

JOURNAL OF NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

Volume VIII

JULY 1949

Number 3

A NINTH-CENTURY FRAGMENT OF THE "THOUSAND NIGHTS" NEW LIGHT ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE *ARABIAN NIGHTS*

NABIA ABBOTT

INTRODUCTION

THE appearance of Arabic papyri on the American scene is a rare event. Scientific preoccupation with such papyri is even rarer. To the author's best knowledge, only two of America's great universities, Chicago and Michigan, have a working collection of these, the earliest of Islamic documents, and, so far, Michigan has not published any of its collection.

The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago has acquired, on several occasions since World War I, small but valuable collections of Arabic parchment and paper documents some of which the

present writer has published from time to time. The latest addition to our growing collection was purchased in 1947 through Director Thorkild Jacobsen of the Oriental Institute. The collection, like its predecessors, came out of Egypt, and like them, too, it contains but few early paper documents—6 out of a total of 331 pieces. But one of these 6, incredible as it may at first seem, is an early ninth-century fragment of the *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights."

Arabic papyri definitely dated or readily datable as of the late seventh and early eighth centuries are generally known to be comparatively rare. But the even greater rarity of known Arabic paper documents dated or datable as of the late eighth and early ninth centuries have received little notice since Karabacek published his pioneer work on the origin and manufacture of paper in the Islamic world of that same period.² These rare Islamic documents, papyri or paper, represent either matters of state administration and taxation or some phase of private or commer-

¹ This general unawareness, in this country, of Arabic papyri and their significance for the earliest phases of Islamic history and culture is all the more regrettable now that work on the great collections of Egypt and Central Europe has slowed down to all but a complete halt as an aftermath of World War II. Grohmann's latest volume on the Arabic papyri of the Egyptian National Library at Cairo was published in 1939. Replies to recent inquiries about the European situation indicate that most of the well-known Arabic papyri collections have escaped the incendiary bomb. However, little work is now being done on any of the collections, and even that little is hampered by the general lack of funds and facilities for research and publication. "The fate of the Berlin collection," writes a fellow-scholar in a private letter, "is deplorable. . . . The bulk of the collection has been deported to the Soviet Union . . . and must be considered lost to the Western world. A small part of the collection is said to have been destroyed by bombs."

² Josef von Karabacek, "Das arabische Papier," *Nationalbibliothek, Mitteilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, Parts II–III (paged continuously) (Wien, 1887), pp. 87–178.

cial correspondence. Furthermore, parchment Qur'āns excepted, known Arabic manuscripts of *book* or pamphlet length, irrespective of the writing materials but dating from this same early period, are even rarer than the above-mentioned documents. Unlike these latter, the book manuscripts contain literary text of *ḥadīth* or Islamic tradition and related subjects.

The early Moslem world had its light and entertaining literature. But extant manuscripts representative of this class of literary productivity consist of trade or private copies, usually dating from periods considerably later than that of the original work. This is particularly the case in respect to the greatest and best-known compilation of this type of literature, namely, the *Arabian Nights*. The earliest manuscript of the *Nights* hitherto known is dated to about the mid-fifteenth century by scholars best acquainted with the complicated history of the known manuscripts of the *Nights*.³ Controversial problems relative to the origin, content, and early literary history of the *Nights* have challenged eminent Arabists for several generations. The discovery, therefore, of a *paper* manuscript fragment, aged and tattered, but one that yields nevertheless the title-page and the first page of the text of a ninth-century version of the *Nights* is an event of major importance. It presents us with the earliest known extant paper book in Islam and with a date of prime significance for the early history of the *Nights*. This being the case, it is thought best not to delay the publication of the fragment until the completion of a volume of Arabic papyri in the Oriental Institute now in its

initial stages of preparation. We shall proceed, therefore, first to the task of decipherment and translation, follow up with a discussion of the contribution of the piece to Arabic paleography and to the history of paper and paper books in early Islam, and conclude with a section on the significance of the manuscript for the early history of the *Arabian Nights*.

I

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE NO. 17618

Description.—Two joined folios of light-brown paper of fine texture, discolored in part and considerably damaged with much of the lower half of both folios lost. 24.2 × 13 cm. Reference to the manuscript will be by page rather than by folio.

Contents.—The manuscript contains six distinctly different entries, the chronological order of which, judged by the factors of space relationships, the different types of scripts, and the overlapping of the inks, seems to be as follows:

1. The *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights" fragment
2. Scattered phrases on pages 2 and 3
3. Outline drawing of the figure of a man on page 2
4. A second group of scattered phrases in different hands on page 2
5. Rough draft of a letter on page 1
6. Formulas of legal testimony dated Šafar A.H. 266/October, A.D. 879 written on the margins of all four pages

These will be considered below in the above order.

1. THE "THOUSAND NIGHTS" FRAGMENT

The two folios on hand consist of the flyleaf, originally blank, and the first folio of the "Thousand Nights." The latter, in its turn, consists of the title-page and the first page of text. Reference to the fragment will be by page rather than by folio.

Script.—The script of this first entry on

³ Cf. M. H. Zotenberg, "Notice sur quelques manuscrits des Mille et une nuits," *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale*, XXVII (1887), 167–218; D. B. Macdonald, "A Preliminary Classification of some MSS of the Arabian Nights," in *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Broune*, ed. Arnold and Nicholson (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 304–21, esp. p. 307 and references there cited.

our pages is an excellent sample of the good book hand of the early Moslem world. It bears, in general, an over-all resemblance to the so-called *kūfic-naskhī* of the book hand of the third century of Islam. It is best described as a script in which the angularity of letters generally associated with the *kūfic* script and the cursive-ness usually credited to the *naskhī* script are both present to a degree. It is a light but well-schooled hand used at the time primarily for the smaller Qurʾāns⁴ and occasionally for other valued works of a religious⁵ and linguistic character.⁶ On the other hand, the script bears a marked general resemblance to the Christian Arabic writing of the same century evolved in the Asiatic provinces of Islam under the influence of the Syriac script.⁷ The main

factor to note in this connection is the tendency to give the vertical strokes, particularly those of the *alif* and *l*, somewhat of the wave that is found in the Syriac script. However, when it comes to a closer analysis of the script and of the individual letters and their varied forms, the script of the "Nights" finds no close parallel in either the Islamic or Christian book hand now extant. This is not surprising, for the "Nights" manuscript is most probably the oldest Arabic book extant to come out of the Asiatic provinces if not indeed the oldest book extant of all Islam, the Qurʾāns alone excepted. We will return later to the question of the "where" and the "when" of the present manuscript after its several texts have yielded their contribution to the answers sought.

⁴ Cf., e.g., B. Moritz, *Arabic Palaeography* (Bibliothèque khédiviale, "Publications," No. 16 [Cairo, 1905]), Pls. 41, 45, and 46. Moritz has reproduced only these few samples. However, on a recent visit to the National (former Khedivial) Library at Cairo, whence Moritz himself drew his materials, I was privileged to see literally dozens of these small parchment Qurʾāns and permitted to examine a goodly number of them minutely. It was most gratifying to find such ample confirmation of my earlier published statement in regard to the relationships of these small Qurʾāns to the larger and more pretentious ones of the same period, particularly with reference to their widespread use and the development and character of their script. Cf. the writer's "Arabic Paleography" in *Ars islamica*, VIII (1941), 79-80.

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my sincere thanks to Dr. Mohammed Sabry, director of the Egyptian National Library at Cairo and to his staff, particularly Mr. Mohammed Husain among the latter, for willing co-operation and numerous courtesies extended to me beyond the *farḍ al-kifāyah*, during the autumn months of 1946 spent in their hospitable city.

⁵ Cf. William Wright (ed.), *Facsimiles of Inscriptions and Manuscripts* ("Oriental Series" [London: Palaeographical Society, 1875-83]), Pl. VI; J. David-Weill (ed.), *Le Djāmiʿ d'Ibn Wahb* ("Publications de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale: Textes Arabes," Tome III [2 vols.; Cairo, 1939-41]), Pls. 1 ff.

⁶ E.g. Oriental Institute No. 17619, a third-century fragment on grammar.

⁷ For a discussion of the relationship of early Christian Arabic scripts to early Moslem scripts see the writer's *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Early Kurʾānic Development* ("Oriental Institute Publications," Vol. L [Chicago, 1939]), pp. 20-21 and references there cited.

In the present entry of the manuscript, the fairly rounded letters are, for the most part, distinctly formed and, up to a point, carefully executed. Letter forms of special interest are the two *alifs*—that with and that without the bend to the right. The horizontal stroke of the second form varies considerably in extent as seen, for example, in the *basmalah* or invocation formula heading the text. Also to be noted is the use of the two forms of final *y*—that with a loop to the left and that with a horizontal stroke reversed to the right. Initial *m* has a number of minutely differentiated forms that play no mean roles in the decipherment of the text. The two letters that are most readily confused and confusing, because they are least carefully differentiated both as to form and size, are the final *n* and *r*. The *hamzah* is not indicated.

Diacritical points are used sparingly except in the first few lines of the text. Where a letter calls for two or three points these are neither consistently grouped together, nor are they accurately placed above or below the letter to which they be-

long. Dotted letters are, in the order of the Arabic alphabet, *b, t, j, z, ḍ, ẓ, f, q* (*qāf*), *n*, and *y*.

A further characteristic of the script as a whole needs to be especially emphasized, as it is not only a marked feature of all early Arabic writing but it also plays a decisive role in the decipherment of one particularly significant word in the piece. This is the practice of writing the vertical stroke of the *alif* and of the *l* downward, regardless of these letters' position in the word.

TEXT

(Pls. XV and XVI)

a) The title-page.

- كتاب (1)
فيه حديث (2)
الف ليلة لاجول (3)
ولا قوة الا بالله ا (4)
لعل العظیم (5)

- (1) A book
(2) of tales from a
(3) Thousand Nights. There is neither strength
(4) nor power except in God the
(5) Highest, the Mightiest.

Comments.—It is to be noted that the title is not *كتاب الف ليلة*, "Book of a Thousand Nights," or *كتاب حديث الف*, "Book of the Tales of a Thousand

Nights," both of which would indicate the entire "Thousand Nights" collection of tales. The translation of the title as given above describes accurately the nature of the volume to which the present fragment originally belonged, namely, a volume containing selected tales from the "Thousand Nights." We will return later to the consideration of the significance of this fact on the early history of the *Nights*.

The paleography of these few short lines calls for but little comment over and above the observation already made under the general heading of "Script." Note should be taken of the triangular form of the final *h* of *lailah* in line 3, particularly the initial slanted stroke of the letter. This is to be contrasted with the corresponding, but in this case perpendicular, stroke in the *h* of *Allah* in line 4. Both forms appear in the text on the following page. The division of a word at the end of a line, as in line 4, is another well-known practice among the scribes of the first centuries of Islam. It is generally common when the initial letter of the word is either separate, as in the present case, or one of the letters of the alphabet that may not be joined to the letter following, for example, *dāl*, *dhāl*, etc.

b) Text of the "Thousand Nights":

- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم (1)
ليلة (2)
فلما كانت تلك الليلة القابلة (3)
قالت دينار يا م (ل) ذقتي ان كنت (4)
غير نائمة تحدثيني بالحديث (5)
الذي اوعدتيني به واضربي (المثل) عن ا (6)
لفضل والنقص والحول والجهل (7)
والسخا والبخل والشجاعة والجبن (8)
[ياكون في الانسان غريزة او طريفة (9)
[او] يخص معلمه او ادب شامي (10)
[او اع] رابي (11)

(12) [فحدثتها شيرازاد بحد]يث فيه حسن ظريف

(13) [عن فلان الـ ؟ وذا] كره

(14) [فته]صير احق من لم

(15) [الا امكر منهم

(16) [(traces only at end of line)

TRANSLATION

(1) In the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate.

(2) N I G H T

(3) And when it was the following night

(4) said Dīnāzād, "O my Delectable One, if you are

(5) not asleep, relate to me the tale

(6) which you promised me and quote striking examples of the

(7) excellencies and shortcomings, the cunning and stupidity

(8) the generosity and avarice, and the courage and cowardice

(9) that are in man, instinctive or acquired

(10) or pertain to his distinctive characteristics or to courtly manners, Syrian

(11) or Bedouin.

(12) [And Shīrāzād related to her a tale of elegant beauty

(13) [of So-and-So the ? and] his [f]ame (or [c]raft)

(14) [sh]e becomes more worthy than they who are (or do) not

(15) [or] else more crafty (or malicious) than they.

(16) [(traces only at the end of the line)]

Comments.—*Lines 1–5.* Though our scribe uses the diacritical points liberally in the first few lines of the text, he is not always particularly careful about placing them with the letters to which they belong, nor is he consistent about their group spacing: the two dots of *t* in *tilk* are far apart, and the first dot is too far out to the right; the dots of *y* in *lailah* are even farther apart, with the second dot too much to the left and so falling before the adjoining *h*; again, the two dots of *y* in *Dīnāzād*, though each is quite distinct, are crowded together and allowed to fall below the preceeding *d*. Both these dots and the one above *z* are faint, but clear nevertheless. Note the use of the *y* for *hamzah* in *nā'imah* of line 5. The omission of the second *l* in *al-lailah* of line 3 is obviously a scribal error.

Line 6. Note especially the separate reversed *y* in *al-ladhī*. The *alif* at the end of

the line is similar to that of *al-rahīm* in line 1. Attention has already been drawn, under the general characterization of the script, to the early practice of splitting a word at the end of a line. The phrase *عن اضربى* offers some difficulty. If one is strictly to follow the great majority of the dictionaries, the phrases should be translated as "leave aside," or "turn away," or "depart, from." But quite obviously such a meaning in the present context would be strange indeed. It is extremely improbable that Dīnāzād in requesting a story should instruct the storyteller to set aside so inclusive a list of such good story materials and at the same time stop short of specifying the type of story she actually desired. Lane (*Lexicon*, "*daraba*," p. 1780, col. c) quotes the *Asās* of Zamakhsharī and after him the *Tāj al-ʿArūs* as explaining the phrase *عن اضرب* to mean *عزف*

عنه, "to inform about (a thing or person)," which meaning fits very well with our text. Lane, however, proceeds to point out that this is a scribal error for عَزَفَ عنه, "to abstain from." While this error could very well be, one still cannot help wondering if it really is so, in view of the applicability of عَزَفَ to the present text. Be that as it may, the Arabic ضَرَبَ, as its English equivalent "to beat," is very rich in idiomatic usage. One could conceivably translate اَضْرَبِيْ عَنْ as "beat about"—whence beat about the bush—in the sense of "approach indirectly" as one does in a story meant to entertain in contrast with the more lucid scientific treatment of the theme of the story. Perhaps the difficulty should be resolved by assuming that المَثَل, "parable," "proverb," "Example," has dropped by scribal error—as the *l* of *al-lailah* in line 3—from the phrase.

