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TIMUR'S HUMOROUS ANTAGONIST, NASREDDIN HOCA

In a tiny booklet first published in 1694, the French orientalist scholar Antoine Galland (1646-1715), who later earned immortal fame with his introduction of the *Arabian Nights* (1704-1717) to the Western world,¹ presented to the French public *Les paroles remarquables, les bons mots et les maximes des Orientaux*, a florilegium of "remarkable utterances, witticisms and clever sayings of the Orientals", further specified as translated from books originally compiled in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.² Towards the end of the first section containing the "bons mots", Galland quotes a number of anecdotes mentioning "Timour", whom in a remark following the first anecdote he introduces as follows: «Timour is the real name of Tamerlan, and the word Tamerlan is a corruption of Timourlenk, meaning Timour the lame, a name he was apparently given in his time by those who had reason not to love him. But it should not be used by us, who have not been subjected to any trouble by him».³ Galland's slightly naïve explanation, which ignores the physical background of Timur's nickname, coincides with the favorable Western evaluation of Timur current in his days. Reliable historical information on Timur had hardly been accessible before Galland's time, and so Timur's image in Europe was dominated by a number of inspired, but largely fictional, portraits,⁴ such as the ones in Pedro de Mexia's widely read *Silva de*

1 – Abdel-Halim, M., *Antoine Galland, sa vie et son œuvre*, Paris, 1964; s.v. «Galland Antoine» (H. Grotzfeld), in: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, V, col. 660-662; Mahdi, M., *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla)*, vol. 3: *Introduction and Indexes*, Leiden, New York, Köln, 1994, p. 11-49.

2 – see Abdel-Halim (as in note 1), p. 249-254.

3 – Galland, A., *Les paroles remarquables, les bons mots et les maximes des Orientaux*, Paris, 1694, p. 189-195, (p. 190).

4 – See Nagel, T., *Timur der Eroberer und die islamische Welt des späten Mittelalters*, München, 1996, p. 10-11.

varia lección (1540)⁵ or Christopher Marlowe's popular drama *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587).⁶

As the *Paroles remarquables* were intended for leisure reading, Galand chose to limit his commentary on the historical context of the anecdotes. This choice was most likely made deliberately, since he had already collaborated in the compilation and in fact completed the editing of the first encyclopedia of Islam ever conceived, Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*. This work, originally published in 1697, contains a lengthy entry on Timur, mostly drawing on the History of Mirḥwānd. The encyclopedic entry focuses on the political history of Timur but also aims to convey an idea of his personal characteristics. In accordance with contemporary convention, this goal is achieved by quoting exemplary anecdotes. The entry closes with an anecdote quoted from the Ottoman writer Lāmi'ī Çelebi's (died 939/1531) collection of anecdotes, *Letā'if*, intended to illustrate the fact that «this great emperor was not as sullen ("farouche") as some would have him appear»:⁷

Timur together with some of his nobles and courtiers attends the public bath. In order to pass the time, Timur asks the poet Aḥmādī to fix a price for each of them. As Aḥmādī evaluates them one by one, he eventually has to mention a price for Timur himself, and fixes it very low. When Timur objects that his towel (Turkish: *futa*) alone has the value mentioned, Aḥmādī retorts: 'That is exactly why I have fixed your price at the price of the towel. Because without it, you are worth nothing at all!' And Timur, amused at the courageous remark, grants the poet a magnificent present.

This anecdote may serve as the starting point for a discussion of specific aspects of the fictional character of Timur, which will focus on the most popular humorous figure in Turkish oral tradition, Nasreddin Ḥoca, in his alleged role as Timur's humorous antagonist.

It is uncertain whether the anecdote quoted contains a kernel of historical truth. Its protagonist in the version quoted above is the poet

5 – *Silva de varia lección*, vol. 1-2, ed. A. Castro, Madrid, 1989; Pues, F., "La Silva de varia lección de Pedro Mexía", in: *Les Lettres romanes*, XIII (1959), p. 119-143; Lerner, I., "Acerca del texto de la primera edición de la Silva de Pedro Mexía", in: *Actas del VII congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*, vol. 2, Roma, 1982, p. 677-684.

6 – Smith, H., "Tamburlaine and the Renaissance", in: *Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays, Festschrift George F. Reynolds*, Boulder Co, 1945, p. 126-131, (p. 130); *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon* (dtv), vol. 21 (1974), p. 9226-9227.

7 – *Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement Tout ce qui regarde le connoissance des Peuples de l'Orient*, [...] par Monsieur d'Herbelot, Maestricht, 1776, p. 872-882, (p. 882). On d'Herbelot see Laurens, L. *Aux sources de l'Orientalisme. La Bibliothèque Orientale de Barthélemy D'Herbelot*, Paris, 1978.

