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Zayde Antrim
Trinity College

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Zayde Antrim
Professor of History and International Studies, Trinity College

(Zayde.Antrim@trincoll.edu)

Abstract

This two-part article argues that the earliest Arabic manuscripts of the 1001 Nights *celebrate sameness, especially physical sameness, in sexual relationships to the extent that a category of erotic embodiment emerges that cannot be understood through a binary construction of sex. The first part of the article proposes a reading of a fifteenth-century manuscript that takes its descriptions of beautiful bodies on their own terms. Eroticized characters recur as both lover and beloved in a series of parallel sexual encounters that situate them in emphatic mutual relation and accumulate weight as the text unfolds. The resulting erotics of sameness decenters the perspective of adult men and displaces or undermines, at least temporarily, the lines of gender otherwise drawn in the stories. By contrast, when difference is stressed via explicitly sexed or racialized bodies, it is used to deem a relationship ridiculous or threatening. The second part of the article presents a diachronic analysis of one story, "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," to show how modern editors, translators, and scholars have read binary sex into the text in order to make sense of its erotics. Manuscripts of the* Nights *dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries differ considerably from the earliest Arabic print editions in their presentation of the story. This case study reveals what translators and scholars miss when they work from these print editions and/or from modern constructions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment.*

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* *Qamarayn* means "two moons" in Arabic. It is a dual noun form often used to refer to a beautiful pair. It is also likely to be familiar to many readers as the title of a song by the famous Egyptian musician Amr Diab. Thank you to Alison Vacca and Dana Sajdi for help with the title. A draft of this paper was presented in a workshop at the Columbia University Middle East Institute. I am grateful to all the participants for their comments and questions and especially to Najam Haider for inviting me and to Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah for delivering an incisive response. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of Rob Corber, Matthew Keegan, Roger Kittleson, Dana Sajdi, Rachel Schine, and Alison Vacca, whose feedback on drafts pushed me to sharpen my analysis, and of Kathleen Kete, who solved a tricky translation problem. Finally, thank you to the three anonymous readers for the journal whose detailed reviews helped me improve the article considerably; the weaknesses that remain are entirely my own.

A wealthy businesswoman discovers a young man reciting the Qurʾan at the heart of an enchanted city and is struck by passion. She recites poetry to convey the experience of his beauty:

> ... by the soft myrtle of his rosy cheeks,
> by his carnelian lips and mouth of pearls,
> which sends the fragrance of the honey breath,
> and the sweet wine which in its sweetness purls,
> by his graceful neck and his boughlike frame,
> which bears two pomegranates on the breast,
> by his charming, tender, and slender waist,
> and hips that quiver while they move or rest...[1]

Today's reader may be disoriented by this episode from a fifteenth-century manuscript of *Alf layla wa-layla* (*1001 Nights*). While the gender roles may be surprising, the young man's embodied presence, as evoked by the poem, may seem downright unlikely. Is this beautiful youth *really* male? Is the poem feminizing his body as a way of eroticizing it? Questions like these spring from assumptions about what a male body or masculine desirability looks like, assumptions that should not be projected onto the past. In fact, examples throughout this manuscript cultivate what might be called an erotics of sameness, in which bodies are described in ways that stress their similarities, regardless of gender. This has the effect of producing for the audience a field of sexual possibility that cannot be understood through modern categories of sexuality or norms of embodied gender.

This article proceeds in two parts. In the first part, I propose a reading of this fifteenth-century manuscript that takes its descriptions of beautiful bodies, like the one above, on their own terms. The evidence here, as in the reams of Arabic poetry composed in the same period unselfconsciously eroticizing both young men and women, confirms previous claims that sex difference was not what made passionate love either aesthetically successful or socially acceptable.[2] Rather, in this manuscript eroticized characters recur as both lover and beloved in a series of parallel sexual encounters that situate them in emphatic mutual relation and accumulate weight as the text unfolds. The resulting erotics of sameness decenters the perspective of adult men and displaces or undermines, at least temporarily, the lines of gender otherwise drawn in the stories. By contrast, when difference emerges via explicitly sexed or racialized bodies, it is used to deem a relationship ridiculous or

1. This excerpt is from Husain Haddawy's excellent translation of the twelve-verse poem in *The Arabian Nights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 166–67. Subsequent translations from the Arabic are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

2. See Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially chapter 2; Thomas Bauer, "Male-Male Love in Classical Arabic Poetry," in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 107–23 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Adam Talib, *How Do You Say "Epigram" in Arabic: Literary History at the Limits of Comparison* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Franz Rosenthal, "Male and Female: Described and Compared," in *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson, 24–54 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and the many works of Everett Rowson cited below.

threatening. In the second part of the article, I present a diachronic analysis of one story, "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," to show how modern editors, translators, and scholars have read binary sex into the text in order to make sense of its erotics. Manuscripts of the *Nights* dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries differ considerably from the earliest Arabic print editions in their presentation of the story. This case study reveals what translators and scholars miss when they work from these print editions and/or from modern constructions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment.

Part 1: Sameness and Difference in a Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *1001 Nights*

For historians working on earlier periods, it is often a challenge to interpret sexual practices and norms without reproducing, even unintentionally, modern binaries, such as the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary and the binary construction of sex.[3] Even a term such as "same-sex desire," which is often seen as a less anachronistic alternative to homosexuality, centers a binary notion of sameness and difference derived from the sexed body. In general, modern sexual taxonomies depend on the concept of sexual dimorphism, in which male and female bodies are understood as categorically and self-evidently different, with a particular emphasis on genitalia. However, scholarship on the history of the body has shown that sexual dimorphism may not have always underpinned scientific or religious thought.[4] In the field of Islamic history, Indira Falk Gesink argues that despite the importance of a gender binary to the realms of marriage, the household, inheritance, and ritual, Muslim scholars from across the spectrum of premodern jurisprudence exhibited flexibility when confronted with morphological ambiguity. They adopted a category of "complex sex" and allowed people to hold different sex designations simultaneously or to

3. Literature on the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality is vast and crosses multiple fields. Terms such as binary sex, gender roles, and embodied gender have become widespread in academic writing. As should be clear already, I take a historical constructionist, rather than an essentialist, approach, and I use these terms throughout the article in particular reference to the primary sources I am analyzing. I also cite relevant secondary scholarship from the fields of medieval and Islamic history and Arabic literature in the notes below. However, if a reader would like to situate these terms in a broader context, informed by recent insights from scholarship in biology and linguistics, starting points that include useful definitions are Ann Fausto-Sterling, "Gender/Sex, Sexual Orientation, and Identity Are in the Body: How Did They Get There?," *Journal of Sex Research* 56, nos. 4–5 (2019): 529–55; and Lauren Ackerman, "Syntactic and Cognitive Issues in Investigating Gendered Coreference," *Glossia: A Journal of General Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–27 (art. 117). As for sexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality, I use these terms not in my analysis of primary sources but rather only in reference to modern systems of sexual classification or to specific scholarly works that are cited in the notes.

4. For the well-known if controversial "one-sex" model, see Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). For critics of Laqueur's model, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Katharine Park, "Cadden, Laqueur, and the 'One-Sex Body,'" *Medieval Feminist Forum* 46, no. 1 (2010): 96–100; and Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

pass from one to another.[5] Medieval Arabic medical texts go a step further and elaborate what Ahmed Ragab calls a "sexscape" in which bodies were observed and placed along a continuum from ultramasculine males at one extreme to ultrafeminine females at the other, with plenty of options in between. Although these texts predictably focus on anatomy and morphology, they deemphasize genitalia, at least in comparison to other physical markers, in locating a body on the continuum.[6] This scholarship highlights the inadequacy of a binary construction of sex for understanding the way bodies were perceived and positioned in premodern legal and medical discourses.

One of the goals of this article is to build on this emerging scholarship by showing the way a literary text also complicates modern binaries in its eroticization of bodies. Existing scholarship on medieval and early modern Arabic literature has tended to use binary sex to establish sexual categories even if other kinds of differences regularly cross-cut those categories. Khaled El-Rouayheb's important monograph on Arabic sources from the Ottoman Empire historicizes the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary and denaturalizes the emphasis on identity and essentialism associated with these modern terms.[7] Although the focus on homoeroticism and same-sex desire centers a category of same-sexed bodies, El-Rouayheb shows that distinctions of age and status organized erotic life among men. In general, scholars of Arabic literature from earlier periods have not paid as much attention to problematizing modern sexual categories as El-Rouayheb has, but have nonetheless found similar patterns. In Abbasid-era belles-lettres, Everett Rowson observes a basic division in society between elite adult men, who authored and acted in texts as sexual agents, and everyone else, who constituted "the ranks of the not-male."[8] Witty disputations between

5. Indira Falk Gesink, "Intersex Bodies in Premodern Islamic Discourse: Complicating the Binary," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (2018): 152–73. See also Saqer A. Almarri, "'You Have Made Her a Man among Men': Translating the *Khuntha*'s Anatomy in Fatimid Jurisprudence," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 3–4 (2016): 578–86; and Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter 4.

6. Ahmed Ragab, "One, Two, or Many Sexes: Sex Differentiation in Medieval Islamicate Medical Thought," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (2015): 428–54. See also Emily Selove and Rosalind Batten, "Making Men and Women: Arabic Commentaries on the Gynaecological Hippocratic Aphorisms in Context," *Annales islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 239–62; and Sherry Sayed Gadelrab, "Discourses on Sex Differences in Medieval Scholarly Islamic Thought," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 66, no. 1 (2011): 40–81. Two related subgenres that predictably focus more attention on genitalia are *ʿilm al-bāh* (sexology) and *ʿilm al-firāsa* (physiognomy), the latter in particular for the purposes of evaluating enslaved people; however, the focus on genitalia only accentuates morphological diversity and a spectrum of possible bodies. On these genres, see Pernilla Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020), chapters 1–2; and Antonella Ghersetti, "The Representation of Slave Girls in a Physiognomic Text of the Fourteenth Century," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 21 (2018): 21–45.

7. El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*. For related work on Ottoman Turkish sources, see Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of the Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

8. Everett K. Rowson, "Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad," in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack, 45–72 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See also Rowson, "The Traffic in Boys:

those who preferred sex with young men and those who preferred sex with women and well-documented practices of cross-dressing imply that gendered and/or sexed bodies mattered in sorting through those ranks. Overall, however, Rowson suggests that difference structured *all* normative sexual relationships, but power difference, expressed in terms of gender, age, religion, or legal status, mattered more than difference derived from the sexed body. The corollary to this was that sameness—which in these texts usually meant two elite adult men—was often portrayed, for at least one of them, as abject or pathological.[9] Pernilla Myrne reads Arabic sources from the same period for women's voices and finds that they sought as diverse an array of partners as the men whose point of view is easier to identify, but that there was less of an emphasis on power asymmetry. For instance, the particular negative associations that attached to sexual relations between adult men did not apply to the case of "female homosexuality," which Myrne understands in line with modern discourses as an "orientation" within a category of same-sexed bodies.[10]

Based on this scholarship, it is clear that concepts of sameness and difference organized sexual practices and norms as portrayed in premodern Arabic literature. Moreover, it is clear that these concepts could not always be mapped onto a binary construction of sex, even if this is not always stated outright. Nonetheless, the emphasis on same-sex desire in much of this work obscures the extent to which the bodies of young men and women are portrayed as strikingly similar in literary texts.[11] These similarities cannot be chalked up solely to the tendency of adult men to sexualize subordinate members of society, especially when viewed through a piece of popular literature such as the *1001 Nights*. In the fifteenth-century manuscript under study here, beautiful he- and she-characters recur as both lover and beloved, both active and passive, and even if they also serve as fantasies for an audience,

Slavery and Homoerotic Liaisons in Elite ʿAbbāsid Society," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 2 (2008): 193–204; and idem, "Homoerotic Narratives from Mamlūk Literature: Al-Ṣafadī's *Lawʿat al-Shākī* and Ibn Dāniyāl's *al-Mutayyam*," in Wright and Rowson, *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, 158–91.

9. Rowson's work on the category of the *mukhannath* ("effeminate") suggests that from the ninth century on some adult men chose to position themselves as sexually available for other adult men and were frequently stigmatized; see Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 4 (1991): 671–93; and idem, "Gender Irregularity." On this category as well as the related *maʾbūn*, see also El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 13–25; and Frédéric Lagrange, "The Obscenity of the Vizier," in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 161–203 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008).

10. See Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, chapters 4–6; and Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (2009): 215–36.

11. This is a point that is always raised, but the attention to homoerotic poetry in much of the secondary scholarship has left the significance of these similarities as well as the way they operate in other kinds of literature underdeveloped. The question of whether the use of the masculine pronoun in such poetry "masks" a female beloved for reasons of either prosody or propriety is often as far as the discussion goes. In any case, in all the examples below from the *Nights* the pronouns in the poems match the pronouns used for the character elsewhere in the story. For an important discussion of the question of love poetry and pronouns, which concludes that they can, for the most part, be taken at face value, see Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 150–62.

the stories insist upon their comparability and juxtaposition.[12] In other words, well-matched pairs are those who are described as similar *to each other*, regardless of the body parts that are (or may be imagined to be) involved. Of course, gender differences are central to the stories of the *Nights*, particularly in their portrayal of marriage, the family, and politics. But sameness, especially physical sameness, is celebrated in the context of erotic love to an extent that destabilizes the relationship between gender difference and embodiment. Among the implications of this erotics of sameness for scholars of Arabic literature and sexuality is that it decenters the perspectives of elite adult men. Diverse observers are pictured admiring beautiful characters who are in turn pictured admiring each other, establishing multidirectional circuits of desire.[13] Another consequence is to expand what has heretofore counted as evidence for homoeroticism. When he- and she-characters are eroticized in nearly identical terms, it is unnecessary for the text to portray men attracted to men or women to women for it to incite or affirm such attractions in an audience. This may have been a way of "masquerading" illicit desires, but more broadly it raises questions about the field of sexual possibility produced by literature like this and the role played by the sexed body in structuring it.[14]

In what follows of the first part of this article, I focus on the earliest surviving manuscript of the *1001 Nights*, likely produced in Syria in the fifteenth century.[15] It was acquired by Antoine Galland in the early eighteenth century and made famous as the basis for his best-selling translation and adaptation *Les mille et une nuits*, published in Paris in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717.[16] Now held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the manuscript opens with a story of two brother-kings who, upon discovering that their wives have been unfaithful, set out on a journey during which they become convinced of the essential treachery of women.[17] After returning to his kingdom, the elder brother, Shahrayar, decides to take a new wife each night and execute her in the morning as a way of protecting himself from further cuckoldry. As she watches the king's vizier procure a new bride for him every day, the vizier's daughter, Shahrazad, hatches a plan to save the women

12. I use the terms he- and she-characters to reflect the grammatical gender binary produced by the Arabic language and avoid the terms male and female, which are associated with binary sex.