Line 7. The upper stroke of the *q* of the first word is very faint. The first reconstruction to suggest itself for the broken third word of the line was الحِكْمَة. However, further examination brought to light a separate *l* as the final letter of the word and also the remaining traces of the head of the *w*.

Lines 8-9. Note the absence of *hamzah* in *sakhā* of line 8. Space permits the reconstruction of only one letter at the beginning of line 9, which must obviously be a *y*. The last word of the line, like that of line 8, is crowded for space resulting in the almost miniature size of the first three letters of the word, particularly with respect to the loop of the *t*. This latter should, however, be compared with the not too large loop of *z* of line 12 and the almost equally small loop of *q* of line 6 and *s* in line 10.

Lines 10-11. As the passage grows, it presents a problem in punctuation and opens up the possibility of more than one

rendering. I am grateful to Professor Sprengling for generous and valuable suggestions which have been incorporated in the translation of these lines and in the following comments.⁸

The stroke of the *y* in *yakhuṣṣ* appears too high but is no higher than the stroke of *n* in *insān* of line 9. Its high position above the line is the result of its being placed over the *kh* as in the case of the *b* over the *kh* of *bukhl* of line 8. At first glance the third word of line 10 appears to be بَعْلِيْه, "by his learning," in which case it would be referring to man's consciously acquired knowledge in contrast to his natural endowments or his chance environmental acquisitions. However, strong light and a microscope reveal an initial *m*, small and faded but definitely there. This suggests مَعْلَمَة, "his particular mark or characteristic." But it is also possible to read مُعَلِمَة and translate this as "cavalier courage" in contrast to "refined or courtly manner." It is possible to punctuate with a semicolon after *ma-lamahu* and link the second verbal clause of line 6 to the last phrase in the paragraph, and render the result as ("and quote striking examples of) courtly manners, Syrian or Bedouin."

The decipherment of the last word of line 10 as *shāmī* calls for some comment. At first sight it looks as though there are but two of the three "teeth" needed for the initial *sh*. But enlarged photographs and careful microscopic examination of the manuscript itself confirmed the writer's suspicion that the scribe, having first written the three-toothed *sh*, lifted his pen to write the *alif* from up downward in the characteristic manner of all the scribes of early Islam—a practice already referred to above under the general heading

⁸ For a fuller list of opposite qualities that pertain to man, cf. Tauhidī, *Al-Imtā' wa al-Mu'ānasah* (3 vols.; Cairo, 1939-44), I, 149.

PLATE XV



ORIENTAL INSTITUTE No. 17618. PAGE 3. TITLE-PAGE OF *Alf Lailah*



PLATE XVII



PLATE XVIII



ORIENTAL INSTITUTE No. 17618. PAGE 2. FIGURE DRAWING
AND SCATTERED ENTRIES

of "Script." In the crowded space at the end of the line the lower end of this downward stroke of the *alif* overlapped almost all—but not quite all—of the third tooth of the *sh*. The next letter of this word, initial *m*, broken and crowded over the final *y*, is similar to the three *m*'s of the invocation formula in line 1, but is closest to the first of these, namely, the *m* of *bism*. Both these *m*'s have a curved stroke at the right which extends at the top beyond the rest of the head of *m*, instead of either failing to meet the stroke at the left, as in the *m* of line 3, or of meeting it in a neat corner, as in the *m* of line 5.

The extent of the space lost at the beginning of line 11 would seem, at first, to call for more than the restoration given above. But, by actual measurement, the three restored letters, *a*, *w*, and *a*, occupy very little more space—5–6 mm. at the most—than the three identical letters written in the very same order in line 10. This extra space can be readily accounted for either by a slight extension of the lower horizontal stroke of one or both *alif*'s or by a very little more spacing between the three separate letters themselves.

Lines 12–15. The partial restoration and translation of these lines are perforce largely a matter of scientific conjecture. They most probably held the definite answer to the Arabicized form of the storyteller's name and to her relationship to Dīnāzād. They certainly held the key to the title and nature of the tale they introduce. All these points will be fully discussed in the third section of the present article.

Line 12. Line 12 permits, at the most, a two- or three-word restoration, depending on the number and size of the letters involved, in addition to the two or three letters of the broken حديث or the more likely بحديث. The reconstructed phrase is given preference over others because it

seems to meet the textual, stylistic, and paleographic requirements as indicated by the preceding lines: a new paragraph is introduced with *fa* as in line 3; the storyteller is granting the request of Dīnāzād, who asks: "relate to me the tale," حديثني بالحدیث; the remains of the broken word fit best with the noun, "tale," حديث, and this in turn calls for the most likely verb in this context, namely, "told, related," حدثت; the feminine pronominal suffix *-ha* seems the most called for under the circumstances, though it must be pointed out that it could be replaced with the plural suffix *-hum*, if one is to keep in mind the interested king who, though not mentioned in the text on hand, is undoubtedly listening, along with Dīnāzād, to the narrator's story. Furthermore, this being the introduction to the first "Night" in this particular copy, the name of the storyteller is definitely called for. Finally, the suggested phrase can be filled in neatly with no smaller letters and no more crowding than are seen in the rest of the line. However, the *f* of the first word and the *b* of the third will have to be written in keeping with the script of the page, namely, not to the right of, but directly above the following *h* as the *t* and *l* over the two *h*'s in line 5, to cite the most relevant of the many comparable instances on the page.

Line 13. Here again any probable reconstruction must take careful note of the space element. The line could have started with فلان بن فلان, "So-and-so the son of So-and-so." But the alternative suggested promises to be more fruitful in the milieu of the *Nights*. For the unnamed hero or villain could be So-and-so "the porter," الحمال, or "the merchant," التاجر, or "the sage," الحكم, or "the wag," الخلع, or "the minister," الوزیر or "the king,"

الملك, and so forth. It is impossible to determine whether or not the *k* is joined to a preceding letter. The three-letter words *k-r-h* or *t* and *k-z-h* or *t* can be read in more than a dozen ways, as any dictionary will substantiate. But none of these three-letter words seems to fit so well as some of the many possibilities that can be formed when at least one letter, separated or joined, is placed before the *k*. Of the words thus formed ذكره, "his fame," and مكره, "his craft," are preferred for reasons which will be explained below.

Line 14. The *ṣ* of the first word was originally joined to one or more letters now lost. The feminine prefix *t*, could be readily replaced by the masculine *y*. احق, "worthier," could also be read اخف, "lighter"; there is a bare possibility that the *alif* could be a case or adverbial ending belonging with the preceding word. A less likely alternative for لم is a very crowded لهم, "to them," with only part of the lower loop of *h* still remaining.

Line 15. Though the final *r*'s and *n*'s are not sufficiently differentiated in several instances on this one page, *r* seems to be the more probable in comparison with the several *r*'s of lines 13–15 and in contrast with the one *n* of line 14.

2. SCATTERED PHRASES ON PAGES 2 AND 3

(Pls. XVIII and XV respectively)

a) Page 2, upper section, three lines in a fine and careful book hand, but different from that of the *Nights* text.

- (1) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
- (2) فَنَحْنُ أَسْرَتُكَ وَأَنْتَ أَمَامُنَا كَفَى بِمَثَلِك
- (3) بِحِلْمِهِ هَادِينَا.

(1) In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

(2) We are your kin and you are our leader. It is sufficient for us that one like you

(3) should guide us through his kindly wisdom.

b) Page 3, just below the initial entry on the title-page:

(1) كَلِمَةٌ (2) مُسْتَحَقَّةٌ فِي نَظَرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

(1) A testimony (2) that is deemed proper by the [faithful].

This undoubtedly refers to the statement in lines 3–5 above it.

c) Below these two lines are two separate entries of the phrase بِسْمِ اللَّهِ, each phrase beginning a new line, but the first *Allah* seems to have been altered to الذي with the *y* reversed. The tail end of the bend of the *alif* of the next word is still visible. The line, therefore, most probably consisted of either the usual *basmalah* or else of the slightly less familiar invocation, بِسْمِ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ, "In the name of him than whom there is no other god." The second and last phrase seems to stand alone.

The remaining initial phrase of the *basmalah* formula seems to stand alone.

The entries (a) and (b) are neither in the same hand nor yet in the same ink. What they have in common is the pious tone of the phrases and the fact that, except for the earlier text of the *Nights*, both entries have priority to space on their respective pages. The succeeding entries are fitted into the remaining space.

3. OUTLINE OF A FIGURE OF A MAN

(Pl. XVIII)

Page 2, lower half:

A rough outline of a man's form is crudely drawn in heavy strokes of thick blue-green ink that has grayed with time. This seems to have been filled in later with white paint, which as mixed with the ink gives the latter a greenish-blue shade. It is barely possible that a name or short phrase is worked into the strokes on the left side. The misproportioned and dwarfed figure shows the outline of the

head, short thick neck, folded arms, and feet that point out sideways in a straight line. Later attempts to wash out the outline of the head were not altogether successful and have left the paper damaged and slightly crinkled from the rubbing. The face is pierced through, leaving a fair-sized hole. This latter was probably intentional and in keeping with the popular belief that orthodox Islam condemned the representation of animate beings.

It seems hardly possible that this crude "work of art" has any relationship to the original, well-written manuscript of the "Nights" that is before us. Furthermore, it is difficult to tell if, when it was first introduced later, it was meant to illustrate some tale or incident in the book. It could conceivably be no more than an amateur's product in an idle moment with scrap paper ready at hand. Spacing and the overlapping of different inks "dates" the figure as "post" the scattered phrases already considered and "pre" the second group of scattered phrases appearing on this same page of the manuscript.

The lone ornament on the left top corner of the opposite page seems to be drawn in the same blue-green ink that was used in the figure.

4. A SECOND GROUP OF SCATTERED PHRASES IN DIFFERENT HANDS

(Pl. XVIII)

Page 2:

a) Roughly circling the head of the figure described above are some short phrases written upside down. They read, from the inner side of the page outward: عجائب, "wonders," الله كبير, "Allah is great," and الكبير الله, "the great one is Allah." The three phrases are in the same shade of ink. The strokes are uneven and the script generally poor.

b) Upper section of page, two lines of

text in a later *mutlaq* common everyday hand in contrast to the book hand of the earlier entry:

(1) قريبيك ما للغلبة عندك يصبر ولا

(2) يطبق الصبر صب محبوب

- (1) Your nearest (or dearest) will not patiently endure an adverse change in your relationships;
- (2) nor will patience itself endure the loved one's anger.

While there can be no question that the figure preceded the scattered phrases, the relative chronological order of either the figure alone or of the figure and the phrases to the entry below cannot be determined with equal certainty; for here neither the space element nor yet the paleography of the nondescript writing can come to our aid. The odds in favor of either order being about equal, it is preferred to treat entries 5 and 6 in succession for reasons that will be seen presently.

5. ROUGH DRAFT OF A LETTER ON PAGE 1 (Pl. XVII)

TEXT

- (1) [بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم]
- (2) [اطال الله بقال]
- (3) [وادام عزك وكرا منك]
- (4) [واتم نعمه عليك]
- (5) [وزاد في احسانه]
- (6) [البك] وعزك في الدنيا و
- (7) [الاخرة برحمته كتبت اليك]
- (8) جعلت فداك من انطاكية
- (9) بقدم اقجبر مع الفرض
- (10) وانا ومن قبلي في عافية والحمد
- (11) لله على ذلك وصلى الله على محمد

TRANSLATION

- (1) [In the name of Allah, the Merciful,] the Compassionate,
- (2) [May Allah] prolong your life
- (3) [and continue you in power and grace]

- (4) [and complete his blessing]s towards you
- (5) [and increase] his benefits
- (6) [to you] and honor you in this world and
- (7) [the] next by his mercy. I wrote you,
- (8) may Allah make me your ransom, from Antioch
- (9) of the arrival of Aqjambar together with the soldiers' pay
- (10) I, myself, and those who are with me are in good health and praise be
- (11) to Allah for that. The blessings of Allah be upon Mohammed.

Comments.—That this is but a rough copy of a letter and not the actual letter itself is evidenced by several factors. The most important of these latter are that it is still attached to the next folio and that it bears no indication of an address nor yet any signs that it had ever been folded or rolled for mailing, as was the practice of the century. The script, too, is a "rough" specimen of the *mutlaq* or common variety of nondescript cursive current among the people. It is in a class with the script of (a) on page 2, but not identical with it, as a careful comparison of the *alif*'s and the *k*'s in both specimens readily reveals. In the former the head of the *alif* is either straight or shows a slight hook to the right; in the letter, the *alif* is either straight or it and the *l* show a marked hook to the left. Again, the *ḥ* in the former consists of two separate pen strokes, the initial *ḥ* and the added *ḥ* above it; in the letter it is formed in one continuous pen operation as in line 3 and in the *k* of *Antākīa* in line 8.

The greetings of lines 2-7 are among the commonest in use in the correspondence, official or private, of the third century. The present version, however, offers one difficulty, namely, the second word of line 6, which I have assumed to be a scribal error for the usually met with *عَزَّكَ* in similar greetings. If, however,

it is to be read as a four-letter word, the following are some of the possibilities: *عَبَّرَكَ*, "afford you passage"; *عَتَّدَكَ*, "provide for your future"; or perhaps even an incorrect *عَبَّدَكَ* for *عَاذَكَ*, or *اعَاذَكَ* "afford you protection."

Lines 8-9. The first two words of line 8 are run together. The word read *فَرَضَ* and translated as "soldiers' pay" can also mean either "a share of an inheritance" or "fees"; read as *قَرْضَ*, it means "loan received." Any one of these three renderings can fit in with the text. The reason for giving the preference to "soldiers' pay" will be discussed later in connection with the early history of the *Nights*. For the present it is to be noted that these lines refer to a Turk who is transporting and delivering (army) funds to a second man who had but recently been in Antioch.

6. FORMULA OF LEGAL TESTIMONY DATED ŞAFAR A.H. 266/OCTOBER, A.D. 879

(Pls. XV-XVIII)

We come now to the last set of entries on these repeatedly used and much scribbled-over pages. By the time these two folios have reached the hands of a certain Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz, professional witness to formal legal contracts, they had not only parted company with their fellow-folios of the "Nights" but had been deprived of their identity as folios and returned to their original state of a flat sheet of paper—only this time of waste paper. Aḥmad, therefore, proceeded to scribble the formula of his trade—legal testimony—all over the margins of the four pages, and a few more blank spaces available. He seems to have been conscious of the central division of the sheet into pages, though in one instance he disregarded this when he began his formula on the inner margin of page 4 and finished it on the ad-

joining inner margin of page 1. He was neither careful nor consistent in his scribbled entries, which seem to be the fruits of an idle moment.

