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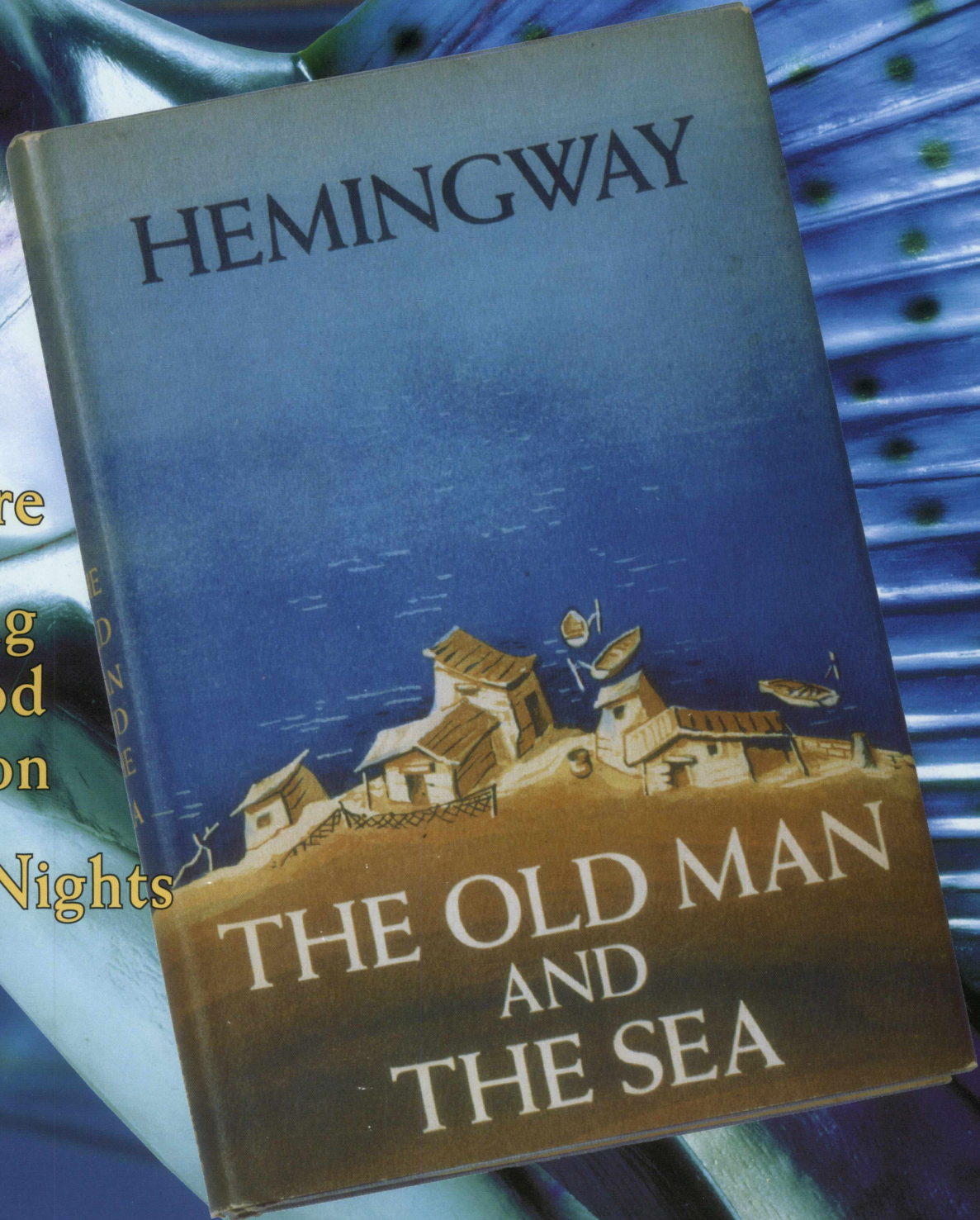
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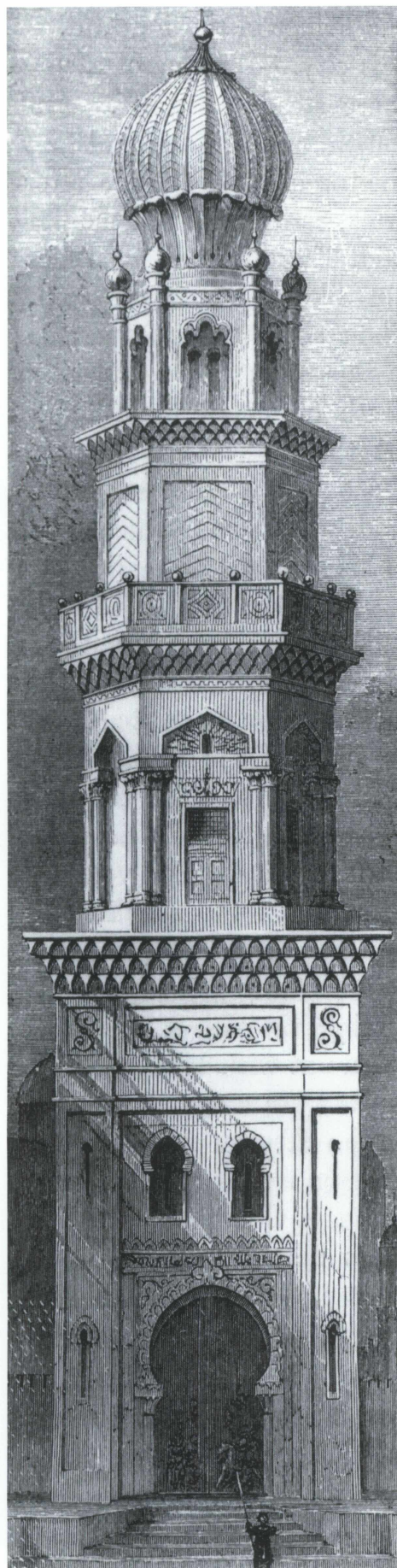
THE BOOK COLLECTOR'S MAGAZINE

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Arabian Nights





The Arabian Nights

*He that has the Book of the Thousand Nights
and a Night has Hashisch-made-words for life.*

—W. H. Henley, 1890

The human voice cannot remain silent. The human ear cannot be satiated. The human soul cannot refrain from longing. The human imagination cannot remain still.

We have a need to tell, and a need to be told.

