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Institut national
des langues
et civilisations orientales

A Call for Papers

Conference

The Thousand and One Nights: Sources, Transformations, and Relationship
with Literature, the Arts and the Sciences

Harvard University (CMES) ~ Institut National des Langues et Civilisations
Orientales (CERMOM, ANR MSFIMA)

Cambridge (Boston) - April 15-17, 2015

Organizing Committee:

- Sandra Naddaff (Harvard U.)
- Aboubakr Chraïbi (Inalco, Paris)
- William Granara (Harvard U.)

Literary works with many textual sources, having been transformed, much translated, and exercising wide influences, such as the *Thousand and One Nights*, create dense and fluid textual networks. What must we have read, seen or heard to claim to know the *Nights*? The oldest and most comprehensive

Arabic manuscript? The Bulaq or Mahdi edition? Burton or Haddawy's translations? Poe's short story? Rabaud's opera? Mahfouz's novel? Borges's essays? Pasolini's film? Materials related to the *Nights* continue to emerge from many arts, countries, periods, disciplines, and languages, and their scope continues to widen, making the *Nights* a universal work from all points of view.

Antoine Galland's French translation published in 1706 had a tremendous impact and was much imitated in French literature, even contributing to the creation of a new literary genre (the oriental tale). It can be argued, by analogy, that the arrival of the *Thousand and One Nights* in the Arabic-speaking world in the mid-8th century had a similar effect on Arabic literature of the period, and that of following centuries. The book's interactions with the wider culture would last a thousand years, the longest period in the text's history. The testimonies of Ibn al-Nadîm and Abu 'Abd Allâh al-Yamanî, who explicitly mention Arabic imitations of the *Nights*, strongly support this hypothesis. Similarly, the existence of numerous books closely related to the *Nights* in terms of content, such as *Kitâb al-Hikâyât al-'Ajîba wa-l-Akhhbâr al-Gharîba* and the *Hundred and One Nights*, shows that this is not a single text but rather a set of texts of a particular genre, which can be called middle literature and which circulated in the Arabic-speaking world at the same time as the *Nights*.

The simultaneous transformations of the *Thousand and One Nights* and their environment often introduce new forms of interaction and promote the creation of new cultural objects and new research perspectives. From the 19th century, short stories and novels would gradually dominate the various forms of literary production, while the *Nights* would also be revitalized with new editions (Bûlâq, Calcutta I and II, Breslau, etc.) and new translations (Lane, Burton, Mardrus, etc.). Always a publishing staple, the *Nights* would gradually enter world literature through the great novelists of the day, from Argentina to Japan, but also other arts, such as music and cinema from its earliest days (Méliès, 1905; Reiniger, 1926). Another remarkable transformation relates to contemporary society, namely the birth of several scientific disciplines, the revival of research tools, and the richness of interdisciplinary approaches such as sociology, history, anthropology, psychoanalysis and political philosophy, which have adopted the *Nights* as a reference corpus.

In light of the above, we ask the following questions:

First panel: The manuscripts of the *Nights* and middle Arabic literature:

What could Arabic manuscripts of the *Nights* represent when compared to their

lost Persian model? What changes have taken place? Have they been imitated, and by what? Do other texts of Arabic literature resemble the Nights? What criteria can be used to identify similarities? How do they differ from other genres, such as the *sîra*, the folktale or the *khabar*? In what ways might they constitute a middle literature?

Second panel: Galland's translation and the 18th century:

How and why were the *Nights* transformed when they were published in France? What type of literature did they represent in the eyes of French readers? What was their impact on the concept of the "tale"? How was the "oriental tale" constructed? What were the consequences on French literature, or even thought and philosophy, of the time?

Third panel: The *Nights*, world literature and the arts:

Do the *Nights*, which exploit a series of embedded frame stories to act out a drama of literary creation, represent a model for the writer and the artist? Among the *Nights*' hundreds of stories which are the most used? Why and how were these stories selected and transformed? What is the effect, in turn, on their original texts?

Fourth panel: The *Nights*, the humanities and the sciences:

How can the *Nights* be used in other disciplines? How can issues concerning medieval societies, religions, or political governance be explored through the *Nights*? For example, is it possible, in the context of interdisciplinary research, to use the therapeutic aspects of Shahrazad's stories in medicine?

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The Center for Middle Eastern Studies' Working Group on Middle Eastern Literatures, The Department of Comparative Literature, The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, in conjunction with Centre de Recherche Moyen-Orient Méditerranée de l'INALCO (ANR MSFIMA : Les Mille et une nuits : Sources et Fonctions dans l'Islam Médiéval Arabe), welcomes proposals for papers that fall within one of the four panel

topics outlined above.

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and should be sent to Professor Aboubakr Chraïbi at: aboubakr.chraibi@inalco.fr by October 15, 2014. Papers may be presented in Arabic, English or French. Email submissions should be sent in Word format only. Successful proposals should present a compelling case for the paper and its relation to the conference topic[s]. We ask that all participants stick to a strict twenty minute time period to allow time for discussion. Please do not send your entire paper and do not include your personal details on the abstract but rather in a separate cover letter. All papers will be peer-reviewed and evaluated anonymously. The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, does not require any conference registration fees, and will provide participants with food and accommodation while in Cambridge (Boston) USA during the conference, it expects participants to arrange and pay for their own travel to and from Boston. For any further information please contact Elizabeth Flanagan: elizabethflanagan@fas.harvard.edu.