The basic form and terminology of the legal formula with its several, but slight, variations are those most commonly met with in the third century of the Hijrah. The script, too, is true to type for the function and the period, though not so neatly executed as in some of the actual legal documents themselves. It is extremely cursive and unduly complicated with unorthodox ligatures. These latter not only join letters that should be left unconnected within the word but frequently run several words together. Careless ab-

breviations and the absence of all diacritical points complicate and slow down the task of decipherment, particularly in respect to names and dates. Fortunately, the repetitions and numerous entries, of which there are at least fifteen, provide the opportunity for minute comparisons and repeated checking in respect to both the full name of the witness and the date of his testimony.

It is impossible to determine the order in which Aḥmad made his entries. But in as much as this order itself is of no significance for us, the simplest course is to follow the page order of the manuscript.

Page 1: (a) Inner margin, lower half of page:

- (1) وشهد احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد الجرهمي على اقرارهما
(2) بجمع ما في هذا الكتاب وكتب بـ(خ)ط(هـ) في اخر صفر

(1) And Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī testified to their agreement

(2) to all that is in this document. And he wrote (his testimony) with his own hand, on the last of Ṣafar.

Comments.—The writing of الجرهمي is the clearest in this entry. The phrase مافي هذا الكتاب is run together as is also the phrase وكتب بخطه, with يط, serving as an abbreviation for the second word. اخر صفر is likewise run together except for the initial *alif*. These and other ligatures are quite common and will be pointed out only as they first occur. The abbreviations are used less frequently. Both practices are extremely common in third century legal testimony.⁹

⁹ Cf., e.g., the writer's "Arabic Marriage Contracts among the Copts," *ZDMG*, XCV (1941), 67-70; Adolph Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library (APEL)* Vol. II (1936), Index, "Abbreviations" and "Ligatures."

b) Part of the top margin and upper half of the inner margin:

- (1) على اقرارهما
(2) بجمع ما في هذا الكتاب
(3) هذا الكتاب هذا الكتاب

(1) to their agreement

(2) to all that is in this document.

(3) this document this document.

The fourth line in this section is upside down to the three lines above. It is the continuation of the entry of the formula begun on page 4 and will be considered in connection with that page.

It is to be further noted that the phrase هذا الكتاب, "this document," occurs twice more in between lines 8-10 of the preceding letter.

Page 2: (a) Upper margin, last three lines written upside down:

- (1) شهد احمد بن محفوظ الجرهمي على اقرارهما
 (2) بجميع ما في هذا الكتاب وذلك في صفر من سنة ست وستين وميتين
 (3) هذا الكتاب في ذ(اريه) خه هذا الكتاب وكتب بـ(ط) هـ وبة(اريه) خه

(1) Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz al-Jurhamī, testified to their agreement

(2) to all that is in this document, and that in Ṣafar of the year 'six and sixty and two-hundred.

(3) this document as of its date. This document with his own hand and as of its date.

Comments.—A line in the same ink as the formula runs through the text of line 1. The first five words of line 2 are run together, as are also *في ذلك سنة*; these last are at the end of the line, with the rest of the date written right below them with the following *وستين و* ligatured. Note the stroke that is meant for the *hamzah* carrier—or more probably here for the tooth of the first *y*—in the last word. The stroke is long enough to be an *alif* in ligature with the following letter. In other words, we have a choice of several common practices of writing the Arabic for “two hundred”—*مئتين*, *مئتين* or *ميتين*. The unorthodox ligatures met with in this line are not so extreme as in some dates yet to follow. There are very numerous illustrations in early Arabic papyri and papers of this unhappy practice of overcrowding the letters and joining several or all the words of dates meant to be written out in full.¹⁰

The second part of line 3 is ligatured right through except for the last word. The abbreviations, as already stated, are common.

b) About the middle of the page and toward the outer margin appears the ligatured name of the witness, *احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد*.

c) Below the above are traces of three lines written upside down:

- (1) احمد [(2) الجرهمي (3) بجميع ما

(1) Aḥmad (2) al-Jurhamī (3) in all that

These three lines most probably constituted originally the complete formula.

d) Lower inner margin, touching the outline of the figure of the man:

شهد احمد بن محفوظ
 Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz testified.

Page 3: The title-page of the “Nights”.

(a) Upper margin, three lines written upside down:

- (1) [شهد] احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد الجرهمي على اقرارهما
 (2) [بجميع] ما في هذا الكتاب وكتب بخطه في صفر من سنة ست وستين وميتين
 (3) هذا الكتاب على

(1) Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī testified to their agreement

(2) to all that is in this document and he wrote (his testimony) with his own hand in Ṣafar of the year six and sixty and two-hundred.

(3) (See comments below under this line.)

Comments.—*Lines 1–2.* The name, *محفوظ*, written with the *w* always ligatured

¹⁰ Cf. Karabacek, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–95; Grohmann, *APEL*, Vol. II, Nos. 88 and 90; N. Abbott, “Arabic Papyri of the Reign of Ḡaʿfar al-Mutawakkil . . .,” *ZDMG*, XCII (1938) 110–11.

to the *z*, is about as clear here as in any of the rest of the entries. Note in the plate the lone word *شهد* at the end of line 1, not introduced into the text above. The date in line 2 is extremely crowded. Hav-

ing first written **و سنة ست**, all ligatured, Aḥmad slides his pen back to start with **ستين** and then completes the date in the crowded space at the end of the line.

Line 3. This line probably represents two separate "operations," the first of which is definitely linked with line 2 and consists of the clear-cut entry of the date in Coptic letter numerals. This practice of repeating the Arabic date in Greek or Coptic numerals was very common in the Egypt of the third and fourth centuries of the Hijrah.¹¹ The σ , *sigma*, and ζ , *stau* (digamma in the old Greek alphabet), for 200 and 6, respectively, offer no paleographic difficulty. The middle letter looks as though it might be a γ , *gamma* or ν , *nu*. Actually however, it represents a known Coptic form of ξ , *xi*, or 60 as seen in other early documents.¹²

The second "operation" of this line relates to the rest of its contents. Here Aḥmad seems to be toying with the phrase, **هذا الكتاب**, and the word, **على**,

no doubt from the familiar **على اقرارها**, as he has toyed with other scattered phrases of the formula in several places in the manuscript. He seems to be doing precisely the same thing with the one Arabic and the several Greco-Coptic letters that follow. The Arabic *s* can be read either as an abbreviation for the word **سنة**, "year," or as the numeral 60;¹³ the two letters following it are, as already seen, the Greco-Coptic numerals for 60 and 200. This still leaves two more letters that look like two *gammas* to be considered. I venture to suggest that these are no more than incomplete forms of the *xi*, or 60, needing but the extended stroke of an adjoining but here absent *sigma* to complete them, as is indeed the case with the two letters preceding them. It is my belief that Aḥmad is here scribbling the different numerals, alone or in combination, of the date 266, just as he scribbles the different words and phrases of the formula.

Page 3: (b) Inner margin:

- (1) شهد [أحمد] بن محفوظ بن أحمد الجرهني بجميع ما في
 (2) هذا الكتاب من بعد ما قرأه [وشهد على اقرارهما في آخر صفر
 (3) من سنة ست وستين [وميّتين]

(1) Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī testified to all that is in

(2) this document after having read it. He testified to their agreement on the last of Šafar

(3) of the year six and sixty and two [hundred].

Comments.—The phrase, **من بعد ما قرأه**, introduced just this once in this set, occurs with variations in other testimony

formulas.¹⁴ **آخر صفر** is ligatured and extremely crowded. The date in line 3 is written in two units, the slight break coming between the **ست** and the **ستين**.

The last of Šafar A.H. 266 corresponds to the twentieth of October, A.D. 879.

¹¹ Cf. Grohmann, *APEL*, Vol. I, Nos. 39, 41, 48; Vol. II, Nos. 89, 96, 98, 114, 126, 127; Vol. III, Nos. 181–88, 190, 196, and 198, dating from A.H. 209 to 293; for fourth-century specimens cf. Karabacek, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91.

¹² Cf. Ludwig Stern, *Koptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1880), pp. 131 ff., and especially the table of forms at the end of the book. I am indebted to Dr. T. G. Allen for the reference to Stern and to Professors Edgerton and Wilson for the confirmation of my reading of this particular date.

¹³ For the early use of Arabic letter numerals cf. the writer's "Arabic Numerals," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1938, pp. 277–80.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., Grohmann, *APEL*, I, 74:11, 88:14–15, 245:20.

c) Lower margin, five fragmentary lines:

(1) شهد (2) على اقرارهما (3) سنة ست وستين (4) شهد احمد
(5) اقرارهما بجمع ما في هذا الكتاب

(1) testified (2) to their agreement (3) year six and sixty (4) Aḥmad testified
(5) their agreement to all that is in this document

Comments.—Lines 1–3 and 4–5 represent two separate entries of the formula. line 3 is run together. Page 4: Text page of the “Nights.” What remains of the fragmentary date in (a) Upper margin, two lines upside down:

(1) شهد احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد الجرهمي
(2) على اقرارهما بجمع ما في هذا الكتاب وذلك في صفر من سنة ست وستين وميتين

(1) Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī testified
(2) to their agreement to all that is in this document and that in Ṣafar of the year six and sixty and two hundred.

Comments.—The words صفر من سنة above this again. b) Outer margin, two lines, the first of which is broken: ست are run together. The rest of the date is completed with ستين, “sixty,” above this and the ميتين, “two hundred,”

(1) [بجمع] ما في هذا الكتاب وذلك في صفر
(2) من سنة ست وستين وميتين [شهد] على

(1) [to all] that is in this document and that in Ṣafar
(2) of the year six and sixty and two hundred. [Testified] to

Comments.—The date here looks hopelessly broken, but in reality it offers no more serious difficulties to the experienced eye than any of the other date entries. It is written in three units, the first break in the flow of the pen coming after the first *w* and the second break after the *n* of ستين. c) Lower margin, three broken lines:

(1) [شهد احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد الجرهمي] بجمع ما في
(2) [هذا الكتاب شهد] احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد الجرهمي
(3) [على اقرارهما] بجمع ما في هذا الكتاب

(1) [Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī testified] to all that is in
(2) [this document]. Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī [testified
(3) to their agreement] to all that is in this document.

Comments.—The three lines quite obviously contain two separate entries of the formula. Between the three lines and the text of the “Nights” there is an extended stroke in the same light ink of the formula. It is most probably the final *b* of الكتاب. This would indicate either a very crowded third entry of the formula or a less crowded scribbling of the phrase هذا الكتاب.

d) Inner margin, one line running the length of the page:

شهد احمد بن محفوظ بن احمد الجرهمي
على اقرارهما بجمع ما في هذا الكتاب
وذلك في صفر

The rest of the formula is entered on the inner margin of page 1 and consists of the date in Arabic words and Greco-Coptic letter numerals:

من سنة ست وستين وميتين

Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūz ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī testified to their agreement to all that is in this document and that in Ṣafar of the year six and sixty and two-hundred, 266.

Comments.—The writing of the date is the largest and the clearest of all the date entries. It is in three units, the first break coming after ست, and the second after ستين. The numerals overflow into the unusually large loop of the last *n*. They consist, as in the previous case discussed above, of the numbers *sigma* or 200, *xi* or 60, and *stau* or 6. However, Aḥmad has, in this instance, reversed the order of the six and the sixty. This may be a reflection of the practice, met with sometimes in early Islam, of writing the letter numerals without regard to the relative position of the units and tens.¹⁵ Or, again, it could well be an unconscious reflection of the commoner practice, in reference to the order of the numerals in *spoken* Arabic, namely, two hundred and six and sixty. The Coptic numerals are written from left to right in this same order.

There are here fifteen separate entries of the legal formula exclusive of the several scattered phrases of the same. Seven of these entries provided a complete date, four of which are still preserved in full:

manuscript page 2, section (a); page 3, section (a); and page 4, sections (a) and (d). The date of the remaining three is but partially preserved: manuscript page 3, sections (b) and (c), and page 4, section (b). But, as already seen, enough of the date of these three is available to make possible the complete restoration of each date as fully written out in words. Furthermore, two of the dates of the complete entries, manuscript page 3, section (a), and page 4, section (d), are reinforced with the date in Greco-Coptic numerals. Thus we have the year 266 of the Hijrah written no less than nine times in all, while the month of Ṣafar occurs seven times, and the further specification of the last day of Ṣafar is given twice: manuscript page 1, section (a) and page 3, section (b). These facts lead to a significant conclusion. The double dating along with the terminology and paleography had left no room for doubt in the mind of the writer that the third century was actually the century involved. But with the first realization that Aḥmad was merely practicing the formula of his trade, the possibility that he may have chosen at random some third-century date or dates called for consideration. That Aḥmad should be practicing the writing of dates already passed seemed less probable than that he should be considering a date or dates yet to come. Here again common sense would seem to suggest a time not too far in the future. However, as the decipherment of Aḥmad's entries progressed and the same date, to the month and the day occurred repeatedly, it seemed reasonably sure that Aḥmad was actually practicing the formula as he needed it for current use, if not on the last day of Ṣafar, then during that month of the year 266 of the Hijrah, that is, October, A.D. 879. This date, therefore, is here accepted as a *terminus ante quam* for the

¹⁵ Cf. above, n. 13. See also Stern, *op. cit.*, table at end of the book for the different paleographic forms of these letter numerals.

earlier date of the *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights" text.

II

With the task of decipherment and translation accomplished, the next step is to bring the results, along with other pertinent materials, to bear on the problem of the provenience and the date of the present *paper* manuscript. The questions that need to be answered are the "where" and the "when" of the first entry of the manuscript, namely, the *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights" fragment.

First as to the "where." The fact that the manuscript is on paper that had already become waste paper by 266/879 would seem to exclude Egypt as even a remote possibility for consideration as to provenience. For Egypt, the home of the papyrus, continued to use that writing material, almost exclusively, throughout the third century of Islam. It is true that paper as an article of trade was known in Egypt at the time, but the manufacture of paper in that country was introduced in the first half of the fourth century of Islam or the first half of the tenth century of our era.¹⁶ Thus while one might expect a few paper documents to come out of third-century Egypt, no one would ever expect the Egypt of the early third century to produce a *paper book* on any subject whatsoever. This is adequately confirmed by the evidence of material remains on hand, for the third-century Arabic *paper* documents so far brought to light number about two dozen,¹⁷ in great

contrast to the hundreds, if not indeed the thousands,¹⁸ of Arabic papyrus documents of the same century. On the other hand, the much smaller number of Islamic book manuscripts definitely known to have originated in third century Egypt are either parchment Qurʾāns or books of traditions written on either parchment or papyrus, while third-century books coming out of the Asiatic provinces are either on parchment or paper. Not only is the present manuscript on paper, like these latter, but it has closer paleographic affinities with them than it does with the Egyptian group, a fact which will be considered with the question of the "when" of the manuscript.

