



ZUBAIDAH BINT JA'FAR AND HER EFFECTS IN CULTURAL, ARTISTIC, AND SOCIAL LIFE IN HER PERIOD

Zübeyde Bint Câfer'in Yaşadığı Dönemde Kültürel, Sanatsal ve Sosyal Hayata Etkileri

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ABSTRACT

Baghdad emerged as a thriving city in the early era of the Abbasids and renowned for its affluence and cultural advancement during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid. Notably, women belonging to the upper echelons of society, including but not limited to the caliph's consorts and concubines, assumed active roles in both society and politics. Zubaidah bint Ja'far, the wife of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, was an influential woman who utilized her position to engage in philanthropic activities and contribute to the development of society. Their love story has become famous and Zubaidah, with her intelligence and beauty, fascinated the Caliph and influenced his decisions. Zubaidah was also recognized for her generosity towards scholars and poets. Her life and contributions to the era are documented in historical texts and literary works of the time, such as the *Thousand and One Nights Tales*. This study aims to examine the life and achievements of Zubaidah bint Ja'far during the Abbasid era, focusing on her contributions to politics, society, and literature. She played a significant role in the administration of the state alongside her husband, and served as inspiration for poems and tales in *Thousand and One Nights* collection. The analysis of the *Thousand and One Nights Tales* involved using a descriptive method and historical research to present how her personality is perceived by people of her time and emphasize her lasting legacy.

Keywords: Zubaidah bint Ja'far, *The Thousand and One Nights*, cultural life, artistic life, social life.

ÖZ

Abbâsîlerin ilk döneminde kurulan Bağdat, Hârûn Reşîd'in halifelik zamanında zenginliği ve kültürel gelişimiyle tanınan müreffeh bir şehir haline gelmiştir. Halifenin desteği ile birlikte eşlerinin, cariyelerinin ve üst sınıftan olan kadınların toplumda ve siyasette aktif roller oynadıkları görülmektedir. Dönemin önde gelen isimlerinden Halife Hârûn Reşîd'in eşi Zübeyde bint Câfer, konumunu hayırsever faaliyetlerde

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bulunmak ve toplumun kalkınmasına katkı sağlamak için kullanan etkili bir kadın olmuştur. Zübeyde ve Hârûn'un aşk hikâyesi dillere destan olmuş, Zübeyde zekâsını ve güzelliğini kullanarak halifeyi kendine hayran etmiş ve kararlarını etkilemiştir. Zübeyde aynı zamanda âlimlere ve şairlere karşı cömertliğiyle de ön plana çıkmıştır. Zübeyde'nin hayatı ve döneme olan katkıları tarihi metinlerde ve *Binbir Gece Masalları* gibi dönemin edebi eserlerinde de yer bulmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Zübeyde bint Cafer'in Abbâsiler dönemindeki hayatını ve başarılarını, siyasi, toplumsal ve edebi katkılarına vurgu yaparak incelemektir. Eşi Halife Hârûn er-Reşid ile birlikte devlet yönetiminde önemli bir etki yaratmış ve *Binbir Gece Masalları* koleksiyonu başta olmak üzere birçok şiir ve söylenceye konu olmuştur. *Binbir Gece Masalları* tarihsel araştırma ve betimleyici yaklaşım ile incelenerek onun kişiliğinin yaşadığı dönemin bireyleri tarafından algılanışı ve kalıcı etkisi ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Zübeyde bint Câfer, *Binbir Gece Masalları*, kültürel yaşam, sanatsal yaşam, sosyal yaşam.

Introduction

The objective of our study is to uncover the life of Zubaidah bint Ja'far, who resided during the first century of the Abbasid era, a period widely regarded as the pinnacle of Islamic history. We seek to explore her life, her contributions to political and social spheres, and her literary attributes with a rigorous and systematic approach. Zubaidah bint Ja'far held a position of influence as the beloved wife of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, contributing to the administration of the state alongside him. She was widely respected and admired by the people of Baghdad for her exceptional beauty, devoutness, and intelligence. The woman in question was of such renown that she served as the inspiration for numerous poems and tales included in the collection known as *Thousand and One Nights*. The focus of our research is on Zubaidah bint Ja'far, a prominent figure in history and Arabic literature whose character is still remembered today. We aim to analyze the perception of her personality among different peoples and highlight her enduring legacy.

In the course of our investigation, which pertains to a historical inquiry, we employed an inductive approach and a source survey method. One of the logical thinking methods is induction. In this method, the starting point is not a theory or hypothesis. It begins with observations or events. Generalizations are made from observations and experiments to reach a theory. Induction is making general judgments based on individually observed phenomena. The method of literature review by examining existing sources and

documents to collect data is called literature review. Literature review helps to understand the selected research problem and place the research in a historical perspective (Karasar, 1994: 183).

The procedures we undertook included the collection of data, the assessment of the credibility and dependability of the available data, and the extraction of pertinent data. The secondary sources' information was incorporated into the research design by conducting a validity analysis, considering the possibility of excessive data on significant historical figures. The analysis of the Thousand and One Nights Tales involved the use of a descriptive method, which was then associated with the context of historical research to examine both people and phenomena.

The era of Harun al-Rashid is widely regarded as the most splendid period in Islamic history. His influence on Arab society was significant in terms of promoting the incorporation of novel customs. Despite his grandiose and illustrious position, he remained steadfast in his religious convictions, which contributed to his widespread renown throughout extensive territories (Üçok, 1968: 45).

