

George Soper's illustration of
'Prince Ahmed and the Fairy',
The Arabian Nights (1913).



Flying Carpets in the Arabian Nights: Disney, Dyâb ... and d'Aulnoy?¹

Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Flying carpets have a spotty literary history until the early 18th century, when one appeared in the *Arabian Nights* corpus in a tale entitled 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou', which was first published in 1717. That flying carpet, although provided to *Arabian Nights* tradition by an Arab, more likely derived from a newly published French book than from an old Arabic oral tradition, to which it has been regularly ascribed.²

Disney's Flying Carpet

Disney's flying carpet is a purple and gold magic carpet with independent agency. With a conscious intention to benefit Aladdin, it whisks him to safety from the threat of boiling lava in the fast-paced 1992 Disney *Aladdin* film. The film's stunning box-office success propagated further visual creations and re-creations in the 21st century: films, television programmes, board and video games, modern British pantomimes, and even a Broadway musical. The carpet carried forward imagery from a 1940 film, *The Thief of Baghdad* by Alexander Korda, itself a remake of Raoul Walsh's 1924 *Thief of Baghdad*, starring the swashbuckling Douglas Fairbanks at the height of his career.³ The principal resemblance between Walsh's and Korda's *Thief* films and the *Arabian Nights* Aladdin tale on which they were loosely based is the love of a poor boy (fatherless in the classic tale, a Robin Hood figure in the *Thief* films) for the caliph's beautiful daughter.

Whether Disney and his artistic and animation teams believed the carpet had formed part of the traditional Aladdin story makes little difference, for the film they produced from the *Arabian Nights* narrative seamlessly incorporated it, embedding it not only in the film but also in popular lore, collective memory and the imagination of readers, both young and old: for post-Disney generations, the flying carpet of the *Arabian Nights* has become identified with Aladdin, the *Arabian Nights*' pre-eminent character.

The Arabian Nights, 'Aladdin', and the Flying Carpet

In historical terms, a flying carpet was a narrative component neither of late medieval nor of early modern *Arabian Nights* tales. When the Aladdin tale was first published in volumes 9 and 10 of Antoine Galland's *Mille et Une Nuits: Contes Arabes* in 1712, it bore the title 'Histoire d'Aladdin, ou La lampe merveilleuse' and portrayed a poor boy's tests,

tasks, and trials at the hands of wicked magicians, whose machinations were defeated through the magic of a ring genie and a lamp genie, who enabled its hero to marry the daughter of a sultan and become both rich and royal – without a flying carpet.

A plot that enables a poor boy to marry the sultan's daughter is at odds with every magic tale in the *Arabian Nights* tradition up to the time that Galland translated, edited, and expanded a 15th-century Syrian *Thousand and One Nights* manuscript. In that document, and in other pre-Galland *Nights* manuscripts, the only tale that mixes magic, trials, and marriage involves the son and daughter of the viziers of Damascus and Cairo respectively. 'Aladdin's European rise fairy tale plot in which a *poor* boy marries royalty is a late addition to the *Nights* corpus. To understand the significance of this fact, it is necessary to refer to the textual history of the *Arabian Nights*.

The manuscript that Antoine Galland used for his translated and highly edited collection of *Nights* tales (12 volumes, 1704-17) has been dated to the later 15th century.⁴ Yet, no story in this manuscript, nor indeed in any other pre-Galland *Nights* manuscript, had a flying carpet in any of its stories. Neither was there a flying carpet in the seven voyages of *Sindbad the Sailor*, which Galland incorporated into the *Nights* from a different manuscript. Nor did the novelistic material that Galland added to subsequent volumes have a flying carpet. Similarly uncarpeted, the magic of Galland's 'Aladdin' centred on and grew from two genies, one in a ring, the other in an old brass oil lamp. Such doubled magic evidently made further magic superfluous.

The plot trajectory of Galland's 'Aladdin, ou la lampe' ('Aladdin, or the Lamp') corresponds to the early modern rise fairy tale exemplified by Giovan Francesco Straparola's 'Costantino Fortunato' (1553), whose happy ending unites a poor protagonist in marriage to royalty for a happy ending here on earth. Such plots lived on famously in a tale such as Charles Perrault's 'Chat botté' ('Puss in Boots', 1697). 'Aladdin', 'Puss in Boots', and 'Costantino Fortunato' tell much the same story, one whose plot addresses the aspirations of poor but potentially upwardly mobile male readers.

Hanna Dyâb's Tales

'Aladdin' is singular in that it entered world literature not from the pen of a man of letters like Straparola or Perrault, but from the mouth of an eager young man before whom the promise of a better life in Paris had been dangled and who was seeking his fortune there.⁵ Its teller, Hanna Dyâb, was a Syrian Christian with a beguiling narrative repertoire, hints of which he revealed to Galland on 25 March 1709. On that Monday he told Antoine Galland 'quelques contes Arabes fort beaux' ('some very nice Arab tales') that he promised to put in writing.⁶ Dyâb seems not to have ever done so, but later in the spring, from 4 May to 2 June 1709, he recounted sixteen stories, of which Galland recorded fifteen in his journal. The very first was what Galland subsequently referred to as 'La lampe' in correspondence and journal entries. But Galland made no notations as Dyâb told 'La Lampe', commenting

only on Sunday morning of 5 May that 'in the morning, the Maronite Hanna from Aleppo finished telling me the story of The Lamp'.⁷ Dyâb promised to write it down in Arabic, which he eventually did some months later.⁸ That manuscript has disappeared, probably discarded once Galland translated and then edited it for publication.