We must turn out attention, therefore, to the three Asiatic Arab provinces of the early ʿAbbāsīd Empire, namely, Ḥijāz, ʿIrāq, and Syria. The first had settled down to being the "sacred province" of Islam. It lagged behind the other two in the production of strictly secular literature. But as the most distinguished province of Arabia proper, its ancient traditions and legendary heroes, both of the desert and of the sown, continued to be rich sources of material and inspiration for the Syrian and ʿIrāqī littérateurs of these fruitful centuries of early Islam. Hence, as the probable provenience of the manuscript, Ḥijāz is the least likely of the three provinces under consideration. The

¹⁶ Karabacek, *op. cit.*, p. 98; N. Abbott, *The Qurrah Papyri from Aphrodite in the Oriental Institute* ("SAOC," No. 15 [Chicago, 1938]), pp. 22-23, and references there cited.

¹⁷ Of these, two only are assigned to the first half of the third century. The definitely dated documents are but five, with their dates extending from A.H. 260 to 297 or A.D. 873-909 (cf. Karabacek, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91; Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer, *Führer durch die Ausstellung* [hereafter *PERF* (Wien, 1894)], p. 226, No. 845 and p. 246, Nos. 924-26; *Corpus Papyrorum*

Raineri archiducis Austriae. III, *Series Arabica*, ed. Adolf Grohmann [hereafter *CPR* III (Vindobonae, 1924. . .)], Vol. I, Part 1, p. 58; Albert Dietrich, "Arabische Papyri aus der Hamburger Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek," *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, XXII, Part 3 [Leipzig, 1937], 49 and 63-64). A few other third-century paper documents, dated or otherwise, will no doubt come to light as research and publication on early materials progress. There is, for instance, Oriental Institute No. 13782, a paper fragment with two lines of invocation on Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn of Egypt (254-70/868-83).

¹⁸ To gain an idea of the wealth of Arabic papyri that came out of Egypt cf. Grohmann, *CPR* III, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 10.

real choice is, therefore, reduced to one between ʿIrāq and Syria.

It is a generally well-known fact that the Persian *Hazar Afsāna* or "Thousand Fanciful Tales" is the starting point in any consideration of the early history of the *Nights*. It is equally well known that it was first translated from Old Persian or Pahlavi into Arabic sometime in the heyday of the early ʿAbbāsids, who had promoted ʿIrāq to the imperial province and created and maintained Baghdād as its political and cultural capital. Therefore, all things being equal, ʿIrāq, rather than Syria, would be the logical choice as the source of our manuscript. But that all things are *not* equal in the case on hand is amply indicated by the manuscript itself.

First we learn from the draft of the letter on the flyleaf of the "Nights" that the manuscript was at that time in the possession of someone who had but recently left Antioch in northern Syria. Again, the manuscript was originally either an extract of selected tales from a then current version of the *Nights* or a new composition or compilation of tales of like character.¹⁹

The third significant fact is provided by the fragmentary text itself, namely, tales of Syrian and Bedouin Arab origin are singled out for special mention. The Bedouin Arab was, as he is still today, a familiar figure of fact and fiction in all the Arab provinces of the empire. His mention, significant enough for the content of the manuscript, is neither here nor there in considering its place of origin. On the other hand, the mention of Syrian tales is highly significant, for these three facts, namely, the presence in Syria of the owner of the manuscript, the selective nature of the original volume which our fragment represents, and the emphasis in its introductory paragraph on Syrian tales, must be taken together and when so taken

clearly point away from ʿIrāq and to Syria as the answer to the "where" in respect to the origin of the manuscript. Furthermore, it is difficult to consider an ʿIrāqī origin for so "Syrian" a manuscript when one recalls the long and bitter rivalry, political and cultural, of these two great provinces of early Islam.

A legitimate question to raise at this point is, granted that this "Nights" manuscript originated in Syria, how did it find its way to Egypt? It is seldom that one is able to give more than a general answer to questions of this nature, particularly in reference to a manuscript that is at once so early and so fragmentary. Books, like other desirable articles, found their way across the provincial borders in the company of their owners, be these scholars or book collectors and traders. In the present instance we are fortunate in being able to suggest an extremely likely answer as to the how and when of the transfer of the manuscript from Syria to Egypt.

Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn (254–70/868–83), the founder of the Ṭūlūnid vassal dynasty of Egypt, was extremely anxious to expand his dominions at the expense of Syria. He fought, at first, a diplomatic war with the court at Baghdād, then a "cold war" with his immediate rival, Aḥmad ibn al-Muḍabbir,²⁰ on the Egyptian scene itself, and finally broke out in open rebellion in A.H. 264–65, when he and his Turks proceeded to annex Syria. Aḥmad himself participated in the expedition and in Muḥarram of 265/September, A.D. 878 took the lead in the final and complete reduction of the key port city of Antioch in northern Syria. After some fighting on the Byzantine border, he moved quickly south to complete the conquest of the entire province before he returned to Egypt that

¹⁹ Cf. above, p. 132, and below, p. 154.

²⁰ For the bitter struggle between the two Aḥmads, cf. the writer's "Arabic Papyri of the Reign of Gaʿfar at-Mutawakkil . . .," *ZDMG*, XCII (1938), 101–4.

same year of A.H. 265, to nip in the bud the revolt of his own son.²¹

Once more the information in the draft of the letter on the flyleaf of the "Nights" must be put to significant use. In the light of the above historical facts, the mention of Antioch in the letter, the fact that the possessor of the manuscript had but recently left that city, the reference to money received by him as having been recently delivered by Aqjambar, obviously a Turk, and, finally, the appearance of the manuscript itself in Egypt the very next year seem, to the present writer, to total up to a reasonably certain answer to our question. To put it more directly, the manuscript was most probably both a casualty and a price of the war of 264-65 between Egypt and Syria. Broken and misused, it found its way out of Syria in the company of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn's victorious Turkish army returning home to Egypt. It is thanks to this likely mishap and to the soil of Egypt, so kind to ancient documents, that we today are in possession of this fragmentary and most unexpected find with its extremely significant evidence on the early history of the *Nights*.²²

The answer to the "when" of the origin of our manuscript must take into consideration several related yet distinct sets of facts. The first of these, as in the case of

the "where," centers around the writing material, namely, paper. It is desirable, to begin with, to review briefly the history of the use and manufacture of paper in early Islam as that history is known from the literary sources and then to follow this with the testimony of the few extant paper documents and books of the third century.

It is hardly necessary to dwell here on the early Chinese origin of paper or on its spread westward to Khurāsān, where the Arabs first came into contact with it in the second half of the seventh century of our era. But it was not until A.D. 751 in the course of the final subjugation of the province and its great city of Samarqand that Chinese captives in that city were made to yield the trade secrets of paper manufacture to their Arab captors. These latter, not being themselves artisans, set their Persian freedmen to the task of its manufacture.²³ The Chinese evidently produced several types of paper differing in their basic composition from grasses and reeds to mixtures of these with hemp and other plants or to mixtures that included part rag and finally to rag paper proper.²⁴ The formula(s) which the Chinese passed on to the Arabs at this point is not stated. The Arab sources distinguish their own early product, generally known as Khurāsānian and Samarqandian paper, as linen-rag paper.²⁵ Microscopic analysis of the hitherto earliest known specimen confirms the statements in the literary sources.²⁶ Microscopic analysis of the pa-

²¹ Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh (Annales)*, ed. de Goeje (15 vols.; Lugduni Batavorum, 1879-1901), III, 1929; Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab (Les Prairies d'or)*, ed. C. Barbier de Meynard (9 vols.; Paris, 1861-77), VIII, 67-71; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-Zāhiraḥ (Annals)*, ed. W. Popper (Berkeley, Calif., 1909—), II, 40-41.

²² In the light of the above, it is quite probable that the only other known third-century documents to come out of Syria and survive to our day were not unearthed in southern Syria as previously suggested but rather shared the above war mishap in Syria and later protection in the Egyptian soil. These are the three papyrus documents drawn up in Damascus in 241/855-56. They were purchased for the Oriental Institute by Professor Sprengling and have already been published by the present writer in *ZDMG*, XCII (1938), 88-135, under the title, "Arabic Papyri from the Reign of Ḡaʿfar al-Mutawakkil 'alā-lāh."

²³ Cf. Karabacek, *Das arabische Papier*, pp. 106-14.

²⁴ Julius v. Wiesner, "Über die ältesten bis jetzt aufgefundenen Hadernpapiere," *Sitzungsberichte der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, Vol. CLXVIII (1911), Abh. V, 1-26.

²⁵ Karabacek, *Das arabische Papier*, pp. 114-17.

²⁶ Julius v. Wiesner, "Die Faijūmer und Ushmūn-einer Papiere, *MPER*, II-III (Wien, 1887), 179-260, esp. pp. 191-218 and 242.

per of our "Nights" fits in with these known literary and material facts, for it, too, proved to be an all-linen paper.²⁷

Though fine-quality Chinese paper continued to be sought after for generations to come, it was the paper of Samarqand that came into widespread use throughout the Asiatic provinces of the empire. It gained rapidly and steadily over the leather and parchments imported from Persia and the papyrus that came from Egypt. Its spectacular victory was accomplished in the last five years of the eighth century when Harūn al-Rashīd and his Barmakid wazirs, the brothers Faḍl and Jaʿfar, patronized the industry, adopted paper for use in the state chancellory,²⁸ and urged the public to use it for their needs even for Qurʾānic codices.²⁹ This would seem to indicate that paper had already become generally acceptable for fine books, otherwise it would not have been even suggested for Qurʾānic writing.

This did not mean that other writing materials went out of use rapidly, but rather that paper soon became the preferred material³⁰ in the Asiatic provinces where local factories began to supplement the imported Khurāsānian variety.³¹ This

being the case, one should expect to find some reference to paper books originating in these parts in the first half of the ninth century.³² One very significant reference, dating from the reign of Maʾmūn (198–218/813–33), relates to Ḥunain ibn Ishāq and his secretary-copyist, al-Azraq, whose books, both for content and penmanship, literally commanded their weight in silver dirhams. Therefore, to increase their cash value, these books were "written in large heavy Kūfīc letters with lines far apart and on paper that was three to four times the normal thickness of the paper manufactured at the time."³³ There is also the reference to a fine forty-volume work, each volume of two hundred or more pages of the Ṭalḥī variety of Khurāsānian paper—named after Ṭalḥah ibn Ṭāḥir, governor of Khurāsān (207–213/822–28)³⁴—written by Mohammed ibn Ḥabīb (d. 245/860) for the wazir Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān.³⁵

Turning now to the testimony of the few extant third-century paper manu-

rials so far on hand suggest a modification of both positions, as I hope to be able to show at some later date. For the present, the controversy is of no major significance here, since the widespread use of paper in the ninth century, regardless of its place of manufacture, is not questioned.

²⁷ Note must be taken of the fact that the sources do not, as a rule, specify the writing material of a book mentioned in passing. Even more disconcerting is their use of *qirṭas*, *kāghid*, and *warāq* interchangeably, though the first generally means "papyrus," the second "paper," and the third is used for both papyrus and paper (cf. Qalqashandī, II, 475–77).

²⁸ Ibn Abī Usaibīʿah, *ʿUyūn al-Anbāʾ fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aʿyibāʾ*, ed. August Müller (2 vols.; Cairo and Königsberg, 1882–84), I, 187 and 197. This was, in all probability, after Maʾmūn's return from Khurāsān to Baghdad in 204/819. It indicates the manufacture in Baghdad of paper made to order according to the buyer's specifications. It is significant to note in this connection that, in time, the paper of Baghdad came to be considered as the very best because of its thickness coupled with pliability, while the paper of Damascus took second place (cf. Qalqashandī, II, 476).

²⁹ Cf. Karabacek, *Das arabische Papier*, p. 118; *Fihrist*, p. 21.

³⁰ *Fihrist*, pp. 106–7. Some twenty volumes of the work survived to Nadīm's day, who is describing them firsthand.

²⁷ The fibers revealed by 250–530 magnifications are similar to linen fibers shown on pp. 195 and 198 of the preceding reference. I am indebted to Mr. P. Delougaz, curator of the Oriental Institute Museum, for technical assistance in the above analysis.

²⁸ Cf. Karabacek, *Das arabische Papier*, pp. 117–21.

²⁹ Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-Aʿshā* (14 vols.; Cairo, 1913–19), II, 475.

³⁰ E.g., the Ṭāhirid governor of Baghdād, finding himself short of paper during the wars of Mustaʿīn and Muʿtazz (248–51–55/862–65–69), instructed his secretaries to write a small hand and to be brief, since papyrus was not desirable (cf. Thaʿālibī, *Khawṣṣ al-Khawṣṣ* [Cairo, 1236], p. 71, and Ṭabarī, III, 1506, 1510–11).

³¹ Karabacek, *Das arabische Papier*, pp. 121–25, argues for the rapid spread of paper factories, while Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islam* (Heidelberg, 1922), pp. 439–41, believes the progress to have been slower. More recent summaries of the history of Arabic paper draw on these two authors. New mate-

scripts that have so far come to light, one must keep in mind that papyrus and paper documents and books originating in these regions had small prospects, ordinarily, of long survival³⁶ unless chance, as with our "Nights" manuscript, carried them off to the desert of Sinai or the sands of Egypt. The wonder is not that so few have survived but that any have survived at all. The oldest dated paper manuscript hitherto known is a copy of the *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* of Abū 'Ubaid al-Qāsim ibn al-Sallām (d. ca. 230/844) of 'Irāq and Khurāsān. The copy now in Leiden is dated 252/866 and is illustrated in Wright's *Facsimiles*, Plate VI.³⁷ The only other dated paper book of the third century that has come to my attention is a copy of the *Masā'il* of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) as transmitted by Abū Da'ūd (d. 275/888) and dated 266/879. The manuscript is in the Zāhiriyyah Library³⁸ at Damascus where I was recently privileged to see and examine it.³⁹

That the Oriental Institute manuscript of the "Nights" is earlier than the last-mentioned book goes without saying. That it is earlier than 252/866 is almost equally apparent, fourteen years being far too few to age a book of its type. Book production of the time was slow and expensive, even when hastily executed by professional scribes from the author's dictation.⁴⁰ The script of the "Nights" places

it among the more carefully executed and time-consuming enterprises of some author or copyist. This in turn suggests that the copy on hand was an expensive and valued possession long treasured by some owner ere time and misfortune rendered its pages scraps of paper. A conservative estimate would allow some half a century, at the least, for this aging and repeated misuse. This throws back the date of the original manuscript to about the first or, at the most second, decade of the third century of the Hijrah or, roughly, to the first quarter of the ninth century of our era. Thus on the evidence, so far, of the manuscript itself, we have here the oldest known extant *paper book* to come out of the Islamic world.