13. This idea was inspired by chapter 2 of Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

14. "Masquerade" comes from Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 27.

15. In his critical edition (which I use for all references to the manuscript below), Muhsin Mahdi dates the manuscript to fourteenth-century Syria; see Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla): The Classic Edition (1984–1994)*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1:12–36 [hereafter Mahdi, 1/2]. Scholarly consensus now, however, accepts a fifteenth-century date. For more on this, see Heinz Grotzfeld, "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Arabian Nights*," in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, 2 vols., 1:17–21 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

16. See Paulo Lemos Horta, *Marvellous Thieves: Secret Authors of the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), chapter 1; and Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 11–49.

17. The three-volume manuscript is BNF Arabe 3609-3611. For more on it, see Ibrahim Akel, "Liste des manuscrits arabes des *Nuits*," in *Arabic Manuscripts of the "Thousand and One Nights,"* ed. Aboubakr Chraïbi, 65–114 (Paris: Espaces & Signes, 2016), 70–71.

of the kingdom. She insists that her father marry her to the king, involves her younger sister Dinarzad in the plot, and proceeds to tell stories to the king every night, breaking off at a climactic point in the narrative just as the sun rises and thereby convincing him to let her live to continue the tale the next evening. The manuscript is clearly unfinished, as it ends abruptly in the middle of night 281, but no one knows exactly how many nights it or its now-lost predecessor(s) contained.[18] Although manuscripts from later centuries include different sequences of nights, the earliest surviving Arabic manuscripts containing a full 1,001 nights date from the early nineteenth century.[19]

Following Muhsin Mahdi's assessment of the manuscript in his 1984 critical edition, as supplemented by more recent historical work, I am persuaded that it contains a text that was shaped by and for an Arabic-speaking, urban constituency, likely located primarily in Egypt and Syria during the period of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517 CE).[20] I do not, however, insist on its particular authenticity or originality, nor do I ignore the fact that it certainly preserves material transmitted either orally or in writing from earlier periods and different geographical and linguistic contexts.[21] Nonetheless, it is a datable artifact that has been shown to be a product of its time in terms of literary style, themes, and sociocultural references and that provides abundant material for analyzing expressions of erotic love. While I also make no claims for its essential representativeness, the existence of manuscript copies of much the same text from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as related examples, both earlier and later, of what Aboubakr Chraïbi calls "Arabic Middle literature," suggest it reflected ongoing and fairly mainstream late medieval readerly appetites.[22] I will

18. Muhsin Mahdi argues that its immediate predecessor did not reach 1,001 nights and may never have been intended to; see Mahdi, 1:12–36. Others have argued that manuscripts with a full 1001 nights certainly existed prior to this, but were always likely to have been rare because of cost and the likelihood that they were broken up for sales. See Heinz Grotzfeld, "Creativity, Random Selection, and *Pia Fraus*: Observations on Compilation and Transmission of the *Arabian Nights*," in *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph, 51–63 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007).

19. For a list of all known manuscripts to date, see Akel, "Liste."

20. In addition to Mahdi's work, see the following for evidence that the manuscript reflects a Mamluk or, more broadly, medieval Islamic milieu: Aboubakr Chraïbi, "Introduction," in Chraïbi, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 15–64; Jean-Claude Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique des "Mille et une nuits"* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2013); Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Islamic Context of "The Thousand and One Nights"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and Heinz Grotzfeld, "Contes populaires de l'époque Mamlouke dans les Mille et une nuits," *ARAM* 9–10 (1997–98): 43–54.

21. The earliest evidence for what has come to be called the *1001 Nights* in Arabic is a ninth-century paper fragment that introduces a book with the phrase *alf layla* (a thousand nights) in its title and a woman named Dinazad exhorting another woman to entertain her with stories at night. Two major tenth-century authors (al-Masʿūdī and Ibn al-Nadīm) refer to both a Persian antecedent called the *Hazār afsāna* (*A Thousand Tales*) and its Arabic adaptation, called *Alf layla*, and a documentary reference from the Cairo Geniza notes a book titled *Alf layla wa-layla* (*1001 Nights*) circulating in the mid-twelfth-century. For good overviews of this history, see Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), chapter 2; and Aboubakr Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits: Histoire du texte et Classification des contes* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), chapter 1.

22. See Chraïbi, "Introduction," especially 62–64. See also Bruce Fudge, "Introduction," in *A Hundred and One Nights*, ed. and trans. Bruce Fudge, xiv–xxviii (New York: New York University Press, 2016). Dwight Reynolds claims that the relatively few references to the *Nights* in medieval sources suggest that it may not have been

add to my analysis three seventeenth-century manuscripts, which are among the earliest to conclude the story that is cut off at the end of the Galland manuscript ("The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur").[23] These versions exhibit sufficient intertextuality with the surviving contents of the fifteenth-century manuscript to convince me to think of them as a single tradition.[24] I will return to this story and present further manuscript evidence in the second part of the article.

1.1 Beautiful Bodies

The eroticization of characters in the *Nights* depends heavily on descriptions of their physical beauty. These descriptions are almost always in rhymed prose (known in Arabic as *sajʿ*) and/or accompanied by poetry. Such stylistic features set physical descriptions apart from the narrative around them, not unlike the way illustrations break up a written text. Indeed, it has been noted that poetry serves as a visual element in manuscripts of the *Nights*, which, likely for reasons of cost, seem to have rarely included illustrations.[25]

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a very popular work; see Reynolds, "*A Thousand and One Nights*: A History of the Text and Its Reception," in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards, 270–91 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 272. However, Konrad Hirschler argues that the scholarly elites who wrote the majority of the sources that have come down to us from this period tended to mention such literature only when they perceived it to impinge on their own authority. It is likely that the content and reading practices associated with the *Nights* were perceived as unthreatening and therefore did not occasion comment. The relatively small number of extant early manuscripts may also reflect a phenomenon Hirschler describes for other kinds of popular literature: the practice of commercial lending. The wear and tear involved in this kind of lending would have lessened the chances of a manuscript's survival. Although it is likely that the *Nights* was transmitted at least in part orally over the centuries, Hirschler's demonstration of the increasing importance of "textualization" from the twelfth century on reinforces the literary arguments made by Chraïbi, Fudge, and others that the fifteenth-century manuscript represents a *written* tradition that was intended to be *read*, either silently alone or out loud for an audience. See Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), especially chapter 5.

23. These are BNF Arabe 3612 (on which see Akel, "Liste," 76); BNF Arabe 3621; and BNF Arabe 3623. The latter two are standalone versions of the story. BNF Arabe 3621 includes night divisions but drops large chunks of the story (as does BNF Arabe 3612). BNF Arabe 3623 is dated 1698 and is highly abridged throughout. I will add a third seventeenth-century standalone manuscript of the story to my analysis in the second part of the article.

24. Apart from its continuation as "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad," Garcin argues that the version of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" presented in Mahdi's critical edition (which is concluded on the basis of an eighteenth-century manuscript, not the sixteenth-century manuscript cited by Garcin) exhibits considerable intertextuality with the rest of the fifteenth-century manuscript; Garcin also cross-checks with one of the seventeenth-century manuscripts I use here. See Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 110–25.

25. See Geert Jan van Gelder, "Poetry and the *Arabian Nights*," in Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 1:13–17; and Wolfhart Heinrichs, "The Function(s) of Poetry in the *Arabian Nights*: Some Observations," in *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture*, ed. Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk, 353–62 (Leiden: Brill, 2007). For the two seventeenth-century manuscripts of the *Nights* known today to include illustrations, see Akel, "Liste," 73–76; for the role played by one of them in a late eighteenth-century lending library, testifying to issues of cost and circulation, see Boris Liebrenz, "The Library of Aḥmad al-Rabbāṭ: Books and Their Audience in 12th to 13th/18th to 19th Century Syria," in *Marginal Perspectives on Early Modern Ottoman Culture: Missionaries, Travelers, Booksellers*, ed. Ralf Elger and Ute Pietruschka, 17–59 (Halle [Saale]: Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien, 2013).

Although poetry also serves other purposes in the stories, the way its highly effusive and metaphorical language is used to evoke characters' bodies was likely intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. Fifteenth-century audiences would have been familiar with such descriptive genres of poetry, and sometimes with the exact poems, from other texts and contexts. In Ulrich Marzolph's words, this kind of repetition is

> a highly effective narrative technique for linking new and unknown tales to a web of tradition the audience shares. On the one hand, the process of recognition links to previous experiences and familiar contexts, thus creating an atmosphere in which the audience would feel welcome and appreciated; on the other, a tale's unexpected turn of events would attract attention and entertain the audience by introducing something new.[26]

In the case of the poetry and prose descriptions that eroticized bodies in the *Nights*, one element that would certainly have been familiar to the audience was the beauty ideal at work. What may have been new was the scenario in which the description was embedded, as well as the cumulative effect of the different kinds of scenarios in which the same kinds of descriptions occurred.

Previous scholarship on premodern Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish belletristic and visual cultures has established that ideals of beauty for young men and women were very similar to each other.[27] At its most basic and across traditions, beauty was associated with youth and a moonlike appearance. In terms of facial features, some combination of dark eyes, arching brows, rosy or ruddy cheeks, and white teeth, often framed by black and/or curling hair and accentuated by a dark beauty mark or mole, seems to have constituted an ideal, moonlike type.[28] Such traits abound in the *Nights*, as do the various words for moon in Arabic, including *badr* and *qamar*, which recur in both poetry and prose descriptions and as names of both he- and she-characters. While the moon in all its guises is the dominant metaphor for beauty, the sun appears too, and radiance seems to be the main aesthetic effect produced by desirable characters. The most common words for beauty in Arabic, such as *jamāl* and *ḥusn*, as well as the adjective *malīḥ*, which appears right at the beginning of the vast majority of descriptions, also apply equally, despite the tendency of some English

26. Ulrich Marzolph, "Making Sense of the 'Nights': Intertextual Connections and Narrative Techniques in the 'Thousand and One Nights,'" *Narrative Culture* 1, no. 2 (2014): 239–57, at 240. The poetry in the fifteenth-century manuscript is overwhelmingly unattributed, but it has been suggested that this was because an audience would have known in many cases who the author was without the need for identification; for more on this, see Heinrichs, "Function(s) of Poetry."

27. Unlike in Arabic, third-person pronouns and verb forms in Persian and Ottoman Turkish are gender-neutral. This means it is sometimes difficult to guess the gender of the person being described. Even in Arabic, though, the rules of poetic meter may dictate the use of a masculine or feminine noun, adjective, or verb form, regardless of the person being described. For representations of beauty in early modern Ottoman and Qajar art and literature, see Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*, passim; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, chapters 1–2; and Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif, eds., *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

28. The way this beauty ideal is racialized will be discussed further below.

translations to distinguish "handsome" men from "beautiful" women.[29] For instance, the following series of rhyming words accompanies the entrance of both he- and she-characters into their stories: *dhāt ḥusn wa-jamāl wa-bahāʾ wa-kamāl wa-qadd wa-ʿtidāl* (having beauty, elegance, radiance, perfection, stature, and symmetry).[30] Overall, there is no generic term or metaphor for physical beauty that seems gender-specific in the fifteenth-century manuscript under study.

Faces dominate the paeans to physical beauty in the *Nights* and are the main referent for the ubiquitous lunar metaphors, but bodies are also described, sometimes in considerable detail. The ideal figure is slender and supple, with some fleshiness in the belly, hips, and buttocks. Recurring metaphors include young deer, gazelles, willow boughs, and spears, all of which apply equally to he- and she-characters. Sometimes the bodies of she-characters are noted as having breasts that are firm or upright (*qāʿidat al-nahd/nahd qāʾim*).[31] The emphasis seems to be on firmness rather than size, which is sustained by more figurative descriptions of the term "chest" (*ṣadr*) upon which "two pots" (*ḥuqqān*) or "pomegranates" (*rummān*) may appear.[32] Significantly, this latter metaphor also appears in the poem that opens this article, which is repeated in two different stories to describe a he-character, raising questions about the extent to which breasts can be understood to sex the body.[33] Reinforcing this impression of embodied sameness, both he- and she-characters are described as possessing "soft curves" (*līnat al-aʿṭāf*) and "hips/haunches/buttocks" (*ridf*) that are "quivering" (*murtijj*), "full to bursting" (*daghaṣ*), or "heavy" (*thaqīl*).[34] Similarly, necks, arms, thighs, and bellies are praised for being soft, smooth, and silky; the belly and its navel, folds, or creaminess in particular function as a catalyst for sexual arousal in the stories.[35] The provocative sight of the belly, rather than the genitals, cannot be attributed

29. For example, compare Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 66 and 114; in the former, a *shābb malīḥ* is a "handsome young man" and in the latter, a *ṣabiyya malīḥa* is a "beautiful girl." In a related inconsistency, even where the term *ṣabiyy* is used, it is sometimes translated as "young man" (see, for instance, Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 142, 173), whereas *ṣabiyya* appears frequently and is almost always translated as "girl."

