The slave-girls who enslaved the free-born: Slave-girls and their masters in Islamic literature

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Revista de Humanidades, 23 (2014). p. 23-60. ISSN 1130-5029

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Las esclavas que esclavizaron a los nacidos libres: esclavas y sus amos en la literatura islámica

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Recibido: 11 de marzo de 2014
Aceptado: 17 de julio de 2014

Abstract

Slave-girls, and in particular singing slave-girls, hold a prominent place in Islamic literary sources. These sources provide quite a number of stories in which the masters of slave-girls fall deeply in love with them, and then, when faced with the prospect of separation or are indeed separated from them, humble themselves and risk losing their honour, all of their wealth, and even their own lives in order to be reunited with the girl whom they love. In some stories, intelligent and learned slave-girls take the initiative to preserve their relationships with their masters who are often depicted as inept and clueless. In the end, the girl is typically given her freedom and marries her master. Although the men are the legal masters of the slave-girls, it seems that there is an inversion of the master/slave roles in the tales and that it is the slave-girl who controls the destiny of both.

Keywords: Slave-girls; Qiyān; Manumission; The Arabian Nights; Tanūkhī.

Resumen

Las esclavas, y en particular las que cantan, han ocupando un lugar destacado en las fuentes literarias islámicas. Estas fuentes proporcionan un buen número de historias en las que los amos de las esclavas se enamoran profundamente de ellas, y luego, cuando se enfrentan a la perspectiva de la separación o de hecho están separados de ellas, se humillen y se arriesgan a perder su honor, toda sus riqueza, e incluso sus propias vidas con el fin de reunirse con la chica a la que aman. Las esclavas en algunas historias, inteligentes y sabias toman la iniciativa para preservar sus relaciones con sus amos, que a menudo son descritos como ineptos e ignorantes. Al final, la chica obtiene normalmente la libertad y se casa con su amo. Aunque los hombres son los dueños legales de las esclavas, parece que hay una

inversión de los papeles de amo / esclavo en las historias y que es la esclava quién controla el destino de ambos.

Palabras Clave: Esclavas; Qiyan; Manumisión; Las mil y una noches; Tanukhi.

Para citar este artículo: Shahin, Aram A. (2014). The slave-girls who enslaved the free-born: Slave-girls and their masters in Islamic literature. *Revista de Humanidades*, n. 23, p. 23-60. ISSN 1130-5029.

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. A Recurring Story of Regret and Generosity. 3. Love between Master and Slave as Allegory of Mystical Love. 4. Conclusion: Fiction and History. 5. Bibliography.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are numerous stories in Islamic literature in which men and women fall deeply in love with each other, often at first sight, and then encounter some adversity that causes their separation and risks ending their relationship. Some of these stories have a happy ending with the couple united in marriage and living blissfully together until their deaths, while others have tragic outcomes in which the lovers are not allowed to be together, and this sometimes results in one or both of them dying from heartache. Although the male protagonist in these stories is almost always a free man, it is quite common for the woman to be a slave. The social condition of the woman does not detract from the way in which she is portrayed in the story or the way she is perceived by the man, who is instead taken by her beauty, wit, knowledge, and skills. The man is typically the woman's master who has inherited her or has speedily purchased her after falling in love with her at first sight.

The slave-girls who are the protagonists in these stories can be simple servants, but they can also be very talented, educated, and intelligent women. Prominent amongst them and extremely valued are singing slave-girls (Pellat, 1976). Although in some of the tales the slave-girls are rather passive and have to endure whatever the male characters decide, in others they take the initiative and prove to be invaluable to their masters and to their wellbeing. What is remarkable about the tales is that the masters of the slave-girls fall deeply in love with them, and, despite their wealth and sometimes high-rank, are willing to humble themselves and/or risk losing their honour, all of their fortune, and even their own lives for their love. In some instances, the masters are completely reliant on their slave-girls (who appear sagacious, enterprising, and intelligent) and follow their suggestions and plans. On other occasions, the slave-girls are instrumental in saving the lives of their masters or in changing their outlook on certain matters by imparting their wisdom. This article is dedicated to the exposition and analysis of a number of these stories in which the roles of master and servant often seem reversed.

2. A RECURRING STORY OF REGRET AND GENEROSITY

One group of stories that are of interest to us here share a similar structure and are often related to highlight the generosity and compassion of a magnanimous benefactor on the two lovers rather than to focus on the lovers themselves or their relationship. The general pattern in these stories is as follows: 1. A man and his slave-girl are deeply in love with each other, although in a few stories the man does not quite realize it at the beginning or does not know how much he loves the girl; 2. Due to financial difficulties or, sometimes, the agency of others, the two are separated or are about to be separated; 3. The master grieves bitterly at the moment of separation or shortly afterwards and, sometimes, in his desperation, goes to extremes in an attempt to become reunited with the slave-girl, although occasionally it is the slave-girl herself that, through her ingenuity, knowledge, and craft, does her best to be reunited with her master; 4. Through the magnanimity of a powerful or wealthy individual, or through the hard work of the slave-girl, the two are reunited and live happily together until they are separated by death.[1]

2.1 Relief after Distress

An important source for these stories is the famous multi-volume work of Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin ibn ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī (329-384/940-994)[2] entitled *al-Faraj baʿda al-Shidda* (Relief after Distress). This work contains hundreds of stories on the topic of joy that follows sorrow or distress. The point of the stories is to show that one should trust and believe in God even in the most dismal of circumstances. Often, relief presents itself in these stories in the form of an influential individual who shows generosity or empathy to those facing difficulties. The story thereby usually turns into a praise of this individual.

In chapter thirteen of this work, the author presents eight stories with similar plots in which a man loses a slave-girl, normally by selling her, only to realize his deep love for her. He regrets losing her and then does his best to get her back. He succeeds in reuniting with his beloved through the help of the buyer, who relinquishes any claim on the girl and on the money that he has paid for her when he sees the love the girl and the man have for each other (al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 309-342 and 345-

1. Van Gelder (2004: 201) suggests a similar structure for the group of stories that he analyzes, some of which are included in the present study. His suggested structure is as follows: 1. A man owns a slave-girl; 2. The man and the slave-girl love each other; 3. The man becomes destitute; 4. The man sells the girl; 5. The new owner becomes aware of their attachment; 6. He generously returns the slave-girl to her lover. Van Gelder studies nine stories that fit this scheme, sometimes including different versions of the same story, as well as two stories that are related to the scheme, but don't quite fit it.

2. The first set of dates is based on the Islamic Hijrī lunar calendar (AH), whereas the second set uses their Gregorian equivalents (AD). In this article, both dates are given when appropriate; otherwise only the Gregorian year is provided.

353 [stories nos. 468-472 and 474-476]). The stories can be very similar and appear repetitive when read together. Bray has referred to them as stories of "Lovers of sold slave-girls" (Bray, 1998: 12-16).[3] The chapter itself is more general in aim and is entitled "On those who experienced distress in their love, and then God relieved it and let them get the ones they loved" (al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 306).

2.1.1 Ibn Maʿmar Reunites Two Lovers[4]

This is the most widely known of the stories with a number of versions appearing with some variants in a variety of sources.[5]

> A wealthy man in Basra bought a slave-girl and spent a lot of money on her education. He loved her greatly and kept spending his wealth on her until he became extremely poor. He then suggested to her that he sell her, even though he would rather die than do so, and she agreed, even though she would rather die than be separated from him.[6] One of the man's friends suggested that he sell her to the *amīr* (governor) of Basra, ʿUmar ibn ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar al-Taymī (22-82/643-701). The man went to the *amīr*, and they agreed on the price (100,000 dirhams [silver coins] plus additional items). Yet when the man was about to leave, the girl recited some verses lamenting her separation from him, and he tearfully replied with verses of his own. When the *amīr* realized that the two were in love with each other, he returned the girl to the man and allowed him to keep what he had paid for her. The *amīr* did not want to separate two lovers.

3. While looking mostly at sources other than the *Faraj baʿda al-Shidda*, Sadan considers this type of stories as representing the theme of the "Bartered Slave Girl," and takes the example of Tawaddud (see section 2.3.1) as the most well known story (Sadan, 1998: 17-21). The choice of the term "bartered" is unclear, as the slave-girls are unquestionably being sold in these stories. Nikita Elisséeff lists the type of stories discussed here that appear in *The Arabian Nights* under the themes "Amants, ou époux séparés, qui se retrouvent" (Separated lovers or spouses who find each other again) and "Esclave rendue à son ancien maître désespéré" (Slave returned to her previous despairing master) (Elisséeff, 1949: 89 and 119).

4. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 328-330, no. 470; Sadan, 1998: 17-18; Van Gelder, 2004: 208-209, no. 8.

5. See al-Anṭākī, 1993: vol. 1: 339-340; Van Gelder, 2004: 206, 208, nos. 1-2, 7. However, the identity of the benefactor is sometimes given as ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar (d. 40/660-661), the father of the protagonist in al-Tanūkhī's story (Van Gelder, 2004: 207-208, nos. 5-6), including in *The Arabian Nights* (2010: vol. 2: 181 [within Night 383]; Van Gelder, 2004: 209, no. 9). The story may have circulated independently with the title "The Slave-Girl, Her Master, and ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar" (*Kitāb al-jāriya wa mawlāhā wa ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar*) (Ibn al-Nadīm, 1971: 366).

6. Only one manuscript has the man's suggestion. The others omit it and include only the response of the girl which makes it appear as if she is the one who is making the suggestion of selling herself to benefit them both.

One of the versions of this story provides greater detail about the girl. It is found in a biographical dictionary and, therefore, claims to be a historical account.[7] Here, it is said that the slave-girl, sold for 20,000 dinars (gold coins), was skilled in singing, playing musical instruments, reciting the Qur'ān and poetry, writing, cooking, and preparing perfumes. As will be seen in other stories below, these were typical skills possessed by the most talented slave-girls that supposedly justified the very high prices that were paid for them.

2.1.2 Of the Noble Deeds of Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī and His Son, Ja'far

In the next two stories, some of the characters are famous historical figures. In the first, Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī (d. 190/805), the grand vizier of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170-193/786-809), aids two lovers shunned by his son, Ja'far al-Barmakī (d. 187/803). In the second, Ja'far appears alongside Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (150-235/767-850), the most famous composer and musical performer of his time. All these individuals, especially Hārūn and Ja'far, are well-known characters that appear in numerous tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Ja'far does not show much magnanimity or empathy with the two lovers in the first story, but he shows nobility of character in the second one. There is a strong affinity between the two stories. The historical details provided in them, especially in the second one, serve to give them a higher degree of veracity.

