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The Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature

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Servitude and Military Grandeur

The entry of large numbers of Turks into the Islamic lands inaugurated an age of ‘servitude and military grandeur’ (to borrow a phrase from the nineteenth-century French poet and novelist, Alfred de Vigny). Turkish slaves had long performed military and administrative roles under the ‘Abbasids and rival rulers. Military slaves were known as *mamluks*. However, from the late tenth century onwards, Turks began to take power in various parts of the territories of Islam. The Ghanavid Turks took control of Afghanistan, eastern Iran and north-west India. In the following century they were supplanted in Iran and most of Afghanistan by the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks went on to occupy the central Islamic lands and

they established their control over Baghdad and the ‘Abbasid caliphs who resided there. (The ‘Abbasid caliph remained the nominal head of the Sunni Muslim community, but the Seljuk sultans, pretending to act in the name of the caliph, exercised all real power.) Although the Seljuk sultanate began to fall apart in the course of the early twelfth century, the petty rulers who established themselves in the fragmented territories of Persian, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Anatolia tended to be of Turkish or, less frequently, of Kurdish origin. Many of those rulers and their attendant elites had a military background and they had often started out as mamluks. The growing role of these soldiers in directing affairs of state culminated in the mid-thirteenth century with establishment of a mamluk or slave-soldier regime in Egypt and Syria.

The political and military rise of the Turks was accompanied by the literary resurgence of Persian. Turkish warlords with pretensions to culture tended to interest themselves in the culture of the Persian country gentlemen and the old Persian epics. Their relative lack of interest in Arabic literature may explain what

has been widely perceived as a falling-off in the originality and vitality of Arabic prose and poetry in the later Middle Ages. Jahiz, Hariri, Mutanabbi and Ma'arri do not seem to have had worthy successors. However, it may be that the growing self-consciousness of Sunni orthodoxy and the increased popularity of fundamentalist religious positions among many intellectuals played a part in increasing suspicion and hostility towards poetry and fiction. Poetry and story-writing did not feature on the official syllabuses of the *madrasas*, the religious teaching colleges which were established in this period. Although some Sufis wrote poetry and used story-telling to illustrate spiritual truths, other Sufis were resolutely anti-intellectual and were opposed to reliance on book-learning. Then again, it is possible that the perceived decline in literary creativity in the late Middle Ages is a matter of mistaken perception. Certainly late medieval Arabic literature (the so-called *'Asr al-lntihat*, or Age of Decadence) has not received from modern scholars the attention it deserves.

In the age of the Crusades, both courts and administrative systems in the Middle East and

North Africa tended to be highly militarized. Some important literature in Arabic was actually produced by Turkish and Kurdish officers. A very large part of the literature of this period was produced by Arabs who served those officers as officials, scribes or pensioned poets. The most influential prose writers of the age, ‘Imad al-Din al-Katib al-Isfahani and al-Qadi al-Fadil, were not story-tellers but the drafters of pompous chancery documents on behalf of non-Arab warlords. ‘Imad al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Katib AL-ISFAHANI (1125–1201) was a Persian and he was born, as his name indicates, in Isfahan. He worked at first in the caliphal administration in Baghdad, but in 1165 he was politically disgraced and cast into prison for two years. After his release, he travelled westwards to Syria in search of a new patron, and was employed by Nur al-Din, the Turkish military ruler of Aleppo and Damascus. When Nur al-Din died in 1174, al-Isfahani took service with the famous leader of the Muslim counter-crusade, the Kurdish warlord Saladin (more correctly, Salah al-Din).

Isfahani wrote two histories which celebrated in rhymed prose the history of Saladin’s

triumphs over the Crusaders and his reconquest of the holy city of Jerusalem in 1187, the *Fath al-Qussi fi al-Fath al-Qudsi* ('Eloquence on the Conquest of the Holy City') and the *Barq al-Shami* ('Syrian Lightning'). He also compiled a major collection of poetry, the *Kharidat al-Qasr*, or 'The Garden of the Palace', an anthology of twelfth-century poetry, with biographical details of the poets. The Persian 'high style' is ornate and flowery and echoes of it are detectable in Isfahani's Arabic. The prose style favoured by Isfahani was given further currency by his chancery colleague and literary ally, al-Qadi al-Fadil (1134–1200). Thereafter, under their influence almost all high-level government correspondence and decrees were drafted in an embellished style which made use of rhymed prose, forced metaphors, parallelisms and balanced antitheses. However, although Isfahani's account of Saladin's achievements is full of flourishes and fanfares, it is still one of the major sources of information on the momentous events of those decades. As he put it, he sought to cater 'both to the literati who watch for brilliant purple passages and to those with historical interests who look out for

embellished biographies'. He also presented his readers with a lot of information about himself, for, as far as he was concerned, he was a major player in the turbulent events of those decades. In the following piece of bombastic, pun-laden rhymed prose, Isfahani describes Saladin's entry into Jerusalem after its capture from the Crusaders in 1187. One gets the impression from Isfahani that at least half the glory of the victory rested in the scribal recording of it.

By a striking coincidence the date of the conquest of Jerusalem was the anniversary of the Prophet's ascension to heaven. Great joy reigned for the brilliant victory won, and words of prayer and invocation to God were on every tongue. The Sultan gave an audience to receive congratulations, and received the great amirs and dignitaries, sufis and scholars. His manner was at once humble and majestic as he sat among the lawyers and scholars, his pious courtiers. His face shone with joy, his door was wide open, his benevolence spread far and wide. There was free access to him, his words were heard, his actions prospered, his carpet was kissed, his face glowed, his perfume was sweet, his affection all-embracing, his authority intimidating. His city radiated light, his person emanated sweetness, his hand was employed in pouring out the waters of liberality and opening the lips of gifts; the back of his hand was the *qibla* of kisses and the palm of his hand was the *Ka'ba* of hope.

Sweet was it for him to be victorious; his throne seemed as if surrounded by a lunar halo. Qur'anic reciters sat there reciting and admonishing in the orthodox tradition. Poets stood up to declaim and to demand, banners advanced to be displayed,

pens scribbled to spread the joyful news, eyes wept with great joy, hearts felt too small to contain their joy at the victory, tongues humbled themselves in invocation to God. The secretaries prepared long and ornate dispatches; eloquent stylists, both prolix and concise, tightened up or opened out their style. I could not compare my pen to anything but the collector of the honey of good news, nor liken my words to anything other than the messengers of the divine graces, nor make my pen run except to apply itself to letters, to accompany virtue, divulge benefits, give widespread accounts and lengthy divulgence of superiority; for its arguments are long, even if its length is short, its words make it powerful although in itself its power to alarm is small, it reveals its master as well-fed although in itself is thin, it makes the army's weight felt, although it is light itself, by making clear the brilliance of the white star in the darkness of the inky night, by revealing the splendour of light from the path of the shadow, by sending out decrees of death or reward, commands to bind or loose, by opposing or yielding, enslaving or freeing, promising and holding to it, enriching and impoverishing, breaking and mending, wounding and healing. It is indeed the pen that brings armies together, elevates thrones, alarms the confident and gives confidence to the discouraged, raises up the stumbler and causes the upright to stumble, sets the army against the enemy for the benefit of friends. Thus with my quills I gave good news to the four quarters of the earth, and with the prodigies of my pen I expressed the marvels of memorable events; I filled the towers with stars and the caskets with pearls. This joyful news spread far and wide, bringing perfume to Rayy and to the evening conversation at Samarkand; it was welcomed with enthusiasm and its sweetness surpassed candied fruits and sugar. The world of Islam was ready and adorned for a festival to celebrate the fall of Jerusalem. Her merits were illustrated and described and the duty to visit her explained and specified to everyone.

Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*

(London, 1969), pp. 160–61

COMMENTARY

The *Mi'raj*, the midnight journey to the seven heavens made by Muhammad from Jerusalem, is held to have occurred on the 27th of the Muslim month of Rajab.

The *qibla* is the direction in which Muslims pray.

When Isfahani refers to 'towers', he is punning, for the Arabic word *bur*) refers both to a tower and a Zodiacal sign.

Government correspondence was business correspondence, but it was also an art form. Official decrees and works of propaganda were treasured by cultured readers for their literary beauty. In Ghuzuli's *belles-lettres* compilation devoted to the pleasures of life (see page 433), he included chancery correspondence among those pleasures.

Abu al-Fadl ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ali Baha' al-Din ZUHAYR (1186–1258), later quaintly dubbed the 'Grand Master of Peculiar Lovers', was born

in Mecca but later moved to Egypt where he grew up and where he studied. In the 1230s he was in the service of one of Saladin's descendants, al-Salih Ayyub. When in 1239 al-Salih Ayyub became the sultan of Egypt, Zuhayr became his vizier. However, he fell out of favour with the sultan shortly before the latter's death in 1249 and died in poverty in 1258.

Although Zuhayr was well known as a calligrapher, he was yet more famous as a poet. Naturally he produced panegyrics in praise of his master, but he also produced *qasidas* on a wide range of topics, some humorous, some savage. In addressing one poem to an old woman, he referred to her as 'a lot of bones in a leather sock'. He wrote many poems about the passing of pleasures and the coming of white hairs. He wrote a poem in praise of brunettes – and another preferring blondes (see below). Some of his poetry can be read as homoerotic; in one poem he portrays himself as fancying the moon-faced and slender monks in a monastery where he sits drinking (see below), and another poem is cast in the form of a lament for a young man who is about to grow his first beard. Nevertheless, Zuhayr was particularly

celebrated for his *ghazals*, or love poetry addressed to women, and he was particularly fond of the theme of doomed love.

On a Brunette

O ne'er despise the sweet brunette!
Such dusky charms my heart engage.
I care not for your blondes; I hate The sickly tint of hoary age.

On a Blonde

That man, believe me, greatly errs,
Whose heart a dusky maiden prefers.
For me, I love my maiden bright,
With teeth of pearl and face of light.
My bright example truth shall be,
For truth is always fair to see.

The water-wheels go round and round,
The song-birds trill with merry sound,
The hour is one of perfect joy,
Bright and pure without alloy.
Arouse thee, then, pretty my lass!
And send around the sparkling glass:
And hand it, bright as coins of gold,
Although it costs us coins untold.
Aye, pass it will while the morn is bright,
'Twill be but adding light to light.
Old wine and choice, it will be found

Like ‘sunbeams *not* diffused around’.
‘Tis pleasanter than fires that rise
Before the shivering traveller’s eyes.

A seat beside the Nile was ours,
Upon a carpet strewn with flowers;
the wavelets rippled on apace,
Like dimples on a maiden’s face;
And bubbles floated to the brink,
Round as the cups from which we drink.
We raced each other out to play,
Full early at the dawn of day.
With here a revered divine,
And there a man who worshipped wine;
Here very grave and sober folk.
There others who enjoyed a joke.
The serious, and the lively too;
the false one mingling with the true;

Now in the cloister’s calm retreat,
Now seated on the tavern’s seat.
And Coptic monks, you understand,
A learned but a jovial band.
And pretty faces too were there,
Their owners were as kind as they were fair.
And one who from the Psalter sang,
In tones that like a psaltery rang;
While faces in dark cowls we spy,
Like full moons in the murky sky;
Faces, like those pictures fair,
To which they make their daily prayer;

And ‘neath the belt of each we traced
A slender and a wasp-like waist.
We joined them, and they scorned to spare
The old wine they had treasured there.
And, oh! we passed a happy day,
One notably most bright and gay!
Just such a one as fancy paints
Without formality’s restraints.
In speaking of it do your best,
And then imagine all the rest!

E. H. Palmer, *The Poetical Works of Beha-Ed-Din Zoheir* (Cambridge, 1877), pp. 27, 42., 109

Zuhayr adopted a conversational style in poems, which came close to what is known as ‘Middle Arabic’. The early development and the particular qualities of Middle Arabic which distinguish it from classical Arabic in the strict sense are complex and, indeed, controversial. Briefly, by the twelfth century at least, and almost certainly earlier, the rules of classical Arabic regarding such matters as word-order and case-endings were no longer being scrupulously observed by all writers. High Arabic (*fusha*) was being infected by colloquial forms. There was now a general tendency to indicate subject and object by word-order – the

word-order doing the work of lost case-endings. Writers who fell into the lazy habits of Middle Arabic usage put the subject in front of the verb, whereas sticklers for the old classical forms placed the subject where they wanted the emphasis to fall in the sentence. Other features which marked out Middle from classical Arabic included the frequent dropping of the dual form for nouns and the imperative form for verbs. The way the Bedouin of seventh-century Arabia spoke ceased to be the inflexible literary model. It is true that well-educated authors who took trouble over what they wrote still took pride in writing correct classical Arabic, but in general in the late medieval period written Arabic more closely reflected spoken colloquial Arabic. (It is because there are so many Middle Arabic features in *The Thousand and One Nights* that these stories are regarded with disdain by fastidious stylists.) The controversy about colloquial and literary Arabic continues to rage today; for example, the famous Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz has described the colloquial as ‘a disease of language’.

Diya’ al-Din Abu’l-Fath Nasr Allah IBN AL-ATHIR (1163–1239) was yet another leading writer

employed by the Ayyubid dynasty to celebrate their triumphs and transact government business. (Diya' al-Din is not to be confused with his brother, 'Izz al-Din (d. 1233), a well-known historian also in the service of the Ayyubids.) Diya' al-Din ibn al-Athir was also a literary critic and theorist. *Mathal al-Sha'ir fi-Adab al-Katib wa al-Sha'ir*, 'The Popular Model for the Discipline of Writer and Poet', is his best-known work of literary criticism (and note the punning rhyme: *sha'ir* means 'popular', while *sha'ir* means 'poetry'). As a writer of prose himself, Ibn al-Athir favoured prose over poetry. In the first passage quoted below, he commends the study of the poetry and prose of the Ancients.

> Thorough familiarity with the discourse of the Ancients in poetry and in prose, is replete with benefits; because it makes known the aims of the masters, and the results of their thoughts. Through their writings we come to know the aims of each group of them, and how far their art has taken them. For these are things that sharpen the intellect and kindle the intelligence. When the practitioner of this art familiarizes himself with their writings, the ideas enclosed therein, and which he toiled to extract, become as something delivered into his hands; he takes what he wishes, and leaves out what he wishes. Also, the ideas previously invented, on becoming

familiar to him, may provide the spark in his mind for a rare and unprecedented idea.

It is a known fact that the minds of men, although differing in good and bad qualities, yet some are not higher nor lower than others except to a slight extent. It thus often happens that talents and minds are equally capable of producing ideas, in such manner that one may produce that same idea in the same words, without being aware of his predecessor's idea. This phenomenon is what practitioners of this art call 'the falling of a hoof upon a hoof.

He who wishes to become a secretary, and has a responsive nature, should memorize collections of poetry containing a great number of poems, and not be content with only a few. He should then begin by decomposing into prose the poems he memorized. His method should be to begin with one of the odes and put into prose each of its verses in turn. At the beginning he should not disdain using the very words of the verse, or most of them; for at this point, that is all he can do. By exercising his mind and training it, he will rise above this level, and begin to take the idea and clothe it in his own words. Then he will again rise above this level and clothe the idea with a variety of personal expressions. At this point his mind will become fecundated through direct contact with the ideas, deriving from them other ideas still. The way for him to proceed is to apply himself night and day, and to remain devoted to his work a long time until the method becomes second nature to him; so that when he writes a letter or delivers a speech the ideas pour forth as he speaks, and his words come out honey-sweet not insipid, and endowed with such lively novelty that they seem to dance for joy. This is something I have come to know through experience; and no one can advise you better than the experienced.

Ibn al-Athir goes on to argue that poetry, rather than prose, should be memorized, because the Arabs put most of their best and most important ideas into poetry. Prose, by contrast, was rather negligible.

George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 357, 361

Under the patronage of the Seljuks and their ministers, as well as of later dynasties, the Sunni Muslim religious institutions of the *madrasa* and the *khanqa* came to play an unprecedentedly important role. The *madrasa* was a college devoted to the teaching of religious subjects: the Qur'an and its exegesis, *hadiths* and Islamic law. Although this was the standard syllabus, it was quite common for other more secular subjects to be taught in the *madrasas* – including, for example, poetry and the correct interpretation of such literary works as Hariri's *Maqamat. A khanqa* was a hospice and centre for prayer and study for the use of Sufis. The *khanqa* bears

some resemblance to a monastery – so long as one bears in mind that a Sufi was not expected to spend all his life in it. The normal expectation was that he would earn a living and marry, in conformity with the Prophet's saying, 'There is no monkery in Islam.' *Khanqas* were really quite similar to *madrasas* and it was often difficult to tell them apart. There was a good deal of movement between *khanqa* and *madrasa*.

Al-Ghazzali (also frequently spelt Ghazali), one of the most famous of all Sufis, made his reputation as an academic teaching in a *madrasa* before pursing a more spiritual path as a Sufi. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-GHAZZALI (1058–1111) was born the son of a poor wool-spinner in eastern Persia. The boy's obvious intellect secured him influential patronage, which allowed him to pursue studies in theology and religious law. At the age of thirty-three he started teaching as a professor in the Nizamiyya *madrasa* in Baghdad (founded by Nizam al-Mulk, the famous vizier of the Seljuks). According to Ghazzali's spiritual autobiography, it was while teaching at the Nizamiyya that he fell victim to an intellectual and spiritual crisis. He was unable to speak and

hardly able to eat, and he went into seclusion. He doubted not only his religious faith, but also the reality of the world and the evidence of his senses. Ghazzali's doubts prefigure those of Rene Descartes, though the answer ultimately discovered by the twelfth-century Sufi bears little resemblance to that worked out by the seventeenth-century French philosopher.

In 1095 Ghazzali absconded from academic life and set out to travel in the Near East. He spent time meditating as an ascetic in Mecca, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Damascus, and his meditations brought him to acknowledge the ultimate truth of Sufism and its superiority over rival spiritual philosophies that were popular at the time. Only then did he return to lecturing, this time at a *madrasa* in Nishapur in eastern Iran, but he soon retired and a few years later he died in his native Tus. That, at any rate, is the version of Ghazzali's life presented for public consumption. However, the spiritual crisis leading to all-encompassing doubt, the travel to holy cities in search of enlightenment, and the ultimate resolution of the crisis through the full understanding of the truths of mysticism, all feature so frequently in Sufi

biographies that one may suspect that this pattern of 'biography' was a cliche of devotional writing – merely a conventional way of packaging mystical and pietistical treatises. Ghazzali's account of his spiritual journey bears a suspicious resemblance to that of an earlier Sufi writer, al-Muhasibi. Indeed there are good grounds for believing that Ghazzali was already a Sufi before he abandoned his first teaching post.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Ghazzali's writings did a great deal to popularize Sufi doctrines and make them respectable. For example, he spent a great deal of time and ink in trying to explain how Hallaj's vainglorious and apparently blasphemous statement 'I am the Truth' could be interpreted in some way that could be accepted by more conventional Muslims. Ghazzali was not a systematic thinker and his books are jackdaw collections of bits of past wisdom. Much of what he wrote is visionary; he described God moving among the 70,000 veils, as well as the ceaseless movement of prophets and saints up and down through the heavens. He drew on ancient doctrines and images of 'light' mysticism. However, even more

of what he wrote is moralistic and world-hating; the world is ‘a prison’, ‘a fiery torment’, ‘a deceitful prostitute’.

He wrote copiously in both Persian and Arabic. *Mishkat al-Anwar,* ‘The Niche of Lights’, is an esoteric treatise with Platonic elements; ‘this visible world is a trace of the invisible one and the former follows the latter like a shadow’. *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, ‘The Incoherence of Philosophers’, as its title suggests is a denunciation of philosophy, particularly philosophizing developed under the influence of the ancient Greeks. The philosophers’ alleged denial of the reality of the resurrection of the body was particularly impious. Ghazzali insisted that there must be limits to the authority of reason and that reason could not direct faith. *Ihya al-‘Ulum al-Din*, ‘The Revival of Religious Sciences’, is a kind of spiritual encyclopedia, a reference work on dogma which is still consulted today. (*Kimiya-yi Sa’dat*, ‘The Alchemy of Happiness’, is an abridgement in Persian.) In the stylishly written *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, ‘The Deliverance from Error’, Ghazzali describes how he investigated the competing claims of philosophers, conventional

theologians and Shi'i illuminationists before he decided to become a Sufi. In the following passage he describes a crisis of doubt:

> Thereupon I investigated the various kinds of knowledge I had, and found myself destitute of all knowledge with this characteristic of infallibility except in the case of sense-perception and necessary truths. So I said: 'Now that despair has come over me, there is no point in studying any problems except on the basis of what is self-evident, namely, necessary truths and the affirmations of the senses. I must first verify these in order that I may be certain on this matter. Is my reliance on sense-perception and my trust in the soundness of necessary truths of the same kind as my previous trust in the beliefs I had merely taken over from others and as the trust most men have in the results of thinking? Or is it a justified trust that is in no danger of being betrayed or destroyed?'
>
> I proceeded therefore with extreme earnestness to reflect on sense-perception and on necessary truths, to see whether I could make myself doubt them. The outcome of this protracted effort to induce doubt was that I could no longer trust sense-perception either. Doubt began to spread here and say: 'From where does this reliance on sense-perception come? The most powerful sense is that of sight. Yet when it looks at the shadow [of a stick or the gnomon of a sundial], it sees it standing still, and judges that there is no motion. Then by experiment and observation after an hour it knows that the shadow is moving and, moreover, that it is moving not by fits and starts but gradually and steadily by infinitely small distances in such a way that it is never in a state of rest. Again, it looks at the heavenly body [the sun] and sees it small, the size of a shilling, yet geometrical computations show that it is greater than the earth in size.'
>
> In this and similar cases of sense-perception the sense as judge forms his judgements, but another judge, the intellect,

shows him repeatedly to be wrong; and the charge of falsity cannot be rebutted.

To this I said: ‘My reliance on sense-perception also has been destroyed. Perhaps only those intellectual truths which are first principles (or derived from first principles) are to be relied upon, such as the assertion that ten are more than three, that the same thing cannot be both affirmed and denied at one time, that one thing is not both generated in time and eternal, nor both existent and non-existent, nor both necessary and impossible.’

Sense-perception replied: ‘Do you not expect that your reliance on intellectual truths will fare like your reliance on sense-perception? You used to trust in me; then along came the intellect-judge and proved me wrong; if it were not for the intellect-judge you would have continued to regard me as true. Perhaps behind intellectual apprehension there is another judge who, if he manifests himself, will show the falsity of intellect in its judging, just as, when intellect manifested itself, it showed the falsity of sense in its judging. The fact that such a supra-intellectual apprehension has not manifested itself is no proof that it is impossible.’

My ego hesitated a little about the reply to that, and sense-perception heightened the difficulty by referring to dreams. ‘Do you not see,’ it said, ‘how, when you are asleep, you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring, and, so long as you are in that dream-condition, have no doubts about them? And is it not the case that when you awake you know that all you have imagined and believed is unfounded and ineffectual? Why then are you confident that all your waking beliefs, whether from sense or intellect, are genuine? They are true in respect of your present state, but it is possible that a state will come upon you whose relation to your waking consciousness is analogous to the relation of the latter to dreaming. In comparison with this state your waking consciousness would be like dreaming! When you have entered into this state, you will be certain that all the suppositions of your intellect are empty imaginings. It may be that state is what

the Sufis claim as their special *hal* [i.e. mystic union or ecstasy], for they consider that in their 'states' (or ecstasies), which occur when they have withdrawn into themselves and are absent from their senses, they witness states (or circumstances) which do not tally with these principles of the intellect. Perhaps that 'state' is death; for the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) says: 'The people are dreaming; when they die, they become awake.' So perhaps life in this world is a dream by comparison with the world to come; and when a man dies, things come to appear differently to him from what he now beholds, and at the same time the words are addressed to him: 'We have taken off thee thy covering, and thy sight today is sharp' (Qur'an 50:21).

When these thoughts had occurred to me and penetrated my being, I tried to find some way of treating my unhealthy condition; but it was not easy. Such ideas can only be repelled by demonstration; but a demonstration requires a combining of first principles; since this is not admitted, however, it is impossible to make the demonstration. The disease was baffling, and lasted almost two months, during which I was a sceptic in fact though not in theory nor in outward expression. At length God cured me of the malady; my being was restored to health and an even balance; the necessary truths of the intellect became once more accepted, as I regained confidence in their certain and trustworthy character.

This did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light which God most high cast into my breast. That light is the key to the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proofs has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God's mercy. When the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) was asked about 'enlarging' and its meaning in the verse, 'Whenever God wills to guide a man, He enlarges his breast for *islam* [i.e. surrender to God]' (Qur'an 6:125), he said, 'It is a light which God most high casts into the heart.' When asked, 'What is the sign of it?', he said, 'Withdrawal from the mansion of deception and return to the

mansion of eternity.' It was about this light that Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'God created the creatures in darkness, and then sprinkled upon them some of His light.'

From that light must be sought an intuitive understanding of things Divine.

W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (new edn., Oxford, 1990), pp. 21–4

COMMENTARY

Hal in everyday parlance means 'state', 'situation', 'position'. However, in the vocabulary of the Sufis it refers to a mystical state, usually ecstasy. A *hal* is a state which has been temporarily reached by the mystic, as opposed to a *maqam*, which is a permanent station.

Sharaf al-Din 'Umar ibn 'Ali IBN AL-FARID (1181–1235), 'the Sultan of the Lovers', was an older contemporary of the Andalusian Sufi, Ibn al-'Arabi. Ibn al-Farid was born in Egypt. His father was a professional allocator of shares in inheritances. (That is what *farid* means.) Ibn al-Farid seems to have led a quiet and solitary life, much of it as an ascetic hermit living on the rubbish tips of Mount Muqattam on the edge of

Cairo. However, he also spent some years in Arabia and underwent a particularly intense mystical experience in Mecca. His poetry was reported to have been composed in trances that often lasted several days. His *Nazm al-Suluk* ('Poem of the Way') is 761 verses long and instructs his disciples about a series of mystical experiences. His other poems are much shorter and his *Diwan* is small, though highly esteemed. Ibn al-Farid, like Ibn al-'Arabi, redirected the conventional imagery of the deserted campsite and of the 'wine poem' to divine ends. Not only did he imitate old poems, he stole directly from them. Thus his poems recycled snatches of Mutanabbi, Buhturi and others, though of course the old verses acquired new meanings in a mystical context. (The practice of stealing or quoting from earlier poems, *tadmin*, was widely accepted and practised in the medieval Arab literary world.) Ibn al-Farid may have composed his verses in a state of mystical ecstasy, but those verses are ornate, highly intellectual and make great play with conventional courtly forms.

More controversial were the dangerous doctrines which Ibn al-Farid had clothed in

conventional poetical imagery. A leading religious thinker of the early fourteenth century, Ibn Taymiyya, denounced Ibn al-Farid for espousing the heresy of monism and of claiming that the mystic could attain full unity with God. One of Ibn Taymiyya's followers, al-Dhahabi, observed of Ibn al-Farid that his *'Diwan* is famous, and it is of great beauty and subtlety, perfection and burning desire. Except that he adulterated it with explicit monism, in the sweetness of expressions and subtlest metaphors, like pastry laced with venom!'

Pass round the remembrance of her I desire, though it be to
reproach me – for tales of the Beloved are my wine –
That mine ear may witness the one I love, afar if she be, in the
fantasy of a reproach, not the fantasy of a dream.
For the mention of her is sweet, in whatever form it be, even
though my upbraiders mingle it with contention:
'Tis as if my upbraider came with good tidings of attainment,
though I had not hoped for any responsive greeting.
My soul be her ransom, for love of whom I have spent my soul!
And indeed the time of my doom is ripe, ere the day of my doom;

And on her account I rejoice that I am exposed to shame, yea,
delightful is my rejection and humbling, after the proud high station that once was mine;

And for her sake is my self-dishonouring sweet, and that after
once I was godly, yea, the casting off of my shame, and the commission of my sins.

I say my prayers, chanting right well as I make mention of her in
my recitation, and I rejoice in the prayer-niche, she being there to lead me.

And when in my pure white robes I go to the pilgrimage, here is
the name I cry *Labbaika;* and breaking my ritual fast I hold to be my withholding from her.

And my tear-ducts flow apace because of the case I am in,
running upon what has passed with me; and my wailing expresses my distraction.

In the evening my heart is distraught with ardent passion, and in
the morning mine eye pours forth the tears of sorrow:

And lo, my heart and mine eye – the former is sorely burdened
by her most spiritual beauty, while the latter is deeply attached to the delicate grace of her stature.

My sleep is all lost, and my morning – thine be continuing life! –
and ever my wakefulness is with me, and still my yearning

increaseth.

My bond and my compact – the one is loosed not, the other unchanging: my passion of old is still my passion, my ardour is yet true ardour.

So wasted my body is, ‘tis transparent to all my secrets; my bones shrunk to thinness, reveal therein a most inward meaning.

Struck down by the violent impact of love, my ribs sore wounded, lacerated mine eyelids, that stream unceasing with blood,

Single-minded in passion, I emulate in my ethereality the air, even the air of dawn, and the breaths of the morning breeze are my rare visitors;

Sound, and yet ailing – seek me then from the zephyr of morn, for there, as my wasting willed, is now my lodging.

