



A review of
**Relief after
Hardship:
The Ottoman
Turkish Model for
The Thousand and One Days**

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In the opening sentence of his recent work of scholarship, *Relief after Hardship: The Ottoman Turkish Model for The Thousand and One Days* (2017), Ulrich Marzolph makes the striking observation that the study 'should have been written long ago by somebody else than the present author' (vii). The 'somebody else' in question is the Austrian scholar of Ottoman Studies, Andreas Tietze, who, in the 1950s, had introduced to European attention the anonymous 15th-century story compilation *Ferec ba 'd es-sidde* (*Relief after hardship*), and who had planned to publish an edition of the Ottoman Turkish text, as well as a German translation of the stories and a detailed commentary on the narratives. As it transpired, Tietze was never able to complete this ambitious project. The Ottoman Turkish text was published by his colleague and friend, György Hazai, but only parts of the German translation appeared, and the proposed commentary 'never materialised' (vii). Written some seventy years later, Marzolph conceives his current project as an endeavour to build on the work done by Tietze and to 'fill the gaps' that he left (vii). To do this, Marzolph offers a study in two parts. The first half of *Relief after Hardship* offers an extensive essay on the collection that traces the genre of storytelling represented in *Ferec ba 'd es-sidde* back to the Persian narrative collections known as *Jami' al-'ikayat* (literally, 'Collection of tales'), and explores its influence on the French orientalist story collection *Les Mille et un jours: Contes orientaux* (*A Thousand and One Days: Oriental Tales*) published by François Pétis de la Croix in five volumes between 1710 and 1712. The second part of the study offers summaries of each of the 42 tales in the collections, along with notes detailing sources and international parallels for the stories. Both parts of the study will prove invaluable to scholars of folk narrative and fairy tale traditions. The opening critical essay, informed by Marzolph's exemplary scholarship, develops a number of important and innovative arguments about the collection – not least, the contention that there is likely to have been a single Persian source for *Ferec ba 'd es-sidde* which is now lost (26-7). Likewise, the story summaries serve to make available to international attention a collection rich with potential for future analysis.

To give an example of a narrative that is, if not typical in a collection so various, at least representative – story 23 concerns a tyrant king who systematically executes his viziers after one year of service by having them thrown to ferocious dogs. Eventually this king appoints a vizier who, cleverer than his predecessors, spends the year feeding and befriending the dogs, so that when he is finally thrown into their cage, he is left in peace. Seeing the vizier unharmed the next day, and having been admonished by the vizier for his cruelty, the king repents his former violence.

The story illustrates the model of 'relief after hardship' succinctly: the narrative is entertaining but simultaneously instructive; it deals with cleverness and the capacity of the clever to overcome and resist mindless violence and ill luck; and it holds out the promise that after suffering comes reward. The story will also be resonant and suggestive for scholars of the international tale interested in comparative narrative analysis. In spirit at least the narrative recalls the frame tale of the *Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade, by telling her nocturnal stories, preserves her own life, and ultimately cures King Shahriyar of his murderous violence against women. The story also, as Marzolph notes, is structurally similar to the international tale type 'Androcles and the Lion' (ATU 156) – in which an escaped slave thrown to a savage lion is not harmed because of a kindness he has previously shown it. Similar resonances, across multiple traditions, may be found in many if not all the stories of this collection.

This slim volume, replete with excellent and illuminating research, leaves the reader hoping that there is more to come from Marzolph on this subject. The story summaries are a wonderful gift to international scholars, and a full translation in a European language (to complete Tietze's scheme) would be even better. Likewise, there are several arguments introduced here that hold out the promise of future elaboration, notably Marzolph's tantalising suggestion that the model of 'relief after hardship' might have influenced the development of the European fairy tale which has a similar 'basic structure' involving 'a series of trials and tribulations before ... lasting amelioration' (46). Most promising, however, is Marzolph's enticing postscript, added whilst the book was in press, in which he reports that there is a volume in the British Library, titled *Mu 'nis-nama* (*The book as an intimate friend*), that 'represents the oldest, and probably even the original Persian version of *Jami' al-'ikayat* ... compiled some two centuries prior to *Ferec ba 'd es-sidde*' and therefore potentially a direct source (47). 'Although the bearings of this new discovery will have to be considered with great care,' Marzolph concludes, 'they can hardly be overestimated' (48). If we may judge by this cliff-hanger of an ending, *Relief after Hardship* represents just the beginning of Marzolph's work on this important collection.

Author: Ulrich Marzolph.

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