

The Tale of *Aladdin* in European Oral Tradition

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There once was a gipsy woman whose only son was very handsome. One day, the son said to his mother: "My dear mother! Go to the king and tell him I want to marry his daughter!" His mother refused to go, since it was quite unlikely that the king would give his daughter to a gipsy boy. But the young man would not let go, he went to the king and asked him for his daughter. The king said: "Get lost, you foul gipsy! How would I give my daughter to a gipsy?" But the young man kept on begging, until the king finally said: "Alright, I will give her to you if you bring three trees to my courtyard in the morning. One of them is to bear golden figs, the second one golden apples, and the third one golden pears."

Following this, the gipsy went to the church and stole everything he could lay his hands on. When he was ready to leave he noticed that he had left a rusty old lock. He thought by himself: "I will also take the lock. Perhaps this will be the most useful of all." And he decided to take the lock, too. When he turned it around three times, three beautiful maiden appeared addressing him: "O king, what is your command?" He told them to plant three trees in the king's courtyard in the morning of such and such a kind, and all three of them disappeared. In the morning, when the king looked into his courtyard, he noticed the three trees, just as he had asked for. Now what was left for him to do? He gave his daughter to the gipsy and also gave them a nasty pigpen to live in. The gipsy's wife was full of grief because of their nasty house. But the man consoled her and said: "Do not worry! It will all change to the better!" Then he took the lock, and again the three maidens appeared, and the gipsy told them to build a castle in front of the king's castle in the morning, just like the king's castle. They built a beautiful castle, and the gipsy and his wife moved in.

One day, when the gipsy had left his house, a jew came to his wife offering all kinds of nice goods. The gipsy's wife was fond of a pair of nice shoes and asked the jew for the price. The jew said: "I will not give them unless you hand me the rusty lock that is hanging on that nail over there!" Well, the woman gave it to him. But as the jew turned the lock around three times, again the three maidens appeared and asked him: "Master jew! What is your command?" And he ordered them to take the gipsy's wife to a place behind the seven seas, and they arrived there in a flash. Now the gipsy came

home and looked for his wife but could not find her anywhere. He asked everybody whether they had not seen his wife. A man told him that he had seen her with a jew on their way to behind the seven seas. So the gipsy decided to go there. He walked for three days and three nights, when suddenly he arrived behind the seven seas, where he found his wife and was very happy. At once he said: "Dear wife! Throw me the lock, so we can get back home!" The gipsy's wife said to the jew: "Master jew, sleep a little!" The jew fell asleep, the woman threw the lock to her husband, and they got back home. The gipsy became king and said: "Now the princess is mine." And they lived happily ever after. If they have not died, they are still alive.

How does the Hungarian "Tale of a Gipsy Boy", published in 1874¹, relate to my present subject? In terms of structure and motifs, the tale presents a fairly rudimentary narrative containing characteristic elements of a regular fairy tale, such as the following: The hero character originates from the lower strata of society and attains his fortune completely undeserved; the tale begins with the frequent initial situation of a lowly boy wooing the king's daughter; the magic object he finds is used by him without questioning its origin or qualities; and, finally, the formulaic number three is mentioned twice. In terms of the tale's sociological background one might point out the stereotypical characters of the thieving gipsy and the rapacious jew, both of which are politically incorrect in modern times but are frequently mentioned in historical texts. In terms of cultural history, an interesting element is mentioned by the "seven seas" as the ultimate expression of a far away place, constituting a vague echo of the ancient concept of the seven climates. And, finally, in terms of folkloristic typology, the narrative relates to a group of fairy tales whose action evolves around the central element of a magic object, such as Hans Christian Andersen's tale *Fyrtpøiet* ([The Lighter] 1835), the Grimm's tale *The Table, the Donkey, and the stick* (KHM 36) or the tale of *Aladdin and The Magic Lamp* from the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The last mentioned tale connects to the following considerations about the tale of *Aladdin* in European popular tradition as representative of the reception and adaptation of Oriental fairy tales in Europe. The main points I will discuss here are summed up in the sentence "Who tells which tale why and how?" In introducing my subject, I will briefly sketch the related theoretical context of historical and comparative folk narrative research as well as recall some of the main points of the reception of the *Thousand and One Nights* in Europe. The greater part of my presentation will discuss in some detail the background of the initially quoted tale, while my conclusion will ponder about the possibilities and limits of fairy tales as intercultural narratives.

