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Are There Oriental Elements in the Tristan Story?

It is now for nearly just a century that the possibility of Oriental influence in the Tristan story is discussed. The idea was not too strange taking into account the numerous Oriental implications that had been found, or suspected, in many other literary works of the mediaeval west. It can be observed, however, that through all these hundred years of Tristan scholarship, almost no progress had been achieved with regard to the methods, and the results, in ascertaining Oriental implications in the Tristan story. Simple similarities, more or less close, between the Tristan story and a Persian verse epic of around A.D. 1050 have been taken as a proof for the hypothesis that the Tristan story was formed in accordance with, or in dependence from that Persian epic. On the other hand, no single detail in the Tristan story could be shown as being specifically Oriental: no personal or geographical name, no elements of historical or social significance.

It seems, therefore, appropriate to reconsider the whole question applying methods of research that have developed and proved successful in this sort of comparative studies in the field of mediaeval east-western relations. This also is the place to stress that neither the standard orientalist, nor the standard occidentalist, are sufficiently equipped to pass judgement on mediaeval east-western relations and influences. What is required here is a special experience in the domain of 'transmission'—transmission, the essential problem in finding out and explaining possible relations between Orient and Occident. It cannot be denied that in many cases, in the past and present, the fundamental method applied in such comparative studies was mere guesswork, examples for which will be given shortly. In our times, however, and in the presence of better methods and rich material, other standards of research must be applied. That is what I am trying to do in the following paper.

When looking for Oriental influence in a western literary work we first should look out for direct Oriental material such as personal and geographical names, or certain historical or sociological details. For it can be observed that the western authors have a real predelection for introducing such exotic items in order to give their works a touch of authenticity. These details may either have formed part of the models of the respective stories, or they may be transferred into a story from elsewhere and without bearing proper relation to the plot of the author's own story.

Introductory Notice. This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the 'Twelfth International Arthurian Congress', August 8–14, 1979, Regensburg (West Germany).

References quoted in an abbreviated form are listed with complete title etc., in the *Bibliography* at the end of the article. In addition to these, further references are quoted in full in the footnotes.

In transliterating the Arabic alphabet the following system is adopted (some additional letters from the Persian alphabet are added in square brackets): ² b [p] t t ġ [č] ħ ħ d d r z [ž] s š š d t z ° ġ f q k [g] l m n h w [v] y a i u ā ī ū aw ay.

Of this sort, the Tristan story shows nothing. In Gottfried's *Tristan*, we find occasionally mentioned Arabia and the Saracens, but only as a qualification for gold and other things of exotic interest, thus being commonplaces, forming part of the standard vocabulary of western poets of the time and no sign of a special Oriental influence. Gurmûn, king of Ireland, is said by Gottfried to have been born from *Affricâ*, which also is of no further impact on the Tristan story. *Bâbilôn*—often used in mediaeval western literature to designate the contemporary town of Cairo, residence of the Fatimide caliphs—in Gottfried's *Tristan* is referred to the classical episode of Pyramus and Thisbe, in Ovid, and thus has nothing to do with the Islamic Orient. Finally, Môrholt, name of the king of Ireland, is obviously of a western etymology¹ and bears no relation to the name of the Moors.

There are, however, two other personal names which give rise to the suspicion that they might be of Oriental origin. One of these two is the name of the brother of Isolt of the White Hands, in the second part of the Tristan story. This character is called, in the different versions of the Tristan story, Kehenîs, Caadin, Kâedîn, etc.² This name is a good example of how far mere guessing can lead scholars astray if no methodical research is done and the problem of transmission is left aside. In a list of Oriental proper names occurring in mediaeval western literature, with their possible etymologies³, Dimitri Scheludko, in 1922, had entered also this name from the Tristan story explaining it, by mere guessing, as the Arabic name Ḥayr ad-Dîn⁴. This etymology has been adopted, and constantly repeated by Loomis⁵ who, however—for reasons unintelligible to me—changed the indication of the original language of the name from Arabic to Turkish. Several other authors also followed Scheludko⁶.