Harun al-Rashid was brought up as a warrior from a young age and held the position of a commander in numerous battles. Furthermore, he made efforts to improve the well-being of the individuals residing in the territories he conquered. The construction of mosques, schools, hospitals, caravanserais, roads and bridges during his tenure, along with the subsequent rise in prosperity, attests to his commitment to the welfare of his people and his concern for their well-being.

In this time frame, the Abbasid government initiated the formation of multiple assemblies as a component of its administrative plan. These assemblies were called upon to deliberate on significant matters and prominent scholars from the relevant fields were invited to contribute their insights and expertise. The objective was to arrive at the most definitive and accurate conclusion through careful consideration. Convened were assemblies for the purpose of exchanging knowledge, poetry and music. Zubaidah, who possessed a profound comprehension of science, culture, art and literature, occasionally graced these gatherings with her presence. These academic meetings were a significant component of the extravagant lifestyle of the caliph and his spouse Zubaidah and have been highlighted in many main historical sources such as *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* (İbn Kathir, 1966: 219) and *al-İmama wa al-Siyasa* (İbn Qutaybah, 2017: 173). Also they

were mentioned in some poems and oriental fables, such as the renowned the Thousand and One Nights. As told in the Tale of the Lazy Youth, Zubaidah was fond of ostentation. It is evident that Zubaidah held a distinguished position in these gatherings, which were some of the most notable cultural and artistic events of the Abbasid era. Zubaidah's reputation was significantly elevated through her engagements with intellectuals and authors (Kan, 2014: 145).

Zubaidah was known to have close relationships with not just scholars, but also individuals in the arts and culture, such as poets and Sufis. It has been reported that Zubaidah even paid visits to Marûf al-Karhî and Bahl al-Dana (Isfahani, 1996: 34). Zubaidah maintained communication with individuals in the fields of science and art, organizing meetings, seeking guidance and presenting awards. Furthermore, Zubaidah greatly impacted their lives and frequently provided aid. Zubaidah's proximity and admiration of the domains of culture, art and science had a constructive influence on the intellectual advancement of the community.

Zubaidah exhibited a keen interest in various fields, including science and art, particularly the physical sciences. Her inquisitive nature extended beyond the scientific realm and encompassed the amalgamation of art with science. During this era, the field of science experienced a surge in growth, which was accompanied by a rise in the translation of foreign languages. As a result, a multitude of scientists emerged, who were provided with financial aid by the palace in the form of monthly scholarships (Kan, 2014: 153).

Zubaidah bint Ja'far, the wife of the caliph, lived during the height of the Abbasid empire and adeptly capitalized on its civilizational opportunities (Kehhale, 1928: 16.). She was also well known her philanthropy. She gathered the best engineers, masters and workers to built waterway called Ayn Zubaidah starting from Kufa to Mecca. It was built to meet the water needs on the pilgrimage route. There had wells, cisterns, inns and rest stops on this road. It was used for twelve centuries (İbn Kathir, 1966: 217).

In addition to her personal accomplishments, Zubaidah significantly aided the scientific and artistic elite through both financial and ethical support. Zubaidah's impact on cultural and social life persists to this day primarily through her significant associations and engagements with members of the scientific community. Zubaidah exhibited great generosity towards scholars and Sufis who served as her advisors, mentors and interme-

diaries in resolving crucial matters (İbn Kesir, 1966: 100). Furthermore, the treatment that Zubaidah afforded to these individuals, including the respect, importance and decorum that she showed towards them, had a pioneering and groundbreaking effect on the cultural and social milieu.

Zubaidah has an important place for Harun al-Rashid for this reason, in many parliaments he wanted to see her with him. Not only he did appreciate her wisdom and intelligence, but many issues he also consulted with her. Zubaidah's encounters with Imam Abu Yusuf (b.182/798) are highly significant in academic circles, as evidenced by historical sources and the *Thousand and One Nights*. Harun al-Rashid appointed Imam Abu Yusuf as the principal qadi (qadi al-kudat). Furthermore, Abu Yusuf provided counsel to the caliph on various religious and personal matters during Harun al-Rashid's reign. After Abu Yusuf passed away at the age of sixty-nine, Harun al-Rashid led his funeral prayer and he was laid to rest in the family cemetery (Tekiner, 2019: 35). Due to frequent disputes between Zubaidah and Harun al-Rashid, Imam Abu Yusuf took on the role of mediator and used his arbitration skills to resolve all their disagreements, from minor daily issues to major legal matters. The significance of Zubaidah's decision to consult with an esteemed jurist such as Imam Abu Yusuf for personal and familial guidance is paramount in comprehending her intellectual character (Kan, 2014: 148).

As recounted in the tale of A Difficulty Resolved from *The Thousand and One Nights*, Harun al-Rashid and Zubaidah bint Ja'far experienced occasional disagreements and Abu Yusuf discovered resolutions for these conflicts. On a certain day, during a disagreement between Zubaidah and Harun al-Rashid, Harun al-Rashid uttered his intention to divorce Zubaidah in a fit of anger. He stated, "Should you remain in my residence for another night, I will initiate a divorce with talaq e salasa." Harun al-Rashid expressed regret over his statement and consulted with scholars. However, all scholars unanimously affirmed the validity of his pronouncement, indicating that the marriage would terminate at the conclusion of the night, as Zubaidah could not feasibly depart for another country within such a short timeframe. Harun al-Rashid was apprised of the fact that Abu Hanifa had a disciple named Abu Yusuf who possessed the aptitude to address the issue in question. Consequently, Harun al-Rashid summoned Abu Yusuf and solicited a fatwa regarding this matter. Abu Yusuf posited that the 72nd verse of Surat al-Jinn signifies that the mosques situated on earth are the exclusive domain of Allah. Furthermore, he stated that Zubaidah is unable to

depart for another country this evening; however, she may pass the night within the mosques, which are not your possession but rather the possession of Allah. Harun was reluctant to divorce his wife, so he had Zubaidah stay overnight in the mosque and canceled the divorce condition. This resolved the issue (Ebu Yusuf, 2019: 12).