1. Sklarek, E.: Ungarische Volksmärchen. Leipzig 1901, pp. 181–183, no. 17.

Probably the most productive controversy of folk narrative research was sparked by the opposition of 'Literature vs. Oral tradition'. It was mainly Walter Anderson and Albert Wesselski who served as the opponents of this debate that raged at the beginning of the twentieth century². While today the controversy is mostly of a historical interest, the influence of written sources on oral tradition was then fiercely debated. Anderson was a proponent of the so-called 'Finnish school'. This school focused on questions related to the origin and diffusion of tales by applying their 'historical-geographical method.' In harmony with the basic tenets of his school, Anderson opined that tales would preserve their structure and content over many generations solely by being passed on by way of oral tradition. Wesselski, on the other hand, relied on his extensive knowledge of written sources in many European languages. He argued that oral tradition would not persist out of its own virtue but rather needed a constant revitalization from written sources. Anderson saw the major forces shaping a tale's characteristic form in oral tradition as deriving from a 'primordial' form that has once been accepted and continued to dominate in a constant process of oral tradition. Wesselski, on the contrary, argued for a decisive influence of narratives contained in influential literary collections, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *Pentamerone*, Charles Perrault's *Contes de ma mère l'oye* or the *Tales for Children and members of the Household* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

While already the brothers Grimm had praised the *Thousand and One Nights* for "its fervent colors, its fragrance of undisturbed flourishing fantasy, and its constant breath of life"³, the narratives of the collection did not appear to contribute fruitfully to the debate of 'Literature vs. Oral Tradition'. The narratives were primarily identified as literary tales of Oriental origin, and both their form and their origin appeared to prohibit their inclusion in the debate. In the present context this historical evaluation needs to be revalidated. First, because a considerable part of the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* originates from oral tradition, i. e. the oral tradition of the Near and Middle East. And second, because several of the tales did have a considerable impact on European oral tradition⁴.

2. Fischer, H.: Schriftlichkeit. In: Enzyklopädie des Märchens [EM] 12. Berlin/New York 2007, cols. 204–212; Wesselski, A.: Versuch einer Theorie des Märchens. Regensburg i. B. 1931; Kiefer, E. E.: Albert Wesselski and Recent Folktale Theories. (Bloomington 1947) Reprint New York 1973; Anderson, W.: Zu Albert Wesselskis Angriffen auf die finnische folkloristische Forschungsmethode. Tartu 1935; Honko, L.: Zielsetzung und Methoden der finnischen Erzählforschung. In: *Fabula* 26 (1985), pp. 318–335.

3. Brüder Grimm: Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Ausgabe letzter Hand mit den Originalanmerkungen der Brüder Grimm. Mit einem Anhang [...] und Herkunftsnachweisen herausgegeben von Heinz Rölleke. Stuttgart 1980 (1993). vol. 3, pp. 348–350, at p. 350 [362].

4. See Horálek, K.: Märchen aus Tausend und einer Nacht bei den Slaven. In: *Fabula* 10 (1969), pp. 156–195; Stewart, J.: Aladdin in Aran: Folktales from Inis Mor, 1895. In: *Papers II. The 8th Congress for the International Society for Folk Narrative Research*. Bergen, June

Considering these arguments, the interaction of literature and oral tradition of narratives from the *Thousand and One Nights* constitutes a promising subject for discussing general processes of reception and tradition.

Various sources suggest that the frame tale of the *Thousand and One Nights* as well as, probably, some of the included narratives, were known in Europe long before Antoine Galland's translation. These sources include Italian Renaissance novelists Giovanni Sercambi's (1347–1424) *Novella d'Astolfo* and Ludovico Ariosto's (1474–1533) *Orlando furioso*⁵ as well as the Spanish tale *La doncella Teodor*, probably dating from as early as the thirteenth century. The collection's major impact on European tradition is, however, due to Galland's translation as published between 1704 and 1717⁶. The only point of the collection's complex history relevant to the present context relates to the fact that the manuscript Galland translated was incomplete, and one of the major sources he used to fulfill his readers' expectations was the oral performance of the Syrian Maronite storyteller Hanna Diyab⁷. Galland's adapted translation, praised in the history of French literature as a 'belle infidèle'⁸, was immediately translated into other European languages such as English and German, and soon the collection's most popular tales were published in cheap 'Grub Street' booklets and later on in large quantities of popular selections⁹. As for the impact of books in historical times, we have to keep in mind that the process of reading a book in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not necessarily imply individual reading in solitude. Rather to the contrary, books were often read out aloud as entertainment for a listening audience. This process of semi-public reading opened up numerous ways to transmit to illiterate strata of society popular literature such as the booklets with tales from the *Thousand and One Nights*. While direct testimonies of this process of transmission are rare, the situation quoted in the following is probably representative of a larger process. The text is taken from Ulrich Jahn's preface to his *Volksmärchen aus Pommern und Rügen* (Popular Tales from the Region of Pommern and Rügen [in East Germany]), published in 1891:

12th – 17th 1984. Edited by Reimund Kvideland and Torunn Selberg. Bergen 1984, pp. 229–237; Cox, H. L.: "L'Histoire du cheval enchanté" aus 1001 Nacht in der mündlichen Überlieferung Französisch-Flanderns. In: *Volkskultur – Geschichte – Region*. Festschrift Wolfgang Brückner. Edited by D. Harmening and E. Wimmer. Würzburg 1990, pp. 581–596.
5. Marzolph, U./van Leeuwen, R.: *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* 1–2. Santa Barbara, Calif./Denver/Oxford 2004, at vol. 2, p. 698 and 483 sq.

6. *ibid.*, pp. 556–560.

7. *ibid.*, pp. 582 sq.; Grotzfeld, H.: Hannâ Diyâb. In: *EM* (see note 2) 6 (1990), cols. 485–487.

8. See May, G.: *Les Mille et une nuits d'Antoine Galland*. Paris 1986; Larzul, S.: *Les Traductions françaises des Mille et une nuits. Étude des versions Galland, Trébutien et Mardrus*. Paris 1996, at pp. 19–116.

9. See Chauvin, V.: *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux Arabes publiés dans l'Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1885*. vol. 4. Liège/Leipzig 1900, at pp. 25–120.

A maid had been presented by her masters with a selection of the narratives of the *Thousand and One Nights* for reading. She liked the well-known tale of *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* best. She read it again and again until she could reproduce it by heart. Then she would retell the tale when occasionally visiting the neighboring village. A storyteller picked up the tale from her and narrated it a generation after he had heard it himself. Out of the tales he remembered, it was his favorite tale, since it was taken from a printed book and therefore was surely more beautiful than all the other stories he knew¹⁰.

Altogether about a quarter out of the roughly 500 narratives contained in the different versions, manuscripts, printed editions and translations of the *Thousand and One Nights* have been classified according to the international system of *The Types of the Folktales*¹¹. Many of the narratives not classifiable according to the system of Indo-European tradition are indigenous Arabic tales. Meanwhile, several of the narratives that fit within the system have not necessarily been introduced to European tradition by *The Thousand and One Nights*, since they are also contained in other literary works that were transmitted to the West at a considerable earlier period¹². Leaving aside for the moment the latter narratives, the most promising objects for the present consideration are those narratives that are solely contained in *The Thousand and One Nights* and that, consequently, can only have been transmitted to Western tradition by way of this particular collection. The “usual suspects” are, above all, those narratives the European audience takes as representative for the whole collection, such as “The Fisherman and the Demon”, “Prince Ahmad and the Fairy Peri-Banu” and “The Ebony Horse”. Most of all, however, two stories in popular appreciation tower above all the others: “Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp”, and “Ali Baba and the Forty Robbers”. I have stressed at various occasions that these tales are the European audience’s favorites not by sheer coincidence. Both “Aladdin” and “Ali Baba” have been told to Galland by Hanna Diyab, both tales have been remodeled and both have, to a certain extent, been reinvented by Galland in the creative rewriting he based on the short notes he had taken down from Hanna’s oral performance in his diary. Moreover, both tales elaborate morals and values familiar to the European audience. Consequently, their enthusiastic appreciation partly relies on the fact that the audience was presented with tales that in their Oriental coloring

10. Jahn, U.: *Volksmärchen aus Pommern und Rügen*. Norden/Leipzig 1891, p. XVI.

11. Marzolph, U.: *The Arabian Nights in Comparative Folk Narrative Research*. In: *Arabian Nights and Orientalism. Perspectives from East and West*. Edited by Y. Yamanaka and T. Nishio. London 2005, pp. 3–24; Marzolph/van Leeuwen (see note 5), pp. 795–800.