From cave paintings to the Internet, the human need for narrative stories is readily evident. This need is best exhibited and, perhaps, best satisfied by the often-shifting conglomeration of narratives contained within a single massive work of the human imagination: *The Thousand and One Nights*. Arguably the most complicated, fascinating and rewarding secular text in the history of humankind is the ever “morphing,” seemingly infinite text of the *Alf Layla wa Layla*, in English known variously as *The Arabian Nights*, *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, *The Thousand Nights and a Night* or *The Thousand and One Nights*.

by
Lee
Biondi

Many great masterpieces of secular literature (notice we omit the Bible before we even begin) lend themselves to multiple readings and multiple approaches through different critical apparatus, cultural heritages, ages in our lives and accumulated experiences we bring to each rereading

(which is a very different act than a first reading). Consider, for example the *Iliad/Odyssey/Aeneid* sequence, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *The Divine Comedy*, almost any Shakespeare, *Don Quixote*, *Moby-Dick*, *Ulysses* and a handful of others.

But these thousand and one nights stand apart: multiple "authors," multiple sources from multiple nations and eras, voices hidden by other voices, stories within stories within stories, and a need so urgent to spin and hear these stories that human life literally depends upon it. No non-Western work has had anywhere near such a huge influence on English art and literature, leaving virtually every storyteller from the early Eighteenth century onward to accomplish his or her work in the inspirational shadow of the clever Scheherazade. The work reverberates endlessly and its complexity is at the very limits of human literary accomplishment and comprehension.

Add to this inherent complexity the act of translating from various texts and from various languages for different generations of English readers and we have here one of only a very few works wherein a reader or scholar can live comfortably for a long and healthy lifetime and not fear exhausting the material. The work has no closure, its narrative suspense seems capable of being extended forever, and any point of entry will serve.

Originally rendered into English as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, this huge sprawl of narrative is much more than mere entertainment, though it is certainly that in spades. It is an edifice, shaky and hodgepodge, built by fits and starts into a *summa* that wishes to encompass and describe the entire scope of existence: worldly and other-worldly, practical, mystical and magical. It very nearly succeeds.

Plenty has been written on the nature and meanings and themes of these interwoven stories in which they have been analyzed and unraveled with wildly varying degrees of success and failure by scholars, students, psychologists, critics and admirers galore. And still the task remains unfinished; it forever will. And I will not raise my voice into the Babel-fray.

Fortunately for me, the scope of this article is narrower: I will focus specifically on the bibliographical history of the *Nights* in English, with only a few sidebars as required to shed light on the subject at hand. This article is intended to be a useful overview of the work to assist readers and collectors in handling a big subject.

As a dealer, I occasionally get this phone query: "Do you have any nice copies of *The Arabian Nights*?"

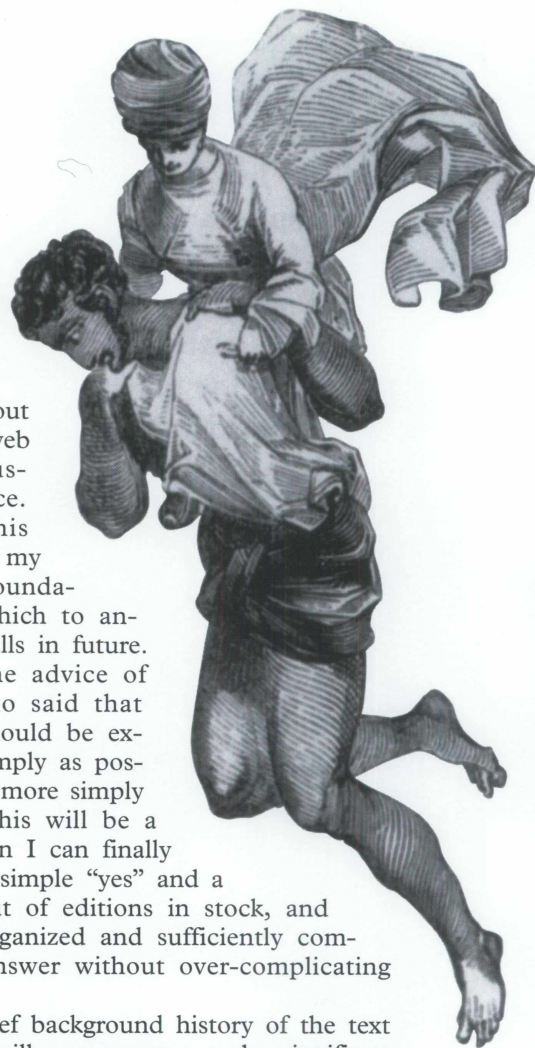
Ah, if only it were that simple.

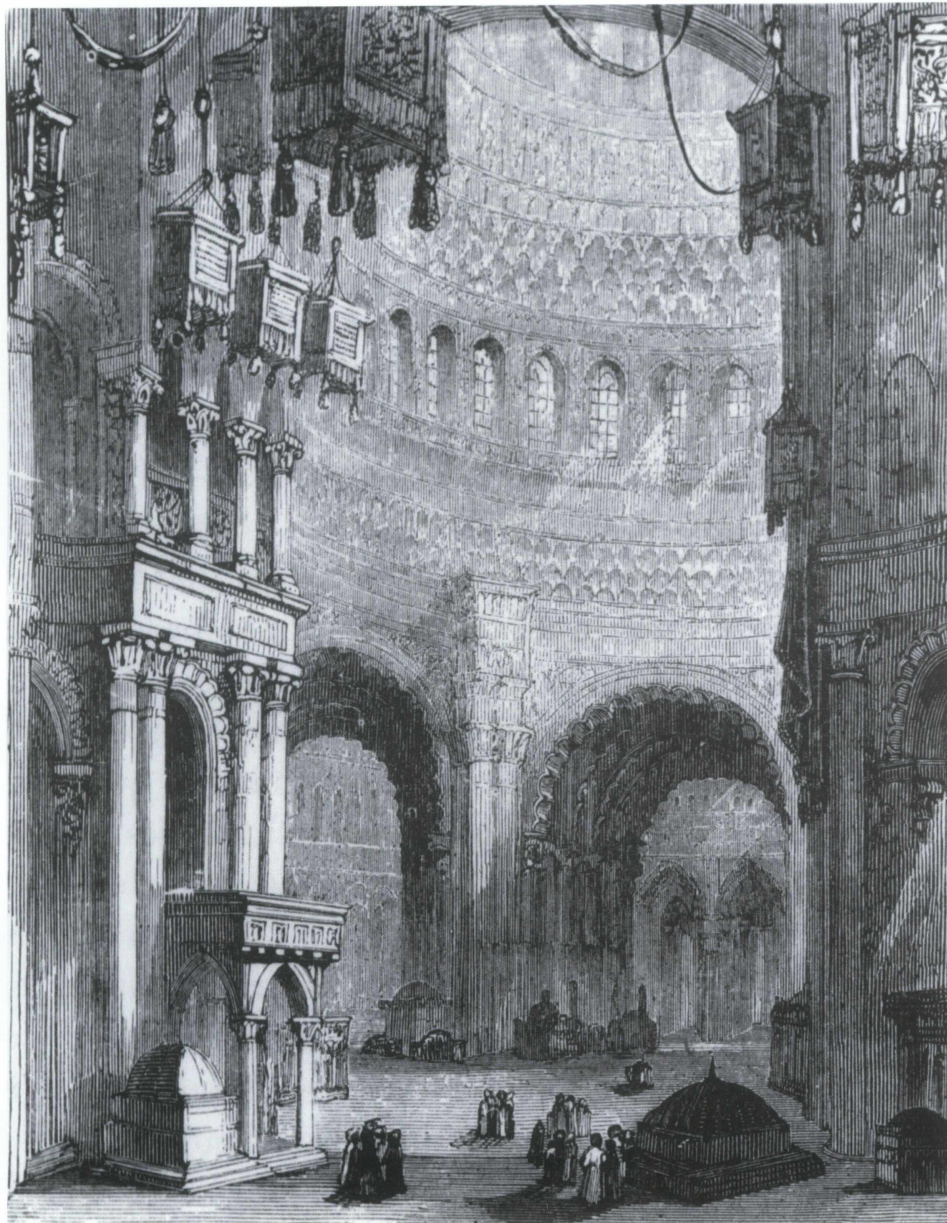
Upon hearing this I am inclined either to say sim-