Tāğaddīn Ibrāhīm b. Ḥiḍr, known as Aḥmadī Kirmānī (died 815/1413), who had been at the court of the emperor Bāyazid I, by whose son, Sülaymān Çelebī, he was especially favored.⁸ Aḥmadī might have met Timur after the battle at Ankara. On the other hand, from a critical remark appended to the mention of the anecdote in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, its fictional character becomes apparent, since it is stated that while Lāmi'ī quotes the witty repartee in the name of Aḥmadī, other authors ("quelques autres") attribute it to a certain 'Baba Sevdai' (= Sawdā'ī), apparently another contemporary poet at the court of Timur.⁹ It is neither mentioned whether this critical observation is already included by Lāmi'ī, nor is it elaborated who the "others" are. On the other hand, Galland himself in his *Paroles remarquables* (which in the edition Maestricht 1776 is appended to the *Bibliothèque orientale*, containing the same text as in the original edition of 1694) quotes a variant version of the anecdote relying on "Cogia Efendi", the Ottoman historian Sa'daddīn b. Ḥasan, usually called Ḥoca (Sa'daddīn) Efendi (died 1008/1599), author of the famous Ottoman history known as *Tāğ al-tawārīḥ*.¹⁰ Given the casual nature of the various translations available, it is difficult to ascertain whether the original wording of the two versions differs decisively. The protagonist in both versions is Aḥmadī, and the only obvious variation consists in the prices mentioned for Timur's towel: While Lāmi'ī mentions thirty-five asper (Turkish: *aḳçe*), Ḥoca Efendi mentions eighty. The French folklorist René Basset, author of the first extensive comparative commentary on the corpus of Nasreddin Ḥoca anecdotes,¹¹ points out a third sixteenth century Turkish version of the anecdote, which is again attributed to Aḥmadī and, as in Ḥoca Efendi mentions the price of eighty asper; Basset for his information relies upon E. J. W. Gibb's history of Ottoman poetry,¹² which in turn quotes from Taşköprüzāde's (died 968/1561) historical work *Şaqā'iq al-nu'māniyya*.¹³

Thus, three largely identical versions in sixteenth century Turkish sources testify to the popularity of this anecdote, which usually serves as an illustration of Timur's alleged appreciation of truthfulness, even if the truth conveyed might be uncomfortable to face. But why discuss this

8 – s.v. «Aḥmadī» (G. L. Lewis), in: *EP*, I, p. 299-300.

9 – s.v. «Saoudai», in: d'Herbelot (as in note 7), p. 743, again relying on Lāmi'ī's *Letā'if*.

10 – Galland (as in note 3), p. 191, commentary p. 191-193; Galland in the *Supplément* to d'Herbelot (as in note 7), p. 226.

11 – Mouliéras, A., *Les Fourberies de Si Djeh'a, contes kabyles, Traduction française et notes avec une étude sur Si Djeh'a et les anecdotes qui lui sont attribuées*, par René Basset, Paris, 1892, p. 52.

12 – Gibb, E. J. W., *Ottoman Poets*, London, 1882, p. 166-167; id., *History of Ottoman Poetry*, vol. 1, London, 1900, p. 262-263.

13 – See *eš-Şaqā'iq en-no'māniyye von Taşköprüzāde*, German translation by O. Rescher, Constantinople, 1927, p. 27.

charming, yet obviously allegorical anecdote in such detail? Why make it the subject of lengthy considerations discussing the fictional character of Timur? The reason underlying this is the fact, well researched in folklorist narrative theory, that tales travel through time and space, and while travelling they are subjected to a number of mechanisms affecting their content and form. One of these mechanisms, already pointed out by the medieval Arabian author al-Ġāhiz (died 255/868), consists in attributing anecdotes of varying origins to specific characters in order to exploit the popularity of those characters to ensure the lasting popularity of the anecdote itself. In his book on stingy persons, the *Kitāb al-Buḥalā'*, al-Ġāhiz says:

If somebody were to attribute an anecdote to Abū'l-Hārīt Ġummayn, al-Hayṭam b. Muṭahhar, Muzabbid or Ibn Aḥmar, it would have the utmost success, even if it were a boring one; if, on the other hand, he were to produce a substantially funny anecdote with subtle meaning, and would then attribute it to Sāliḥ b. Hunayn, Ibn al-Nawwā' or some other contested person, then it would not only become boring but also tasteless, which is worse.¹⁴