(a) Ja'far sent two slave traders to search for a learned and talented girl with certain characteristics. They searched until an old man from Kufa came to them and told them that he had what the vizier was seeking. He took them to a worn down house and showed them a beautiful girl who recited to them verses from the Qur'ān and a poem. The two went to Ja'far and told him about the girl. Ja'far followed them immediately and fell in love with her as soon as he saw her. The old man asked 30,000 dinars for her and insisted that if it weren't for poverty he would never be separated from the girl. Ja'far asked the old man to let the girl sing for them, so she played the lute and sang, but then she screamed and both she and the old man wept. The old man then manumitted her and said that he would never sell her to anyone. Ja'far left angry and told his father, Yaḥyā, who scolded him for attempting to separate two lovers and not help them back up from their poverty. The father sent 30,000 dinars as a gift to the couple, who happily returned to Kufa.[8]

(b) In the year 179/796, when the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd stopped in Basra on his way to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, his vizier Ja'far, who was accompanying

7. Al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Yaghmūrī, 1964: 197-198, entry no. 40 on 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ma'mar; Van Gelder, 2004: 208, no. 6. In this version, it is the girl who suggests that she be sold so that her master may regain his wealth.

8. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 339-342, no. 472.

him, asked Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī for his help in purchasing a singing slave-girl (in another version, it was the father, Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī [125-188/742-804], who was asked). Her owner had refused to show her to buyers except in his house, and Ja'far intended to see her while in disguise. Ja'far, Isḥāq, and a slave trader (some versions have Hārūn al-Rashīd also join the group) went to the man's house, which was in decay but showed signs of previous grandeur. The man greeted them wearing a ragged shirt. He then left, and the slave-girl replaced him, wearing the same shirt. She sang and played, but then started weeping. Her owner wept as well. The owner reappeared, told those present that he had freed the slave-girl, and asked them to marry him to her. Ja'far agreed, although he was frustrated at having lost the girl. The man then told his story.

The girl, who was proficient at playing musical instruments and singing, was given to the man by his mother when he confessed his love for her. He later inherited his father's wealth but did not manage it well and wasted it all. He spent years in poverty. When he heard that the caliph and his court were stopping in Basra, he decided to sell the slave-girl to benefit himself and her. At the moment when he was about to sell her to Ja'far, both he and the slave-girl confessed to each other that they would rather die than be separated. Ja'far gave the purchase money of the girl (3,000 dinars) to the man and then told him to come to the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd. When Hārūn heard the man's story, he ordered that a salary be given to him whereby he became affluent again.[9]

2.1.3 Ibn Abī Ḥāmid Acts Charitably to a Money Changer and a Law Student

The treasurer Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥāmid (d. 321/933) is the main protagonist in the following two stories which are meant to exemplify his

9. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 331-338, no. 471. Van Gelder (2004: 209, no. 10) gives a brief summary of a version of this story from a different source. Yet another version is found in al-Anṭākī (1993: vol. 1: 346-347), where the money given to the owner of the slave-girl is 300,000 dinars. A similar story is told by Ibn al-Mu'tazz (1976: 366-367; Van Gelder, 2004: 209-210, no. 11), the great-great-grandson of Hārūn al-Rashīd and himself the son of a slave-girl. He narrates that the poet Maḥmūd al-Warrāq (d. ca. 230/845) had a slave-girl who was beautiful, cultured, and an accomplished singer and poet. He fell upon hard times and asked his slave-girl if she would prefer that he sell her so that she would live more comfortably. She agreed. He offered her for sale until a Ṭāhirid offered 100,000 dirhams for her. Maḥmūd was about to take her to the prospective buyer when she became tearful. He asked her if she would prefer to live with him in poverty. The girl said yes. The poet manumitted her on the spot in front of all those present and gave her his house as a bridal gift. He told everyone to take away their money, but the Ṭāhirid said that he would never take his money and gave it to them. Despite the resemblance of the story to the two stories of al-Tanūkhī, the emotional tone is very different as the master is always in complete control of the situation and does not need to humble himself in any manner to keep his girl. The expressions of grief are quite muted and it is only at the end that the master realizes how much his girl loves him. The potential buyer plays a very minor role and it almost seems that he has been added to the story to conform to a literary model.

magnanimity and munificence. Versions of the second story are found in historical works. What is of note about each story is the fact that the new master does not meet the slave-girl until he is about to give her back to her previous master.

> (a) A moneychanger sold a slave-girl whom he loved to Ibn Abī Ḥāmid for 300 dinars, but the same night he became despondent, missed her greatly, and regretted selling her. The next day, he went to the assembly of Ibn Abī Ḥāmid, waited until he was alone with him, began weeping, and asked him to return the slave-girl to him. Ibn Abī Ḥāmid asked why he had sold her if she was so dear to him. He replied that he had spent a considerable portion of his capital on her and feared poverty. She insisted that he spend more on her, but he refused. She then began mistreating him and ruining his life, so he decided to sell her. But after selling her, he realized that he would prefer poverty and having the girl, or death, which would be better than how he felt at the moment. Ibn Abī Ḥāmid had the girl brought over. He said that he had not seen her before and returned her to the man, allowing him to keep the money that he had gotten for her. He gave the girl an amount and promised a yearly allowance as long as she didn't misbehave with the man. She got her allowance until Ibn Abī Ḥāmid's death.[10]

> (b) A youth from Khurāsān (modern northeastern Iran) who was studying Islamic law in Iraq bought a slave-girl with whom he fell in love. He paid his expenses with the allowance that his father sent him every year with the pilgrimage caravan. His habit every year was to borrow money to pay for his upkeep until the allowance arrived. Then he would pay back all his debtors. One year, however, the allowance did not arrive with the caravan; something serious had befallen the father and he was unable to send any money. Under pressure from his debtors, the young man sold his slave-girl in the slave market for a little over 1,000 dirhams. That same night he sought the help of a friend to get her back. He was desperate to have her back and he was willing to go to jail for his debts until the following year when the allowance from his father would arrive. The two discovered that a woman from the household of Ibn Abī Ḥāmid had bought the girl. They visited him, but he professed not knowing that any slave-girl had been bought for him. He inquired in his household, and eventually the girl was found and brought before him. Ibn Abī Ḥāmid returned her to the young man after she expressed her wish to do so. He also allowed the man to keep the money that was paid to him and the gifts that were promised to the girl by the household women. Moreover, Ibn Abī Ḥāmid gave the young man a monthly allowance until he (the treasurer) died.[11]

10. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 349-351, no. 475; Van Gelder, 2004: 212-213, no. 16.

11. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 345-348, no. 474; Van Gelder, 2004: 211-212, no. 14. A version of this story is found in the biographical notices of Ibn Abī Ḥāmid in two historical chronicles (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1992: vol. 13: 319-320, within entry no. 2322, in the deaths of the year 321/933; Ibn Kathīr, 1998: vol. 15: 73-74, within the events of the year 321/933; cf. Van Gelder, 2004: 212, no. 15) and in one biographical dictionary (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 2001: vol. 6: 266-268, entry no. 2758).

2.1.4 Al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl Acts Charitably to a Merchant from Fusṭāṭ[12]

The unusual element of the following story is that the man who sells his slave-girl realizes his love for her only after he has sold her and he has seen what she has done to his house.

> Al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl (d. 235 or 6/850 or 51), a minister of finance of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/813-833), bought a slave-girl from a merchant from Fusṭāṭ (Old Cairo) for one thousand dinars. When the merchant returned to his house, he found it cleaned, prepared with scents, and with wine ready for drinking. He was then told that the girl had done this before he sold her. He returned immediately to al-Ḥasan and begged him to have her back, saying that he could not live without her. Al-Ḥasan at first refused, but then he took pity on him when he saw him cry and implore. Al-Ḥasan gave the girl back to the merchant when she said that she wanted to be with her old master. He also allowed the merchant to keep his money. The merchant freed her on the spot and married her.[13]

2.1.5 Of the Noble Deeds of al-Muqtadir[14]

What follows is another story in which a man does not realize how much he loves a slave-girl until she is taken away from him. In this instance, the man does not own the girl initially. He ponders buying her, but balks at the asking price. When the girl is suddenly sold, he despairs and almost loses his job as tutor to a prince.

> Abū al-Ḥusayn ibn Maymūn al-Afṭas (d. 330/941), who would later be briefly the vizier of the caliph al-Muttaqī (r. 329-333/940-944), fell deeply in love with a singing slave-girl. He wanted to buy her, but he thought that the price asked by her mistress (3,000 dinars) was too high. Days passed with the girl visiting him. One day, however, he called for her only to be told that she had been bought with other slave-girls by the caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295-320/908-932), the father of al-Muttaqī. Abū al-Ḥusayn was grief-stricken. He stopped eating and drinking and roamed the deserts.
>
> He was the tutor of al-Muttaqī and, when he stopped going to teach him, al-Muttaqī and his mother grew upset. He went to them and explained his situation, but they

12. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 352-353, no. 476; Van Gelder, 2004: 213, no. 17.

13. A curious tale involving the caliph al-Ma'mūn is found in *The Arabian Nights* (2010: vol. 2: 83-96 [Nights 334-338]). It is said that Muḥammad of Basra told al-Ma'mūn of a wealthy man who moved from Yemen to Baghdad with his six slave-girls. They were all beautiful, cultured, skilled singers and musicians, and they had studied the Qur'ān, poetry, and history. When al-Ma'mūn heard of the girls, he asked Muḥammad to go buy them for him each for 10, 000 dinars. The Yemeni man agreed to sell the girls in order to please al-Ma'mūn. But after some time the Yemeni could no longer bear to be parted from the girls and he wrote to al-Ma'mūn explaining his desperation and love. Al-Ma'mūn gave the girls exquisite robes and 60,000 dinars and sent them back to their previous master.

14. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 309-315, no. 468; Schippers, 2002-2003: 48.

were unable to help him. Abū al-Ḥusayn approached various individuals at court hoping that someone could convince the caliph to give or sell the slave-girl to him, but some disapproved of his request, while others were sympathetic but could not help. After a while, al-Muttaqī and his mother decided to get another tutor. Hearing this, Abū al-Ḥusayn resolved to pull himself together, lest he lose his sustenance as well. One night, there was heavy knocking at his door. Abū al-Ḥusayn feared that the caliph had found out about his love and wanted to punish him. Instead, when the door opened, the girl was brought in along with all her belongings as a gift from the caliph. The girl told him that the caliph had not seen her until that very night and it was only then that the caliph was told about their mutual love for each other. Once he discovered this, he immediately decided to give her to Abū al-Ḥusayn as a gift.