Galland's edits and expansions of the Dyâb material in his journal are regular and predictable, since he rarely inserted exogenous motifs or episodes into Dyâb's narratives. I have used Galland's story-processing habits to edit backward from his published text of 'Aladdin, or the Lamp' to produce a hypothetical original, as Dyâb probably told the story. The summary that follows is based on the style and content of Dyâb's fifteen other stories, as recorded by Galland in his journal.

This is a story about Ala Eddin.⁹ He was a poor boy in China who spent every day playing in the streets. One day a stranger, a Moroccan magician, came up and pretended to be his long-lost uncle. For some days he treated Ala Eddin and his widowed mother well, with gifts and promises to set Ala Eddin up in business among the city's cloth merchants. Then one day he took Ala Eddin out into the countryside, gave him a ring, and sent him down a staircase hidden beneath a rock, in order to obtain a lamp for the magician and whatever treasures he found for Ala Eddin. When Ala Eddin returned with colourful glass fruits, but didn't want to hand over the lamp before he got back to daylight, the man closed him in the cave and left. Days later, Ala Eddin, nearly dead from hunger and thirst, accidentally rubbed the ring. A genie appeared and released him from the cave. When Ala Eddin returned home, his penniless mother suggested that they polish the lamp and sell it. A genie emerged and granted their wish for food.¹⁰

One day Ala Eddin caught sight of the sultan's daughter Bedre al-Bodour and sent some of the coloured glass fruits as a gift to persuade the sultan to grant him her hand in marriage. The fruits, actually gigantic jewels, had the desired effect. But his vizier, wanting the sultan's daughter for his son, postponed Ala Eddin's wedding to her, and married his son to the sultan's daughter instead.

Using the magic of the genie in the lamp, Ala Eddin brought the newly married couple to his bedroom, where the genie locked the groom in the privy, while Ala Eddin took his place in bed, but

chastely laid a naked sabre between himself and the bride. After two additional such nights, the vizier's son begged to be released from the marriage. Ala Eddin magically built a magnificent palace and married the sultan's daughter. When the Moroccan magician learned of Ala Eddin's escape and marriage, he hurried to China and spirited away Ala Eddin's wife and palace to his homeland. After a long search Ala Eddin found and killed the magician and returned home to China with his wife and palace.

Now a new danger appeared, as the magician's younger brother sought revenge and set off for China. Pretending to be a holy woman named Fatima, he persuaded Bedre al-Bodour that her palace needed a roc's egg to perfect its beauty. After Ala Eddin killed the false holy woman, he and Bedr al-Bodour lived together in happiness. And when the sultan died, Bedre al-Bodour succeeded to the throne and ceded supreme power to Ala Eddin. They ruled together and left many children.

Although the story's geography reaches from China to Morocco, that is, from the eastern to the western reaches of Islam, its descriptions of Ala Eddin's adolescent introduction to the bazaar's cloth merchants in China reflect Aleppo's (and of course many other Muslim cities') layout, while the story's account of the terrain beyond the gardens outside city gates resembles nothing so much as the land outside the walls of 18th-century Aleppo, as described by Alexander Russell in his *Natural History of Aleppo*.¹¹

The plot and structure of Ala Eddin's adventures, on the other hand, resemble not those of the *Arabian Nights*, but those of European rise fairy tales, where a poor boy (or girl) experiences magic, performs tasks, successfully withstands tests and trials, and then marries royalty. A further similarity of the 'Aladdin'/'Ala Eddin' tales to complex European fairy tales¹² is the plot extension where adversity or antagonists re-emerge after the happily-ever-after wedding, by which means the story is extended by appending serial adventures. This aspect of fairy tale construction derives directly from medieval and early modern romances. In contrast, tale extensions in pre-Galland *Nights* collections are not serial descriptions of the hero's or heroine's further actions, but are causal in their function. That is, narrative extensions in the pre-Galland *Nights* tradition take the form of embedded, framed explanatory narrative extensions that demonstrate how a strange situation worthy of marvel has come about. The 15th-century Syrian manuscript that Galland translated provides one example after another of this structural storytelling extension principle.

The distinctions made above are important, and it is necessary to repeat that neither the Galland/Dyâb figure of a poor boy who marries royalty nor the serially extended structure of the 'Aladdin' tale exists in Arabic magic tale tradition.¹³ Both distinctions – plot and structure – represent a radical departure from the standard literary practices of traditional (i.e. pre-15th-century Syrian manuscript) *Nights* collections, despite the equally evident fact that the locations, paraphernalia and *dramatis personae* appear quintessentially 'Eastern': a magic lamp, genies within ring and lamp, wondrously beautiful jewels, a sultan, a vizier, the magical displacement of an entire palace, a bazaar and its merchants. The concept that 'Aladdin', the most iconic of all *Nights* tales, was foreign to the *Nights* tradition before Galland inserted it into his collection grates on expectations, but is broadly accepted among *Nights* scholars.