The relevant phenomenon in analytical folklorist terminology has been coined as "*Kristallisationsgestalten*", denominating characters (*Gestalten*) who in popular tradition serve as a point of crystallization for a tradition otherwise highly diversified and amorphous, since originally attributed to various characters, some of them known, others anonymous.¹⁵ Referring to the anecdote of Timur's towel, the sixteenth century sources quoted above obviously still regarded Aḥmadī as being well known; after all, he had been the most famous Ottoman poet of the fourteenth century. Moreover, his intimate relation with the family of Timur's inferior Turkish opponent Bāyazīd made him appear an ideal antagonist to the Mongol emperor's tyrannic behaviour. Yet, the farther sources would move away from the context contemporary to Timur, the more a reliable knowledge about Aḥmadī's position and merits was bound to fade. Fictional traits of Aḥmadī's character might develop, overlap with or even outshine the historical traits; on the other hand, while reliable knowledge was fading, any knowledge about Aḥmadī at all might vanish. As the references in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale* confirm, rival versions of the anecdote were already in circulation in the sixteenth century. Since Aḥmadī in later tradition was no longer regarded as ade-

14 – al-Ġāhiz, *al-Buḥalā'*, ed. T. al-Haġiri, al-Qāhirah, 1981⁶, p. 7.

15 – s.v. «Kristallisationsgestalten» (I. Köhler-Zülch), in: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, VIII, col. 459-466.

quately known,¹⁶ competition between different protagonists might ultimately have resulted in either one of two solutions: the anecdote might have fallen into oblivion or switched to another, more prominent protagonist.

History chose the latter opportunity. At least from the seventeenth century onwards the anecdote switched to Nasreddin Hoca, a then already widely acknowledged central figure in Turkish humor. Nasreddin, whose historical existence is more than doubtful, probably was a minor cleric living in the southern region of central Anatolia in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.¹⁷ Collections of anecdotes attributed to him are known to exist from the sixteenth century onwards,¹⁸ and in the course of subsequent centuries he was developed to monopolize the figure of a humorous "folk philosopher". The Ottoman traveler Evliyā Çelebî in his *Siyāhat-nāme* is the first author to attribute the anecdote about Timur's towel to Nasreddin. Evliyā Çelebî in the course of his voyage to Syria, Palestine, Kurdistān and Armenia lasting from Ša'bān 1058/September 1648 to Raġab 1060/July 1650, passed through the Southern Anatolian town of Aġşehir. In his description of places of pilgrimage in that town, the first place he mentions is the burial place of Hoca Naşr-al-dīn (modern Turkish: Hoca Nasreddin/Nasrettin), whom he qualifies as "the wise one in the world and in faith, the phoenix of the mountain of Qāf of positive religious certainty".¹⁹ According to Evliyā Çelebî, Nasreddin was a holy person endowed with ready wit, who was in close contact with Timur. Timur, on the other hand, is said to have been impressed by Nasreddin's learned conversations and to have spared plundering Aġşehir on his behalf. In consequence, Nasreddin's witty repartees and jocular tales had by Evliyā Çelebî's time become current with many people even to the point of coining proverbial expressions. As an example for this kind of story, Evliyā Çelebî quotes the anecdote of Timur's towel in much the same wording as the previous sixteenth century versions, but now attributed to

16 – Björkmann, W., "Die altosmanische Literatur", in: *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 403-426, (p. 418).

17 – s.v. «Hodscha Nasreddin» (U. Marzolph, I. Baldauf), in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, VI, col. 1127-1151; «Naşr al-dīn Khōdjah» (U. Marzolph), in: *EP*, VII, p. 1018-1020.

18 – Burill, K. R. F., "The Nasreddin Hoca Stories. 1: An Early Ottoman Manuscript at the University of Groningen", in: *Archivum Ottomanicum*, II (1970), p. 7-114; Kut, G., "Nasreddin Hoca hikâyeleri yazmalarının kolları üzerine bir deneme", in: *IV. Milletlerarası Türk Halk Kültürü Kongresi Bildirileri*, vol. 2, Ankara, 1992, p. 147-200; Boratav, P. N., *Nasreddin Hoca*, Ankara, 1995.

19 – Menzel, T., review of Wesselki, A., *Der Hodscha Nasreddin*, Weimar, 1911, in: *Der Islam*, V (1914), p. 212-220, (p. 219-220); see also Wesselski, vol. 1, n° 234; Spies, O., *Hodscha Nasreddin, ein türkischer Eulenspiegel*, Berlin, s.a., p. 8-10. Menzel regards the text as published in the printed edition of Evliyā Çelebî's *Siyāhatnāme* (Constantinople, 1314, vol. 3, p. 16-17) as corrupt and prefers to translate from two manuscripts in his private possession.

Nasreddin. Nasreddin's justification why he evaluates Timur at forty asper only, however, is more aggressive than before: «I would give the forty asper for your towel alone. You are a sick and lame guy, and moreover you are a Mongol. Together with the amount for the towel you are not worth the value of a small copper coin».