2.1.6 Reunion after Separation[15]

The story below begins once again with the male protagonist forced to sell his beloved slave-girl due to poverty. However, in this instance, he does not know the identity of the man to whom he sells the girl. Additionally, the new master is not from the same city, and he departs on a boat to his own town. Because of this situation, the former master has to go through a number of mishaps, including an attempted suicide, before he is reunited with his girl. The two are separated for a few years, during which time the man gets married to a different woman.

It is said that a man in Baghdad inherited a great deal of wealth from his father. He fell in love with a slave-girl, bought her, and then spent all his money on her until he went broke. She told him to seek a source of income. The only thing that he could do was sing, since by bringing over singers and musicians to teach the girl, he had learnt the trade as well and was good at it. He, however, found the idea unappealing and he said that he preferred death to singing in front of people. The girl then suggested that he sell her; he would obtain a good price for her and she would end up in a well-to-do family. A Hashemite from Basra bought her for 1,500 dinars, but as soon as he received the money, the man from Baghdad became depressed and inconsolable.

The Baghdadi fell asleep on the bag of money and was awoken by someone taking it and running away. He then attempted to commit suicide by jumping in the Tigris, but some people who saw him rescued him. The man was then advised to seek employment in a different town, so he went to a ship at the port. The sailors told him that the ship belonged to a Hashemite from Basra and snuck him on board.

15. Al-Tanūkhī, 1978: vol. 4: 316-327, no. 469; Bray, 1998: 12-14; Van Gelder, 2004: 210-211, no. 12. This tale is also found in *The Arabian Nights* (2010: vol. 3: 432-439 [Nights 896-899]; Hamori, 1990: 66; Sadan, 1998: 18-19; Van Gelder, 2004: 211, no. 13) and in other sources as well (e.g., al-Anṭākī, 1993: vol. 1: 343-346).

He had accidentally found the boat of the man who had bought his slave-girl. The girl was very sad, and every time she began to play a tune, she would start crying. Eventually, the Baghdadi man revealed himself to the group. The Hashemite welcomed him and stated that he had not touched the girl at all. He and his family had felt compassion for her and now he promised that, once they arrived in Basra, he would free the slave-girl and marry her to the Baghdadi man. He would also give them a salary on the condition that the girl would come and play and sing for them when requested, since he had bought her for that purpose. Everyone was happy with this arrangement.

One night, while in a state of drunkenness, the Baghdadi man stepped out of the boat to urinate, but then fell asleep on the shore. When he awoke the following morning, the boat had sailed away. He was devastated, because he hadn't asked the Hashemite man's name or his address in Basra. He rode on another boat and arrived in Basra. There, a grocer noticed his good handwriting and hired him to do the accounts for his shop. The grocer was so pleased with the added profit that the store was making that he doubled the man's salary and then married him to his daughter. After two years or more, the man went to an annual festival hoping to meet the Hashemite man. He did indeed see his boat, and there was a reunion. The Hashemite told the man that everyone thought that he had fallen overboard and drowned. The girl had been dressed in black and had been sitting by a tomb all this time, having renounced playing and singing. The Hashemite reunited the man with the girl and the previous agreement was put into effect. The girl was manumitted and she married the man. The man in turn divorced the grocer's daughter. The wealth of the man increased with time and he became affluent with his new wife, his old slave-girl.

2.1.7 Heaven in Exchange for Returning a Slave-Girl

Sometimes a new master returns a slave-girl to her despondent, past owner not out of compassion or any sense of empathy, but out of greed or a desire for a higher reward. In the following story found in *Akhbār al-Nisā'* (Reports about Women), wrongly attributed to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (691-751/1292-1350) (1982: 53; Van Gelder, 2004: 213-214, no. 18), the new master returns the girl because he believes that he has been promised entry into Heaven if he does so. In this instance, the slave-girl is reunited with her old owner because of direct divine intervention.

Muḥammad ibn 'Ubayd Allāh al-Zāhid sold his slave-girl, but could not stand being apart from her. Therefore, he went to her new master with a group of his closest friends who asked the man to rescind the sale and ask whatever price he wanted. He, however, refused. Ibn 'Ubayd Allāh returned to his house saddened and stayed up all night not knowing what to do. He then wrote the name of the girl on the palm of his hand and faced Mecca. He would raise the hand to the sky whenever anyone

asked him what ailed him. Two days later, the new master came to him at dawn with the girl. The man returned the girl to him and refused to take back his money. He explained that he had seen in a dream someone tell him: "Return the girl to Ibn 'Ubayd Allāh and you shall have Paradise!"

2.1.8 Ṭalḥa, the Son of the Judge of Egypt, and His Slave-Girl Tuḥfa

The following story is found in an anonymous manuscript datable to the first half of the 8th/14th century (Anonymous, 1956: 25-44, no. 2; Van Gelder, 2004: 214-215, no. 19). The full title of the story is: "The story of Ṭalḥa, the son of the judge of Egypt, and what occurred to him with his slave-girl, Tuḥfa, how she was taken from him, and what hardships he faced until he was reunited with her. Relief after distress (*faraj ba'da shidda*)." The beginning of the tale is similar to others examined thus far. However, this time the protagonist is separated from his slave-girl partly through the fault of the slave dealer who does not follow his instructions. As in the tale in 2.1.6, the protagonist has to endure a number of difficulties before being reunited with his beloved. In an unusual twist, in this story the new master of the girl also faces severe hardship because of her and his attempt to have her reunited with her old master.

It is said that a judge in Egypt had a son called Ṭalḥa. After reaching the age of six, the judge got his son a female slave of his own age, named Tuḥfa, and had them both instructed by a teacher. The two young people fell deeply in love with each other. The father then married the two (although, judging from what is said later in the story, this could mean that he gave the girl to his son as a concubine). The boy had the girl learn singing and the playing of musical instruments, at which she excelled.

After the father passed away, the son was not careful, and he wasted his father's patrimony. After spending three days without food, Tuḥfa suggested that Ṭalḥa should sell her. This way he would receive a considerable amount for her and she would live in a well-to-do home. Ṭalḥa was tearful and said that he would sell her with the right to rescind the sale within three days. If he found himself able to live without her, then he would complete the sale. But if he discovered that he could not bear being separated from her, he would bring her back and they would both endure what fate had prescribed for them. She accepted.

Ṭalḥa gave Tuḥfa to a slave dealer and explained to him his condition. The next day a wealthy Syrian man from Damascus came to the dealer seeking an extraordinary slave-girl. The man was impressed by Tuḥfa's beauty and even more with her education and skills. The dealer offered the girl for 1,000 dinars, but forgot to tell the Damascene about the 3-day condition. The Damascene realized that the girl was probably worth 10,000 dinars, so he bought her right away.

The new owner wanted Tuḥfa to play and sing for him. After performing, she screamed and fainted. She then told him her whole story. The man felt compassion for her and promised to return her to her previous master. However, after concluding his affairs a number of days later, the Damascene inexplicably did not keep his promise.

In the meantime, Ṭalḥa wept for three days and discovered that he could not live apart from his girl. So he returned to the dealer only to find out that he had sold her and had forgotten about the condition. Ṭalḥa screamed and fainted, then he ran through the streets crying like a madman. People thought that he had gone crazy and took him to an asylum, where he spent the next six months. One day a judge came to the asylum for an investigation and there he chanced upon and recognized Ṭalḥa. He took him home and, after hearing his story, sent Ṭalḥa with some merchandise to trade in Damascus, thus giving him an opportunity to search for his girl. Ṭalḥa got on a ship with the merchandise, but there was a wreck. Although he survived, he lost everything.

Ṭalḥa walked to Damascus and stopped near its gate, where he met a rider who turned out to be the sovereign ʻAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65-86/685-705). Ṭalḥa told ʻAbd al-Malik his whole story, weeping, and the ruler promised to get his girl back. At court, he ordered that the new owner of the girl be brought to him. It was reported that the merchant had left for Egypt, but one of his enemies said that he was just avoiding the court. ʻAbd al-Malik was furious and ordered that the property of the merchant be pillaged and that all the women in his house be brought over. When the household of the merchant heard of the order, many of them, including Tuḥfa, fled to neighbours to hide from the guards. ʻAbd al-Malik offered Ṭalḥa ten slave-girls to replace the one that he had lost, but Ṭalḥa declined the offer. Instead, he asked that he be sent back to Egypt with an administrative position, which ʻAbd al-Malik granted.

Meanwhile, Tuḥfa paid a neighbor to take her to Egypt so that she could check up on her old master. There, she rented a place near his old house. About one month later, Ṭalḥa passed by the neighbourhood and found out about a new woman living there. Wondering if it might be Tuḥfa, he arranged a marriage with her without seeing her. The evening of the wedding a beggar knocked at the door asking for food. Tuḥfa recognized him as her Damascene master. Ṭalḥa then revealed himself to the two. He promised to help the man while Tuḥfa explained that he had come to Egypt to look for Ṭalḥa and bring him to Damascus to reunite him with her. The Damascene right away gave up any claim on Tuḥfa, while Ṭalḥa promised to share his fortune with the man and to write to ʻAbd al-Malik to clear his name. The man returned to Damascus, having received part of Ṭalḥa's wealth, and multiples of his original fortune were given to him by ʻAbd al-Malik, while those who lied about him were punished. Ṭalḥa and Tuḥfa remained married in Egypt and they lived happily until their deaths.

In the previous stories examined above, the reunion of the lovers occurs because of the generosity of the new owner of the girl who gives up any claim on her and on the money that he pays to purchase her. Sometimes the new owner gives even more to the lovers. In this case, the new owner does set out from Damascus to Egypt with the intention of returning Tuḥfa to her previous master. (It is curious that he doesn't take the girl along with him to Egypt, but instead plans on bringing Ṭalḥa to Damascus.) At this juncture, the story deviates from previous tales because Ṭalḥa becomes active in seeking out his beloved Tuḥfa, and his actions cause the new owner to lose all his wealth, which is confiscated by the sovereign, and he becomes a wanted fugitive. By the end of the story, he is still the master of Tuḥfa, and he is happy to let her go. However, unlike in the previous stories, he gains a lot from this action as, out of gratitude, Ṭalḥa gives him a share of his wealth and writes to the sovereign in Damascus to clear his name. When he returns to Damascus, he is amply rewarded and he becomes richer than he was before his ordeal.

2.2 Preferring Death over Separation

Not all new owners feel as compassionate and magnanimous as the ones we have encountered above. Despite of the tears, pleas, and entreaties of old masters, some new masters remain obstinate and unmoved and insist on keeping the slave-girl whom they recently purchased.