Consequently, we have to ask ourselves whether this etymology is true, both from the philological and from the historical point of view. Our findings are as follows: There was no Oriental personality prior to around A.D. 1200 to be of sufficient significance that this name was introduced into western historical sources. So, the etymon Ḥayr ad-Dîn which had been quoted by Scheludko by mere guessing—and which, by the way, is pure Arabic and not at all 'Turkish'—has to be dropped entirely. There is, however, a true Oriental name given in Latin and other western sources, as *Kahadin*, etc., which was a corruption of Arabic Taqî ad-Dîn. This man whose

¹ See, e.g., PHILIPS 1513A–1514A; D.J. SHORT, in: *Tristania*, vol. i, nos. 1–2 (1975/76), p. 14–18.

² See the surveys on the proper names in the Tristan story given by FERRANTE, p. 122, and GOMBERT, p. 6s. See also the list of proper names in the ed. of Gottfried's *Tristan* by MAROLD/RANKE/SCHRÖDER (1969), p. 272ss.; and further BÉDIER, i, p. 257; VAN DAM (1930), p. 37.

³ SCHELUDKO (1922), p. 480–484; with additions in SCHELUDKO (1928), p. 278–280. See also SCHELUDKO (1927), p. 25–27 and 30–35.

⁴ SCHELUDKO (1922), p. 482; repeated in SCHELUDKO (1928), p. 282 N3.

⁵ LOOMIS (1924), p. 328 with N32, quoting SCHELUDKO (1922); dto. (1927), p. 95 with N5, and 99; dto. (1960), p. 569; dto. (1961), p. 485.

⁶ VAN DAM (1930), p. 98 N1; NEWSTEAD, p. 293 N10 (again quoted by NITZE-WILLIAMS, p. 283); F.R. SCHRÖDER, p. 30 N90 (who was puzzled by the fact that the name—apart from its suggested western etymologies—in the Orient was explained both as Arabic and Turkish).

full name was al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Taqī ad-Dīn Abū Saʿīd ʿUmar ibn Šāhanšāh Nūr ad-Dīn ibn Naǧm ad-Dīn Ayyūb⁷, was a historical personality, a nephew of the famous Saladin and lord of the north Syrian town of Hama. He made his appearance in international history in A.D. 1191, during the siege of Acco, in the Third Crusade, when he was commander of the Saracens defending Acco against the Crusaders, and where he eventually died. This eminent rôle gave him a place in western historical sources, chronicles etc., where he is called *Takedinus*, *Tecahadinus*, etc., which sometimes was mutilated to *Kahadinus*, etc.⁸, and whence, no doubt, his name may have been borrowed into literary works, afterwards⁹. Taking into account the historical and chronological circumstances in connection with the introduction of the name into western texts, we see that the *terminus a quo* for this is the year A.D. 1191. It can be assumed that the respective texts did not spread very fast so that several years would have elapsed before the name might have been transferred, from historical sources, into literary texts. This makes it rather improbable that the Tristanian Kâedîn who is named in the versions of the Tristan story much earlier¹⁰, was influenced, or even borrowed, from that historical Arabic name. To this it may be added that the true Oriental name never contains an *r* before the last syllable whereas some of the Tristanian formes are spelt with such an *r* (Caerdin, Kaherdin)¹¹. Oriental influence in the formation of the Tristanian name being impossible, the scholarly world therefore has to content itself with the numerous essays of finding a pure western etymology for it¹².

⁷ Cf. E. DE ZAMBAUR, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de l'Islam*, Hannover 1927, p. 98 and 101. This name was wrongly called Turkish by NEWSTEAD, p. 293 N10.

⁸ The correct form of the name, see, e.g., in *MGH, SS*, 31, p. 172, 16; 650, 22: *Thachadinus*; *MGH, SS*, 23, p. 859, 39: *Thechidinus*; R. RÖHRICHT, *Geschichte des Königreichs Jerusalem* (1100–1291), Innsbruck 1898, p. 503 N1: *Tecahedin*; *Itinerarium Regis Ricardi*, ed. STUBBS, London 1864, p. 90: *Techahadinus*, var. *Tecahadinus*; p. 211: *Techehedini* (genit.), var. *Kahadini*; p. 272s.: *Tekedinus*, var. *Takedinus*, *Tekadinus*; etc. The mutilated form, having lost the first syllable, see, e.g., in RÖHRICHT, *l.c.*, p. 575 N3: *Kahedin*; *Itin. Reg. Ricardi*, *l.c.*, p. 222: *Kahadinus*, and p. 211, variant reading as cited before (*Kahadini*).