I have vanished of wasting even from wasting itself; yea, I have vanished from the cure of my sickness, and the cool waters that would assuage my burning thirst;

And I know not any, except it be passion, that knows where I dwell, and how I have hidden my secrets, and guarded faithfully my covenant.

Love hath left naught surviving of me save a broken heart, and sorrow, and sore distress, and sickness exceeding;

And as for the flaming of passion, my patience, my consolation –

of these not a thing remains to me, save the names of them.

Let him who is free of my desire escape with his soul safe from

all harm; and, O my soul, now depart in peace.

'Forget her!' declared my chider, himself being passionate to

chide me on her account. 'Forget thou to chide me!' I answered.

To whom should I look for guidance, alas! if I sought to forget

her? Seeing that every leader in love looks to follow my

footsteps;

In my every member severally is the whole fire of yearning, all

after her, and longing tugging my reins to pursue her.

She swayed as she moved; and I imagined each side, as she

swung it, a twig on a sand-hill, and, above it, a moon at the full;

And my every member had, as it were, its several heart, the

which, as she glanced, was pierced by its shower of arrows.

And had she laid bare my body, she would have beheld every

essence there, therein every heart contained, possessing all yearning

love.

And when I attain her, a year to me is but as a moment; and an

hour of my banishment seemeth for me a year.

And when we did meet at evening, drawn together by the paths

running straight, the one to her dwelling, the other to my tent,

And we swerved thus a little away from the tribe, where neither

was Watcher to spy, nor Slanderer with his lying talk,

I laid down my cheek upon the soil for her to tread on; and she

cried, ‘Good tidings to thee! Thou mayest kiss my veil.’

But to that my spirit would not consent, out of jealous zeal to

guard my honour and the high object of my desire:

So we passed the night as my choice willed and my heart aspired, and I saw the world my kingdom, and Time itself my slave.

A. J. Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Farid* (Dublin, 1956), pp. 90–92

COMMENTARY

‘Labbaika!’, meaning ‘I am here!’, is the cry of pilgrims as they stand on the plain of ‘Arafat, outside Mecca, during the *hajj*.

Note the stock poetical figure of the upbraider or chider. The images of the twig on the sand-dune to describe a woman’s figure and the full moon her face are, if anything, even more conventional in Arabic love poetry. However, ‘the tales of the Beloved’ refer not to any

woman, but to the Prophet Muhammad. The wine stands for spiritual drunkenness and so on throughout the poem.

When the infant moans
from the tight swaddling wrap,
and restlessly yearns
for relief from distress,
He is soothed by lullabies, and lays aside
the burden that covered him –
he listens silently
to one who soothes him.

The sweet speech makes him
forget his bitter state
and remember a secret whisper
of ancient ages.

His state makes clear
the state of audition
and confirms the dance
to be free of error.

For when he burns with desire
from lullabies,
anxious to fly
to his first abodes,

He is calmed

by his rocking cradle
as his nurse's hands
gently sway it.

I have found in gripping rapture
when she is recalled
in the chanter's tones
and the singer's tunes –

What a suffering man feels
when he gives up his soul,
when death's messengers
come to take him.

One finding pain
in being driven asunder
is like one pained in rapture
yearning for friends.

The soul pitied the body
where it first appeared,
and my spirit rose
to its high beginnings,

And my spirit soared past
the gate beyond my union
where there is no veil
of communion.

Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint. Ibn al-Farid, His*

COMMENTARY

The call to remembrance was one of the most important features of the traditional *qasida*, for, as we have seen, contemplation of the deserted campsite regularly led the poet to recall a past love or loves. The theme of remembrance is crucial to these verses by Ibn al-Farid (extracted from a much longer poem by him, the *Al-Ta'iyah al-Kubra*, or 'Great Poem Rhyming in Ta'). Remembrance was also a leading theme in the previous poem by him. However, *dhikr*, which means 'remembrance', also has a more specialist meaning in the vocabulary of the Sufis. In Sufism, *dhikr* refers to the incessant repetition of certain words or formulas in praise of God, often accompanied by music and dancing. A typical *dhikr* might consist of the repetition of such a phrase as *Ya Latif*, 'Oh Kind One' (that is, 'O God') thousands of times. In the poem above, Ibn al-Farid makes an extended comparison between the *dhikr* and the lullaby.

The controversy over the doubtful orthodoxy of Ibn al-Farid's verses rumbled on through the centuries. Some critics even wrote their own poems rhyming in *ta*, in order to refute Ibn al-Farid's ideas. However, Ibn al-Farid's reputation was fiercely defended by Sufis who chanted his poems in their meetings and, by the late fifteenth century, his defenders could be seen to have triumphed over his critics.

Other poets besides Ibn al-Farid made use of the *qasida* form for devotional purposes. Together with Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allaqat*, Busiri's *Burda* is probably the most famous poem in the Arabic language. Sharaf al-Din Muhammad al-Busiri (1211–1294/6?), a mystic belonging to the Shadhili order of Sufis, earned a living in Alexandria as a manuscript copyist. It is said that the inspiration for the *Qasidat al-Burda*, 'The Ode of the Mantle', came to him as the result of a dream after he had suffered a paralysing stroke. The Prophet appeared in Busiri's dream and put his mantle on the stricken poet, and at that instant he was cured. Busiri composed the *qasida* entitled 'Luminous Stars in Praise of the Best of Mankind', but more popularly known as the *Burda*, as an act of

thanksgiving. The poem follows the conventional structure of the *qasida* and uses that structure to present a compendium of lore about the Prophet together with a call to repentance. The *Burda*, the product of a supernatural cure, itself acquired healing powers and its words were widely used as a kind of talisman against disease and misfortune.

‘Was it the memory of neighbours in Dhu Salam
That made you blend your flowing tears with blood?

Was it the wind that blows from Kazima?
Or did lightning flash in darkness over Idam?

Why are your eyes overflowing though you tell them to stop?
Why is your heart so frantic though you try to keep it calm?

How can a lover hope to hide his love
When his is both streaming and burning?

Without your passion you’d sprinkle no ruin with tears
Nor lie awake remembering ‘Alam and Ban.

Can you still deny your love when tears and illness,
Fair witnesses both, are speaking out against you,

And when passion has marked your cheeks with two deep lines
Of sickness like narcissus and tears like *'anam* fruits?'

Yes, I admit my beloved's apparition has robbed me of my sleep.
Love will spoil all pleasure with pain.

O you who blame me over 'Udhri love, take note
Of my excuse – were you but just, you would stop blaming me:

News of my state has spread far beyond you,
My secret to slander lies exposed and my disease is fatal.
Your advice is most sincere but what you say I cannot hear.
To the riling of his critics the lover is stone deaf.

Even the advice of age I spurned when it censured me.
Yet age is far above suspicion in its counsel.

But my hell-bent soul in its ignorance did not
Take heed of the warnings of hoariness and age,

Nor did I, unashamedly, prepare good deeds of welcome
For that guest who has descended now upon my head.

Had I known I would fail to pay him due respect
I would have concealed this secret for ever with *katam* dye.

Who can restrain my bolting soul from sin,
Like one restrains bolting steeds with bridles?

Do not try to cap its desire through transgression.
Food only strengthens the glutton's lust.

The self is like an infant: given free rein, it craves to suckle
Until it is grown up; if weaned in time, it will abstain.

Curb its passions and beware of letting them take charge –
When passion rules, it kills or brings dishonour.

Be watchful when it forages in the field of deeds;
If the meadow pleases it, do not let it roam.

How many deadly delights has it not made enticing for those
Who never knew that the best cuts are most poisonous.

Beware of its hidden snares in hunger and satiety;
Some hunger is far worse then overeating.

And drain of tears an eye once filled
With forbidden sights, and stick to the diet of remorse.

Oppose the Self and Satan and rise up against them;
Treat their claim of good counsel with mistrust.

If they pretend to litigate or judge, do not obey!

You know the cunning of both litigant and judge.

May God forgive me for words without deeds;
Through which I have ascribed progeny to impotence.

I urge you to do good and myself had no such urge.
Not upright myself, how can I tell you ‘be upright’?

I did not prepare for death with supererogatory works.
Prayer and fasting for me were but an obligation.

I sinned against the example of one whose dark nights spent in prayer
Made his feet complain of painful swelling,

Whose hunger made him squeeze his entrails and fold,
Despite its tender skin, his belly over stones.

To tempt him, high mountains turned to gold
Only to meet with his utmost disdain,

His needs but strengthening his restraint;
True resolution is not swayed by need.

How should his needs draw to the world one without whom
The world would not have been extracted from the void?

Muhammad, lord of both universes, lord of men and jinn,
Lord of the two peoples, Arabs and foreigners,

Our Prophet, source of all command and prohibition,
More truthful than the word of any other in his ‘yes’ or ‘no’,

The beloved in whose intercession all hope resides
In sudden terror and calamity of every kind.

He called us to God. Whoever holds on to him
Holds on to a rope that will not break.

The other prophets he outstripped in virtues physical and moral.
In generosity and knowledge they failed to approach him.

They all seek from the Prophet
A handful from his ocean or a draught from his rain,

Standing before him as befits their limits:
Dots as to knowledge, diacritical signs as to wisdom.

In him, form and essence reach perfection,
And mankind’s Creator chose him as beloved.

In virtues he is exalted above every peer,
And of his beauty’s core none can claim a share.

Forget all the Christians pretend about their prophet;
Devise and decree what you wish in his praise,

Attribute to him whatever honour you wish,

Ascribe to his rank any greatness you wish,

The merits of God's Prophet are limitless;
No human speech can encompass them.

If his miracles in their greatness were equal to his rank
Dry bones would revive at the mention of his name.

Out of craving for us, he spared us trials that surpass our reason
And freed us from uncertainty and doubt.

Comprehension of his meaning confounds mankind;
All appear dumbstruck, be they distant or near,

Like the sun which appears small to the eye
From afar, and blinds when viewed from close at hand.

How in this world can his true nature be grasped
By a people of sleepers concerned only with their dreams?

The sum of our knowledge about him is that he is human
And that he is the best of God's creation,

And that all noble messengers' miracles before him
Became theirs only through his light.

He is the sun of excellence, they are its stars,
Reflecting its rays for people in the dark.

Marvel at the person of the Prophet, with virtues adorned,
In beauty clad, with a smile endowed,

Fresh as blossoms, grand as the full moon,
Generous as the sea, unflinching as Time.

He is one, but appears to you in his glory
As though in the midst of an army or retinue.

The pearl concealed in its shell seems as though
Made from the mine of his speech and smile.

No perfume can equal the dust on his bones;
Lucky is the one who smells its fragrance and kisses it.

Proof of his noble descent are the events at his birth;
How great a beginning, how great an end!

On that day the Persians perceived
Warnings of retribution and impending doom,

And Kisra's Aiwan was cleft asunder,
To be rejoined no more, like Kisra's royal house;

Bemoaning it, the fire's flames died down
And the river's source stopped flowing out of pain.

Sawa suffered when its lake ran dry,
And the thirsty returned in distress.

Fire flowed like water out of grief
And water flamed like fire,

The jinn screamed, the lights rose high
And Truth appeared in meaning and in word.

Yet they were blind and deaf; the message of good tidings
Was not heard, nor was the lightning's warning seen

After the diviners had told their
peoples That their twisted faith would not stand up,

And meteors in the firmament had fallen down
Before their eyes like idols on this earth,

Until, swept from revelation's path,
Droves of devils in rout followed each others' tracks,

Like Abraha's knights in their flight,
Or that army he pelted with pebbles,

Which praised him before they were thrown from his palms
As when Jonah was thrown from the swallower's gut.

At his call the trees came prostrate
Walking on legs without feet,

As though drawing straight lines for those wondrous signs
Which their branches inscribed on the way,

Or like clouds that moved wherever he went
To shield him from the heat of fiery midday.

By the moon split in half, I swear that it shares
A resemblance with his heart that lends truth to my oath,

And by the greatness and goodness contained in that Cave
To which the eyes of all doubters were blind

For Truth and Truthful were in the cave unseen
Yet they said: ‘There is no one inside!’ –

Thinking the dove would not lend its wings,
Nor the spider weave its web to shield the Best of Mankind.

God’s protection dispenses with need
For double armour and ramparts high!

Whenever fate threatens harm and I seek his help
I am assured of a sanctuary beyond harm’s reach,

And when both worlds’ wealth I beg from his generous hand
I gain precious gifts from the best who ever gave.

Do not reject the Revelations that he dreamt;
His eyes may have slept but his heart never did.

They came to him at the onset of his prophethood
When his maturity of vision was beyond refute.

May God be praised! Revelation is no acquired skill,
Nor can prophets be faulted about the unseen.

How many sick he cured with his palm,
How many afflicted he freed from madness's chains!

How often his call restored such life to the ashen year of drought
That its abundance outshone the seasons of plenty,

With clouds so generous the valleys seemed as though
Submerged by the sea or drowned in the Flood of the Dams.

Let me describe his miracles that shone
Like hospitality's fire lit upon hills at night.

Pearls when strung together gain in beauty
Though unstrung their value does not sink;

Yet eulogy can never hope to fathom
The noble traits and virtues that were his:

Signs of truth from the All-merciful, both newly formed,
And, as attributes of the Eternal One, eternal,

Of timeless import, giving news of Judgement Day
And of the days of Iram and 'Ad,

Remaining ours for ever and so surpassing

All former prophets' wonders which came but lasted not,

Firmly cast, leaving no room
For doubters to sow dissent, nor needing arbitration,

Never yet opposed without the worst of enemies
Desisting from his pillage in surrender,

Their eloquence repelling all aggressors,
As honour jealously wards off the harem's desecrators,

Containing meanings of expanse wider than the ocean
And greater in beauty and value than its pearls,

Their wonders uncountable and beyond number,
Never causing lassitude however much repeated,

Cooling the reciter's eye until I said:
'You have seized the rope of God. Now hold it tight.

If you utter them in fear of the Laza fire
Their cool springs will extinguish its flames.'

They are like the Pool that renders the sinners' faces
White when they had come to it as black as coal,

Or like the Bridge and the Scale in equity;
Without them righteousness would not prevail among mankind.

Do not wonder at their rejection by the envious
Who feign ignorance when they understand full well;

Struck by disease, an eye may fail to see the sun,
And mouths may be too ill to know the water's taste.

O best of all whose courtyard ever supplicants sought,
Running, or riding she-camels with sturdy hooves,

O greatest sign for all those who take heed,
Greatest boon for all who seek increase!

In one night you journeyed from sanctuary to sanctuary,
Passing, like the full moon, through bleakest darkness on the way,

Ascending all night till you came within Two Bow-lengths,
A point never attained, nor aspired to before.

There, all messengers and prophets gave you precedence,
Like servants who for their master happily make way.

When you marched through the seven heavens
In procession with them, you were their standard bearer,

Till, when you came so close that no goal was left for other runners,
And no summit for other climbers,

You lowered all ranks by comparison
Since you were summoned high as only overlord

To reap a union – how secluded from all eyes! –
And a secret – how totally concealed! –

And so gathered every unapportioned honour
And traversed every undiscovered place,

And achieved the most exalted rank
And obtained blessings beyond all comprehension.
Good tidings for us people of Islam, for in him we have
A pillar of kind care which none can overthrow.

When God called him – who calls us to obedience of Him –
His noblest messenger, we became the noblest of nations.

The news of his mission struck fear in the enemies' hearts,
As the lion's roar makes heedless herds stampede.

He met up with them in every battle
Till lances made them seem like meat on a butcher's block.

Vainly they hoped to flee, in envy almost of their slain
Whom eagles and vultures carried off in bits.

They lost count of the nights that passed
Except for the nights of the sacred months.

Religion alighted upon their courtyard like a guest
Bringing chiefs hungry for their enemies' flesh,

Leading armies vast as the sea, mounted on swift steeds,
Foaming with surging waves of heroes,

Each answerable to God and trusting in His reward,
And wielding swords that uproot and shatter unbelief,

Until the faith of Islam, exiled from among them at first,
Became part of their lineage and kin,

And was provided through them with the best father and husband,
And would never be orphaned or widowed.

They are the mountains. Ask their foes
What they saw of them on the battlefield;

Ask Hunain, ask Uhud, ask Badr,
Seasons of death more calamitous than the plague.

They brought their white swords back red
From the drinking fount of their enemies' black locks.

With the brown lances of Khatt they wrote, their pens
Leaving no parts of the body without dots.

Armed to the teeth, they have a special mark

Like the mark that distinguishes roses from thorns:

In their fragrance blows the wind of victory;
You would think their every warrior was a rose in its bud.

Seated on their steeds they appear as though planted on hills
Due to their tough resolution, not to their tight saddle-straps.

Their enemies' hearts fled from their power in fear
Unable to distinguish herds from hordes.

When they meet those helped by the Prophet of God,
The lions of the thicket are stunned.

Never will you see an ally of his not aided
By him, nor an enemy of his not crushed.

His people he placed in the fortress of his creed,
Just as lions raise their cubs in dense bush.

How often has God's word felled his opponents,
How often has His proof confounded his contestants.

Suffice it as a miracle to see in the Jahiliyya age
An orphan of such education and knowledge.

I served him with my eulogy to be redeemed thereby
From the sins of a life of poetry and servitude

Which wound around my neck collars of fearful portent
As though I was a lamb destined for ritual death.

In both pursuits I obeyed the folly of youthful passion
And reaped nothing but sins and bitter remorse.

What a loss my soul incurred in this trade!
In exchange for this world it did not buy faith nor even tried to bargain.

Those who sell their assets for short-term gain
Shall see loss in their sales and transactions.

Yet, despite my sins, my covenant with the Prophet is unharmed,
Nor is the rope that links me to him severed.

I have his protection, for I am named
Muhammad, and he is mankind's most faithful protector.

If he does not gently take me by the hand
On Judgement Day, my foot is sure to slip.

Far be it from him that a supplicant should be deprived of his gifts
Or that a neighbour seeking his help should remain unprotected.

Since I have devoted my thoughts to his praise
I have found him the best guarantor of salvation.

No dust-stained hand will ever miss out on his richness;
Rain makes flowers sprout on desert hills.

But I do not seek the flowers of this world
Which Zuhair picked through praising Harim.

O most generous of mankind, I have none to turn to
Save you when the final catastrophe comes.

Your glory, O Prophet, shall not diminish through me
When the Generous one assumes the name of Avenger,

For this world and its counterpart spring but from your bounty
And the Tablet and Pen are but part of your knowledge.

O soul, do not despair over the gravity of your faults;
Great sins when forgiveness comes are like small ones.

When God divides His mercy, its shares
Perchance may equal the size of our transgression.

O Lord, let my hope in You not be thwarted,
And do not annul my account with You,

And be kind to Your servant in both worlds,
For when terror beckons, his fortitude shall wane,

And let a cloud of Your incessant blessings

Pour showers of abundant rain upon the Prophet,

For as long as the zephyr moves the branches of the willow
And camel drivers delight their grey animals with songs.

Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (eds.), *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1996), pp. 389–411

COMMENTARY

The *Burda* starts with a lament over the deserted campsites (Dhu Salam and Kazima) and ends with a panegyric – just like the traditional pre-Islamic *qasida*. In the mid-part of the poem, Busiri compares his wasted youth to the glorious career of the Prophet.

'Udhri love is chaste or unfulfilled love, as celebrated by elegiac poets of the Umayyad period. The name derives from the south Arabian tribe of Banu Udhra, two of whose members allegedly died of love.

Katam is a plant used for dyeing the hair black, but there is a play upon words here, for *katama* means 'conceal'.

Kisra is a generic name for a Persian emperor.

In pre-Islamic times, Abraha was the Christian Abyssinian viceroy over the Yemen. In 570 (the Year of the Elephant) he attempted to march against Mecca, intent on desecrating the Ka'ba. His army was accompanied by elephants. However, the elephants refused to enter Mecca and then, as the Abyssinian army began its retreat, it was pelted by pebbles dropped by birds. Most of the army perished under the hail of stones, but Abraha died of a plague which slowly rotted his body, so that his limbs dropped off. The story is referred to in the Qur'an, *sura* 105, 'The Elephant'.

In pre-Islamic times Iram was the magnificent palace of many columns built by King Shaddad to rival Paradise, but a great shout from heaven destroyed the king and his retinue before they could enter the palace. The whereabouts of the lost palace gave rise to many stories. A version of the legend of the impious King Shaddad is found in later compilations of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

'Ad was a pre-Islamic tribe who failed to heed the warnings of God's prophet, Hud. They were destroyed by a roaring wind.

Laza fire is hellfire.

Zuhair is Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, a pre-Islamic poet who wrote a celebrated *Mu'allaqa* which included a panegyric of a tribal mediator, Harim ibn Sinan.

In the late Middle Ages, Sufi groups were playing a more prominent social and cultural role than they had done hitherto. In a passage extracted below, the twelfth-century writer and adventurer Usamah ibn Munqidh (1095–1188) describes the impact a Sufi gathering had upon him when he was first introduced to one of their meetings.

Usamah is one of the most interesting and appealing of medieval Arab authors. He was born into the ruling dynasty of the tiny principality of Shayzar in northern Syria. However, having fallen out with his uncle who was the Emir of Shayzar, Usamah spent most of his life in exile. (He was therefore one of very few members of his clan not to be killed when an earthquake struck the castle at Shayzar in 1157.) He had a chequered and not entirely honourable career in politics and warfare in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. He had many encounters,

on and off the battlefield, with the Franks of the Crusader principalities, whom he seems to have regarded as a kind of horrible marvel created by Allah. He thought that they were good for fighting, but not for much else. Many, though not all, of his anecdotes about the Franks are to be found in his *Kitab al-Vtibar* ('The Book of Example'). This has sometimes been described as Usamah's autobiography, but this is not quite accurate, for autobiography was not a recognized genre in the medieval Arab world. Rather in the *Vtibar* Usamah aimed to instruct his descendants through teaching by examples. (He did not have a general readership in mind.) *Ibra* is an example, or something from which one takes warning. Thus, for example, pious folk who studied the Qur'an drew example from the fate of once proud dynasties who had displeased God and had since perished. Usamah drew upon the personal experiences of a long and eventful life in order to provide examples which might encourage his descendants to be brave, wary and, above all, mindful of God; the principal theme of his book is that though man proposes, it is God who disposes. Despite its edifying aim, the *I'tibar* is a good read – full of

humour, vivid detail, idiosyncratic thoughts and exciting incidents.

> The Franks are void of all zeal and jealousy. One of them may be walking along with his wife. He meets another man who takes the wife by the hand and steps aside to converse with her while the husband is standing on one side waiting for his wife to conclude the conversation. If she lingers too long for him, he leaves her alone with the conversant and goes away.
>
> Here is an illustration which I myself witnessed:
>
> When I used to visit Nablus, I always took lodging with a man named Mu'izz, whose home was a lodging house for the Moslems. The house had widows which opened to the road, and there stood opposite to it on the other side of the road a house belonging to a Frank who sold wine for the merchants. He would take some wine in a bottle and go around announcing it by shouting, 'So and so, the merchant, has just opened a cask full of this wine. He who wants to buy some of it will find it in such and such a place.' The Frank's pay for the announcement would be the wine in that bottle. One day this Frank went home and found a man with his wife in the same bed. He asked him, 'What could have made thee enter into my wife's room?' The man replied, 'I was tired, so I went into rest.' 'But how,' asked he, 'didst thou get into my bed?' The other replied, 'I found a bed that was spread, so I slept in it.' 'But,' said he, 'my wife was sleeping together with thee!' The other replied, 'Well, the bed is hers. How could I therefore have prevented her from using her own bed?' 'By the truth of my religion,' said the husband, 'if thou shouldst do it again, thou and I would have a quarrel.' Such was for the Frank the entire expression of his disapproval and the limit of his jealousy.

However, Usamah was not always so cheerful…

Let no one therefore assume for a moment that the hour of death is advanced by exposing one's self to danger, or retarded by over-cautiousness. In the fact that I have myself survived is an object lesson, for how many terrors have I braved, and how many horrors and dangers have I risked! How many horsemen have I faced, and how many lions have I killed! How many sword cuts and lance thrusts have I received! How many wounds with darts and arbalest stones have been inflicted on me! All this while I was with regard to death in an impregnable fortress, until I have now attained the completion of my ninetieth year. And now I view health and experience in the same light as the Prophet (may Allah's blessing and peace rest upon him!) when he said, 'Health sufficeth as a malady.' In fact, my survival from all those horrors has resulted for me in something even more arduous than fighting and killing. To me, death at the head of an army would have been easier than the troubles of later life. For my life has been so prolonged that the revolving days have taken from me all the objects of pleasure. The turbidity of misery has marred the clearness of happy living. I am in the position described in my own words as follows:

When, at eighty, time plays havoc with my power of endurance,
I am chagrined at the feebleness of my foot and the trembling of my hand.
While I write, my writing looks crooked,
Like the writing of one whose hands have shivers and tremors.
What a surprise it is that my hand be too feeble to carry a pen,
After it had been strong enough to break a lance in a lion's breast.
And when I walk, cane in hand, I feel heaviness
In my foot as though I were trudging through mud on a plain.
Say, therefore, to him who seeks prolonged existence:

Behold the consequences of long life and agedness.

My energy has subsided and weakened, the joy of living has come to an end. Long life has reversed me: all light starts from darkness and reverts to darkness. I have become as I said:

Destiny seems to have forgotten me, so that now I am like
An exhausted camel left by the caravan in the desert.
My eighty years have left no energy in me.
When I want to rise up, I feel as though I had a broken leg.
I recite my prayer sitting; for kneeling,
If I attempt it, is difficult.
This condition has forewarned me that
The time of my departure on the long journey has drawn nigh.

Enfeebled by years, I have been rendered incapable of performing service for the sultans. So I no more frequent their doors and no longer depend upon them for my livelihood. I have resigned from their service and have returned to them such favours as they had rendered; for I realize that the feebleness of old age cannot stand the exacting duties of service, and the merchandise of the very old man cannot be sold to an amir. I have now confined myself to my house, therefore, taking obscurity for my motto.

Hitti, *Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman*, pp. 164–5, 194–5

Usamah played a leading part in the politics and warfare of the age, but, as the lament in rhymed prose given above indicates, he was to outlive his strength.

The *I'tibar* is rightly Usamah's most famous book and has been translated into many European languages. However, Usamah did not write the book for a general audience and in his own lifetime he was chiefly famous as a poet. The two short poems which follow are somewhat cryptic:

My companion resembles myself in this night of sad separation in emaciation, waking, paleness of colour, and tears. –

I stand over against his face which, wherever I see it, keeps shedding light for any who turns towards him in search of knowledge. As if he is covering my body with his eyelids' illness. In whichever place he appears to me, I see eye to eye beauty in its perfection.

Many a lonely one weeps (silently dying), when the night darkens around her, but in her entrails is a nagging fire.

She melts from grief, either for one's turning away and departure, or because of such separation that those divided will never unite again.

Yet I did not see glowing embers melting, her tears excepted; nor saw I ever before the body of one who weeps so that it totally consisted of tears.

Pieter Smoor (trans.), in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 138 (1988), pp. 300–301

These are riddles cast as poems: in both cases the unnamed object evoked is a candle. Yet the first version is more than a mere riddle, for it is also a metaphorical evocation of Usamah's own lachrymose state.

Usamah was also a noted anthologist. His compilation *Kitab al-Manazil wa al-Diyar*, 'The Book of Campsites and Abodes', is an anthology of poetry devoted to the traditional Bedouin themes of abandoned campsites, lost homelands, lost loves and nostalgia. These were popular subjects in classical Arabic literature, but they also particularly reflected the substance of Usamah's life of wandering, exile and loss; some of the best poems in the anthology are by Usamah himself. In Usamah's introduction to this book, he reflected on the earthquake of 1157 which destroyed the ancestral castle of Shayzar and wiped out almost the entire clan of the Banu Munqidh, who had gathered there to celebrate a circumcision.