A most telling example can be found in *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* (The Dove's Neck-Ring), a treatise on love by Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (384-456/994-1064) and one of the most outstanding Arabic prose works from Andalusia (Ibn Ḥazm, 1993: 265-266; idem, 1953: 227-229; cf. Sadan, 1998: 18; an abbreviated version is found in al-Anṭākī, 1993: vol. 1: 347-348). In one tale, the previous master is able to have his slave-girl back only after becoming suicidal.

> An Andalusian man sold a slave-girl with whom he was passionately in love due to financial difficulties. He immediately regretted it and attempted to get her back from the new owner, a Berber man. He offered the new owner all of his possessions and even himself in return for the woman, but the Berber refused. When the Andalusian asked the inhabitants of the town for help, no one aided him. Thus, in desperation, he sought the help of the king. The king was moved, summoned the new owner of the woman, and asked him to return the woman to the Andalusian. But the Berber man declined, claiming that he had fallen more deeply in love with her than the Andalusian. The king and his courtiers offered financial compensation to the Berber, but he refused. When the king explained to the Andalusian man that he had done all that he could to help him, the Andalusian threw himself from the topmost height of the audience chamber to the ground. Miraculously, he survived and was not hurt too badly. He said that he could no longer live now that he had lost the woman and was about to throw himself again, but was prevented from doing so.

> The king saw in this a solution to the predicament. He challenged the Berber man to jump from the chamber just as the Andalusian had done to prove that his love for the woman was greater. The Berber twice approached the edge of the chamber, but then recoiled. When the king ordered his men to tie him up and throw him over, the man dropped his claims to the woman. The king then compensated him for the girl and gave her to her former owner.

This is the second story in which the male protagonist attempts suicide after he believes that all hope is lost to regain his slave-girl. In the story in 2.1.6, the man is saved, and this gives him the opportunity to find the girl. However, in the case of the Andalusian man, the act itself of attempted suicide provides the solution that he was hoping for, although it is the king who thinks of it. The act of generosity is still key to the story, albeit it is not performed by the new owner who, quite to the contrary, is obstinate in his refusal to return the girl at any price.[16]

Not all of these stories have a happy outcome. The tale below narrated by al-Anṭākī (1993: vol. 1: 317-319) has quite a tragic ending.

> It is said that a young man from Basra called Ẓarīf ibn Naʿīm al-Ghifārī was very handsome and wealthy. He convinced his father to let him go to Baghdad for trade (an anachronism since the city was founded decades later by the ʿAbbāsids in 145/762). One day he was taken to the slave-girl market where an amazing slave-girl fell in love with him and rejected all buyers except for him. He bought her for 100,000 dirhams and took her home. But that very night the police knocked at his door and took him and the girl to the court of al-Ḥajjāj, the governor of Iraq, who had the girl sent to ʿAbd al-Malik in Damascus.[17] The young man followed and attempted to find a way to meet the girl. However, the guards found out about him and took him to ʿAbd al-Malik. The young man told the sovereign to let the girl sing three selections of his choice and then he could do with him as he pleased. ʿAbd al-Malik allowed this. But when the girl finished singing, Ẓarīf threw himself from a high place and died. This angered ʿAbd al-Malik, who ordered that the girl be given to the heirs of the young man or be given away as alms. As she was being led away, she jumped into a pit killing herself.

16. Ibn Ḥazm also tells the tragic story of a slave-girl whom he knew. Her master was a high-ranking figure, but he became upset with her for a trivial matter and sold her. She was shocked by this and became desolate and full of despair because she loved him. She died a few months afterwards (Ibn Ḥazm, 1993: 259; idem, 1953: 221). On certain occasions, leading men would face humiliation and insult because of their love of a slave-girl. Saʿīd ibn Mundhir ibn Saʿīd (d. 403/1013) was the prayer leader at the cathedral mosque of Cordova during the reign of al-Ḥakam II (r. 350-366/961-976). He had a slave-girl with whom he was deeply in love and whom he offered to manumit and marry. The girl replied that she would only marry him if he trimmed his beard. This he did, but when he had gathered witnesses to testify that he had freed the girl and then proposed to her, the girl turned him down. At that instant, the brother of Saʿīd, Ḥakam ibn Mundhir (d. ca. 420/1029), proposed to the girl and she accepted (Ibn Ḥazm, 1993: 156-157; idem, 1953: 91).

17. It is also said that this actually occurred at the court of his son, Sulaymān (r. 96-99/715-717).

2.3 The Enterprising Slave-Girl: Intelligent and Resourceful Slave-Girls Who Save Their Masters from Poverty or Death

Up to now, the female protagonist in all of the tales has been quite passive. She is often described as being beautiful, learned, and skilled, especially in singing and playing music. But it is always the men who act and decide her fate. It is the old master who sells her, and it is the new one who, out of compassion, returns her to him. The girl might be the one to suggest that she be sold, but other than that she weeps and grieves until someone reunites her with her old master. One exception is Tuḥfa who pays a man to take her to Egypt, where she hopes to see her old master. However, this movement is necessary since she has been separated from her two masters who have moved to Egypt. Once the three are located in the same place, it is once again the men who decide on what is to be done with her.

Not all stories of this kind have such passive female protagonists. In fact, there are a number of stories in which the leading and most active character is the slave-girl who, through her actions and quick thinking, revives the fortunes of her master, saves his life, and/or causes the reunion between them. The male protagonists in these cases not only restrict themselves to attempting to follow the instructions of the girl, but are often quite inept and naïve, causing the couple to suffer hardships and heartaches.

2.3.1 The Story of the Slave-Girl Tawaddud

The story of the slave-girl Tawaddud is told in *The Arabian Nights* (2010: vol. 2: 275-321 [Nights 436-462]; cf. Sadan, 1998: 19-21). Her unsurpassed knowledge and intelligence help her defeat the most renowned scholars at the court of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, thereby rescuing her master from financial ruin.

> A wealthy merchant in Baghdad had a son named Abū al-Ḥusn. When the merchant died, the son dissipated his wealth on food, drink, gifts, and entertainment until he no longer had anything except a beautiful, intelligent, and eloquent slave-girl called Tawaddud. After he hadn't eaten for three days, she suggested that he sell her to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, but for no less than 10,000 dinars. If the caliph objected to the price, Abū al-Ḥusn should tell him that she was very learned and worth even more and that he should test her.
>
> Tawaddud was brought before the caliph and she told him that she knew all the branches of knowledge. Hārūn was intrigued by her claims and asked for scholars to come and test her. Seven scholars came forward: two expert *faqīh*s (jurists), a Qur'ān reciter, a physician, an astronomer, a philosopher, and a scholar named Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām. They asked her questions on various topics, including Islamic theology, law, and rituals, the Qur'ān, health and the human body, astronomy /

astrology, and a number of riddles. Tawaddud answered all the questions posed to her, and she impressed all those present with her eloquence. However, her challengers were unable to completely answer the questions she posed. Not only were they shamed because of their defeat, but they also had to give Tawaddud their robes.

Tawaddud's achievements did not end here. After defeating the scholars, she defeated a chess player three times as well as a backgammon player. These two individuals also lost their robes. In the end, Tawaddud played the lute, enchanting the assembly.

The caliph was duly impressed and gave her master 100,000 dinars, ten times the amount which had been asked for the girl. But when he then asked her to make a wish, she replied that she wanted to be rejoined to her master. The caliph handed her back, gave her 5,000 dinars, and made her master a boon companion with a monthly allowance of 1,000 dinars. The girl and her master lived in ease from that moment onwards. The readers are told to admire the eloquence and knowledge of Tawaddud as well as the unmatched generosity of Hārūn al-Rashīd.

This story presents some modifications to the general pattern described in section 2.0. As before, the man and his slave-girl face poverty due to the man's mishandling of money. Because of this situation, the girl suggests that she be sold to the caliph. The ending also follows the same pattern: through the generosity and magnanimity of the caliph, the girl is returned to the man, while the latter is allowed not only to keep the money paid for the girl, but both he and the girl are given additional gifts. The major difference, and the most outstanding part of the story, is the effort exerted by the girl to show her learning, acumen, and artistry by defeating the leading scholars of the court and then her quick wit in making the caliph return her to her master. All the master does in the story is cause the initial difficulty by wasting his wealth and then meekly follow the instructions of his slave-girl. The generosity of the caliph is not spontaneous as in the previous stories, but rather he is forced to acquiesce to the girl's request, lest he lose face for going back on an offer.

The story of Tawaddud appears in Castilian, Portuguese, and Maya versions. The Spanish and Portuguese versions seem to have been more popular in the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas than the Arabic ones have been in the Islamic world. The setting, identities of the characters, length, format, and some details of the story in the Castilian, Portuguese, and Mayan versions differ from the Arabic original, however, the main structure of the story remains the same.[18] The biggest change

18. The story of Tawaddud seems to have been composed in Baghdad and reworked in Cairo between the 9th and 13th centuries (Parker, 1996: 1 and 110-111). Different versions of the tale were well known in Spanish from at least the 15th century onwards and were also known in Portuguese. Abbreviated Castilian versions of the story have been found in five manuscripts from the 15th century

occurs in the examination part where the Islamic material has been changed to a Christian Catholic one and where the number of questions posed varies extensively. The geographical setting and background of the story is different in the printed Castilian versions: the location is now Tunis, the merchant is from Hungary, while the maiden is a Christian from Spain (Parker, 1996: 8).[19]

2.3.2 ʿAlī Nūr al-Dīn and Maryam the Sash-maker

Tawaddud is the central character of the previous story. She is the one who takes the initiative from beginning to end, from suggesting to be sold to the caliph, to defeating the great scholars of the court, up to making the caliph return her to her master. Despite the remarkable feat of Tawaddud, this arguably pales to what two other slave-girls, Maryam and Zumurrud, are able to accomplish in order to be with their beloved masters. The story of Maryam (*The Arabian Nights*, 2010: vol. 3: 341-428 [Nights 863-894]) is summarized in this section, while that of Zumurrud follows in the next.

(*ibid.*: 21-28). The story was printed in numerous editions in Castilian from the 16th to the 19th century in chapbook format. Hundreds of copies of printed pamphlets of the story were sent to cities in the American colonies during the 16th century where the story was included into some Maya Chilam books (*ibid.*: 8, 11-13, 123-124). The great Spanish playwright Lope de Vega (1562-1635) dramatized the story in his play, *La doncella Teodor* (1617). Some Portuguese versions, based on later Castilian prints, were printed in Lisbon and, when the story reached northeast Brazil (perhaps in the 17th century), professional singers recounted the story in the verse *folheto* format up to at least the end of the 20th century (Parker, 1996: 14, 29-30, 124-125). Two Arabic manuscripts (the earliest being from the late 13th or early 14th century) containing the story have been discovered in Spain. These include some variations to the story as it is found in *The Arabian Nights* that have been transmitted to some Castilian versions. In the 13th/14th-century manuscript, one of the differences is that the slave-girl is named Tūdūr, not Tawaddud. In the Spanish and Portuguese versions, her name has become Teodor or Teodora. Another difference is that the girl's master is the merchant, not his son, and he is the one who spends his money to educate her and teach her various arts and skills. Additionally, the merchant loses his wealth due to a calamity, not because of irresponsible behaviour (Parker, 1996: 3-6).