This leads to the consideration of the extant third-century Arabic books on papyrus and parchment or vellum. The second half of the century yields the *Jāmi'* of Ibn Wahb, a collection of Traditions written at Asnā in Egypt on papyrus and dated 276/889. The manuscript has been published in part⁴¹ and is now in the Egyptian National Library at Cairo, where the present writer recently had the pleasure of working with it firsthand. The four other dated Arabic manuscripts from this period are all on parchment or vellum and deal with Christian literature. The first, believed to be the earliest dated Christian Arabic manuscript extant, is a treatise on Christian theology dated 264/872.⁴² The second contains lives of saints and ascetic discourses copied in 272/885

³⁶ Cf. the writer's "An Arabic Papyrus in the Oriental Institute," *JNES*, V (1946), 169.

³⁷ Cf. also M. J. de Goeje in *ZDMG*, XVIII, 781-807.

³⁸ Cf. *Der Islam*, XVII (1928), 250, and Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Suppl., I (1937), 310.

³⁹ Thanks to the courtesy of the director of the library, Mr. 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥālāh, who not only put the facilities of the library at my disposal but kindly accompanied me on several trips to see some well-known private manuscript collections.

⁴⁰ The famous al-Firā' (d. 207/822), tutor to Ma'mūn's sons, outwitted his publisher's greed, which made his books too expensive for the general public,

by starting to dictate his next work direct to the people; cf. Abū Bakr al-Khaṭīb, *Ta'rikh Baghdād* (14 vols.; Cairo and Baghdād, 1931), XIV, 150, and Yā-qūt, *Irshād* ("Dictionary of Learned Men") ("Gibb Memorial Series" [7 vols.; Leyden, 1907-27]), VII, 227-28.

⁴¹ Cf. p. 131, n. 5.

⁴² Cf. A. S. Lewis and M. D. Gibson, "Forty-one Facsimiles of Dated Christian Arabic Manuscripts," *Studia Sinaitica*, Vol. XII (Cambridge, 1907), Pl. XX.

by an ʿIrāqī monk in Palestine for a monastery in Mount Sinai.⁴³ The third is of similar nature written by the same monk in the same year of 272,⁴⁴ and the fourth is New Testament material completed in 279/892.⁴⁵

Next to our "Nights," the only other known manuscript that dates from the first half of the third century is a manuscript now in Heidelberg. This is the story of the prophets in the tradition of Wahb ibn Munabbih and his immediate transmitters. It is of Egyptian origin, written on papyrus, and is dated 229/844.⁴⁶ Its script bears little resemblance to that of the "Nights." This difference in the scripts of two manuscripts so close together in their dates can be explained, I believe, by the fact that the one is on papyrus and represents a current Egyptian book hand while the other is on paper and represents an early variety of the book hand of the Asiatic provinces. Being also the earliest extant specimen of this latter book hand, the present manuscript affords a new landmark in the study of Arabic paleography.

To sum up our findings: the third century of Islam has yielded hitherto, parchment Qurʾāns excluded, but eight dated Arabic books of either Moslem or Christian origin. Of these, two are on papyrus, dated 229 and 276; two are on paper, dated 252 and 266; and four are on parchment, dated 264, 272, and 279. Therefore, our manuscript of the "Nights," aged and tattered by 266, is certainly older than the paper and parchment manuscripts of 252 and 264, respectively. Furthermore, this manuscript, originating most likely in the

earlier decades of the century, as we have tried to show above, emerges, exclusive of parchment Qurʾāns, not only as definitely the earliest Arabic *paper* book known to come down to us out of the Moslem world but also as most probably the earliest known Arabic book extant, irrespective of the writing material, to come out of the Arab world, Christian or Moslem.⁴⁷

With continued research and new discoveries the present manuscript may have to yield, sooner or later, some of its multiple honors. But the one distinction it is least likely to surrender at any time, if ever, is the fact of its being the earliest manuscript extant of the *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights."

III

Thus far this study has been limited more or less to the evidence of the manuscript, direct or inferred, in seeking the answer to the when of this particular fragment of the *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights." But the larger and more complex questions of the relationship of the ancient Persian *Hazār Afsāna* to the *Arabian Nights* and of the early history of the latter bring us to the consideration of the early Arabic sources bearing on

⁴⁷ There are several other undated manuscripts that are attributed to the third century, largely on paleographic grounds alone. They are all Christian manuscripts on parchment with the exception of one that is on paper and one parchment manuscript that consists of Islamic Traditions written in Kūfī. Cf. M. D. Gibson, *Apocrypha Arabica, Studia Sinaitica*, VIII (London, 1901), x and Pl. I; Fleischer, *op. cit.*, III, 388-94; Wright, *op. cit.*, Pls. XIX and CXL; and the writer's "Arabic Paleography," *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82, this latter for special comment on the Islamic manuscript. Oriental Institute No. 12027 is an incomplete paper copy of Baghawī's (d. 210 or 14/825 or 829) *Muʿjam al-Ṣaḥābah* and was believed by Moritz, from whom it was bought, to be an autograph copy of the author. This I very much doubt, though the manuscript itself is probably from the third century. Further work on the text itself may yet yield some clues for a more definite dating within the century. Cf. Brockelmann, *Suppl.*, I, 278, where the fragment there mentioned is very likely none other than that now in the Oriental Institute.

⁴³ Cf. Wright, *op. cit.*, Pl. XX.

⁴⁴ Cf. H. L. Fleischer, *Kleinere Schriften* (3 vols.; Leipzig, 1888), III, 393-94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 389-90.

⁴⁶ Cf. the writer's "An Arabic Papyrus in the Oriental Institute," *JNES*, V (1946), 169-70, and references there cited.

these problems. These sources themselves now take on added significance, since they can be checked and supplemented by the very existence of our manuscript at so early a date as well as by its textual contribution. The earliest and most relevant source materials are the well-known passages from Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab* and Nadīm's *Fihrist* written in the first and second half of the fourth century of the Hijrah, respectively, or late in the first and second half of the tenth century of our era. Hence, our manuscript is better than a century older than the earliest reference to the *Nights* hitherto known. The literary passages in question have been much quoted and discussed since von Hammer⁴⁸ first pointed them out, more than a century ago, as a sequel to Galland's spectacular introduction of *Arabian Nights* to the Western world. They have since formed the basis of searching investigations by such first-rate scholars as de Sacy, Zotenberg, Lane, Nöldeke, Oestrup, Macdonald, and Littmann. It is not intended to outline here the long history of these investigations with the numerous controversies arising out of them in regard to the origin, date, title, framework, and content of the early *Nights*.⁴⁹ The aim is rather to center the attention primarily on those controversial points on which the present manuscript throws sufficient light either to settle the issue involved or to point to a fresh line of approach in the search for the probable answer.

In the interest of ready reference, it is

⁴⁸ For his bibliography on the *Nights*, cf. Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes*, IV (1900), 1-2.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, Vol. IV, for the earlier bibliographical materials; for the more recent studies cf. J. Oestrup, *Studien über 1001 Nacht* (1891), trans. O. Rescher (Stuttgart, 1925), Foreword (not paginated), and pp. 5-21 (3-26 in the original Danish); Enno Littmann, *Die Erzählungen aus den Tausend und Ein Nächten* (6 vols.; Leipzig, 1928), VI, 770-71.

best to begin with a translation of the source passages referred to above.⁵⁰ Variant readings are in square brackets.

Many of those well acquainted with their *akhbār* (pseudo-historical tales of 'Abid [Ubad] ibn Sharyah and others of the court of Mu'āwīyah)⁵¹ state that these *akhbār* are apographal, embellished, and fabricated, strung together by those who drew nigh to the kings by relating them and who duped their contemporaries with memorizing and reciting them (as authentic. They state, furthermore), that they are of the same type as the books which have been transmitted to us and translated for us from the Persian [Pahlavi], Indian and Greek—books composed in like manner as the above mentioned—such as the book of *Hazār Afsāna*, or translated from the Persian to the Arabic of a *Thousand Khurāfāt*, (fantastic tales) for *khurāfa* in Persian is called *afsāna*. The people call this book *A Thousand Nights [and a Night]*. It is the story of the king and the wazir and his daughter and her nurse [or maid, or sister, or the wazir and his two daughters] named Shīrāzād [Shīrāzād] and Dīnāzād [Dīnārazād] and such as the *Book of Farza [Jalī'ad] and Shīmās* and what is in it of the stories of the kings of India and their wazirs. And such as the *Book of Sindbād* and other books of this nature.⁵²

The *Fihrist* passage reads as follows:

The first who made separate compilations of *khurāfāt* into books and placed these latter into libraries and in some gave speaking parts to beasts were the early Persians. Thereafter the Ashghanian kings, who were the third

⁵⁰ There are several textual difficulties involved in these passages. This in turn has resulted in somewhat varying translations. I shall make grateful use of those offered by de Sacy and Macdonald, altering them only where the text in its context would seem to demand the change.

⁵¹ 'Abid ibn Sharyah, *Akhbār* (Hayderabad, 1347/1928-9), paginated consecutively with Wahb ibn Munabbih's *Kitāb al-Tijān*, pp. 312-13; cf. Brockelmann, *Suppl.*, I, 100-101.

⁵² Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, IV, 90-91; cf. Silvestre de Sacy, "Les Mille et une nuits," *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, X (1833), 30-64, esp. pp. 38-41, 62-64; Duncan Black Macdonald, "The Earlier History of the Arabian Nights," *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 353-97, esp. pp. 362-63.

dynasty of kings of Persia, became deeply absorbed in these. Thereafter that (kind of books) increased and spread in the days of the Sassanian kings. The Arabs translated these into the Arabic tongue. Then the eloquent and the rhetoricians took them in hand and revised them and re-wrote them in elegant style and composed, along the same idea, books that resembled them.

The first book that was made along this (*khurāfāt*) idea was the book of *Hazār Afsāna* which means a *Thousand Khurāfāt*. The reason for its composition was that one of their kings whenever he had married a woman and passed a night with her, killed her on the morrow. Presently he married a maiden of royal descent, possessed of understanding and knowledge, who was called Shahrazād. And when she was first with him, she began telling him *khurāfāt* carrying the story along at the end of the night in such a way as to lead the king to preserve her alive and to ask her on the following night for the completion of the story until she had passed a thousand nights. . . . And the king had a stewardess (*qahramānah*) who was called Dinārzād and she assisted her in that.

The truth is—Allah willing—that the first to whom stories were told at night was Alexander the Great. He had people who used to make him laugh and tell him *khurāfāt*, not that he was seeking pleasure thereby but only as a means of keeping vigilant and on his guard. After him the kings used for that purpose the book of *Hazār Afsāna*. It contains a thousand nights and less than two hundred night stories, for the narration of a story often lasted through several nights. I have seen it in its entirety several times. It is in reality a worthless book of silly tales.

Ibn ʿAbdūs al-Jahshiyārī, the author of *Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ*, began to compile a book in which he made choice of a thousand night-stories, *alf samar*, out of the night-stories of the Arabs, Persians, Greeks, and others, each part independent in itself and unconnected with another. He summoned the tellers of night-stories and took from them the best of what they knew and in which they excelled. Then he selected from books of night stories and *khurāfāt* what was to his taste and what was supe-

rior. So, out of all these, he brought together 480 nights, for each night a complete story consisting of fifty pages, more or less. But death overtook him before he had accomplished his intention of completing (the collection of) a thousand night-stories. I have seen several parts of the collection in the handwriting of Abū al-Ṭaiyib the brother of al-Shāfiʿī.

Now previous to this (activity of Ibn ʿAbdūs) there were a group of men who composed night-stories and *khurāfāt* giving speaking parts to people, birds, and beasts. Among them were ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Sahl ibn Harūn and ʿAlī ibn Daʿūd the secretary of Zubaidah, and others.⁵³

Before going any further with these and other early sources, it is possible to settle definitely, on the evidence of the earlier text of our manuscript, some of the controversies relative to the original title of the *Nights*, to the names of the two women in the frame story, and to these women's relationship each to the other.

First as to the title. Though Masʿūdī and Nadīm both equate a "thousand *af-sāna*" with a "thousand *khurāfāt*," neither mentions specifically an Arabic book, translated or original, bearing the title of a *Thousand Khurāfāt*. Furthermore, Masʿūdī states that in his day the Arabic translation of the *Hazār Afsāna* circulated among the people under the Arabic title of *Alf Lailah*. Our manuscript fragment also yields the title *Alf Lailah*. This would seem to indicate that the change from a "thousand *khurāfāt*" to a "thousand nights" was made either at the time of the first translation of the *Hazār Afsāna* or more probably became currently popular soon after. This is understandable if one recalls the leading role originally given to the night in the very inception of the *Hazār Afsāna* and the long tradition of relating at night not only the

⁵³ *Fihrist*, p. 304; Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 364–66. For some of the "others" mentioned by Nadīm in passing, cf. below, p. 155.

khurāfāt or fantastic tales but also the *akhbār*—or legends and quasi-historical tales—as well as the *asmār* or night-stories proper. These three categories of tales, whatever their distinctive character and precise differences, have, nevertheless, much in common. It is therefore not surprising that they soon came to share the night between them. Perhaps in a moment of passing insight, some of the eloquent rhetoricians referred to in the passage translated above made the change to the appropriate and pleasantly alliterative title of *Alf Lailah* or *A Thousand Nights*.⁵⁴ It is not clear when this title yielded in turn to the longer *Alf Lailah wa Lailah*, *A Thousand and One Nights*. But inasmuch as the number “a thousand and one” is absent in the *Fihrist* passage quoted, it is improbable that any Arabic book of night-stories bore this longer title before the end of the fourth century of the Hijrah or the tenth century of our era.⁵⁵

It is unfortunate that our fragment does not yield the name of the storyteller herself. However, in giving the dotted form of the name of her companion, it not only settles that issue but also provides a likely clue to the original Persian name of the heroine. It makes certain that the companion's name was Dīn-āzād and not Dunyāzād nor yet Dīnārazād. Furthermore, Dīnāzād is actually met with in the greater number of the manuscripts

⁵⁴ Cf. Oestrup, pp. 86–87. (119–20), where he seems at a loss to explain this change.