ply, "Yes," or to ramble on for the rest of the day, trying in vain to sort out the tangled web for the unsuspecting novice. I suppose this article will be my effort at a foundation upon which to answer these calls in future. I will use the advice of Einstein, who said that everything should be explained as simply as possible, but no more simply than that. This will be a forum wherein I can finally go beyond a simple "yes" and a faxed printout of editions in stock, and try for an organized and sufficiently comprehensive answer without over-complicating the matter.

After a brief background history of the text in Arabic, I will concentrate on the significant editions in English (hearkening to the French and Arabic as little as possible) and try assiduously to avoid the vast array of paraphrases, parodies, imitations and Bowdlerizations that clutter the landscape. These main significant English versions are:

1. The anonymous "Grub Street" appearances of the Galland French version, circa 1706 through 1721, published as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.
2. The Edward Lane translation—announced in the year Victoria took the throne and Dickens changed all the rules of literature with *Pickwick* (1837)—but not available in its entirety until 1841 in three volumes titled *A New Translation of the Thousand Nights and a Night; Known in England as the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.
3. The John Payne translation published in 1884 as *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night: Now First Done into English Prose and Verse, From the Original Arabic*.
4. The Richard Burton translation titled *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, published in 10 volumes in September 1885, and followed over 1886-1888 with *The Supplemental Nights* in six additional volumes.





The *Alf Layla wa Layla* in Original Tongues: In Manuscript and In Print.

Before tackling the English language history of the text we are obliged to have some background of its various fates and permutations in the Arabic languages and the Arabic world. I will try my hand at unraveling this Gordian knot for the non-professional who has less than several years to dwell on the subject.

The *Alf Layla wa Layla* grew by accretion out of the oral storytelling tradition of Persia, India and Egypt; it has no author and no definitive text. Stories began to accumulate from a variety of sources.

Frenchman Antoine Galland, whose 12-volume *Mille et une Nuits* was published between 1704 and 1717, worked from a nebulous amalgamation of various manuscripts that included some so-called "orphan" stories. Despite their bastard childhoods, these stories—among them "Aladdin and the Lamp," the Sindbad stories, and "Ali Baba and the

40 Thieves"—became famous as part of the *Alf Layla wa Layla* because of Galland's inclusion of them in his work.

It often comes as a surprise to Westerners that no systematic scholarly edition of the *Alf Layla wa Layla* was available in print in Arabic until the Nineteenth century, when there was a cluster of important—though often inadequate or misguided—editions following quickly upon each other and sometimes overlapping:

1. "Calcutta I" edition (1814 and 1818). *The Arabian Nights Entertainment; In the Original Arabic. Published under the Patronage of the College of Fort William.* Edited by Shuekh Uhmud bin Moohummud Shirwanee ul Yumunee. Calcutta, 1814 and 1818. Two volumes.
2. "Breslau" edition (1824-1838 and 1842-1843). *Tausend und eine Nacht: Arabisch, nach eine*

5. The Mathers Englishing of the French translation of Mardrus, *The Thousand Nights and One Night* (1923).

For most collectors and dealers in England and the United States, the list is really narrowed to just two: the Lane and the Burton (and the Burton wins!). (The further complicated history of the illustration of *The Arabian Nights* will not be addressed here, though it is another field ripe for collectors.) For the English-speaking Arabists among us, nothing yet rendered into English approaches the "original," if one can even say that an "original" exists. If so, this would most likely be the Fourteenth century "Mamluk" manuscript in the Bibliotheque Nationale upon which Muhsin Mahdi based his 1984 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, which is now rendered into English as *The Arabian Nights* by the capable hands of Husain Hadaway.

Handschrift aus Tunis. Edited by Maximilian Habicht (and later Heinrich Fleischer). Breslau, 1824-1843. 12 volumes.

3. "Bulak" (aka "Cairo") edition (1835): *Kitab Alf Laylah wa-Laylah*. Edited by Abd al-Rahman al-Safti al-Sharqawi. Bulak, Cairo, 1835.
4. "Calcutta II" edition (1839-1842): *The Alif Laila or the Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night, Commonly Known as "The Arabian Nights Entertainment," now for the first time published complete in the original Arabic, from an Egyptian Manuscript brought to India by the late Major Turner, editor of the Shah-Nameh*. Edited by W.H. Macnaghten, Esq. Calcutta, 1839-1842. Four volumes.

None of these is definitive; each has its drawbacks, and I use the term "scholarly" rather loosely in describing them. The 1984 Muhsin Mahdi edition published in Leiden promises to take the field to itself.

Now, stepping back a millennium...

Arab historians as long ago as the Tenth century alluded to vast apocryphal collections of stories without manuscript versions. There is mention of an Arabic collection whose title translates as *The Thousand Tales*, and hints that this may have originated from or been inspired by a Persian conglomeration titled *Hazar Afsana* (*A Thousand Legends*, or *A Thousand Tales*). If manuscripts of these or similar compilations from this period ever existed they most certainly have been lost to us. But, as reported as far back as the *Hazar Afsana*, the frame story that leads to the anthology is the Bride/Storyteller-and-homicidal-King wraparound.

Reportedly there was a manuscript of the entire work (as then known) that was compiled and written down within the Mamluk domain some time in the later Thirteenth century, probably in either Syria or Egypt, based on subsequent historical appearances of early texts. This reported manuscript is now lost, but a fair copy from about 50 years later (also now lost) became the archetype of subsequent fair copies and renditions, all in manuscript, of the same frame story and similar cores of the stories within the story. One begins to feel the fascination this work held for the great Argentinean modernist Jorge Luis Borges, who became obsessed with it. He often alluded to it, composed brief stories in imitation of it and wrote essays about it.