One might question how so complex a literary problem came to be. One answer lies in the personal life and experience of the teller of the tale, Hanna Dyâb. He was a Maronite, that is, an Eastern Catholic. Unlike Eastern Greek, Armenian, or Assyrian Orthodox Christian communities, Maronites recognised Rome's religious pre-eminence, and in theological terms, Maronite Christianity was closer to Roman Catholic dogma than any other Eastern Christian church.¹⁴ Further, Maronite Christians had been singled out for preferential religious, educational, and economic treatment: a Maronite College had been founded in Rome in 1584; numerous Italian and French religious orders had instituted educational projects in Syria; 16th- and 17th-century Venetian merchants established commercial foundations there, in particular in Aleppo;¹⁵ French merchants followed and eventually largely displaced Italian merchants. A smaller number of English and Dutch merchants also traded in Aleppo. Nearly all merchants needed translators who simultaneously functioned as cultural and commercial mediators.

Of all the foreign communities in Aleppo, the French offered the greatest number of benefits to their Maronite employees. Louis XIV had officially 'adopted' the whole of the Maronite population in 1646, with subsidised travel to and study in France.¹⁶ As fellow Christians whose beliefs and practices were less alien than were those of other Eastern Christians, Maronites like the young Hanna Dyâb were sought out by French merchant employers not only as translators and cultural intermediaries, but also as household factotums. For their part, Maronites placed their family members in such positions, because employment by a Frenchman exempted the employee and his family from Ottoman taxes.¹⁷ Bernard Heyberger identifies the period just preceding and immediately following Hanna Dyâb's birth as one with a change in religious practices, social relations and mentalities, nothing less than an 'occidentalization' of local culture.¹⁸

Because Aleppan Maronite merchants moved freely in the Levant, in Italy, in France, and in between, Dyâb encountered fellow Aleppans wherever he went, and his family appears to have been broadly known in Aleppan Maronite merchant circles. The density of Aleppo's merchant web precipitated social encounters, in foreign cities and in alien lands,

as is attested in the memoir he composed at the end of his life.¹⁹ Dyâb himself worked from early childhood for French merchants, and spoke French fluently, although with an audible Aleppan accent that Galland occasionally captured, when he rendered Dyâb's pronunciation of French words and Arabic names, such as *jardin* (which Dyâb evidently pronounced as *yor-den*) and the personal name *Marjan* (which Galland wrote as 'Morgiane', pronounced as *Mor-john*).²⁰ As a teenager he was drawn to religious life and withdrew to the monastery of St Elisé on Mount Lebanon, about 300 kilometres south-southwest from Aleppo. After he fell dangerously ill and could no longer manage the rigours of monastic life, he left, but with the superior's assurance that he would be welcome to return, should he change his mind. Dyâb did change his mind, after former employers refused to re-hire him in 1707. He was, in fact, on his way back to St Elisé when he met a French antiquarian named Paul Lucas travelling on behalf of Louis XIV and collecting artefacts for the royal collection. Lucas offered immediate employment and held out enticing prospects of a prosperous future in Paris, and so in 1707 Dyâb joined him on a journey of often difficult and adventure-filled land and sea passages that included Beirut, Cairo, Tunis, Livorno, and Marseilles, before reaching Paris in the fall of 1708.²¹

Once in Paris, Lucas exhibited Hanna Dyâb at Versailles (where the ladies of the court received him with curiosity and interest). Dyâb himself paid calls on the Turkish Embassy, and visited salons in the upper reaches of Parisian society, often in Lucas's company, but frequently, it seems, on his own. So passed the autumn and winter of 1708-9, the harshest in living memory. Dyâb met Antoine Galland for the first time in March 1709, simply in passing, on a day when Galland paid a call on Lucas to look at ancient medals.

Hanna Dyâb's experiences from 1707 to 1709 had exposed him to foreigners from Asia, Africa, and Europe, to Aleppan compatriots, and to a varied company of French men and women. By the time of his return trip from Paris to Aleppo in 1709-10, he felt sufficiently comfortable in a French identity to occasionally pass himself off as a French physician in search of healing herbs! I have gone into considerable detail about Hanna Dyâb's life experiences up to the age of 22, in order to show how deeply he was personally involved with and in French social, economic, and administrative culture before, during, and after his Paris sojourn.

Flying Objects in Dyâb's Tales

As we have moved backwards in time from Disney's magic carpet through the 18th-century (and earlier) textual history of *Thousand and One Nights* and into the life of the story's teller Hanna Dyâb, the flying carpet promised by this article's title disappears. It is nowhere to be found in Galland's 'Histoire d'Aladdin', the sole evidence we have of Hanna Dyâb's May 1709 telling of the Aladdin story. Nor does anything like a flying carpet appear in Dyâb's next story, 'Camar eddin and Bedre al-Bodour', although that story's hero marries a woman

named Bedre al-Bodour (as in 'Ala Eddin') who disguises herself as a man named Ala Eddin! Nor does anything fly in Dyâb's next three stories. But in his sixth tale, 'Histoire du cheval de bois' ('Story of the Wooden Horse'), a wooden horse gallops into the air and flies the hero to his beloved, while in his seventh tale, 'La ville d'or' ('The City of Gold') a helpful roc flies the hero from an underworld back to the world of human beings. In the eighth tale that Dyâb told Galland, however, a flying carpet is central.

