Before (cf. pp. 15, 227). The indifferent treatment meted out to the ‘arabīya in the quotations is unpleasant, too; the reader frequently stumbles over repeated cases of mistaken vocalisation and violations of morphology: šahadtu, ta‘raudu instead of ta‘ru’du, albisu; lam yadurku, lam yastahiqhū; šalaihi, ilaihi, ‘anhu etc.; tu‘allimu l-gawūrī; rawa ... muṣannafūlahū; tašaffiyan, muftīyan; siffa instead of sifa, mut’a instead of mut‘a, šiciib instead of šacciib and so on.

Notwithstanding these critical remarks, I am inclined to follow Leder in many of his arguments. Moreover, the monograph contains a lot of shrewd observations on topics other than questions of transmission, e.g., on the literary and ideological tendencies in al-Haĭtam’s transmission activity. Leder’s book is an important contribution to the study of Arabic prose literature.

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Some readers might imagine that the most fantastic features of the Arabian Nights are revealed by the plots developed in this world-famous collection of tales. We may discover, however, to our great surprise, that the history of the text itself is of an even more fantastic nature. From the formation of the old collections bearing this title, till the publication of the various editions of this text, in Arabic and in various translations, it appears as if the framework of the Thousand Stories, Thousand Nights, or, in its final and most known title, Thousand and One Nights and the Arabian Nights, has functioned as a mere concept encompassing replaceable materials contained in the “frame story” (histoire-cadre, Rahmenerzählung) about Shahriyār and Shahrazād. The frame-story tells us the legend of Shahriyār, the misogynist king who, offended by women’s unfaithfulness, decides to spend each night with a newly recruited maiden, whom he will kill in the morning; when Shahrazād, the daughter of his vizier, is chosen for this purpose, she provokes his curiosity by telling him an endless series of stories; after 1001 nights of listening to her stories, he marries her. Throughout the ages, it appears that a certain category of story types has always been likely to be absorbed into the collection, while others already included may disappear from any of the many formulations. The contents constitute an ever-changing material reflecting various layers of Indian, Persian and Arab cultural character, with some added segments originating from the Greek, Jewish, or Turkish ambience. If we look at the textual evolution of the Arabian Nights, from a socio-cultural standpoint, distinguishing between the adab of the elite and the hikāyāt genre, the frame-story resembles a waste bin used, through the ages, by the invisible editorial board of Arabic literature. (That is, if one can define as hikāyāt an entire stratum in Arabic literature, that Pinault, in his new book on the Arabian Nights, calls: Arabian Nights stories and their “analogues”.) The Arab elite highly esteemed adab writing and disregarded the hikāyāt stratum, considering it to be tasteless and frivolous (Walther, p. 23). Too lengthy stories which resemble novels or romances as well as stories containing too many supernatural elements are often rejected by adab collections; the only one outlet left for such material is through the hikāyāt, i.e., tales of the Arabian Nights and its analogues, both in their oral and written presentations. As we shall come to observe, in the next paragraph, this idea is subject to a number of reservations.

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One may easily understand why Wiebke Walther refrains from creating such a socio-cultural stratification. Indeed, there are a few understandable reasons for this. Fantastic elements are to be found even in the *adab* of the elite (Walther, p. 24-25), but there is room to inquire whether the fantastic elements accepted by both *adab* and *şıkayât* are of the same nature as those rejected by *adab* and left exclusively to the *şıkayât*. An *adab* writer would willingly accept "super-natural" miracles prodigiously performed by prophets and saints; marvels reported about remote lands, out of the *oikoumene*, could also be readily appoved of (concerning this issue, an entire colloquium, dedicated to *L'Etrange et le merveilleux dans l'Islam médiéval*, took place in 1974 and was published in 1978). But would such an *adab* author agree to include, in his anthology, fairy tales describing bizarre events such as demons slithering out of bottles, out of copper receptacles and the like, in the middle of Baghdad and Cairo, or marvellous journeys over enormous distances in the blink of an eye? Is there a demarcation representing the satiety level up to which an *adab* writer is ready to accept any kind of fantasy and frivolity? The question becomes more complicated when one takes into consideration the many plots and motifs which can be traced both in the *Arabian Nights* and in *adab* collections (Walther, pp. 24-25 and there is more data which can be added to her references). Since the *Arabian Nights* is not an homogeneous collection and since its stories vary in nature and structure, it is not inappropriate to ask the following question: Can one consider the intriguing stories, often of a witty or romantic nature, which are common to both the *Arabian Nights* and the elite literature, *adab*, as constituting the "floor", i.e., the narrative or anecdotal base, in *adab*? And can one regard this very *adab*-"floor" as constituting a "ceiling" in the *Arabian Nights*, i.e., the most *adab*-like elements in the collection?

Wiebke Walther skims through some of this interesting data, but the issue of social stratum does not appear to have to captured the center of her survey. The essential intent of the book under review is to describe the evolution and formulation of the *Arabian Nights* in its various collections. The author skilfully demonstrates the evolution of the text, from historical clues and traces of its earliest forms to the manuscripts which served as the basis for the European translations. The concocted "supplementary" *Nights* are minutely described and the author rightly refrains from suggesting that the reader make any sort of a value judgement by defining this addition, in some of the European versions, as being pure falsifications, inventions, recording of important folk material from Arab "informants" and the like. The reader objectively learns that some of the most famous *Arabian Nights* stories, such as *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* or *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp*, were added by the French translator, A. Galland. On the other hand, the Arabic manuscripts of the *Arabian Nights* gradually augmented, after the European translation initiative had already occurred. In this manner, the *Arabian Nights* is a truly dynamic collection which can swell (or even shrink) all the time. Other aspects touched upon in Walther's survey are the structure, style and language of the stories as well as the social and religious aspects. But, here, the framework of her survey is very selective; the history of the text is minutely traced, whereas the other aspects are concisely treated and only a few individual stories are more extensively analyzed. These examples, however, are characteristic and reflect the most popular narrative stratum of the *Nights*. We have here a book which conforms to the needs of the average intellectual reader, and, at the same time, it serves as a