Evliyā Çelebî probably relies on oral tradition in Aḳşehir. Various arguments might serve to explain why local tradition in Aḳşehir might have connected with Nasreddin the anecdote previously attributed to Aḥmadî. First, Nasreddin, whose historical lifetime – if he ever lived at all – by in the seventeenth century was about two and a half centuries past, in popular tradition had been elaborated as a venerated saint with a special reputation for ready wit. Second, the major historical threat experienced by the population of Aḳşehir had been Timur's military campaign in Turkey, which had resulted in the (though only temporary) abolishment of Ottoman rule. While it is difficult to ascertain whether Timur ever intended to besiege, let alone destroy, Aḳşehir, the impact of his military campaign certainly was remembered by the people of Aḳşehir: After all, the Ottoman sultan Bāyazîd, whom Timur had conquered and humiliated, died in that city in Şa'bān 805/March 1403 while being taken along by Timur on his way back to Samarqand. Third, as has been discussed above, by Evliyā Çelebî's time the fame of Aḥmadî had faded and certainly in Aḳşehir was surpassed by the popularity of the local character Nasreddin.

But not only in the local tradition of Aḳşehir had Nasreddin occupied the standard position of Timur's antagonist. Evidence for this evaluation is supplied by the *Historia incrementorum atque decrementorum Aulae Othmanicae*, originally completed by about 1716 by the Moldavian prince Demetrius Cantemir, and subsequently translated into English (1734), French (1743), and German (1745).²⁰ Cantemir, who explicitly states that he was relying on Turkish manuscript tradition, in the annotation to his work quotes three anecdotes illustrating the relationship between Timur and Nasreddin, two of which form part of the later standard repertoire of Nasreddin anecdotes:

- (1) Instead of offering sweet quinces as a welcome present to Timur, Nasreddin offers him green figs. As the enraged tyrant has his servants throw the figs at Nasreddin's head, Nasreddin instead of complaining keeps praising God. When asked why, he replies

20 – Latin text quoted in Constantin, G., "Démètre Cantemir et Nasr ed-din Khodja", in: *Türk Kültürü Araştırmaları*, XV (1976), p. 289-310, (p. 307-309); see also *id.* "Nasr ed-Din Khodja' chez les Turcs, les peuples balkaniques et les Roumains", in: *Der Islam*, XLIII (1967), p. 89-133 (p. 97).

that, had he offered quinces, his punishment would have been even harder.²¹

(2) Nasreddin agrees to share with the doorkeeper half the amount of whatever Timur should grant him in reward for a present. Since Timur is angry, he commands a heavy beating to be given to Nasreddin. After silently suffering half the amount of strokes, Nasreddin asks the other half to be given to the doorkeeper.²²

(3) Nasreddin builds a monument in commemoration of himself. It is a gate whose doors are closed and secured with a lock. He wants his monument to serve as a source of laughter, in contrast to the memory of Timur, which is bound to remain a source of grief and tears.²³

The Romanian Turcologist Gh. I. Constantin, who discusses the various implications of the mention of Nasreddin by Cantemir in great detail, obviously regards the supplied information as historically reliable and points out three elements to be derived from it:²⁴

- a) The historical existence of Nasreddin at the time of Timur and the subsequent confirmation that Nasreddin lived at the time of Bāyezīd I;
- b) The meeting of Nasreddin and Timur;
- c) The existence of a book of anecdotes on Nasreddin in Turkish.

Only the third statement can be proved to be historically correct, since Turkish manuscripts of anecdotes on Nasreddin predating Cantemir still exist today. In the first two instances, however, Constantin obviously succumbs to the temptation of regarding the annotation to a historical work – which in the case concerned is explicitly stated to derive from a source known to be fictional – as equally reliable as the historical passages of the work itself. On the contrary, by conducting a short comparative analysis of the quoted anecdotes, Constantin's first two conclusions can be shown to be unfounded. As the Czech folklorist Albert Wesselski has demonstrated, the first anecdote given by Cantemir (figs and quinces) ultimately derives from a Jewish Midrashic tale probably originating from as far back as the seventh century. It probably reached Turkish tradition by the intermediary of the Italian novella literature, where it had been popular since about the fourteenth century (first occurrence in the

21 – see Wesselski (as in note 19), vol. 1, n° 71; Marzolph, U., *Nasreddin Hodscha*, Munic, 1996, n° 365; Kut (as in note 18), n° 182; Aarne, A. and Thompson, S., *The Types of the Folktale*, Helsinki, 1961, (reprint 1973), n° 1689.

22 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, n° 328; Aarne and Thompson (as in note 21), n° 1610.

23 – Wesselski (as in note 19), p. 329.

24 – Constantin 1976 (as in note 20), p. 293.