⁹ Cf. the name lists of LANGLOIS, FLUTRE, and WEST, in cases where names of this type represent Saracens. Apart from these, the name may also often refer to Arthurian knights in which case no Oriental influence seems to be involved; here the 'Tristanian' form of the name would have served as a model.

¹⁰ The approximate dates of Beroul, Eilhard and Thomas are generally accepted as prior to A.D. 1191. Beyond that, the same name also occurs already with CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, in his *Perceval* and *Conte du Graal*, cf. SEIFFERT, p. 57; HERTZ, p. 557; LOOMIS (1961), p. 485; NITZE, p. 299, 304; NITZE-WILLIAMS, p. 283; ACKERMAN, p. 135s.

¹¹ Here it should be added that the afore mentioned Arabic *Kahadin* = Taqī ad-Dīn of A.D. 1191 should not be confounded with another historical personality called, in western sources, *Coradin*, *Coharadinus*, *Corradinus*, etc., and designating Šaraf ad-Dīn, i.e. al-Malik al-Muʿazzam Šaraf ad-Dīn ʿĪsā, son of Saladin's brother al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Sayf ad-Dīn (= Saphadin), lord of Damascus, mentioned in the chronicles around the years A.D. 1218–1220 (died 1227).

¹² See, e.g., BÉDIER, ii, p. 119s.; WESTON, i, p. 272 N1; HERTZ, p. 556s.; LOTH (1912), p. 104; VAN DAM (1930), p. 98 N1; CHANDLER, p. 234; NEWSTEAD, p. 292s.; BROMWICH, p. 54 N94 (for *Cai Hir*), 58 (for *Kyheic*); SCHÖPPERLE (1960), ii, p. 272; cf. LOOMIS, *ib.*, p. 569, 574; F.R. SCHRÖDER, p. 30 N90; EISNER, p. 76 N6, and 80; LOOMIS, in the places quoted above in N5.

The second name suspicious of possible Oriental origin is that of king Marke's steward who is called Mariadok, Meriadok, Marjodô, and Marjodoc, respectively¹³. From my previous work on Oriental proper names in the works of Wolfram von Eschenbach, I remember the name of Marjadox, a Saracen hero in *Willehalm*, whose name apparently ultimately goes back to the name of a historical Oriental personality in the First Crusade¹⁴. Whereas the name, in *Willehalm*, is part of a bulk of names borrowed from the chanson de geste of *Aliscans* and hence belongs to an own branch of transmission for which, in this case, an Oriental derivation can be declared plausible, this is not the case with the somewhat similar name in the Tristan story for which a pure western etymology seems to be established with sufficient certainty¹⁵.

Having, thus, found no evidence for Oriental influence in special details, as names and the like, in the Tristan story, we now have to turn to the greater domain of literary relationship between the Tristan story and some Oriental tales.

Before entering upon this subject in closer detail, it will be good to give some general remarks on our present knowledge of the transmission from east to west in mediaeval times. Contacts between the west and the Islamic world started as early as in the eighth century A.D., with the spreading of Islam, in different parts of the Mediterranean world. There exist written records of such contacts which were more or less fortuitous in the beginning, and which became much closer and even regular later on, especially in southern Italy, in Spain and southern France, in Byzantium and in the Latin Orient. Testimonies of such contacts and closer relations are, among others, a great number of Arabic words penetrating Latin and the western vernaculars, and innumerable translations of Arabic writings, first into Latin, and later on also into old Castilian, Hebrew, and other languages. The Orient, so far only known in its classical antique form, became a new contemporary reality. The Saracens were understood as a great new power in the world, threatening the well established Christian belief, but also providing means of life and luxury, and knowledge unknown to the west before. So, for several centuries, the Orient became a topic of greatest interest to the west reflexes of which are found everywhere in western life and letters. The explanation of many of these new features has been possible by following strictly method-

¹³ Cf. the surveys in GOMBERT, p. 8s.; BÉDIER, i, p. 175s.