12. Heller, B.: *Arabische Motive in deutschen Märchen und Märchendichtungen*. In: *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Märchens 1*. Edited by J. Bolte and L. Mackensen. B. 1930, pp. 93–108, at pp. 96–100 (B I, 2).

were alien enough to be thought of as authentically Oriental while at the same time being European enough not to provoke feelings of alienation¹³. Thus it was a matter of course that those two tales became the European audience's particular favorites. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they were transmitted to the reading and listening audience by way of numerous popular editions and in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they would potentially be retold, often by illiterate narrators, and subsequently would be recorded by folklorists. While the general outlines of this process are fairly clear it will be interesting to have a closer look at what happened to the tale of Aladdin in European popular tradition.

The initially quoted Hungarian "Tale of a Gipsy Boy" at first sight does not look like a tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*. The gipsy is a typical underdog character of Hungarian popular tradition; the church from where the gipsy steals the lock points to a Christian context, and the pigpen where the gipsy and his wife are supposed to live clearly indicates that the tale's indigenous context is not an Islamic one. And still the tale is a variant of the tale of "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp". The characteristic details of the Hungarian tale are nothing but the outcome of an adaptation to the cultural context of nineteenth century Hungarian tradition. They result from a process of cultural adaptation to which narratives have to submit in order to remain culturally intelligible and in order to avoid being identified as alien, a verdict that would sooner or later lead to their disappearance from oral tradition¹⁴. It is not always easy to determine the exact nature of this process of adaptation in terms of cultural, time-bound, or regional characteristics. Moreover, the narrator may have added individual peculiarities escaping our interpretation. In the case of the Hungarian "Tale of the Gipsy Boy", however, we are fortunate to be able to reconstruct the chain linking the narrative to the tale of "Aladdin" from the *Thousand and One Nights* without any major gap.

The tale of "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp" was narrated to Galland by Hanna Diyab on May 5, 1709, probably having started the tale's telling the day before. The corresponding note in Galland's diary reads: "le matin, le maronite Hanna d'Alep, acheva de me faire le récit du conte de la lampe" ("in the morning, the Maronite Hanna from Aleppo finished telling the tale of the lamp")¹⁵. Contrary to most of the tales Hanna narrated later, Galland's diary does not contain an extensive summary of the tale, and a purported

13. Marzolph, U.: Der Orient in uns. Die Europa-Debatte aus Sicht der orientalistischen Erzählforschung. In: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft 15,4 (2004). pp. 9–26, particularly at pp. 14–19.

14. See Marzolph, U.: Arabia ridens. Die humoristische Kurzprosa der frühen adab-Literatur im internationalen Traditionsgeflecht 1–2. Frankfurt am Main 1992, at vol. 1, pp. 234–246; Dégh, L.: Akkulturation. In: EM (see note 2) 1 (1977), pp. 234–239; Honko, L.: Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition. In: Studia Fennica 26 (1981), pp. 19–33.

15. Abdel-Halim, M.: Antoine Galland, sa vie et son œuvre. Paris 1964, p. 273.

written version later produced by Hanna probably belongs to the realm of legend; at least it has not been preserved. The two Arabic manuscript versions later identified by Western scholars have beyond reasonable doubt been shown to constitute intentional mystifications, one of them produced by Michel Sabbagh, the other by Dom Chavis¹⁶. Being published in the ninth volume of Galland's *Mille et une nuit* (1712), the tale of Aladdin soon became a particular favorite of the European audience. Today, after almost three hundred years after its introduction into world literature, its reception besides innumerable printed versions, adaptations and retellings includes numerous pieces of music, drama, pantomime, and film. One of the last major adaptations was presented in 1992 by the Walt Disney studios¹⁷. While the Hungarian tale derives from the tale of Aladdin, it does not do so directly, but rather stems from a lesser known branch of a wide-spread process of adaptation in European oral tradition.

One of the earliest literary reworkings of the tale of Aladdin was published in 1739 by German author Johann Leonhard Rost (1688–1727). Rost's tale titled "A nice story worth reading about the unfathomable lock in the African cave of Xaxa" is contained in his book *Meleatons Wohlangerichtete und neuerfundene Tugendschule* (Meleaton's well-prepared and newly invented school of manners)¹⁸. While modern critics have evaluated the tale as 'long-winded'¹⁹ and 'fairly manipulated'²⁰, Joseph Görres writing about German chapbooks in 1809 was rather enthusiastic. Görres had read the tale's version as published towards the end of the eighteenth century in Cologne, notably together with a "pretty story of a drunken peasant who had been to hell and purgatory". In introducing Rost's version, Görres in a slightly pathetic tone says: "As if coming forth from solid flint stone, in the North the solid power produced the spark of poetry, while in the South it gushes forth in a voluntary discharge. In the thousand nights of Arabic fairy tales the fiery clouds stood under the ray of Canopus, and like a summer-lightning it lit up the northern dark." – Following the tale's condensed summary he comments: "This is the content of the fairy tale that moves playfully through the elements and rocks above earth and life in

16. Mahdi, M.: *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla) from the Earliest Known Sources*. vol. 3: Introduction and Indexes. Leiden/New York/Köln 1994, at pp. 51–72.