From these early and now-lost manuscripts two streams emerged: the Syrian and the Egyptian, with the Syrian being much more cohesive. The earliest manuscript of either stream is the Fourteenth century manuscript now at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Later manuscripts in this stream surfaced in the Sixteenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth cen-

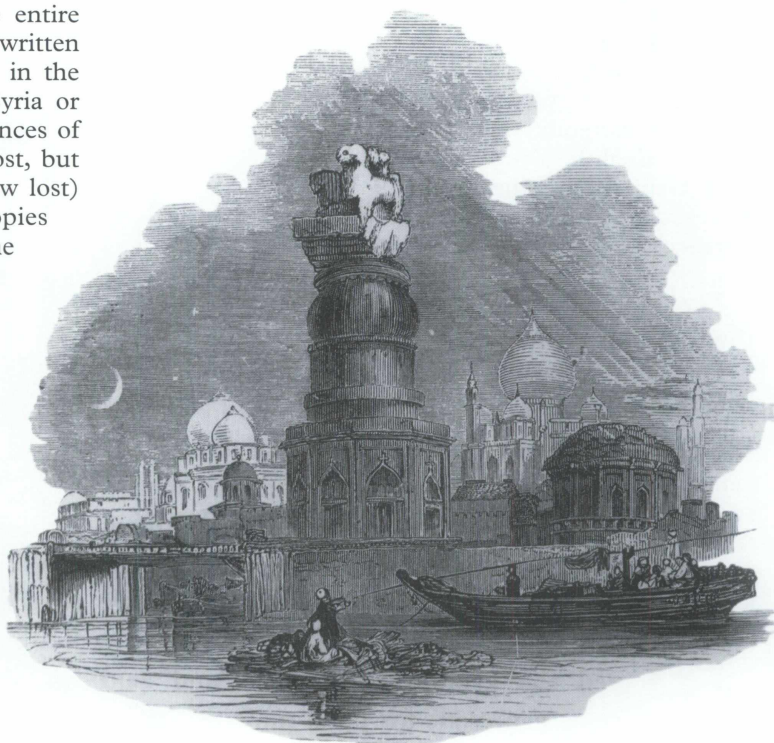
turies. Manuscript experts tend to report a certain internal consistency within these Syrian-branched manuscripts that is sometimes put forth as an argument for authenticity, but may just indicate that each depends all too much on the earlier one(s).

The Egyptian stream can only be picked up substantially later with extant manuscripts no older than the Seventeenth century (and continuing through the Nineteenth). This series shows much more obviously an accretion of untraced stories of dubious, if not clearly foreign, origin. There are influences from Persia, India, Ottoman Turkey and, of course, native Egypt. These Egyptian manuscripts tend to be more indiscriminate and heterogeneous in their contents than those in the Syrian tradition which has a clear beginning and a more direct lineage, that is, the aforementioned Mamluk manuscript.

As an example of accretion in the confusing stream of manuscripts, the first appearance of Galland's Aladdin story (which he claims to have heard in 1709 from a Maromite Christian) does not appear in Arabic until 1787 in a manuscript by a Syrian Christian residing in Paris, though a later compiler whose manuscript was written circa 1805-1808 claims to have copied his Aladdin story from a never-identified or produced Baghdad manuscript from 1703. It seems likely that the Aladdin story entered Arabic after the French of Galland and that Payne and Burton were working from a spurious source, if not an outright Gallic forgery.

This morass of manuscript problems is not much resolved as the *Alf Layla wa Layla* entered print in Arabic.

The first printed edition of the *Alf Layla wa Layla*



was what is now called the "Calcutta I." It was published in two volumes containing the first 200 nights. Volume I appeared in 1814 and Volume II in 1818. (This is a full century after the work captured the public imagination in French and in English.) The editor of this crucial edition was a professor at Fort Williams College who worked from a late manuscript and edited profusely in what seems to be a quite personal manner.

A much better work overall was the 12-volume "Breslau" edition, whose first eight volumes appeared between 1824 and 1838 under the auspices of Maximilian Habicht, and whose last four volumes followed in 1842 and 1843, edited by Heinrich Fleischer. Despite their specific claims to have been working from a single Tunisian manuscript, evidence points to their working from the Fourteenth century Syrian and the late Egyptians.

The "Bulak" edition of 1835 was based solely on a single late Egyptian manuscript that may have been artificially extended to 1,001 nights by the arbitrary division of known stories and the addition of new ones. The results are quite removed from the Fourteenth century manuscript in Paris.

The "Calcutta II" edition was published in four volumes between 1839 and 1842 at the hands of several editors working from an Egyptian manuscript copied in 1829 (!).

Two important things to note. First, though we can't blame anyone that an ideal original manuscript does not exist, the editors of several of these scholarly Arabic editions seem to have gone out of their way to embrace spurious stories and deceptive editorial and narrative tactics to artificially extend the work to match its title. (Would anyone trust the authenticity and accuracy of an 1829 fair copy?) Second, the chronological perspective: this spurt of Arabic scholarship over 30 years is mostly contemporaneous with Lane's work in English, a full century after Galland and the Grub Streeters, and 40 years in advance of Payne and Burton.

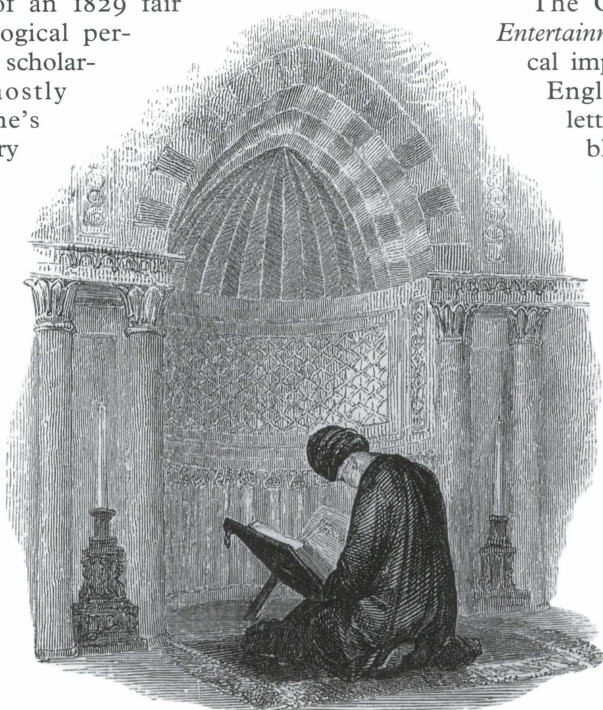
My research suggests (though it seems hard to believe), that no significant new scholarly Arabic edition was published until Mahdi's in 1984. It harkens back to what seems to be the best available "original," that Fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript at the Bibliotheque Nationale which contains the core stories, fewer than 300.