> I was moved to compose this volume by the destruction which has overcome my country and my birthplace. For time

has spread the hem of its robe over it and is striving with all its might and power to annihilate it… All the villages have been levelled to the ground; all the inhabitants perished; the dwelling has become but a trace, and joys have been transformed into sorrows and misfortunes. I stopped there after the earthquake which destroyed it… and I did not find my house, nor the house of my father and brothers, nor the houses of my uncles and my uncles' sons, nor of my clan. Sorely troubled I called upon Allah in this great trial which he had sent me and because he had taken away the favours which he had formerly bestowed upon me. Then I departed… trembling as I went and staggering as though weighed down by a heavy load. So great was the loss that swiftly flowing tears dried up, and sighs followed each other and straightened the curvature of the ribs. The malice of time did not stop at the destruction of the houses and the annihilation of the inhabitants, but they all perished in the twinkling of an eye and even quicker, and then calamity followed upon calamity from that time onwards. And I sought consolation in composing this book and made it into a lament for the home and the beloved ones. This will be of no avail and will bring no comfort, but it is the utmost I can do. And to Allah – the glorious and great – I complain of my solitude, bereft of my family and brothers, I complain of my wanderings in alien lands, bereft of country and birthplace…

I. Y. Kratchkovsky, *Among Arabic Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1953), pp. 83–4

As a keen rhabdophilist, Usamah produced another beguiling anthology, the *Kitab al-'Asa* ('The Book of the Stick'), in which he collected anecdotes and poems about sticks-walking-sticks, crutches, wands, cudgels, herdsmen's crooks – all manner of sticks. Moses and

Solomon had famous magical sticks, but Usamah also included more mundane stories about sticks drawn from his own experience and that of his friends. The following scene was witnessed by Usamah during one of his frequent visits to the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem:

> I paid a visit to the tomb of John the son of Zechariah – God's blessing on both of them! – in the village of Sebastea in the province of Nablus. After saying my prayers, I came out into the square that was bounded on one side by the Holy Precinct. I found a half-closed gate, opened it and entered a church. Inside were about ten old men, their bare heads as white as combed cotton. They were facing the east, and wore [embroidered?] on their breasts staves ending in crossbars turned up like the rear of a saddle. They took their oath on this sign, and gave hospitality to those who needed it. The sight of their piety touched my heart, but at the same time it displeased and saddened me, for I had never seen such zeal and devotion among the Muslims. For some time I brooded on this experience, until one day, as Mu'in ad-Din and I were passing the Peacock House, he said to me: 'I want to dismount here and visit the Old Men.' Certainly,' I replied, and we dismounted and went into a long building set at an angle to the road. For the moment I thought that there was no one there. Then I saw about a hundred prayer-mats, and on each a sufi, his face expressing peaceful serenity, and his body humble devotion. This was a reassuring sight, and I gave thanks to Almighty God that there were among the Muslims men of even more zealous devotion than those Christian priests. Before this I had never seen sufis in their monastery, and was ignorant of the way they lived.
>
> Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (London, 1969), pp. 83–4

Usamah was not the only Arab to write on the subject of sticks. The *Shu'ubiyya* used to mock the way that Arabs when speaking used sticks to emphasize their rhetorical points. In reply, several Arab authors, including Jahiz, produced treatises attesting to the antiquity and usefulness of sticks.

John, the son of Zechariah, is John the Baptist – who is revered by Muslims as well as by Christians.

Usamah also produced treatises, now lost, on dreams and on women. However, the *Lubab al-Adab* ('The Pith of Literature') has survived. This was a *belles-lettres* anthology in which Usamah collected traditional material on a wide range of subjects – among them politics, generosity, holding one's tongue, the way women walk, the wisdom of Pythagoras, the moral and social purpose of *adab*, and eloquence in the service of virtue. Like Abu Tammam, the compiler of the *Hamasa*, Usamah was particularly preoccupied with courage and

he dedicated a special chapter to it. Usamah was also a noted literary critic and his *Kitab al-Badi" fi Naqd al-Sh'ir* ('The Book of Embellishment in the Criticism of Poetry') deals with the new, or *badi'*, style in poetry.

ATHIR AL-DIN Muhammad ibn Yusuf Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi (1256–1344) was born in Granada and came from Berber stock. However, he travelled east on the *hajj* and eventually settled in Cairo. There he taught the religious sciences and grammar in the *madrasas*. He was particularly famous as a grammarian and linguist; he knew Turkish, Persian and Ethiopian, and wrote the oldest grammar of the Turkish language to have survived. He was also a notable poet, as was his learned daughter Nudar, and when she died young, he wrote a short book about her called the *Idrak* ('The Achievement'). The elegy which follows comes from Athir al-Din's *Diwan:*

Now that Nudar
has settled in the grave,
my life would be sweet again
could my soul only taste it.

A brave young woman
seized for six months
by a strange sickness
of varied nature:

Swelling stomach and fever,
then consumption, coughing, and heaving –
who could withstand
five assaults?

She would see
visions sometimes,
or leave this world
for the Realm Divine,

And inwardly,
she was calm, content
with what she saw of paradise,
but of life, despairing.

Yet she was never angry for a day,
never complaining of her grief,
never mentioning the misery
she suffered.

She left her life on Monday
after the sun's disk
appeared to us
as a deep yellow flower.

> The people prayed
> and praised her,
> and placed her in the tomb –
> dark, desolate, oppressive.
>
> Th. Emil Homerin (trans.), in 'Reflections on Poetry in the Mamluk Age', *Mamluk Studies Review*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1997), p. 81

Athir al-Din knew by heart the fundamental work on Arabic grammar, Sibawayhi's monument *Kitab* ('The Book'). This was a noteworthy feat, for the *Kitab* is roughly 900 printed pages long. However, Athir al-Din's achievement has many parallels. Saladin, though a Kurdish military adventurer, seems to have been entirely Arab in his culture and, among other feats, he had memorized the entire *Diwan* of Usamah ibn Munqidh's poems. Usamah himself was reported to know by heart over 20,000 verses of pre-Islamic poetry. Such mnemonic feats were quite common in the pre-modern Middle East. It was normal for a scholar to know the Qur'an by heart and this must have had an influence on the literary styles of those who had memorized the Holy Book. The tenth-century philologist and traditionalist Abu Bakr al-Anbari was reported to have dictated from

memory 45,000 pages of traditions concerning the Prophet. The tenth-century poet, philologist and scribe Abu Bakr al-Khwarizmi sought audience of the Vizier Ibn ‘Abbad (on whom see Chapter 5). Ibn ‘Abbad said, ‘Tell him I have bound myself not to receive any literary man, unless he know by heart twenty thousand verses composed by Arabs of the desert.’ The chamberlain reported this to al-Khwarizmi, who replied, ‘Go back and ask him if he means twenty thousand composed by men or twenty thousand composed by women?’ On being told this, Ibn ‘Abbad realized that it must be the illustrious al-Khwarizmi who was seeking audience and gave instructions for him to be shown in straightaway. Blind poets like Buhturi and Ma‘arri committed anything they heard to memory.

Literary men were walking, talking books (rather like that closing scene in Truffaut’s film *Fahrenheit 451*, in which the rebels dedicated to literature are shown wandering about and declaiming texts they have committed to memory in order to preserve them from oblivion). Writing was not a necessary vehicle

for literature and a number of important poets were illiterate.

The Spanish poet ABU HAMID AL-GHARNATI (d. 1169–70) wrote,

> Knowledge in the heart is not knowledge in books;
> So be not infatuated with fun and play.
> Memorise, understand, and work hard to win it.
> Great labour is needed; there is no other way.
>
> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 207

Ibn Khaldun, having noted that poetry rather than the Qur'an was used to teach Arabic in Andalusia, went on to urge poets to train themselves in their art by memorizing the poems of their great predecessors, especially those included in al-Isfahani's anthology, the *Kitab al-Aghani* (see Chapter 5). Ibn Khaldun believed that one was what one had committed to memory; the better the quality of what had been memorized, the better it was for one's soul. For Ibn Khaldun and his contemporaries, rote-learning was a source of creativity rather than a dreary alternative to it. The impromptu quotation of apposite verses or maxims (so

greatly esteemed by those who attended literary soirées) was only made possible by a well-stocked memory. Similarly the ability of poets to extemporise within traditional forms depended in the first instance on memory.

Riwaya, which in modern Arabic means 'story', originally referred to the act of memorization and transmission. The written word was seen as an accessory, a kind of *aide-memoire* for people who preferred to rely on memorization and oral transmission. Often manuscripts were copied with the sole aim of committing to memory what was being copied. Reading aloud also helped to fix a book in the memory. Incidentally, reading silently in private was commonly disapproved of. One should read aloud with a master and by so doing insert oneself in a chain of authoritative transmission. Medieval literature was a continuous buzz.

Repetition was crucial to memorization. According to one twelfth-century scholar, 'If you do not repeat something fifty times, it will not remain firmly embedded in the mind.' Treatises on technical and practical subjects, such as law, warfare, gardening or the rules of

chess, were commonly put into verse or rhymed prose in order to assist in their memorization. Men worried ceaselessly about how to improve their memory. Honey, toothpicks and twenty-one raisins a day were held to be good for the memory, whereas coriander and aubergine were supposed to be bad. Ibn Jama‘a, a thirteenth-century scholar, held that reading inscriptions on tombs, walking between camels haltered in a line, or flicking away lice, all interfered with memory.

Many of the best-known literary productions of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries were stodgy compilations of received knowledge put together by men whose daytime work was as clerks in some government office, or as tenured professors in *madrasas*. Nevertheless, there were exceptions and it is even possible to discern elements of late medieval ‘counter-culture’, and elements too of a literature of vagabondage, satire, scurrility and eroticism.

The sophisticated craze for stories about thieves and charlatans which had been embraced by litterateurs and intellectuals in

tenth-century Baghdad persisted in the late medieval period and, sometime in the 1230s or 1240s, Jawbari produced the classic work on rogues' tricks. Zayn al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Umar al-JAWBARI was born in Damascus. He pursued an exciting career as a dervish, alchemist and professional treasure-hunter, in the course of which he travelled widely – even as far as India. The *Kashf al-Asrar*, 'The Unveiling of Secrets', was written at the behest of Mas'ud, the Artuqid ruler of Mosul. It is a treatise in thirty chapters on the tricks of all sorts of rogues – peddlers of quack medicines, horse doctors, professional seducers, disreputable monks, fraudulent alchemists, and so on. Besides explaining the technical details of all sorts of criminal and fraudulent activities, Jawbari also tells lots of entertaining stories, some said to be based on personal experience. However, it is clear that some of the stories he claims as his own are in fact very old, and despite his pretence to rendering a public service by warning his readers about various dangers and deceits, it is also clear that Jawbari's primary purpose in assembling his material was to amuse and excite. What follows

is from the chapter on the tricks of the Banu Sasan.

I once saw one of the Banu Sasan in Harran. This man had taken an ape and taught it to salaam to the people and to do the prayer and the rosary, and to use the toothpick and to weep. Then I saw this ape perform a trick which no human could have managed. For, when it was the day of the Friday prayer, an Indian slave proceeded to the mosque. This slave, who was smartly dressed, spread a beautiful prayer-mat in front of the *mihrab*. Then, at the fourth hour, the ape was dressed in a princely robe, secured at the waist by a valuable belt, and he was drenched in all sorts of perfumes. Then he was mounted on a mule which was caparisoned in gold. His escort was provided by three extravagantly apparelled Hindu servants. One carried his prayer-mat, the other his hose, while the third beat the ground in front of him. As they proceeded the ape salaamed the people along the way. When they reached the entrance to the mosque, they put the ape's hose on him, they helped him to dismount and the slave who stood before him with the prayer-mat spread it for him. The ape made the gesture of greeting to the people. Everyone who asked about him was told that, 'He is the son of King So-and-So, who is one of the greatest of Indian kings. However, he has been bewitched and he will remain in this form until he reaches a place to pray.' Then the slave spread out the special prayer-mat and passed the rosary and the toothpick down to the ape. The ape produced a hand-kerchief from his belt and spread that in front of him, after which he made use of the toothpick. Then he did two ritual prostrations as prescribed for ritual purification. Then he did two more prostrations, in the way that they are done in the mosque. Then he took the rosary and ran it through his fingers. After this the chief slave got to his feet and salaamed the people and said, 'O fellows, verily God has blessed the man who has his health, for you should know that humanity is vulnerable to all sorts of

evils. So a man should bear himself steadfastly and let him who is healthy give thanks. And know that this ape which you see in front of you was in his time the handsomest of men. He was the son of King So-and-So, ruler of Such-and-Such Island. Yet praise be to Him who stripped the prince of handsomeness and power. This despite the fact that there was no one more pious and more fearful before God the Exalted. Yet the believer is the afflicted one. God decreed the prince's marriage to the daughter of a certain king and he spent some time living with her. But then people reported to her that he had fallen in love with one of his mamluks. She asked him about this and he swore before God that it was not so, she let the matter drop. Then she heard more gossip on the affair and jealousy overcame her and there was no resisting it. Then she sought permission from him to go away and visit her family. He sent her off in the state appropriate to her rank. But then, when she reached her family, she used magic to transform him into the ape that you see before you. When the king learnt what had happened, he said that he would be utterly disgraced among the other kings. So he ordered him to leave his territory. We have asked all the other kings to intercede for him, but she maintains that she has sworn he shall stay in this form until 100,000 dinars are paid, and only on their payment will he be restored to his former shape. The kings have rallied round and each has paid a bit and we have collected 90,000 dinars and now only need 10,000 dinars. So who will help him with some money and show pity to this young man who has lost kingship, family and homeland, as well as his original shape when he became a monkey?' At this, the ape covered his face with the handkerchief and began to weep tears like rain. Then the hearts of the people were moved by that and every single one gave him something. So he came away from the mosque with a lot and he continued to tour the territory in this guise. Pay attention to this and take heed.

Again, I was once in Konya…

'Abd al-Rahman al-Jawbari, *Kashf al-Asrar*, trans. Robert Irwin (Damascus, n.d.), pp. 22–3

The ancient city of Harran, in the Euphrates basin, is in present-day eastern Turkey.

The year 613 in the Muslim calendar corresponded to April 1216-April 1217 in the Christian calendar.

The use of a toothpick (*siwak*) was part of piety, for, according to a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Cleanse your mouths with toothpicks; for your mouths are the abode of guardian angels; whose pens are the tongues, and whose ink is the spittle of men; and to whom naught is more unbearable than the remains of food in the mouth.’ According to the tenth-century belletrist Muhammad ibn Isma‘il al-Tha’alabi, Abraham was the first person to trim his moustache, part his hair and use a toothpick. According to al-Washsha, use of the toothpick ‘whitens the teeth, cleans the brain, perfumes the breath, puts off choler, drives out phlegm, strengthens the gum, cleans the sight and renders food more tasty’. Despite all this, public use of the toothpick was seen by some as anti-social and the ‘Abbasid poet Ibn al-Mu’tazz

characterized an undesirable table companion as one who ‘continually picks his teeth with a toothpick’. Some Muslims believed that prayer was more efficacious after the use of the toothpick.

However, it is debatable whether the toothpick should be used during the fasting hours of Ramadan.

Friday, in Arabic *yawm al-jum’a*, literally ‘the day of assembly’, is the day when all adult males are supposed to assemble for the noon prayer in the main mosque of the town or region.

A *mihrab* is a niche in the wall of the mosque indicating the direction of prayer (towards Mecca).

Regarding the ape’s hose, *sar-muza* is an imported Persian word, meaning ‘hose placed over boots’.

It is quite common for Muslim worshippers to place a handkerchief (or *mandil*) on the ground where their head will touch during the prostrations of prayer.

Mamluks (slave soldiers) who were beautiful attracted high prices in the slave markets and

homosexual love affairs between master and slave sometimes occurred.

Jawbari's reminiscence should be compared to 'The Second Dervish's Tale' in *The Thousand and One Nights*, in which a prince is transformed into an ape by a wrathful demon but demonstrates his underlying human nature by his skill at calligraphy.

A French translation by René Khawam exists of a somewhat longer version of the *Kashf al-Asrar* (*Le Voile arraché*, 2 vols., Paris, 1980), with a longer and slightly different text of this story. Khawam does not identify his source text, but it is probably a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Like Jawbari, Ibn Daniyal claimed that his writings about villainy served a moral purpose. Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Daniyal was born in Mosul in 1248 and worked as an oculist in Cairo, where he died in 1311. He is the only playwright to be included in this anthology. Live theatre scarcely existed in the medieval Near East. Although there is evidence of plays (usually of a fairly crude and bawdy nature)

being performed in Arab cities, no scripts of those plays seem to have survived, apart from three which Ibn Daniyal produced for shadow-theatre performances.

Egyptian shadow-theatre seems to have offered popular entertainment for the masses, but there is some evidence that members of the elite also enjoyed such performances. It is said that Saladin once persuaded al-Qadi al-Fadil to watch a shadow play, at the end of which the pompous minister remarked, 'I have had a lesson of great significance. I have seen empires coming and going, and when the screen was folded up, I discovered that the Prime Mover was but one.'

(For pious moralists like al-Fadil everything in life had a moral, if only one could discover it.)

Ibn Daniyal himself was a member of the Egyptian elite and a friend of senior mamluk officers. He was a literary disciple of 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani and he wrote didactic poetry in classical Arabic on the history of the *qadis* (judges) in Egypt and on medicine. His use of low-life dialect and Middle Arabic forms in his

plays was therefore for artistic effect. In his preface to the text of his plays, he claimed that they were works of literary art, which could only be understood by men of *adab*. There are indeed a number of similarities between the plays of Ibn Daniyal and the *Maqamats* written by, among others, Hamadhani and Hariri. Like those *Maqamats*, Ibn Daniya's plays deal with low life but enjoy a high literary status, and, again like them, they are written in a mixture of verse and rhymed prose. In his preface Ibn Daniyal addresses a certain 'Ali ibn Mawlahum who, he says, requested his play scripts: 'So I let my thoughts range through the wide fields of my profligacy and I was able to fulfil your request without the slightest delay. I have composed for you some licentious plays, pieces of high not low literature, which, once you have made the puppets, divided the script into scenes, assembled your audience and waxed the screen, you will find to be entirely novel and truly superior to the usual shadow play.'

The first of his three plays, *Tayf al-Khayyal*, 'The Imaginary Phantom', recounts the attempts of a disreputable hunchbacked soldier called Wisal (the name means 'sexual congress') to

find a bride. He is assisted by Umm Rashid, a dishonest marriage-broker. Poorly served by Umm Rashid, Tayf al-Khayyal ends up with a hideous bride, who wants to beat her husband and who farts a lot; but she dies, in time for Wisal to repent his dissolute ways.

The next play, *'Ajib wa-Gharib*, has no plot worthy of the name. The 'play' merely consists of a parade of low-life characters who come on stage to describe their various professions. The play's title can be translated as 'Marvellous and Strange', but 'Ajib and Gharib are also the names of two of the leading figures in the parade. 'Ajib is a low-grade, unlicensed popular preacher. Gharib is a wizard, who rubs along precariously by writing out spells, handling animals, and faking illnesses. He is versed in most of the arts of the Banu Sasan. Other characters include a snake-charmer, an astrologer, a juggler, a sorcerer trading in amulets, an acrobat, a lion-tamer, and so on. The last characters to appear are a camel-driver who wants to go to the Holy Places, and a lamp-lighter (*masha'ili*) who is the jack of all pariah trades. He sings a song about Christianity and a mocking lament for the good old days of

debauchery now brought to an end by the puritan legislation of the Mamluk sultan Baybars (reigned 1260–77). In the passage which follows, the *masha'ili* starts to describe not only his job, but also what he gets up to when he is moonlighting. Having entered the *maydan*, or square, carrying his brazier, he describes his work as a lamp-lighter and lamp-bearer and then goes on to describe the different sorts of patter he uses when begging from Muslims, Christians and Jews.

He ends his appeal to the Jew as follows:

Bestow on me a favour with a red copper penny,
Like a glowing coal in my brazier,
And do not say to me 'Away!' and do not delay like a miser.
You think perhaps that I am a boor. No, by 'Ali! No, by 'Ali!
(Curses against him who does not give.)
So it is, and of how many sewers have we not emptied the bottom
with the mattock,
As though we were doing the work of the aperient remedy in their
interior.
Our trade is a laudable one, where the sewer is like a full belly.
And when you find one who is led around like a criminal on an ass
with a white hind-foot,

Whose eye weeps, as though it had been rubbed with pepper,
Then we strike his neck with whips,
We cry with a voice which shocks even the deaf:
That is the reward of the man who says what he does not do.

And when we act as criers, how often have we ordered people (by
order of the Government) what they should do in the future,
You people who have assembled, do so and so, but he who does
not do it,
Let him not be surprised at what he shall receive [as punishment]
from him, who instructed me [the Emir].
In the same way we cry out when a man has lost something.
He who directs us to it, we grant him a gift,
And God's reward, oh honourable gracious Sirs.

And we flay the skin from the carcase, whether it be from bullock
or from camel,
So that it may act as a protection against harm for the feet,
And you see no men who are not provided with shoes.
And how many of the crafty people have we punished with
flogging, robbers of all kinds, who come by night like
approaching disaster.
Who in their cunning know the house better than its owner.
Such a man climbs up to the house like a travelling star,
Enters lightly by its narrow side, like a sustained breath,
With courageous heart, without fear because of his cunning,
He creeps slowly into the house like an ant,

Comes to the sleepers in the middle of the night, soft as a Zephyr,
Till his protective covering fails him.
We seize him so that he is like a chained horse.
Sometimes we sever his hand from the wrist,
And sometimes we hang him on the cross, when he is guilty of
murder.

And in playing with dice we are famous as a proverb.
They gleam in our hands like assembled jewels.
Our man is at peace [has won], he sweeps it together, that for himself, that for me.
From the other they have taken everything, so that he must despise himself,
Saying: Oh, had I been satisfied with my first winnings!
And how often have I thought that I would never lose my position!
And if they, the dice, were lucky stars in their changing influence
over the dynasties.

And how much trade do we do with best fresh plants,
Hashish of the colour of down on a shining cheek,
Which is made into pills, perfumed with ‘Anbar, spiced and roasted for us,
Or with indigo which is handed round in the beggar’s bowl for
those drunk with hashish.

We sell that to the people when it is cheap for the price of an ear
of corn.

We are the sons of Sasan, descended from their kings, who possessed golden ornaments.

Our qualities are these in detail and in general.

They are shortly related in a *qasida*, which suffices and need be no longer.

Our might is on the peak of two mountains in Mosul.

We are honoured there as the sun is honoured in the Zodiac of the Ram,

And I pray to God, as prays a suppliant, a petitioner,

That he may forgive these sins and the bad speech.

When he has set forth his qualities and filled his fodder bag he turns and departs.

Paul Kahle (trans.), *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1940), pp. 30–32

COMMENTARY

The *masha'ili's* performance is followed by that of a camel-driver, before Gharib reappears at the end of this disreputable cavalcade to wind up the play. According to Ira Marvin Lapidus's *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) the *masha'iliyya* were 'the night-watchmen and torch-bearers who cleaned the latrines, removed refuse from the streets, and carried off the bodies of dead

animals, served as police, guards, executioners and public criers, and paraded people condemned to public disgrace whose shame may have consisted in part in being handled by such men. At the same time, the *masha'iliyya* made use of their intimacy with nightlife to become involved in gambling, theft, and dealing in hashish and wine.'

I have no idea why the drinkers of hashish were presented with indigo.

Kahle has omitted some of the obscenities in his translation, particularly those hurled at any who are too mean to respond to the begging patter.

The whole speech rhymes in *lam*.

Finally, *'Al-Mutayyam wa'l-Da'i" al-Yutayyim'*, 'The Man Distracted by Passion and the Little Vagabond Orphan', is a play about unfulfilled homosexual love. In the first part, al-Mutayyam laments his frustrated love for the beautiful boy, Yutayyim. Mutayyam is interrupted by an old and ugly lover, who recites a poem in praise of small things. Then Mutayyam and the beloved

boy Yutayyim meet for a cockfight, a ram fight and a bullfight. After the boy has departed, Mutayyam has a bull slaughtered for a homosexual feast. His guests make speeches on various naughty things like wine, masturbation, and gluttony. The host had been hoping to attract Yutayyim to the feast, but the Angel of Death arrives instead and Mutayyam repents (thereby giving the play a belated and perfunctory moral gloss).

Ibn Daniyal's portrayal of conmen working the market-place in his play *"Ajib wa-Gharib* catered for the contemporary interest in stories of cunning exploits (*hiyal*). The heroes of popular epics and stories often relied more on crafty eloquence than they did on swordsmanship. The *Raqa'iq al-Hilal fi Daqaiq al-Hiyal*, 'Cloaks of Fine Fabric in Subtle Ruses', catered to the same sort of taste. This anthology is anonymous, but it can tentatively be dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

We are told how the King of the Greeks of Byzantium used cunning when he invaded Ifriqiya and the population learned of this well enough in advance for them to organize resistance and entrench themselves in a city that he besieged for a long time to no avail. The city gate withstood all his attacks. Among the citizens there was a man called Aqtar who was very daring and courageous. Anyone who fought him was invariably killed. The King of the Greeks was told of this.

He had a commander named Arsilaous, unsurpassed for his bravery throughout the world. Following an outburst of anger from the King, he had refused to take any part in the war. The King had asked him to, but he did not obey. The King then said:

– Spread the rumour that our enemy Aqtar has captured the brother of Arsilaous.

The latter was distressed when he heard the news. He looked everywhere for his brother, but could not find him. Then he asked for his weapons and went out against Aqtar. He fought against him and took him prisoner and led him before the King of the Greeks. The latter put Aqtar to death. The people of Ifriqiya and all their supporters were terror-stricken when they found out that their hero was gone. The King of the Greeks, with Arsilaous, attacked the city, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy and conquering the region.

René Khawam (trans.), *The Subtle Ruse: The Book of Arabic Wisdom and Guile* (London, 1976), pp. 185–6

COMMENTARY

Evidently what we have here is a distorted and much simplified version of the story, in Homer's *Iliad*, of the anger of Achilles and his eventual fight with Hector (Aqtar). As far as one can tell, neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* was translated

into Arabic in the medieval period and the Arabs were much less familiar with the name of Homer than they were with those of the Greek philosophers. Nevertheless, a handful of scholars in the ‘Abbasid period had been aware of the contents of the two epics, and fragments of Homer resurfaced in such popular stories as ‘The Seven Voyages of Sinbad’. In Homer’s *Iliad* the focus was on the anger of Achilles; here, in this dim reminiscence of the Trojan War, the point is the cunning of the Greek king.

Ifriqiya should be Phrygia.

Tales of ingenuity also played a leading role in the story-collection of *The Thousand and One Nights*. The origins of this collection have already been discussed. However, all that survives from the (doubtless primitive) tenth century is a fragment of the opening page. The oldest substantially surviving manuscript (in three manuscript volumes in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It seems to have been skilfully put together by a single editor who probably lived and worked in Mamluk Syria. The stories have many references to Mamluk topography,

household articles, coinage and so forth. It is likely that there was originally a fourth, concluding, manuscript volume. The surviving three volumes contain some thirty-five and a half stories. These latter stories are artfully boxed within one another, and are linked in their themes and imagery. They deal with telling one's story in order to save one's life, sexual betrayal, magic, mutilation, and fulfilment deferred. 'The Tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban', which as we shall see contains two stories boxed within it, is told to a *jinn*, or demon, by a fisherman who hopes that he will thereby save his life. 'The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon' is told by Shahrazad to King Shahriyar, in the hope that her nightly suspenseful story-telling may prevent, or at least delay, her execution.

The Tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban

Demon, there was once a king called Yunan, who reigned in one of the cities of Persia, in the province of Zuman. This king was afflicted with leprosy, which had defied the physicians and the sages, who, for all the medicines they gave him to drink and all the ointments they applied, were unable to cure him. One day there came to the city of King Yunan a sage called Duban. This sage had read all sorts of books, Greek, Persian, Turkish,

Arabic, Byzantine, Syriac, and Hebrew, had studied the sciences, and had learned their groundwork, as well as their principles and basic benefits. Thus he was versed in all the sciences, from philosophy to the lore of plants and herbs, the harmful as well as the beneficial. A few days after he arrived in the city of King Yunan, the sage heard about the king and his leprosy and the fact that the physicians and the sages were unable to cure him. On the following day, when God's morning dawned and His sun rose, the sage Duban put on his best clothes, went to King Yunan and, introducing himself, said, 'Your Majesty, I have heard of that which has afflicted your body and heard that many physicians have treated you without finding a way to cure you. Your Majesty, I can treat you without giving you any medicine to drink or ointment to apply.' When the king heard this, he said, 'If you succeed, I will bestow on you riches that would be enough for you and your grandchildren. I will bestow favours on you, and I will make you my companion and friend.' The king bestowed robes of honour on the sage, treated him kindly, and then asked him, 'Can you really cure me from my leprosy without any medicine to drink or ointment to apply?' The sage replied, 'Yes, I will cure you externally.' The king was astonished, and he began to feel respect as well as great affection for the sage. He said, 'Now, sage, do what you have promised.' The sage replied, 'I hear and obey. I will do it tomorrow morning, the Almighty God willing.' Then the sage went to the city, rented a house, and there he distilled and extracted medicines and drugs. Then with his great knowledge and skill, he fashioned a mallet with a curved end, hollowed the mallet, as well as the handle, and filled the handle with his medicines and drugs. He likewise made a ball. When he had perfected and prepared everything, he went on the following day to King Yunan and kissed the ground before him.

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'What a lovely story!' Shahrazad replied, 'You have heard nothing yet. Tomorrow night I shall tell

you something stranger and more amazing if the king spares me and lets me live!'