30. Mahdi, 1:128 (she), 212 (he), 232 (he), 233 (he), 240 (she), and with variation in sequence 226 (he).

31. Mahdi, 1:128, 157, 245, 436. Brief appearances of *juwar*, young women purchased as concubines, are described as having "virginal breasts" (*nahd abkār*); see Mahdi, 1:311, 380.

32. The description of the Doorkeeper in "The Story of the Porter and Three Ladies" is unusual for its emphasis on size, comparing her chest to "a fountain" (*shādharwān*) and her breasts to "two large pomegranates" (*faḥlayn rummān*); see Mahdi, 1:129. For caskets/pots of ivory or musk, see Mahdi, 1:194, 542 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 226a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 1a).

33. Mahdi, 1:206; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a. For an even more explicit example in English translation by one of the most famous poets of the ninth century, see Thomas Bauer, "The Arabic Ghazal: Formal and Thematic Aspects of a Problematic Genre," in *Ghazal as World Literature II: From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition; The Ottoman Gazel in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Michael Hess, Judith Pfeiffer, and Börte Sagaster, 3–13 (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2006), 9–10. For more examples from this genre, along with the argument that pronouns in Arabic love poetry can, for the most part, be taken at face value, see Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, passim.

34. Mahdi, 1:194, 206, 230, 246, 260, 436, 483, 500, 540; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a.

35. Mahdi, 1:129, 251, 333, 541–42 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 226a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 1a–1b), 584 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 15b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 8b). Belly "folds" (*ṭayyāt*) are mentioned in the case of two she-characters, but neither seems to conform to the gendered ideal of fatness Marion Holmes Katz

to politesse, since genitals are explicitly named in other scenarios. Rather, the belly's role in arousal likely reflected the expectations of the audience just as it provided an opportunity to eroticize he- and she-characters in the same way.

The association of youth with so many of these beautiful bodies may suggest that what appears to be a shared beauty standard is actually a standard for feminine beauty to which young men are assimilated before they acquire the trappings of adult masculinity (usually marked by the growth of a full beard). This could mean that young men are being feminized when they are eroticized or that they occupy a temporary and separately gendered space, distinct from women but still subordinate to adult men.[36] The evidence in this manuscript does not, however, clearly align with either of these options. I have not found a single instance of the use of the term *amrad* (beardless youth), a well-attested and age-sensitive category of embodied masculinity.[37] More generally, there are very few words that could be said to pertain only to embodied masculinity or femininity. The two most frequent examples are *ʿidhār* (beard down) and *nahd/nuhūd* (breasts), but these are by no means used every time a he- or she-character, respectively, is described.[38] In fact, the ease with which characters cross-dress convincingly in several stories suggests that bodies were imagined to be either so similar or so variable as to provide little visual evidence of sex or gender beyond what clothing was understood to convey.[39] Indeed, clothing is the most obviously gendered element in physical descriptions, as when the occasion for praising a she-character's face is the lifting of a veil (though beautiful he-characters' faces are also "uncovered" for dramatic effect), but often it communicates as much about luxury and wealth as about gender.[40] Moreover, in contrast to many of the other textual environments

describes for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Cairo; see Katz, "Fattening Up in Fourteenth-Century Cairo: Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ and the Many Meanings of Overeating," *Annales islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 31–53. As mentioned above, references to full or heavy hips and buttocks in this manuscript apply equally to he- and she-characters, and belly folds do not prevent one of the aforementioned she-characters (Princess Budur) from significant physical activity as well as successfully passing as a he-character.

36. See El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, especially 25–33, 60–75; and Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 11–25.

37. *Ghulām*, usually considered an equivalent of *amrad* but without the literal association with facial hair, appears occasionally. The most common words for desirable characters are *shābb*, *ṣabiyy/ṣabiyya*, and *jāriya*.

38. It is impossible to say whether he-characters who are not described with beard down are meant to be imagined as beardless or with some other form of facial hair; nor is it possible to say whether desirable she-characters are meant to be imagined with any facial hair at all, though none is mentioned to the best of my knowledge. Likewise, dark hair and "curling sidelocks" (*ʿaqrab/ʿaqārib*) are praised equally on he- and she-characters (for examples, see Mahdi, 1:206, 246, 333, 536). The only two references I found to very long hair, reaching to the waist or ankles, are for she-characters (see Mahdi, 1:246, 483); this does not, of course, tell us anything about the length or style of hair of others.

39. The most obvious example of this is the lengthy period in which Princess Budur is dressed as a man in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," which will be discussed below. Other examples include King Shahrayar's twenty concubines in the frame story who become ten concubines and ten "black slaves" after taking off their clothes and the episode in which Budur's brother dresses as a woman in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur."

40. For examples of unveiling that apply to she-characters only, see Mahdi, 1:126, 294 (*shālat al-shaʿriyya*); and 290, 319 (*kashafat/shālat al-niqāb*). For examples of uncovering that apply to both he- and she-characters,

in which late medieval Arabic-speakers would have encountered eroticized descriptions, which explicitly establish separate categories for young men and women, the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* jumbles them up, he- and she-characters moving in and out of plots and falling in love with other he- and she-characters.[41] All in all, I am not convinced that desirable young men in this manuscript are being either feminized or placed in their own category. Rather, a select group of both he- and she-characters occupy a shared space of the erotic, not defined by subordination to older men, in which bodies appear virtually interchangeable.

That said, because Arabic second- and third-person pronouns, verbs, and many nouns have masculine and feminine forms, characters are always identifiable in terms of a grammatical gender binary. It could be argued that the combination of Arabic grammar and the roles played by characters elsewhere in the stories prompted readers to "flesh out" generic or metaphorical descriptions of beautiful bodies so as to stress gender differences or binary sex, at least in their imaginations if not also in improvised ways in front of an audience.[42] However, I maintain that it is significant that these differences are not stressed in the text, especially in light of the tendency, discussed in the second part of this article, for modern editors and translators to make interventions that do just that. Moreover, scholars of the *Nights* have noted that repetition—of motifs, of descriptive language, of the framing device itself—is an "economy" that allows for the crafting of highly sophisticated narratives.[43] For instance, the same poetic verses and rhyming prose passages are recycled for different characters in the fifteenth-century manuscript. Some might object, therefore, to placing such emphasis on a series of repetitive, even formulaic, descriptions that were, in any case, secondary to plot. At the same time, repetition draws attention to itself in ways that accumulate as a reader moves through a text, especially when, as Sandra Naddaff puts it, "repetition is attended by difference."[44] When poetic evocations of eroticized bodies, which would be familiar to audiences by virtue of literary compendia authored by well-known men, issue from the mouths of both he- and she-characters in a series of new or surprising narrative contexts, they likely attracted notice in ways they would not have done otherwise. This kind of repetition may have served, in Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah's

see Mahdi, 1:306, 321, 458, 540 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 225b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 2b), 544 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 2b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3a), 545 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b) (*kashafa al-wajh*, *kashafa al-ghiṭāʾ/al-mulāʾa ʿan al-wajh*).

41. For examples from the proliferation of literary anthologies in this period that devote separate chapters to young men and women, see Talib, *"Epigram" in Arabic*, passim; and for essays that explicitly compare young men and women from the centuries-old Arabic literary genre of contrastive enumeration, see Rosenthal, "Male and Female."

42. We have no direct evidence of how the *Nights* was consumed at the time of the production of the fifteenth-century manuscript under study, but it is likely to have been in ways analogous to the consumption of epic literature in the period, i.e., *read* either quietly alone or out loud in front of an audience. See Hirschler, *Written Word*, chapter 5.

43. See Daniel Beaumont, "Literary Style and Narrative Technique in the *Arabian Nights*," in Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 1:1–5.

44. Sandra Naddaff, *Arabesque: Narrative Structure and the Aesthetics of Repetition in "1001 Nights"* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 82.

words, "not only to convey what is important but also to inform and cultivate audience-reader expectations."[45] Although we have no direct evidence regarding who constituted the readership of the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights*, the stories themselves portray heterogeneous audiences whose appreciation for a pair of lovers or a beautiful body might be considered to reflect or model external audience attitudes.[46] Finally, if what is said, repeatedly, in a text is important, so is what is unsaid. When the sexed body is repeatedly unsaid, a binary construction of sex or embodied gender may not be a helpful way to understand, and may in fact cause us to misunderstand, eroticism within the *Nights* as well as, perhaps, outside it.

1.2 Pairs, Parallels, and Triangles

Not only are eroticized he- and she-characters described in similar terms in the fifteenth-century manuscript, but they are also put emphatically into relation with each other. Multiple stories revolve around a pair of characters whose beauty is explicitly compared using the terms *mithl* (like/the same as), *shakl* (likeness/resemblance), *ashbaha* (to be similar/resemble), *qāraba* (to approximate/be equivalent to), or *ʿādala* (to be equal to) and whose mutual, if often thwarted, desire traces the plot's dramatic arc.[47] These pairings convey the sense that beautiful people belong together and that a sameness that transcends or displaces distinctions of gender is the most appropriate basis for a relationship. In addition, there is no hint in this manuscript that beauty equates to passivity in matters of love and lust. This is true of both he- and she-characters, whose parallel pursuit of partners decenters the perspective of adult men, so well established in other genres of literature. These pairs and parallels also make space for sexual attraction between characters of the same grammatical gender, while triangles in the text allow for outsiders to collude in the erotics on display.

Since passionate love need not be experienced or expressed as erotic, key to this analysis are the moments when characters react to beautiful bodies in ways that strongly imply sexual desire.[48] These reactions range from verbal declarations, such as "fire exploded in my heart" or "I lost my mind," to seemingly uncontrollable nonverbal responses like intense gazes, sighs, rapid heartbeat, trembling hands, fainting, exclamations, kisses, and embraces.[49] Many of these encounters culminate in sexual intercourse, referred to using numerous Arabic terms, including the euphemistic but usually contextually clear "sleeping

45. Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah, "A Response to Zayde Antrim's 'Sex, Sameness, and Embodiments of Desire in the 1001 Nights,'" paper presented at the Islamic History Workshop, Columbia University, February 20, 2020.

46. Khaled El-Rouayheb's discussion of the relationship between homoerotic literature and real-life attitudes is also applicable here; see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 75–85.

47. For examples of these terms in use, see Mahdi, 1:240, 459, 490, 500, 544 (see also BNF 3612, fol. 227a; BNF 3621, fol. 2b; and, for a variant, BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b), 547 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 228a), 582 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 14b), 590 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 237b; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 18a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9a), 591 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 18b; BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9a; and, for a variant, BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 237b).

48. For a discussion of the relationship between passionate love and sexual desire in poetry of this period, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 85–95.

49. Examples of such reactions in the text are legion. For the two specific phrases here, see Mahdi, 1:329, 380.

with/spending the night with" (*nāma ʿinda/bāta maʿa*). In four cases, it is formulated as a he-character "taking the virginity of" a she-character, but in the more than three times as many cases in which some form of intercourse clearly takes place no mention of virginity is made, nor is virginity as such an attribute stressed in descriptions of beautiful bodies.[50] Other pleasurable activities, primarily eating, drinking, bathing, and massaging, but also talking, reciting poetry, and playing games, are often preludes to sexual intercourse, but when they stand on their own it is not always clear whether they should be read as erotic.[51] When a succession of such activities takes place between characters who have both been established as beautiful or who have been described in terms of sameness, I am interpreting the ambiguity as suggestive of the sexual nature of the relationship.

In the two stories in which the comparable beauty of a pair of characters functions most explicitly as a plot device, their union is facilitated, at least initially, by the supernatural powers of the *jinn* ("genies" or demons). In both stories, the humans are each championed by a demon, resulting in a kind of beauty contest between them, which is then either left unresolved or resolved on the basis of something other than the physical attributes of the characters, further emphasizing the sameness of their looks. For instance, at the beginning of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," a stalemate is broken between the two beautiful humans, Prince Qamar al-Zaman and Princess Budur (whose gender-neutral names both mean "moon") not on the basis of their shared physical perfection—which makes them equally desirable—but on the basis of their actions. While Qamar al-Zaman is able to resist kissing the sleeping Budur, she cannot help kissing and embracing him when their positions are reversed. At this point the narrator of the story interjects a well-known stereotype: "the desire (*shahwa*) of women is stronger than that of men."[52] This is a gendered distinction, but not one presented, at least in this context, in terms of embodied difference.[53] Qamar al-Zaman's restraint takes the form of an internal monologue in which he makes a set of calculations involving his expectation of marriage and willingness to defer gratification, while Budur is simply portrayed as not thinking at all. In the end, Qamar al-Zaman wins the contest, not because he is either more or differently physically beautiful, but because he exhibits self-control.

50. For these four cases, see Mahdi, 1:250, 440, 486, 532. Interestingly, these four cases include the only two times in which an act of sexual intercourse described as part of a story's plot results in a baby.

51. This is particularly complicated in scenes of attachment between fathers and sons, which sometimes involve displays of physical intimacy and declarations of passionate love that might strike readers today as sexual. The two most prominent examples of this are in "The Story of the Two Viziers" and "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur."

52. The fifteenth-century manuscript breaks off just before this point in the story, so here Mahdi's edition follows an eighteenth-century manuscript, which I supplement with three seventeenth-century manuscripts. See Mahdi, 1:551; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 4a. BNF Arabe 3623 does not include this line. For more on the *shahwa* of women, see Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 57–60.

53. I will discuss this episode further in part 2 of this article. For a different interpretation based on a psychoanalytic reading, see Daniel Beaumont, *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the "1001 Nights"* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University, 2002), chapter 4.