19. The story of Tawaddud bears some similarities with the episode of the princess Nuzhat al-Zamān at the court of Damascus (*The Arabian Nights*, 2010: vol. 1: 355-382 [Nights 55-67]) told within the longer tale of King ʻUmar ibn al-Nuʻmān and his family. In this episode, it is narrated how the princess was captured outside of Jerusalem by an uncouth, foul-mouthed old Bedouin who, without realizing her real identity and worth, sold her as a slave to a merchant in Damascus. The merchant was awed by the girl's beauty, manners, and eloquence, and understood her true value. He was, therefore, quite willing to pay 100,000 dinars for her. He then spent 100,000 more on splendid clothes, jewelry, and whatever else she needed. Since he had laid eyes on her, the intention of the merchant had been to sell her to the Sultan Sharkān, the governor of Damascus, in return for an exemption from customs taxes. He found out that the girl was learned in philosophy, medicine, geometry, law, grammar, astronomy, and other sciences. The merchant took the girl to the sultan, who duly paid 320,000 dinars for her. The sultan freed the girl on the spot and married her. After that, he called on his four judges to test the knowledge of the girl. They did not ask specific questions, but rather asked the girl to show them part of her learning. She gave a relatively long lecture on administration and the conduct of kings, which impressed all those who were present.

A merchant in Cairo had a handsome son, ʻAlī Nūr al-Dīn, who was invited by some young men to a party in a garden. There, he got drunk and, upon returning home, he struck his father, causing him to lose his right eye. The father swore to cut off his right hand in the morning. But as he slept, the mother instructed Nūr al-Dīn to leave the city. Thus, he embarked on a boat and sailed to Alexandria.

A few days later, as Nūr al-Dīn sat by a shop, he saw a Persian man arrive to sell a beautiful slave-girl. When the bidding for the girl reached 950 dinars, the auctioneer asked the owner if the price was acceptable. The slave-girl herself requested to be shown the bidders. These were all old men or had physical blemishes. She scolded the auctioneer and ridiculed each man. Her eyes then fell on Nūr al-Dīn, and she immediately fell in love with him.

Nūr al-Dīn had not made a single bid for the girl, but she cajoled him into doing so. Nūr al-Dīn paid 1,000 dinars and took home the girl, named Maryam. When Maryam found out that her new master had spent all his money to buy her, she urged him to borrow money from a friend and then instructed him to buy silk, food, and wine. Later, while Nūr al-Dīn slept, she knit a sash with the silk. Afterwards, she lay next to Nūr al-Dīn and they made love (she had not been with another man before).

The next morning, the girl instructed Nūr al-Dīn to sell the sash in the market for twenty dinars. He sold the sash and then bought some more silk and food, and the routine repeated itself for one year. Then one night, Maryam tearfully warned her master never to have any dealings with an old Frank who had lost his right eye and had a limp in his left leg. The next day, Nūr al-Dīn was accosted in the market by the old Frank described by Maryam. The Frank pressured Nūr al-Dīn into selling to him and then coerced him to go to his party, where he made him completely drunk. At that point, the Frank tricked him into selling him Maryam for 10,000 dinars. The next morning, Nūr al-Dīn returned home with the Frank and, weeping, confessed his mistake. The Frank took Maryam on his ship and sailed to the kingdom of Ifranja.

Maryam was actually the daughter of the king of Ifranja. She had been taught all the sciences and arts of women and men, and she excelled in all of them. While visiting a monastery on an island, her ship was attacked by Muslims, and she was captured and sold to a Persian man, who was impotent and had no interest in women. Maryam took care of him for months and, in return, he promised to allow her to choose her next master. Her father sent his vizier, the old Frank, to get her back.

Nūr al-Dīn wept bitterly at the loss of Maryam and boarded a ship that was sailing to her city with Muslim merchants. However, the ship was attacked and everyone was taken to the city of Ifranja, where the king ordered that all the Muslim captives be executed. Nūr al-Dīn was spared in order to work as a labourer in a church.

After seven days, Maryam came to the church with a group of women. Nūr al-Dīn made contact with her, and she gave him instructions on how to escape to the beach to meet a ship's captain. Maryam disguised herself as the captain, killed off all the sailors, and then sailed a ship to Alexandria. She showed Nūr al-Dīn gems and precious objects that she had taken from her father's palace. Upon reaching Alexandria, Nūr al-Dīn told Maryam to wait while he went to get some proper attire for her. In the meantime, the king had sent out a ship to retrieve his daughter. The ship arrived, and the crew captured Maryam and took her back to Ifranja. The king accused his daughter of treachery and wanted to have her crucified on the palace gate. But the vizier convinced the king against this course of action.

When Nūr al-Dīn found out what happened, he insisted on returning to Ifranja even if it would cost him his life. He boarded a ship that was sailing there, but it was attacked by a vessel of the king of Ifranja. All the Muslims on the ship were executed by the king except for Nūr al-Dīn, who was imprisoned by the vizier in his stables where two of the king's horses were kept. The vizier later placed him in charge of them. Maryam discovered that Nūr al-Dīn was working in the stables and sent him instructions to prepare the two horses so that they may use them to escape. She told him that he should follow her instructions without any deviation and without falling asleep. That night, Maryam drugged the vizier, dressed and armed herself as a warrior, filled two saddlebags with precious items, and then headed to the city gate.

Nūr al-Dīn followed Maryam's instructions as best he could, but he fell asleep while tending the horses at the city gate. A thief took the horses away, but Maryam intervened, killing him. She then slapped Nūr al-Dīn awake and rode out of the city with him. Maryam told him to strip the thief and take his weapons, but he refused.

The king discovered his daughter's escape and rode after her with his three sons and a group of men. Maryam asked her master if he could fight, but he admitted his cowardice. The king sent each of his sons in turn to duel against his daughter. However, through Maryam's skill and expert horsemanship, she was able to kill all three. Having seen this, the rest of the men withdrew, and the king followed suit. He then wrote to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd a letter claiming that Nūr al-Dīn had captured his daughter Maryam. He asked Hārūn to have Maryam returned to him.

Maryam and Nūr al-Dīn rode until they reached Syria. There, they were arrested and taken to Baghdad. Hārūn was immediately impressed by Maryam's strength, beauty, and eloquence. In a long speech, Maryam explained that she was a Muslim and that it would be unfitting for the caliph to send her to the land of the infidels. Hārūn was convinced and stated that he would never do that. He then asked Maryam if she would accept Nūr al-Dīn as her husband. She did, and the marriage contract was immediately written. Maryam and Nūr al-Dīn then lived in the palace, were

given an allowance, and lived in luxury. After a while, Nūr al-Dīn wanted to see his parents again. Hārūn allowed the two to return to Cairo, where the two lived happily until their deaths.

There are a number of remarkable aspects to this story. First, it is the slave-girl herself who selects her future master, and she actually succeeds in convincing him to buy her even though he does not have any interest in purchasing a slave-girl to begin with. Second, the slave-girl is actually a princess who is rescued by her people and brought back to her father's palace twice. Yet she prefers to live as a slave-girl with her master rather than as a princess in her kingdom. Third, the slave-girl is repeatedly praised throughout the story concerning her abilities and skills: she is eloquent, strong, brave, a skilled sash-maker, sailor and horse rider, and has great strength of mind. Fourth, although the male protagonist risks his life twice to get her back by sailing to her home city, he is rather an inept character. He is forced to leave his home after he gets drunk and makes his father lose an eye; he spends all of his money to purchase a slave-girl even though he has no intention of buying one; he follows the instructions of the slave-girl and lives off her handiwork; he does not heed her warning about interacting with a particular man, gets drunk at the latter's place, and sells the girl to him; he is about to be executed twice by the father of the girl and is saved by pure chance; he has to follow the girl's plans twice in order to escape, but he ruins the plans or comes close to doing so; and he shows cowardice by refusing to strip the dead thief of his weapons and letting his girl fight against her brothers alone. In the end, the caliph asks the girl, not her master, whether she would like to marry him, considering her decision more important than his. Fifth, the girl accomplishes some remarkable feats to be with her beloved, including killing her three brothers.

2.3.3 ʿAlī Shār and Zumurrud

The second story in which a slave-girl takes complete control of her relationship with her master and guides it to a happy conclusion is that of ʿAlī Shār and Zumurrud (*The Arabian Nights*, 2010: vol. 2: 33-68 [Nights 308-327]; Van Gelder, 2004: 215, no. 20).

A wealthy merchant in Khurāsān had a son named ʿAlī Shār. After the father passed away, ʿAlī Shār tended his shop for one year. But soon after, he squandered all his wealth on drinking and pretty girls.

One day, ʿAlī Shār went to the market where they were selling a slave-girl named Zumurrud, who was well-versed in the Qur'ān, calligraphy, poetry, and many branches of knowledge and also made silk curtains. The condition of the sale was that she would be the one to choose her new master. The bidding went up to 1,000 dinars, but Zumurrud rejected all bidders, mocking them all for their old age or

physical deformity. She was then asked to choose from those present. Her eyes fell on ʻAlī Shār, and she immediately fell in love with him. She requested that he purchase her, but he confessed to her that he did not have any money. She asked to be taken aside and then gave him a purse with 1,000 dinars, which he used to buy her.

ʻAlī Shār's house was no more than one unfurnished room. Zumurrud gave him 1,000 dinars and asked him to buy furnishings and food. She also asked for a silk curtain, silver and gold threads, and silk in different colours. The two slept together. The next day, she began embroidering the curtain. She worked for eight days and then told ʻAlī Shār to sell it in the market for 50 dinars, but to beware not to sell it to a passerby, or else they would be separated. She instructed him also to purchase food and more silk so that she could start working again. This went on for one year. Then one day, a Christian passerby offered 100 dinars for the curtain. The other merchants pressed ʻAlī Shār to accept the offer, which he did. The Christian followed him home and then gave him some drugged food. As ʻAlī Shār slept, the Christian took Zumurrud to his brother's house, where she was beaten unconscious for refusing to convert to Christianity.