THE TWELFTH NIGHT

The following night Dinarzad said to her sister Shahrazad, 'Please, sister, finish the rest of the story of the fisherman and the demon.' Shahrazad replied, "With the greatest pleasure':

I heard, O King, that the fisherman said to the demon:

The sage Duban came to King Yunan and asked him to ride to the playground to play with the ball and mallet. The king rode out, attended by his chamberlains, princes, viziers, and lords and eminent men of the realm. When the king was seated, the sage Duban entered, offered him the mallet, and said, 'O happy King, take this mallet, hold it in your hand, and as you race on the playground, hold the grip tightly in your fist, and hit the ball. Race until you perspire, and the medicine will ooze from the grip into your perspiring hand, spread to your wrist, and circulate through your entire body. After you perspire and the medicine spreads in your body, return to your royal palace, take a bath, and go to sleep. You will wake up cured, and that is all there is to it.' King Yunan took the mallet from the sage Duban and mounted his horse. The attendants threw the ball before the king, who, holding the grip tightly in his fist, followed it and struggled excitedly to catch up with it and hit it. He kept galloping after the ball and hitting it until his palm and the rest of his body began to perspire, and the medicine began to ooze from the handle and flow through his entire body. When the sage Duban was certain that the medicine had oozed and spread through the king's body, he advised him to return to his palace and go immediately to the bath. The king went to the bath and washed himself thoroughly. Then he put on his clothes, left the bath, and returned to his palace.

As for the sage Duban, he spent the night at home, and early in the morning, he went to the palace and asked for permission to see the king. When he was allowed in, he entered and kissed the ground before the king; then, pointing toward him with his hand, he began to recite the following verses:

The virtues you fostered are great;
For who but you could sire them?
Yours is the face whose radiant light
Effaces the night dark and grim.
Forever beams your radiant face;
That of the world is still in gloom.
You rained on us with ample grace,
As the clouds rain on thirsty hills,
Expending your munificence,
Attaining your magnificence.

When the sage Duban finished reciting these verses, the king stood up and embraced him. Then he seated the sage beside him, and with attentiveness and smiles, engaged him in conversation. Then the king bestowed on the sage robes of honour, gave him gifts and endowments, and granted his wishes. For when the king had looked at himself the morning after the bath, he found that his body was clear of leprosy, as clear and pure as silver. He therefore felt exceedingly happy and in a very generous mood. Thus when he went in the morning to the reception hall and sat on his throne, attended by the Mamluks and chamberlains, in the company of the viziers and the lords of the realm, and the sage Duban presented himself, as we have mentioned, the king stood up, embraced him, and seated him beside him. He treated him attentively and drank and ate with him.

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'Sister, what a lovely story!' Shahrazad replied, 'The rest of the story is stranger and more amazing. If the king spares me and I am alive tomorrow night, 1 shall tell you something even more entertaining.'

THE THIRTEENTH NIGHT

The following night Dinarzad said to her sister Shahrazad, 'Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales to while away the night.' Shahrazad replied, 'With the greatest pleasure':

I heard, O happy King who is praiseworthy by the Grace of God, that King Yunan bestowed favours on the sage, gave him robes of honour, and granted his wishes. At the end of the day he gave the sage a thousand dinars and sent him home. The king, who was amazed at the skill of the sage Duban, said to himself, 'This man has treated me externally, without giving me any draught to drink or ointment to apply. His is indeed a great wisdom for which he deserves to be honoured and rewarded. He shall become my companion, confidant, and close friend.' Then the king spent the night, happy at his recovery from his illness, at his good health, and at the soundness of his body. When morning came and it was light, the king went to the royal reception hall and sat on the throne, attended by his chief officers, while the princes, viziers, and lords of the realm sat to his right and left. Then the king called for the sage, and when the sage entered and kissed the ground before him, the king stood up to salute him, seated him beside him, and invited him to eat with him. The king treated him intimately, showed him favours, and bestowed on him robes of honour and many other gifts. Then he spent the whole day conversing with him, and at the end of the day he ordered that he be given a thousand dinars. The sage went home and spent the night with his wife, feeling happy and thankful to God the Arbiter.

In the morning, the king went to the royal reception hall, and the princes and viziers came to stand in attendance. It happened that King Yunan had a vizier who was sinister, greedy, envious, and fretful, and when he saw that the sage had found favour with the king, who bestowed on him much money and many robes of honour, he feared that the king would dismiss him and appoint the sage in his place; therefore, he envied the sage and harboured ill-will against him, for 'nobody is free from envy'. The envious vizier approached the king and, kissing the ground before him, said, 'O excellent King and glorious Lord, it was by your kindness and with your blessing that I rose to prominence; therefore, if I fail to advise you on a grave matter, I am not my father's son. If the great King and noble Lord commands, I shall disclose the matter to him.' The king was upset and asked, 'Damn you, what advice have you got?' The vizier replied, 'Your Majesty, "He who considers not the end, fortune is not his friend." I have seen your Majesty make a mistake, for you have bestowed favours on your enemy who has come to destroy your power and steal your wealth. Indeed, you have pampered him and shown him many favours, but I fear that he will do you harm.' The king asked, 'Whom do you accuse, whom do you have in mind, and at whom do you point the finger?' The vizier replied, 'If you are asleep, wake up, for I point the finger at the sage Duban, who has come from Byzantium.' The king replied, 'Damn you, is he my enemy? To me he is the most faithful, the dearest, and the most favoured of people, for this sage has treated me simply by making me hold something in my hand and has cured me from the disease that had defied the physicians and the sages and rendered them helpless. In all the world, east and west, near and far, there is no one like him, yet you accuse him of such a thing. From this day onward, I will give him every month a thousand dinars, in addition to his rations and regular salary. Even if I were to share my wealth and my kingdom with him, it would be less than he deserves. I think that you have said what you said because you envy him. This is very much like the situation in

the story told by the vizier of King Sindbad when the king wanted to kill his own son.'

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'Sister, what a lovely story!' Shahrazad replied, 'What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night! It will be stranger and more amazing.'

THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT

The following night, when the king got into bed and Shahrazad got in with him, her sister Dinarzad said, 'Please, sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales to while away the night.' Shahrazad replied, 'Very well':

I heard, O happy King, that King Yunan's vizier asked, 'King of the age, I beg your pardon, but what did King Sindbad's vizier tell the king when he wished to kill his own son?' King Yunan said to the vizier, 'When King Sindbad, provoked by an envious man, wanted to kill his own son, his vizier said to him, "Don't do what you will regret afterward." '

The Tale of the Husband and the Parrot

I have heard it told that there was once a very jealous man who had a wife so splendidly beautiful that she was perfection itself. The wife always refused to let her husband travel and leave her behind, until one day when he found it absolutely necessary to go on a journey. He went to the bird market, bought a parrot, and brought it home. The parrot was intelligent, knowledgeable, smart, and retentive. Then he went away on his journey, and when he finished his business and came back, he brought the parrot and inquired about his wife

during his absence. The parrot gave him a day-by-day account of what his wife had done with her lover and how the two carried on in his absence. When the husband heard the account, he felt very angry, went to his wife, and gave her a sound beating. Thinking that one of her maids had informed her husband about what she did with her lover in her husband's absence, the wife interrogated her maids one by one, and they all swore that they had heard the parrot inform the husband.

When the wife heard that it was the parrot who had informed the husband, she ordered one of her maids to take the grinding stone and grind under the cage, ordered a second maid to sprinkle water over the cage, and ordered a third to carry a steel mirror and walk back and forth all night long. That night her husband stayed out, and when he came home in the morning, he brought the parrot, spoke with it, and asked about what had transpired in his absence that night. The parrot replied, 'Master, forgive me, for last night, all night long, I was unable to hear or see very well because of the intense darkness, the rain, and the thunder and lightning.' Seeing that it was summertime, during the month of July, the husband replied, 'Woe unto you, this is no season for rain.' The parrot said, 'Yes, by God, all night long, I saw what I told you.' The husband, concluding that the parrot had lied about his wife and had accused her falsely, got angry, and he grabbed the parrot and, taking it out of the cage, smote it on the ground and killed it. But after the parrot's death, the husband heard from his neighbours that the parrot had told the truth about his wife, and he was full of regret that he had been tricked by his wife to kill the parrot.

King Yunan concluded, 'Vizier, the same will happen to me.'

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'What a strange and lovely story!' Shahrazad replied, 'What is this compared with what I shall tell you

tomorrow night! If the king spares me and lets me live, I shall tell you something more amazing.' The king thought to himself, 'By God, this is indeed an amazing story.'

THE FIFTEENTH NIGHT

The following night Dinarzad said to her sister Shahrazad, 'Please, sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales, for they entertain and help everyone to forget his cares and banish sorrow from the heart.' Shahrazad replied, 'With the greatest pleasure.' King Shahriyar added, 'Let it be the remainder of the story of King Yunan, his vizier, and the sage Duban, and of the fisherman, the demon, and the jar.' Shahrazad replied, 'With the greatest pleasure':

I heard, O happy King, that King Yunan said to his envious vizier, 'After the husband killed the parrot and heard from his neighbours that the parrot had told him the truth, he was filled with remorse. You too, my vizier, being envious of this wise man, would like me to kill him and regret it afterward, as did the husband after he killed the parrot.' When the vizier heard what King Yunan said, he replied, 'O great king, what harm has this sage done to me? Why, he has not harmed me in any way. I am telling you all this out of love and fear for you. If you don't discover my veracity, let me perish like the vizier who deceived the son of the king.' King Yunan asked his vizier, 'How so?' The vizier replied:

The Tale of the King's Son and the She-Ghoul

It is said, O happy King, that there was once a king who had a son who was fond of hunting and trapping. The prince had with him a vizier appointed by his father the king to follow him wherever he went. One day the prince went with his men into the wilderness, and when he chanced to see a wild beast, the

vizier urged him to go after it. The prince pursued the beast and continued to press in pursuit until he lost its track and found himself alone in the wilderness, not knowing which way to turn or where to go, when he came upon a girl, standing on the road, in tears. When the young prince asked her, 'Where do you come from?' she replied, 'I am the daughter of an Indian king. I was riding in the wilderness when I dozed off and in my sleep fell off my horse and found myself alone and helpless.' When the young prince heard what she said, he felt sorry for her, and he placed her behind him on his horse and rode on. As they passed by some ruins, she said, 'O my lord, I wish to relieve myself here.' He let her down and she went into the ruins. Then he went in after her, ignorant of what she was, and discovered that she was a she-ghoul, who was saying to her children, 'I brought you a good, fat boy.' They replied, 'Mother, bring him to us, so that we may feed on his innards.' When the young prince heard what they said, he shook with terror, and fearing for his life, ran outside. The she-ghoul followed him and asked, 'Why are you afraid?' and he told her about his situation and his predicament, concluding, 'I have been unfairly treated.' She replied, 'If you have been unfairly treated, ask the Almighty God for help, and he will protect you from harm.' The young prince raised his eyes to Heaven…

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'What a strange and lovely story!' Shahrazad replied, 'What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night! It will be even stranger and more amazing.'

THE SIXTEENTH NIGHT

The following night Dinarzad said, 'Please, sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales.' Shahrazad replied, I *shall with pleasure':*

I heard, O King, that the vizier said to King Yunan:

When the young prince said to the she-ghoul, ‘I have been unfairly treated,’ she replied, ‘Ask God for help, and He will protect you from harm.’ The young prince raised his eyes to Heaven and said, ‘O Lord, help me to prevail upon my enemy, for “everything is within your power”‘. When the she-ghoul heard his invocation, she gave up and departed, and he returned safely to his father and told him about the vizier and how it was he who had urged him to pursue the beast and drove him to his encounter with the she-ghoul. The king summoned the vizier and had him put to death.

The vizier added, ‘You too, your Majesty, if you trust, befriend, and bestow favours on this sage, he will plot to destroy you and cause your death. Your Majesty should realize that I know for certain that he is a foreign agent who has come to destroy you. Haven’t you seen that he cured you externally, simply with something you held in your hand?’ King Yunan, who was beginning to feel angry, replied, ‘You are right, vizier. The sage may well be what you say and may have come to destroy me. He who has cured me with something to hold can kill me with something to smell.’ Then the king asked the vizier, ‘My vizier and good counsellor, how should I deal with him?’ The vizier replied, ‘Send for him now and have him brought before you, and when he arrives, strike off his head. In this way, you will attain your aim and fulfil your wish.’ The king said, ‘This is good and sound advice.’ Then he sent for the sage Duban, who came immediately, still feeling happy at the favours, the money, and the robes the king had bestowed on him. When he entered, he pointed with his hand toward the king and began to recite the following verses:

If I have been remiss in thanking you,
For whom then have I made my verse and prose?

You granted me your gifts before I asked,
Without deferment and without excuse.
How can I fail to praise your noble deeds,
Inspired in private and in public by my muse?
I thank you for your deeds and for your gifts,
Which, though they bend my back, my care reduce.

The king asked, ‘Sage, do you know why I have had you brought before me?’ The sage replied, ‘No, your Majesty.’ The king said, ‘I brought you here to have you killed and to destroy the breath of life within you.’ In astonishment Duban asked, ‘Why does your Majesty wish to have me put to death, and for what crime?’ The king replied, ‘I have been told that you are a spy and that you have come to kill me. Today I will have you killed before you kill me. I will have you for lunch before you have me for dinner.’ Then the king called for the executioner and ordered him, saying, ‘Strike off the head of this sage and rid me of him! Strike!’

When the sage heard what the king said, he knew that because he had been favoured by the king, someone had envied him, plotted against him, and lied to the king, in order to have him killed and get rid of him. The sage realized then that the king had little wisdom, judgment, or good sense, and he was filled with regret, when it was useless to regret. He said to himself, ‘There is no power and no strength, save in God the Almighty, the Magnificent. I did a good deed but was rewarded with an evil one.’ In the meantime, the king was shouting at the executioner, ‘Strike off his head.’ The sage implored, ‘Spare me, your Majesty, and God will spare you; destroy me, and God will destroy you.’ He repeated the statement, just as I did, O demon, but you too refused, insisting on killing me. King Yunan said to the sage, ‘Sage, you must die, for you have cured me with a mere handle, and I fear that you can kill me with anything.’ The sage replied, ‘This is my reward from your Majesty. You reward good with evil.’ The king said, ‘Don’t stall; you must die today

without delay.' When the sage Duban became convinced that he was going to die, he was filled with grief and sorrow, and his eyes overflowed with tears. He blamed himself for doing a favour for one who does not deserve it and for sowing seeds in a barren soil and recited the following verses:

Maimuna was a foolish girl,
Though from a sage descended,
And many with pretence to skill
Are e'en on dry land upended.

The executioner approached the sage, bandaged his eyes, bound his hands, and raised the sword, while the sage cried, expressed regret, and implored, 'For God's sake, your Majesty, spare me, and God will spare you; destroy me, and God will destroy you.' Then he tearfully began to recite the following verses:

They who deceive enjoy success,
While I with my true counsel fail
And am rewarded with disgrace.
If I live, I'll nothing unveil;
If I die, then curse all the men,
The men who counsel and prevail.

Then the sage added, 'Is this my reward from your Majesty? It is like the reward of the crocodile.' The king asked, 'What is the story of the crocodile?' The sage replied, 'I am in no condition to tell you a story. For God's sake, spare me, and God will spare you. Destroy me, and God will destroy you,' and he wept bitterly.

Then several noblemen approached the king and said, 'We beg your Majesty to forgive him for our sake, for in our view,

he has done nothing to deserve this.' The king replied, 'You do not know the reason why I wish to have him killed. I tell you that if I spare him, I will surely perish, for I fear that he who has cured me externally from my affliction, which had defied the Greek sages, simply by having me hold a handle, can kill me with anything I touch. I must kill him, in order to protect myself from him.' The sage Duban implored again, 'For God's sake, your Majesty, spare me, and God will spare you. Destroy me, and God will destroy you.' The king insisted, 'I must kill you.'

Demon, when the sage realized that he was surely going to die, he said, 'I beg your Majesty to postpone my execution until I return home, leave instructions for my burial, discharge my obligations, distribute alms, and donate my scientific and medical books to one who deserves them. I have in particular a book entitled *The Secret of Secrets*, which I should like to give you for safekeeping in your library.' The king asked, 'What is the secret of this book?' The sage replied, 'It contains countless secrets, but the chief one is that if your Majesty has my head struck off, opens the book on the sixth leaf, reads three lines from the left page, and speaks to me, my head will speak and answer whatever you ask.'

The king was greatly amazed and said, 'Is it possible that if I cut off your head and, as you say, open the book, read the third line, and speak to your head, it will speak to me? This is the wonder of wonders.' Then the king allowed the sage to go and sent him home under guard. The sage settled his affairs and on the following day returned to the royal palace and found assembled there the princes, viziers, chamberlains, lords of the realm, and military officers, as well as the king's retinue, servants, and many of his citizens. The sage Duban entered, carrying an old book and a kohl jar containing powder. He sat down, ordered a platter, and poured out the powder and smoothed it on the platter. Then he said to the king, 'Take this book, your Majesty, and don't open it until after my execution. When my head is cut off, let it be placed on the platter and order that it be pressed on the powder. Then open the book and

begin to ask my head a question, for it will then answer you. There is no power and no strength save in God, the Almighty, the Magnificent. For God's sake, spare me, and God will spare you; destroy me, and God will destroy you.' The king replied, 'I must kill you, especially to see how your head will speak to me.' Then the king took the book and ordered the executioner to strike off the sage's head. The executioner drew his sword and, with one stroke, dropped the head in the middle of the platter, and when he pressed the head on the powder, the bleeding stopped. Then the sage Durban opened his eyes and said, 'Now, your Majesty, open the book.' When the king opened the book, he found the pages stuck. So he put his finger in his mouth, wetted it with his saliva, and opened the first page, and he kept opening the pages with difficulty until he turned seven leaves. But when he looked in the book, he found nothing written inside, and he exclaimed, 'Sage, I see nothing written in this book.' The sage replied, 'Open more pages.' The king opened some more pages but still found nothing, and while he was doing this, the drug spread through his body – for the book had been poisoned – and he began to heave, sway, and twitch.

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'Sister, what an amazing and entertaining story!' Shahrazad replied, 'What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night if the king spares me and lets me live!'

THE SEVENTEENTH NIGHT

The following night Dinarzad said to her sister Shahrazad, 'Please, sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales to while away the night.' The king added, 'Let it be the rest of the story of the sage and the king and of the fisherman and the demon.' Shahrazad replied, 'Very well, with the greatest pleasure.'

I heard, O King, that when the sage Duban saw that the drug had spread through the king's body and that the king was heaving and swaying, he began to recite the following verses:

For long they ruled us arbitrarily,
But suddenly vanished their powerful rule.
Had they been just, they would have happily
Lived, but they oppressed, and punishing fate
Afflicted them with ruin deservedly,
And on the morrow the world taunted them,
' 'Tis tit for tat; blame not just destiny.'

As the sage's head finished reciting the verses, the king fell dead, and at that very moment the head too succumbed to death. Demon, consider this story.

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister Dinarzad said, 'Sister, what an entertaining story!' Shahrazad replied, 'What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night if I live!'

Haddawy (trans.), *The Arabian Nights*, pp. 36–47

Stories about poisoned books have a long ancestry, going back to ancient Indian times.

The version of *The Thousand and One Nights* which circulated in the Mamluk period probably contained relatively few stories, artfully

arranged in such a manner that they could – implicitly, at least – comment on one another. However, in the centuries which followed compilers and copyists swelled the bulk of the anthology with all manner of stories – with whatever took their fantasy. Large numbers of stories were added in the Ottoman period (from the early sixteenth century onwards). Many of these tales were pilfered from traditional anthologies of *adab* and featured the caliphs, their cup companions, and poets. Others were pietistic parables or Sufi teaching-stories. Some were animal fables. Some swashbuckling popular epics were used to increase the bulk of the *Nights*. Many of the added tales dealt with low-life exploits, or the buffoonery of drinkers and drug-takers. Adultery and the cunning of would-be adulterers were especially popular topics.

'The Tale of Judar and His Brothers', which is given below, is a superb tale of treasure-hunting and sorcery.

Once upon a time there was a merchant called Omar who had three sons: the eldest was named Salem, the second Seleem, and the youngest Judar. He reared them all to manhood, but the youngest he loved more than his brothers, so that they grew

jealous of Judar and hated him. When Omar, who was by now well advanced in years, noticed that the two hated their brother, he feared that after his death Judar might come to mischief at their hands. He therefore summoned his kinsfolk together with some learned men and a number of property-dividers from the Cadi's court, and said to them: 'Bring me my money and all my goods.' They brought him his money and his goods, and Omar said: 'Friends, divide these things into four portions according to the law.'

They did so; and he gave each of his sons a portion and kept the last for himself, saying: 'This is the sum of my property and I have divided it among my children in my lifetime, so that all disputes should be avoided. They shall have nothing to claim from each other after my death. The portion which I have kept for myself shall belong to my wife, the mother of these children, that she may have the wherewithal to support herself when I am gone.'

Shortly afterwards old Omar died, and the two elder brothers, not content with their inheritance, claimed a part of Judar's share, saying: 'Our father's wealth has fallen into your hands.'

Judar referred the matter to the judges, and the Moslems who witnessed the division came and gave testimony. The judge dismissed their claim; but as a result of the dispute Judar lost a part of his property and so did his brothers. Yet it was not long before they plotted against him a second time, so that he was obliged to go to law again. The three lost more money at the hands of the judges. Bent on ruining Judar, his brothers pursued their claim from court to court; they lost, and he lost, until at length they were reduced to penury.

The two elder brothers then came to their mother; they cheated her of her money, beat her, and threw her out. In this state she came to Judar and told him what his brothers had done to her, cursing them bitterly.

'Mother, do not curse them,' Judar replied. 'Allah will requite them for their deeds. We are paupers now; we have lost all our inheritance in suing one another and incurred disgrace in the

sight of men. Am I to sue them again on your account? No, we must resign ourselves. Stay with me, and the bread I eat I will share with you. Allah will sustain us both. As for my brothers, leave them to Allah's judgement.' And he went on comforting his mother until he persuaded her to stay with him.

He bought a net, and every day he went to the river and the neighbouring lakes. One day he would earn ten coppers, another day twenty, and another thirty, so that he and his mother ate and drank well.

Meanwhile the two brothers squandered away the money which they had taken from their mother. Misery and ruin soon overtook them, for they neither bought nor sold, nor had any trade with which to earn a living. Naked and destitute, they would come from time to time humbling themselves before their mother and complaining of hunger. Her heart being compassionate, the old woman would feed them on mouldy bread or any remnants from the previous night's supper.

'Eat this quickly,' she would say, 'and go before your brother returns; for if he sees you here he will harden his heart against me and I shall justly earn his displeasure.'

So they would eat in haste and leave her. One day, however, as they sat eating the bread and cooked meat she had placed before them, their brother Judar came in. Confused and ashamed, his mother hung her head and looked at the ground, fearing his anger. But Judar smiled at them.

'Welcome, my brothers,' he cried, 'and may this day bring you joy! How is it that you have honoured me today with this visit?'

Then he embraced them lovingly, saying: 'I never thought that you would keep away from me and your mother.'

'By Allah, we have longed to see you, brother,' they replied. 'But we were stricken with remorse over what had passed between us, and shame prevented us from coming. That was the work of Satan, Allah's curse be upon him! We have no blessing but you and our mother.'

'And I have no blessing but you two,' Judar answered.

‘May Allah bless you, my son,’ exclaimed the old woman, ‘and shower His abundance upon you. You are the most generous of us all!’

‘Stay and be welcome in this house,’ said Judar to his brothers. ‘Allah is bountiful; there is plenty here for all.’

He thus made peace with them, and they ate and stayed the night in his house.

Next morning, after they had breakfasted, Judar took up his net and went to work, trusting in Allah's bounty. His brothers also went out, and came back at noon to eat with their mother. In the evening Judar returned, bringing meat and vegetables. In this way they lived together for a whole month, Judar paying for their daily needs with his fishing and his brothers eating their fill and making merry.

Now it chanced that one day Judar went down to the river, cast his net, and brought it up empty. He cast it a second time, and again it came up empty.

'There are no fish in this place,' he muttered to himself, and moved to another spot. He cast his net there, but it still brought up nothing. In that way he moved farther and farther along the bank from morning till evening, but caught nothing at all.

'This is indeed a strange thing!' he exclaimed. 'Are there no fish left in the river? Or is there some other reason?'

Dejected and sick at heart, he took up his net and made for home, troubled over his brothers and his mother; for he did not know what he could give them to eat. Presently he came to a baker's shop and saw the people crowding round the bread with money in their hands. He stopped and sighed.

'Welcome, Judar!' the baker cried. 'Do you want any bread?'

But Judar remained silent.

'If you have no money with you,' said the baker, 'take what you need. You can pay me some other time.'

'Give me ten halves' worth of bread,' said the fisherman. The baker handed him the loaves together with ten halves, saying: 'You can bring me fish for the twenty tomorrow.'

Judar warmly thanked the good man. He took the loaves and the ten halves and bought meat and vegetables with the money. 'The Lord willing,' he said to himself, 'all will be well again tomorrow.'

His mother cooked the meal, and Judar had his supper and went to bed. Next morning he rose and took up his net.

‘Sit down and eat your breakfast,’ said his mother.

‘You have breakfast,’ he replied, ‘and my brothers.’

He went down to the river and cast his net time after time, moving from place to place until the afternoon; but all to no purpose. In despair he carried up his net and walked away. The baker saw him as he passed by, and gave him bread and ten coppers, as on the day before.

‘Here,’ he cried, ‘take this and go. If you had no luck today, you will have luck tomorrow.’

Judar wished to apologize, but the baker would not listen to him.

‘There is no need for apologies,’ he said. ‘When I saw you empty-handed I knew you had caught nothing. If you have no luck tomorrow, come again and take your bread. Let shame not prevent you; I will give you time to pay.’

For the third day Judar went from lake to lake, but when evening came he had caught nothing, and was forced to accept the baker’s loaves and coppers. Ill-luck pursued him for a whole week, and at the end of that time he said despondently: ‘Today I will go to Lake Karoon.’

He journeyed to Lake Karoon, and was about to cast his net when there suddenly came up to him a Moor riding upon a mule and wearing a magnificent robe. The mule was richly saddled and bridled and bore upon its flank a saddle-bag embroidered with gold.

‘Peace be to you, Judar son of Omar,’ cried the Moor, dismounting.

‘And to you peace, good pilgrim,’ answered the fisherman.

‘Judar,’ said the Moor, ‘I need your help. If you accept my offer you shall have much to gain and be my companion and trusted friend.’

‘Good sir,’ Judar replied, ‘tell me what you have in mind and I will gladly do your bidding.’

‘First,’ said the Moor, ‘recite the opening chapter of the Koran.’

Judar recited it with him, and then the stranger took out a silken cord and handed it to the fisherman, saying: ‘Fasten my arms behind me as firmly as you can, then throw me into the lake and wait a little. If you see me lift up my hands out of the water, cast in your net and haul me quickly ashore. But if you see me put up my feet, you will know that I am dead. In that case leave me in the water and take the mule with the saddle-bag to the market-place. There you will find a Jew called Shamayah; give him the beast and he will pay you a hundred dinars. Take them and go your way. But you must on no account reveal the secret.’

Judar fastened the Moor tightly; then, at his request, he pushed him forward and threw him into the lake. After a little while he saw his feet come out of the water, and he knew that the Moor was dead. Leaving the body in the lake, Judar took the mule to the market-place, where he found the Jew sitting on a chair at the door of his shop.

‘The man must have perished!’ exclaimed the Jew when he saw the mule. ‘It was greed that destroyed him.’

He took the beast and gave Judar a hundred pieces of gold, charging him to keep the matter secret.

Judar hastened to the baker’s and, giving him a dinar, took as many loaves as he required. The baker made up his account and said: ‘I now owe you enough for two days’ bread.’ He then bought meat and vegetables and returned home with the provisions, to find his brothers asking their mother for something to eat.

‘I have nothing to give you,’ she was saying. ‘Have patience until your brother returns.’

‘Take this,’ Judar cried, throwing to them the bread. And the two fell upon the loaves like famished beasts.

Then Judar gave his mother the rest of the gold, saying: ‘If my brothers come tomorrow, give them money to buy some food and eat while I am away.’

Next morning he went again to Lake Karoon, and was just about to cast his net when he was approached by another Moor, dressed more sumptuously than the first. He, too, was on a mule and had a saddle-bag which held a pair of little caskets.

'Peace be to you, Judar!' he cried.

'And to you peace, pilgrim,' replied the fisherman.

'Did you meet a Moor yesterday, mounted upon a mule like mine?' he asked.

Fearing lest he should be accused of having drowned the man, Judar denied all knowledge of him. But the Moor cried: 'Poor wretch! He was my brother. He came here before me. Was it not you that tied his hands behind him and threw him into the lake? And did he not say to you: "If you see my hands come up through the water, haul me quickly ashore, but if my feet appear you will know that I am dead"? It was his feet that came up; you took the mule to Shamayah the Jew and he gave you a hundred pieces of gold.'

'If you know all that,' said Judar, 'why do you ask me?'

'Because I wish you to do with me as you did with my brother,' replied the Moor.

And he thereupon took out a silken cord and handed it to the fisherman, saying: 'Fasten my arms and throw me into the lake. If I meet the same end as my brother's, take my mule to the Jew and he will give you a hundred pieces of gold.'

'Very well,' Judar answered.

He tied his arms and threw him into the lake, and the Moor disappeared under the water. After a while his feet emerged.

'He is dead and finished,' said Judar to himself. 'May Allah send me a Moor each day to drown, that I may earn a hundred pieces of gold!'

Then he took the mule to the market-place.

'The second one is dead!' exclaimed the Jew when he saw him.

'May Allah give *you* long life!' cried the fisherman.

