

## IZNOGOUD AND THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

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### *The Thousand and One Nights and Popular Culture*

Since the beginning, the impact of the *Mille et Une Nuits* extended well beyond the elite circles that had constituted Antoine Galland's original target audience. Ranging from the early eighteenth-century London Grub Street prints as probably the best-known historical example of this impact with a « popular » audience<sup>1</sup> via the colorful Parisian Ballets Russes<sup>2</sup> and numerous tales of the *Nuits* that by way of their oral retellings became « folk tales » in Europe and elsewhere<sup>3</sup> to the current proverbial use of phrases referring to the fairy-tale character of the « Orient » in twentieth- and twenty-first-century international imagery,<sup>4</sup> the international audiences appropriated the *Nuits* in popular culture in their own specific ways. If we consider the *longue durée* of the *Mille et Une Nuits* in France, a country in which the *bandes dessinées* traditionally enjoy great popularity, it is little surprising that the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a particular repercussion of the *Nuits* in this medium. In a previous essay, I have discussed the comics of the grand vizier Iznogoud, the vizier whose one and only goal in life is to « devenir calife à la place du calife », as an Orientalist comic serving as a ma-

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<sup>1</sup> See M. J. ALI [AL-MUSAWI], *Scheherazade in England : A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights*, Boulder (Colorado), Three Continents, 1981, p. 9 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> M. SIRONVAL, *Album Mille et Une Nuits : Iconographie choisie et commentée*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, p. 198-211.

<sup>3</sup> U. MARZOLPH, « The Arabian Nights in Comparative Folk Narrative Research », in Y. YAMANAKA, T. NISHIO (eds.), *Arabian Nights and Orientalism : Perspectives from East and West*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2006, p. 3-24.

<sup>4</sup> U. MARZOLPH, R. VAN LEEUWEN, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, II, Santa Barbara etc., ABC-Clio, « Popular Icons », 2004, p. 680-681.

trix for the representation of and coming to terms with daily frustrations.<sup>5</sup> In the present context, I would like to focus on the particular relations between the *Mille et Une Nuits* and *Iznogoud* as an expression of French popular culture. It should be mentioned at this point that, particularly in the context of studies relating to the *Mille et Une Nuits*, popular culture is not only understudied in relation to products of elite literature. The neglect of popular culture in cultural and literary studies moreover goes hand in hand with a serious underestimation of its general impact in the different strata of society who more often than not would gain substantial elements of their knowledge of the *Nuits* and the « Orient » in general from wide-spread products of popular culture such as the French comics of Iznogoud.

### *The History of Iznogoud*

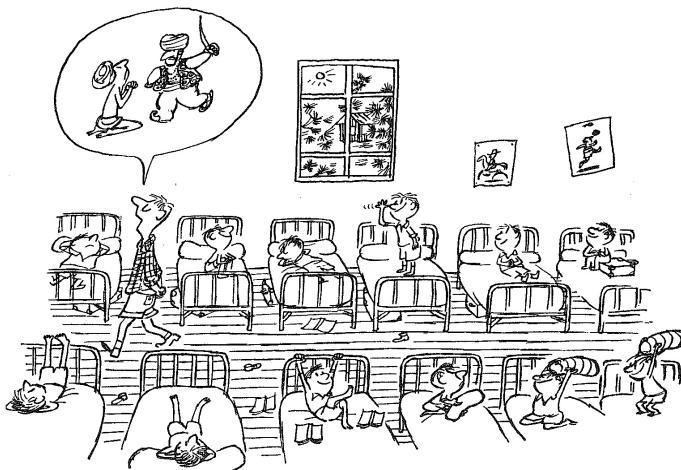
In an interview with *Le Journal du Dimanche* dated 20 October 1974, René Goscinny (1926-1977), the author who designed Iznogoud in collaboration with the artist Jean Tabary (1930-2011), has stated that :

La série *Iznogoud* est née d'une façon spéciale : elle est curieusement issue du *Petit Nicolas* que je faisais avec Sempé. J'avais écrit une histoire où Nicolas était en vacances dans une colonie, avec un moniteur qui racontait des histoires aux enfants. Et il leur avait raconté l'histoire d'un méchant grand vizir qui voulait toujours devenir calife à la place du calife. C'était tout. Et, lorsqu'on nous a demandé une série à Tabary et moi pour la revue *Record*, j'ai pensé faire une parodie des *Mille et une nuits*, en prenant toujours le thème du vizir qui veut devenir calife et qui n'y arrive pas. Et puis j'ai décidé que là je m'abandonnerais à mon péché mignon de trouver les calembours les plus atroces.<sup>6</sup>

The book *Les vacances du petit Nicolas* quoted by Goscinny was first published in 1962. The scene he refers to has been lively illustrated by Sempé [ill. 1].

<sup>5</sup> See U. MARZOLPH, « Jamais Calife ! Der orientalistische Comic als narrative Matrix », dans R. W. BRENDICH (ed.), *Erzählkultur : Beiträge zur kulturwissenschaftlichen Erzählforschung*, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2009, p. 381-397.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted at <<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iznogoud>> ; <<https://m.actualite.com/n/54427>> ; <<http://lewebpedagogique.com/vitale/category/conseils-de-lecture/>> ; <<http://www.bdparadisio.com/intgosc.htm> and other websites>, accessed February 11, 2015.



Ill. 1. The « invention » of *Iznogoud: Les vacances du petit Nicolas* (1962).

It reads as follows :

– Une histoire, chef ! Une histoire ! nous avons tous crié.  
 – Le chef a fait un gros soupir et il a dit que bon, d'accord, mais silence.  
 – Il y avait une fois, a dit le chef, dans un très lointain pays, un calife qui était très bon, mais qui avait un très méchant vizir

...