There was a significant incident that illuminates the impact of the period on conjugal relations. During a disagreement with her spouse, Harun, Zubaidah declared, “Do not assume that you will gain entrance to Paradise unless you act justly! If you are unkind, you will be among those who will be consigned to hell!” Harun al-Rashid was incensed by this assertion and retorted, “Divorce me if I am not one of Allah’s pious servants in Paradise!” Harun soon regretted his words and the issue was brought before the chief qadi, Abu Yusuf. Abu Yusuf inquired of the caliph whether he harbored the fear of Allah. He requested that the caliph provide proof of this fear from his recollection. Harun responded affirmatively, stating that he did indeed possess the fear of Allah. He proceeded to relate a memory in the presence of Abu Yusuf and his wife. Abu Yusuf cited a verse from Surah al-Rahman stating that those who fear Allah will be granted two heavens. He inferred from this verse that whoever is in awe of standing before Allah will eventually be admitted into two paradise (Rahman 55/46). Furthermore, he expressed that their marital bond will persist even in the afterlife (Kan, 2014: 157).

These historical occurrences, happening in distinct eras, pertain to the identical subject matter, but are diverse illustrations that can be credited to Zubaidah’s impact on social connections. From a sociological vantage point, the deeds of a caliph who initially intended to terminate his marriage but ultimately sought advice from a scholar to avoid such an action and his subsequent endeavors to encourage the endurance of the matrimonial bond, evince his concern for both his spouse and the institution of marriage. It can be contended that the affection that Harun harbored for Zubaidah was profound and fervent. Zubaidah did not maintain a state of naivety and silence in the company of her spouse. Rather, she demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of legal theory that was comparable to that of a learned individual. The woman’s dedication to upholding justice, her intentional position of defending this principle in opposition to her spouse and her readiness to acknowledge her own lack of proficiency and consult with specialists serve as exemplary models of conduct that hold significant implications for communal existence. Furthermore, Zubaidah possessed pro-

found scientific knowledge and made a noteworthy contribution to the cultural domain.

The fact that Zubaidah and Harun sought the counsel of a scholar or qadi in the event of a disagreement or difference of opinion between them had a significant impact on social life, particularly with regards to husband-wife relationships (İbn Kesir, 1966: 101). It is an inescapable fact that the way in which Zubaidah and Harun conducted themselves and lived their lives would have undoubtedly influenced society's perception of the husband-wife relationship. As such, from a sociological perspective, they serve as a paradigm for family formation. Looking at Zubaidah from a new angle, her position as a female figure with agency, authority and impact in spite of her distinctive traits serves as a model that will shape the way women live in Islamic communities. The Reeve's Tale from *The Thousand and One Nights* tells about Zubaidah's being one of the approval authorities of her time, her quick wit and lifestyle. Zubaidah's conduct had a noteworthy effect on the intellectual advancement of women, endowing them with the capacity to exert influence on occurrences and granting them the capability and authorization to collaborate with men. Furthermore, the phenomenon of women enjoying higher levels of prestige and influence contributed to their enhanced societal acceptance, elevated social status, greater involvement in social affairs and increased value in social contexts (Safedi, 1991: 15).

Zubaidah was a pioneer in fashion; she introduced novel fabrics, jewelry and shoes bedecked with valuable gems. The textile industry thrived during this era and Zubaidah did not hesitate to invest generously in her wardrobe. Her collection of jewelry was also renowned (Üçok, 1968: 94). Harun al-Rashid was the pioneer in the country to partake in polo, archery, ball and racket games, backgammon and chess. Zubaidah also enjoyed the fruits of this prosperity by indulging in opulence and delegating her daily tasks to her concubines. The lady adorned her palanquins with gold and silver and popularized the trend of court ladies wearing men's attire (Abbott, 2000: 12).

1. Zubaidah bint Ja'far in Literature

The reign of Harun al-Rashid marked a significant period in the history of literature and its global influence. It was during this era that there was a notable increase in the pursuit of independent studies in various fields, including positive sciences, religious sciences and philology. The translation

of Persian, Syriac and Latin works gave rise to new philosophies and ideas. This led to an increased demand for books that could regulate and explain the Arabic grammar. As a result, the translation activities continued to flourish (Arnold, 1923: 14). During this era, there was a surge in written compositions, resulting in a rise in the populace inclined towards literature and science in the community.

During this period, numerous individuals gained fame throughout the Islamic geography for their contributions to educational institutions, including the masjids and the quttâb. The emphasis of education in these institutions was on memorization, in line with the Arabic tradition. The Ulema conducted various trials to make memorization easier. The Caliph promoted the growth of Arabic literature by endorsing the generation of phonetic poetry, which was a groundbreaking advancement (Yıldırım, 2009: 23). The caliph who provided the greatest support for education and training was Harun al-Rashid (Üçok, 1968: 49).

The assistance provided by the state administration towards education and training resulted in a rise in both written and oral literature. The Caliph displayed a personal inclination towards the fields of science, Islamic studies, mysticism and poetry. Zubaidah bint Ja'far, the Caliph's spouse, would occasionally attend scientific assemblies and meetings held in the palace and would provide support to distinguished scholars. Zubaidah possessed a keen interest in the domains of science, literature and academia and made noteworthy contributions to these fields and provided opportunities for girls to receive education in the palace (Nedim, 2017: 18).