Hanna Dyâb's Flying Carpet

On Wednesday, 22 May 1709 Hanna Dyâb's flying carpet entered the *Thousand and One Nights* corpus in a lengthy story about Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou.²² This straightforward fairy fiction plays out in two worlds, one the human world of Prince Ahmed and his family, the other Pari Banou's enchanted subterranean realm. In this story, Hanna Dyâb's flying carpet forms an integral part of a bride competition, in which three brothers – Ali, Hussein, and Ahmed – are dispatched by their father, the Sultan of the Indies, to acquire the rarest and most wonderful object in the world to win their cousin as a bride. (Complicating the issue is their father's sudden love for the same girl.) The oldest, Prince Hussein, travels through many cities and provinces before he

arrives at one of the principal cities of the Indies, where he takes lodging in the city's most magnificent and most beautiful khan. The next day he goes to the shops of the richest merchants.²³

A hawker comes by with an unremarkable small carpet with a very high price.

Finding the price high, the prince asks the hawker what made the rug so special. The hawker explains that it can bear him to whatever place he wished. The prince verifies the carpet's flying ability,²⁴ buys it, and returns to his lodgings. Satisfied with his purchase, he later flies on the rug to the agreed-upon meeting place, folds up the carpet and waits for his brothers.

When the brothers arrive, they show their purchases, a telescope that can see anywhere in the world and a magic apple that can bring sick people back to health, even if they are at death's door. When Ali's telescope reveals that their beloved cousin is nigh unto death, all three fly to her on Hussein's rug 'in a few moments', and Ahmed heals her by means of the magic apple. They all return to the palace.²⁵

'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou' recalls Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's fairy fiction 'La Chatte blanche' ('The White Cat'). Published in Paris in 1698 as one of several tales in the four-volume *Contes nouveaux, ou Les Fées à la mode* (*New Tales, or The Fashionable Fairies*),²⁶ it belongs to the same genre – tale collection – that underlay Dyâb's Arabic language readings in Aleppo²⁷ and that also provided a source for his tenth tale, 'The Two Jealous Sisters'²⁸ (Fig. 2).

A striking number of narrative elements from Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat' re-emerge in Hanna Dyâb's 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou':

1. The king in 'The White Cat' sends his three sons on a quest
2. and gives them money and jewels for the expenses of their journeys.²⁹
3. The brothers evince the same positive emotions and helpful behaviour toward each other in Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat' and 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'.³⁰
4. The youngest son in 'The White Cat' finds an extraordinary palace³¹ (aboveground, however, unlike the palace in 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou').
5. The youngest son in Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat' returns at the end of a year to the meeting place arranged with his brothers,³² the exact span of time adopted by Hanna Dyâb in 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'.
6. The king in Mme d'Aulnoy's tale sets an impossible task for the youngest son (to find and bring back an impossibly fine piece of fabric),³³ nearly identical to that in the second section of 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'.
7. In Mme d'Aulnoy's tale a dying queen is magically healed, after which she feeds on fruit, whereas in Hanna Dyâb's story a dying princess is healed by a magic fruit.
8. Mme d'Aulnoy's fairyland fiction vocabulary ('superbement', 'magnifique')³⁴ returns repeatedly in Hanna Dyâb's story.
9. A telescope figures in both 'The White Cat' and 'Prince Ahmed and Paris Banou'.

The large number of textual, functional, and lexical similarities linking Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat' to Hanna Dyâb's 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou' are clear and persuasive evidence for a remembered text ('The White Cat') steering the composition of Hanna Dyâb's 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'.³⁵

D'Aulnoy's
White Cat.



'The White Cat' provides one more image: a Persian carpet (*tapis de Perse*), on which the white cat awaits her beloved's return:

She was seated on a Persian carpet, beneath a tent made of cloth-of-gold on a loggia from which she could see him approaching.³⁶

Dyâb adopted the fact of a Persian carpet on which a person sits and which itself is associated with a bride competition. Then he associates the same carpet with the bride competition in his own tale, 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'. Dyâb made the borrowed image into a small carpet, on whose diminutive size he elaborated when he gave it measurable dimensions – six footlengths on a side – and found the price for so small a rug to be exorbitant.

The Persian carpet in d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat' lies on the floor, a creature comfort for the hero's beloved White Cat. It doesn't fly, and the White Cat stays where she is, on the Persian carpet. What reason, then, may one cite to claim that d'Aulnoy's unmoving Persian carpet is the imaginative source for Hanna Dyâb's flying carpet, on which a person 'only had to sit down' and immediately 'would be borne to the place [that] he wished'? Although d'Aulnoy's Persian carpet does nothing of the sort, its positioning within the structure of 'The White Cat' aligns it with self-propelling objects.