¹⁴ See P. KUNITZSCH, *Quellenkritische Bemerkungen zu einigen Wolframschen Orientalia*, in: *Wolfram-Studien*, ed. by W. SCHRÖDER, vol. iii, Berlin 1975, p. 271; dto., *ZRPh* 88 (1972), p. 43 N32. See also *Willehalm. The Middle High German Poem*, Transl. into English Prose by C.E. PASSAGE, New York 1977, p. 362 (s. *Marjadox*) and 364 (s. *Merabjax*), and the name index of the new critical edition of *Willehalm* by W. SCHRÖDER (Berlin/New York 1978), p. 642 and 643, under the same two entries. It is to be assumed that these two Wolframian names are to be derived from some variants in the chanson de geste of *Aliscans*, which in turn go back to the Arabic name of a person mentioned in chronicles, and chansons de geste in connection with the capture of Antioch, in A.D. 1098.

¹⁵ Cf. *Conanus Meriadocus* in GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH'S *Historia Regum Britanniae*, ed. A. GRISSOM and R. E. JONES, London/New York/Toronto 1929, p. 342ss. See further LEVOT, ii, p. 406-422; BÉDIER, ii, p. 120 N3; FLETCHER, p. 47 and 86; LOTH (1909), p. 146; HERTZ, p. 537 N94; LOTH (1912), p. 99 and 103; E. BRUGGER, *ZFSL* 49 (1926-27), 237-239 and 400; CHANDLER, p. 312; LOOMIS (1959), p. 472-474; LOOMIS (1961), p. 487; HUTSON, p. 52.

ical measures and tightly keeping to the historical documents. There should be left no more room, today, for mere guessing in this field.

As for the transmission of written works from the east to the west up to A.D. 1200—the period which interests us in our present research—it can be said that these works, with probably but one exception, consisted of scientific texts, in medicine, astronomy and astrology, mathematics, philosophy and similar theoretical subjects. Secondly, all the transmitted works were Arabic (or Hebrew), nothing Persian or Turkish is to be found among them. Persian material, as names, words, and technical terms, reached the west only in Arabic context, but not independently. The single exception among the transmitted works may be called the *Disciplina clericalis* of Petrus Alfonsi, that converted Jew of the beginning of the twelfth century A.D. who was conversant with Hebrew, Arabic, the old Castilian vernacular, and perhaps also with Latin. The *Disciplina clericalis* is, to our present knowledge, the only work of a literary character that was translated into Latin before A.D. 1200, all the other translated material being of strictly scientific character. Literary translations such as the fables of *Kalila and Dimna* started only after the middle of the thirteenth century A.D., under Alfons X., king of Castile. It may be added that Hilka has found some places in Thoma's *Tristan* that prove to be derived from the *Disciplina clericalis*¹⁶.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that the Oriental material became accessible to the western public generally only after it had found a fixed form written down in some context. The knowledge of writing was still a rare one in mediaeval Europe. Mostly clerks were able to write, and this in their well studied Latin. Writing vernacular was much more difficult and rare. It goes without saying that the first coining of a written form of Oriental names and words was a matter of extreme difficulty that could be executed only by very well versed specialists. In other words, the mass of Oriental words and names in mediaeval western texts consists of blind repetitions—mostly more or less corrupt—of archetypes that had been formed at special occasions, by specially equipped men. That means that it never can be assumed that, for example, poets living far away from the centres of east-western contacts—as in Germany, France or Britain—were able to introduce Oriental matter into their works from mere hearsay. Also for them it must be assumed that they follow, in their Oriental matter, existing written sources which provided them with such names and words.

Still another argument has to be brought forward here: the chronological one. It can be seen that almost no eastern Arabic scientific works had been translated in Spain, up to A.D. 1200, that were written later than the first half of the eleventh century A.D. Thus, nothing of the works of one of the greatest scholars of the Islamic world, al-Bīrūnī, who wrote about the same time as the poet of *Vis-u Rāmīn*, had been communicated to the Latin west. There are just some translations of Maghrebine and Spanish-Arabic authors living into the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D., such as

¹⁶ See HILKA, in the *Bibliography* at the end of this article.