Renderings into English

→ *Antoine Galland and the Grub Streeters*

The English-speaking world originally discovered *The Arabian Nights* through an anonymous translation of the massive work of Antoine Galland. This anonymous translation, or more precisely, series of translations, became known as the "Grub Street" translation after the cluster of disreputable publishers and hack writers to whom this epithet had become attached. It is sometimes assumed that a single Grub Street translator tackled the project alone; I find no hints as to this translator's identity and, knowing a little about the reckless attitude prevailing in the subrosa world of Grub Street publishing, I feel these publications were not a solo effort. Galland's and the anonymous "Grub Street" translation originally began appearing in 1705 or 1706 through bookseller Andrew Bell (at the Sign of the Cross Keys and Bible) in Cornhill as *Arabian Winter-Evenings' Entertainments*, then *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. Soon after these very first appearances a group of publishers led by W. Taylor (at the Ship in Pater-noster Row) picked up and continued through Galland's 12th volume. The work was immediately and immensely popular, seizing the imagination of the public and authors alike, and other publishers such as Robert Osborne and Thomas Longman continued to pirate Galland in translation, and often with interpolations, through the Eighteenth century. Since Galland's work included the so-called "orphan" stories of Aladdin, Ali Baba and Sindbad, so, of course, did the Grub Streeters'. In 1723 *The London News* began its three-year, 445-installment, serialization of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.

The Grub Street *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* is of significant historical importance, having an effect on English and American arts and letters far beyond what its humble, haphazard and mercenary beginnings would have led one to expect. This is the version of *The Arabian Nights* that influenced English writers from Swift and Defoe through Johnson, M.G. Lewis, Maturin and Scott to Dickens (this being the version that the Victorian novelists grew up reading, as the Lane did not begin to appear until Victoria was Queen). It remains an enjoyable and enlightening read, as there is no gainsaying Galland's ability to tell a good story well. The Gallic-versus-Arabic arguments and



textual criticism never affected a curious child's desire to sneak off alone for a late night read, a vicarious trip to exotic and magical lands. Oxford University Press' paperback "World Classics" series keeps the Grub Street version based on an edition of 1812 edited by Henry Weber in print, and it is highly recommended reading, as most of us today will not fault the Gallicisms (if we even spot them) and few readers, children or adults, will miss the ponderous pseudo-anthropological footnote mania present in Lane and Burton.

— Edward William Lane

The publication in 1811 of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* in a new translation from Galland by Jonathan Scott never took hold with the reading public. It is arguably more literary than the Grub Street version, and did serve the valuable purpose of allowing pirates, paraphrasers and Bowdlerizers to publish improved versions aimed at children.

Henry Weber's *Tales of the East* (1812) solidified the various Grub Street versions and remains their best single collection.

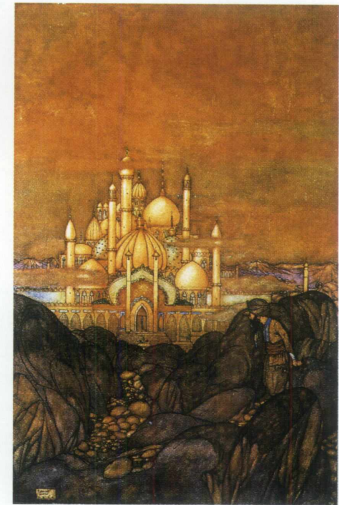
Henry Torrens trod roughly through the first 50 nights from the Arabic then available, but seemed happy enough to withdraw from the arduous task upon hearing of Edward William Lane's intention to retranslate the entire work as it could best be compiled at that time.

By the time Lane's new translation was announced, Victoria had become Queen of England, *Pickwick*-mania was sweeping the country, and *The Arabian Nights* had finally appeared in Arabic editions: "Calcutta I" was 20 years old, "Bulak" had just taken the field, and "Breslau" had partially appeared. Nineteenth-century England was ready for an *Arabian Nights* to call its own. Lane's translation, published by Charles Knight and Company, began its parts issue in 1838 and the final volume of the three-volume work in book form was published in 1841, the entire work being "Illustrated with Many Hundred Wood-Cuts, engraved by the first English Artists, After Original Designs by William Harvey, Esq." In the announcement in the "Pickwick Advertiser" (Parts XIX/XX) and signed "E.W.L., Kensington, August, 1837," Lane divulges his intention "to offer to the English reader an entirely new version of the *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*...to render these enchanting fictions as interesting to persons of mature age and education as they have hitherto been to the young." Decrying the inadequate Grub Street renditions as "through the medium of a French



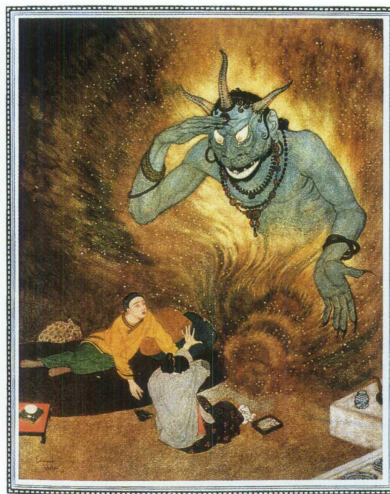
Illustrations by Edmund Dulac

"When having brought into submission all the rest of my race" from *Stories from the Arabian Nights*, 1907



"He arrived within sight of a palace of shining marble"

from *Stories from the Arabian Nights*, 1907



"Aladdin & the Efrite"

from *Sinbad the Sailor and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights*, 1914



"The prince is taken back to the Golden Palace by the Magic Black Horse"

from *Sinbad the Sailor and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights*, 1914

translation” he promises a more accurate version “from the original Arabic” (remember, the Arabic editions sometimes follow Galland). He promises “copious notes” and “most faithful and minutely detailed pictures of the manners and customs of the Arabs.” He tells his early Victorian audience that he “is engaged in translating the whole of the original work, with the exception of such portions as he deems uninteresting, or on any account objectionable.” I think we can see right here why Richard Burton felt an obligation toward this work as he, 50 years later, wanted his readers to revel in the “objectionable.” The most surprising result, given these intentions, is (to me) that Lane did not simply fail abjectly, and in fact rendered a fairly competent book given the Arabic sources used (Calcutta I, Breslau and especially the Bulak).