Cento novelle antiche).²⁵ The second anecdote quoted by Cantemir (sharing the strokes), on the other hand, is already included in an Arabic compilation dating from the ninth century, the *Murūğ al-dahab* by the historian al-Mas'ūdī (died 345/956).²⁶ Thus, the anecdotes mentioned by Cantemir, rather than supplying reliable historical information, testify to the fact that Nasreddin in the seventeenth century had become the point of crystallization of a number of anecdotes originally not at all connected with him as a historical or even fictional character. Moreover, the latter anecdote in Arabic tradition is also known to have undergone a similar development as for a pointed solution to contrast between a jocular character and the ruler. While al-Mas'ūdī mentions the conflict as occurring between the popular storyteller Ibn al-Mağāzilī and the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tadid (ruled 279/892-289/902), the fifteenth century Egyptian encyclopedic author al-Ibšīhī,²⁷ while preserving in his version Ibn al-Mağāzilī as the jester, has substituted Hārūn al-Rašīd (ruled 170/786-193/809) as the ruler. This development corresponds to the general development of Hārūn al-Rašīd as a major focus of fictional narrative in late medieval Arabic literature.²⁸

Cantemir was the first to introduce Nasreddin to a European audience, and it is thus likely to be his credit that Nasreddin in subsequent publications was regarded as a Turkish court fool.²⁹ Karl Friedrich Flögel's *Geschichte der Hofnarren* (1789), one of the first works of its kind, mentions Nasreddin as the court fool of Bāyazīd and credits him with achieving Timur's pardon for the city of Aqşehir. Out of the four anecdotes quoted in this respect, two derive from Cantemir (figs and quinces; sharing the strokes); one is taken from De la Croix's eighteenth century history of the Ottoman empire (Nasreddin saves the officers of Bāyazīd's army from execution by advising the ruler to kill them and then face the enemy without being able to profit from their expertise);³⁰ and the fourth

25 – Wesselski, A., *Die Schwänke und Schnurren des Pfarrers Arlotto*, vol. 1-2, Berlin, 1910, (vol. 1, p. 226-267); Wesselski (as in note 19), vol. 1, 227-228.

26 – For references see Marzolph, U., *Arabia ridens, Die humoristische Kurzprosa der frühen Abbasidenzeit im internationalen Traditionsgeslecht*, vol. 1-2, Frankfurt, 1992, (vol. 2, n° 351).

27 – Marzolph, U., "Medieval Knowledge in Modern Reading, A 15th Century Arabic Encyclopedia of *omni re scibili*", in: *Pre-modern Encyclopedic Texts*, ed. P. Binkley, Leiden (in print).

28 – See Gerhardt, M., *The Art of Story-Telling*, Leiden, 1963, p. 419-470; s. v. «Hārūn ar-Rašīd» (U. Marzolph), in: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, VI, col. 534-537.

29 – Flögel, K. F., *Geschichte der Hofnarren*, (Liegnitz, Leipzig, 1789), reprint Hildesheim, New York, 1977, p. 176-179; Doran, J., *The History of Court Fools*, (London, 1858), reprint New York, 1966, p. 191-208; Nick, F., *Die Hof- und Volks-Narren*, Stuttgart, 1861, vol. 1, p. 152; Gazeau, M. A., *Les Bouffons*, Paris, 1882, p. 191-208.

30 – Wesselski (as in note 19), vol. 1, n° 330.

one is the attribution to Nasreddin (and Bāyazīd) of a scatological anecdote previously mentioned in the Latin compilation *Democritus ridens* (Amsterdam 1649) as occurring between Bāyazīd and an anonymous Arab (who defecates from up in a tree in order to prevent the soldiers from chopping down the tree).³¹

Even before the Austrian orientalist scholar Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall had qualified Nasreddin as the “Eulenspiegel der Türken”³² – equivalent to the later labelling as the “Joe Miller of the Near East” by Albert Rapp³³ – Germany’s poet genius Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had grown fond of Nasreddin,³⁴ whom he understood to be the terrible tyrant Timur’s humorous companion (‘des fürchterlichen Weltverwüsters launiger Zug- und Zeltgefährte’).³⁵ Goethe – who apparently was not aware of the information included in Flögel’s book³⁶ – owed his knowledge about Nasreddin (and probably to some extent, on Timur as well) to the German orientalist scholar Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (1751-1817), who in a correspondence shortly before his death had informed Goethe about Nasreddin³⁷ and also supplied five anecdotes, three out of which focus on a humorous confrontation between Nasreddin and Timur.³⁸ Goethe himself quoted one of these anecdotes in the notes to a prospective enlarged edition of his *West-östlicher Divan* (When Timur sees his own ugly face in the mirror, he cries for a while, but Nasreddin goes on: He has to look at Timur’s face all the time).³⁹ The other two anecdotes are as follows:

31 – *Ibid.*, n° 331.

32 – Hammer-Purgstall, J., *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. 1, Pest, 1827, p. 186 (1834², p. 161).

33 – Rapp, A., *The Joe Miller of the Near East*, San Francisco, 1960 (privately printed for the members of the Roxburghe Club of San Francisco).

34 – Bajraktarević, F., “Goethes Interesse für Nasreddin Chodscha”, in: *Jean Deny Armağanı (Mélanges Jean Deny)*, Ankara, 1958, p. 31-37.