Zubaidah was a patron of the academics and facilitated a conducive atmosphere for them to pen their manuscripts. She harbored a profound affection for literature in verse and frequently commissioned odes that celebrated her own persona, remunerating the poets magnanimously. During the reign of Harun al-Rashid, the *Thousand and One Nights* was originated in the city of Baghdad and was orally transmitted from one generation to another. The collection of tales is vast and encompasses a broad geographic area from Asia to Africa. The identity of the narrator remains unknown.

The collection known as the *Thousand and One Nights* is now a well-known oral tradition that consists of 101 stories divided into 1001 nights. The narratives in the text draw inspiration from early Persian tales, as well as

stories that feature prominent figures of the time, such as Caliph Harun al-Rashid and Zubaidah bint Ja'far.

1.1. Zubaidah Bint Ja'far and Poetry

Poetry has been a long-standing tradition in Arab civilization, dating back to the pre-Islamic era. Its primary purpose was to transmit the virtues of nobility, purity of lineage, victories, migrations, valiant heroes and the commendable qualities of families to posterity (Stetkevych, 1979: 24). During the pre-Islamic era, poets were held in high regard for their skill in conveying emotions that initiated social action (Abbott, 2000: 16). However, after the advent of Islam, poetry underwent a significant transformation that included political events. The poets who wrote poetry for Prophet Muhammad were highly praised and even received gifts. They were known as Shair'un-Nebi and were also requested by the Prophet to write satires about wars and enemies. This led to an increase in both praise and satire (Çiftçi, 2004: 81).

During the period before Islam, poets were mainly concerned with their own ancestry and acts of bravery. However, in later times, they began to extol the virtues of influential individuals and state leaders (Polat, 2018: 638). In the Umayyad era, there was a noticeable transition towards lyrical poems of love and wine, accompanied by the growth of musical expression. In the Abbasid era, there was a substantial backing from the palace for poetry and music and poets became essential personalities in social gatherings. They even outranked certain officials in their closeness to the caliph (Polat, 2018: 639).

The emergence of poetry and music can be attributed to the ruling family's profound fascination with these art forms. During the early period of the Abbasid dynasty, music was strictly prohibited within the palace, but this constraint was abolished following the reign of Caliph Mahdi (İbn'ul Esir, 1871: 2). During the reigns of Caliphs Musa and Harun al-Rashid, there was a flourishing of poetry and music. Talented slaves and servants were carefully selected and trained in highly esteemed musical institutions. These slaves were considered to be a valuable investment by the caliphs and nobles who invested large sums of money in their education and adorned them with expensive jewelry.

During the era of Harun al-Rashid, the ruling family generously bestowed rewards upon poets who exhibited exceptional talent in their lyrics or poems (Abbott, 2000: 18). A few poets openly expressed their antipa-

tion of receiving material favors from the caliph and were granted them accordingly (Zehebi, 1987: 33). The dynasty expressed a deep appreciation for literature, which served as a means of cultural preservation and inspiration for poets. Harun al-Rashid, who was a poet himself, extended considerable support and aid to poets and musicians (Üçok, 1968: 52).

Poetry and music served not only to express artistic and literary ideas, but also as a means of interpersonal communication. The Abbasid rulers were aware of the effectiveness of poetry in communicating messages and they frequently employed it for this purpose. They recognized the expressive power of poetry and therefore kept poets in close proximity to state officials. The significance of poets and composers was amplified by the capacity of poetry to exert a substantial influence on individual and governmental affairs. Consequently, it became customary in the Abbasid realm to curry favor with poets and to retain their presence in the company of those who were agreeable to them (İbn Abdirabbih, 1983: 6). Harun al-Rashid possessed a profound fondness for poetry and consistently kept poets in his company, even bringing them along on his military campaigns (Zehebi, 1987: 38). The poets of this era held contempt for the pre-Islamic and Umayyad poets, regarding them as inferior (Arnold, 1923: 25). Harun al-Rashid had a fondness for poetry and was known to have written and encouraged its creation. This affection for poetry also extended to his harem, as he went to great lengths to procure talented slave girls who could sing and recite it (İbn'ul Esir, 1871: 5).

Harun al-Rashid's affection for poetry served as a medium for expressing his love for Zubaidah. Zubaidah also frequently utilized poetry to articulate her emotions and sentiments, employing the medium to express her vexation and sorrow. Their shared passion for poetry is widely acknowledged, as evidenced by accounts of them reciting poems to each other and dispatching poetic compositions through messengers during their periods of separation (Abbott, 2000: 22). Following a dispute, Zubaidah commissioned a poet to compose a poem regarding Harun al-Rashid, whom she referred to as her subordinate, urging him to apologize. It is noteworthy that Harun did not take offense to this depiction and heeded the counsel, extending apologies to his spouse and restoring their relationship. Zubaidah recognized the remedial and communicative potential of poetry and generously compensated the poet for his contribution in resolving their discord (Şeyban, 2004: 35).

The authorship of the poems Zubaidah used is unclear, as it is not known whether she composed them herself or drew inspiration from renowned poets. However, her profound understanding of poetry implies that she may have authored and recited her own works. One instance highlights her proficiency in crafting poetry to support her clerk (Kan, 2014: 158).