⁵⁵ For the different early views on these numbers, their changes and their significance, cf. Oestrup, pp. 84–87 (116–21) and Littmann, VI, 696–97. See also Richard Burton, *Nights*, X, 75. The edition available to me gives no place and date of publication. It is, nevertheless, the ten volumes of *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night* and the seven volumes of *The Supplemental Nights*, published by the so-called “Burton Club”—a nom de plume of a certain Boston publisher—presumably in Boston, in 1903. It is, except for splitting Volume III of the *Supplemental Nights* into two volumes, a facsimile of the original Benares edition of 1885–88; cf. Norman M. Penzer, *An annotated Bibliography of Sir Richard Francis Burton* (London, 1923), pp. 126, 130–32.

of Mas'ūdī's text, and this usually in combination with Shīrāzād—a fact which led de Sacy to accept these as the original forms.⁵⁶ Thus in eliminating Dunyāzād, “World Freer,” doubt is thrown on the form neatly coupled with it, namely, Shahrāzād, “City Freer.” Two such names could well belong to two sisters, though one would expect the older to be called Dunyāzād and the younger Shahrāzād. But they would hardly be bestowed, in the same household, on the daughter of the house and on her nurse or maid even in this second order, let alone the first. It is to be further noted that in the known manuscripts of Mas'ūdī's text, the names Dīnāzād and Shīrāzād are met with more frequently in combination with *dāyah*, “foster-mother” or “wet-nurse” and *jāriyah*, “maid-servant,” than with *ukht*, “sister.”⁵⁷ These names sharing the word *āzād*, “free, pure, noble,” between them are distinguished by *dīn*, “religion, faith,” and by *shīr*, “lion.” One may freely translate Dīnāzād as “of noble religion” or “pure in faith”—a quality much sought after in trusted personal servants for the young—and Shīrāzād as “Lionhearted.” The lion itself being the symbol of Persian royalty and courage, this latter name is aptly descriptive of both the royal birth and the outstanding personal courage of the heroine of the *Nights*.

In the Oriental Institute manuscript Dīnāzād addresses the heroine as her “delectable one.” Now an older sister may use this and similar romantic terms of endearment toward a younger sister; but in

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 38–41, 62–64.

⁵⁷ The fact that *qahramānah*, “stewardess,” does not seem to appear in any copy of Mas'ūdī's text would seem to indicate that the word is either a later addition or else belongs with Nadīm's version of the frame story which makes Shīrāzād's companion not one who accompanied her from her father's home, but a woman of the king's household. But in the latter case she would be a stranger and therefore not likely to be so familiar or affectionate with the heroine as our text implies.

all oriental countries, up to very modern times, etiquette demanded that a younger sister show due respect rather than light-hearted affection in addressing an older sister or any other older person for that matter. On the other hand, wet-nurses and personal maids generally make use of a long list of fantastic and superlative endearments in speaking to or of their precious charges. Thus the use of this early ninth-century fragment of the *Nights* to control⁵⁸ and supplement the next earliest reference to the collection, namely, Mas'ūdī's account of more than a century later, permits us to conclude that in the earliest Arabic version of the *Nights* the names of the two women in the frame work were Shīrāzād and Dīnāzād and that the latter was almost certainly not a younger sister but an older nurse.⁵⁹

The contribution of the precious fragment so far, significant as it is, is minor in comparison to the light that the manuscript throws on the much wider problems of the origin and early evolution of the *Nights*. Here two major lines of approach need to be followed and explored. The first leads to the consideration of the time and the nature of the first impact of the Persian *Hazār Afsāna* on the Arabic literary world. The second seeks the steps in the subsequent development of the *Nights* up to Nadīm's time, that is, the late tenth century of our era.⁶⁰

The passages from Mas'ūdī and Nadīm already translated above need to be sup-

plemented at this point with other materials from these same early authors and from a few others. It is Mas'ūdī who informs us that the first wave of literary and scientific translation among the Arabs took place in the reign and under the patronage of the 'Abbāsid caliph Maṣṣūr (A.H. 135-58/A.D. 754-75). Among the books then translated was that of *Kaḥlāh and Dimnah* which Nadīm includes, along with the *Hazār Afsāna*, in his section on *khurāfāt* and *asmār*.⁶¹ Some of the other books mentioned in these passages as of the same category as the *Hazār Afsāna* are also known to have been translated in the eighth century. These facts led several scholars to accept the translation of the *Hazār Afsāna* itself either in Maṣṣūr's time or soon after as not at all improbable. Oestrup went as far as to suggest that an Arabic *Nights* bearing the title mentioned by Mas'ūdī already existed at the beginning of the ninth century.⁶² On the other hand, other noted scholars have insisted that Mas'ūdī's passages yield nothing definite beyond the fact of the existence of an Arabic *Nights* in the early tenth century and that Ibn 'Abdūs' (d. 331/942) unfinished collection of about the same time represents the first attempt to edit and literalize the *Arabian Nights*. Broadly stated, the two points of view have over a century as a major issue between them.⁶³

The Oriental Institute manuscript, itself of the early ninth century, establishes beyond a doubt the existence of an Arabic version of the *Nights* at that time. But it does much more than that by virtue of its literary style and the nature of its text. These latter, when tested by Nadīm's

⁵⁸ It is to be noted that this control can be extended up to a point and used as a factor in determining the relative chronological age of the available manuscripts of this section of Mas'ūdī's *Murūj* and of the relevant section of Nadīm's *Fihrist*.

⁵⁹ de Sacy, in his reconstruction of Mas'ūdī's text, arrived at these same conclusions; cf. above, p. 150.

⁶⁰ The equally wide and fascinating problem of the origin and earlier history of the *Hazār Afsāna* itself, on the one hand, and of the post-tenth-century development of the *Nights*, on the other, fall outside the scope of the contribution of the Oriental Institute manuscript.

⁶¹ Mas'ūdī, VIII, 290-91; *Fihrist*, pp. 304-5.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, p. 91 (126); cf. below, pp. 160-61.

⁶³ Oestrup summarizes the arguments, pro and con, on these points up to his time; cf. esp., pp. 9, 80-82, 91, 99, 105-6 (9, 111-14, 126, 137, 146-47) and corrects on p. 81 (112) Maṣṣūr's dates to read not 712-55 but 754-75. For more recent developments in both camps, cf. Littmann, VI, 695-96, 705-6.

three evolutionary stages of this class of Arabic literature in general and, by logical and justified inference, also of the *Nights* in particular, are seen already to have passed the initial stage of literal translation to those of literary revision and of creative imitation. For the brief passage is certainly written in an elegant style already familiar in the second century of the Hijrah or eighth century of our era. This is the literary device of *Aḍḍād*, the treatment of a subject and its opposite, or the treatment of the same subject pro and con.⁶⁴ Again, the text, while not necessarily excluding tales of non-Arabic origin, does definitely specify Syrian and Bedouin stories cast within the framework of the *Hazār Afsāna*. This is evidence enough of Nadīm's third stage, namely, creative imitation. That this stage should have been already reached by the early ninth century is further evidence that the *Hazār Afsāna* must have made its first impact on the Arabic literary world in Maṣṣūr's time or very soon thereafter.

Again, attention must be drawn to the accumulative evidence, including the emphasis of the text on Syrian tales, that points to Syria as the provenance of our manuscript.⁶⁵ It would be strange indeed if the capital province of ʿIrāq, where Persian influence was certainly greater than in Syria, had not kept up with the latter in production of this type of literature. It becomes necessary here to consider at some length the relationship of the Oriental Institute manuscript to the still earlier Arabic manuscripts of the *Nights*, the

contemporary existence of which is demanded by the very nature of our manuscript. For it is reasonable to expect that the *very first attempt* to put into written form any or all of what was to be an Arabic *Nights*, either by direct translation from or by imitation of the *Hazār Afsāna*, would certainly call for the inclusion of an adequate introduction that would give the setting and the framework for these tales. Our manuscript, intact in its title-page, pious invocation, and short introductory paragraph, nevertheless lacks this necessary complete introduction. Its title is not a clear-cut *Kitāb Alf Laylah*, "Book of a Thousand Nights";⁶⁶ it plunges headlong into a "following night" without any setting for the tales; and it uses part only of a known framework that it does not itself introduce or explain. These are factors that indicate that the man behind the manuscript, be he author, compiler, or copyist, meant to produce nothing more than either an actual "selection" from the *Nights* or new tales intended to pass as a "selection" from that work. The great probability is that our manuscript is in the tradition of other likewise partial compilations, these being either descendants of or accretions to an earlier manuscript version(s) containing the necessary introduction with the complete framework. It is highly probable, therefore, that the parent Arabic *Nights* originated in ʿIrāq and that ʿIrāq itself had its own "selections" in circulation by the beginning of the ninth or the end of the eighth century. It is perhaps too much to hope that any of these have survived.

Again the Oriental Institute manuscript is a starting point for the tracing of the development of the *Nights* through the ninth century and up to Ibn ʿAbdūs' collection of night-stories in the early tenth century. The accelerated speed and

⁶⁴ For late second- and early third-century works of these types produced by some of the outstanding scholars of the day, including Aṣmaʿī (d. 216/831) and Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), and written from linguistic and literary points of view, cf. Brockelmann, *op. cit.*, I, 103, 105, 117, 153, and *Suppl.* I, 167, 246, and 249; August Haßner, *Drei Arabische Quellenwerke über die ʿAddād* (Beirut, 1913).

⁶⁵ Cf. above, pp. 144-45.

⁶⁶ Cf. above, p. 132.

increasing momentum of the many faceted literary movement that had already produced an Arabic *Nights* by the late eighth, or at the most early ninth, century continued to grow throughout the period under consideration. The ninth and tenth centuries yielded a literary harvest that was not to be surpassed in the entire history of Islam. Copious literary evidence indicates that the lighter literature, the *khurāfāt* and *asmār* to which class the *Nights* belong, shared all along the way in this rapid and extensive movement, though generally on a somewhat lower level of respectability. The list of those who contributed to it is quite impressive for its continuity from the last of the reign of the Umayyad caliph Mu'āwiyah (41–60/661–80) to the reign of the 'Abbāsīd caliph Muqtadir (295–320/908–32). It is equally impressive for the rich diversity and the caliber of some of its contributors, several of whom were polyglots engaged in translations from the Greek and the Persian. There is little to be gained in giving here the long list of names and dates of all of these: suffice it to say that they included 'Abīd ibn Sharyah of the court of Mu'āwiyah,⁶⁷ Jablah ibn Sālim⁶⁸ of the time of Hishām (105–25/724–43), Ibn al-Muqaffa⁶⁹ of the reign of Manṣūr (135–58/754–75), al-'Atābī⁷⁰ and Hishām al-Kalbī⁷¹ of the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–93/786–809), Mufaḍḍal ibn Salama (c. 250/865),⁷² Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir (d. 280/893),⁷³ Ibn 'Abdūs (d. 321/942),⁷⁴ and Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahānī (d. 360/970).

It is the tenth century with its Mas'ūdī

and Nadīm, as already seen, that yields the most significant literary references to this entire class of literature. Three other references from this same century supplement, in some measure, our still too scanty knowledge. Sūlī, court scholar and tutor to Prince Mohammed, son of the caliph Muqtadir, writing in 320/932, reports the following incident. In the midst of a lesson on Arabic literature tutor and pupil were rudely disturbed when servants from the palace of grandmother Shaghab walked silently in, collected all the young prince's books, and departed with them, leaving Mohammed in a rage. Sūlī calmed his young charge and future caliph, al-Rādī (322–29/934–40), by pointing out that the queen and her party were probably checking on his reading and that he should not object to this opportunity of letting it be known that his books were of the very best. Several hours later the servants returned with the books to be greeted by the prince with, "Tell them who sent you, 'You have seen these books and found them to be books of tradition, jurisprudence, poetry, language, history, and the works of the learned—books through the study of which God causes one to benefit and to be complete. They are not like the books which you read excessively such as *The Wonders of the Sea*, *The Tale of Sindbad*, and *The Cat and the Mouse*.'" ⁷⁵

The second reference comes from the pen of Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahānī, who informs us in his general history (finished in 350/961) that Alexander the Great, after his conquest of Persia, divided the country into petty kingdoms under the Ashgarian kings who thereafter engaged not in war but in contests of difficult questions, "so that in their days were composed the books which are now in the hands of the people, such as the *Book of Marūk*, and

⁶⁷ Cf. above, p. 150, n. 51, and *Fihrist*, pp. 89–90.

⁶⁸ *Fihrist*, pp. 305, 244–45.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 305–6, 118.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 308, 121.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷² Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 371–72.

⁷³ *Fihrist*, pp. 308, 146–47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 305; cf. Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 367–72, for general analysis of *Fihrist*, pp. 305–13.

⁷⁵ *Akhbār al-Rādī wa al-Muttaqī* (from *K. al-Awrāq*, ed. J. Heyworth Dunne [Cairo, 1354/1935], pp. 5–6).

the *Book of Sindbād*, and the *Book of Barsanās* and the *Book of Shimās* and the like, about seventy books in all."⁷⁶ Here quite obviously Ḥamzah is dealing with the same *khurāfāt* and *asmār* literature with which Mas'ūdī and Nadīm are concerned. He in part confirms and in part supplements both of these authors' accounts, particularly in his mentioning specific titles and in giving a general estimate of the number of foreign books of that type current in the first half of the tenth century. It would seem therefore that he was readily acquainted with the history of this literature if not indeed with its current supply. His context, he may have felt, did not call for more than this passing remark. At any rate we know that he was interested in the Arab and Jewish counterpart of this same literature; for he is eager to add from the Persian stock of such tales one that was as yet unknown to the Arabs and places this story in the same class as the Arab tales of Luqmān ibn 'Ād and the Jewish tales of 'Uj and Bulūqiyā.⁷⁷ Again he selects a list of Arab *khurāfāt* that had given rise to proverbs still current in his day and appends these to his larger work of Arabic proverbs.⁷⁸ Ḥamzah, therefore, must have been acquainted with both the Persian *Hazār Afsāna* and the Arabic *Alf Lailah*, both of which, according to Mas'ūdī's account, were popular among the people in Ḥamzāh's own day.⁷⁹ It is therefore not unlikely that some of his unpublished works may yet reveal with certainty both the fact and

the extent of his familiarity with these particular works.