His work remains somewhat valid for several reasons. Though the Arabic manuscripts and editions Lane worked from seem influenced by Galland and are of dubious origin and presented by dubious editors, Lane did not translate from French, but rather directly from the best Arabic available to him. This work is not wholly discarded and forgotten because no subsequent translator into English has been superior enough or definitive enough to render all his predecessors dinosaurs. Though collectors focus almost exclusively on the Burton translation (if they get past the illustrated paraphrases), readers and

scholars would agree that the Burton translation does deserve Haddawy’s epithet “a literary Brighton Pavilion.” And thus, by comparison to Burton, Lane seems a sane and palatable, if not wholly satisfying, alternative.

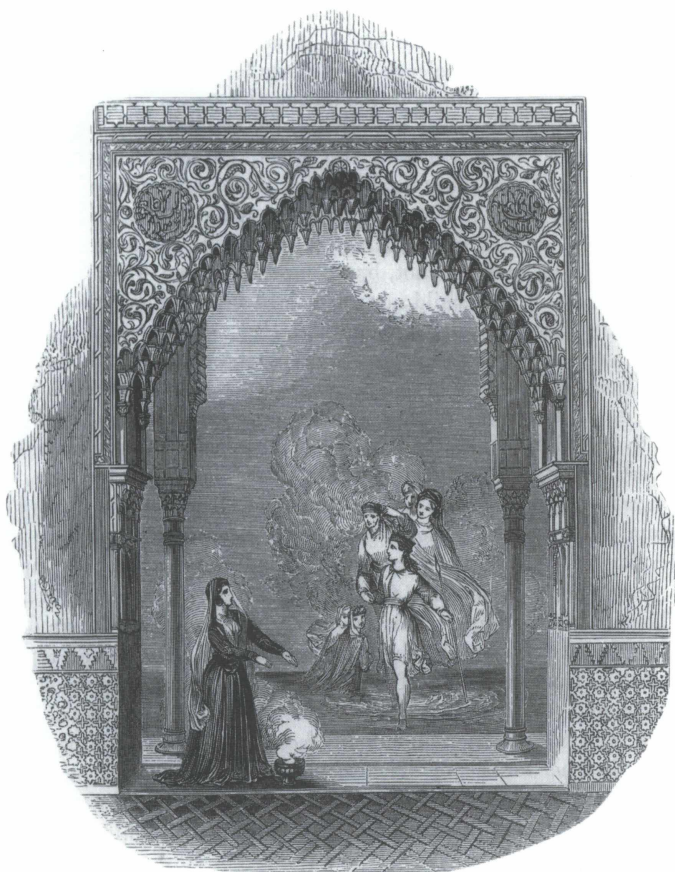
Collectors may note that the first edition of Lane in three volumes is readily available and not very expensive. The parts issue is rare; I have never seen a set. Reprints of the Lane translation abound. John Murray published a revised and corrected edition with Lane’s final notes in 1859. Edward Stanley Poole continued the tradition of republishing Lane with a “New Edition,” touting it as the “standard translation” when competition arose from Payne and Burton. So the Lane version kept its supporters and a reading public for some time, and still has much to recommend it, including the nice engravings after Harvey which are generally included in the reprints.

— John Payne

For more than 50 years the Lane translation remained unthreatened. When Lane died in 1876, his translation still held sway and he could see no competition on the horizon. However, it was about this time John Payne began work on translating the Calcutta II. Payne was self-taught in Arabic (and a few other languages) but unlike Lane had never been to the Orient. He was more the scholar than the traveler, and he intended his translation to be a literary one, not an exercise in ethnography or anthropology.

Among Payne’s circle of friends and acquaintances were Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot and H.S. Ashbee (aka Pisanus Fraxi), two figures of the London literary cognoscenti, friends of Richard Burton, and connoisseurs of pornography. These two were helpful to both Payne and Burton in seeing their respective versions of the *Nights* reach print.

Payne’s work on the Calcutta II took six years. The result was certainly the fullest of the English versions yet published, but he included pornographic passages only when they could be matched in the Breslau and Bulak versions. Payne’s translation was published in nine volumes from 1882-1884 by his previously-established “Villon Society,” whose “members only” policy was expected to protect Payne from obscenity prosecutions. The Payne translation in the Villon Society edition was limited to 500 copies and subscriptions were speedily exhausted. This edition has no illustrations. And, unlike the previous Lane and the soon-to-come Burton, Payne’s version was not overloaded with extensive encyclopedic footnotes regarding Arabic customs; he was content to let the work speak for itself, even if he provided it with a somewhat old-fashioned, “King James-style” voice. After his *Nights*, Payne followed with a three-volume *Tales of the Arabic* in 1884, using additional stories from the Breslau and the Calcutta I. And when the Zotenberg manuscripts of “Alaeddin and the En-



chanted Lamp” and “Zein Ul Asnam and the King of the Jinn” became available to him, he had his translations of these in print by 1889. There exists a 13-volume set of these works dated 1884-1889 that states “Printed for Subscribers Only” without mentioning the Villon Society and without stating a limitation.

Despite a few drawbacks such as a penchant for obscure words and the mock archaic style already mentioned, the Payne translation does not deserve to be utterly lost, as it is nowadays, between Lane and Burton. It should at the very least be acknowledged as an inspiration to Burton, if not his actual template. But the official limitation of Payne’s *Nights* to 500 copies was apparently stuck to and, with a surfeit of Lane reprints and a near infinity of Burtons forthcoming, Payne was simply not as much circulated or read. The nine-volume *Nights* by the Villon Society and the 13-volume extended work of 1889 occasionally appear on the market and are generally rather modestly priced. It is a recommended acquisition on its own merits, and certainly for comparison with the Burton.

→ *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton*

“From my dull and commonplace and respectable surroundings, the Jinn bore me at once to the land of my predilection, Arabia.”

—Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton,
from the foreword to his translation.

When Edward Rice’s 1990 biography of Richard Burton gets to the *Arabian Nights* section, Rice makes the outlandish claim that “it is due to him that the work in general and especially certain of the stories like ‘Aladdin’ and ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves’ became such a standard item in the early reading of Western children.” What nonsense. This certainly would have come as news to Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, DeQuincey, Coleridge, Wordsworth and a host of other writers who preceded Burton. We have already seen that the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* had been a commonplace for childhood reading for more than 150 years. Further, Burton is unreadable by most children and the childhood experience of *The Arabian Nights* owes its continuance through and past Burton much more still to Forster, Weber and Lane, and then to Andrew Lang, Kate Douglas Wiggin, and fresh illustrators than to this massive, slow-going sprawl of often difficult text and self-styled “learned” footnotes, which were never intended for children in the first place.