Comme plus personne ne dormait, le chef a continué à nous raconter son histoire.

C'était pas mal, surtout la partie où le chouette calife se déguise pour savoir ce que les gens pensent de lui, et le grand vizir, qui est drôlement méchant, en profite pour prendre sa place.<sup>7</sup>

The most recent volume of *Les nouvelles aventures d'Iznogoud, Iznogoud président* (2012), alludes to this episode that was essential for the BD's genesis when Nicolas (in the original black and white, in contrast to the usual colored characters) makes a short appearance visiting the magician « Lâkan » (a little veiled parody of French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan [1901-1981]). As Nicolas leaves, Lâkan advises him that he should talk to

<sup>7</sup> Quoted at <[http://roble.ptnic.mec.es/apadilla/autourdufrancais/contenus/coursdefrancais/4ESO/LitteratureLe%20petit%20Nicolas/la\\_sieste.html](http://roble.ptnic.mec.es/apadilla/autourdufrancais/contenus/coursdefrancais/4ESO/LitteratureLe%20petit%20Nicolas/la_sieste.html)> ; <<http://users.skynet.be/asterixlegaulois/divers/iznogoud.htm>>, accessed February 11, 2015.

Ill. 2. Nicolas in *Iznogoud président* (p. 4).

his parents who have given him « ce prénom grotesque » ; a note on the margin explains further that the name was « peu usité à cette époque à Bagdad » [ill. 2].<sup>8</sup>

Initially published in the journals *Record* and *Pilote*, the first album of *Iznogoud*, *Le grand vizir Iznogoud*, was published with Dargaud in 1966. Until his early death in 1977, Goscinny wrote the scenario for a total of 13 albums and three collections of one-pagers (*Les cauchemars d'Iznogoud*, vols. 1-3) that were published in albums after his death (1979, 1994, 1994). Twelve of the original albums were published with Dargaud, album 13 appeared with BD'Star. Since details of the publication history have been repeatedly published in the internet,<sup>9</sup> suffice it to point out here that the character of the series changed dramatically as of vol. 14, when Jean Tabary decided to continue the commercially successful series on his own, taking care of both the text and the images. Between 1981 and 2004, Tabary published another eleven albums. As of 2008, a

<sup>8</sup> *Iznogoud président*, text by N. CANTELOUP, L. VASSILIAN, dessins de N. TABARY, Paris, IMAV éditions, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> See <<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iznogoud#Albums>> ; <<http://www.bdcentral.com/Iznogoud/albums.html>> ; <<http://www.bedetheque.com/albums-146-B-D-Iznogoud.html>>, accessed February 1, 2015.

younger generation has taken over, again changing the original concept of the series.<sup>10</sup> The present discussion is restricted to those 13 albums whose scenario was developed by Goscinny.

1. *Le Grand Vizir Iznogoud* (1966)
2. *Les Complots du grand vizir Iznogoud* (1967)
3. *Les Vacances du calife* (1968)
4. *Iznogoud l'infâme* (1969)
5. *Des Astres pour Iznogoud* (1969)
6. *Iznogoud et l'ordinateur magique* (1970)
7. *Une Carotte pour Iznogoud* (1971)
8. *Le Jour des fous* (1972)
9. *Le Tapis magique* (1973)
10. *Iznogoud l'acharné* (1974)
11. *La Tête de turc d'Iznogoud* (1975)
12. *Le Conte de fées d'Iznogoud* (1976)
13. *Je veux être calife à la place du calife* (1978)

### *Who is Iznogoud ?*

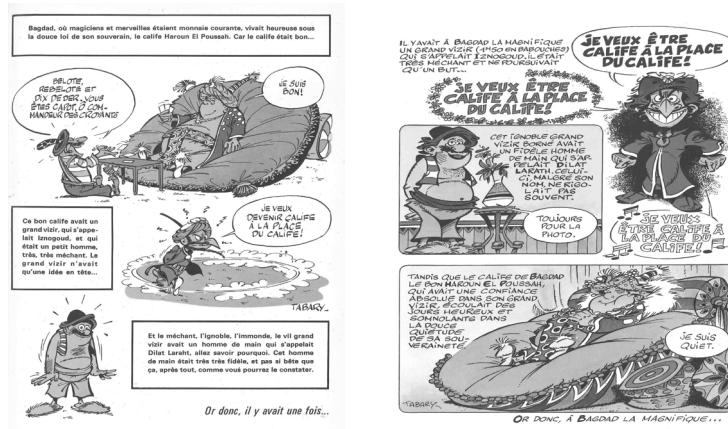
From the beginning, the evil vizier Iznogoud, whose name (= He's no good) is his program, was the main character of the series. Of course, in order to continue, the series requires that he never reaches his goal to « devenir calife à la place du calife », and as Iznogoud continues to devise new plots, one after the other fails. It is thus somewhat surprising to see that the first volume of the series bears the serial heading « Les aventures du Calife Haroun el-Poussah », a heading that was only changed to « Les aventures du grand vizir Iznogoud » as of the following volume. Similarly, the page that in every volume introduces the characters as well as the general scenario underwent a small, yet decisive change from the first to most of the subsequent albums. In the first album, it is the caliph who is first portrayed as the good ruler of the mythical city of Bagdad « où magiciens et merveilles étaient monnaie courante » [ill. 3]. He is comfortably resting on a huge cushion, spending his time not by applying his « douce loi », but rather by playing cards with one of his servants. Even though he has apparently just lost the game, his only jovial commentary to the scene is

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<sup>10</sup> *Les Mille et Une Nuits du Calife*, scénario de M. TABARY-DUMAS, S. TABARY, dessin N. TABARY, Paris, Tabary, 2008 ; *Iznogoud président*, op. cit.