The third reference is to the *Hazār Afsāna* itself, but only as typifying the entire class of *khurāfāt*. It comes from Tauḥidī, who, writing in 374/984, characterizes these narratives as "containing unfounded statements, mixed with the impossible, conjoined to the marvelous and the entertaining, and incapable of derivation and verification." There is also the implication that such tales are particularly enjoyed by women and youths.⁸⁰

The next problem for consideration is the absence of more frequent and specific mention of the Arabic *Alf Lailah* in works of Arabic literature. Hitherto this problem has centered largely on the scarcity of materials from the late tenth century onward, for those who interpreted Mas'ūdī's reference to mean that the first Arabic *Nights* took form about his own time, dismissed the question of earlier references as irrelevant. On the other hand, those who believed Mas'ūdī's passage to mean an eighth-century translation of the *Hazār Afsāna* and a ninth-century Arabic *Alf Lailah* seem to have tacitly assumed the loss of earlier references to both these books including Mas'ūdī's own sources. But now that we know definitely of the existence of an Arabic *Nights* between the late eighth and the early ninth centuries, attention needs to be focused as much on this lack of tangible pre-tenth-century references as on their subsequent rarity.⁸¹ Allowing for some necessary time lag between the appearance of a literary phenomenon and its subsequent treatment by literary historians, the eighth century is

⁷⁶ *Ta'rikh* ("Analium"), ed. J. M. E. Gottwaldt (2 vols.; Lipsica, 1848), I, 41-42; cf. Oestrup, pp. 30-31; Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 361-62.

⁷⁷ *Ta'rikh*, I, 64; cf. Eugen Mittwoch, "Die literarische Tätigkeit Ḥamza al-Iṣbahānīs," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für orientalische Sprachen (MSOS)*, XII (1909), 140.

⁷⁸ Mittwoch, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-47, and in *MSOS*, XVI (1913), 37-50. I have been unable to discover any further work by Mittwoch on these as expected by Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, p. 362.

⁷⁹ Cf. Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 361-62.

⁸⁰ Tauḥidī, *Al-Imtā' wa al-Mu'ānasah*, I, 23. I am indebted to Professor Von Grunebaum for this reference.

⁸¹ For the few later references to either the *Hazār Afsāna* or the *Alf Lailah*, cf. Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 367, 379-80, 390; Littmann, VI, 697; Oestrup, p. 98 (135-36).

obviously too early to expect much from it in this respect.⁸² Not so the ninth century. One wonders, for instance, if the movement could have really escaped the

⁸² There is a tantalizing reference to an *Alf Lailah* by al-Aṣma'ī (122–216/739–831) that is reported by E. J. W. Gibb in Burton (*Supplemental Nights*, III, 41–42) and passed over by both without comment. The reference itself is made by the Turkish author 'Alī 'Azīz Efendī of Crete in his *Mukhayyalāt-i Ledun-i Illāhī* ("Phantasms from the Divine Presence"), written in 1211/1796–97 and published at Constantinople in 1268/1851–52. The author cites as his source (Turkish text, p. 3), a *Khulāṣat al-Khayāl*, "Extracts of Phantasms," compiled from the Syriac, Hebrew, and other languages. He adds: "When it had been entirely perused and its strange matter considered, as one would from an esoteric scrip or a philosophic volume, such as would cause heedfulness and consideration, and yield counsel and admonition, like the 'Ibret-numā of Lāmi'ī and the Elf Leyle of Aṣma'ī (الف الليلي أصمعي in the Turkish text), certain of the strange

stories and wonderful tales of the book were selected and separated, and having been arranged, dervish-fashion in simple style, were made the adornment of the pen of composition and offered to the notice of them of penetration. For all that this book is of the class of phantasms, still, as it has been written in conformity with the position of the readers of these times, it is of its virtues that its perusal will of a surety dispel sadness of heart" (cf. Burton, *op. cit.*, III, 41–47, for Gibb's extracts, in translation, and comments).

The resulting *Mukhayyalāt* contains three phantasms, each consisting of a principal story supported by several subordinate tales. These, in their style and objective, seem to have much in common with the allegorical romances in verse and prose of the famed Lāmi'ī (d. between 1530 and 1532) (cf. E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry* [6 vols.; London, 1900–9], III, 20–34, 353–74). The *'Ibret-numā* (not available to me) is a prose romance characterized by Gibb as "a collection of wild and fantastic allegories" (*ibid.*, III, 21). The *Mukhayyalāt* indeed justifies its title and carries out the main objective of the author who presents us with highly imaginative and fairly entertaining romances wherein pious men "yield counsel and admonition" through the exercise of supernatural powers. Not only is there a common ground between these phantasms and the didactic and supernatural elements of the *Nights*, but the first phantasm (Turkish text, pp. 3–73) actually consists largely of tales from the following stories of the *Nights*: Qamar al-Zamān and Prince Amjad, The Enchanted Horse, and Zain al-Asnām, all woven into one cycle. Thus while the author's reference to the *Alf Lailah* is not inappropriate, his crediting Aṣma'ī with an edition of that work remains somewhat a puzzle. That Aṣma'ī edited a "Thousand Nights" which remained unknown and unnoticed through the centuries before and after 'Alī 'Azīz Efendī seems hardly possible. On the other hand, in view of the Oriental Institute manuscript confirming the existence of a "Thousand Nights" in Aṣma'ī's own day, it does not seem improbable that this famed and prolific scholar made reference to the collection in some of his works still unknown to us. The answer may

attention of the encyclopedic Jāhīz (d. 255/869), whose unusual talents were most certainly appreciated by Mas'ūdī⁸³ among many others. Be that as it may, the reason for this marked rarity of reference early or late to the *Alf Lailah* is to be sought, up to a point, in influences that are common to both periods.

The main factors to consider in this respect are the very nature of this *khurāfāt* literature and its standing among the Arabs. *Khurāfah*, from whom this class of story takes its name, is supposed to have been a contemporary of Mohammed to whom, among others, he related his experiences in the world of the jinns. Mohammed, in turn, is said to have repeated this and similar tales to Aishah and the other members of his harem. *Khurāfah*'s story as reported by Mufaḍḍal ibn Salama⁸⁴ (ca. 250/865) is an artless tale with no line drawn between the worlds of the jinn, man, and other creatures wherein any one of these may assume not only the characteristics but also the form of the other. Whether the *Khurāfah*-Mohammed link is an invention or not, the tale itself was definitely known in the last quarter of the eighth century,⁸⁵ hence affording, along with similar tales, ready basis for comparison with the Persian *Afsāna*, "wherein speaking parts were given to beasts," as Nadīm informs us. There is, of course, no question of their widespread and increasing popularity from the ninth

or may not be in 'Alī 'Azīz's source, the *Khulāṣat al-Khayāl* which title, however, is not to be found in either Ḥajjī Khalifah or Brockelmann.

Since the above note was written, Dr. Von Grunbaum has kindly loaned me his "advance" complimentary copy of a more recent and critical analysis of the *Mukhayyalāt* and its sources, though this, too, throws no more light on the *Khulāṣat al-Khayāl* (cf. Andreas Tietze, "'Azīz Efendis Muhayyemat," *Oriens*, I [1948], 248–329, esp. pp. 308 ff.).

⁸³ *Murūj*, VIII, 33–35.

⁸⁴ *Fākhīr*, ed. C. A. Storey (Leyden, 1915), pp. 137–40; for translation and comment, cf. Macdonald *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 372–79.

⁸⁵ See preceding note.

century on, but generally on the level of folk tales that were considered good enough media for the amusement and instruction of the ignorant and frivolous and of women and children, but seldom considered sufficiently dignified for the serious attention of reputable littérateurs and scholars.⁸⁶ Thus this somewhat paradoxical situation: the *khurāfāt*, along with other imaginative and fantastic fiction, though growing more and more popular, fell increasingly to the lot of little known and/or anonymous writers. Only on rare occasions were they to be rescued for mention in the historical record by either the unusually curious or the exceptionally cosmopolitan and encyclopedic authors. Thus one can understand, at one and the same time, Rādi's contemptuous reference to sea adventures and animal fables, Mas'ūdī's guarded yet critical account of legendary *akhbār* and Nadīm's poor opinion of the *Hazār Afsāna*. And since all these elements were to be found in the *Alf Lailah*, this representative collection par excellence went merrily rolling along all over the Moslem world, flourishing in its anonymity, cherished by the common man, and ignored by the highbrow, down almost to our own times.

But what of the content of the earliest Arabic *Nights*? Here the evidence of the Oriental Institute fragment, direct or indirect, is more general than specific. But, as will be seen presently, it is, nevertheless, highly significant. As already stated in the section on the "when" of the fragment, this latter represents the last stage outlined in Nadīm's account, namely, imitation, and therefore presupposes an Arabic translation of the *Hazār Afsāna*. It becomes necessary now to consider its

⁸⁶ Cf. Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 368-71, where he is right to emphasize the acceleration of these factors from the ninth century on but fails to point out that the situation was inherent in the Arab's general outlook on this as on all types of highly fantastic and imaginative fiction.

bearing on some of the points in a related group of long-standing controversial questions. Was this Arabic translation a literal one or merely a paraphrase? Was it complete or partial? And did this translated material, whatever its literary style and extent, constitute the first Arabic *Nights* or was this latter a combination of Persian and Arabic elements? Or, again, was the first Arabic collection genuinely Arabian consisting entirely of Arabic stories and borrowing only the framework and a modified version of the Introduction of the *Hazār Afsāna*. In that case there would have to be two separate but contemporary collections of the *Nights*: the earlier *Hazār Afsāna* current in Mas'ūdī's time in an Arabic version entitled *Alf Lailah* and an imitative but distinctly separate collection of Arabic stories bearing the same title. Were definite answers to all these general questions forthcoming, there would still be the further problem of identifying the specific tales, Persian, Arabic, or both, that would be involved at any given point.

We turn again to our fragment, this time in search of clues to the general nature of the collection it represents and to the specific story or cycle of stories that headed the manuscript itself. It will be recalled that lines 10-11 of the text emphasize Syrian and Bedouin Arab tales. However, there is nothing in the text itself that would necessarily exclude stories of other localities, Arab or otherwise, since the *insān* of line 9 is meant for MAN, *Homo sapiens*. Hence, it is quite possible that the present "selection" of the *Nights* could have contained tales of Arab and of foreign origin, the most probable source of the latter being the *Hazār Afsāna* because of its close affinity with the *Alf Lailah*. Yet there is no reason to exclude the possibility of other foreign sources of the same category as contributing to the

Arabic *Nights* even at this early stage. It seems reasonably certain that the theme of the first story in the manuscript is *makr*. It is to be noted that this word *makr* and its synonym *kaid* are used in their numerous shades of meaning as artifice, cunning, trick, wile, ruse, stratagem, craft, deceit, and malice throughout the *Nights*, in connection with both men and women, though the latter are portrayed as more cunning, crafty, and malicious than the men. *Makr* is a theme alike for short anecdotes as for longer stories and for entire cycles of stories. The probability is that it is one of these latter that is involved in our manuscript. Among the tales generally considered as part of the *Hazār Afsāna* and one that also has the craft and malice of women for a theme is the story of Qamar al-Zamān and the Lady Budūr. The same theme plays a major role in two cycles of tales that existed in the eighth century as works similar to, but independent of, the *Hazār Afsāna*, but that were later incorporated into the Arabic *Nights*, though how much later is precisely the question that con-

cerns us at this point. These two are the well-known book-sized stories of King Jalīʿād (or Farza and other variants) and his wazīr Shīmās (or Shīmās) and the story of Sindbād the Sage (as distinguished from Sindbād the Sailor) known also as the story of "The King and His Seven Wazirs." In this latter the long cycle of tales revolves around Sindbād's reputation as the wisest tutor and preceptor of his day and around the clever stratagems and craft of both men and women, *kaid* or *makr al-rijāl* as contrasted with *kaid* or *makr al-nisāʾ*. It is, therefore, the story of human craft par excellence. The book enjoyed an early popularity comparable to that of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*. Along with this latter, it was cast from Arabic prose into Arabic verse by Abān al-Lāḥiqī (d. 200/815).⁸⁷ The prose version must therefore have been readily available in the period before our manuscript to which it is time to return.

The lost space in line 13 of the text could easily accommodate any one of the following phrases:

كـره [عن قمر الزمان وذ], of Qamar al-Zamān and his fame;

كـره [عن الملك جليعاد وذ], of King Jalīʿād (or some variant of the name) and his fame;

كـره [عن شيماس الوزير وذ], of Shīmās the wazīr and his fame;

كـره [عن سندباد الحكيم وذ], of Sindbād the Sage and his fame; or

كـره [عن كيد الرجل و مـ], of the stratagem of man and his malice.

Line 15 could then be referring to the popular belief that women are more crafty than men, the obvious point of all three stories. In the story of Sindbād, the palace favorite, herself guilty, seeks to prove that women are not so crafty and certainly not craftier than the men using the phrases *امكر من الرجال*, "more crafty than the men," or *امكر منهم*, "more crafty

than they" (masculine plural).⁸⁸ This last phrase is actually in our text, line 15, preceded by *لا*, "except, or else." Now if

⁸⁷ Cf. Nöldeke, *ZDMG*, XXXIII (1879), 513–27, esp. pp. 518 and 521; Oestrup, pp. 82, 99 (113, 137); Burton, X, 93; Josef Horowitz, *ZDMG*, LXV (1911), 287–88; Brockelmann, *Suppl.*, I, 107, 219, 238–39.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Alf Lailah wa Lailah*, ed. Maximilian Habicht (12 vols.; Breslau, 1825–43), XII, 299; ed. W. H. Macnaghten (4 vols.; Calcutta, 1839–42), III, 142; (Bulāq, 1279/1823), III, 92.

we take lines 14 and 15 together, they would seem to be saying that either "a man becomes," if we read *يَصِير*, or "a woman becomes," if we read the feminine *تَصِير*, "more worthy," *أَحَقَّ*, "or else more crafty than other men" *وَالْأَمَكْرُ مِنْهُمْ*.

This could mean that the comparison is either between men only or that it is between men and women. Considering the ever present battle of the sexes in some form or another in the society of the *Nights*, the probability is somewhat in favor of the second alternative. In that case the text would seem to be adequately describing a situation in the story of Sindbād the Sage. For the very first tale of the first wazir dramatizes the praiseworthy conduct of a virtuous woman who by a clever stratagem restrained the king from forcing his attentions on her in her husband's absence;⁸⁹ but, ere the cycle of tales is done, woman is nevertheless proved to be more malicious than man.