The prince encounters the first of Mme d'Aulnoy's self-propelling objects when he arrives at the White Cat's palace and sees 'a large easy chair, which moved all by itself'.³⁷ The following morning, invisible servitors present the prince 'with a wooden horse which galloped and cantered marvellously'.³⁸ The prince must have ridden the wooden horse often, for at the end of a year in White Cat's fairy realm, it has become 'the trusty wooden horse' that carries him five hundred leagues 'in less than twelve hours'.³⁹ When it bears him to White Cat's palace for a midnight supper, it does so 'more quickly than any coach could have travelled'.⁴⁰ In the immediately following episode, in which the prince prepares to visit his father, White Cat supplies him with a far more regal form of transportation. It is on his return from that visit that the Persian carpet makes its first appearance. White Cat sits on it, awaiting his arrival.

Thus Mme d'Aulnoy introduces the Persian carpet at a dramatic moment of aerial transportation. The prince returns to her palace in the barouche pulled by twelve snow-white horses that she has given him, and White Cat, sitting on the *tapis de Perse*, welcomes him back to her palace.⁴¹ The horses, the coach they pull, the caparisons they wear, and the coachmen are described three pages earlier.⁴² At this point the capacity for aerial transport, it would seem, is passed from one kind of object – horses that fly, whether those horses are of wood or of flesh – to an inanimate object, a simple Persian carpet.⁴³ For Mme d'Aulnoy the Persian carpet appears to mark fabulous wealth, but Hanna Dyâb appears to have remembered it in the context of flying as he recalled the story's elements in creating a new narrative, 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'. Were this the only occasion on which Dyâb reformulated the parts of a remembered tale, this reasoning might be considered shaky, or perhaps unreliable. But the same mental process can be observed in Dyâb's 'City of Gold', which incorporates, but jumbles, numerous details from the second voyage of *Sindbad the Sailor*. He similarly re-used many of the same motifs in his 'Sultan of Samarcand', where he shifts their motivations within the tale.⁴⁴

Just as textual proximity unites the concept of 'flying' with a Persian carpet in Mme d'Aulnoy's tale, so too does other textual evidence link her story to Hanna Dyâb's world. In Paris Dyâb knew people who were concerned with ancient coins and medals. He had translated for and assisted Paul Lucas as he acquired ancient coins, medals, and other artefacts for Louis XIV's personal collection in 1707-8. Galland, an expert numismatist and member of the Academy of Inscriptions, studied and wrote learnedly about ancient coins and medals. In fact, it was in the course of examining some of Lucas's acquisitions that Galland and Dyâb first met. It cannot be accidental that the d'Aulnoy story that seems to have left so deep an impression on Dyâb was one in which the prince could acquire through magical servants whatever 'ancient medal' he wished for.⁴⁵ It was a motif with which the young Dyâb could instantly identify, affirming who he was and what he had done as Lucas's traveling companion, translator, and cultural intermediary in 1707 and 1708.

I have argued that 'flying' and 'carpet' are linked by the textual proximity of a flying horse⁴⁶ and a Persian carpet in Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat'. I have also argued that Hanna Dyâb would have read Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat' with particular interest because of the tale's passing reference to ancient medals. Is it legitimate to attribute Dyâb's narrative creation of a flying carpet to a literary and a personal conjunction? Or might Dyâb's creation of a flying carpet suggest his possible knowledge of a different tradition altogether?

Pre-Dyâb Flying Carpets and Objects

I will ignore the oft-cited hero-carrying, flying Garuda of Hindu and Buddhist religion and mythology as a possible precursor for Hanna Dyâb's flying carpet. For one, Garuda was fundamentally birdlike. For another, the Arabic *Nights* tradition already lay at two significant removes from Indian sources by the time Dyâb composed 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'. And finally, the principal Indian components remaining in the 15th-century Syrian *Nights* manuscript are the animal wisdom tales in the prologue. I will also pass over legends associated with two early Persian monarchs, Phraates and Shapur. Phraates II, who reigned in Parthia (Persia) from c.138 to 127 BCE, is said to have flown on a carpet from the Zagros Mountains in Persia to a battle in which he defeated King Antiochus VII, while Shapur I, who ruled from c.240 to c.270 CE, is said to have flown on a carpet to achieve a similar victory over Roman forces. I was unable to find sources of either account from, or even near, their historical periods.⁴⁷ Until those are located, those flying carpets should probably be regarded as early modern legends projected back onto historical figures.

A venerable Arabic-language Muslim religious tradition offers datable evidence, however. Commentary on two Qur'anic Surahs – 21:81 and 34:12 – elaborate on God's having given Solomon control of the winds, with the result that he could travel a two-month journey in a single day. A 14th-century Sunni Muslim Qur'anic interpreter Ismail

Ibn Kathir wrote a commentary on Surah 21:81, in which he described a wooden mat, or platform, that moved along above the earth as Solomon walked beneath it. In this way it protected him from the burning sun.