« Je suis bon ! » In fact, passively enjoying his own naïve goodness without expecting anybody to do him harm is one of the caliph's major traits of his character. Only in second place, the initial page introduces the grand vizier Iznogoud, « qui était un petit homme, très, très méchant. Le grand vizir n'avait qu'une idée en tête... », and this idea is illustrated by Iznogoud restlessly pacing around in his room while expressing his goal « Je veux devenir calife à la place du calife ». The third character introduced on the page is the « homme de main » Dilaht Larat, (whose name is a contortion of the French idiom « se dilater la rate » = to rock with laughter), who « était très fidèle, et pas si bête que ça, après tout ». As it to be expected, Dilaht Larat adds spice to the action, often by warning Iznogoud about the consequences of his schemes or suffering himself from Iznogoud's evil plans.

From the second album onwards, the focus of this introduction changes [ill. 4]. Now « Bagdad la magnifique » is introduced



Ill. 3. Introductory leaflet in the first album.

Ill. 4. Introductory leaf in most of the subsequent albums of *Iznogoud*.

as the city of the « grand vizir (1<sup>m</sup>50 en babouches) » Iznogoud who as before is characterized as being « très méchant ». His goal of « être calife à la place du calife » is now prominently voiced a total of three times in different modes of expression, two of which are graphically denoted as charming (being framed with petals)

and melodious (by added musical notes). The « fidèle homme de main » Dilaht Larat is presented second, somewhat foolishly smiling « pour la photo ». The caliph, now relegated to the third position, is introduced as « le bon Haroun El Poussah, qui avait une confiance absolue dans son grand vizir » and who instead of worrying about his vizier's plots or even noticing them « écoulait des jours heureux et somnolants dans la douce quiétude de sa souveraineté », as before relaxing on a huge cushion, now complacently saying « Je suis quiet ».

The main course of action is further emphasized by the albums' fly-leaves one of which depicts a compilation of Iznogoud expressing his one and only goal in different moods, ranging from a factual mode via angry, imploring and tired expressions to uncontrolled frustration and vicious outbursts of anger [ill. 5].

### *Allusions to The Thousand and One Nights*

From the beginning, Goscinny had envisaged the series as a « parodie des *Mille et Une Nuits* » (see note 6). We may surmise



Ill. 5. Flyleaf in most albums of *Iznogoud*.

that after two centuries and a half of deep immersion had passed since Antoine Galland had introduced the *Nuits* to the French (and the world) audience, it might be difficult for any person acquainted with French culture not to have the least idea about the *Nuits*. But what exactly is this idea that may be presumed to be known to the French public at large ? Rather than expecting a detailed and somewhat adequate repercussion of the variety and complexity of the *Nuits*, besides the scenario's location in a fairy-tale Bagdad that is vaguely reminiscent of the *Nuits*, this idea is restricted to the « usual suspects » (Sheherazade, Aladdin, and Ali Baba), a variety of djinnis, Sindbad the seafaring merchant appearing in various guises, the general character of the storyteller, and a few marginal motifs.

### *The usual suspects*

As is well known, the stories of *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba* did not belong to the original Arabic manuscript that served as the initial basis of Galland's adapted translation. Instead, Galland included them in the latter volumes of his publication as elaborated versions of the tales that the Syrian Maronite storyteller Hanna Diyab had performed for him. While details of the process of transmission have repeatedly been discussed,<sup>11</sup> it remains a notable paradox that precisely those tales that never belonged to the Arabic manuscript tradition of the *Nuits* eventually gained such a renown in European popular imagination that they came to be representative of the *Nuits*, and moreover of Oriental storytelling in general. When teaching the *Nuits*, I sometimes begin the course with a questionnaire asking students to list those tales of the *Nuits* they remember. It is from this experience that I label (the tales of) *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba* (together with *Sindbad*, who needs to be treated separately in the present context) the « usual suspects », because they are the ones even an uninitiated audience would invariably list. Only rarely are they accompanied by other better-known tales such as that of *Le pêcheur et le génie* or *Le cheval d'ébène*.

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., U. MARZOLPH, « Das Aladdin-Syndrom : Zur Phänomenologie des narrativen Orientalismus », in U. BRUNOLD-BIGLER, H. BAUSINGER (eds.), *Hören, Sagen, Lesen, Lernen : Bausteine zu einer Geschichte der kommunikativen Kultur*, Festschrift Rudolf Schenda, Bern, Peter Lang, 1995, p. 449-462 ; A. CHRAÏBI, « Galland's Ali Baba and Other Arabic Versions », in U. MARZOLPH (ed.), *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2007, p. 3-15.

In Iznogoud, the « usual suspects » are rarely mentioned, and if they are, they mainly serve to emphasize an atmosphere that vague-



Ill. 6. The « usual suspects » in the *Musée de Cire* (« Scandale à Bagdad », p. 23-24).

ly alludes to the *Nuits*. Right at the beginning of the very first story ever published, « Le génie », Iznogoud – whose numerous plots to become caliph instead of the caliph have so far failed – wants to find a djinni : « Il nous faudrait un génie. Comme celui de la lampe d’Aladin. Le génie qui apparaît, qui obéit et qui est capable de tout faire ».<sup>12</sup> The initial image of the futuristic adventure « Magie-Fiction » depicts a shop whose sign advertises « Aladin’s Luminaires », and a desperate customer is asking « Vouz n’avez rien pour faire simplement de la lumière ? Sans génie ? ».<sup>13</sup> « Chassé croisé » begins by mentioning that in « Bagdad la superbe il existait bon nombre d’établissements où l’on servait l’eau de rose, le thé de Chine, le nectar des indes, et où l’on pouvait rencontrer des êtres étranges et merveilleux : voyageurs, fakirs, magiciens, derviches, génies... ». The story begins in « un établissement de ce genre... un établissement