If we have interpreted our meager clues correctly, then we have here the identification of the story and through the story proof that foreign sources other than the *Hazār Afsāna* formed part of the earliest collection of the *Nights* in the late eighth or early ninth century. But so weighty a conclusion demands further corroborative evidence before it can be claimed as certain.

A more positive identification of the story of the Oriental Institute manuscript and of a group of stories contemporaneous with it can perhaps be arrived at through the combination of several or all of the elements afforded by the text, only one of which remains yet to be considered. This last is the sentence, "O my delectable one, if you are not asleep, relate to me

the story which you promised me," taken as a whole and also phrase by phrase. The first phrase has already been touched upon.⁹⁰ The second, "if you are not asleep," appears, though not consistently, in some of the printed editions,⁹¹ and the last, "the story which you promised me," like the first, has not been met with so far despite a liberal sampling of the printed editions. To put to the utmost use all our manuscript's textual data, the definite, the implied, and the uncertain, requires an exhaustive study of all extant manuscripts of the *Nights* with a view to forwarding their classification chronologically and geographically. This is quite obviously a task not to be lightly undertaken; for, aside from the time element, it calls for a scholar familiar with the history of the extant manuscripts of the *Nights* and experienced in their textual criticism. It is a task for one both willing and able to put to good use the late Professor Duncan Black Macdonald's magnificent collection of manuscript and printed editions of the *Nights* now in the library of the Hartford Theological Seminary.

Fortunately, we are not entirely dependent on the results of such a project before we can exhaust the evidence of our manuscript on the question of the content of the early *Nights*. The significance of early dates mentioned in the *Nights* has been for long a center of controversy. Some hold that these early dates, specific or implied by association with historic characters and events, are either errors of figures and/or names or else are later interpolations. Others again have inclined strongly toward the view that these dates are authentic and therefore significant both as the approximate date of the entry of the particular story in which they occur

⁸⁹ Nöldeke pointed out that this particular story had a basis in Persian history (*ZDMG*, XXXIV, 523); cf. also Oestrup, p. 29 (38).

⁹⁰ Cf. above, p. 152.

⁹¹ E.g., ed. Habicht, I, 31-32, 36-37, 41-42, 44-45, 49-50, 55; ed. Macnaghten, I, 25, 30.

in the *Nights* and of the nature of the content of the *Nights* as a whole. This latter view, fully and brilliantly presented by Oestrup,⁹² points to the fisherman's statement, in the story of "The Fisherman and the Jinn," that Solomon had been dead these eighteen hundred years, to indicate that an Arabic version of the *Hazār Afsāna* existed as early as about A.D. 800, since in Moslem popular belief there is a thousand years between Solomon and Christ. Again, there is the statement of Abū Ḥasan of Khurāsān, that he fled from Baghdād to Basrah during the civil wars of Muntaṣir and Musta'in (248-52/862-66). Finally, there is the exactness of the date, Friday the tenth of Ṣafar, 263/second November, 876, mentioned by the Barber of Baghdād in the Hunchback cycle. These confirmed Oestrup's belief in an early translation of the *Hazār Afsāna*, as already seen above,⁹³ and furthermore convinced him that a certain part of the *Nights* had already received its final form in the ninth century. Yet even he cautiously adds: "But although I am absolutely inclined to accept this, yet I dare not consider the matter as definitely certain; but it is not at all impossible that in the various manuscripts will be found materials that will provide a final solution to this complicated question."⁹⁴

Little did anyone then dream of so dramatic a confirmation of his view and of so definite a solution to the problem as the Oriental Institute manuscript indeed supplies. For the very existence of such an early manuscript that also lays emphasis on the Arabic tales gives just that needed extra evidence in order to give full credence to these early internal dates. These dates, it must be noted, occur alike in the thoroughly Persian tale, despite its added Islamic color, of "The Fisherman and the

Jinn," the purely Arabic story of "Abū Ḥasan of Khurāsān," and in the Hunchback cycle which combines both Persian and Arabic elements. Hence, the combined evidence of our manuscript, of the literary sources, and of the text of the *Arabian Nights* as we now have them, leave no room to doubt the existence of a ninth-century version of the *Nights* that was composite in its content. The *Hazār Afsāna*, until definite proof to the contrary is forthcoming, must be considered as the one certain source of the Persian tales, with the *Book of Sindbād* and the *Book of Jali'ād and Shimās* as further probable sources. All foreign materials seem to have been Islamized in the process of adoption. So far as the Arabic elements of such a version are concerned, the great probability is that the pre-Islamic Arab materials competed with the Persian from the start, followed closely by the tales and anecdotes of the early caliphs and of the Umayyads and their times. As for tales and anecdotes of the early 'Abbāsids, these were probably contemporaneous, or nearly so, with the characters and events to which they belong with few exceptions, the most outstanding of which being Hārūn al-Rashīd and his times (170-93/786-809). The stories that are woven around this caliph fall into two groups: those that actually refer to him and his courtiers and those that have been transferred to him from characters and events that came either before or after his reign. The first could well have found their way into manuscripts parent to or collateral with the Oriental Institute manuscript. The stories in the second group are necessarily later and the probability is that they found their way into the *Nights* singly or in groups, at different times and in different places. Those of Asiatic setting, controlled by other internal criteria, such as the absence or negligible presence of

⁹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 88-92 (122-28).

⁹³ *Cf. p. 153.*

⁹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 91 (126).

the fantastic and the supernatural, as Nöldeke pointed out⁹⁵ had probably been absorbed into the *Nights* by the time of Ibn ʿAbdūs' collection in the early tenth century. Those of Egyptian color with the supernatural in control are almost certainly of later Egyptian origin.

Ibn ʿAbdūs' cosmopolitan collection of the "night-stories of the Arabs, Persians, Greeks, and others"⁹⁶ was unquestionably meant to be more inclusive than any other single collection of its kind. This is amply indicated by the multiplicity of the editor's sources both oral and written; by the contemplated number of stories—an exact thousand in contrast to the less than two hundred of the *Hazār Afsāna*; and by the size of each story—some fifty pages more or less. It had a definite plan of organization, since the stories of each people were to be grouped together as a complete and independent unit. But unfortunately we do not know the exact title of this large collection of many volumes. Neither do we know the racial distribution of the 480 stories that were actually completed ere death overtook the editor and halted this magnificently conceived but ill-fated project. Hence, the exact relationship, in respect to specific content, of this tenth-century *Alf Samar*, "Thousand Night Stories," to the ninth-century *Alf Lailah*, "Thousand Nights," and the eighth-century *Hazār Afsāna*, "Thousand Fanciful Tales," remains uncertain to an even greater degree than does the comparable relationship of the *Alf Lailah* to the *Hazār Afsāna*. But in the over-all picture there can be no doubt that the incomplete *Alf Samar* borrowed largely from its two well-known and popular predecessors and in turn contributed liberally to the interna-

tional *Alf Lailah wa Lailah* that we know today.

Further rapid and certain progress relative to the what and whence of the *Nights*, particularly in the earlier stages of the collection, must await the discovery of new evidence. There still is the possibility, remote as it may seem, that the Egyptian soil or some obscure and neglected collection in either East or West may yet yield one or more of the following: the Persian *Hazār Afsāna* known to be still in existence in the eleventh century,⁹⁷ a more generous portion of the ninth-century *Alf Lailah* than our precious fragment proved to be, and a volume or more of the *Alf Samar* that were current in Nadīm's day. There is, however, the greater probability of finding an additional historical reference or two to one or all of these three works, particularly in the hitherto unpublished works of outstanding encyclopedists of the ninth and tenth centuries, such as Hishām al-Kalbī, Jāḥiẓ, Masʿūdī, and Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahānī.⁹⁸ And, finally, there is the certainty of discovering an increasing number of literary parallels to the anecdotes and tales, particularly those of Arabic origin, that are in the *Nights*.

This brings us to the wider problem of the interrelationships of the *Nights* and the literary sources, using this latter phrase in the widest sense with the emphasis on literary, historical, and even scientific materials. The problem has been long recognized and in some of its many phases partly solved. But a renewed and intensified search for literary parallels is indicated, since availability of materials, published or in microfilm, is steadily increasing. The search may even bring to light some hitherto unknown or neglected manuscript that could compare to Jāḥiẓ's

⁹⁵ Cf. *ZDMG*, XLII, 68-72; Oestrup, pp. 72-79 (99-108).

⁹⁶ Cf. above, p. 151.

⁹⁷ Oestrup, pp. 7, 81-82 (6, 112-13); Burton, X, 71, 93; Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 367, 397.

⁹⁸ Cf. above, p. 155-56.

(pseudo) *Maḥāsin*, Masʿūdī's *Murūj* and the *Aghānī*, by far the most fruitful early sources of literary parallels yet known. Newly discovered parallels together with those already known could then be subjected to the test of textual literary criticism to determine, in so far as this is possible, which of these materials have a common source and which are more directly interdependent, being lifted, so to speak, from the literary sources into the *Nights* or even vice versa.⁹⁹ Such a project should help to set close enough limits certainly *a quo* and probably also *ad quem* for most of the largely Arabic materials of the *Nights*. Hitherto little-known anthologies containing some parallels to the *Nights*, such as the Constantinople manuscript discovered by Ritter and described by Littmann¹⁰⁰ may prove to have been intermediary between earlier and later versions of the *Nights* as well as between earlier and later literary sources. It was some of these later works taken at their face value, at a time when earlier materials were either unknown or unavailable, that helped in misleading Lane to assign so late a date to the *Arabian Nights*.¹⁰¹ But with our present knowledge of this problem of interrelationships, it does not seem at all improbable that some of these later sources known to him had themselves borrowed from the earlier *Nights*.

Having exhausted the evidence of the Oriental Institute manuscript, direct or indirect, specific or general, it is best to give here a summary of its contribution to the early history of the *Nights*. While the fragment does not settle all the long-standing controversies in the field, it definitely confirms the title *Alf Lailah* and the

name Dīnāzād and, by implication, also the name Shīrāzād and the relationship of the former to the latter as that of a nurse. It establishes with greater certainty than was hitherto possible an earlier origin and a more rapid and steady growth for the collection than was generally conceded. In these respects it confirms the general lines long discerned by von Hammer and Oestrup; for it was the former who first accepted an eighth-century Arabic translation of the *Hazār Afsāna* and the latter who was convinced that a composite section of the growing *Nights* had already attained a definite form in the ninth century.

Based on this firm foundation and the few subsequent literary references, it becomes possible to modify and supplement the general outline of the long history of the *Nights* as submitted by Macdonald.¹⁰² The successive steps in the evolution of the collection may be stated as follows:

I. An eighth-century translation of the *Hazār Afsāna*. It is my belief this was most probably a complete and literal translation perhaps entitled *Alf Khurāfāt*.

II. An eighth-century Islamized Arabic version of the *Hazār Afsāna* entitled *Alf Lailah*. This could have been either partial or complete.

III. A ninth-century composite *Alf Lailah* containing both Persian and Arabic materials. While most of the former came undoubtedly from the *Hazār Afsāna*, other current story-books, especially the *Book of Sindbād* and the *Book of Shimās*, are not improbable sources. The Arabic materials, as Littmann has already pointed out, were not so slight or insignificant as Macdonald believed them to be.

IV. The tenth-century *Alf Samar* of Ibn ʿAbdūs. Whether this was meant to

⁹⁹ Cf. Burton, X, 132–52; *Suppl.*, VII, 426; C. C. Torrey, "The Story of ʿAbbās ibn al-Ahnāf . . .," *JAOS*, XVI (1894), 44–70; Oestrup, pp. 35–36 (46–47); Macdonald, *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 358–61; Littmann, VI, 707 ff.

¹⁰⁰ *Op. cit.*, VI, 692, 702–4.

¹⁰¹ See his "Review" at the end of his Vol. III.

¹⁰² *JRAS*, 1924, pp. 390–91; cf. Littmann, VI, 705–7; for earlier grouping see, Burton, X, 93–94; Oestrup, pp. 106–9 (147–54).

include, among other materials, all the current *Alf Lailah*, and so supersede it, is not clear.

V. A twelfth-century collection augmented by materials from IV and by Asiatic and Egyptian tales of local Egyptian composition. The change of title to *Alf Lailah* belongs, in all probability, to this period.

VI. The final stages of the growing collection extending to the early sixteenth century. Heroic tales of the Islamic counter-crusades are among the most prominent additions. Persia and 'Irāq may have contributed some of the later predominantly Far Eastern tales in the wake of the thirteenth-century Mongol conquest of those lands. The final conquest of Mameluke Syria and Egypt by the Ottoman Salīm I (1512–20) closed the last chapter of the history of the *Arabian Nights* in its oriental home land.

Though the framework and an inkling of some of the stories of the *Nights* had found their way into Europe as early as the fourteenth century,¹⁰³ it was not until the turn of the eighteenth century that the collection itself was introduced into Europe by the Frenchman Jean Antoine Galland (1646–1715). Thereafter, the history of the *Arabian Nights* in its European domicile offers in several respects a subtle yet instructive parallel to the early history of the *Nights*. The Galland manuscript, like the *Hazār Afsāna*, has been translated, literally and otherwise. It has been, up to a point, Europeanized as the *Hazār Afsāna* was likewise Islamized. The initial edition represented by the Galland manuscript has grown and multiplied from generation to generation as did indeed the

original *Hazār Afsāna* from century to century. The Arabic manuscripts of Syria and Egypt, like the non-Arabic editions of the various countries of Europe, present us with a bewildering variety of versions and/or selections that abound, in part for this same reason, in differences as well as in duplications. And just as the *Hazār Afsāna* was imitated by the Arabs, so was the *Arabian Nights* at first imitated in the West. But, unlike their Arabic counterpart which united with the *Hazār Afsāna*, these Western imitations remained apart from the oriental collection. These broad historical parallels reflect a wide and steady demand and constitute an eloquent testimony to the lasting and universal appeal of the *Arabian Nights*.

If a major catastrophe—which Allah forbid!—were to overtake our world comparable in some measure to the progressive decline of the Perso-Arab world subsequent to the Mongol, Turkish, and Western conquests, the history of the *Arabian Nights* could again prove difficult indeed to piece together. And if in such a world a student of this subject, working with whatever atomic destruction may have chanced to spare, were to come on a few pages sketching a part of that history, he could hardly be more surprised or delighted than was the present writer when Oriental Institute No. 17618, a tattered paper fragment, proved to be the earliest-known manuscript of the *Alf Lailah* or "Thousand Nights" with a significance that far outweighed its size, and, for good measure, turned out to be also the earliest-known extant evidence of any *paper* book outside the ancient Far East.

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

¹⁰³ Cf. Littmann, VI, 687–88.