35 – Goethe, W., *Westöstlicher Divan*, ed. H.-J. Weitz, Frankfurt, 1974, p. 204-205; on Timur in the *Divan* see also Dill, C., *Wörterbuch zu Goethes West-östlichem Divan*, Tübingen, 1987, p. 376-377.

36 – For negative evidence that Goethe neither possessed nor used Flögel’s book see *Goethe als Benutzer der Weimarer Bibliothek. Ein Verzeichnis der von ihm entliehenen Werke*, ed. W. Deetjen, Weimar, 1931; *Goethes Bibliothek, Katalog*, ed. H. Ruppert, Weimar, 1958.

37 – See *Goethes Werke*, vol. 7, Weimar 1988, p. 222-224; “Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und v. Diez”, in: *Goethe Jahrbuch*, XI, (1980), p. 24-41, (p. 34-36).

38 – *Werke Goethes, Westöstlicher Divan*, 3. *Paralipomena*, ed. E. Grumach, Berlin, 1952, p. 226-231.

39 – Wesselski (as in note 19), vol. 1, n° 327; Fink, K. J., “Goethe’s West Östlicher Divan: Orientalism Restructured”, in: *JMES*, XIV (1982), p. 315-328, (p. 324).

(1) Besides presenting figs to Timur, Nasreddin presents fried poultry. But since he and his wife had been hungry the night before, they had eaten one of the legs of each bird. After suffering the figs being thrown at his head (and praising the Lord for not having brought the quinces), Nasreddin justifies the mutilated chicken by explaining that in his country, all poultry only possess one leg. When Timur in the distance sees some geese standing on one leg he has the servants beat the drum and the geese run away on their two feet. But Nasreddin denies the proof and calmly remarks, that if they had done the same to Timur, he himself would certainly have been so scared as to run away four-footed.

(2) Timur and Nasreddin are riding through the city as a cat crosses the road and breaks wind. When Timur asks to which house the fart belongs, Nasreddin argues that since it occurred on a public road, it ought to belong to Timur's treasury.

While the second anecdote in a slightly different version (dog defecates, judge instead of Timur) is documented in Turkish manuscript and early printed collections of Nasreddin anecdotes,⁴⁰ the first one is a peculiar combination of two tales originally not connected with each other. It was probably von Diez himself who combined the two stories which are linked by the common situation of bringing presents to the emperor. Yet, much the same as the first element (figs and quinces) has already been shown to derive from origins prior to Nasreddin's alleged or actual lifetime, so is the second one: The tale of *The Goose with One Leg* is already known in the fourteenth century, when it is included in the Italian novelist Boccaccio's *Decamerone* (6,4).⁴¹

In this way, the analysis of pre-twentieth century written sources on Nasreddin Hoca as Timur's humorous antagonist boils down to a number of modest outlines:

(1) The majority of anecdotes portraying Nasreddin as an antagonist of Timur has been attributed to Nasreddin at a later stage in their tradition.

(2) Though there might be some plausibility as for supposing a meeting between Nasreddin and Timur, neither can Nasreddin's historical existence be ascertained nor the alleged "intimate relationship" (Evlüyâ Çelebî) with Timur.

(3) Two elements appear to be responsible for the later evaluation: (3.1) Nasreddin's eminent position in Turkish jocular tradition, ultimately deriving from a local tradition at Akşehir; (3.2) Timur's

40 – Wesselski (as in note 19), vol. 1, n° 107; Kut (as in note 18), n° 114; Marzolph (as in note 21), n° 390.

41 – s.v. «Einbeiniges Geflügel» (H.-J. Uther), in: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, III, col. 1203-1207; Aarne and Thompson (as in note 21), n° 785 A; Wesselski (as in note 19), vol. 1, n° 75; Kut (as in note 18), n° 119; Marzolph (as in note 21), n° 396.

alleged tolerance against intellectuals confronting him with an unveiled truth.

It obviously is of little historical relevance to consider Nasreddin as a court fool (of Timur, or rather of Bāyazīd), as Flögel had done, based on the sources available to him. Yet in order to account for the further development which drew its energy from the convincing opposition between Timur the tyrant and Nasreddin the jester, it is helpful to remember that the general phenomenon of the jester, both as a jocular entertainer and *memento mori*, relies on a long tradition in the Near Eastern cultures. Even Alexander the Great is said to have employed jesters – not for diversion and entertainment, but rather to stay alert during his night campaigns.⁴² Various medieval Arabic authors, such as the above mentioned Mas'ūdī, quote the Sassanian emperors Ardašīr (I, ruled 226-241),⁴³ Šāpūr (I, 241-272),⁴⁴ Yazdagird (I, 399-421),⁴⁵ and others as employing court jesters (Arabic: *mudḥikūn*) in order to divert their minds after dealing with serious business as well as to demonstrate the hidden truth of things by apparent absurd action.⁴⁶ In addition, medieval Arabic literature contains a considerable number of references to jesters in the service of rulers such as the Lakhmīd al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundir (592-604),⁴⁷ or the Abbasid caliphs al-Mahdī (158/775-169/785),⁴⁸ Hārūn al-Rašīd,⁴⁹ and al-

42 – see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tağaddud, Teherān, 1350hš/1971, p. 363; *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, ed. and transl. B. Dodge, vol. 2, New York, London, 1970, p. 714 (chapter 8,1).