ʿAlī ibn Abī r-Riḡāl and Ġābir ibn Aflāḥ. Averroes, however, and al-Biṭrūḡī were only translated in the thirteenth century A.D. With special regard to the Persian epic of *Viš-u Rāmīn*, it is known that a Georgian translation of it was made as late as around A.D. 1200, under the famous queen Tʿamar, her country being in the nearest neighbourhood to Persia. So what can be expected of a transmission of the Persian epic through what channels ever, to arrive in the Latin west in due time to contribute to the formation of the Tristan story, necessarily a century, or half a century earlier?

It is in the light of this general situation that we have to approach the hypothesis of possible relations between the Tristan story and Oriental tales.

The German orientalist Karl Heinrich Graf was the first to publish a lengthy analysis and description of the Persian verse epic of *Viš-u Rāmīn*, in 1869¹⁷. Very soon then, there were observed some parallels in the plots of this epic and of the Tristan story. But whereas, in the beginning, it was only spoken of parallels and similarities without establishing an immediate relationship between the two¹⁸, in 1911 Rudol Zenker published a paper¹⁹ in which he classified these similarities and deduced from them that the Tristan story must have been formed after that Persian model. Then the idea of the Persian origin of the Tristan story was born, and it has not ceased to be adopted by scholars of all sorts up to this day. Among its supporters there are orientalists²⁰ as well as occidentalists and Tristan scholars²¹. On the other hand, again both orientalists²² and occidentalists²³ have more or less decidedly opposed to this hypothesis, while again others avoided mentioning it totally thus showing their disapproval

But not only this. Still worse, in 1918 Samuel Singer dug out in Hammer-Purgstall's *Literaturgeschichte der Araber* of 1851 an extract from the Arabic *Kitāb al-aḡāni* "Book of Songs", telling the story of Qays and Lubnā, and identified this story as a model for the second part of the Tristan story, the story of Isolt of the White Hands²⁴. Astonishingly enough, Singer's hypothesis was eagerly accepted by a great number of Tristan scholars, several of them just following in this some of their predecessors, just as in an Oriental caravan one camel follows the other bound to it by a string through its nose²⁵. The only one to beware his critical mind was Scheludko²⁶.

¹⁷ *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 23 (1869), 375–433. Now also available in a complete French translation, MASSÉ (1959), and in an English translation, MORRISON (1972).

¹⁸ ETHÉ, p. 295; PIZZI, 1892 and 1894, see ZENKER, p. 321.

¹⁹ See ZENKER, in the *Bibliography* at the end of this article.

²⁰ PIZZI (1911), in answer to Zenker's article; SPIES; BABINGER.

²¹ F.R. SCHRÖDER, HAUG, GALLAIS, POLAK, BAEHRE-WALDHERR, partly also SINGER (see the *Bibliography*).

²² HORN, MINORSKY, BÜRGEL.

²³ GOLTHER (p. 36); SCHOEPFERLE; SCHELUDKO (1928, p. 292s.); WEBER-HOFFMANN (p. 65s.).

²⁴ See SINGER, 1918, in the *Bibliography*.

²⁵ LOOMIS (1927); VAN DAM (1930, following Singer); BROMWICH (following Loomis, 1927) SPIES; BABINGER; LOOMIS (1960); F.R. SCHRÖDER (p. 29ss., following Singer); EISNER (p. 89 and 92 following Loomis); WEBER-HOFFMANN (p. 30 and 65, following Singer and Schröder); HAUG (p. 409 N20, 410s.); GALLAIS; POLAK (p. 229s., following Singer and Loomis).

²⁶ See SCHELUDKO (1928), p. 282.

Thus, we are confronted with a conglomerate of theories saying that a Persian verse epic of around A.D. 1050, and an Arabic romantic story of around A.D. 950, had been amalgamated, sometime somewhere, and had been passed over to the western Islamic regions, as Spain, whence the product of this amalgamation came to the knowledge of some western poets who used it to elaborate, after its model, the Tristan story.

In analysing these arguments in some detail, we have to indulge a bit more to the orientalist side of the matter.

The Persian verse epic of *Vis-u Rāmīn* was composed, around A.D. 1050, by the poet Faḥr ad-Dīn Asʿad Gurgānī in Isfahan, at the court of the governor of the first ruler of a newly established dynasty²⁷. Gurgānī composed his verses after a Persian prose version which itself was translated from a middle Persian (Pahlavī) form of the story. The epic, in its plot of a considerable age, reflects historical elements from older Persian times, Sassanian, or even Arsacid²⁸. Its story seems to have been well known in Persia so that Gurgānī's epic found a great echo.