‘That is the reward of avarice,’ added the Jew. And he took the mule from him and gave him a hundred dinars.

Judar went home and gave the gold to his mother.

‘My son,’ she cried, ‘where did you come by this?’

Judar recounted to her all that had happened.

‘You should never go to Lake Karoon again,’ said the old woman. ‘I greatly fear that you may come to harm at the hands of these Moors.’

‘But, mother,’ replied Judar, ‘it is at their request that I throw them into the lake. Am I to give up this trade which brings me every day a hundred dinars, and for such little labour? By Allah, I will go there day after day until I have drowned them all and not a single Moor has been left alive.’

The next day he went again to Lake Karoon; and presently a third Moor, even more richly attired than the other two, came riding on a mule with a saddle-bag.

‘Peace be to you, Judar son of Omar!’ he cried.

‘How is that they all know my name?’ thought Judar to himself as he returned his greeting.

‘Have any Moors passed by this lake?’ inquired the stranger.

‘Yes, two,’ replied Judar.

‘Where did they go?’ he asked.

‘I bound their arms and threw them into the lake,’ replied the fisherman. ‘They were both drowned. I am ready to render you the same service.’

‘Miserable fool!’ smiled the Moor. ‘Do you not know that every life has its predestined end?’

Then, dismounting, he gave the fisherman a silken cord and said: ‘Judar, do with me as you did with them.’

‘Turn around and let me bind your arms,’ said the fisherman. ‘Time is short and I am in a hurry.’

Judar threw the Moor into the lake and stood waiting for his feet to emerge from the water. But to his surprise a pair of

hands came out instead, and he heard the Moor crying: ‘Good fellow, cast out your net!’

He threw the net over him and, drawing him in, saw that in each hand he was holding a fish, red as coral.

‘Open the two caskets,’ cried the Moor, as he quickly rose to his feet.

Judar opened the caskets, and the Moor put a fish in each and securely shut them up. Then he threw his arms about the fisherman’s neck and kissed him on both cheeks saying: ‘May the Most High preserve you from all hardships! By Allah, but for your help I would have surely perished.’

‘Sir,’ said Judar, ‘I beg you in Allah’s name to tell me the story of the drowned Moors, the red fish, and the Jew Shamayah.’

‘The two who were drowned were my brothers,’ the Moor replied. ‘One was called Abdul Salam, and the other Abdul Ahad. My name is Abdul Samad, and the man whom you take to be a Jew is my fourth brother, a true Malikite Moslem whose real name is Abdul Rahim. Our father, Abdul Wadud, taught us the occult sciences, witchcraft, and the art of opening hidden treasures, to which we applied ourselves with such diligence that in the end we made the demons and the jinn our servants. When our father died we inherited all his wealth and divided his gold and his treasures, his talismans and his books; but a quarrel arose amongst us concerning a book called *The Lore of the Ancients*. It is unique among writings and cannot be valued in gold or jewels: for it holds the answer to all mysteries and the clue to every hidden treasure. Our father made it the study of his life, and we four conned a little of its contents. Each of us strove to gain possession of it, so as to be acquainted with its secrets. When our feud had reached its height, we were visited by the old sheikh who had reared our father and taught him magic and divination; his name was Al-Kahin al-Abtan. He ordered us to bring him the book, and he took it in his hand and said: “You are the sons of my son, and I cannot wrong any one of you. I therefore pronounce that none shall have this

book but he that opens the Treasure of Al-Shamardal and brings me the Celestial Orb, the Vial of Kohl, the Ring, and the Sword. The Ring is served by a jinnee called Rattling Thunder, and he that wears it can vanquish kings and sultans and make himself master of the vast earth. The man who holds the sword and shakes it can rout whole armies, for flames as bright as lightning shoot forth from it at his bidding. By means of the. Celestial Orb a man can view the world from east to west while sitting in his chamber: he has but to turn the orb towards the land he desires to see and, looking upon it, he shall behold that land with all its people. If he is incensed against a city and has a mind to burn it down, let him turn the orb towards the sun's disc, and all its dwellings shall be consumed with fire. As for the Vial, he that applies its kohl to his eyes shall see the buried treasures of the earth.

‘ “This then is the condition which I impose upon you. Whoever fails to open that treasure shall forfeit his claim to this book; but he that opens it and brings me the four precious things it holds shall become sole master of it.”

‘We all agreed to his condition, and the old sage went on: “Know, my children, that the Treasure of Al-Shamardal is under the power of the sons of the Red King. Your father told me that he himself had vainly tried to open it, for the sons of the Red King had fled away from him to Egypt. He pursued them to that land, but could not capture them because they had thrown themselves into an enchanted lake called Lake Karoon. When he returned and told me of his failure I made for him a computation and discovered that the treasure could be opened only under the auspices of an Egyptian youth called Judar son of Omar, who would be the means of capturing the Red King's sons. This youth was a fisherman and could be met with on the shores of Lake Karoon. He alone could break the spell that bound it, and it was for him to cast into the lake those who would tackle the sons of the Red King. The man whose destiny it was to vanquish them, his hands would come out of the water and Judar would bring him safe to land with his net. But those

who were destined to drown, their feet would come out first and they would be abandoned to their fate."

'Two of my brothers said: "We will go, even though we perish," and I resolved to do the same. But my third brother, Abdul Rahim, said: "I will not risk my life." We thereupon arranged with him that he should go to Egypt in the guise of a Jewish merchant, so that if any of us perished in the attempt he should take the mule and the saddle-bag from Judar and pay him a hundred pieces of gold.

'My first brother was slain by the sons of the Red King, and so was my second brother. But against me they could not prevail and I took them prisoner.'

'Where did you imprison them?' Judar asked.

'Did you not see them?' answered the Moor. 'I shut them up in the two caskets.'

'But those were fish,' said Judar in amazement.

'No, they are not fish,' replied the Moor. 'They are jinn in the shape of fish. Now you must know that the treasure can be opened only in your presence. Will you agree to come with me to the city of Fez-and-Meknes and open the treasure? I will give you everything that you demand and you shall be my brother in the sight of Allah. When our quest has been accomplished, you shall return to your people with a joyful heart.'

'Sir,' Judar replied, 'I have a mother and two brothers to support. If I go with you, who will provide for them?'

'A poor excuse,' rejoined the Moor. 'If it is money that prevents you, I will give you a thousand dinars for your mother to spend and my promise that you shall return within four months.'

On hearing mention of this sum, the fisherman cried: 'Give me the thousand dinars, my master. I will at once carry them to my mother and set out with you.'

He handed him the gold, and Judar hastened to his mother and recounted to her all that had passed between him and the Moor.

‘Take these thousand dinars,’ he said, ‘and spend them on yourself and my brothers. I am going away to Maghreb with the Moor, and shall be back within four months. I may return with a vast fortune.’

‘My son, I shall be desolate without you,’ said the old woman. ‘I greatly fear for your safety.’

‘No harm can befall the man who is in Allah’s protection,’ he replied. ‘Besides, the Moor is a good and honest fellow.’

And he went on praising him to her until his mother said: ‘May Allah incline his heart towards you! Go with him, my son; perhaps he will reward your labours.’

He took leave of his mother and returned to the Moor.

‘Have you consulted your mother?’ Abdul Samad asked.

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘and she has given me her blessing.’

The Moor bade Judar mount behind him on the mule, and they rode from midday till late in the afternoon. By that time the fisherman felt very hungry, and, noticing that his companion had nothing with him to eat, he remarked: ‘Sir, you have forgotten to bring any provisions for the journey.’

‘Are you hungry?’ asked the Moor.

‘I am indeed,’ Judar replied.

They both dismounted from the mule.

‘Bring down the saddle-bag,’ said the Moor.

Judar brought it down.

‘Now, my brother, what would you like?’ his companion asked.

‘Anything will do,’ Judar answered.

‘In Allah’s name, tell me what you would rather have,’ said the Moor.

‘Some bread and cheese,’ replied the fisherman.

‘Poor Judar,’ said the Moor, ‘you surely deserve better than that. Ask for some excellent dish.’

‘Anything would be excellent to me just now,’ Judar replied.

‘Would you like some roast chicken?’ asked the Moor.

‘I would,’ answered the fisherman.

‘And some honeyed rice?’ asked the Moor.

‘Yes, by Allah,’ replied Judar.

‘And such-and-such a dish,’ went on the Moor, until he had named four-and-twenty dishes.

‘The man is mad,’ thought Judar to himself. ‘Where will he bring me all these dishes from when he has no cook and no kitchen?’ Then, aloud, he said: ‘That is enough. But why do you make my mouth water when I cannot see a thing?’

‘You are welcome, Judar,’ said the Moor with a smile. And, putting his hand into the bag, he took out a gold plate with two roast chickens upon it steaming hot. He thrust his hand in a second time and there appeared a plate filled with kebab. And he went on bringing dishes out of the bag until he had produced the two dozen courses he had named.

‘Now eat, my friend,’ said the Moor.

‘Sir,’ exclaimed the confounded Judar, ‘you must surely have a kitchen and numerous cooks in that saddle-bag of yours!’

‘It is enchanted,’ replied the Moor, laughing. ‘It is served by a jinnee. If we were to ask for a thousand dishes every hour, the jinnee would come and prepare them for us immediately.’

‘Upon my life,’ Judar exclaimed, ‘that is an excellent bag!’

The two ate together, and when they were satisfied the Moor threw away what remained of the meal and replaced the empty dishes into the bag. He put his hand in again and brought out a ewer filled with water. They drank, made their ablutions, and recited the afternoon prayers; then, returning the ewer to the bag, they mounted on the mule and resumed their journey.

Presently the Moor said to Judar: ‘Do you know how far we have travelled from Egypt?’

‘No, by Allah,’ Judar replied.

‘We have travelled a whole year’s journey,’ said the Moor. ‘You must know that this mule of mine is a jinnee and can make a year’s journey in a single day. But for your sake it has been going at an easy pace.’

For four days they travelled westwards, riding every day till midnight and having all their food provided by the enchanted bag. Judar demanded of the Moor whatever he fancied, and the Moor supplied it promptly upon a gold dish. On the fifth day they reached Maghreb and entered the city of Fez-and-Meknes. As they made their way into the town, everyone who met the Moor greeted him and kissed his hand. At length they halted before a certain house; the Moor knocked, and the door was opened by a girl as radiant as the moon.

'Rahmah, my daughter,' said the Moor, 'open for us the great hall.'

'Welcome, father,' the girl replied, and went in, swinging her hips.

'She must be a princess,' said Judar to himself, marvelling at her beauty.

The girl opened the great hall, and the Moor took the saddlebag off the mule.

'Go,' he said to the beast, 'and may Allah's blessing be upon you!'

At once the earth opened, swallowed up the mule, and closed again.

'Praise be to Allah,' Judar exclaimed, 'who kept us safe on the creature's back!'

'Do not be amazed, Judar,' said the Moor. 'Did I not tell you that the mule was a jinnee? Come now, let us go into the hall.'

Judar followed him into the hall and was astounded at the abundance of fine carpets, the rare ornaments, and the hangings of gold and jewels which decked its walls. As soon as the two were seated the Moor bade his daughter bring him a certain bundle. She fetched it for him and he took out from it a robe worth a thousand dinars.

'Put this on, Judar,' he said, 'and be welcome in this house.'

Judar put it on and was so transformed that he looked like some Moroccan king. Then the Moor plunged his hand into the

bag and drew from it dish after dish until he had spread out before his guest a banquet of forty courses.

‘Eat, sir,’ he said, ‘and pardon us our shortcomings. We do not know what kind of food you fancy. Tell us what you relish and we will set it before you without delay.’

‘By Allah,’ Judar replied, ‘I like every kind of food and hate nothing. Do not ask me what I fancy; give me whatever comes into your mind and I will do nothing but eat.’

He stayed with the Moor twenty days, receiving from his host a new robe every day and feasting with him on the provisions of the enchanted bag. On the morning of the twenty-first day the Moor came to him and said: ‘Rise, my friend. This is the day appointed for opening the Treasure of Al-Shamardal.’

Judar walked with the Moor to the outskirts of the city, where he found two mules with two slaves in attendance. The Moor mounted one beast and Judar the other, and they rode on and on, followed by the slaves. At midday they came to a running river and dismounted. The Moor made a sign to the slaves, who took the mules and went off with them. Presently they returned, one carrying a tent, which he pitched, and the other a mattress and cushions, which he spread inside. Then one of them went and brought the two caskets containing the two fish, and the other brought the enchanted bag.

The Moor drew several dishes out of the bag and, seating Judar by his side, invited him to eat. As soon as the meal was over he took the caskets in his hands and mumbled a magic charm over them.

‘At your service, dread enchanter!’ cried the two fish from within. ‘Have mercy upon us!’

He repeated his incantation, and they pleaded louder and louder, until the caskets burst in fragments and there appeared two creatures with their arms chained behind them.

‘Pardon us, great enchanter!’ they cried. ‘What would you do with us?’

‘Swear to open the Treasure of Al-Shamardal,’ roared the Moor, ‘or I will burn you both!’

‘We will open it on one condition,’ they answered. ‘You must bring the son of Omar, Judar the fisherman. The treasure cannot be opened except in his presence. None but he may enter it.’

‘Here stands the very man of whom you speak,’ replied the sorcerer. ‘He beholds and hears you.’

Thereupon they swore to open the treasure and the Moor broke the spell that bound them. He placed two tablets of red carnelian upon a hollow reed; then he took a brazier filled with charcoal and set it alight with one breath. After that he brought some incense and said to Judar: ‘I am about to throw the incense and recite my conjuration. Once I begin the charm I cannot speak again, or the spell will be broken. Therefore I will now tell you what you are to do so as to achieve your end.’

‘Speak,’ Judar replied.

‘Know,’ said the Moor, ‘that as soon as I have cast the incense and begun my charm, the water of the river will dry up and on the sloping bank there will appear a door of gold, as high as the city gate, with a pair of metal rings. Go down to that door, knock lightly on it, and wait a little. Then knock louder and wait again. After that knock three times in succession, and you will hear a voice say from within: “Who knocks at the door of the treasure-house and yet cannot solve the Riddle?” You will reply: “I am the son of Omar, Judar the fisherman.” The door will open and reveal a man bearing a sword in his hand, who will say: “If you are that man stretch out your neck, that I may strike off your head.” Stretch out your neck to him and have no fear; for no sooner will he raise his sword and smite you than he will fall on the ground, a body without a soul. You will feel no pain from the blow, nor will any harm befall you. But if you defy him he will kill you.

‘When you have thus broken the first charm, go in and you will find another door. Knock on it, and the door will be opened by a horseman bearing a lance upon his shoulder, who will say: “What brings you to this place, forbidden alike to man and jinnee?” He will brandish his lance at you. Bare your breast to

him and he will strike you and fall on the ground, a body without a soul. But if you defy him he will kill you.

‘You will make your way to a third door, which will be opened by a man armed with a bow and arrow. He will shoot at you with his weapon. Bare your breast to him and he will at once fall on the ground, a body without a soul. But if you defy him he will kill you.

‘After that go in to the fourth door and knock. An enormous lion will rush out and leap upon you, opening its jaws apart to eat you. Do not flinch or run away; give it your hand and it will fall down lifeless upon the instant.

‘Then knock at the fifth door. A black slave will open it to you, saying: “Who are you?” Say: “I am Judar”, and he will reply: “If you are that man, go and open the sixth door.”

‘At the sixth door you must cry: “Jesus, bid Moses open the door.” The door will swing ajar. Go in, and two huge serpents, one on the right and the other on the left, will hurl themselves at you with open mouths. If you stretch out a hand to each they will do you no harm. But if you resist them they will kill you.

‘The seventh door will be opened by your mother. “Welcome, my son,” she will say. “Come near that I may greet you.” You must answer: “Stay where you are and put off your clothes!” “My child,” she will say, “I am your mother, who suckled you and brought you up. How would you see me naked?” You must reply: “Put off your clothes, or I will kill you.” Look on your right, and you will find a sword hanging from the wall: take it down and threaten her with it. She will plead with you and humble herself before you; have no pity on her, and each time she takes anything off, cry: “The rest!” Go on threatening her until she has put off all her clothes. Then she will fall at your feet.

‘At that moment all the charms will be annulled and all the spells broken. Safe and sound, you will enter the hall of the treasure and see the gold lying in heaps. But pay no heed to that. At the opposite end you will find a small pavilion with a curtain over it. Draw aside the curtain and you will see the

Magician Al-Shamardal sleeping on a couch of gold, with a round object above his head shining like the moon. That is the Celestial Orb. You will find the Sword on his side, the Ring on his finger, and the Vial of Kohl hung from a chain about his neck. Bring back these four talismans. Be on your guard lest you forget any of my instructions; if you go against them you shall rue it.'

The Moor repeated his directions until Judar assured him that he had them all by heart.

'But who can face the charms you speak of?' the fisherman then cried. 'Who can brave such mighty perils?'

'Have no fear, Judar,' the Moor replied. 'They are but phantoms without souls.'

Judar commended himself to Allah, and the Moor threw the incense on the fire and began his incantation. Presently the water of the river vanished and the door of the treasure-house appeared below. Judar went down to the door and knocked.

'Who knocks at the door of the treasure-house and yet cannot solve the Riddle?' cried a voice from within.

'Judar, son of Omar,' he answered.

The door was opened and a man with an unsheathed sword appeared, crying: 'Stretch out your neck!' Judar stretched out his neck, but no sooner did he raise his sword and smite Judar than the man fell down on the ground. Then Judar passed on to the other doors, breaking their spells in turn. When he reached the seventh door, his mother came out and greeted him.

'What are you?' Judar asked.

'I am your mother,' she answered. 'I suckled you and brought you up. I carried you for nine months, my son.'

'Put off your clothes!' cried Judar.

'But you are my son!' the old woman exclaimed. 'How can you strip me naked?'

She pleaded long with him, but Judar repeated his demand, threatening her with the sword which he had taken from the wall, until she had put off all but one of her garments.

‘Is your heart of stone, my son?’ she cried. ‘Would you see your mother utterly naked? Do you not know that this is unlawful?’

‘You are right, mother,’ answered Judar. ‘That is enough.’

Scarcely had he uttered these words when the old woman exclaimed: ‘Beat him! The man has failed!’

At this the guardians of the treasure fell upon him with mighty blows and gave him a thrashing which he never forgot for the rest of his life. Then they flung him out of the treasure-house and slammed the golden gate behind him.

When the Moor saw the fisherman thrown outside the door he hurriedly dragged him from the water, which was already tumbling back into the river-bed, and recited charms over him until he recovered his senses.

‘What have you done, you fool?’ he cried.

Judar recounted to him all that happened after he had met his mother.

‘Did I not charge you to observe all my instructions?’ shouted the Moor. ‘By Allah, you have wronged me, and yourself too. Had the woman unrobed herself entirely we would have gained our end. Now a whole year will have to pass before we can renew our attempt.’

He at once called the slaves, who struck the tent and brought back the mules. And the two rode back to the city of Fez.

Judar stayed with the Moor another year, feasting to his heart’s content and dressing in a splendid new robe each morning. When the appointed day arrived, the Moor took him outside the city, and there they saw the black slaves with the mules. On reaching the river bank they pitched the tent and ate the midday meal. Then the Moor arranged the reed and the tablets as before, lit the charcoal, and said to Judar: ‘Listen again to these instructions.’

‘You need not repeat them, sir,’ Judar cried. ‘I shall forget them only when I forget my thrashing.’

‘Do you remember every detail?’ asked the Moor, and, when the fisherman assured him that he did, went on: ‘Keep your wits about you. Do not think that the woman is really your mother; she is no more than a phantom which has taken on your mother’s semblance to mislead you. You came out alive the first time; but, if you slip this time, you shall assuredly perish.’

‘If I slip this time,’ Judar replied, ‘I shall deserve burning.’

The Moor cast the incense on the fire and as soon as he began his conjuration the river dried up and Judar went down to the golden door. Spell after spell was broken until he came to his mother.

‘Welcome, my son!’ she cried.

‘Wretched woman!’ Judar shouted. ‘Since when have I been your son? Put off your clothes!’

The old woman undressed herself, pleading with him the while, until only her drawers remained.

‘Off with them, wretch!’ he cried.

And as she removed her drawers she dropped at his feet, a phantom without a soul.

Judar entered the seventh door and, paying no heed to the piles of gold that lay within, went straight up to the pavilion. There he saw the Wizard Al-Shamardal lying, with the Sword at his side, the Ring on his finger, the Vial of Kohl upon his chest, and the Celestial Orb above his head. He ungirt the Sword, pulled off the Ring, unclasped the Vial, took down the Orb, and made for the door again. Suddenly a burst of music sounded in his praise, and the guardians of the treasure cried: ‘Rejoice, Judar, in that which you have gained!’ The music went on playing until he was outside the gate of the treasure-house.

As soon as he saw him, the Moor ceased his fumigation and his charms, and, quickly rising, threw his arms about the fisherman’s neck. Judar gave him the four talismans and the Moor called the slaves, who carried away the tent and returned with the mules.

When they were back in the city the Moor brought out a variety of meats, and the two feasted and ate their fill. Then the magician said: ‘Judar, you left your native land on my account and have fulfilled my dearest wish. Therefore name your reward; ask whatever you desire and Allah will grant it through me. Do not be shy; you have earned it well.’

‘Sir,’ replied the fisherman, ‘I can ask for nothing better than this saddle-bag.’

The Moor bade his slave fetch the bag, and then handed it to Judar, saying: ‘It is yours. You have earned it. Had you asked me for anything else I would have as willingly given it to you. But, my friend, this saddle-bag will provide you only with your food. You have exposed yourself to great perils for my sake, and I promised to send you home with a contented heart. I will give you another bag filled with gold and jewels and bring you safe to your own land. There you can set up as a merchant, and satisfy your needs and your family’s. As for the first bag, I will now tell you how to use it. Stretch your hand into it and say: “Servant of the Bag, by the mighty names that have power over you, bring me such-and-such a dish.” He will at once provide you with whatever you demand, even if you call for a thousand different dishes every day.’

The Moor sent for a slave and a mule and, filling a second bag with gold and jewels, said to Judar: ‘Mount this mule. The slave will walk before you and be your guide until he brings you to the door of your own house. On your arrival take the two bags and return the mule to the slave, so that he may bring it back. Admit none to your secret. And now go with Allah’s blessing.’

Judar thanked the Moor with all his heart, and, loading the two bags on the beast, rode off. The mule followed the slave all day and all night, and early next morning Judar entered the Victory Gate. There he was astounded to see his mother sitting by the roadside.

‘Alms, in the name of Allah,’ she was crying.

Judar quickly dismounted and threw himself with open arms upon the old woman, who burst into tears on seeing him. He mounted her on the mule and walked by her side until they reached their dwelling. There he took down the saddle-bags and left the mule to the slave, who returned with it to his master; for they were both devils.

Judar was profoundly distressed at his mother's plight.

'Are my brothers well?' he asked as soon as they went in.

'Yes, they are well,' she answered.

'Then why are you begging on the streets?' he inquired. 'I gave you a hundred pieces of gold the first day, a hundred more the next day, and a thousand the day I left home.'

'My son,' she replied, 'your brothers took all the money, saying they wished to buy some merchandise. But they deceived me and threw me out, so that I was forced to beg or starve.'

'Never mind, mother,' said Judar. 'All will be well with you now that I am home again. Here is a bag full of gold and jewels. Henceforth we shall lack nothing.'

'Fortune has smiled upon you, my son,' cried the old woman. 'May Allah bless you and ever give you of His bounty! Rise now and get us some bread. I have had nothing to eat since yesterday.'

'You are welcome, mother,' Judar replied, laughing. 'Tell me what you would like to eat and it shall be set before you this very instant. There is nothing I need to buy or cook.'

'But I can see nothing with you, my son,' said his mother.

'It is in the bag,' he answered. 'Every kind of food.'

'Anything will serve, if it can fill a hungry woman,' she replied.

'That is true, mother,' said Judar. 'When there is no choice one has to be content with the meanest thing: but when there is plenty one must choose the best. I have plenty: so name your choice.'

‘Very well, then,’ she replied. ‘Some fresh bread and a slice of cheese.’

‘That scarcely befits your station, mother,’ Judar protested.

‘If you know what is fitting,’ she answered, ‘then give me what I ought to eat.’

‘What would you say,’ he smiled, ‘to roast meat and roast chicken, peppered rice, sausage and stuffed marrow, stuffed lamb and stuffed ribs, kunafah swimming in bees’ honey, fritters and almond cakes?’

‘What has come over you, Judar?’ exclaimed the old woman, thinking her son was making fun of her. ‘Are you dreaming or have you taken leave of your senses? Who can afford these wondrous dishes, and who can cook them?’

‘Upon my life,’ Judar replied, ‘you shall have them all this very moment. Bring me the bag.’

His mother brought the bag; she felt it and saw that it was empty. Then she handed it to Judar, who proceeded to take out from it dish after dish until he had ranged before her all the dishes he had described.

‘My child,’ cried the astonished woman, ‘the bag is very small, and it was empty; I felt it with my own hands. How do you account for these numerous dishes?’

‘Know, mother, that the bag is enchanted,’ he replied. ‘It was given me by the Moor. It is served by a jinnee who, if invoked by the Mighty Names, provides any dish that a man can desire.’

Thereupon his mother asked if she herself might call the jinnee. Judar gave her the bag, and she thrust in her hand, saying: ‘Servant of the Bag, by the mighty names that have power over you, bring me a stuffed rib of lamb!’

She at once felt the dish under her hand. She drew it out, and then called for bread and other meats.

‘Mother,’ said Judar, ‘when you have finished eating, empty the rest of the meal into other plates and restore the dishes to the bag. That is one part of the secret. And keep the bag safely hidden.’

The old woman got up and stowed away the bag in a safe place.

‘Above all, mother,’ he resumed, ‘you must on no account disclose the secret. Whenever you need any food bring it out of the bag. Give alms and feed my brothers, alike when I am here and when I am away.’

The two had scarcely begun eating when Judar’s brothers entered the house.

They had heard the news of his arrival from a neighbour, who had said to them: ‘Your brother has come home, riding on a mule and with a slave marching before him. No one ever wore the like of his rich garments.’

‘Would that we had never wronged our mother,’ they said to each other. ‘She is bound to tell him what we did to her. Think of the disgrace!’

‘But mother is soft-hearted,’ one of them remarked. ‘And supposing she does tell him, our brother is kindlier still. If we apologize to him he will excuse us.’

Judar jumped to his feet as they entered, and greeted them in the friendliest fashion. ‘Sit down,’ he said, ‘and eat with us.’

They sat down and ate ravenously, for they were quite faint with hunger.

‘Brothers,’ said Judar when they could eat no more, ‘take the rest of the food and distribute it among the beggars.’

‘But why, brother?’ they replied. ‘We can have it for supper.’

‘At supper-time,’ said he, ‘you shall have a greater feast than this.’

So they went out with the food, and to every beggar that passed by they said: ‘Take and eat.’ Then they brought the empty dishes back to Judar, who bad his mother return them to the bag.

In the evening Judar went into the room where the bag was hidden and drew from it forty different dishes, which his mother carried up to the eating-chamber. He invited his brothers to eat, and, when the meal was over, told them to take

the remainder of the food and distribute it among the beggars. After supper he produced sweets and pastries for them; they ate their fill, and what was left over he told them to carry to the neighbours.

In this fashion he regaled his brothers for ten days, and at the end of that time Salem said to Seleem: ‘What is the meaning of all this? How can our brother provide us every day with such lavish feasts morning, noon, and evening, and then with sweetmeats late at night? And whatever remains he distributes among the poor and needy. Only sultans do such things. Where could he have got this fortune from? Will you not inquire about these various dishes and how they are prepared? We have never seen him buy anything at all or even light a fire; he has no cook and no kitchen.’

‘By Allah, I do not know,’ replied Seleem. ‘Only our mother can tell us the truth about it all.’

Thereupon they contrived a plan and, going to their mother in Judar’s absence, told her that they were hungry. She at once entered the room where the bag was hidden, invoked the jinnee, and returned with a hot meal.

‘Mother, this food is hot,’ they said. ‘And yet you did not cook it, nor did you even blow a fire.’

‘It is from the bag,’ she answered.

‘What bag is that?’ they asked.

‘A magic bag,’ she replied.

And she told them the whole story, adding: ‘You must keep the matter secret.’

‘No one shall know of it,’ they said. ‘But show us how it works.’

Their mother showed them and they proceeded to put in their hands, each asking for a dish of his own choice.

When the two were alone, Salem said to Seleem: ‘How long are we to stay like servants in our brother’s house, living abjectly on his charity? Can we not trick him and take the bag from him, and keep it for our own use?’

‘And how shall we do that?’ asked Seleem.

‘We will sell our brother to the chief captain of Suez,’ Salem replied. ‘We will go to the captain, and invite him to the house with two of his men. You have only to confirm whatever I say to Judar and by the end of the night you will see what I shall do.’

When they had thus agreed to sell their brother, they went to the chief captain of Suez and said to him: ‘Sir, we have come upon some business that will please you.’

‘Good,’ said the captain.