43 – Mas'ūdī, *Murūğ al-dahab*, ed. Ch. Pellat, vol. 1, Beirut, 1966, p. 286 (mentioned in the "third class" of entertainers at the court of Ardašīr are «*al-mudḥikūn wa ahl al-bitāla wa ahl al-hazb*»).

44 – Ibšīhī, *al-Mustatraf*, ed. M. Qumayha, vol. 2, Beirut, 1403/1983, p. 512: see the same anecdote in Mas'ūdī (as in note 43), vol. 3, p. 326, n° 2048, where the person concerned is qualified as one of Šāpūr's storytellers (*summār*).

45 – al-Musta'shimī, *Asrār al-ḥukamā'*, Constantinople, 1300/1882, p. 99.

46 – al-Ta'ālibī, *Ġurār aḥbār mulūk al-Furs wa siyarihīm*, ed. Zotenberg, Paris, 1940 (reprint Teheran, 1960), p. 584-585; «*wa'ttaḥada al-mudḥikīn li-yu'ayyinūhu bi 'l-hazl 'ālā al-ğidd wa bi 'l-bāṭil 'ālā al-ḥaqq wa yutayyibū nafsahū wa yastağlibū bi 'l-aḍḥāki anfusahū*»; see also (Pseudo-) Ġāhiz, [= Muḥammad b. al-Hārīt al-Tağlibī/al-Ta'ālibī], *Kitāb al-Tağ* [= *Aḥlāq al-mulūk*], ed. A. Zakī Pāšā, al-Qāhirah, 1332/1914, p. 21; Christensen, A., *L'Empire des Sassanides*, Copenhagen, 1907, p. 97; *id.*, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen, (1936) 1944⁴, p. 402; «*Dalqak*» (F. Gaffary), in *Ebr*, VI, p. 611-614.

47 – al-Zamaḥšarī, *Rabī' al-abrār wa nuṣūṣ al-aḥbār*, ed. S. al-Nu'aymī, vol. 2, Baghdad, 1982, p. 699; al-Ta'ālibī, *Ṭimār al-qulūb fi mudāf wa 'l-mansūb*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm, al-Qāhirah, 1384/1965 (reprint 1986), p. 109, n° 156.

48 – al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī, *Ġam' al-ğawāhir fi 'l-mulaḥ wa 'l-nawādir*, ed. 'A. M. al-Biğāwī, al-Qāhirah, 1372/1953, p. 307.

49 – Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Aḥbār al-Zirāf wa 'l-mutamāğinīn*, ed. M. Bahr al-'ulūm, al-Nağaf, 1386²/1967, p. 87; al-Zamaḥšarī (as in note 47), vol. 4, p. 194.

Mutawakkil (763/1362-785/1383).⁵⁰ These jesters might have been buffoons and slapstick artists,⁵¹ or close to the phenomenon of the Wise fool, whose stereotypical representation in the Near Eastern literatures is represented by Hārūn al-Rašīd's contemporary Buhlūl,⁵² but in most cases the role and function of these "court fools" is not clear. We do not know whether they were institutionalized nor whether they formed a rank of their own (as they obviously had done in Sassanian court regulations). And other than a number of more or less stale jokes, additional information allowing any adequate assessment is not at hand. The same holds true for jesters of Timur's time who might or might not have existed. Too few facts are known to allow detailed descriptions, let alone evaluations as to the function court fools in the Near East might have had in comparison with the equivalent institution in the European middle ages.⁵³

Regardless of any historical facts, in the oral tradition of subsequent centuries, Nasreddin was elaborated as Timur's standard antagonist to such an extent that towards the end of the twentieth century a considerable number of the anecdotes attributed to Nasreddin focuses on his opposition to Timur in some way or other.⁵⁴ Moreover, this opposition is not only prominent in the Turco-Iranian area (modern Turkey, Iran, the Caucasian and Central Asian Turkish republics), but also has left its traces in the Arabic tradition of Baghdād, where Timur is made to meet Ġuḥā, Nasreddin's Arabic equivalent (When Ġuḥā is appointed governor by Timur, he writes his accounts on thin pieces of bread – because the angry Timur had made the previous governor eat the account books).⁵⁵

A final point on Timur and his humorous antagonist Nasreddin is the coincidence, though obviously not at all haphazard, of their meeting at the occasion of UNESCO sponsored celebration of anniversaries in 1996. In the Records of the 1995 General Conference of the UNESCO under heading 11.4: "Celebration of anniversaries" it reads: "(xxix) seven hundredth anniversary of the death of the Turkish humorist Nasreddin

50 – al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Basā'ir wa'l-dahā'ir*, ed. I. al-Kaylānī, vol. 1, Dimašq, 1964, p. 25 = al-Zamaḥšarī (as in note 47), p. 630.

