. Although the attitude of Sindbad can never be clearly portrayed as pious or reverent, yet in his present life he thanks God and acts as a generous host who entertains his guest and gives him money.

The Christian scribes did not aim to portray the romantic figure that modern Western audiences wish to find in Sindbad: such a hero would be neither suitable nor acceptable in the context of such edifying literature. The tales of his seven voyages were in fact aimed to bring home a moral teaching through the adventures and catastrophes that befall the hero, and this purpose certainly implied that *Sindbad* was perceived in some way as a didactic and apologetic narrative. Just as other characters speaking of themselves in the first person (e.g. Ḥayqār), even Sindbad could have been understood as

[45] Pétis's version is paradigmatic in this regard: "Sanchez que j'ai eu en patrimoine de grands biens, des possessions amples et une bonne reputation, mais que m'estant extrémement rendu magnifique dans ma dépenses et prenant largement les commoditez, les delices de la vie et le plaisir des compagnies", Cod. gall. 799, p. 14; "Ce n'estois pas tant l'intérest du negoce qui m'y excitait, mais le libertinage et la débauche y avoiens beaucoup plus de part", ibidem, p. 75.

[46] "Aprés m'estre donné carriere dans les delices et dans les plaisir, aiant oublié les peines que j'avais endurées (…) le libertinage me poussa malgré moi à aller en marchandise", Pétis, ibidem, p. 51; "Aprés que je me fut bien reposé et que j'eus longtems gouté les plaisirs et les commoditez de la vie, j'oubliai les peines que j'avois souffert et le desir de voïager s'embarqua encore de mon coeur", ibidem, p. 114.

[47] "Ma passion pour le monde et ses vanitez s'essant réveillée et rallumée, mon esprit m'inspira encore d'aller en voïage pour trafiquer", Pétis, ibidem, p. 151.

a real man and the tale of his journeys as a true testimony of remote and fabulous lands. This assumption can explain why *Sindbad* and a few other fabulous narratives have been preserved in manuscripts containing tales on religious subjects and paradigmatic figures, such as the lives of saints, apocryphal accounts, and pseudo-historical biographies.[48]

3.2 Levantine story-tellers between East and West

As the review of the texts of *Sindbad* shows clearly, in the period spanning from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century the links between the Western translations of Arabic fairy tales and their sources drew heavily on Arab Christianity. The majority of the manuscripts used by European scholars were from Eastern Christian libraries and a good number of Levantine scholars played a key role in the circulation of favourite stories originally unrelated to the *Arabian Nights*. However, their contribution was often underestimated and not adequately investigated. It may still surprise many to learn that the two most popular stories, those of Aladdin and Ali Baba, are classed as "orphan stories" because neither of them existed in written Arabic before Galland's version. Galland himself mentioned in his diaries that he heard these stories in Paris from a man named Hanna Diyab, a Maronite from Aleppo, who personally narrated several stories to Galland.[49]

Diyab was a traveller and a learned man who knew Arabic, Turkish, French, and Provençal[50] and showed both great sensitivity to the art of storytelling and extensive knowledge of stories from the narrative repertoires of Western Europe and Near East as well. Although he has consistently been depicted as the link between Galland and an alleged Arabic folk-based oral tradition, we can not claim to know with certainty the language in which Hanna Diyab told his tales. In a recent study, Ruth Bottigheimer carefully

[48] The single manuscript witnessing a collection of stories which have no relationship with religion, MS Gotha 2652, has to be dated to the late eighteen century and it was possibly conceived under the influence of Western studies prevailing at the time.

[49] Hanna Diyab's autobiography is preserved in MS Sbath 254, Vatican Library. See P. Fahmé-Thiéry, B. Heyberger and Jérôme Lentin (eds), *D'Alep à Paris. Les pérégrinations d'un chrétien de Syrie au temps de Louis XIV: Hânna Dyâb*; Aboubakr Chraibi, *Galland's "Ali Baba" and Other Arabic Versions*, p. 159–169. With regard to the alleged awkward relationship between Diyab and Galland, see E. Kallas, *Aventures de Hanna Diyab avec Paul Lucas et Antoine Galland (1707–1710)*, p. 255–267.

[50] F. Bauden, R. Waller (eds), *Le Journal d'Antoine Galland (1646–1715): La period Parisienne (1708–1709)*, p. 286.

examined Galland's *Journal* entries in which he reported his meetings with Diyab and she came to the conclusion that "Hannä Diyäb recounted his stories to Galland in French rather than in Arabic and that Galland recorded the stories as he heard them in Hannä Diyäb's heavily accented French".[51] This conclusion, which might seem revolutionary and amazing to a superficial understanding, sounds instead perfectly convincing if you have some familiarity with the work of other learned Arab Christians who lived in Europe in those centuries.[52]

The appearance of the *Nights* in France was widely connected with learned Arab Christians living in Paris. Besides Hanna Diyab, the Syrian Christian priest Denis Chavis (Dionysius Šāwīš) was the first who wrote an Arabic version of *Aladdin* in 1787.[53] Also Michel Sabbagh, who was so deeply involved in the popularisation of the *Arabian Nights* in the Arabic-speaking world, was a Levantine scholar coming from a wealthy family of Palestinian origin. The practice and acquaintance with the language of the place these scholars lived in constantly emerge from their works, as well as their widespread knowledge of themes and motifs from both Western literary and folkloric culture. This is not a surprising result, owing to their social position and the cultural milieu in which many of Arab Christians lived in Europe. To name but a couple, the Maronite librarian of the Vatican Library Joseph Simon Assemani (Yūsuf Simʿān as-Simʿānī, 1687–1768) and the Maronite Pierre Dippy (1622–1709), professor of Arabic at the Collège Royal in Paris, were both at the heart of the main centres of Orientalism at the time of Galland.

The widespread presence of distinguished Arab Christian figures in the European Orientalism and the many attestations of Garshuni manuscripts in European libraries must lead Western historiography to pay more attention to the Arabic Christian milieu as a fundamental cross-cultural transmission

[51] R. B. Bottigheimer, *East Meets West: Hannā Diyāb and The Thousand and One Nights*, p. 302–324. Bottigheimer deduced her thesis from the instances of grammatical errors, renderings of mispronunciations, and misspellings she found throughout Galland's French notations of Diyab's stories. The analysis of these instances led the author to conclude that they were dependent on the "auditory dissonances that characterize a native speaker's writing down a foreign speaker's words as they are uttered".

[52] See, for exemple, my articles *Codex Guelph. 3.1.300: The Note of the Restorer*, p. 57–65; and *Duas lineas olearum prope oppidum Besciara. Le localizzazioni del codice siriaco Pluteo 1.58 (ca. IX sec.) della Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana di Firenze*, p. 255–69.

[53] F. Pouillon, J.-C. Vatin (eds), *Après l'orientalisme. L'Orient crée par l'Orient*, p. 443.

channel between Europe and the Middle East since at least the seventeenth century. The Garshuni manuscript of *Sindbad* adds another element to our knowledge of the circulation of secular themes and stories in the folk literature of Near Eastern Christians. Although many scholars have analysed, commented, interpreted, re-evaluated in many ways *Sindbad*, and they consistently tried to discover its literary roots in distant cultures of ancient times, they did not give enough weight to the very close cultural link that brought this remarkable account within Galland's reach and, thanks to him, made it accessible to all Western readers.

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