When ʻAlī Shār awoke the following day and realized that Zumurrud had disappeared, he walked in the streets lamenting and hitting his chest with stones. An old woman offered to help him find Zumurrud. She posed as a seller and went from door to door offering her wares until she found the house in which Zumurrud was held. She told Zumurrud to be ready to escape the next night, as ʻAlī Shār would be waiting at the bench outside the mansion. ʻAlī went to the bench at night, but fell asleep. A thief walked by and, seeing ʻAlī asleep, took his turban. At that point, Zumurrud looked down from the house and, believing the man to be her master, lowered herself from a window with two saddlebags of gold. The thief grabbed her and the bags and rushed to a hideout outside of the city. This was a cave to which he had brought his mother and where he had killed a soldier and taken his horse. He told his mother to keep an eye on Zumurrud until he returned next morning. Zumurrud saw this as a chance to escape. She suggested to the old woman that she delouse her hair. As Zumurrud did this, the old woman fell asleep. Zumurrud put on the dress of the dead soldier, took the bags of gold, and rode off on the horse. She rode for ten days and on the eleventh she reached a city. The soldiers and notables came to her and, mistaking her for a man, greeted her as their new king. It was their custom that, when their king died, they stayed for three days waiting outside the city gate and then crowned the first man whom they encountered.

Zumurrud was put on the throne. She gave gifts to the soldiers, abolished market taxes, freed prisoners, and removed injustices. As a result of her conduct, she was loved by all. After ruling for a year and hearing nothing of ʻAlī Shār, she devised a plan to encourage people to come to her city, with the hope that ʻAlī would

be one of them. She ordered an arena to be built below the palace in which, at the beginning of each month, banquets would be set out for everyone in the city, locals and visitors alike. This practice went on for a year. ʻAlī Shār did not appear. However, the Christian who kidnapped her, his brother who had her beaten, and the thief came in successive months. Zumurrud had the opportunity to avenge herself of the wrongs that they committed against her, and she had them all flayed and killed.

As for ʻAlī Shār, he had fallen ill for one year because of his grief over the loss of Zumurrud. When he recovered, he wandered the lands and cities until he finally reached her city. As he sat at one of the banquets, she recognized him, but he did not recognize her because she was dressed like a king. She ordered that good care be taken of him and then, at night, had him brought to her chamber. ʻAlī Shār feared of what the king might do to him, but he was ecstatic when Zumurrud revealed herself. The next day, Zumurrud announced to the people of the city that she would be going to the land of ʻAlī Shār and that they should appoint another king. The two had children and lived happily until their deaths.

Like in the tale of Maryam and Nūr al-Dīn, the male protagonist of this story becomes the master of the slave-girl when she selects him from a crowd of men. One big difference exists: here she gives him the money to buy her because he has none of his own. After the sale, the girl also gives her new master additional money to buy furnishings for the house and material for her work. Just as Maryam supports her master by making silk sashes, Zumurrud earns money by embroidering silk curtains. Zumurrud is just as clever as Maryam, although perhaps she does not possess all of her skills (she does not seem to be warrior-like nor know much about sailing ships). On the other hand, ʻAlī Shār is even more incompetent and hopeless than Nūr al-Dīn: he wastes the fortune inherited from his father; he has Zumurrud kidnapped from his house after he does exactly what she warns him not to do; he fails to rescue her because he falls asleep while waiting for her; he then roams aimlessly searching for her, but it is by pure chance, and partly by her efforts, that he reunites with her. If not for Zumurrud, the two would never even meet. She is the one who chooses him as her master, who provides for the two, who escapes from her kidnappers, who rules successfully as a king for more than a year, and who devises a way to find her master and reunites with him.[20]

20. The last two tales were merged together by the director Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) and turned into the frame story of the movie *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* (1974), which won the Jury's Special Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 1974. The initial sequence, which shows Nūr al-Dīn drinking with friends in a garden and then being forced to leave his house after striking his father while drunk, was omitted from the final edition of the movie. Because of this, the only remnant from the first tale is the name of the male protagonist who is called Nūr al-Dīn. Other than that, the frame story of the movie follows the adventures of Zumurrud and ʻAlī Shār.

Elements in the story of ʻAlī Bābā and the Forty Thieves bear some resemblance to parts of the tales of Maryam and Zumurrud, although the story does not involve the amorous relationship

2.4 King Bahrām and Fitna His Slave-Girl

The most outstanding author of Persian romantic epics is the poet Niẓāmī Ganjavī (535-605/1141-1209), among whose works is the versified romance *Haft Paykar* (Seven Beauties). This is a collection of episodes whose main character is the Sasanian Persian king Bahrām V Gūr (r. 420-438). The episodes are connected together by the frame story of Bahrām's love for the seven princesses of the seven climes. One of the episodes recounts a hunting trip on which Bahrām brings along his slave-girl Fitna. The events that transpire eventually lead to the slave-girl teaching her king and master a lesson, although she almost loses her life in the process (Niẓāmī, 1987: 204-230; idem, 1995: 76-86, sections 25-26).

> One day, King Bahrām went hunting with his Chinese slave-girl Fitna. She was very beautiful and an elegant singer, player, and dancer. During the hunting expedition, Fitna did not praise Bahrām for any of his kills. At one point he asked her what he should do with a prey that just appeared before them. Fitna said that he attach the hoof of the animal to its head. Bahrām made the animal raise its hoof to its head and with one arrow killed it by piercing the hoof and the head. But when Bahrām asked Fitna of her opinion of this feat, she was not impressed: she said that whatever was rehearsed often was not hard to accomplish and that training made one capable of achieving hard objectives. Bahrām became furious and ordered an officer to kill Fitna. But Fitna struck a deal with the officer. She offered him seven rubies and asked him to stay her death until he could see what effect the news of her death

between a male master and a slave-girl, but rather recounts how a smart and quick-thinking slave-girl is able to save her master a number of times as a result of which she is given her freedom and is then married to his son (*The Arabian Nights*, 2010: vol. 1: 929-960). In the first part of the tale, ʻAlī Bābā is the main protagonist. He discovered a magic cave in which a band of forty thieves hid their loot. He was able to enter it and take some bags of gold coins. Shortly afterwards, his brother Qāsim also went into the cave, but the thieves caught him and quartered him. ʻAlī Bābā found the cut up corpse of his brother and took it home. From here onwards, Marjāna, the slave-girl of Qāsim, is the principal character in the tale. With Qāsim's death, Marjāna became the slave-girl of ʻAlī Bābā. Through a stratagem, she led people to believe that Qāsim had died of a sudden illness, and she had a cobbler sew together the body. In this fashion, the actual way in which Qāsim died was kept secret, and he was publicly buried. In the meantime, the forty thieves wanted to find out who had discovered their secret cave. Twice they tracked down the house of ʻAlī Bābā, leaving a mark on its door. However, Marjāna noticed the mark on both occasions and made similar marks on the doors of the neighbours, thwarting the efforts of the thieves in identifying the house. Next, the captain of the thieves found the house. He returned later disguised as an oil merchant having hidden his men in leather jars carried by mules, and received ʻAlī Bābā's hospitality. The plan was for the thieves to come out of the jars after the people of the house had gone to sleep, and kill everyone. The plan failed because Marjāna accidentally discovered that the jars contained men and not oil. She killed every man by pouring boiling oil on his head, but the captain escaped. When Marjāna told ʻAlī Bābā about the men and the marks on the door, he was impressed and granted her her freedom. Some time later, the captain of the thieves returned to ʻAlī Bābā's house in disguise. But Marjāna recognized him and stabbed him. ʻAlī Bābā praised Marjāna for her quick thinking and married her to his son.

would have on the king. Later, when the officer saw that the king was saddened by the news of Fitna's death, he forewent killing her and let her live in one of his palaces.

One day, a calf was born in the officer's palace. From then on, every day Fitna lifted the calf on her shoulders and carried it to the top of the tower of the palace. She continued to do this for six years until the calf had become an ox. Fitna then asked the officer to invite the king for a feast the next time he went hunting. On that day, the officer brought the king to the top of the tower. After the king had feasted, he asked the officer how he could climb to the top of the tower at his old age. The officer replied that a young woman carried an ox up the tower's steps every day. The king asked to see this, so Fitna came out and showed her ability. The king was initially amazed, but stated that the woman was not that strong and that it was merely through practice that she was able to accomplish this feat. The woman reminded the king of his own hunting feats and how they too were a result of practice. Hearing these words, the king recognized Fitna and tearfully begged for her forgiveness. He was happy for their reunion, and he made Fitna his lawful wife with whom he lived in love and comfort for a very long time.

If we attempt to fit this story within the pattern described earlier in section 2.0, we will note that once again the master (King Bahrām) and his slave-girl (Fitna) are in love, but are separated when the master orders her execution in a moment of fury. The master regrets the separation, but since he believes the girl to be dead, he does nothing. In the meantime, the girl hatches a plan to make the master understand her viewpoint, teach him a lesson that will benefit him in the future, and cause a reunion between the two. The girl is successful in accomplishing these tasks and the master pardons her.[21]

3. LOVE BETWEEN MASTER AND SLAVE AS ALLEGORY OF MYSTICAL LOVE

Muslim mystics took love stories that are told in literary and popular sources and rewrote them in verse and prose as allegories of mystical love, exalting earthly love as a first step towards spiritual love. For them, the lover should always be under the control of the beloved and should be ready to sacrifice everything for his or her

21. Niẓāmī's version of the story of King Bahrām and his slave-girl is based on the episode as narrated in the *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings), the monumental Persian epic by Firdawsī (d. 411/1020 or 416/1025), albeit with some major differences. In the *Shāhnāma*, when the king becomes angry at the girl's response, he tramples her with his camel and kills her, as he vows never to take women with him hunting again. In Niẓāmī's version, the girl is spared and she is able to teach the king a lesson "towards acquiring the wisdom which will lead him to justice and true kingship," as the episode suggests "the importance of love in leading to the comprehension of its analogue, justice" (Meisami, 1989: 59). Niẓāmī's version also shows a more egalitarian depiction of the male and female protagonists in which they are drawn closer to each other with respect to their qualities (Gabbay, 2009).

sake. This ought to be true regardless of the social condition of the beloved. When the beloved is a slave, the master has to become the slave of the beloved, as their love dissolves social status.

3.1 The Humbling of a Monarch for the Sake of His Slave-Girl

The *Masnavī* (or *Mathnawī*) of the great Muslim mystic poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (604-672/1207-1273) is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of religious literature. Its contents can be divided into two groups: (1) exposition of the main themes of Islamic mysticism, and (2) tales or anecdotes meant to clarify those themes. One of these tales is about a king who falls in love at first sight with a slave-girl and then humbles himself in a plea to God to cure her when she becomes ill (Rūmī, 1925: 5-17; idem, 1926: 6-17).