‘We are brothers,’ they went on. ‘We have a third brother, a worthless ne’er-do-well. Our father died and left us a small fortune. We divided the inheritance and our brother took his share and squandered it on lechery and all manner of vices. When he had lost all his money, he began complaining of us to the judges, saying that we had defrauded him of his inheritance. He took us from one court of law to another and in the end we forfeited all our fortune. Now he is at us again. We cannot bear with him any longer and want you to buy him from us.’

‘Can you bring him here upon some pretext?’ the captain asked. ‘Then I can send him off to sea forthwith.’

‘No, we cannot bring him here,’ they answered. ‘But you come to our house and be our guest this evening. Bring two of your sailors with you – no more. When he is sound asleep the five of us can set upon and gag him. Then you can carry him out of the house under cover of darkness and do whatever you please with him.’

‘Very well,’ said the captain. ‘Will you sell him for forty dinars?’

‘We agree to that,’ they replied. ‘Go after dark to such-and-such a street and there you will find one of us waiting for you.’

They returned home and sat talking together for a while. Then Salem went up to Judar and kissed his hand.

‘What can I do for you, brother?’ Judar asked.

‘I have a friend,’ he said, ‘who has invited me many times to his house and done me a thousand kindnesses, as Seleem here knows. Today I called on him and he invited me again. I excused myself, saying: “I cannot leave my brother.” “Let him come too,” he said. I told him you would never consent to that and asked him and his brothers to dine with us tonight. His brothers were sitting there with him and I invited them, thinking they would refuse. However, they all accepted, and asked me to meet them at the gate of the little mosque. I now regret my indiscretion and feel ashamed for asking them without your leave. But will you be so kind as to give them hospitality tonight? If you would rather not, allow me to take them to the neighbours’ house.’

‘But why to the neighbours’?’ Judar protested. ‘Is our house too small or have we no food to give them? Shame on you that you should even ask me. They shall have nothing but the choicest dishes. If you bring home any guests and I happen to be out, you have only to ask our mother and she will provide you with all the food you need and more. Go and bring them. They shall be most welcome.’

Salem kissed Judar’s hand and went off to the gate of the little mosque. The captain and his men came at the appointed hour and he took them home with him. As soon as they entered, Judar rose to receive them. He gave them a kindly welcome and seated them by his side, for he knew nothing of their intent. Then he bade his mother serve a meal of forty courses and the sailors ate their fill, thinking that it was all at Salem’s expense. After that he produced for them sweets and pastries; Salem served the guests with these, while his two brothers remained seated. At midnight the captain and his men begged leave to retire, and Judar got up with them and went to bed. As soon as he fell asleep the five men set upon him and, thrusting a gag into his mouth, bound his arms and carried him out of the house under cover of darkness. The sailors took their victim to Suez, and there, with irons on his feet, he toiled for a whole year as a galley-slave in one of the captain’s ships. So much for Judar.

Next morning the two brothers went in to their mother and asked her whether Judar had woken up.

'He is still asleep,' she said. 'Go and wake him.'

'Where is he sleeping?' they asked.

'With the guests,' she answered.

'There is no one there,' they said. 'Perhaps he went off with them whilst we were still asleep. It seems our brother has acquired a taste for visiting foreign lands and opening hidden treasures. Last night we overheard him talking to the Moors. "We will take you with us, and open the treasure for you," they were saying.'

'But when did he meet the Moors?' she asked.

'Did they not dine with us last night?' they answered.

'It is probable, then, that he has gone with them,' said the old woman. 'But Allah will guide him wherever he goes, for he was born under a lucky star. He is bound to come back laden with riches.'

Upon this she broke down and wept, for she could not bear to be parted from him.

'Vile woman!' they exclaimed. 'Do you love our brother so much? Yet if *we* went away or returned home, you would neither shed tears nor rejoice. Are we not your sons as much as he?'

'Yes, you are my sons,' she answered. 'But how wicked and ungrateful! Ever since your father died I have not had a moment's joy with you. But Judar has always been good and kind and generous to me. He is worthy of my tears, for we are all indebted to him.'

Stung by her words, the two abused their mother and beat her. Then they went in and searched the house until they found the two bags. They took the gold and jewels from the second bag, saying: 'This is our father's property.'

'No, by Allah,' their mother replied. 'It is your brother's. Judar brought it with him from the Moors' country.'

‘You lie!’ they shouted. ‘It is our father’s property. We will dispose of it as we choose.’

They divided the gold and jewels between them. But over the magic bag they fell into a hot dispute.

‘I take this,’ said Salem.

‘No, I take it,’ said Seleem.

‘My children,’ pleaded the old woman, ‘you have divided the first bag, but the second bag is beyond price and cannot be divided. If it is split into two parts, its charm will be annulled. Leave it with me and I will bring out for you whatever food you need, contenting myself with a mouthful. Buy some merchandise and trade with it like honest men. You are my sons, and I am your mother. Let us live in amity and peace, so that you may incur no shame when your brother comes back.’

However, they paid no heed to her and spent the night quarrelling over the magic bag. Now it chanced that an officer of the King’s guards was being entertained in the house next door, of which one of the windows was open. Leaning out of the window, he listened to the angry words that passed between the two brothers and understood the cause of the dispute. Next morning he presented himself before Shams-al-Dowlah, King of Egypt, and informed him of all he had overheard. The King sent at once for Judar’s brothers and tortured them until they confessed all. He took the two bags, threw the brothers into prison, and appointed their mother a daily allowance sufficient for her needs. So much for them.

Now to return to Judar. After toiling for a whole year in Suez, he set sail one day with several of his mates; a violent tempest struck their ship and, hurling it against a rocky cliff, shattered it to pieces. Judar alone escaped alive. Swimming ashore, he journeyed inland until he reached an encampment of bedouin Arabs. They asked him who he was, and he recounted to them his whole story. In the camp there was a merchant from Jedda, who at once took pity upon him.

‘Would you like to enter our service, Egyptian?’ he said, ‘I will furnish you with clothes and take you with me to Jedda.’

Judar accepted the merchant's offer and accompanied him to Jedda, where he was generously treated. Soon afterwards his master set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and took Judar with him. On their arrival Judar hastened to join the pilgrims' procession round the Ca'aba. Whilst he was thus engaged in his devotions, he met his friend Abdul Samad the Moor, who greeted him warmly and inquired his news. Judar wept as he recounted to him the tale of his misfortunes, and the Moor took him to his own house and dressed him in a magnificent robe.

'Your troubles are now ended, Judar,' he said.

Then he cast a handful of sand on the ground and, divining all that had befallen Salem and Seleem, declared: 'Your brothers have been thrown into prison by the King of Egypt. But you are welcome here until you have performed the season's rites. All shall be well with you.'

'Sir,' said Judar, 'I must first go and take my leave of the merchant who brought me here. Then I will come to you straightway.'

'Do you owe him any money?' asked the Moor.

'No,' Judar replied.

'Go, then,' said the Moor, 'and take leave of him. Honest men must not forget past favours.'

Judar sought out the good merchant and told him that he had met a long-lost brother.

'Go and bring him here, that he may eat with us,' said the merchant.

'There is no need for that,' Judar answered. 'He is a man of wealth and has a host of servants.'

'Then take these,' said the merchant, handing him twenty dinars, 'and free me of all obligations towards you.'

Judar took leave of him and went out. On his way he met a beggar and gave him the twenty dinars. Then he rejoined the Moor, and stayed with him until the pilgrimage rites had been completed. When it was time to part, the magician gave him the ring which he had taken from the treasure of Al-Shamardal.

‘This ring,’ he said, ‘will grant you all that you desire. It is served by a jinnee called Rattling Thunder. If you need anything, you have but to rub the seal and he will be at hand to do your bidding.’

The Moor rubbed the seal in front of him, and at once the jinnee appeared, saying: ‘I am here, my master! Ask what you will and it shall be done. Would you restore a ruined city, or lay a populous town in ruin? Would you slay a king, or rout a whole army?’

‘Thunder,’ cried the Moor, ‘this man will henceforth be your master. Serve him well.’

Then he dismissed the jinnee and said to Judar: ‘Go back to your country and take good care of the ring. Do not make light of it, for its magic will give you power over all your enemies.’

‘By your leave, sir,’ Judar replied, ‘I will now set forth for my native land.’

‘Rub the seal,’ said the Moor, ‘and the jinnee will take you there upon his back.’

Judar said farewell to the Moor and rubbed the seal. At once the jinnee appeared before him.

‘Take me to Egypt this very day,’ he commanded.

‘I hear and obey,’ Thunder replied. And carrying Judar upon his back flew with him high up into the air. At midnight he set him down in the courtyard of his mother’s house and vanished.

Judar went in to his mother. She greeted him with many tears and told him how the King had tortured his brothers, thrown them into prison, and taken from them the two bags.

‘Do not grieve any more over that,’ Judar replied. ‘You shall see what I can do. I will bring my brothers back this very instant.’

He rubbed the ring, and the jinnee appeared, saying: ‘I am here, my master! Ask, and you shall be given.’

‘I order you,’ Judar said, ‘to free my brothers from the King’s prison and bring them back forthwith.’

The jinnee vanished into the earth and in the twinkling of an eye emerged from the floor of the prison-house, where the two men lay lamenting their plight and praying for death. When they saw the earth open and the jinnee appear, the brothers fainted away with fright; nor did they recover their senses until they found themselves at home, with Judar and their mother seated by their side.

'Thank Allah you are safe, brothers!' said Judar when they came round. 'I am heartily pleased to see you.'

They hung their heads and burst out crying.

'Do not weep,' said Judar. 'It was Satan, and greed, that prompted you to act as you did. How could you sell me? But I will think of Joseph and console myself; his brothers behaved to him worse than you did to me, for they threw him into a pit. Still, never mind. Turn to Allah and ask His pardon: He will forgive you as I forgive you. And now you are welcome; no harm shall befall you here.'

He thus comforted them until their hearts were set at ease. Then he related to them all he had suffered until he met the Moor and told them of the magic ring.

'Pardon us this time, brother,' they said. 'If we return to our evil practices, then punish us as you deem fit.'

'Think no more of that,' he answered. 'Tell me what the King did to you.'

'He beat us and threatened us,' they replied. 'And he took away the two bags.'

'By Allah, he shall answer for that!' Judar exclaimed. And so saying he rubbed the ring.

At the sight of the jinnee the brothers were seized with terror, thinking that he would order him to kill them. They threw themselves at their mother's feet, crying: 'Protect us, mother! Intercede for us, we beg you!'

'Do not be alarmed, my children,' she answered.

'I order you,' said Judar to the jinnee, 'to bring me all the gold and jewels in the King's treasury. Also fetch me the two

bags which the King took from my brothers. Leave nothing there.'

'I hear and obey,' replied the jinnee.

He thereupon vanished and instantly returned with the King's treasures and the two bags.

'My master,' he said, 'I have left nothing in all the treasury.'

Judar put the bag of jewels into his mother's charge and kept the magic bag by his side. Then he said to the jinnee: 'I order you to build me a lofty palace this very night and to adorn it with liquid gold and furnish it magnificently. The whole must be ready by tomorrow's dawn.'

'You shall have your wish,' replied the jinnee, and disappeared into the earth.

Judar sat feasting with his family and, when they had taken their fill, they got up and went to sleep. Meanwhile Thunder summoned his minions from among the jinn and ordered them to build the palace. Some hewed the stones, some built the walls, some engraved and painted them, some spread the rooms with rugs and tapestries; so that before day dawned the palace stood complete in all its splendour. Then the servant of the ring presented himself before Judar, saying: 'The task is accomplished, my master. Will you come and inspect your palace?'

Judar went forth with his mother and brothers to see the building and they were amazed at its magnificence and the peerless beauty of its structure. Judar rejoiced as he looked at the edifice towering high on the main road and marvelled that it had cost him nothing.

'Would you like to live in this palace?' he asked his mother.

'I would indeed,' she answered, calling down blessings upon him.

He rubbed the ring again, and at once the jinnee appeared saying: 'I am here, my master.'

'I order you,' said Judar, 'to bring me forty beautiful white slave-girls and forty black slave-girls, forty white slave-boys and

forty black eunuchs.'

'I hear and obey,' the jinnee replied.

The slave of the ring at once departed with forty of his attendants to India, Sind, and Persia, and in a trice returned with a multitude of handsome slaves to Judar's palace. There he made them stand in full array before their master, who was greatly pleased to see them.

'Now bring each a splendid robe to put on,' said Judar, 'and rich garments for my mother, my brothers, and myself.'

The jinnee brought the robes and dressed the slave-girls.

'This is your mistress,' he said to them. 'Kiss her hand and obey her orders; serve her well, you blacks and whites.'

He also clothed the slave-boys, and one by one they went up to Judar and kissed his hand. Finally the three brothers put on their fine robes, so that Judar looked like a king and Salem and Seleem like viziers. His house being spacious, Judar assigned a whole wing to each of his brothers with a full retinue of slaves and servants, while he and his mother dwelt in the main suite of the palace. Thus each one of them lived like a sultan in his own apartment. So much for them.

Next morning the King's treasurer went to take some valuables from the royal coffers. He entered the treasury, but found nothing there. He gave a loud cry and fell down fainting; when he recovered himself, he rushed to King Shams-al-Dowlah, crying: 'Prince of the Faithful, the treasury has been emptied during the night.'

'Dog,' cried the King, 'what have you done with all my wealth?'

'By Allah, I have done nothing, nor do I know how it was ransacked,' he replied. 'When I was there last night the treasury was full, but this morning all the coffers are clean empty; yet the walls have not been pierced and the locks are unbroken. No thief could have possibly entered there.'

'And the two bags,' the King shouted, 'have they also gone?'

'They have,' replied the treasurer.

Aghast at these words, the King jumped to his feet and, ordering the old man to follow him, ran to the treasury, which he found quite empty.

‘Who dared to rob me?’ exclaimed the infuriated King. ‘Did he not fear my punishment?’

Blazing with rage, he rushed out of the room and assembled his court. The captains of his army hastened to the King’s presence, each thinking himself the object of his wrath.

‘Know,’ exclaimed the King, ‘that my treasury has been plundered in the night. I have yet to catch the thief who has dared to commit so great an outrage.’

‘How did it all happen?’ the officers inquired.

‘Ask the treasurer,’ shouted the King.

‘Yesterday the coffers were full,’ said the treasurer. ‘Today I found them empty. Yet the walls of the treasury have not been pierced, nor the door broken.’

The courtiers were amazed at the treasurer’s words and did not know what to answer. As they stood in silence before the King, there entered the hall that same officer who had denounced Salem and Seleem.

‘Your majesty,’ said he, ‘all night long I have been watching a great multitude of masons at work. By daybreak they had erected an entire building, a palace of unparalleled splendour. Upon inquiry I was informed that it had been built by a man called Judar, who had but recently returned from abroad with vast riches and innumerable slaves and servants. I was also told that he had freed his brothers from prison and now sits like a sultan in his palace.’

‘Go, search the prison!’ cried the King to his attendants.

They went and looked, but saw no trace of the two brothers. Then they came back to inform the King.

‘Now I know my enemy,’ the King exclaimed. ‘He that released Salem and Seleem from prison is the man who stole my treasure.’

‘And who may that be, your majesty?’ asked the Vizier.

‘Their brother Judar,’ replied the King. ‘And he has taken away the two bags. Vizier, send at once an officer with fifty men to seal up all his property and bring the three of them before me, that I may hang them! Do you hear? And quickly, too!’

‘Be indulgent,’ said the Vizier. ‘Allah himself is indulgent and never too quick to chastise His servants when they disobey Him. The man who could build a palace in a single night cannot be judged by ordinary standards. Indeed, I greatly fear for the officer whom you would send to him. Therefore have patience until I devise some way of discovering the truth. Then you can deal with these offenders as you think fit, your majesty.’

‘Tell me what to do, then,’ said the King.

‘I advise your majesty,’ replied the Vizier, ‘to send an officer to him and invite him to the palace. When he is here I shall converse with him in friendly fashion and ask him his news. After that we shall see. If he is indeed a powerful man, we will contrive some plot against him; if he is just an ordinary rascal, you can arrest him and do what you please with him.’

‘Then send one to invite him,’ said the King.

The Vizier ordered an officer called Othman to go to Judar and invite him to the King’s palace.

‘And do not come back without him,’ the King shouted.

Now this officer was a proud and foolish fellow. When he came to Judar’s palace, he saw a eunuch sitting on a chair outside the gateway. Othman dismounted, but the eunuch remained seated on his chair and paid no heed to the distinguished courtier, despite the fifty soldiers who stood behind him.

‘Slave, where is your master?’ the officer cried.

‘In the palace,’ replied the eunuch, without stirring from his seat.

‘Ill-omened slave,’ exclaimed the angry Othman, ‘are you not ashamed to lounge there like a fool while I am speaking to you?’

‘Be off, and hold your tongue,’ the eunuch replied.

At this the officer flew into a violent rage. He lifted up his mace and made to strike the eunuch, for he did not know that he was a devil. As soon as he saw this movement the doorkeeper sprang upon him, threw him on the ground, and dealt him four blows with his own mace. Indignant at the treatment accorded to their master, the fifty soldiers drew their swords and rushed upon the eunuch.

‘Would you draw your swords against me, you dogs?’ he shouted and, falling upon them with the mace, maimed them in every limb. The soldiers took to their heels in panic-stricken flight, and did not stop running until they were far away from the palace. Then the eunuch returned to his chair and sat down at his ease, as though nothing had troubled him.

Back at the palace the battered Othman related to the King what had befallen him at the hands of Judar’s slave.

‘Let a hundred men be sent against him!’ cried the King, bursting with rage.

A hundred men marched down to Judar’s palace. When they came near, the eunuch leapt upon them with the mace and cudgelled them soundly, so that they turned their backs and fled. Returning to the King, they told him what had happened.

‘Let two hundred go down!’ the King exclaimed.

When these came back, broken and put to rout, the King cried to his vizier: ‘Go down yourself with five hundred and bring me this eunuch at once, together with his master Judar and his brothers!’

‘Great King,’ replied the Vizier, ‘I need no troops. I would rather go alone, unarmed.’

‘Do what you think fit,’ said the King.

The Vizier cast aside his weapons and, dressing himself in a white robe, took a rosary in his hand and walked unescorted to Judar’s palace. There he saw the eunuch sitting at the gate; he went up to him and sat down courteously by his side, saying: ‘Peace be with you.’

‘And to you peace, human,’ the eunuch replied. ‘What is your wish?’

On hearing himself addressed as a human, the Vizier realized that the eunuch was a jinnee and trembled with fear.

‘Sir, is your master here?’ he asked.

‘He is in the palace,’ replied the jinnee.

‘Sir,’ said the Vizier, ‘I beg you to go in and say to him: “King Shams-al-Dowlah invites you to a banquet at his palace. He sends you his greeting and requests you to honour him with your presence.”’

‘Wait here while I tell him,’ the jinnee answered.

The Vizier waited humbly, while the eunuch went into the palace.

‘Know, my master,’ he said to Judar, ‘that this morning the King sent to you an officer with fifty guards. I cudgelled him and put his men to flight. Next he sent a hundred, whom I beat, and then two hundred, whom I routed. Now he has sent you his Vizier, unarmed and unattended, to invite you as his guest. What answer shall I give him?’

‘Go and bring the Vizier in,’ Judar replied.

The jinnee led the Vizier into the palace, where he saw Judar seated upon a couch such as no king ever possessed and arrayed in greater magnificence than any sultan. He was confounded at the splendour of the palace and the beauty of its ornaments and furniture, and, Vizier that he was, felt himself a beggar in those surroundings. He kissed the ground before Judar and called down blessings upon him.

‘What is your errand, Vizier?’ Judar demanded.

‘Sir,’ he answered, ‘your friend King Shams-al-Dowlah sends you his greetings. He desires to delight himself with your company, and begs your attendance at a banquet in his palace. Will you do him the honour of accepting his invitation?’

‘Since he is my friend,’ returned Judar, ‘give him my salutations and tell him to come and visit me himself.’

‘It shall be as you wish,’ the Vizier replied.

Upon this Judar rubbed the ring and ordered the jinnee to fetch him a splendid robe. The jinnee brought him a robe, and Judar handed it to the Vizier, saying: ‘Put this on. Then go and inform the King what I have told you.’

The Vizier put on the robe, the like of which he had never worn in all his life, and returned to his master. He gave him an account of all that he had seen, enlarging upon the splendour of the palace and its contents.

‘Judar invites you,’ he said.

‘To your horses, captains!’ the King exclaimed and, mounting his own steed, rode with his followers to Judar’s house.

Meanwhile, Judar summoned the servant of the ring and said to him: ‘I require you to bring me from among the jinn a troop of guards in human guise and station them in the courtyard of the palace, so that when the King passes through their ranks his heart may be filled with awe and he may realize that my might is greater than his.’

At once two hundred stalwart guards appeared in the courtyard, dressed in magnificent armour. When the King arrived and saw the formidable array, his heart trembled with fear. He went up into the palace and found Judar sitting in the spacious hall, surrounded with such grandeur as cannot be found in the courts of kings or sultans. He greeted him and bowed respectfully before him; but Judar neither rose in his honour nor invited him to be seated. The King grew fearful of his host’s intent and, in his embarrassment, did not know whether to sit down or leave.

‘Were he afraid of me,’ he thought to himself, ‘he would have shown me more respect. Is it to avenge his brothers’ wrong that he has brought me here?’

‘Your majesty,’ Judar said at last, ‘is it proper for a king to oppress his subjects and seize their goods?’

‘Sir, do not be angry with me,’ the King replied. ‘It was avarice, and fate, that led me to wrong your brothers. If men could never do wrong, there would be no pardon.’

He went on begging forgiveness and humbling himself in this fashion until Judar said: ‘Allah forgive you,’ and bade him be seated. Then Judar dressed the King in the robe of safety and ordered his brothers to serve a sumptuous banquet. When they had finished eating, he invested all the courtiers with robes of honour and gave them costly presents. After that the King took leave of him and departed.

Thenceforth the King visited Judar every day and never held his court except in Judar’s house. Friendship and amity flourished between them and they continued in this state for some time. One day, however, the King said to his vizier: ‘I fear that Judar may kill me and usurp my kingdom.’

‘Have no fear of that, your majesty,’ the Vizier answered. ‘Judar will never stoop so low as to rob you of your kingdom, for the wealth and power he enjoys are greater than any king’s. And if you are afraid that he may kill you, give him your daughter in marriage and you and he will be for ever united.’

‘Vizier, you shall act as our go-between,’ the King said.

‘Gladly, your majesty,’ the Vizier replied. ‘Invite him to your palace, and we will spend the evening together in one of the halls. Ask your daughter to put on her finest jewels and walk across the doorway. When Judar sees her he will fall in love with her out-right. I will then lean towards him and encourage him by hint and suggestion, as though you know nothing about the matter, until he asks you for the girl. Once they are married, a lasting bond will be ensured between you and, when he dies, the greater part of his riches will be yours.’

‘You have spoken wisely, my Vizier,’ said the King.

He thereupon ordered a banquet to be given, and invited him. Judar came to the royal palace and they sat feasting in the great hall till evening.

The King had instructed his wife to array the Princess in her finest ornaments and walk with her past the doorway. She did as the King bade her and walked past the hall with her daughter. When Judar caught sight of the girl in her incomparable beauty, he uttered a deep sigh and felt his limbs

grow numb and languid. Love took possession of his heart, and he turned pale with overpowering passion.

‘I trust you are well, my master,’ said the Vizier in a whisper. ‘Why do I see you so distressed?’

‘That girl,’ Judar murmured, ‘whose daughter is she?’

‘She is the daughter of your friend the King,’ replied the Vizier. ‘If you like her, I will ask him if he will marry her to you.’

‘Do that, Vizier,’ Judar said, ‘and you shall be handsomely rewarded. I will give the King whatever dowry he demands and the two of us will be friends and kinsmen.’

‘Allah willing, you shall have her,’ the Vizier replied.

Then, turning to the King, he whispered to him.

‘Your majesty,’ he said, ‘your friend Judar desires to marry your daughter, the Princess Asiah. Pray accept my plea on his behalf. He offers you whatever dowry you wish to ask.’

‘I have already received the dowry,’ the King answered. ‘My daughter is a slave in his service. I marry her to him. If he accepts her I shall be greatly honoured.’

Next morning the King assembled his court, and in the presence of Sheikh al-Islam Judar wedded the Princess. He presented the King with the bag of gold and jewels as a dowry for his daughter and the marriage-contract was drawn up amidst great rejoicings. Judar and the King lived together in harmony and mutual trust for many months; and when the King died the troops requested his son-in-law to be their sultan. At first Judar declined, but when they continued to press him he accepted and was proclaimed their king. He built a great mosque over the tomb of Shams-al-Dowlah and endowed it munificently. Judar’s house was in the Yemenite Quarter, but since the beginning of his reign the entire district has been known as Judariyah.

Judar appointed Salem and Seleem his viziers, and the three of them lived in peace for one year, no more. At the end of that time Salem said to Seleem: ‘How long are we to stay as we are?

Are we to spend the whole of our lives as servants to Judar? We shall never taste the joy of sovereignty or power as long as Judar is alive. Can we not kill him and take the ring and the bag from him?'

'You are cleverer than I am,' Seleem replied. 'Think out some plot for us whereby we can destroy him.'

'If I contrive to bring about his death,' said Salem, 'will you agree that I shall become sultan and you chief vizier? Will you accept the magic bag and let me keep the ring?'

'I agree to that,' Seleem replied.

Thus for the sake of power and worldly gain, the two conspired to kill their brother. They betook themselves to Judar and said to him: 'Brother, will you do us the honour of dining with us this evening?'

'To whose house shall I come?' he asked.

'To mine,' Salem replied. 'Then you can go to my brother's.'

'Very well,' said Judar.

He went with Seleem to Salem's house, where a poisoned feast was spread before him. As soon as he had swallowed a mouthful his flesh fell about his bones in little pieces. Salem thereupon rose to pull the ring off his finger, and, seeing that it would not yield, cut off the finger with his knife. Then he rubbed the ring, and the jinnee appeared before him, saying: 'I am here! Demand what you will.'

'Take hold of my brother and put him to instant death,' Salem said. 'Then carry the two bodies and throw them down before the troops.'

The jinnee put Seleem to death, then carried out the two corpses and cast them down in the midst of the palace hall, where the army chiefs were eating. Alarmed at the sight, the captains lifted their hands from the food and cried to the jinnee: 'Who has killed the King and his vizier?'

'Their brother Salem,' he replied.

At that moment Salem himself entered the hall.

‘Captains,’ he said, ‘eat and set your minds at rest. I have become master of this ring, which I have taken from my brother Judar. The jinnee who stands before you is its faithful servant. I ordered him to kill my brother Seleem so that he should not scheme against my throne. He was a traitor and I feared he would betray me. Judar being dead, I am your only King. Will you accept my rule, or shall I order this jinnee to slay you all, great and small alike?’

The captains answered: ‘We accept you as our King.’

Salem gave orders for the burial of his brothers, and assembled his court. Some of the people walked in the funeral and some in Salem’s procession. When he reached the audience-hall, Salem sat upon the throne and received the allegiance of his subjects. Then said he: ‘I wish to take in marriage my brother’s wife.’

‘That may not be done,’ they answered, ‘until the period of her widowhood has expired.’

But Salem cried: ‘I will not hear of such trifles. Upon my life, I will go in to her this very night.’

Thus they wrote the marriage-contract and sent to inform Judar’s widow.

‘Let him come,’ she said.

When he entered, she welcomed him with a great show of joy. But she mixed poison in his drink and so destroyed him.

Shams-al-Dowlah’s daughter took the ring and broke it to pieces, so that none should ever use it. She also tore the magic bag. Then she sent to inform Sheikh-al-Islam of what had happened and to bid the people choose a new king.

N. J. Dawood (trans.), *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 350–71

Even without taking account of the *Nights*, the Mamluk period was a golden age for the

production of popular fiction. In particular there was a vogue for lengthy poetic epics featuring Arab paladins who battled against Byzantines, Crusaders and Zoroastrians – not to mention sorcerers, dragons and seductresses. Such enthusiasm for pseudo-historical fiction aroused disapproval in pious circles. A fourteenth-century Syrian religious scholar advised copyists not to copy deceptive books 'by which Allah does not offer any useful thing, such as *Sirat 'Antar* and other fabricated things'. Quite a number of heroic epics circulated in the late Middle Ages, among them *Sirat Dhat-al-Himma, Sayf al-Tijan, Sirat al-Zahir* and *Sirat Sayf bin Dhi Yazan*. However, the *Sirat 'Antar* seems to have been the best known of these epics, as well as the most accomplished in literary terms. Its stories were lightly based on the exploits of the real-life warrior and poet of pre-Islamic times, 'Antara ibn Shaddad. 'Antara (but 'Antar in the folk epic) had been born to an Arab father, but his mother was an Abyssinian slave. Thus 'Antar was one of the *Ghurab*, or 'Crows', and in early episodes of the epic he has to perform many valorous feats in order to be fully accepted by his fellow tribesmen as one of them. More acts

of heroism have to be accomplished before he can win the hand of Abla, his uncle's daughter. Although *'Antar* started out as a saga of inter-tribal warfare in the Arabian desert, later episodes took the hero to Europe, Africa, India and even into the skies (thanks to a box drawn up by eagles). 'Antar fought for the Byzantines against the Franks and tangled with heroes of Persian legend. His fantasy conquests can be seen as prefiguring the real ones made by Islamic armies in the seventh and eighth centuries. At the opening of the epic it is claimed that it was composed by the famous ninth-century philologist al-Asma'i. However, its real authors were anonymous figures who transmitted and added to the epic over several centuries. A version of *'Antar* certainly existed as early as the twelfth century, though what survives today seems to have been heavily revised in the fourteenth century, probably in Egypt. It is rich in excitement and colour – and also very long and somewhat shapeless. One printed version in Arabic runs to thirty-two volumes.