<sup>12</sup> « Le génie », *Le grand vizir Iznogoud*. Paris, Dargaud, 1966, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> « Magie fiction », *Une carotte pour Iznogoud*, Paris, Dargaud, 1967, p. 25.

fréquenté naguère par les 40 voleurs d'Ali Baba, d'où son nom... » – a name that is given as « Au rendez-vous des faucheurs ».<sup>14</sup> In the tale « Scandale à Bagdad » contained in the final album texted by Goscinny, Iznogoud and Dilaht Larat visit a *Musée de Cire* where we find all of the « usual suspects » exhibited together : « Aladin et la lampe merveilleuse », « Simbad le marin », « Shéhérazade racontant pendant 1.000 et une nuits des histoires au calife Haroun al Rashid » and, finally, « Ali Baba et les 40 voleurs ». Funnily, all of them have been produced from the same mold, and only their costumes distinguish the characters from each other [ill. 6].<sup>15</sup>

### *The djinnis*

By far the most often quoted group of characters relating to the *Nuits* are the djnnis. In fact, even though they sometimes have to be summoned, they are present in the tales with the same natural attitude as any other character endowed with magic capacities, including fakirs and magicians.<sup>16</sup>

The djinni in « Le génie » is bound to a pair of green *babouches* and has the power to transform living beings [ill. 7].<sup>17</sup> The djinni in « Le dissolvant malfaisant » lives in « une région insalubre de marécages putrides et sinistres » ; he has the power to dissolve anything that comes into contact with the water he inhabits.<sup>18</sup> In « L'élève d'Iznogoud » the djinni is contained in a small bottle owned by the son of Haroun El Poussah's neighbour Sultan Pullmankar ; when the bottle is opened, a huge and evil-tempered black slave appears who in the end helps the little boy to become « sultan à la place du sultan », his father.<sup>19</sup> In « Le jour de fous », the djinni is summoned by rubbing the magic lamp ; rather than obeying orders, however, he expects his master to serve him, as on

<sup>14</sup> « Chassé croisé », *Les complots d'Iznogoud*, Paris, Dargaud, 1967, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> « Scandale à Bagdad », *Je veux être calife à la place du calife*, Paris, BD'Star, 1978, p. 23-24.

<sup>16</sup> « Les vacances d'été ou Tas d'attentats », *Le vacances du Calife*, Paris, Dargaud, 1968, p. 5, 13.

<sup>17</sup> « Le génie », *Le grand vizir Iznogoud*, Paris, Dargaud, 1966, p. 5-12.

<sup>18</sup> « Le dissolvant malfaisant », *Iznogoud l'infâme*, Paris, Dargaud, 2001, p. 5-12.

<sup>19</sup> « L'élève d'Iznogoud », *Des astres pour Iznogoud*, Paris, Dargaud, 1969, p. 13-20.

this particular day, the usually reigning hierarchies are reversed.<sup>20</sup> In « Elections dans le Califat » we even learn that djinnis are organised in their own worker's union as everybody else ; their organisation is called G.N.O.U.F. (= Génies nationaux organisés unifiés et fédérés).<sup>21</sup>

Probably the historically most interesting of those djinnis is the one bound to the *babouches*. While there is no such djinni mentioned in the *Nuits*, the babouches as an object of « Oriental » (or rather Orientalist) narratives are bound to ring a bell with the educated French audience.<sup>22</sup> Even though one might presume the unusual magic object to have been invented by Goscinny, the babouches belong to the regular inventory of « Oriental » motifs used by French authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, the *babouches* make a prominent appearance in a story that is quoted several times in the popular genre of Oriental florilèges, a genre that was originally initiated by Galland's *Paroles remarquables* (1697). The tale is about the stingy Abū al-Qāsim Tanbūrī who when trying to get rid of his old slippers causes one unlucky accident after the other until he finally has the Qadi issue an order that from now on nobody may hold him responsible for any disaster caused by the slippers. First known from fifteenth-century Arabic literature, the tale was translated to French from a seventeenth-century Ottoman work and published in Denis Dominique Cardonne's *Mélanges de littérature orientale* (1770) from where it was subsequently quoted. Considering the tale's popularity in French literature, it does not appear far-fetched to presume that Goscinny's djinni of the babouches was to some extent inspired by the tale of Abū al-Qāsim's slippers.

### *Sindbad*

The one single character from the *Nuits* that appears most often in the Iznogoud tales is Sindbad, or more correctly variations

<sup>20</sup> « Le jour des fous », *Le jour des fous*, Paris, Dargaud, 1972, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> For the following cf. U. MARZOLPH, « The Literary Genre of “Oriental Miscellany” », dans F. BAUDEN, A. CHRAÏBI, A. GHERSETTI (eds.), *Le Répertoire narratif arabe médiéval : transmission et ouverture*, Actes du colloque international, Université de Liège 15-17 septembre 2005, Genève, Droz, 2008, p. 315-316.