Similarly, in "The Story of the Two Viziers" two demons stage an elaborate ruse whereby a young man, Badr al-Din, is transported from Basra to Cairo to replace a hunchbacked groom whose physical appearance makes him, in the world of the story, unworthy of the bride, Sitt al-Husn, who also happens to be Badr al-Din's long-lost cousin. After a brief dispute in which a she-demon champions the beauty of Sitt al-Husn and a he-demon the beauty of Badr al-Din, they let the contest go unresolved in order to act as matchmakers. At the wedding of Sitt al-Husn and the hunchback, the women attendants allow Badr al-Din into the bride's unveiling, as they are, en masse, smitten by him. During the proceedings, Badr al-Din gazes upon the dazzling bride, just as the assembly gazes upon him, all with mounting passion. Afterward, when Sitt al-Husn finds Badr al-Din rather than the hunchback in her bedroom, she implores him to sleep with her, quoting poetry to urge him on. Though he is easily persuaded, she is portrayed as the initiator and, by implication, as the one with less self-control.[54] In both stories, the message appears to be that beauty manifests itself equally in both kind and degree among he- and she-characters, but the way a character acts on feelings of sexual attraction may reflect gender stereotypes.

Nevertheless, the fifteenth-century manuscript produces parallels in which both he- and she-characters express attraction in similar ways and pursue partners whose appropriateness is established in terms of a sameness that includes but also exceeds the physical. The clearest examples of these parallels come from "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," especially the tales of the Second and Third Dervish (he-characters) and the tales of the Mistress of the House and the Doorkeeper (she-characters).[55] The Second and Third Dervish both tell stories in which their lack of self-control spells their doom, proving that women are not the only ones who let their appetites command them. When the Dervishes first enter, they have each lost an eye and shaved their hair, defects that keep them from being described as beautiful at the outset. Later, their role as narrators of their own tales means they are never described as they were before their downfall, though their self-narrated encounters with beautiful characters suggest that they too possessed similar qualities at the time. In the case of the Second Dervish, after he spends a night enjoying the charms of a gorgeous woman imprisoned in a subterranean chamber, her captor, a demon, discovers them and exclaims in rage and betrayal, "It is clear that like (*jins*) yearns only for like (*jins*)."[56] The use of the term *jins*, which today may be translated as sex, gender, race, or nation, here may refer to the category of humankind (versus the category of *jinn*).[57] Regardless of its exact meaning, the demon is recognizing and attributing the affair to an essential sameness in the pair. In the Third Dervish's tale, the narrator happens upon an attractive young he-character who had been hidden away by his father in another

54. Mahdi, 1:249.

55. For an analysis of these parallels in terms of narrative repetition, see Naddaff, *Arabesque*, especially chapter 4.

56. Mahdi, 1:163.

57. The term *jins* here may also be understood as a reference to Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, which portrays lovers as two halves of the same whole. For an articulation of this idea in Arabic in a well-known eleventh-century work, see Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma* (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, 2002), 25–32. I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

subterranean chamber, in this case to escape a fatal prophecy. The youth is initially hesitant but is then reassured that they can enjoy each other's company because they are "like" (*mithl*) each other and he is "of his kind" (*min jinsihi*), which is specified as meaning both human and elite, though other forms of sameness, such as gender, may be implied.[58] Although it is left ambiguous as to whether the two engage in any sex acts, the language used for the pleasurable activities they do together—eating, drinking, bathing, staying up late, having stimulating conversation, and sleeping together—is nearly identical to that of scenarios in other stories that explicitly involve sexual intercourse.[59]

The tales of the Mistress of the House and the Doorkeeper, whose beauty had been established by the time they tell their stories, highlight physical sameness as well as status and reciprocity to justify their unions. In the encounter featured at the beginning of this article, the Mistress of the House falls in love with a captivating prince reciting the Qurʾan alone in an enchanted city and begs him to accompany her back to her home in Baghdad. To convince him to agree, she asserts that she is a successful merchant and head of her household, while pledging to become his "concubine" (*jāriya*) and "wife" (*ahl*), if he will be her "lord/husband" (*baʿl*).[60] To this, he answers, "Yes, indeed, for you are my mistress (*sayyidatī*) and patron (*mawlātī*); whatever I do, I will not disobey you."[61] Her wealth and independence balance his piety and nobility, and their promises to each other emphasize reciprocity and mutual devotion. Status also factors in the story of the less self-possessed Doorkeeper, who agrees to marry a total stranger because of his good looks and the fact that they are each heads of their respective households.[62] Like the Dervishes, the two women are filled with desire at the sight of a beautiful body that mirrors their own, but shared status is also stressed as a basis for the relationship.

Sometimes status difference may be ignored or minimized by an emphasis on reciprocity, as when free men are paired with unfree women. The figure of the refined and sexually desirable concubine (*jāriya*) makes relationships with kings or well-to-do men legible within the terms of sameness advanced by the fifteenth-century manuscript, especially when feelings are mutual.[63] Jullanar, for instance, is a concubine to a king who is so attached to

58. Mahdi, 1:183.

59. The language differences are subtle; for instance, in this case the text says, "we slept" and "when he slept I slept," rather than "I slept with him." For this particular episode, see Mahdi, 1:184–85. There are many episodes to compare it with, but the most obvious is the parallel episode in the Second Dervish's tale; see Mahdi, 1:159.

60. I have translated *jāriya* as "concubine" throughout this article, as it is most often used to describe a category of enslaved woman. That is not literally the case here, but the connotation applies in that love has made her a captive to his will. The other connotation of *jāriya* is sexual availability, which is also implied here.

61. Mahdi, 1:207–8. The terminology in this exchange blurs distinctions of free and unfree legal status just as it blurs the gendered hierarchy early Muslim jurists insisted defined marriage; for more on this, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

62. Mahdi, 1:212. Another example of this comes in "The Story of Jullanar of the Sea": when Badr's mother is looking for a bride for him, she says she will only marry him to "his like" (*mithlihi*) in both beauty *and* a series of other qualities that include intelligence and social status; see Mahdi, 1:499.

63. For a related story type that occurs in later manuscripts of the *Nights*, as well as in a handful of authored works of medieval Arabic belles-lettres, see Geert Jan van Gelder, "Slave-Girl Lost and Regained: Transformations of a Story," *Marvels & Tales* 18, no. 2 (2004): 201–17. For more on the figure of the *jāriya* in this period, see the

her that he forsakes all the other women of his household. In recognition of his devotion, she reveals herself as the daughter of an undersea king, but agrees to stay with him on land and bear his son and heir.[64] Shams al-Nahar, a concubine of the storied Caliph Harun al-Rashid, has a tragic love affair with an elegant young man, one of the "sons of the kings of Persia" (*awlād mulūk al-ʿajam*). They are portrayed repeatedly as well-matched in beauty and eloquence, if ultimately doomed by circumstance.[65] Finally, Anis al-Jalis, a concubine purchased for a king, falls in love with the son of a vizier whose beauty rivals her own. Upon his promise never to marry, abuse her, or sell her, they spend the rest of their lives together under the approving eyes of various observers, including Caliph Harun al-Rashid.[66] The text does not offer, however, any parallel possibility of appropriate relationships between free women and unfree men, as will be discussed further below.

Another way in which sameness is emphasized in many stories is through roughly equivalent age pairings. Although exact ages are given in only a few cases, the words most frequently used for beautiful characters—*shābb*, *ṣabiyy/ṣabiyya*, *ghulām*, *jāriya*—all either literally mean young or have strong connotations of youth.[67] Badr al-Din and Qamar al-Zaman are just over twenty when they encounter, respectively, Sitt al-Husn, described as "about twenty," and Budur, whose many similarities to Qamar al-Zaman include, it is stated, age.[68] The ages of the respective partners of the Second and Third Dervishes are also specified, the first being a *ṣabiyya malīḥa* (beautiful young woman) of thirty-seven and the second a *shābb malīḥ* (beautiful young man) of fifteen, though it is unclear how old the Dervishes themselves are at the time of the encounters.[69] In some cases boys are described as beautiful as they grow up, with the ages of twelve, fifteen, and sixteen invoked as moments when their looks are admired and/or they are deemed ready for marriage, but the girls with whom they are eventually paired seem to be about the same age.[70] Beard down (*ʿidhār*) and, in one case, a mustache (*shārib*) appear in physical descriptions of beautiful he-characters, but facial hair is not mentioned at all in at least as many other descriptions, which does

essays in Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, eds., *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

64. Mahdi, 1:486–88.

65. Mahdi, 1:380–82.

66. Mahdi, 1:436–43, 480.

67. It is important, however, to remember that the concept of "youth" is a social construction and may have varied considerably from the way we understand it today. Syrinx von Hees's analysis of Qurʾanic commentaries from the Mamluk period reveals that the term *shabāb* referred to the prime of life enjoyed by bearded men up to the age of forty; see von Hees, "Die Kraft der Jugend und die Vielfalt der Übergangsfasen: Eine historisch-anthropologische Auswertung von Korankommentaren des 10. bis 15. Jahrhunderts," in *Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft I: Historische Anthropologie – Ansätze und Möglichkeiten*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Syrinx von Hees, 139–76 (Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2007).

68. Mahdi, 1:234, 240, 536, 590 (on Budur's age, see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 237b; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 18a).

69. Mahdi, 1:161, 164, 184.

70. See, for examples, Mahdi, 1:233, 496, 499. In "The First Old Man's Tale," two marriages take place, one in which the girl is twelve (and, it is said, has yet to go through puberty) and another in which the boy is twelve; see Mahdi, 1:78–81.

not mean, of course, that it was not present.[71] Only one beautiful character, to the best of my knowledge, is portrayed as growing a full beard, at which point in the story he begins to pursue a youth who turns out to be his son.[72] Regardless, the vast majority of couples in the fifteenth-century manuscript are about the same age, which complicates the emphasis in other texts on the erotic agency of elite men, whose dominance was often expressed sexually through age asymmetry.[73] By contrast, the appeal here seems to be the spectacle of sameness produced by characters of commensurate age, beauty, and status attracted to each other.

In many cases, this spectacle is staged explicitly for admiring audiences within the story, audiences in which elite men are by no means the majority. As has already been discussed, in two stories the role of demons is to test, and attest to, the sameness of a beautiful pair; this involves much gazing down on human forms and rhapsodizing over their loveliness. Other stories feature various groups of bystanders whose eyewitness testimony and seemingly involuntary physical reactions make clear that a character is being eroticized. In "The Story of the Two Viziers," whenever Badr al-Din would go out in the city of Basra, people would "look" (*naẓara*) at him and marvel at his beauty.[74] When he is later transported to Cairo for Sitt al-Husn's wedding, the guests "look" (*naẓara*) and "gaze" (*aḥdaqa*) at him, imagining themselves in his arms.[75] Finally, after the wedding night, when he is dropped in his sleep outside the gates of Damascus by the *jinn*, a crowd assembles to admire his half-naked form, exclaiming in pleasure at the sight of his creamy thighs and belly.[76] Similarly, when Princess Budur, disguised as a man, appears to a group of courtiers and state officials, they are inspired just by "looking" (*naẓar*) at her/his beauty and elegance.[77] The responses of these diverse observers suggest that the erotics of sameness cultivated in the stories was imagined as enjoyable for both men and women, rich and poor.

In several stories, third parties act as go-betweens for or witnesses to a well-matched pair, resulting in a triangulation of desire. The tragic love story of ʿAli b. Bakkar and Shams al-Nahar is set in motion by a merchant whose appreciation of the two beautiful young people motivates him to abet their union. Hidden behind a piece of furniture, he describes his pleasure in watching them recite passionate poetry to each other: "I have never before

71. For examples of beard down, see Mahdi, 1:114, 206, 220, 262, 438, 497, 536; for a mustache, see Mahdi, 1:490.

72. See Mahdi, 1:260. This is a highly ambiguous episode, in which the father rhapsodizes about the son's beauty, feeds him from his hand, and follows him around the city. The son accuses the father of inappropriate sexual desire before they realize they are father and son and the desire was actually just a case of "blood longing for blood"; see Mahdi, 1:261–69.

73. This has been particularly well elaborated in Everett Rowson's work on early Arabic literature, in which adult men may sexually pursue subordinate members of society, including younger men, women, non-Muslims, and slaves, without endangering their masculinity and social status; see, for instance, Rowson, "Traffic in Boys." See also El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, chapters 1–2; and Bauer, "Male-Male Love."

74. Mahdi, 1:234.

75. Mahdi, 1:243–44.

76. Mahdi, 1:251.

77. Mahdi, 1:592; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19a.

seen two people more beautiful than the two of them, as I have never, before them, seen a sun embrace a moon."[78] Similarly, in the love story of Nur al-Din and Anis al-Jalis, two scenes are staged in which a third character bears witness to the eroticized sameness of the pair. First, an elderly gardener finds them sleeping on the grounds of a caliphal estate and, after uncovering their faces, is so taken by their beauty—"they were like two moons (*qamarayn*)"—that he cannot bring himself to evict them. Instead, he is moved to recite poetry and to begin massaging the legs of Nur al-Din.[79] Later, the couple persuades him to feast with them in one of the palaces on the grounds. Upon noticing the lights in the building, Caliph Harun al-Rashid devises a plan to climb a tree and catch the trespassers in the act. Peering through a window, he is greeted by such a delightful sight—"two moons" drinking wine and making music—that his anger melts away and he is moved to bestow upon them his considerable largesse.[80] In another story, an old woman acts as a go-between for a young couple who fall in love at first sight, she on her balcony and he on the street below. In this case, the old woman recites poetry to each of them, ventriloquizing one's devotion and visualizing the other's beauty. Through the pictures she paints with words, the old woman functions as a stand-in for the absent beloved.[81] Such scenes of witnessing, enabling, and enacting may have presented an opportunity for audiences outside the text to imagine themselves within the story. Third parties can be seen as proxies for readers who have before them two seemingly interchangeable, though in these cases grammatically distinct, objects of desire. This form of triangulation makes space for difference, thus enlarging the field of sexual possibility for the audience, without disturbing the erotics of sameness produced by the pairs and parallels in the stories.