In the light of our knowledge of the transmission of Islamic matters to the mediaeval west it cannot be assumed that the story of *Vis-u Rāmīn* became known to the west directly in its Persian form. The supporters of this hypothesis therefore have to assume an Arabic mediation.

The question, then, would be whether, and how the Persian epic could have become known in Arabic. Pierre Gallais has mentioned, citing Minorsky²⁹, that *Vis-u Rāmīn* was already known to Abū Nuwās, the famous Arabic lyrical poet at the caliphs' court of Baghdad (died around A.D. 815)³⁰. This, however, must not induce us to suppose that the Persian epic, or story, was already known, at that time, to the Arabs in general. Abū Nuwās' mother was Persian, and he himself, during his life, was closely attached to some Persian noble families in Baghdad. Thus, he himself has had exceptionally narrow relations to Persian matters, much different from most of the other Arabs in Baghdad, not to speak of those in the other regions of the califate. Beyond that, nothing in Abū Nuwās' poem allows the conclusion that even he himself might have known the contents of *Vis-u Rāmīn*. His poem is a satire on a Persian boy in which he enumerates quite a number of Persian religious rites, festivals, and other peculiarities making a

²⁷ For the author, see MASSÉ (1965). See further HORN, p. 43 and 179ss.; E.G. BROWNE, *A Literary History of Persia*, ii, Cambridge 1951, p. 274s.; J. RYPKA, *Iranische Literaturgeschichte*, Leipzig 1959, p. 176-178; A. PAGLIARO and A. BAUSANI, *Storia della letteratura persiana*, Milano 1960, p. 621-626; MINORSKY. (All these authors mention the similarities between *Vis-u Rāmīn* and the Tristan story, but do not affirm immediate relations between the two.)

²⁸ See MINORSKY, and MASSÉ (1959), introduction.

²⁹ GALLAIS, p. 97, citing MINORSKY (1962), p. 277 N1.

³⁰ See also E. WAGNER, *Abū Nuwās. Eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen 'Abbāsidenzeit*, Wiesbaden 1965, p. 138 and especially p. 195. It is not quite clear what the *firḡardāt* (MINORSKY and GALLAIS: *farḡardāt*) exactly means by which non-Arabic expression the recitals of *Vis-u Rāmīn* are designated by Abū Nuwās; cf. W.B. HENNING, *Mitteliranisch*, in: *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 1. Abt., 4. Bd., 1. Abschn., Leiden/Köln 1958, p. 88.

great show of their strange Persian names which he fitted artificially into the Arabic poetical metres³¹. This is more sort of a poetical catalogue and does not allow to assume that the poet had a detailed knowledge of all the things so neatly enumerated in his poem. The quotation of *Vis-u Rāmīn* by Abū Nuwās can only be taken as an evidence for the existence of the story in Persian circles, at his time, and its being recited—either in prose, as a story, or in verse, as an epic.

This is the only explicit quotation of *Vis-u Rāmīn* in Arabic literature, as far as is known until now. Beyond that, we do not know of any Persian epic that was translated into Arabic³². Moreover, it is one of the specialities of the classical Arabic literature that it did not have epic poetry. If anything, the story could have been retold in prose, as a novel, but also of this transformation nothing is known as yet in the classical Arabic literature³³.

There have always been close relations between the Persian and the Arabic world, and we know of many works that were translated from Persian into Arabic, both literary and scientific. There are also hints that individual Arabs acquired a knowledge of Persian heroic tales, and recited them—certainly in prose—to an audience, as, e.g., an-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārīṭ, as early as in the time of the prophet Muḥammad³⁴. But this was an isolated fact not allowing any generalization, or perpetuation.

³¹ See some quotations, in German, in WAGNER, *l.c.*, p. 190, 192, 193, and 195, following MS. Fatih 3774, fol. 191a, metre *al-wāfir*, rhyme *-īsi (-ūsī)*.