17. Marzolph, U.: *Das Aladdin-Syndrom. Zur Phänomenologie des narrativen Orientalismus*. In: *Hören, Sagen, Lesen, Lernen: Bausteine zu einer Geschichte der kommunikativen Kultur*. Festschrift Rudolf Schenda. Edited by U. Brunold-Bigler and Hermann Bausinger. Bern 1995, pp. 449–462; Cooperson, M.: *The Monstrous Births of 'Aladdin'*. In: *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1 (1994), pp. 67–86; Marzolph/van Leeuwen (see note 5), pp. 82–85.

18. Rost, J. L.: *Die wohlangerichtete neuerfundene Tugendschule. in welcher vier und zwanzig anmuthige Historien zu erlaubter Gemüths-Ergötzung der Jugend auf eine erbauliche Art vorgetragen und mit nützlichen Anmerkungen und Lehren begleitet worden. von Meleaton. Frankfurt 1739.*

19. *Märchen aus dem Nachlaß der Brüder Grimm*. Edited by H. Rölleke. Bonn ²1979, p. 99.

20. Ranke, K.: *Alad(d)in*. In: *EM* (see note 2) 1 (1977), pp. 240–247, at p. 242.

the sunshine. It is not a popular book (Volksbuch) in the narrow sense, since it did not originate from the people. Nevertheless its ease and graciousness of wonder have probably enabled the tale's easy access, and the people have adopted this alien with pleasure."²¹

From today's perspective, the most obvious characteristic of the tale of the "unfathomable lock in the African cave of Xaxa" is its anti-Jewish tone. The nameless sorcerer from the Maghreb who acts in the original tale of Aladdin has here turned into the malicious and tyrannical Jewish sorcerer Mattetai. Instead of an unnamed town in China, the action takes place in Constantinople, where Mattetai finds the boy Lameth. And besides Mattetai, the merchant to whom Lameth first sells the vessels the djinni had brought him is also a treacherous Jew – the latter trait, albeit, already being contained in the original story. The most peculiar trait of Rost's version is the magic object. This is not a lamp as the tale of Aladdin, but a rusty lock whose djinni appears when the lock is opened by turning its key. The German word for lock, "Schloß", also denotes a castle that in several versions is mentioned as the place where the magic object is kept. In order to avoid a misunderstanding, Gustav Schwab in his later rendering of the tale coins the term "key lock" (Schlüsselschloß)²². Rost's tale was published widely in the eighteenth century, gaining popularity as a chapbook. Consequently Görres understood it to pertain to the genre of "Volksbuch". Later it was included in standard series of the genre such as Gotthard Oswald Marbach's series *Volksbücher* (1838–1842) where it was published as volume 25.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century Rost's version of the tale of Aladdin has also been recorded from oral tradition. Probably the earliest recording is contained in the literary bequest of the brothers Grimm who had received the text from the family Haxthausen located in the Northern German town of Paderborn in 1817. The text is a creative, albeit slightly confused variant titled "Of the lock Saza in the African cave". Here, we find the boy as an apprentice of a benevolent sorcerer. The malicious person who makes his appearance only somewhat later is again a Jew, whose wickedness is additionally underlined by the fact that he is black²³. In a Romanic version recorded in the Swiss region of Bündnerland, a poor peasant boy finds the magic object, a strangely formed ancient key, with his godfather, a blacksmith, and the object's magic servant is a black man²⁴. In a text from the Eastern German region of Silesia the hero's adversary, after abducting

21. Görres, J.: Die deutschen Volksbücher. Nähere Würdigung der schönen Historien, Wetter, und Arzneibüchlein, welche theils inneren Werth, theils Zufall, Jahrhunderte hindurch bis auf unsere Zeit erhalten hat. Heidelberg 1808, pp. 233 sq.

22. Die Deutschen Volksbücher für Jung und Alt wiedererzählt von Gustav Schwab. Teil 1. Gütersloh/Leipzig s. a., pp. 181–231, at p. 181.