It is well documented that Harun al-Rashid composed poetry not only for Zubaidah but also for other wives residing within his harem. Among these works were pieces expressing his affection for Mu'tasim's mother, Maridah and he even employed verse as a means of reconciliation following disagreements. After departing from Maridah in Raqqa following a disagreement, she later realized her mistake and requested the services of court musician Ibrahim Mawsili to craft a melody from the poem she penned expressing her affection for Maridah. Upon receiving the song, Maridah composed a poem that questioned the inconsistency in Harun's affection. Consequently, Harun expeditiously summoned Maridah back to Raqqa (Isfahani, 1996: 38).

Harun al-Rashid composed poems for his concubines, such as Dhat al-Khal, Sihr and Ziya, which greatly disturbed Zubaidah (Abbott, 2000: 27). Zubaidah endeavored to maintain Harun's affection, but he readily added other women to his harem. The Story of the Sleeper Awaken'd from the Thousand and One Nights gives information about the harem life of the time and Zubaidah's position in the harem life.

Despite the presence of concubines and singers in the harem, Zubaidah held a unique position in the affections of Harun al-Rashid. Upon expressing her distress at a servant joining the harem, Uleyyah, her sister, offered her comfort (Şeyban, 1996: 22). Uleyyah, renowned for her aptitude in poetry and singing, composed a new poem with the intention of reuniting Harun with Zubaidah. The poem was committed to memory by all the attendants and upon hearing it, Harun was pleased to return to Zubaidah's side (Abbott, 2000: 31).

Zubaidah recognized the influence of poetry and generously rewarded poets. After giving birth to her son Muhammad Amin, the renowned court poet Marwan b. Abi Hafsa presented her with a poem, which she received with gratitude. Although Harun al-Rashid deemed it worthy of reward, Zubaidah deemed the reward insufficient and ordered the poet's mouth to be filled with jewels as a sign of her appreciation (Kan, 2014: 160).

During the reign of Amin, a poem was composed by Salm b. Amr al-Hasir in praise of his caliphate and lineage. The magnanimity of Zubaidah was such that the poet sold the jewelry gifted to him by her for a sum of 20,000 dinars (Isfahani, 1996: 41). According to a reliable source, after the demise of Salm b. 'Amr al-Hasir, only the money received from Zubaidah and Harun was discovered, amounting to 1,500,000 dirhams, exclusive of his other assets (Isfahani, 1996: 43).

Zubaidah developed intimate ties with poets and musicians and frequently arranged gatherings to appreciate their work. Zubaidah was quite generous when it came to rewarding poets and composers and she was widely recognized for her commendable support of the arts. Her love for poetry was evident in the way she communicated and expressed herself through this medium and her passion for it was highly regarded by both the artistic fraternity and the general public. She played a significant role in promoting poetry and intellectualism during the Abbasid period.

1.2. Zubaidah Bint Ja'far and the *Thousand and One Nights Tales*

The Thousand and One Nights Tales, which are also referred to as “Alf Laylah wa-Laylah”, comprise a compendium of oral folk stories that have been transmitted from one generation to the next. These tales have been transcribed due to their oral literary background. The collection of stories in this anthology includes several sub-stories and dates back to the 9th and 10th centuries. The most significant publication of these tales occurred in Paris between 1704 and 1717. *The Thousand and One Nights*, which has been translated and published in numerous languages, features intricate narratives that are unique to Arab nations. *The Thousand and One Nights Tales* have two main manuscript groups: one in Syria and the other in Egypt (Mahdi, 1990: 55). Translations by various authors, including Dr. J. C. Mardrus and Powys Mathers, were utilized. Alim Serif Onaran translated it into Turkish, with additional translations from Mardrus, Powys Mathers and Ahmet Nazif. This collection comprises 8 volumes and 16 books. The tales are available in a variety of languages such as Turkish, Hindi, Chinese and English. These stories are rich in cultural significance from the Eastern world. Some versions have been edited to exclude explicit content, correct grammatical errors and abbreviate certain stories (Hitti, 1980: 56).

The Thousand and One Nights are often referred to by various sources using different terms such as stories, narratives and tales. These terms, namely story, tale and narrative, are used interchangeably throughout the

collection (Karataş, 2008: 14). The tales included in this collection have been contributed by the entire Islamic world, spanning from Damascus to Baghdad and from Cairo to Fez. The exact author, time and origin of each tale remain uncertain, but it is believed that some of these tales have been derived from the Persian collection known as “Hezar Efsane” (One Thousand Tales). The impact of Iran and India can be observed in the names of the characters and the selection of locations. The primary motif of the stories is female unfaithfulness, which is also a prevalent topic in Indian tales (Weidner, 2017: 5). The corpus of tales comprises a collection of diverse cultures, including Iran, India, Arabia, Turkey and Greece. These tales were passed down orally and have undergone numerous alterations over time, incorporating a blend of traditional and contemporary elements (Haddawy, 1990: xiii).

The collection of stories known as the *Thousand and One Nights* provides insights into the cultural and social beliefs of various societies. The stories are presented in the form of poems of varying length, ranging from one to thirty-three lines and the collection comprises a total of 1202 poems. The narratives are intermittently corroborated by Qur’anic verses and hadiths. Within these stories, the notions of caliphate, science and Sufism are portrayed as respectable elements. Furthermore, the characters in the stories possess socially advantageous attributes, such as fairness, attractiveness, affluence, sorcery and paranormal abilities. The stories in the *Thousand and One Nights* explore themes such as trade and caravans as means of livelihood and often allude to the presence of slaves and concubines. Furthermore, these tales provide valuable insight into the values of the Abbasid era, the imaginative abilities of individuals, the importance of loyalty to the caliph, the social structure of the populace and the role of women in society. The most significant impact of literature is its capacity to offer the perspectives of significant leaders and eras to the public, both in written historical accounts and implicit messages conveyed through books (Weidner, 2017: 16).