Ill. 7. *The génie des babouches* (« Le génie », p. 6).

of Sindbad, and it is here that Goscinny freely indulged in his « péché mignon de trouver les calembours les plus atroces », in this case to introduce variations of the name of Sindbad (see note 6). Except for Simbad's wax figure in the museum, quoted above, we encounter a variety of Sindbad-like characters such as (in alphabetical order) Boutad, Brandad, Cemballes, Cymbale, Gambah, Itsnotsobad, Itstoubad, and Timbal. Every one of them is introduced with the qualification « le marin », and each has a strange story of his adventures to tell, often involving a shipwreck reminiscent of Sindbad's voyages. When Iznogoud and « son fidèle homme de main » are about to board Boutad's ship, he wonders « Sans blague ! Vous voulez vraiment vous embarquer à bord de mon bateau ? »<sup>23</sup> Brandad, who is deaf, is the only one who escaped from being petrified by listening to the siren's chant.<sup>24</sup> Cemballes' ship is wrecked because he unwittingly transports Iznogoud who owns the jewel that attracts bad luck.<sup>25</sup> Cymbale is introduced by the owner of « un petit café louche du port » of Bagdad as having a lively imagination ; one of his legs has been devoured by cannibals.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> « La tête de Turc », *La tête de Turc d'Iznogoud*, Paris, Dargaud, 1975, p. 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> « Le chant qui fige », *ibid.*, p. 23-31.

<sup>25</sup> « Le diamant de malheur », *Iznogoud l'infâme*, op. cit., p. 21-28.

<sup>26</sup> « L'île des géants », *Le grand vizir Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 45-52.

Gambad El Galipeht is mentioned as having invented « une machine permettant d'atteindre les astres ».<sup>27</sup> Itsnotsobad, who has actually forgotten to buy the obligatory present for Iznogoud during his travels, presents him with a tube of toothpaste suggesting that this « redoutable et mystérieux onguent, qui m'a été vendu par un apothicaire peu avant mon départ des pays du soleil couchant » might actually have magical qualities that the vizier could use to become « calife à la place du calife ».<sup>28</sup> The crew of Itstoubad's ship is happy to be captured by pirates (incidentally the same pirates that usually make their appearance in *Astérix et Obélix*), as they « pense que l'esclavage est une amélioration notable de son sort ».<sup>29</sup> And Timbale is said to be « le marin le plus malchanceux du califat. Il a fait 26 voyages, et chaque fois, il lui arrive des catastrophes : il perd son navire, ses passagers et son équipage ... ».<sup>30</sup>

The adventure Iznogoud and the caliph experience together with Timbal is the only one that incorporates motifs from the Sindbad tales in some detail, as here we encounter both the cannibal cyclops of Sindbad's third voyage and the giant Roc, « un oiseau de l'ordre des falconiformes qui se nourri d'éléphants, d'hippopotames et de cyclopes » that appears in Sindbad's second and fifth voyages. Fortunately, when the company is first captured by the giant Cyclops, the Cyclops is then captured by the Roc, and Iznogoud and his company manage to escape since the Roc, « malgré sa taille assez forte, est une oiseau craintif... et la moindre émotion lui fait lâcher prise » [ill. 8].

Incidentally, one of the fanciful names introduced by Goscinny for the likenesses of Sindbad has a deeper historical connection to seafaring. French colleagues tell me that the name Brendad reminds them of Brandade de morue, a regional dish in the Provence, or Brandon, an apple-pie popular in the Normandie. Meanwhile, there exists a historical character known as Brendan (or Brandan) who happens to be famed for his travels. The medieval *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, probably first compiled in the tenth century, is a sort of Christian *Odyssey*. In terms of origin, it is a literary treatment of

<sup>27</sup> « Des astres pour Iznogoud », *Des astres pour Iznogoud*, Paris, Dargaud 1969, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> « L'onguent mystérieux », *Iznogoud et l'ordinateur magique*, Paris, Dargaud, 1970, p. 37-44.

<sup>29</sup> « Une carotte pour Iznogoud », *Une carotte pour Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> « La croisière du calife », *Les vacances du calife*, op. cit., p. 25-34.

the travels of the historical six-century abbot Brendan who is said to have founded many monasteries during his travels to Scotland



Ill. 8. The Cyclops and the Roc (*« La croisière du calife »*, p. 319).

and other neighbouring regions.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not Goscinny had this Brendan in mind when he invented Brendad must remain open to speculation. Even though allusions to learned literature might at times have reigned in the back of his mind, it is obvious that he took great pleasure in playfully suggesting various names that sound vaguely similar to Sindbad for various characters whose fate overlaps with Sindbad's in that most of them invariably suffer from shipwreck.

### *The storytellers*

Another feature linking *Iznogoud* to the *Nuits* is, of course, storytelling. Shéhérazade, the female storyteller in the *Nuits*, is

<sup>31</sup> C. STRIJBOSCH, *The Seafaring Saint : Sources and Analogues of the Twelfth-Century Voyage of Saint Brendan*, Dublin, Four Courts, 2000 ; G. S. BURGESS, C. STRIJBOSCH (eds.), *The Brendan Legend*, Leiden, Brill, 2006.

conspicuously absent in Goscinny's albums. Her parody only makes an appearance in the first album Tabary produced all by himself, *L'enfance d'Iznogoud*, originally published in 1981. Here Théléérazade is « la conteuse du commandeur des croyants » who entertains the caliph by reading from a bulky book titled *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, putting the caliph to sleep with the very first line she reads. While this is not really a magic act, the book itself has magic qualities : when Théléérazade hits somebody with the book (which she does repeatedly to put that person to sleep), that person in addition to his grown-up persona will also be present as a child. In Goscinny's albums the only travesty of Shéhérazade is the female character Razade who is said to run « l'établissement le plus couru de Bagdad », « Chez Razade », where they serve ice-cold drinks. Razade covets her face with a veil, and when questioned reveals her



Ill. 9. Razade (« Crime glacé », p. 34).

secret : « Quand je me dévoile la face, ceux qui la voient sont immédiatement glacés d'horreur » [ill. 9].<sup>32</sup> Needless to say that readers never get to see her face, and so it remains enigmatic whether she is extremely ugly or has some other features that cause the viewers to freeze in horror.