51 – see Rosenthal, F., *Humor in Early Islam*, Leiden, 1956.

52 – Marzolph, U., *Der Weise Narr Buhlūl*, Wiesbaden, 1983, id.; "Der Weise Narr Buhlūl in den modernen Volksliteraturen der islamischen Länder", in: *Fabula*, XXVIII (1987), p. 72-89.

53 – see Mezger, W., *Hofnarren im Mittelalter*, Konstanz, 1981; id., *Narrenidee und Fastnachtsbrauch*, Konstanz, 1991; Lever, M., *Zepter und Schellenkappe, Zur Geschichte der Hofnarren* (French original: *Le sceptre et la marotte*, 1983), Frankfurt, 1992.

54 – The most comprehensive documentation of Nasreddin anecdotes ever published is Kharitonov, M. S., *Dvadcat' četyre Nasreddina*, Moskva, 1986. Out of its 1238 anecdotes 139 items (n° 827-965) deal with Nasreddin and Timur.

55 – McCarthy, R. J. and Raffouli, F., *Spoken Arabic of Baghdad*, vol. 2 A, Beirut, 1965, p. 286-287, n° 37; Marzolph (as in note 21), n° 604.

Hoca (Mulla Nasruddin, Goha) (1996)"; this is immediately followed by "(xxx) six hundred and sixtieth anniversary of Emir Timur (1996)".⁵⁶ Though it is not disclosed who the proponents of the mentioned celebrations are, the various opportunities for the propagation of Turkish culture are obvious. Yet, while the dating of Timur's birth in 1336, though fictional, is probably close to historical reality,⁵⁷ any attempt at a definite fixing of Nasreddin's death is simply bizarre.⁵⁸ Besides this general consideration it must be noted that previous attempts to arrive at a historically reliable dating of Nasreddin Hoca have usually agreed on the year mentioned on his alleged tombstone in Aşkehir, where 386 of the Muslim era is mentioned. The interpretation goes that this number, interpreted as the trickster's final posthumous joke, has to be read backwards, thus arriving at 683 of the Muslim era, corresponding to 1284 of the Christian era. Neither scholarly analysis nor popular imagination has ever attempted to fix Nasreddin's death in the year 1296 of the Christian era (696 of the Muslim era). Moreover, if any of the above dates holds true – how could Nasreddin ever have lived to see Timur in Anatolia? And if he did, as popular imagination would have it, how could we trust the dates presented to the international community? And again, how would all this go together with a graffiti allegedly found on the outside of Nasreddin's *türbe* in Aşkehir, in which a *sepâhî* of Bâyezîd documented his presence in the year 1392?⁵⁹

The likely answer to all these questions is that Nasreddin and Timur, regardless of any historical facts have been joined by popular tradition since they represent stereotype antagonist characters: On the one side the wise and unconventional, provocative, yet sympathetic Nasreddin, on the other side the brutal tyrant, whose major characteristic is the exertion of power. Popular tradition needs simple stereotypes without too much psychological depth in order to facilitate identification. Thus, the result of the present investigation can be seen in the overall narrative applicability of the model represented by Timur and Nasreddin, as a focus and a generating force for anecdotes criticizing government and power. While available evidence discredits all attempts to verify their historical meeting, in popular tradition Timur and Nasreddin have achieved their fundamental position as a convincing couple. This conclusion, modest as it may seem, is more than dealing a fatal blow to a historically fallacious concept. It shows that telling anecdotes about Timur and his humorous antagonist

56 – *Records of the General Conference of the UNESCO, Twenty-eight Session, Paris 25 October to 16 November 1995*, vol. 1: *Resolutions*, p. 89.

57 – see Nagel (as in note 4), p. 175-176.

58 – see Marzolph, U., "The UNESCO sponsored "International Nasreddin Hodja Year"", in: *Middle East & South Asian Folklore Bulletin*, XIII, 3 (1996), p. 11-13.

59 – Boratav, P. N., "Le conte et la légende", in: *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta 2*, Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 44-67, (p. 50), referring to Konyalı, İ. H., *Aşkehir, Nasreddin Hoca'nın şehri*, İstanbul, 1945, p. 472.

Nasreddin is the narrative revenge of the people conquered and oppressed by an emperor who – contrary to Alexander – as successful as he was in military terms, never managed to gain the affection of his subjects.

(Enzyklopädie des Märchens, Göttingen)