In the first extract here, the jinn Wajh al-Ghul (his name means 'face of a monster') is

dispatched by King Ghawwar to do battle with ‘Antar. After a week’s marching Wajh al-Ghul’s army encounters that of ‘Antar, but the battle goes badly for the former. Then Wajh al-Ghul is tempted to enter the heat of the fray…

Then it was that a knight called al-Dahhash ibn al-Ra“ash advanced towards him and kissed the ground. He said, ‘My lord, by al-Lat and al-‘Uzza be not rash. I shall go forth in single combat. I will show you what I can do with these horsemen.’ When Wajh al-Ghul heard him speak, he answered, ‘Hurry to achieve your wish. If you slay not Antar, then bring him to me captive so that I can deliver him to the great king.’ Then the other went forth on a pale charger, tall and thin, which raced against the wind. He bore a sharp sword and having entered the field of combat he loosed his horse’s reins and broke forth into verse. He had but finished when Ghasub attacked him. He was mounted on a fine-coated horse of unsurpassed speed. Over his chest he wore a hauberk of closely linked rings, impenetrable to the Indian blade nor could a well-aimed spear penetrate its doubled links. On his head he wore a *pot de fer* prized by Chosroes, king of Persia. It was hammered from iron plates. In his hand he grasped a sword as sharp as a razor.

Then he attacked, roaring like a lion. He thrust his enemy through the heart, toppled him from the back of his steed, and he fell on the ground wallowing in his gore. Ghasub cried out with an eloquent tongue, ‘Woe to you, will you challenge us with words, bastards that you are! We are heroes of the Banu ‘Abs, noble among men called by the name of “the terrible death”.’

When they saw these deeds of Ghasub the gallant were in awe of him. None came out to challenge him in single combat, neither Arab nor negro. He therefore returned to his people and changed his horse. Once again he returned to the battlefield. He

cried out, ‘Oh, sons of harlots, come out and fight this knight of ‘Adnan.’ Wajh al-Ghul remained still, looking and listening. But he had become restive within. His eyes burned like embers when set alight. He charged forth from between the banners. He roared, and he made for Ghasub like a bird of prey when it strikes a dove. He taunted him in verse, then he unsheathed his Indian sword. He was a fighter skilled in every kind of weapon, and no man could face him when he screamed with all his voice.

On that day he was clad in a *jazerant* of thick quilted cotton hidden by a covering of tightly woven mail. On his head he wore a casque which deflected blades of iron, nor could spears penetrate its thickness. When Ghamra saw him she feared for the safety of her son, and she wished to sally forth to bring him away from Wajh al-Ghul. She went to Antar and told him of the matter. She said to him, ‘I fear this knight and what he may do to my son. I fear lest he arouse my emotions to a degree that I go forth to send back my son and fight the foe myself.’ When Antar heard her, he persuaded her not to act thus. He said to her, ‘Stay where you are. I will fulfil your hope. This devil is a doughty smiter and I alone can resist him.’ Then he went to his son and said to him, ‘What you have done today in battle is more than enough.’ When Ghasub heard the words of his father he realized that affection had inspired his sentiments. So he returned to his mother. She embraced him and kissed him. She thanked him and praised him.

But then Wajh al-Ghul saw that he was angry, and he wondered how he could withstand the opponent who now faced him. He advanced towards Antar with caution and calculation. He said to him, ‘Woe to you, offspring of base blood. Who are you to turn aside my foe and deny me my vengeance?’

Antar said, ‘Oh, offspring of apes and vilest creature of these lands. I am Antar ibn Shaddad, the mightiest of the Arabs in zeal and the firmest in resolve. No tongue can describe me and my noble deeds. I am the mine of valour and pride, unique in this age. I have attained every goal I have sought, and every enemy of mine is abandoned. My foe has been slain, his blood

scattered in drops. I smite with iron swords and with the lofty lance. My flame burns brightest among the Arabs. I am the noblest born and the stoutest in rebuff. I am the viper in the valley bottom, the father of knights, Antar ibn Shaddad. I have only to come to this country to avenge Ghamra, to uproot every trace of you, and to ruin these towns so that no hearth will be left to be tended.'

Al-Asma'i said that when Wajh al-Ghul heard Antar's speech he was dark in his countenance. He said, 'How happy is this day of combat. I will show all who is the doughty knight, and who is the one entitled to his praise.' Then he attacked Antar with a pounce while Antar met him with cool resolve. Dust rose above them as they were locked in weighty struggle beyond the gaze of the courageous. Destiny decided their fate – glory be to Him who has decreed death and wretchedness and who has singled out life and glory for the elect. The knights were awestruck until their horses, restless beneath them, were aware that both parties to the fight were equally fatigued, hungry and thirsty in a confined desert where the sun had passed its zenith.

Wajh al-Ghul sought to escape, but when Antar realized his intent he faced him, and when he was opposite him he thrust him with his spear in his left side. He leant from his saddle like a towering mountain and cried aloud, 'Oh, 'Abs, oh, 'Adnan, I am Antar, the father of knights.' Then the negroes saw Wajh al-Ghul covered in dust on the ground, and they all attacked Antar like the onset of blackest night. They called aloud in one great shout, 'Oh, mighty knight and hero, may God cut short your life and rid the world of your evil. You have slain the knight of the desert.'

When Antar saw the negroes attack and loose their reins he made a sign with his hand. He cried out to the Banu 'Abs, and they attacked behind him. They answered his call. They hurled cries into the hearts of Antar's foes. Death was relief, and the battle raged on foot. The sea of mortality swelled, and the fire of fate burst into flame. Swords were blunted by hard blows, and spear-points were moist with blood. The horizon became sombre and darkened. Amid the rage of nations skulls were

severed from their bodies. Only the bones were left. Men roared like forest beasts, speaking in tongues which were unintelligible. Every negro leader was killed. Lawn al-Zalam and his son accomplished deeds of valour, so too the negroes who were beneath his sway and his cousins. As for Ghamra and her son Ghasub, and Maysara his brother, they were like a blazing fire which caught alight amidst dry firewood. Their fighting was a marvel, it stirred the spirit. Their sword was at close quarters and in remoter corners of the battlefield.

After a little while Antar had split apart the other negro bands and the Arabs. His men forgot their cares. Every rank he attacked sought flight. As the night fell the negro warriors scattered. The Banu Quda'a and the soldiers of Lawn al-Zalam returned praising Antar and praying for his life to be prolonged, for he had endured much. He returned sorely stabbed, and like a red flower, bathed in human blood. He marched before his men. He was tired and bent, yet able to phrase his couplets as he sat in his saddle. Lawn al-Zalam said to him, 'May God's breath give joy to your heart. You have quenched your thirst in breaking asunder these innumerable warriors.' In this wise their discourse continued until they reached their tents. They rejoiced at their success while the negro warriors said to one another, 'By the All Knowing King, Lawn al-Zalam has fortified this knight with his utmost powers. Antar has no equal at this time. None can resist him.'

COMMENTARY

Al-Lat and al-'Uzza are pre-Islamic goddesses.

Jazerant is a piece of armour.

Lawn al-Zalam had previously defected to 'Antar's army.

The next short extract concerns the bizarre pagan city of King Hammam. King Ghawwar has written to him requesting help against ‘Antar.

This King Hammam was a man of great courage and stubborn in combat. He used to raid tribes and capture women. He used to attack a man mounted on horse or righting on foot, and he thrust with spear and lance. He had a city constructed from white stone. There was none like it in that land. It was reported that the *jinn* had built it for our lord Solomon, son of David, peace be upon him. Near that city was a hill like a pyramid. It was covered with growing vegetation, dark and obscure. In the middle of that hill was an upright sword over which a bird ceased not to hover. No one could pass by that sword unless his garments were white. If one whose clothes were dyed approached it, winds from all countries blew upon it, and a flood would come upon it until the villages which were round about it were almost destroyed; so violent were the rains.

King Hammam was lord of the Land of Flags and Ensigns. In that place he had left those who could guard him by the payment of *jamakiyya* and *diwan*. At the base of it was a house. When one of the people died they left him in that house. They took the deceased and extracted his bones and stripped him of his flesh and pickled it. All the marrow in the bones would be removed, and they would place the bones in bags according to the status of the deceased. As for those who were revered their coverings were of Byzantine brocade, and the poor were placed in bags of cotton and sacking. They wrote on each the name of the occupant. They cast them in that house. As for the flesh, they cast it outside the city to the black crows so they could eat it. They allowed no other creature to eat any of it. They chased it away with arrows and with slings and catapults. All who were in that city were engaged in the manufacture of suits of

mail; and coats of mail and helmets and swords and spears and everything concerned with weapons of war and other arms. They paid no tax or tribute to King Hammam, and none of the kings could take anything from them in that country…

H. T. Norris (trans.), *The Adventures of Antar* (Warminster, Wilts., 1980), pp. 122–5, 155–6

COMMENTARY

This strange fantasy appears to draw on Arab early accounts of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as on Muslim distortions of Persian Zoro-astrian burial practices.

Jamakiyya means ‘pay’ or ‘salary’. *Diwan* in this context refers to a ‘financial bureau’ (and not a collection of poetry).

Warfare is described in quite a different key in another anonymous narrative, *The Delectable War between Mutton and the Refreshments of the Market Place*. This curiosity, which dates from the Mamluk period, is a kind of dramatized version of *munazara* (the competitive comparison of one kind of person or thing with another). King Mutton, leader of the foods of the rich, alarmed by reports of the growing power of the foods of the poor, decides to wage

war on their leader, King Honey. King Honey musters his vegetables, milk, cheese and fish to resist the onslaught of the foods of the rich. In the end, however, he is defeated by the defection to mutton of treacherous sugar, syrup and rendered fat. The mock-epic saga ends with the line, ‘And the boon companions related tales in praise of foods, attaching to each story the names of its transmitters.’ Despite the triumph of the food of the rich, this strange story is part of folk literature.

> In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate! It has been told of the wonders of time that there was a monarch of powerful sway, called ‘King Mutton’. He was savoured by every caliph and sultan, and people were eager to taste him that he might ward off adversity from them. Invigorated by his healing powers, they implored Allah for the prolonging of his life. Whenever gratified at the sight of him, they thanked Allah for that favour. He used to sit in his fortress on lances, known as ‘hooks’, and none save the well-fed lambs might keep him company. His insignia were red and white, and his cuts glistened [with crimson]. In his presence stood people known as ‘Butchers’, incessantly wielding their cleavers and knives. In his kindness he adapted himself to every disposition, and was the healing salve applied to the wounds of hunger. In his service were enrolled only people of dinars and dirhams. He had a vizier, called the ‘Meat of Goats’, to whom no poor man came but he fortified him and supplied his want. He had also an emir, called ‘Beef, in whom every noble found refuge when in need, and a clever and sociable chamberlain, called the ‘Scalded

Meat'. He had, besides, special attendants who added to the glory of it all; they were called 'Chicken'. Says the poet apropos:

'When he appears in the assembly, you are the recipients of those favours with which pleasures are conjoined;

'and when he is remote from his mansion, sadness overwhelms you, and you are overcome with grief.'

And the narrator continues: And once when he appeared in his shining glory, overlooking the country and its market-places, and diverting himself with the radiance in the eyes of his admirers, behold searchers and spies came unto him, informing him that a nation, called 'Paupers', had given the Honey sway over the refreshments of the market, and had enlisted in his service in both East and West; and that he had engrossed their hearts and minds, and was content with the tribute of a baser coin than a dirham. [And the spies added:] 'And if you are unmindful of them, they will degrade you and depose you from your throne.' And the king grew angry at hearing this, and his demeanour became severe, yet he jestingly alluded to the situation in a verse:

'Behold this is an age and you are of its neighbourhood; it has unjustly dispensed its laws and become oppressive.'

Then he ordered a wise man into his presence, called the 'Fat Tail', renowned for his elegance and stately appearance, and said unto him: 'Immediately proceed, delegated in power, to the king of the refreshments, and summon him to service and obedience; and in case he refuses, challenge him to prepare a banquet for us, if he thinks that the bounty of a king can vie in munificence with the bounty of a caliph.' Then he improvised:

'And here is a letter expressing our wish; convey it to him, and return with his answer.

'And capture the hearts of his oppressed subjects with promises whose fulfilment will delight them when we draw nigh unto them.' – And the narrator continues: In preparation for his departure, the messenger embarked upon a vessel called the 'Frying Pan'. And the whiteness of his adipose layer was disclosed after he had been fried and the coating removed; and

his scent became delightful after he had been boiled and cooked. And lo, his tissue proved immaculate, and his taste delicious. He then seated himself in his glass-jar cabinet, deigning to expose himself to view.

And he proceeded on his way until he reached the shops of the sellers, where the [meat]-starved people approached him with hot breads. And he bestowed upon them his generosity, and satisfied their hunger with his fat. Thereupon he was met by the special officers of King Honey, such as rendered fat, syrup, butter and the various juices, contained in rows of vessels upon stone-benches. He was next met by the grand-vizier, called 'Sugar'. They all introduced him to their king, the 'Honey of bees', to whom the Fat Tail made obeisance. And the king rose from his place when the Fat Tail was presented, and inquired about his welfare and about his experiences since the day he started on his journey. And the Fat Tail thanked the king for his great solicitude and overflowing kindness.

Thereupon the king prescribed a rest for him in the palatial residence, and withdrew showing signs of fear. To quote the poet:

'And he beamed with a beautiful and joyous and sweet countenance, and with a mien that was appealing.

'And greeting in genial manner those prostrated before him, and they in turn saluted him with their fingers.'

And the narrator continues: Afterwards the Fat Tail proceeded on his journey until he alighted upon the upper shop-shelves only to find himself surrounded by the special officers of the empire of Honey. And he began to run to and fro among the various personages, recounting the virtues of his king; and excited within them a desire to behold him, by revealing to them the secrets that would make them anxious to serve him, saying:

'My king bestows favours bountifully; there is no poor man, but he makes him rich by his gifts.

'And at no time does calamity creep stealthily over any of his subjects, but he endeavors to battle it in the open.'

Then he conferred privately with each of them, impressing them with his amenities and tractability, and assuring them of such favours from his king as would burst their rivals' hearts with envy. He first addressed the Syrup, who was already distressed by being bottled-up for the night, saying: 'O, translucent swain, sweet of taste and of goodly nature! What distinguished office has the king of the refreshments assigned to you that you are so loyal to him? Is not your form more delicate than his, your countenance fairer?' And the Syrup responded: 'By Allah, he displays me only in a cold day on the surface of puddings, and does not care to be my fellow-condiment in any dough but the Basisa; and this is the highest honour and rank that I have attained in this service.' Thereupon the Fat Tail resumed: I am touched with pity at the sight of your coat torn in contention between the soft, unleavened starch-paste and the leavened Basisa. Also for your mingling with the solid greases upon every table! How much pleasanter are the surroundings of King Mutton, who is endeared to all hearts! Were he to note your good qualities, he would befriend you, and raise you above those of his immediate entourage, and privilege you to communicate with him directly. Moreover, I guarantee you to become the emir of fried colocasia, sweetened rice and the chickens of the frying pan, prepared with butter and stuffed with seeds, and warrant, besides, your overtopping the legions of pancakes. You would be stationed in an elevated position on his table-cloth, towering high above the trays. Thus says the poet:

'You would come to lead a life of ease on the rims of the pastries, and you would trail upon the confections the train of your silk-gown.

'You would ascend lofty places; yea, with your shoes you would step upon the cheeks of the sweetmeats.'

And the narrator continues: And the Syrup swore to join his ranks on the day of battle, while the Fat Tail reassured him in turn of his promise to assist him.

Then the Fat Tail entered into private conference with the grand-vizier, whose name was ‘Sugar’, and heaped praises upon him, saying: ‘O, heart’s delight and of all things most resembling a lover! In what way has the king of the refreshments helped you that you became so enamoured of him?’ And the Sugar replied: ‘By Allah, I am disgusted with frequenting the sick. Indeed the king has assigned me an office with which I am displeased. Moreover, I do not convene with my peers, the seeds, except as a dressing for legumes. And the highest rank I have attained with him is that he placed me in control over the beverages; but only those stricken with fever, sore throat or indigestion taste me, with the result that I have been disgorged from many a stomach in which I had hardly settled.’ And the Fat Tail responded: ‘O, soul-food and healer of misfortune! By Allah, you deserve preference over all refreshments of the market-place, and you ought to rank higher in majesty than King Honey himself. Were you to repair to King Mutton, he would set you in control over all foods, especially over the appetizing dishes of dense consistency, such as sweetened rice, *zirbaj*, chicken conserved with julep, clotted lemon-sauce with its ingredients mixed in the right proportion, juice of pomegranate seeds, clarified upon sheets of Tutmaj, and fine flour gruel, and concoctions such as poppy-seeds, Lady Nuba, apricots, pistachio nuts, walnuts and hazelnuts. Then he would appoint you to be the flag-dainty of all sweets, and you would ascend the loftiest station, and gain the highest rank you might wish. You would become the topic of people’s talk and the object of their fascination.’ Having said this, the Fat Tail recited:

‘In how many lofty castles, whose tables abound in wonderful foods, would you take up your abode!

‘And over how many splendid victuals and relished dishes of the choicest viands would you preside!’

And the narrator continues: And the Sugar smiled wonderingly and became almost intoxicated with joy. Then he swore by the brightness of his youth and by the folding of the sheaths of his canes at the melodious sound of the rollers that

no one would forestall him to the royal gate of King Mutton, and that he was determined to spend the rest of his life in no other place but under the shadow of his stirrup.

Thereupon the Fat Tail began to wheedle the rendered Fat until he secured a hold on the handle of his friendship, and said: ‘O, brother, and beloved, and nearest of all things to myself! What precious gifts has the king of the refreshments bestowed upon you all the while you have been in familiar discourse with him?’ And the rendered Fat answered: ‘Why inquire about my misery when my very existence is to be marvelled at? By Allah, I have been shut up in earthenware vessels for years until I became rancid, and hoofs have been smeared with me so I became putrid. And they made me a medicine for wounds and swellings, and the poor mended their soups with me. My anger reached its height when the king ordered me into the pans for the frying of eggs. And the highest rank he conferred upon me was that he anointed his lances with me on the day of battle, and coated with me the unleavened flat-cake whose harm exceeds its benefit. Such is surely an evil master and a miserable companion! And yet he styled me “vizier”, but no one could better inform you of my plight than I who suffer from it.’

Upon hearing this the Fat Tail became agitated, and was on the point of melting from indignation and resentment, and exclaimed: ‘I wonder how your delicate sap could endure such harsh treatment. Alas for you! Were you to repair to King Mutton, he would put you at the head of all boiled milk preparations, such as Haytaliyya, rice cooked in milk, macaroni-stew, slices of paste dipped in milk, vermicelli-pottage and boiled eggs well compounded with milk and butter. And with you would be seasoned such noble and renowned foods as are made of dates, white flour and thin bread-sheets, also dates mixed with butter and curd, dates soaked in milk, and dried dates. And the viands of the most distant lands would serve you; yea, of all countries foods worthy of you, such as the gruel of coarse semolina, Ma’muniyya and peppered rice. And sweets would be added to you, such as the pastry made of vermicelli

and the ‘Ajamiyya. And you would take my place as vizier, and my armies and everyone connected with my office would obey you.’ Then the Fat Tail improvised:

‘And you would come to be an emir in all porringers, leading all lions of the legions of pounded grain.

‘And you would join the confections in a combination highly favoured by the knights.’

And the rendered Fat, having been won over to the side of the Fat Tail, said thus: ‘I swear in the name of the good tidings that I will join your cause and plot against my king.’

And the Fat Tail, having corrupted the highest officials of the empire of the refreshments, sent messengers to King Honey with a request to admit him, so that he might deliver the letter and set out on his return-journey.

And the narrator continues: And the king resided in parlours, called ‘bee-hives’, whose ceilings and cells were overlaid with white and yellow wax. Surrounded by swarms of bees which guarded him from adversity, he overlooked the country from the windows of his palace, enjoying universal admiration. He then ordered into his presence the Fat Tail, who stepped forward in the midst of the royal attendants. And the king drew himself up and went forward to meet him; then gathered him to himself and greeted him and brought him near [to the throne]. Then he began to observe his features, and found him to resemble none of the officers of his kingdom. He next inquired about the welfare of King Mutton on the day he left him, and about the most signal favours he had bestowed upon him. And the Fat Tail rose to his feet at the mention of his king, and bowed to Allah with words of praise and gratitude for the gifts and benefactions which his king had conferred upon him. Then [in reply to the king’s last question] he said: ‘How can one count the waves of the sea, and how can one number the drops of the rain? However, one must curtail his speech in the presence of a king. Now, my sovereign – may God ever be gracious to him, and exalt his authority, and inspire the hearts of men to love him – has made me governor of all his provinces

and set me at the head of all his emirs and captains. I am the nearest to him in station and the most beloved of all. I make swallowing pleasant at his court, and I stamp my mark upon all kinds of foods.' But the king of the refreshments interrupted him, saying: 'Present the letter; "a messenger is to do no more than deliver his message".' At these words, the Fat Tail arose from among those who were seated, and produced the letter of King Mutton, kissing it and raising it above his head. Then he turned it over with both hands to the king, who kissed it in turn, and placed it on his eyes; then he broke its seal and passed it on to his vizier. And behold the following was its content…

Anon., 'King Mutton. A curious Egyptian tale of the Mamluk period', trans. J. Finkel, in *Zeitschrift fur Semitisik und verwandte Gebiete*, vol. 8 (1932), pp. 1–8

COMMENTARY

The fat tail of the sheep was especially esteemed as a dish by the Mamluk elite.

Essentially *zirbaj* is a Persian sweet-and-sour recipe, but there are many varieties of this dish.

Ibn Zafar's collection of animal fables, which was very loosely modelled on *Kalila wa-Dimna*, had more serious literary pretensions. Hujjat al-Din Muhammad IBN ZAFAR (1104–70) was born in Sicily and strictly his book should be accounted as a work of Sicilian Arab literature. Sicily had

been occupied by the Arabs in the ninth century, and even after the loss of the island to the Normans in the eleventh century Muslim Arabs continued for some time to play an important role at court and in the administration. However, even in the heyday of Muslim rule in Sicily, the place seems to have been a cultural backwater and Ibn Zafar was one of the very few writers of note to have been born on the island. He was educated in Mecca and later he spent so much time in Syria that his book should be accounted as, to all intents and purposes, a work of Syrian literature.

The title of Ibn Zafar's book, *Sulwan al-Muta' fi 'Udwan al-Atba'*, has been translated as 'Resources of a Prince against the Hostility of Subjects'. *Sulwan* strictly means 'seashells of a special kind such that if one drinks water from them, one is cured of lovesickness'. Like *Kalila wa-Dimna, Sulwan* consists of a series of moralizing, proverb-laden animal fables boxed within one another and – again like *Kalila wa-Dimna* – the book presents itself as a guide to good government. Ibn Zafar dedicated the first version of his book to an unnamed and possibly perfectly imaginary Syrian ruler; the second

version was dedicated to a Sicilian Arab grandee. This rather pietistic treatise deals with good kingship, taking wise advice, fortitude in adversity and the benefits and limitations of friendship. Although modelled on the fable collection of Ibn al-Muqaffa, Ibn Zafar's version is pervaded with an Islamic religiosity which one does not find in *Kalila wa-Dimna*. Each chapter of *Sulwan* begins with citations from the Qur'an, the Prophet and other pious figures. Interestingly, Ibn Zafar felt that the practice of fiction needed defence against the strictures of people who saw themselves as even more pious than he was. He invoked the precedents of the early caliphs 'Umar and Ali who occasionally used fables to drive home their points, as well as the appearance in the Qur'an of the ant and the lapwing as creatures from whom one should take instruction. Ibn Zafar claimed that he employed animal fables to make his points in order that 'no law shall be found to prohibit my work, nor shall the ear of any be offended by it'. Also, 'We are more willing to listen to the language of brutes than to the quoted sayings of men of genius.' Though fiction may have had its critics in the twelfth century, the great 'Imad al-

Din Isfahani commended Ibn Zafar's collection of fables: 'I have read it with close attention and have found it a very useful work, combining beauty of thought with diction, and moral warning with instruction.' However, such were the embarrassments of fiction that in the passage which follows (from the introduction to the first version) Ibn Zafar is impelled to defend the practice of writing fables:

> I therefore now prepare myself to set forth the parables of various kinds which I have succeeded in collecting, all resting on the foundation of the original narratives translated into Arabic; which parables I have sought to enliven with the charm of eloquence, and have introduced into them various philosophical sayings put into the mouths of animals. But first I must premise one consideration, in order to shield myself from the blame of the short-sighted, and also from that of men of penetration, who feign not to see. And this consideration is the same which is recorded upon good authority, by the Imam and Jurist Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Husayn al-Ajawi, who relates that the Commander of the Faithful, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, having on one occasion attended the obsequies of a member of the house of Umayya when the corpse was buried, commanded those present to remain where they were, whilst he, uttering a cry, went forward into the midst of the tombs. His attendants waited for him a long time, and when he at length returned, with red eyes, and the veins of his neck all swollen, they said to him, 'You have lingered a long time, O Commander of the Faithful! what has detained you?' And 'Umar replied: 'I have been among the sepulchres of those most dear to me. I saluted them; but no one returned my salutation; and when I turned my

back to depart, the earth cried unto me: " 'Umar, why dost thou not ask me what is become of the arms?" "What is become of them?" said I; and the earth replied; "The hands have been separated from the wrists, the wrists from the fore-arms, the fore-arms from the elbows, the elbows from the joints of the shoulders, the joints from the shoulder blades." And as I turned in the act to depart, the earth called to me once more: "Why, 'Umar, dost thou not ask me about, what is become of the trunks?" "What?" replied I, and the earth resumed: "The shoulders have been parted from the ribs: and afterwards, in succession, the ribs, and the back-bone, the hipbones, the two thigh-bones, and in the lower extremities, the knees, the legs, and the feet, have been severed from one another." I then sought to withdraw, and the voice cried to me a third time: "Attend to me, 'Umar; hast thou no shrouds that will not wear out?" "And what shrouds will not wear out?" replied I. And the earth answered, "The fear of God, and obedience to his will" 'and so on to the end of the tradition.

The author of this book says: O reader, may God be gracious unto thee, attend to these words that 'Umar attributed to the earth, to which, as inanimate matter, it appears absurd to ascribe flowery and elegant language. 'Umar nevertheless represented the earth as repeatedly calling upon another person, questioning, relating, and admonishing; which assuredly had never really come to pass: but he used this language metaphorically, because having called to mind these philosophical admonitions he was minded to cast them in the form of a narrative, dividing them into questions and answers, attributing them to others, and putting them in the mouth of the inanimate earth, because he perceived that the hearers would thus be more forcibly driven to reflection, and more urgently moved to relate the matter to others. For if he had said, 'Reflecting upon the state of those who are buried, I perceive that they must be reduced by the earth to such and such a condition', his warning would not have been expressed with nearly the same vigour that is derived from the original form recorded above…

Ibn Zafar, *Solwan, or Waters of Comfort*, trans. Edgerton from Michele Amari's Italian (London, 1852), pp. 124–6

COMMENTARY

'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz was one of the Ummayad caliphs and reigned from 717 to 720. Although 'Umar when young seems to have had a taste for luxury, when he became caliph he was noted for austere piety.

Ibn Zafar goes on to cite an instance when 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, used a fable concerning three bulls and a lion to make a political point. Thus comfortably supported by pious precedent, Ibn Zafar concludes that 'the examples here alleged give abundant evidence of the lawfulness of the species of fiction which I have undertaken to relate'.

Ibn Zafar also wrote *Inba Nujaba' al-Abna'*, a treatise on the intriguing subject of the characteristics of children of the famous.

Thanks to the abundance of *madrasas* (teaching colleges) and *khanqas* (Sufi hospices

or colleges), Egypt and Syria under the Ayyubids and Mamluks offered good prospects for intellectual employment and lured scholars and authors from all over the Islamic world. ‘Ala al-Din ibn ‘Ali al-GHUZULI (d. 1412) was of Berber origin and came from North Africa, but settled in Damascus. His *Matali’ al-Budur fi Manazil al-Surur* (‘Risings of the Full Moons in the Mansions of Pleasure’) is a *belles-lettres* compilation on the pleasures of life, including houses, gardens, *hammams*, palaces, birds, parties, lamps, chess, wine, cup companions, story-telling, slave-girls, sex, the pleasures of talking with viziers and reading chancery documents. Ghuzuli drew heavily on earlier *adab* compilations and his work is a late testimony to the enduring appeal of the culture of the *nadim* and the *zarif*. The following old Bedouin romance is found in several other *belles-lettres* anthologies.