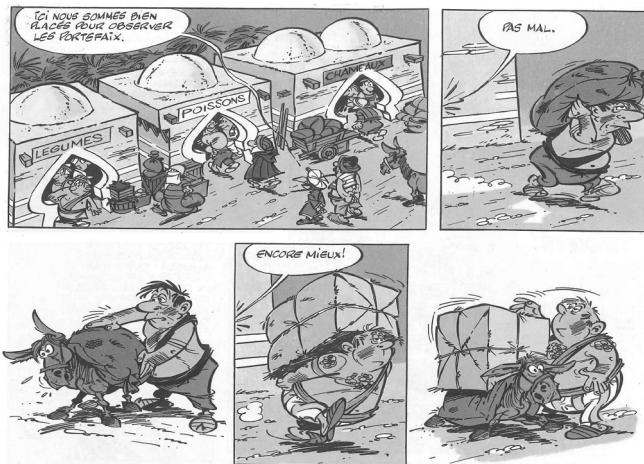
<sup>32</sup> « Crime glacé, ou, pour nos amis lecteurs anglo-saxons : Ice Crime », *Une carotte pour Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 33-40.



Ill. 10. Rashid, le barbier (« Les hommes de main », p. 25-26).

Other storytellers, notably all of them male, appear at times, albeit only in marginal roles. There is Haroun El Poussah's personal storyteller who knows the « merveilleuses histoires du lontain et mystérieux occident » ; the story he begins to tell is about « Sidi Marius et Sidi Olive », a couple from Provençale jocular tradition who have been immortalized in the popular French film « Marius et Olive à Paris » (1935) directed by Jean Epstein.<sup>33</sup> Another anonymous storyteller entertains his audience in public, and « après avoir charmé son auditoire par ses récits, présente un bulletin d'informations locales ».<sup>34</sup> Then there is Agaz the storyteller, « qui a beaucoup voyagé, et qui possède des tuyaux sur tout ce qui se passe en occident ».<sup>35</sup> The only storyteller who has a somewhat prominent role (in delaying the action) is Rashid, le barbier, « qui connaît toujours des histoires tellement drôles ».<sup>36</sup> As he stutters heavily, he takes a long time to even complete the simplest sentence ; nevertheless, the caliph enjoys his performance tremendously [ill. 10]. Judging from the way it begins, the story he is about to tell might be *Le pêcheur et le génie*.

<sup>33</sup> « La potion du Cheik », *Le tête de Turc d'Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 32.<sup>34</sup> « Des astres pour Iznogoud », *Des astres pour Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 5.<sup>35</sup> « Sports dans le califat », *Les vacances du calife*, op. cit., p. 15.<sup>36</sup> « Les hommes de main », *Le grand vizir Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 25-26.



III. 11. The porter (« Le défi », p. 24).

### *Various other motifs*

Besides the more prominent characters or features of the *Nuits*, Goscinny's stories occasionally also refer to a limited number of motifs that experts of the *Nuits* will easily recognize.

There is, for instance, the porter in « Le défi » [ill. 11] who is reminiscent of the character who plays a prominent role in the tale *Les trois dames de Bagdad*. As people in *Iznogoud* are rarely what they appear to be at first sight, the porter in the end turns out to be the bewitched daughter of Sultan Pullmankar who is disenchanted when Harooun El Poussah gives his opponent the traditional kiss before they start their combat.<sup>37</sup>

Prominently known from various stories of the *Nuits* and appearing twice in *Iznogoud* is the motif of the caliph who disguises himself so as to « se promener incognito dans Bagdad » [ill. 12] « pour savoir ce que mon bon peuple pense de moi » ;<sup>38</sup> even though the caliph is notoriously inattentive to what is going on in Bagdad, he appears to have a vague notion that « il paraît qu'il y a beaucoup de mécontents ».<sup>39</sup> In comparative folk narrative re-

<sup>37</sup> « Le défi », *Le jour des fous*, op. cit., p. 23-30.

<sup>38</sup> « Incognito », *Iznogoud et le tapis magique*, Paris, Tabary, 1994, p. 21-30, particularly at p. 23-25.

<sup>39</sup> « Le catalogue magique », *Iznogoud l'acharné*, Paris, Tabary, 1994, p. 46.



Ill. 12. Le calife se déguise (« Incognito », p. 25).

search, this motif has been catalogued as K 1812.17 : *King in disguise to spy out his kingdom*.<sup>40</sup> In the collective corpus of tales from the *Nuits* it is quoted a total of 20 times.<sup>41</sup> In « Incognito », we moreover encounter the motif of the tabu to look at a person of high standing who is about to be present in the streets [ill. 13]. Catalogued under C 312.2.1 : *Tabu : looking at princess on public appearance*,<sup>42</sup> this motif is prominently known from the tale of *Aladdin*.

Marginal as these motifs might appear, they indicate that Goscinny's acquaintance with the *Nuits* went beyond the tales of the « usual suspects ». At the same time, further research will have to discuss to which extent motifs such as these belonged to the stock of Orientalist motifs prevalent in French literature, a genre that to a certain extent was ruled by stereotypes such as that of the tyrannical ruler who would pass sentence arbitrarily.

<sup>40</sup> S. THOMPSON, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Revised and Enlarged edition, IV, Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1955, p. 431, cf. also H. EL-SHAMY, *A Motif Index of The Thousand and One Nights*, Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 164.

<sup>41</sup> U. MARZOLPH, R. VAN LEEUWEN, *op. cit.*, II, p. 806.

<sup>42</sup> S. THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, I, p. 512 ; EL-SHAMY, *op. cit.*, p. 44.



Ill. 13. Le calife va se promener (« Incognito », p. 23).