23. Rölleke (see note 19).

24. Märchen aus dem Bündnerland. Nach dem Rätomanischen erzählt von Gian Bundi. Basel 1935, pp. 94 sq.

his wife, swallows the key, so that – as the text says – “nobody can henceforth summon the seven djinnis”; this element, however, later forces the hero to cut open his adversary’s belly²⁵. In Heinrich Pröhle’s version titled “The Jew and the Lock” (1835) a strong young man gains his beloved, the castle and imperial rule by proving his worth in three subsequent nights of suffering; the Jew and the magic lock only play a role when the castle is transported to a place behind the mountain “where neither sun nor moon do shine”; the hero’s helpers are three giants²⁶. Three giants also appear as the servants of the magic lock in the variant recorded by Ulrich Jahn at the end of the nineteenth century in Pommern; in order to summon the djinnis the lock here has to be shaken²⁷. All of the quoted German texts demonstrate that the narrators took great care to adopt the action to their background by introducing typical traits of their regional culture. More surprisingly, the text has also moved beyond the German language region to regions dominated at the time by German culture such as Hungary²⁸, Slovakia²⁹, and Estonia³⁰.

Turning to the main branch of the tale of Aladdin in European oral tradition, Kurt Ranke in his entry published in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (1975) has analyzed some 40 different texts. His analysis confirms the supposition voiced by earlier studies that the majority of variants of the tale of Aladdin recorded from oral tradition derive more or less directly from Galland’s text. Ranke states that besides the text contained in the bequest of the brothers Grimm “all variants from oral tradition have been recorded after 1850” and concludes that “the processes of evolution and diffusion did not permit the fairy tale to develop notable regional redactions, let alone oicotypical versions.”³¹ Ranke’s statement is probably right. One might, however, question whether his evaluation does justice to a tale deriving from a fairly late literary source. On the one hand, my analysis of the “Tale of the unfathomable lock in the African cave of Xaxa” has proved that the tale of Aladdin did, in fact, develop “notable redactions” of its own; on the other hand, it appears to be more promising to analyze the popular reception of the tale of Aladdin from a different perspective. When we focus on how “popular creativity” has adopted³² what Jahn has labeled the “young Oriental intruder”³³ one of the most obvious points is the fact that next to none of the variants recorded from oral tradition has preserved Galland’s original

25. Peuckert, W.-E.: Schlesiens deutsche Märchen. Breslau 1932, pp. 289–292, no. 127.

26. Pröhle, H.: Kinder- und Volksmärchen. Leipzig 1853, pp. 37–44, no. 9.

27. Jahn (see note 10) pp. 325–331, no. 59.

28. s. Berze Nagy, J.: Magyar népmesetípusok 1–2. Pécs 1957, s. v. Type 561 (text 1).

29. s. Polívka, J.: Súpis slovenských rozprávok 2. Turčiansky sv. Martin 1924, pp. 417–419, no. 29 A (a).

30. see the Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu, Estonia.

31. Ranke (see note 20), p. 244.

32. Görres (see note 21), p. 234.

33. Jahn (see note 10).

ending. In Galland's version the tale could have ended in a "happily ever after" as soon as the malicious sorcerer had been killed. Instead, another sorcerer, being the first one's brother, makes his appearance. This sorcerer dresses up as a holy woman, gains the confidence of Aladdin's wife and seeks to destroy both of them. He urges the woman to request from the servant of the lamp the egg of the fabulous bird Rokh, himself knowing quite well that this presumptuous wish would enrage the djinni. This ending was obviously experienced as unnecessary and, in fact, redundant by most narrators and was consequently left out in their retellings of the tale. A rare exception is constituted by the version recorded by Jahn from the already mentioned narrator in Pommern who performed the tale he had heard from the maid servant. Jahn says about this version:

Step by step the tale's performance retold the original, except for the fact that the good man has transformed dirty Aladdin, without knowing why and how, into a red-haired and faithless dumb Jack who could neither read nor write and did not even know how to say the Lord's Prayer. The garden that had been filled by Oriental fantasy with fruit-trees bearing pearls and jewels instead of ordinary fruit had been transformed to a popular garden of Fehnus. He had kept, however, the egg of the bird Rokh (Rochei) that plays such an important role in the original tale and that Aladdin should request from the djinni of the lamp to be inserted into the cupola of his castle. He deemed this trait to be too important to be changed. Consequently he narrated that in the end red-haired dumb Jack asked the djinni to bring king Reckeï ("Egg of the Rokh") and hang him at the top of the vault. When I (says the collector) told him that such a name as "Reckeï" did not exist, he calmly replied: "How do you want me to call him? You are cleverer than I am, so do give him a name that sounds better. His name is King Reckeï, and I shall call him by that name as long as I live."³⁴