> It is said that one day the king went out hunting with his courtiers when he saw a slave-girl on the road: "The king saw a slave-girl on the highway; the king's soul became the slave of that slave-girl" (*yak kanīzak dīd shah bar shāh-rāh / shud ghulām-i ān kanīzak jān-i shāh*) (verse 38). He bought her right away and returned with her to his palace. Soon afterwards, however, the girl fell ill. The king summoned all the physicians of his realm and pleaded with them to help them both, for the girl was the life of his life, and his own life was nothing without her. He promised to give all of his treasure to whoever could heal her. The physicians pledged to save her, but they were conceited and arrogant and did not acknowledge the power of God. All their treatments failed, and her condition worsened. When the king realized the ineffectiveness of the cures of his physicians, in great humility he rushed barefoot to the mosque where he beseeched God's aid with copious tears. After falling asleep at the sanctuary, the king saw an old man in a dream who told him that a stranger would come the next day and cure the girl. This healer did arrive, and he discovered that what ailed the girl was her heart: she was lovesick for a goldsmith from the city of Samarqand. The healer suggested that, to cure the girl, the goldsmith should be enticed to come to court. The goldsmith came to the king's court, where he was united with the slave-girl. The hope was that their union would put out the girl's passion. After six months, the girl was completely restored to good health, and the healer began giving the goldsmith a draught that made him ill and slowly waste away. As he became emaciated and his good looks withered away, the girl's love for him also faded away. By the time he died, the girl's love for him had disappeared.

What of the king's love for the girl? That also passed. Unlike all our previous stories that focused on the themes of romance and generosity, Rūmī's tale is told to instill a particular mystical concept: love for the sake of physical beauty is not true love. Humans should seek the love of God who is eternal and everlasting and not the love of a mortal who will wither and die. Despite of this message, within the tale, if

the king had not abased himself for the sake of his slave-girl, the healer would not have appeared. Then the king would not have been cured of his worldly outlook, and the girl would not have been cured of her sickness.

3.2 The Seduction of Yūsuf/Joseph

The earliest Islamic source in which is told the story of a master who falls passionately in love with a slave is the Qur'ān itself. However, in this case, it is the wife of a high-ranking official who is infatuated with a male slave of unequalled beauty. In Sūrat Yūsuf (the Chapter of Joseph), the wife of Yūsuf's Egyptian master attempted to seduce him, but he rebuffed her advances (Sūrat Yūsuf 12:23-34 and 50-53). When she was caught in the act of seduction, she accused Yūsuf of attacking her. He was shown to be innocent, but the story spread amongst the women of the city and they mocked Yūsuf's mistress for having fallen in love with her slave. The mistress, despite the affront to her honour, did not relent. She gave Yūsuf an ultimatum, and when he refused to comply, he was placed in prison. He was finally freed when the woman confessed before the Egyptian king that Yūsuf had done no wrong.

In this *sūra*, the focus is exclusively on the character of Yūsuf, who is the only character that is named other than his father Ya'qūb (Jacob). The moral here is that a believer should always cling to piety, avoid sin, and trust completely in God, just like Yūsuf did repeatedly. In return, God will reward the believer in this life and the next. The story of Yūsuf became popular in Islamic pietistic and mystic literature, where Yūsuf was used as a model of virtue, chastity, and wisdom and "as one of the most important models of the relationship between the manifestation of Divine beauty in the world and the loving soul of the mystic" (de Bruijn & Flemming, 2001: 360). The story was told in narrative poetry in Persian from at least the 4th/10th century onwards, with its most renowned and celebrated version being the romance entitled *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā* by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (817-898/1414-1492) who turned the story into a mystical allegory.[22] In this rendering of the tale, Zulaykhā, the wife of the Grand Vizier of Egypt, plays a more central role than Yūsuf.

> Zulaykhā fell desperately in love with Yūsuf after seeing him in her dreams. In one of the dreams, he told her that he was the Grand Vizier of Egypt. Thus, she arranged a marriage with the Grand Vizier of the time. But when she arrived in Egypt, her joy turned to sorrow because she discovered that the vizier was not the youth from her dreams. Some time later, an Egyptian brought Yūsuf to the capital as a slave and offered him for sale. When Zulaykhā saw him, she recognized him from her dreams and asked her husband to buy him. He said he couldn't afford to pay for him, but she offered her personal jewels to use as payment. Then the vizier

22. There were a number of imitators of Jāmī, with few successful ones, while Turkish authors also composed prose and verse versions of the story (de Bruijn & Flemming, 2001).

complained that the king was interested in the youth, but she told him to ask the king for a favour and say that he wanted to raise the youth as his son. The king gave his consent, and in this manner Yūsuf came to live in the same house as Zulaykhā.

Zulaykhā was happy that she was finally with her beloved. She spent her whole day serving Yūsuf and meeting all his needs, from the moment he awoke until he went to sleep. "Her constant thought to his wants she gave, / And, queen of the house, was his humble slave" (Jāmī, 1882: 153; idem, [1999]: 106, verse 1818). However, he ignored her love and constant attention, which made her despondent and sad. She rebuked herself for having disgraced her name by falling in love with her own slave (Jāmī, 1882: 164; idem, [1999]: 111, verses 1923-1925). But this did not work; she was completely infatuated with Yūsuf, who said that he could not betray his master who had taken him as a son nor could he commit a sin before God. Zulaykhā then accused him of attempting to take advantage of her as she slept, but it was proven to be a lie. The women of the city began talking about Zulaykhā and criticized her: "Heedless of honour and name she gave / The love of her heart to the Hebrew slave" (Jāmī, 1882: 223; idem, [1999]: 142, verse 2612). Zulaykhā herself told Yūsuf: "For thee I have forfeited all: my name / Through thee has been made a reproach and shame" (Jāmī, 1882: 227; idem, [1999]: 145, verse 2664).

Zulaykhā then went to her husband and convinced him to put Yūsuf in prison for shaming her. But this did not help Zulaykhā, who was saddened by her separation from her beloved. She visited the prison at night looking at Yūsuf from a distance and spent her days espying the roof of the prison from a turret above her palace.

After some years, the king released Yūsuf from prison because he interpreted his dream and gave him advice. This was coupled with Zulaykhā confessing that Yūsuf had not committed any crime. As a result of this, Yūsuf was made the Grand Vizier. The old vizier died of heartache for having lost his position, and his widowed wife lost all her belongings. She was filled with sorrow and constantly wept for her lost Yūsuf. In the end, her youth and beauty disappeared and she became blind. Up to this point, Zulaykhā had been worshipping an idol. But she had a spiritual conversion and began to pray to God. One day she was noticed by Yūsuf as he passed by her with his retinue and he had her brought to his council-chamber. At first, he did not recognize her and asked her what her wish was. She wanted her youth, beauty, and eyesight back. Yūsuf prayed, and Zulaykhā received what she had asked for. She then asked to be next to Yūsuf. He was recalcitrant, but the angel Gabriel descended upon him and told him that God had pity on her and that He had betrothed the two. Yūsuf and Zulaykhā were married and they lived happily until their deaths.

This story presents a number of differences in comparison to the other tales. First of all, the genders are reversed: the slave is a man and the master is a woman.

Second, the master falls in love with the slave before physically seeing him (and before realizing his social status), but when the two do meet, the slave rebuffs the love of his master. Third, the two individuals live together in the same building, but the slave attempts to separate himself from the master, while the master, in a moment of exasperation, sends the slave to prison. These failed attempts at separation serve to highlight the undying love of the master. Separation does occur when the slave regains his freedom and is granted the high social status originally belonging to his masters. Four, the master does everything in her power to achieve union with her beloved, but is unsuccessful because of the slave's sense of loyalty to her husband and devotion to God. It is only when the old master attains spiritual enlightenment, after becoming destitute, scarred, and blind, that the two are finally united, albeit through the direct agency of God.

3.3 Sultan Maḥmūd and Ayāz

One last relationship to be discussed is that between the sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030) and his Turkic male slave Ayāz (d. 449/1057-1058). The love of the sultan to his favourite slave is a common theme in Persian literature, and a number of anecdotes and stories about the two are found in the writings of many major Persian authors.[23] Romance epics on the two were also written in the 16th and 17th centuries, including one by Muḥammad Ḥasan Zulālī Khvānsārī (d. 1024/1615).[24]

In the romance of Zulālī it is related that, while on a campaign to conquer Kashmir, Maḥmūd took a nap and fell in love with a male slave that he saw in a dream. When he awoke, he discovered where the slave was about to be sold, and he hurried there, abandoning his campaign. The sultan bought Ayāz and brought him back to his capital Ghazna, where he tried to replace the master-slave relationship with companionship based on love. Subsequently, the two suffered a number of separations as jealous courtiers led Ayāz astray and the king of Kashmir kidnapped him. However, through their actions, driven by love, they were reunited, and Maḥmūd attacked Kashmir and freed his beloved Ayāz (Kugle, 2002: 31-34).

One story in the *Muṣībatnāma* (The Book of Affliction) of ʻAṭṭār bears some similarities to the stories in section 2 above. It is related that one day Maḥmūd was angry with Ayāz. He wondered whether he should kill him or put him in chains. But it was suggested to him that he sell him instead. Ayāz was sold for one thousand dinars. A while later, the sultan regretted the sale and asked for Ayāz to be brought back. When Ayāz and his new owner arrived, the sultan rebuked the latter and stated

23. This includes Niẓāmī ʻArūḍī (d. ca. 556/1161), Farīd al-Dīn ʻAṭṭār (d. 618/1221), Rūmī, and Saʻdī (d. ca. 691/1292) (Suhaylī, [1951]; Spieß, 1959: 46-95; Dhū al-Faqārī, [2011-2012]).

24. Other romances were composed by Fakhr al-Dīn ʻAlī ibn Ḥusayn Wāʻiẓ Kāshifī (d. 939/1532-1533, known as Ṣafī) and Anīsī Shāmlū Yūl-qulī Beg (d. 1014/1605) (Dhū al-Faqārī, [2011-2012]: 67-70).

that buying the beloved of the sultan was an act worthy of punishment by death. Ayāz intervened and remarked to the sultan: What was then the due of the one who had sold the beloved? (Suhaylī, [1951]: 331; Spieß, 1959: 70-71). A number of other anecdotes explicitly state that the sultan had become the slave of his own slave, since Ayāz was master of the sultan's heart (Spieß, 1959: 66-71).

4. CONCLUSION: FICTION AND HISTORY

The line between literary fiction and historical fact is often blurred in the stories discussed here. Even in tales that are obviously fictitious, historical characters appear and behave as they are portrayed in historical chronicles. But the situation is more complicated when a story is presented in a chronicle, a biographical dictionary, or in a source that claims to be reporting historical facts and actual eyewitness accounts. The question that poses itself is how much of what occurs in these tales is of a historical nature or can be ascertained via documentary or historical sources?