### *Allusions to The Thief of Bagdad*

A number of additional motifs furthermore indicate that Goscinny was not only inspired by Galland's *Nuits*, but also – and to some extent even more so – by one of the adaptations of the *Thousand and One Nights* that was extremely popular in twentieth-century Western culture, i.e. the various versions of the film « *The Thief of Bagdad* ».<sup>43</sup> This film's two best-known versions are those starring Douglas Fairbanks (1924), a lengthy adaptation of the tale of *Ahmad and the Fairy Peri-Banou*, and its 1940 remake by Alexander Corda ; various motifs from both films were later incorporated into the Disney cartoon version of *Aladdin* (1992).<sup>44</sup>

A strong argument for this source of inspiration is the frequent appearance of flying carpets in *Iznogoud*. As is well known, there are no flying carpets in the original Arabic *Nuits*, and the first flying carpet in the context of the *Nuits* is only mentioned in Galland's adaptation of Hanna's performance of the *Histoire du prince Ahmed*.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the flying carpet soon became a stock mo-

<sup>43</sup> For the following cf. U. MARZOLPH, « *Thief of Bagdad Films* », in D. HAASE (ed.), *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales & Fairy Tales*, III, Westport (Connecticut)/London, Greenwood, 2008, p. 966-968.

<sup>44</sup> M. COOPERTON, « *The Monstrous Births of “Aladdin”* », *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 1, 1994, p. 67-86.

<sup>45</sup> U. MARZOLPH, R. VAN LEEUWEN, *op. cit.*, II, p. 513-514 ; I, p. 80-82.



Ill. 14. The magic carpet (« Le tapis magique », p. 19).

tif of Orientalist fairy-tales, and its appearance in the final scene of Douglas Fairbanks' « The Thief of Bagdad » established its international prominence. Besides serving as the normal means of transportation in Goscinny's mythical Bagdad,<sup>46</sup> the flying carpet plays a prominent role in « Iznogoud et le tapis magique » where the magic word « Barbapapa » makes the carpet automatically transport itself (and every person aboard) to an unknown far-away place [ill. 14].<sup>47</sup>

In addition, Iznogoud shares two motifs with the 1940 remake of « Thief of Bagdad » that play an important role in the film. These are the transformation of a human into a dog and the rose that makes anybody who smells her fragrance lose their memory. In the 1940 « Thief of Badgdad », the evil vizier Jaffar turns the trickster character Abu into a dog ; the spell will only be broken when Jaffar embraces the princess.

In *Iznogoud*, an enchanted dog in the initial image of « Magie-

<sup>46</sup> « La horde », *Le grand vizir Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 32 ; « Chassé croisé », *Les complots d'Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 45-52, p. 51 ; « Les vacances d'été ou Tas d'attentas », dans *Le vacances du calife*, op. cit., p. 5-14, p. 5 ; « Magie fiction », *Une carotte pour Iznogoude*, op. cit., p. 25-32, p. 25 ; « Incognito », *Iznogoud et le tapis magique*, op. cit., p. 21-30, p. 21 ; « Scandale à Bagdad », *Je veux être calife à la place du calife*, op. cit., p. 15-32, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> « Le tapis magique », *Iznogoud et le tapis magique*, op. cit., p. 5-20.



Ill. 15. Scene of urban life in Goscinny's mythical Bagdad  
(« Magie fiction », p. 25)

fiction » implores a passer-by « Aidez-moi ! Je suis un prince victime d'un charme ! » [ill. 15].<sup>48</sup> And in « La flûte à toutous », a Chinese man possesses a magic flute that, when a specific melody is played, transforms a human into a dog and an enchanted dog back into a human.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in « Noirs dessins », Iznogoud protects a cat from an attacking vicious dog ; through this act of (unwitting) kindness, he undoes the spell that an envious magician had cast on one of his fellows.<sup>50</sup> Still more specific is the « rose de l'oubli », a blue rose that in the 1940 *Thief of Bagdad* makes the princess forget her love for Prince Ahmad. In « Le marchand de l'oubli » Iznogoud acquires a magic perfume that will cause « amnésie totale » to anybody who inhales its fragrance. During the various tricks he tries to make the caliph inhale the fragrance so as to lose his memory and enable himself to become caliph, he spreads the perfume first on a bouquet of purple roses, and next on a bush of wild roses [ill. 16].<sup>51</sup>

Finally, and probably most important, we need to consider

<sup>48</sup> « Magie fiction », *Une carotte pour Iznogoude*, op. cit., p. 25-32.

<sup>49</sup> « La flûte à toutous », *Iznogoud l'acharné*, op. cit., p. 27-34.

<sup>50</sup> « Noirs dessins », *Des astres pour Iznogoud*, op. cit., p. 37-38.

<sup>51</sup> « Le marchand de l'oubli », *Iznogoud l'acharné*, op. cit., p. 22-24.



Ill. 16. La rose de l'oubli (« Noirs dessins », p. 37-38).

the « Thief of Bagdad » films as a major source of inspiration for *Iznogoud*'s general plot. Without any doubt, Haroun El Poussah is a parody of the historical Hārūn al-Rashīd (706-809), the prototype of the just ruler in the *Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>52</sup> Incidentally, Haroun El Poussah's plumpness might be inspired by the plumpness of the historical character of Hārūn's wife, Zubayda, whose name literally means « little butter ball ».<sup>53</sup> Hārūn's close connection to his vizier Ja'far al-Barmakī is mentioned in many stories of the *Nights*,<sup>54</sup> particularly when both of them go out incognito for nocturnal strolls in the city of Bagdad. But even though historically, their relationship ended on a tragic note, as Ja'far was disposed of and executed, the image of the relationship depicted in the *Nuits* is a harmonious one. It was only tradition subsequent to Galland's *Nuits* that gradually transformed the competent vizier into an envious and vicious character, and again the impact the « Thief of Bagdad » films had on popular imagination in this respect cannot be underestimated.