1.3 Sexed and Racialized Bodies

When difference is emphasized, however, in sexual scenarios, it is done primarily for the purpose of comedy or derision. This is usually signaled by an explicitly sexed or racialized body. The most graphic references to genitalia in the fifteenth-century manuscript occur in encounters structured by socioeconomic difference. In these situations, the appearance of genitalia suggests sexual arousal but also throws into question the mutuality of the encounter, blurring the line between titillation and ridicule. This reinforces the sense conveyed elsewhere in the manuscript that the sexed body is peripheral to and may even interrupt circuits of desire. Unlike socioeconomic difference, which provides fodder for comedy in the stories, racial difference, when marked, invites contempt and, ultimately, violence. Black skin is never mentioned as a feature of a beautiful body in the fifteenth-century manuscript. In terms of color, redness is the dominant attribute of beautiful faces,

78. Mahdi, 1:388.

79. Mahdi, 1:458–59. Other pairs are described as "two moons" (*qamarayn*), using the Arabic dual that stresses the sameness of their beauty; for examples, see Mahdi, 1:226, 545 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b), 592.

80. Mahdi, 1:466.

81. Mahdi, 1:329–33.

with ruddy, rosy, or ruby cheeks set in contrast to white teeth, black hair, or a dark beauty spot.[82] Radiance and luminosity, as when a sun or moon illuminates a sky, may imply a light complexion, but the far-ranging geographies, both imagined and real, that the stories traverse likely conjured various forms of racialized desirability within the parameters of this beauty ideal.[83] What is absolutely clear, however, is that all the characters marked as "black" in the stories are also attributed slave status, and the two sexual scenarios that involve a she-character and a "black slave" are presented as evidence of women's perfidy and punished dramatically.

One of the most well-known erotic sequences in the *Nights*, the opening to "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," may be read as both sexual fantasy and physical comedy. It features a porter hired by a well-dressed woman in a market in Baghdad who ends up inviting him to spend the evening feasting in her sumptuous home along with her two beautiful sisters. The porter is included in the revelries out of a combination of amusement and pity; he recites verses to plead his case that make the women laugh, and the sister who initially hired him wants to reward him for his hard work. Ultimately, he returns the payment he received for his services in the market and says, "Take me as a servant (*khadīm*) rather than a companion (*nadīm*)."[84] His socioeconomic difference thus accentuated, the partying begins, replete with singing, dancing, and various forms of touching: kissing, biting, rubbing, and so on. As they get drunk, a game of erotic wordplay commences. Each sister undresses, first washing herself as the others watch, and then sits in the porter's lap, demanding he name her genitals. Every time the porter comes up with a name that does not please her, he gets slapped. When it is his turn, he undresses and does the same, culminating in a witty punchline in which he plays the name of his penis—"inserts" it, perhaps—into the metaphorical names each of the women had previously insisted on for their vaginas.[85] The lengthy lists of Arabic terms for genitalia that come out of this scene, ranging from the formal to the crude, emphasize sex difference, just as the porter's service profession and the fact that he is not described as beautiful in any way cement his social and physical difference from the women. Although most of the episode seems pleasurable for all involved, the porter's perspective is described as one of astonishment and bliss, whereas the women's reactions tend toward amusement and laughter. Moreover, although

82. Comparisons of skin to cream, silk, or marble seem more immediately evocative of texture than of color. One beautiful character is described twice as having "a neck like marble" (*ʿunuq ka-l-marmar*); see Mahdi, 1:231, 244. Husain Haddawy translates this as "a neck like white marble," which seems an instance of reading color into the text; see Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 196, 210.

83. This is reinforced in three places in the fifteenth-century manuscript when a group of concubines (*juwar*) are described as of "all geographical origins" (*sāʾir al-ajnās*). One of these scenes is set in a slave market specified as having concubines for sale representing regions and peoples from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Central Asia; see Mahdi, 1:449, 457, 481.

84. Mahdi, 1:131–32.

85. For an analysis of the language used in this episode, see Erez Naaman, "Eating Figs and Pomegranates: Taboos and Language in the *Thousand and One Nights*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44 (2013): 335–70, at 362–64. For a contrasting reading that focuses on the metaphorical language of the female body, see Naddaff, *Arabesque*, especially chapter 2.

slapping, like biting can certainly be associated with eroticism, the repeated references to the porter's sore neck and shoulders to the point that he starts to "worry" (*karaba*) and to feel as though he is "choking to death" (*inkhanaqa*) suggest that he is not having as much fun as his hosts. Ultimately, in this scene the porter walks the line between being laughed with and being laughed at, and in any case the comedic elements certainly balance, if not outweigh, the erotic ones.

If "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" can be read as a sexual fantasy in which an ordinary man gets to spend the night of his life with three beautiful women, the tales of the barber's six brothers in "The Hunchback Story" feature a series of ordinary men who suffer just for daring to dream of such a scenario. For instance, "The Tale of the Second Brother" stages what could be thought of as a mean-spirited version of the opening to "The Porter and the Three Ladies." The brother is lured to a mansion by an old woman who promises him luxury and pleasure. She leaves him in an opulent garden where he is soon joined by a beautiful she-character surrounded by companions. As they eat, drink, and listen to music, she pretends to flirt with him, all the while laughing at him behind his back. She begins slapping him and encourages her companions to hit him too. She then orders that they shave his facial hair, take off his clothes, and make him chase her around the garden until his penis becomes erect. At that point she lures him to a trapdoor that plunges him—naked, hairless, and aroused—into the middle of a crowded marketplace, where he gets beaten up and hauled away by the police.[86] In two other stories, the barber's brothers are lured by beautiful women into financial scams, one of which involves a gruesome mass murder. All six tales, including those that do not directly involve sexual encounters, stage elaborate scenes of humiliation or stress the brothers' gullibility, disability, and poverty.[87] Though this may not seem funny today, the intended comic effect is evidenced by the fact that the barber's narration of his brothers' stories is immediately directed at a caliph, who greets each vignette with laughter and at one point falls on his back in mirth.[88]

While it may be possible to imagine someone fantasizing about being in the shoes of the porter, it is difficult to imagine the same in the case of the barber's brothers. One moment in "The Hunchback Story," however, offers up a match better suited to such characters. The barber, describing some of his friends to a well-to-do young man he meets in Baghdad, emphasizes the beauty of one of them, a garbage collector, in terms reminiscent of other eroticized he- and she-characters in the stories, reciting verses that compare his movement to the swaying of a bough.[89] Although this physical description evokes a beautiful body that anyone might appreciate, it seems to be his socioeconomic status, not his grammatical gender, that makes him a more appropriate match for the barber and his ilk than for the

86. Mahdi, 1:354–57.

87. The issue of disability and its relationship to difference, as it manifests here as well as in the various hunchback characters and the one-eyed dervishes, is worth further investigation from a historical perspective; for an illuminating study that addresses this time period, though not the *Nights*, see Kristina L. Richardson, *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

88. Mahdi, 1:363.

89. Mahdi, 1:342.

well-to-do young man, who shows no interest whatsoever. This is also an opportunity for comedy, since the verses conclude with wordplay on the garbage collector's lowly profession, and the well-to-do young man reacts with amusement as well as exasperation. This poem is notable for being the only one, to the best of my knowledge, in the fifteenth-century manuscript that reflects the contemporary popularity of a poetic genre in which non-elite men and women were eroticized through witty takes on their urban trades.[90]

Though characters of lower socioeconomic standing are frequently the butts of jokes, their aspirational desires are depicted as unrealistic rather than threatening. Characters described as "black," however, are not only even less fully developed but also associated with sexual deceit and danger.[91] As Rachel Schine has shown, the scenes of infidelity and their violent aftermaths in the frame story are shot through with blackness.[92] The parties involved in the first act of infidelity, King Shahzaman's wife and a kitchen servant, are not described physically, but their clear status difference and the murderous rage into which the sight of them sends Shahzaman set up the next, more spectacular, scene of infidelity.[93] This scene, which is first witnessed by Shahzaman from a window and then repeated later under the eyes of both brothers, features King Shahrayar's gazelle-like wife and a "black slave" (*ʿabd aswad*) named Masʿud who jumps down from a tree to mount her. She is accompanied by twenty companions in women's clothing who, once undressed, appear as ten concubines (*juwar*) and ten "black slaves" (*ʿabīd sūd*), both categories of enslaved people but the former connoting higher status than the latter. These ten pairs then proceed to copulate.[94] While the concubines are racially unmarked, one of the terms used for the sex acts that ensue is *sakhkhamūhum*, which means slangily "[the slaves] fucked them" and literally "[the slaves] blackened them."[95] Schine argues that this verb and the mass violence with which King Shahrayar ultimately reacts—killing all of the women in the palace and vowing to take a new wife every night only to execute her in the morning—reveal profound anxiety about racial mixing in the royal household.[96] This anxiety is intensified not only by the fact of the deception but also by the apparent difficulty of detecting it, as each time upon getting

90. See Adam Talib, "Citystruck," in *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Nizar F. Hermes and Gretchen Head, 138–64 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Thomas Bauer, "'Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!': Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22; and Rosenthal, "Male and Female."

91. The same could be said of sexual relations across the human/demon divide, and demons are sometimes described as "black" or associated with "darkness"; see Mahdi, 1:23, 160. The difference is that they are portrayed as the captors of women, rather than as the women's chosen sexual partners.

92. Rachel Schine, "Reading Race and Racism in the *1001 Nights*," in *Approaches to Teaching the Arabian Nights*, ed. Paulo Lemos Horta (forthcoming). See also Ferial J. Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: "The Arabian Nights" in Comparative Context* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996), 26–27, 32–33.

93. Mahdi, 1:57. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century versions, this "man from among the kitchen boys" (*rajul min ṣibyān al-maṭbakh*) was changed to a "black slave" (*ʿabd aswad*); see Mahdi, 2:34.

94. Mahdi, 1:59.

95. The concubines are not described as "white" in the fifteenth-century manuscript. That adjective is inserted only in eighteenth-century manuscripts; see Mahdi, 2:35. For the use of the verb *sakhkhama*, see Mahdi, 1:62.

96. Schine, "Reading Race."

dressed the group "became twenty concubines to anyone who saw them (*yarāhum*)."[97] Thus framed by an optical illusion of sameness, the dysfunction at the heart of this orgiastic spectacle is rendered even more shocking.

A more elaborate example comes not long after the frame story in "The Tale of the Enchanted King," in which a king discovers that his wife has been cheating on him with a "diseased black slave" (*ʿabd aswad mubtalan*). The combination of blackness, slave status, and a "blighted body" seems intended to elicit disgust from the audience.[98] Moreover, his unkempt dwelling in a slum outside of town, the crude food and drink he offers her, and the rough floor where they lie together present a parodic inversion of the opulent erotic scenes in other stories and make the queen's behavior appear particularly irrational and demeaning. Even worse, her desire for him seems greater than his desire for her. She calls him "beloved of my heart" (*ḥabīb qalbī*), whereas he calls her "cursed woman" (*malʿūna*) and threatens to withhold sex if she does not do as he wants.[99] The entire situation stands in stark contrast to her marriage to a king whose beauty is evoked at the beginning of the story and whose status as her cousin makes their match in many ways an exemplar of sameness. Ultimately, this king, with help from another king who feels sorry for him, manages to get revenge, and both the wife and her lover end up slain.

These stories of infidelity and retribution emphasize the treachery of women and the abjection to which their lack of self-control may drive them, themes that come up elsewhere in the *Nights*. The likelihood that audiences would have imagined some of the many concubines that fill the pages of the fifteenth-century manuscript with dark skin suggests that the problem in these cases was not just racial mixing, but queens choosing slaves over kings.[100] This is arguably also why the bodies of the "black slaves" in these scenarios are unsexed; they are primarily signifiers of women's duplicity and sexual excess and only secondarily racial stereotypes or biological threats in and of themselves.[101] Nonetheless, it is likely that these stories confirmed both misogynistic and racist attitudes among the audience of the fifteenth-century manuscript. As opposed to the situations in which sexed

97. Mahdi, 1:59, 61.

98. Mahdi, 1:117. I take "blighted body" from the subtitle of Richardson's *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World*. Translators sometimes render *mubtal* as "leprous," though Richardson shows that more specific terms tended to be used for leprosy in this period.

99. Mahdi, 1:117.

100. For examples of diversity among concubines in the stories, see Mahdi, 1:368, 449, 457, 481. For explicit mentions of a "black concubine," see Mahdi, 1:208, 296. For a related interpretation of the "husband-wife-master-slave" dynamic in the frame story, see Beaumont, *Slave of Desire*, 49. As Schine reminds me, "this is a legal breach as well as a social one" (personal communication). According to Kecia Ali, the possibility that women might have sexual rights to their slaves akin to those granted men (and the related possibility that women might therefore have licit access to more than one sexual partner as men did) was shut down early on in the development of Islamic jurisprudence; see Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*, 12–15, 176–83.

101. That said, in other examples of popular Arabic literature from the period, it is "the female body's sexual and biological vulnerability [that] is cautionarily represented through the black body"; see Rachel Schine, "Conceiving the Pre-Modern Black-Arab Hero: On the Gendered Production of Racial Difference in *Sīrat al-Amīrah Dhāt al-Himmah*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48 (2017): 298–326, at 325.

bodies highlight poor men's inappropriate desire for comedic effect, the situations involving racialized bodies highlight rich women's excessive desire and always result in death.[102]

Part 2: Modern (Mis-)Readings of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur"

While sex across racial difference retains its negative associations in the modern dissemination of the *Nights*, a new set of anxieties crops up over sameness.[103] What seems taken for granted in the fifteenth-century manuscript—namely, that he- and she-characters are eroticized in the same way and that the field of sexual possibility is not structured by binary constructions of sex or embodied gender—seems to require explanation or intervention starting in the nineteenth century. Specifically, the two most important Arabic print versions of the *Nights*, the Bulaq (1835) and Calcutta II (1839–42) editions, alter the conclusion to "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" so as to emphasize sexual binaries.[104] This tendency is magnified in subsequent translations and scholarship that read sexed bodies into other parts of the story in order to make sense of its erotics.