The value of the work of al-Tanūkhī as a historical source has been analyzed by a number of scholars who have concluded that, although many of the stories which are narrated are of dubious historical worth and contain chronological and factual inaccuracies, their descriptive realism is of immense value for the study of private life, economic life, the history of medicine, the world of bureaucracy, and institutions such as prisons and schools (Gabrieli, 1941: 29-34; Schippers, 2002-2003; cf. Ashtiany, 1991: 126-127). Detailed analysis of some stories has led scholars to argue that the tales told by al-Tanūkhī, although fictional and based on folkloric motifs, shed of their more supernatural elements, made them more lifelike and realistic with a strong degree of plausibility (Hamori, 1990).

The slave-girls in the stories are described as possessing exquisite beauty and unusual intelligence, learning, and skill. The prices that are asked and paid for them are typically presented as uncharacteristically high, in particular the price that is asked for Tawaddud (2.3.1). Indeed, according to documentary sources, the average slave sold for about 20 dinars around the 11th-12th century, with some reaching 80 dinars (Cheikh-Moussa, 1996: 44). The astronomical prices that we find in the literary sources are thus meant to emphasize the excellence of the girl in question or the extravagance of the purchaser. Historically, the most expensive were singing slave-girls (*qiyān*, sing. *qayna*) and, according to literary accounts, they could fetch high prices (Cheikh-Moussa, 1996: 45-51). Some reports tell us that some buyers went into financial ruin or had to give up a good portion of their wealth in order to obtain a particular *qayna* whom they desired (Cheikh-Moussa, 1996: 51-52). In fact, many of the slave-girls that appear in our stories are said to be skilled in singing and playing musical instruments.

Yet the existence of these *qiyān* was itself controversial. The eminent prose writer al-Jāḥiẓ (160-255/776-868) composed an epistle in which he apparently

defends the practice of owning *qiyān* and the licitness of enjoying their company (al-Jāḥiẓ, 1980; Pellat, 1963). However, the epistle is in reality a satire criticizing the custom and those involved in it (al-Jāḥiẓ, 1980: 2-5; Cheikh-Moussa, 1990: 88, 108). The ʻAbbāsid poet Ibn al-Rūmī (221-283/836-896) describes how a *qayna* named Waḥīd ensnared him with her beauty and her musical performance and how he has become like her slave:

> "O my two friends, Waḥīd has enslaved me,
> Till my heart is tormented and broken by love. [...]
> "She is blamed because when she sings
> The free-born become enslaved by her."
>
> (Motoyoshi, 2001: 5 and 6, lines 1 and 29)[25]

This was in fact part of the problem. These *qiyān*, who have been compared to the Athenian *hetairai* and the Japanese geishas (al-Jāḥiẓ, 1980: 2; Paraskeva, 2010), were seen by some as a subversive element in society that transgressed the strict hierarchical order of the social ranks and the sexes: the slave became the master and the female slave commanded the male elite in what was considered a reversal of the social and ethical order (Cheikh-Moussa, 1990: 116-118; idem, 1996: 65-67; Bray, 2004: 136-139). An early example of a high-ranking man who is described as following the instructions of his slave girl is the Umayyad ruler Yazīd ibn ʻAbd al-Malik (r. 101-105/720-723). It is said that he fell in love with his favourite *qayna* Ḥabāba to such a degree that he let her influence his decisions, if not make them herself. It is also reported that he died a few days after her death out of grief for her (Zakharia, 2011). Although these reports are probably exaggerations, if not straight fabrications aimed at mocking Yazīd and his dynasty, they still indicate the negative view that the authors had of the possible influence of slave-girls on free men.[26] Contrary to this attitude, this reversal of roles is not depicted in any negative way in the stories studied above. The skill and initiative of the slave-girls in the stories always result in a positive and happy ending.

As for individual *qiyān* and their lives, the sources provide more information about them than about free women. Let us take as an example the life of ʻArīb (181-277/797-890), one of the most famous *qiyān* at the ʻAbbāsid court (al-Heity & Zia, 1997; Al-Heitty, 2005: 73-98). ʻArīb was the daughter of Jaʻfar al-Barmakī, who is a character in the stories in 2.1.2. Jaʻfar had fallen in love with Fāṭima, the head of

25. The Arabic original is found on pp. 27 and 28:

yā khalīlayya, tayyamatnī Waḥīdu / fa-fu'ādī bihā muʻannan ʻamīdu

ʻaybuhā annahā idhā ghannat al-aḥ/rāra ẓallū, wa hum ladayhā ʻabīdu

The lines are taken from ode 593, "Waḥīd, the Singing Slave-Girl of ʻAmhamah."

26. It is to be noted that out of the 37 ʻAbbāsid caliphs who ruled up to the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258, only three were born of free mothers (Zakharia, 2011: 306, note 24).

the slave-girls of his father's wife, and married her against his father's wishes. It is reported that his father offered him 200 of his slave-girls to leave Fāṭima, but Ja'far refused. A short time later, Fāṭima died in labour while giving birth to 'Arīb, and Ja'far hired a wet nurse to take care of his daughter. However, in 187/803, the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd had Ja'far executed, his father thrown in jail, and the property of the family confiscated. The wet nurse sold 'Arīb, who was six years old at the time, to a slave dealer, who in turn sold her to the commander of the caliph's naval force. The latter took the girl to Basra, which was the centre for training slave-girls at the time, and had her taught poetry, grammar, calligraphy, singing, playing different musical instruments, and other related arts. She would later be renowned for her singing, compositions in verse and prose, chess playing, and her musical compositions. All of these are skills that a number of slave-girls in our stories are said to have mastered and to have made them valuable. 'Arīb had close relationships with a number of 'Abbāsid caliphs, including three sons of Hārūn al-Rashīd. The third of these, al-Mu'taṣim (r. 218-227/833-842), bought her and freed her. 'Arīb continued to entertain at the courts of caliphs and other high-ranking individuals. By the time she was 50, she had amassed some wealth, and she had her own slave-girls who participated in her performances.[27]

Although there are some similarities between the life of 'Arīb and a number of the slave-girls that appear in the stories, in particular with regards to her education and skills, there is one major difference: she had a relationship with more than one master in addition to having multiple lovers. On the other hand, all the slave-girls in our stories have relationships with only one man, their beloved master, something which is made explicitly clear in all the stories. This is always true, even when the girl is separated from her master for a number of months or years (as in 2.1.6, 2.1.8, and 2.3.2). The reasons given for this vary: the new master sees the girl for the first time only when he is about to return her (as in 2.1.3a, 2.1.3b, and 2.1.5); the new master only buys the girl so that she may entertain with her singing and playing (as in 2.1.6); or the old master has no interest in women (as in 2.3.2). Even in the romance of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā (3.2), Zulaykhā has only a relationship with Yūsuf after their marriage, since her first husband is a eunuch. One exception is the slave-girl in the tale by Rūmī (3.1) who is allowed to consummate a relationship with the goldsmith after she is bought by the king. However, by this time the king has reached spiritual enlightenment and is no longer interested in her. Contrary to this, most of the time not much is said about the number of relationships that the men in the stories have had, although it is clear that for some, the slave-girl is not their first love. In one case (2.1.6), the old master marries another woman while still looking for his slave-girl.

27. One of the slave-girls of 'Arīb named Bid'a, who was well known for her singing, was given her freedom when she preferred to stay with her mistress than be sold for 100,000 dinars. She later married the caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 279-289/892-902) (al-Heity & Zia, 1997: 129, note 79).

One additional difference and one similarity can be noticed between the sources and our stories. One difference is that the sources report that some masters would make a singing slave-girl pregnant in order to avoid the possibility of her being confiscated by a caliph (Cheikh-Moussa, 1996: 63). This never happens in our stories. When a man is afraid that he might lose his beloved slave-girl to a more powerful individual, he resorts to freeing her, so that no one else may own her, and then marries her (2.1.2a and b). On the other hand, one similarity is the examination of the skill and knowledge of a slave-girl. For example, it is reported in a biographical dictionary that the prominent philologist al-Aṣma‘ī (d. ca. 213/828) was once summoned before Hārūn al-Rashīd to inspect the knowledge of two slave-girls who had been given to the caliph as a gift. The scholar interrogated them briefly on the Qur’ān, grammar, poetry, and history, and approved of both, although he suggested that one of them needed more work to equal the other (Ibn al-Anbārī, 1998: 105-106, within entry no. 33). This is similar to the way in which Tawaddud’s knowledge is tested by Hārūn (2.3.1), although here the test is magnified in scale and is turned into a veritable challenge and duel with the court scholars, and Tawaddud’s expertise is aggrandized.

The love stories of masters with their slave-girls summarized above thus appear to have some basis in reality, although in some of them various aspects are exaggerated for entertainment purposes or to accentuate certain features of the stories. They can be divided into three groups based on the sources in which they are found. The stories of the first group are found in literary sources, some of which are of a historical and scholarly nature (2.1.1-2.1.7 and 2.2). They are the most numerous and most widespread and follow a particular pattern. They might seem repetitive, but they actually present interesting variations and often contain historical details that give them the appearance of being authentic. The second group consists of stories that are part of collections of popular tales (2.1.8 and 2.3), most notably *The Arabian Nights*. They are fictional accounts that strain belief, narrated in a colloquial form influenced by dialect. Although the *Nights* incorporates some of the tales from the first group, other tales in the work display different degrees of implausibility as well as a reversal of the gender roles of the two lovers. Whereas in the stories of the first group the male characters dominate all the action and the female slaves are completely passive, in stories from the *Nights* (2.3) the slave-girls are the ones who lead the way while the masters are almost entirely inert and other male characters are defeated by the girls in one way or another.[28] The tales of the third group are mystical allegories (3.1-3.3) and stand apart for their inherently pedagogical and moralizing aims. Their authors have taken pre-existing stories or story patterns and then reshaped them to impart a moral lesson or a doctrinal message. There is no

28. The story of Bahrām and Fitna (2.4) contains some fantastic or unrealistic elements, such as the monarch’s hunting prowess and Fitna’s ability to carry a fully-grown ox to the top of a tower. The romance epic in which it is found, however, is a literary work and not a collection of popular tales.

interest in historical accuracy. Rather, the focus is on creating poignant parables. Since the ultimate goal is to exalt spiritual love by means of its earthly counterpart, the gender and rank of the protagonists is irrelevant, because love transcends the boundaries of social status and gender. For this reason, in these tales both the master and the slave can be of either gender.

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