The Thousand and One Nights provides us with a diverse range of historical figures of the era, whose personal attributes are portrayed in parallel to their depictions in the pages of history. Zubaidah bint Ja’far, the spouse of Harun al-Rashid, is a significant figure in the narratives of the period. Zubaidah bint Ja’far is featured in 264 tales, playing different roles as either a supporting character or the main protagonist. These stories primarily focus on the magnificence of Baghdad and the life of Harun al-Rashid, high-

lighting his admiration, benevolence and profound affection for Zubaidah bint Ja'far. These narratives, which have been transmitted verbally across multiple generations, offer valuable insights into the societal perception of Zubaidah bint Ja'far.

The Thousand and One Nights Tales' origin and the reason for their telling on a thousand and one nights can be explained as follows. Shahriyar, a ruler who has lost his trust in women due to being repeatedly deceived by his wife, seeks retribution by marrying a new young girl every night and ordering her execution the following morning. Scheherazade, the daughter of the vizier, devised a plan to put an end to the inhumane treatment of women in the country. She successfully persuaded her father to grant her permission to marry Shahriyar and expressed her desire to bid farewell to her sister Dunyazad prior to the nuptial ceremony. During their parting, Dunyazad requested Scheherazade to narrate her a final tale. The story was so poignant that Shahriyar granted Scheherazade the permission to continue telling stories every night. Eventually, Shahriyar was so deeply touched by the stories that he found it impossible to execute Scheherazade. They lived happily ever after with their three offspring (Onaran, 2000: 50).

This compilation of narratives comprises 264 tales with interwoven plots and multi-faceted storytelling. Among the prominent tales are *The Merchant and the Jinni*, *The Porter and the Three Ladies*, *The Hunchback*, *The Magic Lamp*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, *Sindbad the Sailor*. The following are some of the tales from the *Thousand and One Nights*, including *Zubaidah bint Ja'far*.

The Reeve's Tale: This is the story of a merchant who becomes enamored with a gorgeous young lady. They encounter each other while she is purchasing fabric and after several interactions, they declare their affection for one another. Nonetheless, the lady discloses that she is a slave and that they can only wed with her owner's agreement. The woman devises a scheme to smuggle the merchant into the palace inside a chest. The merchant complies with her instructions and manages to gain entry into the palace, where he presents himself before Zubaidah, the woman's mistress. Upon hearing the merchant's assurances, Zubaidah consents to their union (Onaran, 2000: 125). In this narrative, Zubaidah is depicted as a person of influence and sagacity who guarantees the endorsement of Caliph Harun al-Rashid for the nuptials of the pair. The anecdote also accentuates Zubaidah's benevolent demeanor, such as the construction of a mosque on the shores of the Euphrates. The depiction of the merchant being presented

before Zubaidah with a group of stunning slaves showcases the opulence and lifestyle portrayed in the Thousand and One Nights.

The Surname of Love's Slave: In this narrative, a juvenile merchant identified as Ganem unearths a sepulcher interred in a cemetery and encounters a resplendent damsel nestled within it. The damsel, known as Kut al-Kulub, was interred alive as a result of a conspiracy orchestrated by Zubaidah, the consort of the reigning Caliph. Ganem brought Kut al-Kulub to his residence and they fell in love. However, Kut al-Kulub couldn't disclose her true identity as Caliph Harun al-Rashid's favorite concubine. In due course, Zubaidah became aware of Kut al-Kulub's existence and instructed Ganem's apprehension. Ganem manages to get away and is welcomed by a benevolent gentleman who looks after her (Onaran, 2000: 455). The Caliph discovers the truth and sets Kut al-Kulub and Ganem free, while also taking Ganem's sister as his wife. The narrative delves into the themes of affection, envy and the power structures within the Caliph's harem.

The Tale of the Lazy Youth: According to the tale, Zubaidah, the wife of the caliph, desired a crown but was unable to locate a suitable gemstone to adorn its apex. The caliph directed his officials to procure the ideal stone, yet their efforts proved fruitless. Ultimately, they were informed that the stone could be obtained in Basra, in close proximity to Abu Muhammad the Lazy. The Caliph has dispatched his vizier to retrieve the stone and upon its arrival, he is astounded by the vast riches of Abu Muhammad the Lazy (Onaran, 2000: 399). The narrative highlights Zubaidah's fixation with jewels and the caliph's endeavors to gratify her. Moreover, it exemplifies the caliph's resoluteness to realize Zubaidah's desire.

Abu-Nowas Improvises: In this tale, the sleepless caliph Harun al-Rashid comes across a mansion while wandering through a garden. He discovers a concubine sleeping inside and awakens her by kissing her. The concubine reveals that she was purchased by Amîn, the caliph's son, with the intention of presenting her to the caliph. Zubaidah acquired her from Amîn and entrusted her to a black eunuch to be confined within the mansion. The caliph was enraged with his wife due to his jealousy and vowed to safeguard the concubine. He subsequently summoned the court poet, Abu Nuwas, to amuse him with poetry. Abu Nuwas composed poems about the concubine, but the indecent language in his verses resulted in his punishment. Initially, the caliph had intended to execute him, but he later granted him clemency (Onaran, 2000: 201). The narrative highlights the envy felt by

the wife of the caliph and the caliph's fondness for music and poetry. Additionally, it scrutinizes the significance attributed to concubines who possess the ability to sing and play musical instruments. The story alludes to the actual poet Abu Nuwas and depicts the opulent lifestyle and indulgences of the caliphate.