> Numayr, of the tribe Hilal, narrates the following: There was a certain youth of the Bani Hilal whose name was Bishr ibn ‘Abdal-lah, but who was commonly known as el-Ashtar. Among all the chieftains of the tribe, he was the handsomest face and the most liberal hand. He fell desperately in love with a girl of his people named Jayda’, who was pre-eminent in her beauty and her accomplishments; then after the fact of their

attachment became generally known, the affair grew to be a cause of strife between their two families, until blood was shed; whereupon the two clans separated, and settled at a long distance apart from each other.

So when the time of separation grew so long for al-Ashtar that he could bear it no more, he came to me, and said: 'O Numayr, have you no aid for me?' I answered: 'There is with me naught but what you wish.' Then he said: 'You must help me to visit Jayda', for the longing to see her has carried away my soul.' 'Most gladly and freely!' I replied; 'Only set out, and we will go whenever you wish.' So we rode away together, and journeyed that day and night, and the morrow until evening, when we halted our beasts in a ravine near the settlement of the clan we were seeking. Then he said: 'Do you go on, and mingle with the people; and when you meet anyone, say that you are in search of a stray camel. Let no mention of me pass lip or tongue, until you find her servant-girl, named so-and-so, who is tending their sheep. Give her my greeting and ask her for tidings; tell her also where I am.'

So I went forth, not averse to do what he bade me, until I found the servant-girl and brought her the message, telling her where el-Ashtar was, and asking her for tidings. She sent back this word: 'She is treated harshly, and they keep watch of her. But your place of meeting will be the first of those trees which are near by the hin-dermost of the tents, and the time the hour of the evening prayer.'

So I returned to my comrade, and told him what I had heard. Thereupon we set out, leading our beasts, until we came to the designated spot at the appointed time. We had waited only a few moments when we saw Jayda' walking toward us. El-Ashtar sprang forward and seized her hand, giving her his greeting, while I withdrew a little from them; but they both cried out: 'We adjure you by Allah to come back, for we intend nothing dishonourable, nor is there anything between us that need be hid from you.' So I returned to them and sat beside them. Then el-Ashtar said: 'Can you contrive no way, Jayda', by which we may have this night to ourselves?' 'No,' she replied, 'nor is it in

any way possible for me, without the return of all that misery and strife of which you know.' 'Nevertheless it must be,' he answered, 'even if that results which seems likely.' But she said: 'Will this friend of yours assist us?' I answered: 'Only say what you have devised; for I will go through to the very end of your plan, though the loss of my life should be in it.' Thereupon she took off her outer garments, saying: 'Put these on, and give me your garments in place of them.' This I did. Then she said: 'Go to my tent, and take your place behind my curtain; for my husband will come to you, after he has finished milking, bringing a full jar of milk, and he will say: "Here, your evening draught!" But do not take it from him, until you have tried his patience well; then either take it or leave it, so that he will put it down and go away; and then (please Allah) you will not see him again until morning.'

So I went away, and did as she had bidden me. When he came with the jar of milk I refused to take it, until he was thoroughly tired of my contrariness; then I wished to take it from him, and he at the same time wished to put it down; so our two hands met at cross purposes on the jar, and it upset, and the milk was all spilled. Thereupon he cried out: 'This is wilfulness beyond the limit!', and he thrust his hand into the front part of the tent and brought out a leather whip coiled like a serpent. Then he came in, tearing down my curtain, and had used the whip on me for full twenty lashes when his mother and sister entered and pulled me out of his hands. But, by Allah, before they did this I had lost control of myself, and was just ready to stab him with my knife, whether it cost me my life or not. However, as soon as they had gone out I fastened up my curtain again, and sat down as before.

Only a short time had passed when Jayda"s mother entered and spoke to me, never doubting that I was her daughter. But I struck up a weeping and a sobbing, and hid my face in my garment, turning my back to her. So she said: 'O my dear daughter, fear Allah and keep from displeasing your husband, for that is where your duty lies; as for el-Ashtar, you have seen him for the last time.' Then as she was going out she said: 'I will

send in your sister to keep you company tonight.' And sure enough, after a few minutes the girl appeared. She began crying and calling down curses on him who beat me, but I made no answer. Then she nestled up close to me. As soon as I had her in my power, I clapped my hand over her mouth, and said: 'O Such-a-one, that sister of yours is with el-Ashtar, and it is in her service that my back has been flayed this night. Now it behoves you to keep her secret, so choose for yourself and for her; for by Allah, if you utter a single word, I will make all the outcry I can, until the disgrace becomes general.' Then I took away my hand from her mouth. She trembled like a branch in the wind; but after we had been together a little while she made friends with me, and there passed the night with me then and there the most delightful companion I have ever had. We did not cease chatting together, and she was also rallying me, and laughing at the plight I was in. And I found myself in the position of one who, had he wished to take a base advantage, could have done so; but Allah restrained me from evil, and to him is the praise.

Thus we continued until the dawn broke, when lo, Jayda' stole in upon us. When she saw us, she started, and cried out: 'Allah! Who is this?' 'Your sister!' I replied. 'What has happened?' she asked. 'She will tell you,' I answered, 'for she, on my word, is the sweetest of sisters.' Then I took my own clothing, and made off to my companion. As we rode, I narrated to him what had happened to me, and bared my back for him to see. Such a flaying as it had had – may Allah throw into hell-fire the man who did it! – from every single stripe the blood was oozing out. When he saw this, he exclaimed: 'Great was the deed which you did, and great the acknowledgement due you; your hand was generous indeed! May Allah not withhold me from repaying you in full.' And from that time on he never ceased to show me his gratitude and appreciation.

Ghuzuli, Matali 'al-Budur fi Manazil al-Surur, 'A Friend in Need', trans. Charles Torrey, *Journal of the American Oriental Society 26* (1905), pp. 303–30

Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad IBN ‘ARABSHAH (1392–1450) was born in Damascus. In 1400, when Ibn ‘Arabshah was only nine, Syria was invaded by a Turco-Mongol army under the command of Timur (also known in the West as Tamerlane), Damascus was sacked, and Ibn ‘Arabshah and his family were among the thousands taken off in captivity to Timur’s Central Asian capital, Samarkand. While in the eastern lands, Ibn ‘Arabshah learnt Turkish, Persian and Mongolian. Subsequently he travelled widely in the Islamic world and for a time served as secretary to the Ottoman Turkish Sultan Mehmed I, before settling in Egypt, where he wrote various works designed to attract the patronage of the Mamluk sultan. In the long run he was unsuccessful in this endeavour and, despite having begun a eulogistic biography of the Sultan Jaqmaq, the sultan imprisoned him and Ibn ‘Arabshah was to die in captivity.

Ibn ‘Arabshah’s earlier works included a volume of animal fables in the tradition of *Kalila wa-Dimna* and *Sulwan al-Muta*. The *Fakihat al-Khulafa” wa Mufakahat al-Zurafa’*, or ‘The Caliph’s Delicacy and Joke of the Refined’,

like its predecessors purports to give guidance on good government and how to take wise counsel. The ape is the governor of a province, the fox is his vizier, the mule is the *qadi*, the panther an obedient subject, and so on. Wise animals teach man. Like Ibn Zafar, Ibn ‘Arabshah in his preface justified the writing and reading of animal stories by quoting the Qur’an and other impeccable precedents. Some of the *Fakihat* is really no more than a plagiarization of the *Marzuban-nama*, an eleventh-century Persian collection of animal fables by Marzuban-i-Rustam-i-Sharwin. On the other hand, much of the work, particularly the diatribes against Timur, is original to Ibn ‘Arabshah.

Ibn ‘Arabshah’s chief claim to fame is his full-length biography of Timur. Although his time as a prisoner in Samarkand was the intellectual making of him, Ibn ‘Arabshah was not grateful to his captor and his life of Timur is an act of retrospective revenge. The *‘Aja’ib al-Maqdur fi-Nawa’ib Timur*, or ‘Wonders of Destiny regarding the Misfortunes Inflicted by Timur’, is a vitriolic biography of the would-be world conqueror, written in the most extraordinarily

ornate and metaphor-laden rhymed prose. Ibn ‘Arabshah’s colourful but rather strained imagery is certainly the product of his familiarity with the classics of Persian literature. Among the chapter headings of the biography one comes across such choice specimens as ‘What Timur Did with the Rogues and Villains of Samarkand and how He Sent Them to Hell’, ‘The Cause of His Invading Arabian Iraq, Though His Tyranny Needed No Reason or Cause’, ‘An Example of the Way in which that Faithless Despot Plunged into the Seas of His Army, and Dived into Affairs, then Advanced with the Surge of Calamities; and Particularly His Plunges into Transoxania and His Coming Forth from the Country of Lur’, and ‘The Thunderstorms of that Exceeding Disaster Pour from the Clouds of Greed upon the Territories of Syria’. Ibn ‘Arabshah’s portrayal of Timur, which verges on parody, may remind some of Sir Thomas More’s life of Richard III.

… when he [Toqtamish] saw that the attack could not be avoided and that the place was settled, he strengthened his spirit and the spirit of his army and put aside heaviness and levity and placed in the front line the bolder of his followers and arrayed his horse and foot and strengthened the centre and wing and made ready arrows and swords.

But Timur's army was not wanting in these things, since what each one had to do was decided and explored and where to fight and where to stand was inscribed on the front of its standards. Then both armies, when they came in sight one of the other, were kindled and mingling with each other became hot with the fire of war and they joined battle and necks were extended for sword-blows and throats outstretched for spear thrusts and faces were drawn with sternness and fouled with dust, the wolves of war set their teeth and fierce leopards mingled and charged and the lions of the armies rushed upon each other and men's skins bristled, clad with the feathers of arrows and the brows of the leaders drooped and the heads of the heads [captains] bent in the devotion of war and fell forward and the dust was thickened and stood black and the leaders and common soldiers alike plunged into seas of blood and arrows became in the darkness of black dust like stars placed to destroy the Princes of Satan, while swords glittering like fulminating stars in clouds of dust rushed on kings and sultans nor did the horses of death cease to pass through and revolve and race against the squadrons which charged straight ahead or the dust of hooves to be borne into the air or the blood of swords to flow over the plain, until the earth was rent and the heavens like the eight seas; and this struggle and conflict lasted about three days; then dust appeared from the stricken army of Toqtamish, who turned his back, and his armies took to flight…

COMMENTARY

Toqtamish was the Khan of the Golden Horde, ruling over the Kipchak Turks of the south Russian steppes. This first defeat at the hands of Timur took place in 1387.

Ibn ‘Arabshah offers a perfectly useless all-purpose literary description of a battle.

The ‘heads of the heads’ phrase is a pun, as *ru’asa’* means both ‘heads’, as on necks, and ‘heads’ in the sense of captains.

> *How that proud tyrant was broken and borne to the house of destruction, where he had his constant seat in the lowest pit of Hell*
>
> Now Timur advanced up to the town called Atrar and since he was enough protected from cold without, he wished something to be made for him, which would drive the cold from him within and so he ordered to be distilled for him arrack blended with hot drugs and several health-giving spices which were not harmful; and God did not will that such an impure soul should go forth, save in that manner of which he by his wickedness had been the cause.
>
> Therefore Timur took of that arrack and drank it again and again without pause, not asking about affairs and news of his army or caring concerning them or hearing their petitions, until the hand of death gave him the cup to drink. ‘And they shall be made to drink boiling water which will rend their bowels.’
>
> But he ceased not to oppose fate and wage war with fortune and obstinately resist the grace of God Almighty, wherefore he could not but fail and endure the greater punishments for wickedness. But that arrack, as though making footprints, injured his bowels and heart, whereby the structure of his body

tottered and his supports grew weak. Then he summoned doctors and expounded his sickness to them, who in that cold treated him by putting ice on his belly and chest. Therefore he was restrained from the march for three days and prepared himself to be carried to the house of retribution and punishment. And his liver was crushed and neither his wealth nor children availed him aught and he began to vomit blood and bite his hands with grief and penitence.

'When death has fastened his talons

I have marked that every charm is in vain.'

And the butler of death gave him to drink a bitter cup and soon he believed that which he had resolutely denied, but his faith availed him naught, after he had seen punishment; and he implored aid, but no helper was found for him; and it was said to him: 'Depart, O impure soul, who wert in an impure body, depart vile, wicked sinner and delight in boiling water, fetid blood, and the company of sinners.' But if one saw him, he coughed like a camel which is strangled, his colour was nigh quenched and his cheeks foamed like a camel dragged backwards with the rein; and if one saw the angels that tormented him, they showed their joy, with which they threaten the wicked to lay waste their houses and utterly destroy the whole memory of them; and if one saw, when they hand over to death those who were infidels, the angels smite their faces and backs; and if one beheld his wives and servants and those who continually clung groaning to his side and his attendants and soldiers, already what they had feigned fled from them and if one saw, when the wicked are in the sharpness of death, angels stretch forth their hands and say, 'Cast out your souls; to-day you shall receive the punishment of shame, because you spoke concerning God without truth and proudly scorned His signs.'

Then they brought garments of hair from Hell and drew forth his soul like a spit from a soaked fleece and he was carried to the cursing and punishment of God, remaining in torment and God's infernal punishment.

That happened on the night of the fourth day of the week which was the 17th of Shaban, the month of fires, in the plains of Atrar and God Almighty in His mercy took from men the punishment of shame and the stock of the race which had done wickedly was cut off; praise be to God, Lord of the ages!

J. H. Sanders, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir* (London, 1936), pp. 81–2, 231–3

COMMENTARY

Timur died in 1405 while he was on his way to conquer China. His death occurred at Atrar (or Utrar), a town on the caravan route to China, some 250 miles east of Samarkand.

He had been drinking the spirit arrack heavily until the very last days.

‘And they shall be made to drink boiling water which will rend their bowels’ is from the Qur’an.

The Mamluk sultanate survived Timur’s occupation of Syria, which lasted less than a year, and during the fifteenth century its fortunes revived somewhat, particularly during the long reign of the Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay (1468–96). Qaytbay himself wrote poetry in Turkish and Arabic, as did at least one of his senior generals, the Amir Yashbak. In the course

of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and probably as a result of the prestige of the courts of the Timurid princes in Samarkand, Bokhara and elsewhere, Persian increasingly came to be regarded as the language of the courts and high literature, not only in the Timurid lands, but also in Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India. The more cultivated members of the Mamluk elite also interested themselves in Persian poetry and prose. The penultimate Mamluk sultan, Qansuh al-Ghuri (reigned 1501–16), was of Circassian origin, but wrote poetry in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. He commissioned a translation into Turkish of Firdawsi's epic saga of Persian legend and history, the *Shahnama*. (Qansuh al-Ghuri could read it in the original; he commissioned the translation for the benefit of those of his emirs who could not read Persian.)

Qansuh al-Ghuri used to hold twice-weekly *majalis*, or soirées, in the Cairo Citadel which were attended by the city's leading scholars and literary men. (No wine was drunk at these very proper soirées.) The subjects of conversation that came up in these gatherings were many and various, but religious topics were the most frequent. A partial record of what was said in

the course of some of the sessions has survived in two sources. The first of these, the *Nafa'is Majalis al-Sultaniyya*, 'The Gems of the Royal Sessions', was written down by Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-HUSAYNI called Sharif and covers a run of sessions from February to December 1505. The second source, the *Kawkab al-Durri fi-Masa'il al-Ghuri*, 'The Glittering Stars regarding the Questions of al-Ghuri', was completed in 1513–14, but the second half of the text has been lost. Religious, historical, humorous and literary matters came up for discussion. The meaning of an obscure couplet in Ibn al-Farid's poetry was debated. The sultan and one of the chief *qadis* debated the rightness of addressing a love poem to an Abyssinian slave rather than to a Circassian or Turk. Harun al-Rashid's request for panegyric lines on brevity was alluded to. However, in general the sultan and his courtiers seem to have been more interested in Persian and Turkish history and literature than in Arab culture.

In the extract which follows, as so often the sultan has produced a story from Persian literature about the Turkish Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (who ruled over Afghanistan and north-

west India from 998 to 1030) and the famous poet Firdawsi. (The story is legendary. The real origins of the *Shahnama* were quite different.)

Our lord the Sultan said: 'The Sultan Mahmud intended to perpetuate his name up to the Day of Resurrection. It was suggested to him that he could become known as the "Supreme Builder", but he said, "Buildings perish after three or four hundred years." So then everyone agreed that a book should be compiled bearing the name of the Sultan Mahmud. They gave orders for the composition of the *Shahnama* and they promised its author Firdawsi a *mithqal* of gold for each couplet. However, when the work was complete, Mahmud's vizier suggested that a *mithqal* of silver for each couplet should suffice the poet. The whole work ran to 60,000 verses, so the Sultan sent 60,000 *mithqah* of silver to Firdawsi. At the time of receipt Firdawsi was in the *hammam*, so he gave 20,000 to the bath-keeper and another 20,000 went as payment for a bubbling barley drink, and he gave the final 20,000 to the bearer of the drink. When the Sultan heard of this he gave orders for Firdawsi to be killed because of this grievous insult. Firdawsi went into hiding. Then he composed a satire on the Sultan and he spent half the night with the treasurer and (while he was there) he requested a copy of the *Shahnama* so that he could consult it. He took the book and wrote in it his lampoon on the Sultan Mahmud before fleeing from him.

Then one day when the Sultan was out hunting, he requested the copy of the *Shahnama* to be brought to him. When he opened the book and he saw the satire, he became utterly enraged. He ordered the execution of the vizier and at the same time he sent sixty thousand *mithqals* of gold to Firdawsi's home town. Just as this money reached one of the gates of Tus, Firdawsi's coffin was being carried out by another gate. So they offered this money to his daughter, but she refused it. So the Sultan ordained that the money be spent on buildings in honour

of the spirit of Firdawsi, and they built a great bridge which is still extant today.

Husayni, *Nafa'is Majalis al-Sultaniyya* (ed. 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Azzam), in *Majalis al-Sultan al-Ghawri* (Cairo, 1941), pp. 81–2, trans. Robert Irwin

COMMENTARY

Firdawsi's *Shahnama*, written around 1110, is one of the longest poems in the world. There is no fixed text, but its length is between 50,000 and 60,000 couplets. It was normal for a medieval ruler to store books (which were expensive artefacts) in his treasury. Thus a treasurer, or *kbazindar*, often doubled as a librarian.

A *mithqal* is a unit of weight. Like most such units it varied from region to region.

Tus is a town in north-east Iran.

Sadly there was little discussion of literature. Though the records of the sultan's night conversations are absolutely fascinating, if one compares these sessions with the soirées of 'Abbasid caliphs, Mamluk culture seems less impressive. There seems (to me at least) to have

been a diminishment in the range of topics, the erudition and the literary skill displayed in the Mamluk sultan's soirées.

In 1516 the Ottoman Turkish Sultan Selim I invaded Syria and Qansuh al-Ghuri was defeated and died at the battle of Marj Dabiq. (He seems to have died as the result of a stroke, or a hernia.) Although Qansuh al-Ghuri's nephew, Tumanbay, proclaimed himself sultan in Egypt and rallied last-ditch resistance to the Ottoman invasion, he was defeated at the battle of Raydaniyya in 1517 and subsequently executed. Thereafter the Mamluk territories were annexed to the Ottoman sultanate.

The heroic last days of the Mamluk sultanate were celebrated in a prose romance entitled the *Kitab Infisal dawlat al-Awam wa'l-Itisal Dawlat Bani Uthman* ('Book of the Departure of the Dynasty of Time and the Coming of the Ottoman Dynasty'). Nothing is known about its author, Ahmad IBN ZUNBUL al-Rammal, apart from what can be deduced from his own writings. Neither the date of his birth nor of his death is known, but he was probably a boy at the time of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, and he was

certainly still alive in 1558. He was a *ratmmal*, that is to say a geomancer who told fortunes from randomly made markings in the sand. He wrote treatises on geomancy, astrology, dream interpretation and apocalyptic prophecy.

The *Infisal* has been misclassified by some scholars as a serious historical chronicle. It is in fact a remarkably early example of the historical novel. It tells the tale of the chivalrous but doomed Mamluks. Although Ibn Zunbul clearly sympathized with the Mamluks, he also recognized the justice of the Ottoman cause and gave due weight to Selim's piety. To paraphrase *1066 and All That*, the Mamluks were wrong but romantic, whereas the Ottomans were right but repulsive. Ibn Zunbul is interested in the motivations of his protagonists and he often makes use of invented dialogue to bring out those motivations. The dialogue is vigorous, even at times to the point of crudity. His heroes are Tumanbay and his allies. Yet, for all their chivalric *élan* and martial prowess, the Mamluks are destined to be defeated. At one level, this is because of traitors within their ranks and the superiority of Ottoman firearms; but at another level, the

Mamluks are fighting a hopeless series of battles against fate itself. All dynasties and people have their appointed times. Ibn Zunbul's book is a nostalgic romance about a society on the turn. Unsurprisingly, given Ibn Zunbul's other profession, his novel is pervaded by occult themes and imagery. The *Infisal* survives in many manuscripts, almost all of them containing significant variations and additions. The basic text seems to have been revised again and again over several decades. The way Ibn Zunbul presents his story suggests that it was designed for oral delivery.

In the passage which is extracted here, a leading Mamluk general, Kurtbay the Wali ('Governor'), has surrendered after the battle of Raydaniyya and has been brought before Selim's tent.

Then Selim emerged from his tent and took his seat on the throne which had been put there for him. He looked at Kurtbay and said to him, 'You are Kurtbay?'

He replied, 'Yes'.

'Where now is your chivalry and valour?' asked Selim.

'They are as ever.'

'Do you recall the damage you have done to my army?'

'I do and I shall never forget any of it.'

‘What did you do with ‘Ali ibn Shahwar?’

‘I killed him together with a lot of your army.’

Then, after he had seen the treachery in the eyes of the Sultan and realized that Selim had resolved to kill him, so that it was all up with him, Kurtbay abandoned decorum and spoke in despair of his life. He looked the Sultan in the eyes and he raised his right hand and said, ‘Listen to my speech, so that you and others may know that we count Fate and the Red Death among our horsemen. A single one of us could account for your army. If you do not believe it, have a go, so long only as you refrain from using the gun. You have two hundred thousand men of all races here with you. So stand your ground and deploy your troops, and three of us will sally out against you: myself, the slave of God; the noble horseman, the Sultan Tuman-bay; and the Emir ‘Allan. Then you will see for yourself how we three will fare and you will then learn about yourself, whether you are really a king in spirit and whether you deserve to be a king. For only an experienced warrior deserves to be king – as were our virtuous predecessors (may God be pleased with them). Look into the history books and consider ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) and observe his courage and similarly consider the Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (may God be merciful to him and bless his face). But you have pieced together an army from the Christian and Anatolian regions and from other places as well and you have brought with you this device which the Franks invented, because they were incapable otherwise of encountering Muslim armies.

The nature of the musket is that, even if a woman fired it, it would keep at bay such-and-such a number of men. If we had chosen to use this weapon, you would not have beaten us to it. However, we are a people who will not abandon the practice of the Prophet. Shame on you! How dare you fire upon Muslims who profess the unity of God and the mission of the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him). The right way is that of Holy War with the lance and the victory belongs to God.

It happened once that a Maghribi with a musket appeared at the court of Qansuh al-Ghuri (may God be merciful to him and slay his killer). The Maghribi informed the Sultan about how the musket had appeared in Venetian territory and how all the Ottoman and Arab armies were using it, and here was the weapon.

Then the Sultan ordered him to teach the use of it to some of his mamluks. So he did so. Then he brought them in to the Sultan's presence and they fired their guns, but the Sultan was displeased and he said to the Maghribi, "We are not going to abandon the way of our Prophet in order to follow the way of the Christians, for God, may He be praised and exalted, has said 'If God aids you, then you will be victorious.'"

So the Maghribi went home, saying, "There are those now living who will see the conquest of this land by the musket."

Then Sultan Selim asked Kurtbay, "If you possess bravery and brave men and cavalry and you follow the Book and the Sunna, as you claim, then how is it that you have been defeated and expelled from your land and your children enslaved and many of you perished? How is it that you stand before me a prisoner?"

Kurtbay replied, "You have not taken our land because of your strength or because of your horsemanship. It has only happened by God's decree and fate fixed from eternity. For every dynasty there is a fixed duration and an appointed end. This is the way of God (may He be praised) with his creation. What has become of the holy warriors:? And what has become of kings and sultans? You also must certainly die…" '

Ibn Zunbul, *Akhira al-Mamalik. Waqi'a al-Sultan al-Ghuri ma'a Salim al-Thani*, trans. Robert Irwin, 'Abd al-Mu'nim 'Amir edn. (Cairo, 1962), pp. 57–9

COMMENTARY

Although there are two printed versions and many manuscripts, there is no properly established text of Ibn Zunbul's book and the text I have used for my translation has its problems and obscurities.

I have translated *furusiyya* as 'horsemanship', but it is not a very satisfactory translation because *furusiyya* also has connotations of chivalry, courage and military prowess. Medieval Arab treatises on the arts of war in general and on the requirements of Holy War (*jihad*) in particular were known as books of *furusiyya*.

'Ali Ibn Shahwar in my text is a corrupt rendering of 'Ali Ibn Shahsiwar. Shahsiwar had been an Ottoman client prince and enemy of the Mamluks in eastern Anatolia. (Despite Kurtbay's boast, an 'Ali ibn Shahsiwar in fact seems to have survived the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and outlived Kurtbay.)

In this extract, 'decorum' is my translation of *adab*. As we have seen, in other contexts the same word could be translated as *belles-lettres*.

'Fate' is *manaya*, which has the more specific sense of fated death. *Manaya* was one of the key

notions in pre-Islamic poetry. Arab fatalism predates the revelation of the Qur'an.

'Red Death' is a stock phrase for violent death, as opposed to 'White Death', which is a natural death.

Bunduq means a bullet. (It also means a hazelnut.) *Bunduqiyya* means a rifle, musket, or arquebus. Coincidentally, *Bunduqiyya* is also Arabic for Venice – hence doubtless the Maghribi's impression that the musket originated in Venice.

Historically, the alleged dialogue between Selim and Kurtbay is a piece of nonsense. The Mamluks loved guns and had been using them for decades, before any alleged arrival of a prophetic Maghribi at the court of Qansuh al-Ghuri. They both bought guns from their Venetian allies and they also manufactured them themselves. The story reflects the prejudices of Ibn Zunbul rather than those of the ruling military elite of Mamluk Egypt. In fact Kurtbay, a former governor or *wali* of Cairo, was discovered in hiding and seems to have been peremptorily executed. It is all but certain that his argument with Selim never took place.

The dialogue is fiction, not history. The meeting was invented by Ibn Zunbul to provide a context for a meditation on the decline of chivalry and the doom of dynasties – themes he returns to again and again in his historical romance.

Historians of Arabic literature have neglected Ibn Zunbul. (He does not even rate an entry in the capacious *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.) It may well be that other writers from the sixteenth century onwards have been overlooked. The decline of Arabic literature in the post-medieval period may possibly be an optical illusion, the product of insufficient research into the literary productions of the period in question. Whatever the truth of the matter, it is certain that relatively few texts from the sixteenth, seventeenth or eighteenth centuries have been published and edited (and even fewer have been translated into English).

Although it is conceivable that the decline of Arabic literature in what European historians call the ‘early modern period’ is more apparent than real, there does appear to have been a

decline both in the quantity and quality of original writing in Arabic in that period. We find no poets who can bear comparison with Mutanabbi or Ibn al-Farid, or prose writers who can match the achievements of Ibn Hazm or Hariri. This phenomenon requires explanation. In part it may be due to the relegation of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and much of North Africa to the status of provinces within the Ottoman Turkish empire. Cairo was no longer the seat of a court which could dispense lavish patronage to writers. (Baghdad had, of course, ceased to be a significant centre of patronage centuries earlier.) The culture of the court elites tended to be Turco-Persian rather than Arabic. Outside the courts, Arabic culture was by and large dominated by a rigorist Sunni orthodoxy, something which had not been the case in, for instance, the tenth century. Horizons seemed to have shrunk and there were to be no more translations from the Greek, or from more modern European languages, until the late eighteenth century. The poetry and fiction which was produced in the Ottoman centuries was mostly conventional and backward-looking (though there were of course occasional

exceptions, such as the satirical verse of the seventeenth-century Egyptian, al-Shirbini).

In time Arabic literature would revive. That revival should be seen as beginning in the late eighteenth century with al-Jabarti (d. 1825) and his vividly written chronicle of Egyptian history since the Ottoman conquest. In the late nineteenth century Jurji Zaydan practically invented the Arabic novel (though, as we have seen, he did have one precursor in Ibn Zunbul). In the twentieth century there was a real renaissance of Arab poetry. Experimental poets like Adonis have found precedents and licence for their experiments in the works of medieval poets. Innovative novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz, Gamal al-Ghitaniy and Tayyib Salih have succeeded in breaking away from the Western form of the novel and have sometimes drawn on medieval Arab prose works in order to do so. But all this should really be the subject of another book.