



The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West

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Alf layla wa layla (known in English as A Thousand and One Nights or The Arabian Nights) changed the world on a scale unrivalled by any other literary text. Inspired by a fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript, the appearance of Antoine Galland's twelve-volume *Mille et Une Nuits* in English translation (1704-1717), closely followed by the Grub Street English edition, drew the text into European circulation. Over the following three hundred years, a widely heterogeneous series of editions, compilations, translations, and variations circled the globe to reveal the absorption of The Arabian Nights into English, Continental, and global literatures, and its transformative return to modern Arabic literature, where it now enjoys a degree of prominence that it had never attained during the classical period. Beginning with a thorough introduction situating The Arabian Nights in its historical and cultural contexts-and offering a fresh examination of the text's multiple locations in the long history of modern Orientalism—this collection of essays by noted scholars from 'East', 'West', and in-between reassesses the influence of the Nights in Enlightenment and Romantic literature, as well as the text's vigorous after-life in the contemporary Arabic novel.

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Review

"These essays present an important methodological as well as literary-historical contribution to the field. In expanding the contexts in which the tales may be interpreted and interrogating the practices and protocols used to master their meanings, the collection invites us to reflect on how the *Nights* have historically been read and to imagine how we might learn to read them now." --*Eighteenth-Century Fiction*

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Saree Makdisi is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author of *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (1998), and *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (2003). He has also written a number of articles for publications including *Critical Inquiry*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *The Cambridge Companion to Blake*, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, and *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*. Felicity Nussbaum is Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Senior Global Fellow with the International Institute. She is the author most recently of *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2003), and the editor of *The Global Eighteenth Century* (2003). Among her other publications are *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989), co-winner of the Louis Gottschalk Prize; and *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire* (1995).

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