Abu-Nowas and Zobeida's Bath: Harun al-Rashid constructed a concealed pool in a remote forest to enable his wife and cousin, Zubaidah, to bathe in seclusion. Harun surreptitiously observes Zubaidah and, captivated by her stunning appearance, inadvertently snaps a branch, thereby exposing himself. Impressed by this spectacle, Harun commissions the court poet Abu Nuwas to expand upon a verse he had previously penned concerning this occurrence. It has been ascertained that the poet who carried on with the poem also witnessed Zubaidah in the pool. Harun was unperturbed by this particular detail owing to the exquisite beauty of the poem and subsequently remunerated the poet (Onaran, 2000: 485).

Zobeida Caught in the Act: In this narrative, Scheherazade recounts Harun al-Rashid's mistrust of his wife Zubaidah's fidelity. The caliph summons the qadi Abu Yusuf to scrutinize the issue. Abu Yusuf uncovers that a blemish on the bed is not a sign of infidelity but rather bat secretion. Harun al-Rashid and Zubaidah were greatly impressed by Abu Yusuf's intellect and therefore bestowed him with lavish gifts (Onaran, 2000: 491). The narrative also highlights Abu Yusuf's apprehension towards Zubaidah and his endeavors to preserve the union of Harun al-Rashid and Zubaidah.

Khalifah The Fisherman of Baghdad: The narrative proceeds with the caliph embarking on a fishing expedition alongside the vizier and encountering a fisherman who shares his name. Simultaneously, Zubaidah formulates a plan to avenge herself against Kuwwa'ul-Kulub. She extends an invitation to him for a banquet and clandestinely adds a sedative to the food. Zubaidah has incarcerated Kuwwa'ul-Kulub and falsely declared that he has died due to suffocation. Upon the Caliph's arrival, the officials of the harem falsely deny knowledge of Kuwwa'ul-Kulub's whereabouts, out of fear of being executed by Zubaidah (Onaran, 2000: 163).

The Story of the Sleeper Awaken'd: In this tale, a man by the name of Abu al-Hasan takes the place of the caliph for a day and regales him with his amusing behavior. The caliph is so entertained that he desires Abu al-Hasan's constant presence and even permits him to enter his spouse's chamber. Abu al-Hasan and one of the caliph's concubines, Sugar Cane,

got hitched. Nonetheless, their lavish way of life resulted in financial difficulties. To extricate themselves from their predicament, Abu al-Hasan feigned his demise, which led to misinterpretations and comedic situations. In due course, the veracity of the situation is unveiled and the caliph grants them pardon and bestows upon Abu al-Hasan a stipend on a monthly basis (Onaran, 2000: 320). The narrative highlights the resolute and spirited persona of Sugar Cane and the commanding influence of the caliph. It offers an understanding of the lifestyle within the harem and the power structures of the era.

The Tale of the Unending Treasure: The narrative commences with the Wazir Ja'far al-Barmaki informing the Caliph Harun al-Rashid that he was not the sole beneficiary of Allah's invaluable blessings. Incensed, the caliph inquires as to the identity of this individual and Ja'far elucidates that it is a gentleman by the name of Abu al-Qasim whom he encountered during a trip to Basra. The caliph issued an order to arrest Ja'far, but Ja'far persisted in telling the truth. In search of comfort, the caliph paid a visit to Zubaidah in order to regain composure. During their conversation, Zubaidah referred to the caliph as "my cousin's son" and the caliph addressed Zubaidah as "my cousin's daughter." The caliph informed Zubaidah of Ja'far's disrespectful comments and recommended that she dispatch someone to Basra to investigate before taking any action. Despite Zubaidah's counsel, the caliph resolved to travel to Basra incognito as an Iraqi merchant. He directs Zubaidah to oversee the affairs of the nation during his absence. During his time in Basra, Ja'far had the opportunity to meet with the caliph Abu al-Qasim. He was amazed by the caliph's wealth and generosity and Abu al-Qasim explained that he had inherited a treasure which he believed was his duty to use to help others. Ja'far was impressed by the caliph's sincerity and honesty and the caliph also saw that Ja'far was a trustworthy person. As a result, the caliph returned to Baghdad and brought gifts from Abu al-Qasim. Ja'far was subsequently released from his imprisonment and offered the governorship of Basra. Abu al-Qasim presented gifts to Zubaidah and narrated the account of his voyage. He was cordially invited to Baghdad where he had the pleasure of meeting his first and last love, Sitti Lebibah (Onaran, 2000: 42). Zubaidah plays an important role in the story by supporting the caliph, advising her and being a trusted figure in the administration of the state. In this tale, as in many others, Zubaidah is seen to intervene in the events and the caliph with her intelligence. There are many comments on Zubaidah effectiveness in other stories. Rather than a refer-

ence in this story there is an emphasis showing that the management itself is left to her.