³² See, however, the next following N, at the end, for the *Šāhnāma*. There are Arabic traditions saying that some Persian prose books—biographies of kings, paraenetic and similar items—were converted into Arabic verse (of the *muzdawīḡ* sort), from existing Arabic prose versions, by the Arabic poet Abān al-Lāḥiqī, a contemporary of Abū Nuwās, of which, as it seems, nothing has survived; cf. C. BROCKELMANN, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, Supplement*, vol. i, Leiden 1937, p. 238s. (no. 1d); F. SEZGIN, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. ii, Leiden 1975, p. 438 and 580.

³³ Thus, *Vis-u Rāmīn* is not contained among the titles of Persian books and stories known in Arabic (prose) versions that were listed, in A.D. 987/988, by the Baghdad book-seller and literate Ibn an-Nadīm in his famous catalogue of books, *al-Fihrist*; see *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. FLÜGEL, vol. i, Leipzig 1871, p. 305, 4–12; English transl. by B. DODGE, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, New York/London/Toronto 1970, vol. ii, p. 716. Whereas, on the other hand, the heroic story of *Rustam and Isfandiyār* which in other traditions is reported to have already been known to a contemporary of the prophet Muḥammad (see below, and the next following N), is well registered in the *Fihrist*, naming Ġabala ibn Sālim as the translator into Arabic, see *al-Fihrist*, *l.c.*, p. 305, 9; transl. DODGE, *l.c.*, ii, p. 716. Ġabala ibn Sālim was a secretary to the Umayyad caliph Hišām (reg. A.D. 724–743), cf. *al-Fihrist*, *l.c.*, p. 244, 31; transl. DODGE, *l.c.*, ii, p. 589. – It ought to be mentioned here that the most famous Persian epic, the *Šāhnāma*, composed by Firdawsī near the year A.D. 1000—that is, about fifty years before *Vis-u Rāmīn*—was translated into Arabic prose (!) only in the first half of the thirteenth century A.D., by Abū Ibrāhīm Faḥr ad-Dīn al-Bundārī; a modern edition of it, by Dr. 'A.W. 'Azzām [sic], was published in Cairo A.H. 1350 (= A.D. 1932), see C. BROCKELMANN, *l.c.*, i, 2nd ed., Leiden 1943, p. 391s. (no. 2, work no. 2), and *Supplement*, i, p. 554 (no. 2, work no. 2).

³⁴ See Ibn Ishāq / Ibn Hišām, *Das Leben Muhammed's*, Arabic text, ed. F. WÜSTENFELD, vol. i, part 1, Göttingen 1858, p. 191, 14ss., and 235, 11ss.; English transl. by A. GUILLAUME, *The Life of Muhammad*, London/New York/Toronto 1955, p. 136 and 162. (This citation was kindly brought to my attention by Prof. A. SPITALER, Munich.) Cf. also the foregoing N (the story of *Rustam and Isfandiyār*).

Let us, now, leave *Vis-u Rāmīn* and consider Singer's find of the romantic story of Qays and Lubnā, in the *Kitāb al-aḡānī* of Abū l-Faraḡ 'Alī al-Iṣbahānī (died A.D. 967), which he regarded a model for the second part of the Tristan story, the story of Isolt of the White Hands. I cannot omit inserting here the anecdote that Singer quoted the name of the person in question as 'Kais ibn Doreidsch', following his source, that is Hammer-Purgstall's *Literaturgeschichte der Araber* of 1851. This was one of the mischiefs of Hammer-Purgstall who had misread the Arabic name, in his manuscript source, as 'Doreidsch', the correct spelling being, however, *Dariḥ*. Nevertheless, 'Doreidsch' subsequently was repeated by all authors down to Polak (1974), with the single exception of Gallais (1974), who applied the correct form Qays ibn *Dariḥ*³⁵. The story of Qays and Lubnā may, or may not, have a historical background. Certainly the underlying base for the whole tradition must have been a number of poems by Qays, addressed to Lubnā³⁶.