This narrator's variation is probably the most creative one encountered in the oral versions of the tale of Aladdin, but other recordings also demonstrate varying degrees of creative adaptation. While Aladdin in the original tale is the son of a tailor, his father is sometimes mentioned as exercising another, notably always a lowly profession, such as that of shoemaker³⁵, broom maker³⁶ or swineherd³⁷. Instead of the lamp oral versions often mention a magic book or other document – a written

34. Jahn (see note 10), pp. XVI sq.; cf. Schenda, R.: *Von Mund zu Ohr*. Göttingen 1993, p. 225.

35. Goyert, G.: *Vlämische Märchen*. Jena 1925, pp. 68–75.

36. Sklarek (see note 1), pp. 183–189, no. 18.

37. Knoop, O.: *Volkssagen, Erzählungen, Aberglauben, Gebräuche und Märchen aus dem östlichen Hinterpommern*. Posen 1885, pp. 215–223, no. 11; also in Woeller, W.: *Deutsche Volksmärchen von arm und reich*. Berlin 1959, pp. 54–63, no. 9.

document constituting the quintessential representative of superior wisdom for the illiterate. For instance, in a Swedish version an impoverished notable finds a casket in a deserted house in the forest, and – as the tale says – “he was so hungry that his bowels clung to his ribs”, he opened the casket hoping to find something he could eat. Inside the casket he found another casket and inside that one another one; this went on and on until finally he opened a tiny box in which he found the magic object. This was a piece of paper containing the words “Lasse, my servant.” When reading those words aloud, the bodyless voice of the invisible djinni bound to the paper asked for his command³⁸. – In a version recorded by Ulrich Knoop from Eastern Pommern, the young apprentice of a sorcerer unintentionally kicks a book from the shelf whose pages open in falling down, “and at once a black man appeared from between the pages, bowed before the boy and asked: ‘His Royal Majesty, what is your command?’”³⁹ It is interesting to see that the tale’s narrator denied ever having read the story in a book, insisting instead that he had learned it from oral performance⁴⁰. This version has, moreover, been closely adapted to the narrator’s lowly social stratum. When his new master asks the hero, the son of a swineherd, what he would like to eat, the answer is: “If I had a plate of potatoes and herring or a good piece of bread, I would be quite happy.” – Another revealing case of the tale’s adaptation to the local context is given in a version recorded in 1895 on the Irish isle of Arran, in the words of its publisher James Stewart a case of “Aranisation”⁴¹. In the original tale, Aladdin transgresses the order not to watch the princess on her way to the public bath, and when he sees her, falls immortally in love. On the isle of Arran, everybody went to the beach in summer. Consequently, the hero hides behind one of the typical stone walls in the vicinity of the beach and, in order to watch his beloved without her noticing him, removes a few of the smaller stones to make a loophole.

A version from the German region of Siebenbürgen, in today’s Rumania, is only vaguely connected to the tale of Aladdin in Rost’s version. In fact, the only direct relation is constituted by the hero’s adversary employing the magic object to transport the hero’s castle and wife to a distant land – as the text says: “to the Arabic lands, where the Arabs are.”⁴² Besides this rather vague reminiscence, this version is a somewhat crowded conglomerate of numerous well-known elements of European fairy-tale tradition: The introduction mentions a stereotype set of three brothers (two of which, however, soon disappear without leaving any traits). Next the hero has to prove his worth in two subsequent nights of suffering, after which

38. Stroebe, K.: *Nordische Volksmärchen* 1. Jena 1915, pp. 182–196, no. 2.

39. Knoop and Woeller (see note 37).

40. Knoop (see note 37), p. XXI.

41. Stewart (see note 4), p. 235.

42. *Archiv für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 33 (1905/06), pp. 436–441, no. 22.