The Perils of Insistence: Following the assassination of his brother Amin, the regions that had backed Amin pledged loyalty to Ma'mun in a timely manner. The account commences with Ma'mun attributing the hardship experienced by himself and Amin during the reign of Harun al-Rashid to Zubaidah. Upon learning of the calamities that had befallen his mother, Ma'mun contemplated seeking refuge in the holy lands of Mecca. Nonetheless, unable to reach a decision, he resolved to entrust his fate to the individual who had deprived him of his rightful position on the throne and caused him immense suffering. Ma'mun dispatched a correspondence to Amin, extending his pardon and beseeching him to recollect a cherished remembrance and absolve the individual who had exhibited benevolence to Ma'mun previously. Subsequently, Ma'mun was furnished with a missive from Zubaidah, wherein Zubaidah conveys her appreciation for al-Ma'mun's clemency and asserts that she has regained her entitlements and is accorded filial treatment by al-Ma'mun. The narrative proceeds with Zubaidah flinging herself at the feet of Ma'mun, who stands up and weeps in reverence of her mother. The tale then progresses to Zubaidah's persistent fury over Amin's demise and Ma'mun's ongoing distress over this hostility. Ma'mun recounted how Harun al-Rashid penalized him for his defeat in a game of chess by mandating his nude promenade around the palace and the garden. Zubaidah voiced her remorse for the affliction she caused to her kin. Ma'mun was perturbed by this tale and departed, recognizing that had Zubaidah not insisted on the penalty, this disagreeable incident would not have been recalled (Onaran, 2000: 712). The narrative encompasses historical occurrences and makes mention of a letter that has been enshrined in history. The missive of clemency that was anticipated from the incoming caliph following the demise of his offspring left an indelible mark on both the chroniclers and the populace of that era and was transmitted down through the ages. The narrative additionally incorporates facets such as the altercation between Zubaidah and Harun al-Rashid, the employment of the slave portrayal and the accentuation on the caliphate.

The Arab Girl at the Fountain: This narrative recounts the encounter between Ma'mun and his spouse. According to historical account, the nuptial ceremony featured the bride receiving a gift of a thousand pearls from her mother. Additionally, the bride bestowed upon her mother-in-law a coat from the Umayyad palace and in response, her mother-in-law permitted

her to embark on a pilgrimage. In the *Thousand and One Nights*, the wedding ceremony is portrayed as an exquisite event. The bride's mother ceremoniously empties a thousand pearls from a golden bowl. Furthermore, the bride is described as one of the most admired, knowledgeable and praised women in Islam (Onaran, 2000: 708).

A Difficulty Resolved: In this narrative, Harun al-Rashid requests his acquaintance Ja'far to sell him a concubine, but Ja'far declines. Harun intimates to terminate his marriage if he does not receive the concubine and Ja'far intimidates to terminate his marriage if he hands her over to him. Both individuals express regret for their words, yet are uncertain how to rectify the situation. Harun has summoned Abu Yusuf. Harun intended to dissolve his marital union with the concubine, however, she has declined to comply. Abu Yusuf proposed that the slave be transferred to the possession of Harun, to which Harun acquiesced. Subsequently, Abu Yusuf declared the dissolution of the marriage contract. Harun rewarded him with a golden tray (Onaran, 2000: 482). This narrative pertains to a historical divorce case that took place between Harun al-Rashid and his wife Zubaidah. Upon hearing the account, Shahriyar requests Scheherazade to narrate the tale of Ja'far.

The End of Ja'far and the Barmacides: The narrative commences with a historical context of the Barmaki family's ascent to power in the Abbasid Empire. It elucidates the intimate association between Harun al-Rashid and al-Fadl, the progeny of Yahya ibn Khalid and how this association culminated in the nomination of Ja'far al-Barmaki as the vizier. The contribution of the Barmaki family's knowledge and skills brought about a reinvigoration of the empire, but the circumstances of their abrupt downfall remain unclear. There are those who propose that Harun al-Rashid's partiality toward Ja'far and his family resulted in their demise, while others posit that it was due to their prior religious convictions or the romantic relationship between Ja'far and Harun al-Rashid's sister Abbasa (Onaran, 2000: 715). Upon the conclusion of the tale of Prince Jasmin and Princess Almond, the existing rendition of the *Thousand and One Nights* draws to a close (Onaran, 2000: 58). Scheherazad entered into matrimony with Shah Shahriyar, who was enamored by her cerebral acumen, devout nature and physical attractiveness. Over the course of three years, they bore three offspring. *The Tales of the Thousand and One Nights*, written in their entirety, are believed to occupy thirty volumes and include every detail. The work concludes with the assertion that only Allah possesses the knowledge to distinguish between the true and fictional narratives.

Conclusion

Zubaidah bint Ja'far is a well-known character in the Thousand and One Nights Tales. She held a significant position as the beloved wife of Harun al-Rashid, the caliph of Baghdad. Her beauty, power and influence within the harem, as well as her ambition and jealousy, are prominent themes in the tales. Zubaidah was a significant and magnanimous personality during the Abbasid period. She extended her patronage to scholars, poets and artists, thus contributing significantly to the cultural and intellectual growth of the society. Her wealth and influence enabled her to engage in philanthropic activities, primarily in the Hijaz region and along the pilgrimage routes. Zubaidah is one of the most renowned female figures in Islamic history due to her affection for Harun al-Rashid, her distinguished lineage and her love for opulence and adornment. The Thousand and One Nights Tales that feature Zubaidah portray authentic scenarios and allude to notable personalities of that era. These narratives are indicative of the political and societal milieu of the era and provide insight into the personality of Zubaidah amidst the opulent palace existence. The Thousand and One Nights Tales elevated Zubaidah's fame beyond the confines of the Islamic world. Her impact is evident not only in historical records but also in the realm of literature and poetry. Zubaidah's portrayal in the Thousand and One Nights Tales is examined in light of her personal history, highlighting both similarities and disparities. Zubaidah is commemorated as a significant historical figure, not only due to her status but also for her impact on the literature, art, architecture, politics and science of her era. The Thousand and One Nights Tales depict Zubaidah's name in connection with magnificent palaces, waterways and religious devotion, thereby perpetuating her legacy.

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