He had a mat made of wood on which he would place all the equipment of his kingship; horses, camels, tents and troops, then he would command the wind to carry it, and he would go underneath it and it would carry him aloft, shading him and protecting him from the heat, until it reached wherever he wanted to go in the land. Then it would come down and deposit his equipment and entourage ...⁴⁸

When Ibn Kathir wrote about God's having put the winds under Solomon's control in Sura 34:12, he provided a different image. Here Solomon travelled vast distances on 'his carpet' rather than under a wooden mat that shaded him:

He subjugated the wind to [Sulayman/Solomon], so that it could carry his carpet one way for a month, then back again the next month. Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "He set out from Damascus in the morning, landed in Istakhar where he ate a meal, then flew on from Istakhar and spent the night in Kabil." Between Damascus and Istakhar is an entire month's travel for a swift rider, and between Istakhar and Kabil is an entire month's travel for a swift rider.⁴⁹

Ibn Kathir's 14th-century citation of the early theologian Al-Hasan al-Basri⁵⁰ suggests that the image of a flying carpet might have been available to Muslims through Qur'anic commentary or Muslim preachers. If so, it left no trace: Arabic literary tradition has not a single flying carpet before Dyâb's 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'.⁵¹

In Jewish tradition Solomon also had a flying carpet. Recognising what must have been the image's Muslim origins, Jewish tradition gave Solomon's carpet the Muslim sacred colour, and described it as green silk shot through with gold threads. Expanding (literally) on the Muslim carpet, the Jewish Solomonic carpet was 60 miles square. This vision of Solomonic flight is documented in an 11th-century manuscript entitled *Ma'aseh ha-Nemala*, which was subsequently copied in the late 1400s and printed in Constantinople in 1519.⁵² The image of a flying green silk carpet has been revived in contemporary Jewish children's literature, an example of which appears in 'The Mysterious Palace' in *Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales*.⁵³

In 'Reading for Fun in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo', I argue that Hanna Dyâb was unlikely to have heard or read Jewish material or to have incorporated it into his own

stories, because the anti-Jewish sentiments expressed both in his memoir and in the Aladdin tale itself (see note 10) make it unlikely that he would have sought or have been exposed to Jewish storytelling. And since Dyâb did not know Hebrew, he could not have read a story collection in which the Solomonic carpet appeared. Dyâb could read Arabic but, to the best of my knowledge, Jewish story collections did not circulate in Arabic in Aleppo in the late 17th or early 18th centuries. Supporting the possibility that Dyâb knew of a flying carpet in Jewish tradition, on the other hand, are the measurements he gives the flying carpet in 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'. Like the Jewish rug it is *square*, and its size, instead of sixty miles on a side is a mere six footlengths. In some way that is not yet known, Jewish material did enter Dyâb's repertoire, for one of the stories he told Galland, 'Ali Cogia', is a direct re-telling of a Hebrew tale documented as medieval in origin.

Solomon legends in the Islamic stories-of-the-Prophets tradition include references to the Solomonic carpet, as do the Reinhardt, the Weil, and the Mardrus *Nights* recensions.⁵⁴ But there are no reliable dates for the entry of the Solomonic carpet narrative tradition into individual stories of the prophets or into stories included in the three recensions listed above, which makes it impossible to determine if Hanna Dyâb could have known or did, in fact, know, about an Arabic-language Muslim Solomonic flying carpet when he created a flying carpet in his 1709 telling of 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou'.

On the other hand, certain things *are* known, such as the absence of flying carpets from the pre-Galland stock of *Arabian Nights* tales and the absence of Solomonic flying carpets from medieval and early modern Arabic literature, as well as Hanna Dyâb's apparent antipathy towards Jews and Jewishness. These facts diminish the likelihood that Dyâb based his flying carpet on Muslim or Jewish commentary or literature.

Do the squareness and the six-ness (six footlengths vs sixty miles on a side) of Hanna Dyâb's flying carpet reveal a fusion of a remembered gigantic Jewish flying carpet with a Persian rug encountered in Mme d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat'? We must at least allow for this possibility as we consider the many evident connections between Dyâb's 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou', the story in which the flying carpet makes its debut, and d'Aulnoy's 'White Cat'. It is also the case that in the second (but not the first) Muslim Surah discussed above and in the Jewish tale, a 'carpet' carries a person, a further similarity between Dyâb's creation and earlier flying carpets.

Viewed as a whole, Hanna Dyâb's 'Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou' resembles nothing so much as an orientalised version of contemporaneous stories published in Paris a decade before he arrived there. What is fascinating is that Dyâb himself did the orientalising. It was he who mined a Western story to create an iconic image of the East. It was he who fashioned an Eastern context and outcome for a Western story. He was a Christian and an Arab, a traveller between Aleppo and Paris, a real-world mediator between East and West in his employment as translator for Paul Lucas

and a literary go-between in the stories he created for the *Arabian Nights*. With his small flying carpet he created an image that is as captivating in modern film as it was in 18th-century storytelling.

.....

Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Notes

1. This article was first published as 'Vliegende tapijten in Duizend-en-een-nacht: Disney, Dyâb ... en d'Aulnoy?' in the Dutch journal *Volkskunde* (2017), vol. 3, 255-72.
2. Mia Gerhardt, *The Art of Storytelling* (Leiden: Brill, 1963); Aoubakr Chraïbi, *Les mille et une nuits: Histoire du text et Classification des contes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).
3. See Noel Brown, *British Children's Cinema: From The Thief of Bagdad to Wallace and Gromit* (London: Tauris, 2017).
4. Muhsin Mahdi routinely referred to it as a 14th-century manuscript in his critical edition, *Alf Layla wa-Layla (The Thousand and One Nights)*, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1995), and its translator into English, Husain Haddawy, maintained that dating in his book (*The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddawy (New York: Norton, 1990; 2008)). Heinz Grotzfeld revised that date to the late 15th century based on the mention of a coin first issued at a later date (Grotzfeld, 'The Age of the Galland Manuscript of the *Nights*: Numismatic Evidence for Dating a Manuscript?', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 1: 50-64); Jean-Claude Garcin has further revised the date based on the datable construction of a Damascus building mentioned in one of the tales (Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique des Mille et Une Nuits: Essai sur l'édition de Bûlâq* (Paris: Sindbad (La Bibliothèque Arabe), 2013), 2).
5. See also Arafat Razzaque, 'Who Wrote Aladdin? The Forgotten Syrian Storyteller' with marvellous illustrations: <https://ajammm.com/2017/08/10/who-was-the-real-aladdin/>.
6. Antoine Galland, *Le Journal d'Antoine Galland (1646-1715): La période Parisienne*, vol. 1 (1708-9), edited by Frédéric Bauden and Richard Waller (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 290.
7. 'Le matin, le Maronite Hanna d'Alep, acheva de me faire le recit du Conte de La Lampe', Galland, *Journal*, vol. 1, 321.
8. In his journal, Galland notes translating and editing Dyâb's Arabic document, for instance on 10 January 1711.
9. In Dyâb's second tale, 'Camar eddin and Bedr al-Bodour', the heroine disguises herself as a man and adopts the name Ala Eddin. For that reason I have used the name that Dyâb would in all likelihood have given his hero, even though Galland wrote the name in the now-familiar form, 'Aladdin'. I will continue to use 'Aladdin' when discussing the tale in its subsequently published form, and 'Ala Eddin' when referring to or quoting from Dyâb's creation.
10. This part of the story incorporates Ala Eddin's being cheated by a Jew. The anti-Jewish sentiments expressed here, where 'an honest old jeweler' tells him a Jewish merchant and his wife have been cheating him, are consistent with anti-Jewish stories recounted by Hanna Dyâb about his experiences in Livorno. Dyâb's memoir statements make it likely that the anti-Jewish sentiments expressed in 'Ala Eddin'/Aladdin' are his, rather than Galland's insertions.
11. Alexander Russell, *Natural History of Aleppo* (London: A. Millar, 1756), 5-9.
12. Please note that my use of the term 'complex' here differs somewhat from Elizabeth Wanning Harries's meaning in *Twice Upon a Time* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2003). There she distinguishes between 'folk' and 'literary' fairy tales with the terms 'simple' and 'complex' respectively.
13. Contrary to the Wikipedia article 'Magic Carpet', Richard Burton's edition of *Thousand and One Nights* (vol. 13, 1885) incorporates significant numbers of post-Syrian 'Galland' manuscript material, that is, stories of European provenance, in an effort to achieve a much-longed-for 'completeness' in the world of 19th-century *Nights* collections. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_carpet, as of 5 November 2016.

14. Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au Temps de la réforme catholique* (Rome: École française de Rome, Palais Farnese, 1994), 469.
15. Surāya Farooqī, 'The Venetian presence in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-30' in *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, ed. Huri Islamoglu-Inan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 342.
16. Don Peretz, *The Middle East Today* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 341; Milton Viorst, *The Arabs in Search of the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 164; Aviau de Piolant, *Au pays des Maronites* (Paris: H. Oudin, 1882), 26-8.
17. Bruce Masters, 'Trading Diasporas and "Nations": The Genesis of National Identities in Ottoman Aleppo', *International History Review* 9.3 (1987), 358-360, 366
18. Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 383.
19. Translated from Arabic into French (*D'Alep à Paris: Les pérégrinations d'un jeune Syrien au temps de Louis XIV*, trans. Paule Fahmé-Thiéry, Bernard Heyberger, and Jérôme Lentin (Paris: Sindbad, 2016)) and into German (*Von Aleppo nach Paris: Die Reise eines jungen Syrers bis an den Hof Ludwig XIV*, trans. Gennaro Ghirardelli (Berlin: Die Andere Bibliothek), vol. 378). An English translation is in the works.
20. Galland, *Journal*, vol. 1, 359-63; see also Ruth B. Bottigheimer, 'East Meets West: Hannâ Dyâb and *The Thousand and One Nights*', *Marvels and Tales* 28.2 (2014), 305, and Bottigheimer, 'Hannâ Dyâb's Tales in Antoine Galland's *Mille et Une Nuit(s)*: I – New Perspectives on their Recording II. New Conclusions about Western Sources within *Nights* Texts', in *Mémoires de l'Association pour la Promotion de l'Histoire et de l'Archéologie Orientales*, eds. Frédéric Bauden and Richard Wâller (Leuven: Peeters, 2017).
21. Paulo Horta independently treats some of this material in his *Marvellous Thieves: Secret Authors of the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).
22. Galland, *Journal*, vol. 1, 343. Years later, Galland edited it in preparation for what would be the final volume of his *Mille et Une Nuits*, but he died in 1715, and the story appeared posthumously in 1717.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Just as does the prince in Dyâb's flying horse story.
25. Galland, *Journal*, vol. 1, 343-4.
26. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, 'The White Cat', trans. John Ashbery, in *Wonder Tales: Six Stories of Enchantment*, ed. Marina Warner (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994). A critical edition of 'The White Cat' appears in Nadine Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux, ou Les Fées à la mode* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 755-90.
27. This understanding is worked out in Bottigheimer's 'Reading for Fun in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo', an examination of Arabic-language precursors for motifs, episodes and plots that appear in Dyâb's tales. The article is currently under consideration and has not yet been published.
28. Bottigheimer, 'East Meets West'.
29. Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux*, 755.
30. Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux*, 755-6: 'sans jalousie et sans chagrin, et que le plus heureux ferait toujours part de sa fortune aux autres'.
31. Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux*, 756-9.
32. Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux*, 764.
33. Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux*, 766: 'une pièce de toile qui pût passer par le trou d'une aiguille'.
34. Jasmin (ed.), *Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes nouveaux*, 768, 773, 781 (twice), 782.
35. This analysis is excerpted from the forthcoming Bottigheimer, 'Hannâ Dyâb, Antoine Galland, and Hannâ Dyâb's Tales', 69-91.
36. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 770.
37. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 22.
38. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 27.
39. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 28-9. Later in the story, the wooden horse's pace is apparently reduced in hindsight, now remembered to have required 'less than two days' to traverse more than 500 leagues. The wooden horse's example, however, 'animates' the prince's grand cortege, so that they cover this distance in twenty-four hours (35).

40. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 32.
41. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 37.
42. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 34.
43. Fruit on trees in a fairy orchard are credited with being able to bring themselves from tree to table on their own a few pages later. However, they do not fly, but arrive 'rolling, creeping, pell-mell, without getting bruised or dirty', i.e. not moving aerially but terrestrially (Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 43). Note, however, the insertion of a flying dragon who carries the princess in a cradle to the fairies' castle several years before, but related subsequently in the tale itself (49), and a chariot of fire drawn by winged salamanders (57).
44. Bottigheimer, 'Reading for Fun in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo'.
45. Warner (ed.), *Wonder Tales*, 33
46. I will not go into Mme d'Aulnoy's sources for a wooden horse that could fly. Suffice it to say that she could easily have drawn her unencumbered image of a flying wooden horse from late medieval and early modern Orlando stories, of which there is ample evidence in other of her tales, or she could have been familiar with chapbook versions of the *Clamades* tale or even of the medieval verse *Cleomades* romance. For more on these European flying wooden horse stories see Bottigheimer, 'The Case of "The Ebony Horse"', Part I', *Gramarye* vol. 5, 8-20.
47. The Shapur and Phraates legends may be an instance of back projection onto a historical character of a motif that developed later. The information included above comes from the internet (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/aladdins-flying-carpet-connection-between-past-present-mohammed-islam>), but neither I nor an Iranian colleague, Mehdi Faraji, have been able to identify the historical point at which these legends came into existence.
48. Tafsir Ibn Kathir, (*Abridged*) *Surat Al-Isra'*, Verse 39 to the End of *Surat Al-Mu'minun*, ed. Shaykh Safir Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh, Houston, New York, London, Lahore: Darussalam, 2000), vol. 6, 476-7. From http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Sources/Legends/flying_carpet.htm
49. Tafsir Ibn Kathir, *Surat Al-Ahzab*, Verse 51 to the End of *Surat Ad-Dukhan*, ed. Shaykh Safur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh, Houston, New York, London, Lahore: Darussalam, 2000), vol. 8, 70. From http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Sources/Legends/flying_carpet.htm.
50. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasan_of_Basra.
51. Dwight F. Reynolds, 'A Thousand and One Nights: A History of the Text and Its Reception', in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, eds. Roger Allen, D.S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 278. A highly detailed history is Aboubakr Chraïbi, 'Introduction', *Arabic Manuscripts of the Thousand and One Nights: Presentation and Critical Editions of Four Noteworthy Texts; Observations on Some Osmanli Translations* (Paris: espaces et signes, 2016) 15-64.
52. Sulamith Ish-Kishor, *The Carpet of Solomon, A Hebrew Legend* (New York: Pantheon, 1966); Dov Noy, Dan Ben-Amos, Ellen Frankel (eds), *Folktales of the Jews: Sephardic Dispersion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), vol. 1, 496.
53. *The Elijah's Violin* story (ed. Howard Schwartz (London: Oxford University Press, 1983)) is based on 'Maaseh ha-Nemelah' in *Beit ha-Midrash*, ed. Andrew Jellinek (Jerusalem: Bamnberger and Wahrmann, 1938) (*Elijah's Violin*, 298).
54. MS Reinhardt held at the University of Strasbourg (Ar. No 4278-4281) (date?); Gustav Weil's translation into German, intended to be philologically exact but edited by the publisher (4 vols, 1837-41); and Jean-Charles Mardrus, who translated the *Nights* into French (1898-1904), adding his own invented material. *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen (Santa Barbara CA: ABC-Clio), 'Stories of the Prophet', vol. 2, 711 and 'Carpet, Flying', vol. 2, 513-14.

Further reading

- Ashman, Howard and Tim Rice, *Aladdin* (screenplay), Disney Productions, 1992.
Disney's Aladdin (Danbury: Grolier/Copenhagen: Egmont Books, 1993).
 Skinner, Joy, *Over the Hill with a Magic Carpet* (Haddenham: Fern House, 1999).