In 1881 Burton read a notice in *The Athenaeum* that Payne was soliciting subscriptions for his translation-in-progress of the complete Calcutta II. Burton contacted Payne with an offer to help him in any way, and to “correct” his translation. In general Payne welcomed Burton’s attention and certainly his support in the press. Payne’s book was over-subscribed by several times yet he was determined to

keep to the limitation of 500 copies, as originally announced. With Payne’s knowledge and blessing, Burton decided to take advantage of an obvious market and to produce and publish his own translation to meet the ready demand.

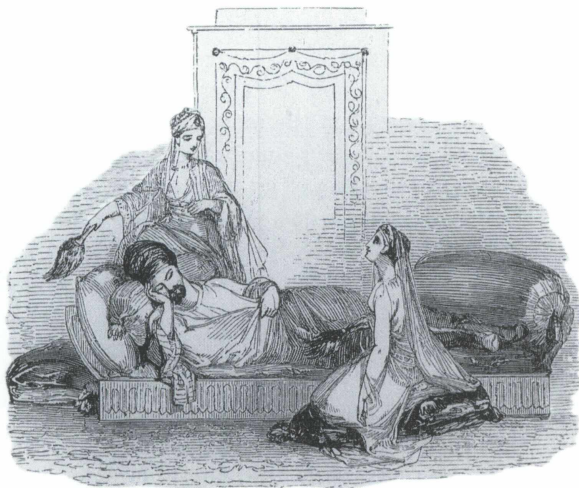
Like Payne’s Villon Society, Burton already had in place the fictional Benares imprint of the Kama Shastra Society, set up by Burton and Arbuthnot to insulate against obscenity prosecution for their publication of the *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, the *Ananga Ranga*, *The Perfumed Garden* and a couple of other works of erotica. This fiction would serve again as the imprint of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* with Benares yet again supplying the exotic locale to a book actually printed at Stoke Newington.

Common knowledge has it that Burton, like Payne, worked from the Calcutta II with, as usual by now, additional stories from the other available Arabic texts and manuscripts. But it is clear that Burton also worked directly from Payne, despite some athletic machinations by Burton to hide the obvious. Burton seems to have had before him on his desk the Calcutta II, the Payne translation and a seemingly unending thesaurus. Burton’s strategy was far more inclusive than exclusive and he felt free to broaden the *Nights* Apocrypha from any semilegitimate source at hand. The work for him is not strictly literary, and the show-off ethnographer in him comes to the fore in his extensive notes—some excellent and informative, some drifting off into minutiae and personal anecdote—and the magnificent, if sometimes bizarre, “Terminal Essay.” All said and done, like everything else Burton had a hand in, his translation of the *Nights* comes out as more “Burton” than anything else, with all his alternately balletic or cumbersome wordplay, his Rabelaisian sense of humor, his desire to shock high Victorian standards of decency and his anthropological/scholarly aspirations.

Burton’s 10-volume translation, with the “Terminal Essay” filling most of the tenth volume, was published as a set in 1885. It immediately absorbed/obliterated the Payne version, though Lane’s version (with the excellent Harvey illustrations) still had its adamant supporters among critics and the general reading public.

Since Burton’s is the most collected and collectable of the *Arabian Nights* translations, I will turn now to Burton bibliographer Norman Penzer to sort out the first edition and various of the more important subsequent editions. There are an overwhelming number of subsequent editions and it is difficult sometimes to know precisely what you might have at hand, especially since reprints continued past Penzer’s 1922 publication. Reference to Penzer is essential, especially for different formats within a specific edition, but for the sake of this overview I will provide a usable gloss (I hope) without going into exact physical descriptions and collations.

The first edition of the Burton translation is: 10



volumes published in 1885; claims to have been published in Benares and printed by the Kama Shastra Society for private subscribers only; title pages in black and red; original publisher's cloth is black with gold diagonal bands enclosing letters in black with additional gold stamping on boards and spines. The *Supplemental Nights* follow the 10-volume set in six additional volumes, two a year from 1886 through 1888, with similar blocking on the cloth casings but now in silver. To be sure of first printing status, one must check copyright statements on the versos of all 16 title pages against Penzer. In either publisher's cloth or a nice binding these 16 volumes are an excellent addition to any library. These are absolutely essential for a collector of Victorian literature or Victoriana, collectors of Burton, and collectors of *The Arabian Nights*. But so, I would contend, are the three volumes of Lane from the dawn of the Victorian age.

By 1886, even before concluding *The Supplemental Nights* for the original work, Burton was in the "self-Bowdlerization" business, though blaming it on his wife, Isabel (who, in a leap of logic, was announced as not having read the unexpurgated text). Over the years 1886-1888 there appeared *Lady Burton's Edition of her Husband's Arabian Nights, prepared for Household Reading by Justin Huntly McCarthy*. This set was issued in six volumes in white cloth with gold stamping. The title page of Volume VI reads "1886" for 1888. This entire production was deservedly unsuccessful and, to my knowledge, was never reprinted.

In 1894 there appeared the first "Nichols-Smithers" edition of the Burton translation (aka "The Library Edition") in 12 volumes: black cloth again, with heavy, elaborate gold stamping on the top boards. In 1896 Nichols and Smithers began an ill-fated parts issue of the text: June 1896 through August 1897 in 63 weekly parts at two shillings each. These were not illustrated, though during the run of the parts issue Albert Letchford began the commission of illustrating the 1897 12-volume edition, which appeared with 70 heliogravures by Letchford to illustrate the text along with his portrait of Burton and (sometimes) 21 additional etchings after Lalauze (which first appeared in a French edition of Galland, 1881-1882). This edition of 1897, with or without the

additional Lalauze illustrations, is known as the "Illustrated Edition" when issued in publisher's cloth. It is stated on the title page to be "The Library Edition" when issued in publisher's morocco, though these copies also contained the Letchford plates, and are dubbed by Penzer the "Illustrated Library Edition." I again advise any interested parties to see Penzer (pages 117-125) for the full convoluted path these Nichols-Smithers-Letchford editions take from 1894 through 1897 and their various monikers and formats.

In 1900, things again changed quite dramatically, thanks to the Press of the Carson-Harper Company in Denver, Colorado and their excellent facsimile reprint of the first Burton edition, supplemented with 100 new illustrations by Stanley L. Wood, and printed "by the Burton Society of Denver Colorado for private circulation among its members." The project was finished in 1901 (the last three volumes bear that date) in an edition of 1,000 copies.

This Denver reprint is an admirable production. The electrotypes from which it was printed held up fine for the intended 1,000-copy press run. But from there forward, the history of the reprinting from these same electros is one of steady quality loss. By 1903 the electros had come into the hands of an unidentified Boston publisher set up as "The Burton Club," a completely specious claim. These "Burton Club" editions and the so-called "Catchword" editions, named after various cities in the Middle East, are the now-familiar 17-volume set of *The Thousand Nights and a Night* and *The Supplemental Nights* which split the rather unwieldy original Volume III of *The Supplemental Nights* into two smaller volumes closer in bulk to the rest of the set.