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God himself (wandering the earth in human shape) hands him a small booklet as a reward. Whenever the young man takes the booklet into his hands, three soldiers appear asking him: "What just wish do you have, o master?" The hero marries the king's eldest daughter – notably against the standard rule of fairy tales where the hero always marries the youngest daughter, but in harmony with the social rules of the day. The hero's adversary is a doe that consoles the woman during her husband's frequent hunting parties. In the end, when his wife has been abducted, the remorseful hero resolves to search her using a pair of shoes made of iron and a stick made of steel. Only when the iron shoes are torn and tattered and the steel stick is worn down to the size of his hand does the hero reach a band of twelve robbers. After making friends with the robbers, he steals a pair of magic boots and by asking directions from the sun, the moon, and the wind finally learns about his wife's whereabouts. Changed into a fly he regains command of his magic book. – This version is unique in its creative combination of popular fairy-tale elements, and it is not necessarily a very convincing combination. Still, it serves to demonstrate that creative narrators did not refrain from developing their versions of the tale of Aladdin even to the extent that the original tale is all almost completely veiled.

My case study has demonstrated the extent to which fairy tales as an intercultural narrative genre are subjected to change and adaptation. In the framework of the discussion, the tale of Aladdin from Galland's *Thousand and One Nights* has been discussed in some detail since it connects to various arguments. Its general structure derives from Near Eastern popular tradition; its best known form bespeaks the atmosphere of the French court in the early eighteenth century in terms of language, content, and mentality; and its different versions in European oral tradition demonstrate the ways in which narrators have adapted the original "alien" tale – albeit with varying success – to the context they lived in. For non-specialists it might not be obvious to link some of the versions discussed, such as the initially quote Hungarian tale, to the originally Oriental tale of Aladdin. Besides the obvious individual adaptations concerning the plot and specific motifs, a close reading of those versions reveals the extent to which the tale's basic moral message remains unchanged. All versions of the tale of Aladdin celebrate a lowly hero's undeserved attainment of happiness. While the original model of the tale bears witness to a distinct "Oriental" atmosphere, its characteristic features are easily adaptable to any other context. If proof were needed, this astonishing adaptability is proven by the numerous version from European popular tradition that have adapted the tale to conform with salient moral messages current in Western, or maybe even universal ethics. But even if the narrators of the European versions have succeeded in adapting their tales to their own context almost beyond recognition – the ultimate origin of their tales from the influential collection of the *Thousand and One Nights* may easily be revealed.

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Résumé français

Le conte d'Aladdin dans la tradition orale européenne

Le conte d'Aladdin est sûrement l'un des contes les plus populaires des *Mille et une nuits*. Il prend son origine, au début du XVIII^e siècle, dans la narration orale du maronite Hanna Diyab que l'on peut clairement dater. Mais depuis cette date le conte a également marqué de différentes manières la tradition orale européenne. Un exemple particulier est constitué par l'adaptation littéraire du conte publiée par l'auteur allemand Johann Leonhard Rost en 1739, trois décennies environ après l'introduction du conte pour la première fois auprès des lecteurs européens en tant qu'élément des *Mille et une nuits*.

En traçant l'histoire du conte et les manières multiples par lesquelles il a atteint la tradition orale, je vais d'abord discuter le contexte plus large de la réception et de l'adaptation des contes de fées orientaux en Europe ; je vais ensuite illustrer brièvement le contexte théorique relatif à la recherche sur les contes populaires du point de vue historique et comparatif. En outre, je rappellerai quelques questions importantes à propos de la réception des *Mille et une nuits* en Europe. L'essentiel de ma présentation entend discuter en détail les origines d'une version d'Aladdin recueillie dans la tradition orale du XIX^e siècle que je cite au début. Ma conclusion examinera les possibilités et les limites des contes de fées en tant que récits interculturels.

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A ma connaissance, personne parmi les chercheurs appartenant à notre génération n'a contribué plus que le Professeur Ulrich Marzolph à l'étude des *Mille et une nuits*. Dans son récent article, «Das Aladdin-Syndrom; zur Phänomenologie des narrativen Orientalismus» (publié dans Rudolf Schenda *Festschrift*),⁶⁷⁹ ainsi que dans sa présente contribution à ce colloque, le

⁶⁷⁹ Edité par U. Brunold-Bigler et H. Bausinger, Bern (Peter Lang), 1995, pp. 449-462. Voir, par exemple, les doutes quant à l'origine arabe du conte, p. 452 : « Das Resultat der bisherigen Untersuchungen lässt sich aus heutiger Sicht wie folgt zusammenfassen: Ein arabischer Ursprung der Aladdin-Geschichte lässt sich nicht zweifelsfrei nachweisen.

Sous la direction de
Aboubakr CHRAÏBI
Carmen RAMIREZ

Les Mille et une nuits
et le récit oriental

En Espagne et en Occident

L'HARMATTAN

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