Here again, we have to come back to the afore mentioned statement that nothing of the Arabic literature proper—apart from those scientific textbooks—had been formally translated into Latin and brought to the knowledge of the western people. They may, occasionally, have assisted to Arabic musical, or poetical, recitals but most certainly without understanding the words of the story presented. Not only nowadays classical Arabic poetry is very hard to understand for us orientalist—with all the modern apparatus at hands—but even harder it must have been for mediaeval Europeans whose practical knowledge of Arabic can be regarded as much inferior to ours. Thus we know that several of the classical mediaeval translators from Arabic into Latin did not work by themselves, directly from the Arabic text. Moreover, we are told that the translation was executed with the help of some Jew, or Mozarab who read the Arabic and translated it, orally, into the local Romance idiom, whence the Latin translator put it into Latin and wrote it down. It cannot be expected that, under such circumstances, a poetical work could have been translated into a form attracting the interest of western poets and inducing them to imitate such a rough product in a strange Latin. There is, indeed, an example of a Latin translation of some isolated Arabic verses: Hermannus Alemannus completed, in A.D. 1256, a translation of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this text, Averroes had inserted a number of Arabic poetic examples in order to illustrate certain of his theories. It is interesting to see that of 68 verse examples the translator has totally omitted 16, substituted 9, translated into Latin prose 29 and into Latin poetry 14³⁷. But even

³⁵ With the defect that in the print of his book the stroke under the *D* has been omitted (*Dariḥ*, instead of *Dariḥ*).

³⁶ The *Fihrist* (see above, N33) states that such stories of famous Arabic lovers, of pre-Islamic and Islamic times, were written down; he names several authors and a great number of 'books' of that sort known in Baghdad at his time, among them *Kitāb Qays wa-Lubnā*, "The Book of Qays and Lubnā"; see *al-Fihrist*, l.c., p. 306, 8ss. (especially line 11s.); trans. DODGE, l.c., ii, p. 719. Nothing of all these 'books'—whatever they may have been—seems to have survived.

³⁷ See the details in the paper of W.F. BOGGESE.

here we cannot speak of a translation of Arabic poetry proper—it was a philosophical book that was translated, and hidden in it there occurred those scarce verses.

Having denied, in the foregoing, that the Persian epic of *Vis-u Rāmīn* could have reached Europe in the Persian language—which, by the way, nobody in Europe would have been able to understand, at that epoch—,having also denied that *Vis-u Rāmīn* had been done into Arabic, and reached Europe in an Arabicized form, and having denied, thirdly, that the Arabic story of Qays and Lubnā might have been translated into a European language in due time to be ready for the composition of the Tristan story, we finally have to deny the most improbable of all these theories, that is that both *Vis-u Rāmīn* and the story of Qays and Lubnā had been amalgamated somewhere in the Arabic region and had been passed over, in this amalgamated form, to the Europeans.

The results are none the less better if we assume, as the place of transmission, the Crusaders' Lands, the Latin Orient, instead of Spain. It is well known that the Crusaders were mostly anything else but the sort of learned men, interested in Oriental languages and literatures, that were needed if such a borrowing should really be expected. We know of two outstanding personalities in the Latin Orient knowing Arabic, and we know some of their Latin writings: William of Tyre, and William of Tripoli. But none of the two would we expect to read and study and translate such unorthodox erotic adventures as *Vis-u Rāmīn* and the story of Qays and Lubnā. Apart from that, we know the chronicles, the letters, and the chansons de geste from the Holy Land—but none of these leaves room to suspect Oriental tales like those of *Vis-u Rāmīn* and Qays and Lubnā, among them.

So, at the end of our survey we have to admit that our present knowledge of the circumstances of the transmission of Oriental matters to Europe does not allow to assume that either the Persian verse epic of *Vis-u Rāmīn*, or the Arabic romance of Qays and Lubnā, have contributed to the formation of the story of Tristan and Isolt.

May the Orient have been a topic of phantasy and myth for the mediaeval Europeans, it is not allowed to us, near the end of our twentieth century, to repeat old, or create new mystifications concerning Oriental matter. The parallels that have been brought forward between those Oriental stories and the Tristan story, more or less striking as they can be judged, cannot be accepted as a safe evidence as long as the problem of transmission is not satisfactorily solved. When looking around in world literature, similar resemblances to the Tristan story might turn up anywhere in Africa, Asia, or America, and nobody would ever proceed to establish relations between them and the European Tristan because of the total absence of connections and possibilities of transmission. The same must hold good for supposed relations between the Islamic-Arabic civilization and Europe where we are, as well, bound to establish the ways of transmission, in all details, before we are entitled to affirm relationship and dependence.

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