These editions have no key to the illustrations but usually have the 70 by Letchford, 17 of the original 21 by Lalauze (no one knows what happened to the rest), and an assortment of others by various artists up to an expected total of 114 (if all went well for any particular set). Again, for details, Penzer is recommended.

Each of these reprints states a limitation of 1,000 copies but since so many reprints were done this number becomes meaningless: these sets abound. They continued being reprinted well past the publication of Penzer (1922); I have seen several "Catchword" editions he does not mention. They were available in drab buckram or the familiar black cloth with the attractive gold and silver diagonal bands (though now with much cheaper gilt and argent applied). Generally these editions were cased in America; it seems that sometimes sheets were sent flat to the UK for casing there. Any buyer should be aware of just how plentiful these sets really are, and how the electros continued to degrade with such heavy use. None of the reprints is from standing type, of course, but buyers should look for as little degradation in the typeface as possible, as well as a clean bright cloth casing. If a set is rebound, no matter

how nicely, it is still a good idea for the buyer to flip through the text to gauge the state of degradation and make sure the text impression itself is satisfactory to his or her personal taste.

These Burton editions are readily available to any seekers (a typical reprint in very good condition should only run about \$450). If you would rather die on the spot than be forced to slog through 17 volumes of Burton's prose, Signet Classics publishes in paperback a "best of" rendition, edited admirably by Jack Zipes and for which he has modernized the English prose which, remember, was bizarre even in its own time. This may be a good introduction for high school students, but as Burton said, there are no *Nights* without the nights (which some translators and editors excise). So what fun is Burton without the Burton?

→ After Richard Burton

By the turn of the century, the history of *The Arabian Nights* in English had forked into two very distinct paths: children and adult. In the Eighteenth century, children read the *Nights* voraciously, but as often as not in the same Grub Street and post-Grub Street editions that were intended for and read by adults. More and more, as time went by, collections and individual stories were "re-told" (that is, watered down) specifically for children. After Burton and Payne there was little crossover of intended audiences. The children's path was kept clear by competent editors such as Andrew Lang and Kate Douglas Wiggin (as well as plenty of incompetent editors and "re-tellers") and various superb new illustrated selections featuring the work of such luminaries as Edmund Dulac, Edward Detmold, René Bull and Maxfield Parrish, who each dared to try to better Harvey, Doré, Tenniel, Millais, Ford and their other worthy predecessors. This line descends, sometimes admirably, all the way through the modern children's book illustrators and Disney animators. The Lang/Ford version is kept in print by Dover, and the Wiggin/Parrish by Scribner's.

The adult path continued with, but was not particularly enhanced by, the flat French version of Dr. J.C. Mardrus (Paris: 1899-1904, 16 volumes), which was competently Englished by E.

Powys Mathers (London: 1923, 16 volumes) after narrowly missing being rendered by T.E. Lawrence. This full translation is still in print in four trade paperbacks from St. Martin's.

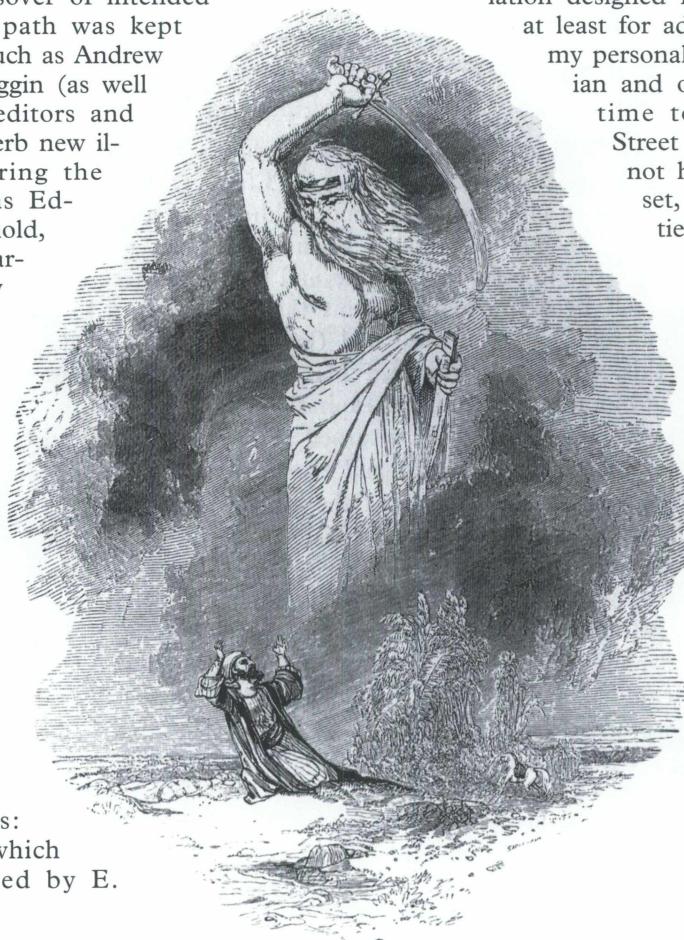
Penguin has kept in print since the 1950s a "best of" version by N.J. Dawood, who worked from the Calcutta II, the Bulak and the Zotenberg "Aladdin." (This pattern may sound familiar to you by now.) Dawood's Penguin paperback edition is well-intentioned, quite readable, and effectively enhanced by a selection of the Harvey illustrations lifted from the original Lane edition.

Recent years have been brilliantly served by Muhsin Mahdi's critical Arabic edition of the core stories contained in the original Fourteenth-century Mamluk manuscript in the Bibliotheque Nationale (published in Leiden in 1984 as *The 1001 Nights [Alf Layla wa-Layla] from the Earliest Known Sources*). This version may prove definitive, at least for this generation of scholars and readers. The Mahdi text was aptly translated into English by Husain Haddawy and published as *The Arabian Nights* by Norton in 1990. Since that deservedly well-received publication, Haddawy has followed with a second volume rendering the more famous "orphan" stories from their best sources with the same excellence. These two books are highly recommended for adults wishing to experience the *Arabian Nights* translated from the best available Arabic, in an English translation designed for this generation. Or

at least for adults who do not share my personal taste for the antiquarian and outré, do not have the time to read all the Grub Street or Mathers' *Nights*, do not have access to a Payne set, or do not have the patience for Burton.

Or, one might more simply follow the advice of the *Nights*-obsessed Jorge Luis Borges, who said of this infinite tapestry of stories that held him so enthralled:

"It is a book so vast that it is not necessary to read it."



Wood engravings after William Harvey, from the Lane edition of 1889.