<sup>52</sup> M. GERHARDT, *The Art of Storytelling*, Leiden, Brill, 1963, p. 419-470.

<sup>53</sup> U. MARZOLPH, R. VAN LEEUWEN, *op. cit.*, II, p. 740-741.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487-489.

### *Conclusion : Iznogoud's Orientalism*

Even though the general scenario in terms of ambience and major characters relates to the *Nuits*, it goes without saying that neither Galland's *Nuits* nor any of the versions of the « Thief of Bagdad » served as the sole source of inspiration for details in Goscinny's *Iznogoud*. Rather to the contrary, Goscinny drew freely on numerous sources, in particular fairy-tales and tales of magic of the European tradition.<sup>55</sup> While the *Nuits* thus supplied the plot's general frame, the above minute and fairly exhaustive analysis of motifs drawn from (different versions of) the *Nuits* should not deceive us into believing that the work's various versions served as the dominant source of inspiration for single motifs.

It is equally understood that *Iznogoud* does not intend to represent the historical Bagdad or, for that matter, any historical character, city, country, culture, or religion. As a fictional story taking place in the Bagdad of the *Mille et Une Nuits*, *Iznogoud* is part of a long tradition in which Western authors, screen-writers, or artists felt entitled to employ the « Orient » as a scenario in which their fictional action would take place.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo* (which I consciously do not call « Islamist » because I am firmly convinced that the reference to religion claimed by the murderers constitutes a violent abuse of Muslim or, for that matter, any religious values) it appears necessary to point out an important sensibility of Goscinny's fictional Orient : Goscinny never ever made fun of religion. A parody such as the one in which « Aïcha, la fille du prophète » [sic !] dances while singing « A-A-Allah queue leu leu » and provocatively saying « Ben quoi ? Je suis "Pro-fêtes" et alors ? » in one of the recent albums of *Iznogoud*<sup>57</sup> was out of question for him. Referring to several recent cases in which Western humor caused vio-

<sup>55</sup> See U. MARZOLPH, « Jamais Calife ! », *op. cit.*, p. 393-394.

<sup>56</sup> Out of the vast literature treating this aspect, see, e.g., R. KABBANI, *Imperial Fictions : Europe's Myth of Orient*, London, Pandora, 1994 ; J. M. MACKENZIE, *Orientalism : History, Theory and the Arts*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995 ; R. LEWIS, *Gendering Orientalism : Race, Femininity, and Representation*, London, Routledge, 1996 ; M. BERNSTEIN, G. STUDLAR (eds.), *Visions of the East : Orientalism in Film*, New Brunswick (New Jersey), Rutgers University Press, 1997 ; M. YEGENOĞLU, *Colonial Fantasies : Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>57</sup> *Iznogoud président*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

lent reactions from the satirized Muslims, I have repeatedly voiced my conviction that intercultural contacts need to be based on mutual respect.<sup>58</sup> Even though Goscinny was the child of a time in which the colonialist arrogance of employing an Orientalist scenario to make fun of whatsoever was not seriously questioned, he never elaborated racial nor religious stereotypes. His « Orient » is not the real Orient, whether historical or contemporary, and his characters are equally unreal, as they relate to the fictional adaptations of historical characters in the *Nuits*. He never made fun of the « Orient ». Instead, he used the ambience of the *Mille et Une Nuits* to tell his funny stories about the fruitless vicious plots of an overambitious character who rather than belonging to any specific historical or cultural context illustrates common human vices and foibles.

*Résumé* – Outre le fait d'avoir atteint un public cible plutôt élitaire, Antoine Galland, en traduisant les *Mille et Une Nuits*, rejoignait aussi le champ élargi de la culture populaire. Depuis les éditions de la Grub Street de Londres, au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, jusqu'aux nombreux contes qui se diffusaient par voie orale dans toute l'Europe des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, la culture populaire s'est appropriée les *Mille et Une Nuits* de manière distincte et spécifique selon les pays. Si l'on considère le succès de longue durée des *Nuits*, il est peu surprenant de retrouver, encore au milieu du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, de nouvelles expressions culturelles qui s'y réfèrent. Aussi le présent article explore-t-il les relations entre les *Nuits* et la bande dessinée *Iznogoud*, considérée ici comme une expression de la culture populaire française à travers laquelle différentes strates de la société ont appréhendé les *Mille et Une Nuits* et « l'Orient ».

*Abstract* – In addition to the elite circles that constituted Antoine Galland's original target audience, the impact of the *Mille et Une Nuits* extended well into popular culture. Ranging from the early eighteenth-century London Grub Street prints to the numerous tales of the *Nuits* that by way of their oral retellings became « folk tales » in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, the international popular audiences appropriat-

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<sup>58</sup> U. MARZOLPH, « Provokative Grenzbereiche im klassischen arabischen Witz », in G. TAMER (ed.), *Humor in der arabischen Kultur/Humor in Arabic Culture*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2009, p. 153-166. ID., « The Muslim Sense of Humor », in H. GEYBELS, W. VAN HERCK (eds.), *Humour and Religion : Challenges and Ambiguities*, London/New York, Continuum, 2011, p. 169-187.

ed the *Nuits* in their own specific ways. Considering the *longue durée* of the *Mille et Une Nuits* in France, it is little surprising that the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a particular repercussion of the *Nuits* in the medium of bandes dessinées. The present essay explores the relations between the *Mille et Une Nuits* and the comics of *Iznogoud* as an expression of French popular culture by way of which different strata of society would gain substantial elements of their knowledge of both the *Nuits* and the « Orient ».

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Registrazione Pubblicazione Periodici - Trib. Bologna, n° 4925 del 29/7/1981.

Stampa: ABC TIPOGRAFIA - SESTO FIORENTINO (FI)