"The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" provides a useful case study for these nineteenth-century changes, as it features recurring evocations of physical beauty, multiple sexual pairings, and an extended episode of cross-dressing. It has also received particular attention in recent scholarship on sexuality. It presents, however, challenges for a diachronic analysis, as the fact that it was cut off in midstream in the fifteenth-century manuscript means that it is more difficult to establish a baseline for comparison. That said, later manuscripts sometimes preserve older material than earlier manuscripts do, especially when oral transmission and multifarious, fragmentary, and lost manuscript traditions are involved, as they are with the *Nights*.[105] For my analysis, I use the version presented in Mahdi's critical edition, which is based on the fifteenth-century manuscript

102. In a third example from "The Story of the Three Apples," a husband kills his wife because of a rumor, later disproved, that she was having an affair with a "black slave"; see Mahdi, 1:223.

103. The racism in later editions may in fact be more pronounced. For instance, the character described as a "diseased black slave" in the fifteenth-century manuscript is, in nineteenth-century Arabic manuscripts and print editions, further ridiculed for his protruding, ugly lips. Such elements were exaggerated even further in nineteenth-century English and French translations, like those of Richard Burton and Joseph Charles Mardrus, just as, in some more recent examples, they have been downplayed or erased. For more on this, see Schine, "Reading Race"; and Robert Irwin, "The Dark Side of 'The Arabian Nights,'" *Critical Muslim* 13 (2015), https://www.criticalmuslim.io/the-dark-side-of-the-arabian-nights/.

104. W. H. Macnaghten, ed., *The Alif Lailá, or Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night/Alf layla wa-layla*, 4 vols. (Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1839–42) [hereafter Calcutta II]; and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣafatī al-Sharqāwī, ed., *Alf layla wa-layla*, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kubrā bi-Būlāq, 1251/1835) [hereafter Bulaq]. For the purposes of this analysis, I am considering "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad," which is presented as a continuation of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" in most of the versions under study here, as a separate story, in part on the basis of Garcin's historicist assessment; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 352–53. It has also received less attention in scholarship on sexuality. Therefore, when I refer to the conclusion of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," I am referring to the reunion between Qamar al-Zaman and Budur in the Ebony Islands. For a different assessment of "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad" from a literary perspective, see Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, *Les mille et une nuits ou la parole prisonnière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 97–135.

105. For an example of this dynamic, see Chraïbi, "Introduction," 54–58.

through the middle of night 281 and then concluded on the basis of a manuscript copied in Egypt in 1764, though this is missing the crucial final scene. I supplement this with the three seventeenth-century manuscripts cited in the first part of this article, two of which are standalone versions of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," and I cross-check them with three early nineteenth-century representatives of the manuscript tradition known as Zotenberg's Egyptian Recension (ZER) that are among the first extant examples to feature a full 1,001 nights.[106] Where they diverge, I tend to prefer the earliest manuscript version available and give variations in the notes, but all of them have more in common with each other than they do with the Bulaq and Calcutta II print editions, particularly at the story's conclusion. This matters because these editions have come to represent the *Nights* for a modern global audience.[107] It is possible that what I see as changes in the print editions are actually continuities with earlier oral traditions, manuscripts I have not studied, or now-lost manuscripts. However, the way in which the print version of the conclusion differs from all the manuscripts I have consulted persuades me that the difference is the work of nineteenth-century editors, magnified by subsequent translators and scholars, concerned with (or simply defaulting to) modern sexual binaries.

As we have seen, the beginning of the story features a beauty contest adjudicated by demons. Qamar al-Zaman is deemed the winner for the restraint he shows when presented

106. These are Gotha Forschungsbibliothek Ms. Orient. A 2633 [hereafter Gotha]; Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod.arab 623 [hereafter Munich]; and BNF Arabe 3602. The latter two manuscripts were both copied by the same person, though they are not identical texts. The Munich manuscript is dated 1806. My analysis of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" indicates that BNF Arabe 3602 is identical to BNF Arabe 3598, so I include references only to the former (which is a clearer copy). According to Garcin, both of these manuscripts are identical to Cairo Dār al-Kutub 13523z, which is dated 1809; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 25–26. For more on Zotenberg's Egyptian Recension, see Grotzfeld, "Manuscript Tradition." I have also cross-checked with a third standalone manuscript of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," datable to the seventeenth century: BNF Arabe 3622. This was one of the manuscripts brought to France from Syria by Antoine Galland, and Ibrahim Akel suggests it may have been used as the basis for the story as it appears in Galland's French translation (if that is the case, however, Galland took considerable liberties with it); see Akel, "Quelques remarques sur la bibliothèque d'Antoine Galland et l'arrivée des *Mille et une nuits* en occident," in *Antoine Galland et l'Orient des savants*, ed. Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat and Michel Zink, 199–215 (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2019), 205–9. What is interesting for the purposes of this study, however, is that the text of BNF Arabe 3622 is identical to the version of the story presented in a third early print edition, known as the Breslau edition; see Maximilien Habicht and Heinrich Fleischer, eds., *Tausend und eine Nacht/Alf layla wa-layla*, 12 vols. (Breslau: J. Max, 1825–43) [hereafter Breslau]. This version differs in a few striking places from the other versions under study here, and I will provide details in the notes.

107. For more on these editions, see Mahdi, *Thousand and One Nights*, 87–126. Famous early English translators of the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions include Edward W. Lane (Bulaq) and Richard Burton (Calcutta II). More recently, Calcutta II has been translated into English by Malcolm C. Lyons with Ursula Lyons and into French by Jamel Eddine Bencheikh and André Miquel, whereas Husain Haddawy has produced a collection of select stories (including "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur") from the Bulaq edition. See Lyons with Lyons, trans., *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, 3 vols. (London: Penguin Books, 2008); Bencheikh and Miquel, trans., *Les mille et une nuits*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2005); and Haddawy, trans., *Sindbad and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). For the way English translations of the *Nights* influenced its reception among nineteenth-century Arabic- and Persian-speaking audiences, see Kamran Rastegar, "The Changing Value of *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* for Nineteenth-Century Arabic, Persian, and English Readerships," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 3 (2005): 269–87.

with the near-naked sleeping body of Budur. Even though it is his gendered behavior that wins him the day, it is the physical sameness of the two bodies that dominates the narration of the sequence, presented initially in lengthy descriptions of the beauty of each and then repeated as the contest ensues, punctuated by astonished exclamations on the part of the *jinn* about how similar the two look. Qamar al-Zaman's beauty is described right at the beginning of the story in terms that recall previous descriptions, including the poem quoted at the beginning of this article that is first used for the beloved of the Mistress of the House in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies." The fifteenth-century manuscript presents only the first six verses of the twelve-verse poem for Qamar al-Zaman.[108] In two of the early nineteenth-century manuscripts I consulted, the poem appears in its full twelve verses with only minor variations in wording from its first appearance in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies."[109] In the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions, however, only ten of the twelve verses appear, with what may be a telling omission.[110] One of the dropped verses is the seventh verse, which praises Qamar al-Zaman for his bough-like figure and the "two pomegranates on his chest." This verse may not have conformed to nineteenth-century norms for embodied masculinity, and its omission serves to downplay the sense of interchangeability among beautiful he- and she-characters that repetition of this kind of poetry conveys.[111] Even without that verse, twentieth-century French translators Jamel Eddine Bencheikh and André Miquel feel the need to explain the poem in a footnote: "This evocation is more reminiscent, classically so, of a woman and becomes only more suspect given that it has to do with a young man obviously disinclined toward the other sex... and given that one of these women, so disparaged by him, will save him."[112] This reading suggests that the poem may not actually describe Qamar al-Zaman's body, or, if it does, his

108. There is a slight variation in the first verse. Compare Mahdi, 1:206 ("The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies") and 536 ("The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur"). For a full English translation of the twelve-verse poem when it first appears in the fifteenth-century manuscript, see Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 166–67.

109. BNF Arabe 3602, fols. 435b–436a; Gotha, fol. 49b. One of the seventeenth-century manuscripts I consulted includes eleven verses of the poem, omitting only the second verse; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a–224b. The other two seventeenth-century manuscripts are missing the beginning of the story where this poem occurs.

110. Bulaq, 1:345; Calcutta II, 1:815–16. One of the manuscripts I consulted also omits the seventh verse: Munich, fol. 450a.

111. This poem does not appear at all in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" in the Bulaq edition; see Bulaq, 1:44–46. It does appear in the earlier story in the Calcutta II edition, and there it includes the "pomegranate" verse but drops two others (the fourth and the sixth); see Calcutta II, 1:125–26. The Breslau edition has the poem in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" (Breslau, 1:318–19) but drops it entirely in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" and inserts instead into the first description of Budur a description of her breasts as being like "a large pair of pomegranates" (Breslau, 3:182; BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 5b).

112. Bencheikh and Miquel, *Mille et une nuits*, 1:1196, n. 3. They do not comment on the poem when it occurs earlier in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies." By contrast, in his 1885 translation of the Calcutta II edition, Richard F. Burton restores the "pomegranate" verse to "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," explaining in a footnote, "These lines occur in Night xvii.; so I borrow from Torrens (p. 163) by way of variety"; see Burton, trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 10 vols. (Reprint: Project Gutenberg EBook, 2001), 3:n. 232.

looks are a function of his "disinclination toward the other sex" and/or a prefiguration of the beautiful female body that will "save" him.

The assumption that the story opens with a crisis of sexual orientation—especially one that muddies the otherwise clear waters of sexual dimorphism—does not match up with the way any of the Arabic versions under study here present the issue. In the fifteenth-century manuscript, both Qamar al-Zaman and Budur reject the prospect of marriage until they lay eyes on each other. In Qamar al-Zaman's case, he explains his rejection by saying that his "soul is not sympathetic to/inclined toward women" (*lā lī nafs tamīlu ilā al-nisāʾ*) because he has read cautionary tales about their deceitfulness. His position is amplified by additional poetry in the nineteenth-century versions, but the rationale remains the same: women are not to be trusted.[113] Although it might be possible to read the verb "to be inclined toward" in terms of sexual object choice, the immediate context in which it occurs, reinforced by the broader environment of the *Nights* with its prominent theme of marital infidelity, strongly suggests that it is marriage, not the female body, that Qamar al-Zaman is refusing.[114] In Budur's case, all versions have her explaining that she is already a princess (*sayyida*) and a ruler (*ḥākima*, *malika*) and does not want a man to rule over her.[115] While the explanations invoke gender stereotypes and norms (women are treacherous; men wield more power in marriage), the more striking effect is to stress the sameness of the two protagonists: both are powerful, self-sufficient, and loath to put themselves in a structurally vulnerable position. The fact that they are both promptly locked up by their fathers to punish them for their disobedience only reinforces the parallel. In other words, the problem is not one of object choice in which Qamar al-Zaman just needs to find a sufficiently desirable female body; it is that both Qamar al-Zaman and Budur need to meet

113. Compare Mahdi, 1:534–35; BNF Arabe 3612, fols. 223b–224a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 2a; with BNF 3602, fols. 434a, 435a; Gotha, fols. 47b–48b; Munich, fols. 448a, 449a; Bulaq, 1:343–44; and Calcutta II, 1:812–14. In "The Hunchback Story," the young man from Baghdad who meets the barber is also initially described as a hater of women, but no reason is given. One glimpse of a beautiful woman on a balcony and his "hatred of women was reversed by love"; see Mahdi, 1:328–29.

114. On the use of this verb form, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality,* 48–49. The French translator Joseph Charles Mardrus embellishes these explanations to make them seem much more like sexual preferences; see Mardrus, *The Book of the Thousand and One Night*, trans. E. Powys Mathers, 4 vols. (1923; repr., London: Routledge, 1986), 2:3, 9 [hereafter Mardrus-Mathers]. This has led Brad Epps, on the basis of the Mathers translation of Mardrus, to argue, "Inasmuch as both Qamar and Budur had already professed to reject not only marriage but also any interest in the opposite sex, Qamar's self-control may be as consistent with his previously expressed penchant as Budur's lack of self-control is inconsistent with hers"; see Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing: Cross-Cultural Analysis in a Contested World," in Babayan and Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, 114–60, at 119–20 and n. 17. David Ghanim copies this word-for-word from Epps; see Ghanim, *The Sexual World of the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 40.

115. See Mahdi, 1:542; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 226b; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 1b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 440b; Gotha, fol. 54b; Munich, fol. 455a–455b; Bulaq, 1:349; and Calcutta II, 1:825. The highly abridged BNF Arabe 3623 (fol. 3a) just says she "does not want marriage."

someone similar enough to themselves to put their fears about the gendered institution of marriage to rest.[116]

Like Bencheikh and Miquel, other translators and scholars read a binary construction of sex into the story's opening sequence. Brad Epps claims that phallic imagery recurs in the beauty competition and that its resolution hinges in large part on the presentation of "women as lacking 'the thing' that men have and, perhaps on the basis of that 'lack,' as being less capable of self-control ..."[117] However, almost all of the examples of phallic imagery are embellishments made by Joseph Charles Mardrus in his notorious sixteen-volume French translation (1899–1904) as rendered in English by E. Powys Mathers in 1923.[118] For example, Mardrus tempers the physical resemblance between the two protagonists by emphatically sexing their bodies: "... the two upon the couch might be twins, save in the matter of their *middle parts*. Each had the same moonlit face, the same slim waist, and the same rich round croup; if the girl lacked the youth's *central ornament*, she made up for it in *marvelous paps which confessed her sex*" (italics mine).[119] The Arabic versions I have consulted liken Qamar al-Zaman and Budur to "two moons" (*qamarayn*) and/or "siblings" (*akhawayn*) when they are first placed next to each other, but it is likely that the rest of the passage was inserted at that point in the story by Mardrus, and I have found no Arabic equivalent for the italicized phrases in any version I have consulted.[120] Although the Arabic manuscripts and print editions alike portray the excitement of each protagonist upon encountering parts of the other's body that may be interpreted as signifying binary sex—Budur's breasts, Qamar al-Zaman's penis—these are very brief mentions, particularly in comparison with the lengthy descriptions of other aspects of their physical beauty.[121] At one point a demon

116. The tendency to conflate marriage and heterosexuality is an effect of modern discourses of sexuality. Fedwa Malti-Douglas's reading of the frame story, while groundbreaking and insightful in so many ways, is an example; see Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), chapter 1; and idem, "Homosociality, Heterosexuality, and Sharazâd," in Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 1:38–42.

117. Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 121.

118. One is Epps's own misinterpretation of the phrase "his waist sometimes complained of the weight which went below it"; see Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 118. Mardrus leaves this ambiguous (Mardrus-Mathers, 2:2), but the Arabic versions clearly refer to the weight of his hips (*ardāfihi*), not of his penis, a description consistent with the recurring image of beautiful men and women with fleshy hips and buttocks below slim waists; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 435b; Gotha, fol. 49b; Munich, fol. 450a; Bulaq, 1:345; and Calcutta II, 1:815. Among Mardrus's blatant embellishments is the reference to the enormous *zabb* (an Arabic term for penis) on one of the demons, which does not appear in any Arabic version I have seen; see Mardrus-Mathers, 2:14; and Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 118. For more on the Mardrus translation, see Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 36–40.

119. Mardrus-Mathers, 2:12.

120. For this scene, see Mahdi, 1:545; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 442a; Gotha, fol. 56b; Munich, fol. 457b (*qamarayn aw badrayn ... akhawayn*); BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a (omits *akhawayn*); Bulaq, 1:351; Calcutta II, 1:828 (*taw'amān aw akhawān munfaridān*); and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b (*qamarayn aw najmatayn aw tuffāḥatayn*). BNF Arabe 3621 does not include this section.

121. For breasts (*nuhūduhā*), see Mahdi, 1:548; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 228b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 444b; Gotha, fol. 59a; Munich, fol. 460a; and Bulaq, 1:353. The only variant is Calcutta II, 1:833 (*nuhūduhā mithl ḥuqqayn min al-ʿāj*), while BNF Arabe 3621 is missing this section. BNF Arabe 3623 does not mention Qamar al-Zaman looking

observes that "the sweetness of women is a thing and the sweetness of men is a[nother] thing" (*ḥalī al-nisāʾ shayʾ wa-ḥalī al-rijāl shayʾ*), but in no specific way does the scene indicate the relevance of the sexed body to either the kind or the degree of beauty.[122] Though Budur's reaction to Qamar al-Zaman is more intense than is Qamar al-Zaman's to Budur, it is presented as a matter of masculine self-control rather than as one of embodiment. Thus while it is true that the outcome is a gender hierarchy, it is not one rooted in the body or its "middle parts."

The next phase of the story has also prompted readings that understand sexual attraction as a matter of object choice. Sahar Amer calls this phase a "lesbian interlude" and argues that it highlights the appeal of a female body to another female body.[123] After Qamar al-Zaman and Budur, so fleetingly united by supernatural forces, eventually find their way to each other in the light of day, as it were, they get married. However, on a journey together Qamar al-Zaman is lured away from his wife's sleeping body and loses his bearings. Waking up alone, Budur realizes she must cope without Qamar al-Zaman and decides to dress in his clothes. Traveling as a man, Budur arrives in the capital of the Ebony Islands and is given an audience with the king, who is so taken with the beauty and regal bearing of the person he sees in front of him that he offers Budur his kingdom and his daughter, Hayat al-Nufus, in marriage. The newlyweds pass several nights together before Budur, under pressure to consummate the marriage, tells Hayat al-Nufus that she is a woman. Together they devise a ruse involving chicken blood to convince her father the consummation has taken place, thus extending the marriage and Budur's reign. During this time, all of the officials of the kingdom are fully convinced that Budur is a man, and the story describes Budur as a skillful, just, and beloved ruler.[124]

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at her breasts at all. For Qamar al-Zaman's genitals, see Mahdi, 1:551 (*shayʾ bayn fakhidhayhi*); BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a; BNF Arabe 3621, fols. 3b–4a (*hādhā alladhī bayn afkhādhihi wa-huwa isbaʿ*); BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 446b; Gotha, fol. 61a; Munich, fol. 462a; Bulaq, 1:355; and Calcutta II, 1:837 (*ayrihi*). BNF Arabe 3623 does not mention his genitals at all. By contrast, in Mardrus's version Budur lingers over Qamar al-Zaman's penis, and it is implied that she inserts it into her vagina. She then later tells her nurse that she lost her virginity; see Mardrus-Mathers, 2:18, 26. In the Arabic versions, she kisses him between his eyes and on his mouth and hands and then embraces him, putting her arm under his neck; see Mahdi, 1:551; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 4a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 4a (slight variant). For variants that have Budur kissing him all over his body, see BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 446b; Gotha, fol. 61a; Munich, fol. 462a; Bulaq, 1:355; and Calcutta II, 1:837. I do not see any evidence anywhere that she "mounts him," as stated by Ghanim, *Sexual World*, 40.

122. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 2b. This line is dropped completely in BNF Arabe 3623. The eighteenth-century manuscript used by Mahdi reads, "the sweetness of women is different from (*ghayr*) the sweetness of men"; see Mahdi, 1:544. In the nineteenth-century manuscripts and print editions, the text reads, "the female case (*ḥāl al-unthā*) is different from the male case (*ḥāl al-dhakar*)"; see BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 441b; Gotha, fol. 56a; Munich, fol. 457a; Bulaq, 1:351; and Calcutta II, 1:827. Mardrus changes it completely: "If there is equality between a male and a female, the male bears off the prize" (Mardrus-Mathers, 2:12).

123. Sahar Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures," in Babayan and Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities*, 72–113, at 77. Relatedly, Garcin suggests that Budur may have been modeled on the "lesbian" daughter of the Timurid ruler Shah Rukh (r. 1405–47); see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 204.

124. Mahdi, 1:592–93; BNF Arabe 3612, fols. 237b–238a; BNF Arabe 3621, fols. 18b–19b; BNF Arabe 3623, fols. 9a–9b; BNF Arabe 3602, fols. 468b–469a; Gotha, fols. 86b–87b; Munich, fols. 485b–486a; Bulaq, 1:375; Calcutta II,

In some ways, this is a remarkable episode, both for Budur's utterly persuasive embodiment of a young man and accomplished ruler and for the extended marital relationship between Budur and Hayat al-Nufus.[125] However, in other ways it is merely an extension of the pattern already established in the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* in which beautiful characters are marked by sameness, regardless of gender. Indeed, the nights Budur and Hayat al-Nufus spend together are very much a parallel of erotic encounters in earlier stories. There is a shared bed, conversation, playing, laughing, embracing, caressing, kissing, and sleeping, at the very least.[126] As with other ambiguous episodes (such as that between the Third Dervish and the young man in the subterranean chamber), I interpret these activities as strongly suggestive of eroticism even if the verbs used in previous stories for sexual intercourse are not used here.[127] Thus, although I would not call this an example of "homosexual marriage" or "lesbian sexuality," as Amer does, it is not because I do not believe any sex acts took place. It is because I do not believe that this episode is any more indicative of sameness in sexual relations than are any of the other pairings in the *Nights*, nor do I think it involves object choice. Amer's reading depends heavily on the assumption that Budur's and Hayat al-Nufus's bodies are to be understood as categorically different from Qamar al-Zaman's, a reading that, like others examined above, imposes modern sexual binaries onto the story.

Key to Amer's argument is the moment in which Budur declares herself to be a woman to Hayat al-Nufus. In the eighteenth-century manuscript that Mahdi follows at this point in his critical edition, Budur switches to a "real," "feminine" voice and uncovers her breasts and genitals.[128] The only earlier manuscript to include this scene does not refer to breasts or genitals at all but says rather that she uncovers "her thighs" and Hayat al-Nufus sees that she is "a virginal girl" (*bint bikr*), at which point Budur then explains that she is an "elite [secluded] woman" (*imrāʾ dhāt khidr*).[129] The earlier manuscript thus stresses sameness of

1:880–81. Throughout the story, the narrator uses feminine pronouns and verb forms to refer to Budur, even while she is cross-dressed. However, when she is referred to directly by another character who believes her to be a man, that character uses masculine pronouns and verb forms.

125. This has prompted Wendy Doniger to argue that Budur should be seen as the story's protagonist; see Doniger, "The Rings of Budur and Qamar al-Zaman," in *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner, 108–26 (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

126. Mahdi, 1:592–93, 595; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19a; BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9b; BNF Arabe 3602, fols. 468b–469b, 471b; Gotha, fols. 86b–87b, 89b–90a; Munich, fols. 485b–486b, 488b; Bulaq, 1:375, 377; Calcutta II, 1:880–81, 885.

127. Amer argues that the formulation in the eighteenth-century manuscript that Mahdi follows at this point of the story, *dakhalat Budūr ilā Ḥayāt al-Nufūs*, refers to penetrating a sexual partner; see Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," 96; and Mahdi, 1:592. The same formulation appears in Gotha, fol. 86b. In the two seventeenth-century manuscripts I consulted, the text reads, rather, *dakhalat Budūr al-bayt*; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19a. The line is skipped entirely in BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 468b; BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9b; Munich, fol. 485b; Bulaq, 1:375; and Calcutta II, 1:880.

128. Mahdi, 1:595.

129. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238b. The other manuscripts use similar wording for her vocal change, but then say only that Budur "uncovered her situation" and "showed herself" to Hayat al-Nufus; see BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 471a; Munich, fol. 488a. One of them adds the part about Budur being an elite woman; see Gotha, fol. 89b. For

gender and status between Budur and Hayat al-Nufus rather than the sexing of the body. In either version, this moment may have been received by the audience, to use Amer's words, "in titillation" and as a "sexual act," but its cursory presentation contrasts with the lengthy and poetic evocations of Budur's memories of Qamar al-Zaman while she is with Hayat al-Nufus.[130] This is not evidence that Budur prefers Qamar al-Zaman to Hayat al-Nufus or male bodies to female bodies. It is, rather, to suggest that in that room three commensurable objects of desire are conjured.

Just before Budur declares herself a woman, she is portrayed gazing upon Hayat al-Nufus and reminiscing about Qamar al-Zaman:

> When Princess Budur entered Hayat al-Nufus's room and she found the candles burning and Hayat al-Nufus sitting there like the moon on the fourteenth night, she gazed upon her and thought about her beloved Qamar al-Zaman and what had passed between them of the good life, of embracing necks, [kissing mouths], hugging chests, letting down hair, nibbling cheeks, and biting breasts.[131]

It is significant that Budur takes in the candlelit spectacle of Hayat al-Nufus's beauty and then immediately recalls her sexual past. The generic references to activities with body parts (all plural nouns without possessive pronouns) might apply to any of the three characters "in the room" at that moment. In the nineteenth-century manuscripts, in fact, this prose passage is followed by a poem describing Qamar al-Zaman's beauty in terms that could easily be used for Budur or Hayat al-Nufus, including verses about him shaking out his locks and unveiling his face and about his slender waist and heavy buttocks.[132] It is this multidirectional circuit of desire, I would submit, rather than Budur's sexed body, that charges the scene with eroticism. While Amer sees the heightened pleasure that follows Budur's revelation as evidence of "an alternative female space" where "heterosexuality is critiqued, denaturalized, animalized," it is far from clear to me that this is about female bodies or even gendered solidarity, much less homosexuality vs. heterosexuality.[133] However, I certainly agree with Amer that scenes like this one may have provided fodder for audience members to fantasize about a multiplicity of sexual configurations, including those not sanctioned or otherwise available in their lives.[134]

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a slightly abridged version, see BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9b. BNF Arabe 3621 skips over this part. The print editions do not include any references to Budur's body, voice, or status and merely say she "showed herself" to Hayat al-Nufus; see Bulaq, 1:377; and Calcutta II, 1:884.

130. Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," 98–100.

131. Mahdi, 1:594. See also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238b; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19b. I add the "kissing mouths" from the nineteenth-century manuscripts: BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 470a; Gotha, fol. 88b; Munich, fol. 487a. This passage is dropped in BNF Arabe 3623.

132. The poem ranges from twelve to fifteen verses; see Munich, fol. 487a–487b; Gotha, fol. 89a–89b; and BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 470a–470b. The printed editions do not include the prose passage and give only eight verses of the poem; see Bulaq, 1:376; and Calcutta II, 1:883.

133. Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," 99–101.

134. This could also be said of the conclusion to the story, in which the three end up in one household together. Although this restores the gender order (Qamar al-Zaman becomes king in Budur's place, while

That said, the concluding scene, particularly with the dramatic changes made to the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions, may have contributed to the tendency to see this story as exploring the relationship between the sexed body and sexual attraction. In all the manuscript versions I have consulted, when Budur finally locates Qamar al-Zaman, she plays a trick on him in which she maintains her guise as a king to force Qamar al-Zaman into sexual activity.[135] Throughout the encounter Qamar al-Zaman refuses repeatedly and expresses extreme distress, even breaking down in tears several times, while Budur alternately cajoles, threatens, and screams at him. It is a drawn-out scene in which Budur forces him first to give her a leg massage and then to straddle her and put his hand underneath her tunic, ostensibly to fondle her "stick" (*qaḍīb*).[136] In each of these two phases of physical contact, the narrative breathlessly follows Qamar al-Zaman's hands as they move up Budur's lower body, encountering skin smoother than cream at each turn. By the end, Qamar al-Zaman has transitioned from tears to exclamations of surprise and pleasure. When he touches her genitals, he exclaims: "By God, how lovely! A king with a pussy (*kuss*)!"[137] Even then, it does not occur to Qamar al-Zaman that he is with a woman, much less his long-lost wife, until she starts laughing, asks how he could have forgotten her, and takes him into her arms.

Readers today are likely to understand this as a scene of rape. There is no doubt that Qamar al-Zaman is being coerced into physical intimacy against his will. He invokes God's protection repeatedly and at one point uses the term "transgression" (*fāḥisha*) and at another "ugly thing" (*shayʾ qabīḥ*).[138] It seems that his distress is at least in part due to

Budur becomes a co-wife with Hayat al-Nufus), it keeps the possibilities for sexual desire open-ended and multidirectional. Garcin, however, questions this ending, wondering whether it was rewritten to enable the addition of "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad"; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 119–20.

135. This scene is missing from the Mahdi edition and has been rather violently crossed out in BNF Arabe 3621, fols. 23b–24a. The nineteenth-century manuscripts I have consulted are very close to the version in BNF Arabe 3612, which I will follow below, noting variants in the notes.

136. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479a; Gotha, fol. 100a; Munich, fol. 496b. BNF Arabe 3623 does not include this.

137. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 243a. BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 11a, has *faraj* rather than *kuss*. The nineteenth-century manuscripts use much the same wording: BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479b; Gotha, fol. 100b; Munich, fol. 496b. The Breslau edition has Qamar al-Zaman laugh and say, "A king with a woman's tool!" (*malik wa-lahu ālat al-nisāʾ*); see Breslau, 3:274; and BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 25b. There is a parallel here with "The Story of ʿAli Shar and Zumurrud," which does not appear in the fifteenth-century manuscript. Zumurrud, a concubine disguised as a king, plays the same trick on her long-lost lover, ʿAli Shar, as Budur plays on Qamar al-Zaman. When ʿAli reaches between the king's legs, he exclaims, "A king with a pussy! This is a marvel!" Only after Zumurrud sees that he is thoroughly sexually aroused does she tell him who she is. Unlike the conclusion to "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," however, the conclusion to this story seems to be the same in the nineteenth-century manuscripts I have consulted and the print editions. See, for instance, Bulaq, 2:234; and Calcutta II, 2:249–50; and compare with Gotha, fol. 226a.

138. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b. BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 11a, has "the sultan wants to ruin me" (*al-sulṭān yurīd yaʿmal maʿī al-ʿāṭil*) (?). The nineteenth-century manuscripts I have consulted insert a line that may be read as "the king wants to make me effeminate" (*al-malik yaṭlubu yukhannit*[*h*]*unī*), adding that this would be a "reprehensible act" (*munkar*), a term that, like *fāḥisha*, has a religious connotation. This may make more explicit Qamar al-Zaman's objections, though the rest of the scene is very close to that in the seventeenth-century manuscript. See BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 478b; Gotha, fol. 99a; and Munich, fol. 495b. On *takhannuth*

his belief that he is being confronted with male anatomy, as the prospect of touching a "stick" provokes a fresh round of protests and the discovery of a "pussy" cheers him up considerably, even without knowing whose it is. However, even before this, the text implies that there is mutual pleasure in the encounter. In between his protests, Qamar al-Zaman is portrayed wondering at the softness of the king's skin, and his hand keeps shaking and slipping, signs of sexual attraction elsewhere in the *Nights*. Likewise, Budur's arousal is evoked in physical terms; "her insides tremble" (*khafaqat aḥshāʾuhā*) at Qamar al-Zaman's touch.[139] These reactions may be interpreted as either increasing or belying the vehemence of Qamar al-Zaman's objections and Budur's threats. Arguably the most prominent element in the scene is the suspense generated by the gradual exploration of a body beneath clothes, as if anything is possible—including a pleasant surprise. Here clothing makes the sexed body effectively imperceptible, though perhaps not entirely irrelevant. Undress a king and who knows what you will find?

By contrast, the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions remove the ambiguity, Budur's aggression, and most of the touching. From the start, the scene is clearly about the king's preference for male sexual partners, and most of the narrative consists of a verbal debate between Budur and Qamar al-Zaman on its permissibility and appeal.[140] Qamar al-Zaman's protests focus on the issues of sin, religious law, and God's judgment. Budur attempts to persuade Qamar al-Zaman that it is not forbidden for youths below a certain age to be penetrated. Although she admits that the penetrator—which it is implied will be her—does bear blame, she explains that because her "temperament and nature" (*al-amzija wa-l-ṭabīʿa*) are corrupt, she cannot help herself.[141] Then she recites a succession of ten bawdy poems about the attractions of boys, the drawbacks of girls, and the overall pleasures of anal sex.[142] Many of

(effeminacy) in the premodern period, see Rowson, "Effeminates"; and idem, "Gender Irregularity." On *fāḥisha* and its association with the story of Lot in the Qurʾan, see Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, "Sexuality, Diversity and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi, 190–234 (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003); and Sara Omar, "In Search of Authenticity: Modern Discourse over Homosexuality through Early Islamic Thought," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. Herbert Berg, 339–58 (New York: Routledge: 2018).

139. The striking parallel with the scene at the beginning of the story in which Budur's hand slips and her insides tremble as she moves her hand up the thigh of the sleeping Qamar al-Zaman reinforces this sense. Compare, for example, BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a and fols. 242b–243a.

140. The Breslau edition follows BNF Arabe 3622 and hews much closer to the other manuscripts I have consulted than to the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions. It adds, however, a scenario in which Budur forces Qamar al-Zaman to assume a position with raised buttocks as if he were about to be anally penetrated (Breslau, 3:272; BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 25a), whereas the rest of the manuscripts say that Budur turned onto her back "as a woman lies down with a man" or "as a woman does" (BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b; Munich, fol. 496b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479a; Gotha, fol. 100a) for Qamar al-Zaman to straddle her. The Breslau edition also adds a line in which Qamar al-Zaman says to himself, "By my life, the king likes boys!" (Breslau, 3:270; BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 24b), and many times it inserts variants on the word "fuck" (*nayk*), which does not appear in any of the other versions I have consulted.

141. Bulaq, 1:382, 383–84; Calcutta II, 1:897, 899.

142. This series of short poems represents a literary subgenre known as *mujūn-maqāṭīʿ* (obscene epigrams), and at least two of them can be found in the relevant chapter of an important fifteenth-century literary anthology analyzed, edited, and translated in Talib, *"Epigram" in Arabic*, 128–56 (the epigrams that appear in

the poems play on religious symbolism, an irreverent echo of Qamar al-Zaman's concern with sin.[143] Convinced by these poems that there is no dissuading her, Qamar al-Zaman agrees to "one time only" (*ghayr marra wāḥida*), in the hope that God will forgive him this isolated transgression.[144] At this point, they get into bed, and after some brief kissing and embracing he reaches between Budur's thighs to find "a domed shrine of many blessings and motions (*barakāt wa-ḥarakāt*)."[145] He then muses to himself, "Perhaps this king is a *khunthā*, neither male nor female (*wa-laysa bi-dhakar wa-lā unthā*)," before asking Budur directly, "O King, you do not have a tool (*āla*) like the tools of men (*ālāt al-rijāl*), so what made you do this?"[146] At that point, Budur laughs and tells him who she is.

This version of the scene is very different from any of the manuscripts I have consulted, perhaps the most thoroughly altered scene in the entire story.[147] It represents a preference for male sexual partners as a matter of "temperament and nature" and in so doing appears much closer to a modern understanding of sexuality, with its emphasis on object choice and essentialism, than anything discussed thus far. The poems recited by Budur explain the king's orientation in terms of both sex and gender; men are "unique in beauty" (*farīd al-jamāl*) and comparatively more socially accessible, while women have the added drawback of menstruating and bearing children.[148] Although the poems themselves may have been considered titillating, as they describe sexual organs and positions, the actual physical encounter between Qamar al-Zaman and Budur is decidedly brief. The delight expressed in the manuscript versions over "a king with a pussy" contrasts with the rather formal consideration in the printed editions of the medical and legal status of *khunthā*, which is

the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions are #9 and #23). For more on *mujūn* in Arabic literature, see Zoltan Szombathy, *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013); and Adam Talib, Marlé Hammond, and Arie Schippers, eds., *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy: Essays in Honour of Professor Geert Jan van Gelder* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014).

143. On this use of language, as well as a comparison with "The Story of ʿAli Shar and Zumurrud," see the analysis in Naaman, "Eating Figs," 351–56.

144. Bulaq, 1:383; Calcutta II, 1:899. The manuscripts also have Qamar al-Zaman asking Budur to assure him this would be one time only, but without the lengthy passage afterwards about sin, repentance, and God's forgiveness; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479a; Gotha, fol. 100a; and Munich, fol. 496a.

145. This is Erez Naaman's translation. Naaman points out the double entendre in the word for motions (*ḥarakāt*), which can refer to both sexual activity and prayer; see Naaman, "Eating Figs," 353, n. 59.

146. Bulaq, 1:384; Calcutta II, 1:900.

147. Garcin makes particular reference to this scene and argues that the changes were made by the Bulaq "éditeur-poète"; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 123–25. Very little is known about the editor of the Bulaq edition, nor do we know what manuscript(s) he used; all we have is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣafatī al-Sharqāwī's name and the date of publication in a colophon on the last page of the second volume.

148. The Bulaq edition contains an additional poem that the Calcutta II edition lacks. Interestingly, it is a poem that appears earlier in both editions (but not in any of the manuscripts I have consulted) by way of praising Qamar al-Zaman's beauty as sufficient to make a man forsake women; see Bulaq, 1:382–83; and Calcutta II, 1:897–99.

immediately explained with reference to a binary construction of sex—"neither male nor female."[149] The Bulaq and Calcutta II editions are still too early to reflect the influence of the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary, and this scene does demonstrate affinities with other modes of organizing erotic life. Among these are a distinction between insertive and receptive sexual roles and the significance of age in interpreting and evaluating sexual practices.[150] However, the anxiety, religious and otherwise, around object choice that seems to pervade this version of the scene does not resonate at all with the erotics of sameness cultivated in the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* or even elsewhere in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur."

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Brad Epps, despite reading this scene through the Mardrus-Mathers translation, argues that it "conjures forth a different sexual economy than one that rises and falls on a modern hetero/homo, male/female divide."[151] I wholeheartedly agree and add that untethering the concepts of sameness and difference from sexual binaries helps illuminate this "different sexual economy." The pattern in the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* is that sameness is mapped onto bodies in ways that stress their physical similarity, regardless of the body parts that are (or may be imagined as being) involved. Beautiful he- and she-characters proliferate, mirroring each other in a variety of erotic encounters that draw the approving attention of onlookers from all walks of life. Repetition of descriptive poetry and prose within these encounters demonstrates that while embodiment is central to the portrayal of sexual attraction, embodied difference is not. In fact, emphasizing embodied difference serves to flag a relationship as inappropriate or dysfunctional. At the same time, triangles within the text, and the possibility that triangulation might also reach into the world outside the text, make space for a variety of erotic possibilities, if only in the realm of fantasy.

These observations should remind us that terms such as "homosexuality," "heterosexuality," and "same-sex desire" privilege anatomical notions of sameness and difference and risk sidelining other ways of understanding sexual relations. My broader goal, however, is to question any assumption that the sexed body is always already there, qualifying otherwise similar evocations of beauty, ratifying grammatical gender (or exposing it as a lie), and making sense of desire. In this view, undressing a body, whether it happens literally in a text or in the mind of a scholar, provides a stable foundation for understanding and interpreting expressions of erotic love. However, historians can only perceive bodies

149. It is possible that this insistence on neither/nor for the category of *khunthā*, which, as Gesink shows, was understood historically to be mutable and complex, represents an intermediate position between the greater ambiguity of the manuscript tradition and the modern fetishization of the binary; see Gesink, "Intersex Bodies," especially the conclusion.

150. On these distinctions, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, especially chapter 1. For their genealogical relationship to modern homosexuality, see David M. Halperin, "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 87–123.

151. Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 152.

through their discursive production; we cannot assume we know what they "really" looked like, or which body parts mattered, especially when confronted with formulaic, terse, or counterintuitive evidence. Why bracket this evidence as a function of narrative technique or literary convention? What if it also reflected a historical reality in which socially legible gender was much more dependent on clothing and context and much less dependent on the shape of the body than we have come to see it today? After all, a "king with a pussy" is not the same as a queen, and the implications of this should prompt a rethinking of the extent to which we read binary constructions of sex or embodied gender into our sources.[152]

By taking descriptions of beautiful characters on their own terms in the context of a source-critical, historicist study, I hope to have shown that the *1001 Nights* offers rich possibilities for this kind of rethinking. This is particularly true since the *Nights* is "a heterogeneous work with a complex textual history," and therefore questions of point of view, voice, and reception are more open than they are for other Arabic genres associated with eroticism.[153] That said, it is crucial for scholars to look beyond the canonical print editions and perform comparative close readings of earlier manuscripts.[154] My analysis of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" indicates that nineteenth-century editors and translators had a heavy hand in shaping its sexual content. Given the relationship in this period between the rise of European colonialism and the production of modern discourses of gender and sexuality, it is all the more pressing to pursue source-critical and historicist projects.[155] Ultimately, if further research shows that erotic love was imaginable in ways that throw into question modern binaries, it will be important to rethink not only our language but also how we understand embodiment as part of the sexual past.

152. This observation may resonate with those working in the field of transgender history. For a recent discussion of "the possibilities of non-binary lives in our archives," see Shireen Hamza, "Annulling the Marriage of Two Men: A Marginal Note in a Yemeni Manuscript," *Journal of the History of Ideas Blog*, June 10, 2020, https://jhiblog.org/2020/06/10/annulling-the-marriage-of-two-men-a-marginal-note-in-a-yemeni-manuscript/.

153. See Ibrahim Muhawi, "The Arabian Nights and the Question of Authorship," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 3 (2005): 323–37, at 323.

154. Recent examples of what can be achieved by this kind of work, although without a focus on sexuality, can be found in Chraïbi, *Arabic Manuscripts*. Unfortunately, the most recently published book on sexuality in the *Nights* does not engage in any source criticism and recycles arguments (sometimes verbatim) made by other scholars; see Ghanim, *Sexual World*.

155. For the close association between British and French colonialism in North Africa and India and the publication of the nineteenth-century Arabic print editions of the *Nights*, see Mahdi, *Thousand and One Nights*, 87–126; and Horta, *Marvellous Thieves*, especially chapter 3. For the relationship between European colonialism and the production of modern discourses of gender and sexuality, see María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, 1 (2007): 186–209.

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