



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב  
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The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of Jewish History

*Unveiling Mar'ot ha-tsovo'ot*  
An Introduction and Critical Translation

Maayan Zadok

Under the supervision of: Professor Iris Idelson-Shein

הרשות הלאומית לתרבות היידיש  
נאַציאָנאַלע אינסטאַנץ פאַר ייִדישער קולטור  
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## Thesis Abstract

This thesis presents the first critical introduction and English translation of the frame story of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, the earliest known Yiddish adaptation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, printed anonymously in 1718 in Wandsbek. Long overlooked, the book offers a rare window into early modern Ashkenazi literary culture, translation practices, and moral discourse. While its tales were adapted from the German translation of Antoine Galland's influential French edition<sup>1</sup>, this text is far more than a mere reproduction. At its core lies an original frame narrative, absent from Galland's collection, that transforms the oriental setting into a moralistic tale rich in Jewish values, gendered commentary, and narrative agency.

Situated within the tradition of Yiddish *musar* literature, *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* blends popular European motifs with Jewish moral instruction.<sup>2</sup> Its frame narrative draws on classical myths, such as those of Acrisius and Danae and Tiresias, reimagined through a Jewish lens.<sup>3</sup> Characters like Melela, the storyteller who contests patriarchal norms and Karmolia, an Arabian prince disguised as a woman, whose shifting identity invites reflection on gender roles and transformation. Rather than exoticizing the East, the text reframes foreign tales to emphasize moral growth and divine providence, incorporating Jewish idioms, prayers, and ethical teachings throughout.

The thesis explores the intersection between translation, genre, and gender and argues that *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* complicates conventional understandings of Orientalism. While based on an Orientalist source, it shows little interest in the "East" as an exotic space and instead reimagines the stories as vehicles for religious and ethical reflection. The absence of polemic against Muslims and the integration of Jewish expressions into the text reveal a distinct mode of Jewish engagement with non-Jewish narratives, neither fully appropriative nor oppositional. This study positions *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* as a hybrid literary work that embodies early modern Ashkenazi vernacular creativity. It challenges rigid binaries between East and West, religious and secular, male and female, and affirms the unique cultural role of Yiddish literature as a site of storytelling and imagination.

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<sup>1</sup> Iris Idelson-Shein, *Between the Bridge and the Barricade: Jewish Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2024), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Iris Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound: The Staunch Vernacularity of the First Yiddish Arabian Nights," forthcoming.

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## Introduction

Jacob Grimm once described *One Thousand and One Nights* as “the poetic geography of the East”.<sup>4</sup> This renowned collection of tales, first translated into a European language by the French Orientalist Antoine Galland (1646–1715), profoundly shaped European imagination of the East in eighteenth-century literature and has since influenced a wide range of cultural expressions, including literature, music, and art.<sup>5</sup> Originating from oral and written traditions across Persia, India, and the Arab world, in eighteenth-century Europe the tales gained immense popularity, undergoing numerous reeditions and being translated into many European languages, including Yiddish.<sup>6</sup>

The first known Yiddish translation, published under the title *Mar’ot ha-tsovo’t* (Mirrors of the Assembling Women), exemplifies the remarkable reach of Galland’s book, transcending cultural and religious boundaries and reaching a Yiddish-speaking audience. *Mar’ot ha-tsovo’t* is, however, an unusual translation. The book features two introductions, a frame story that presents a new narrative, distinct from Galland’s tales, followed by a near transliteration of seven stories translated from the German translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>7</sup> It is also deeply influenced by the contemporary Yiddish *musar* literature, tales with a moral lesson, a genre that encompassed a diverse range of texts, including original Yiddish compositions, adaptations of foreign works, and translations from Hebrew.<sup>8</sup> In two extensive introductions, the author highlights the moral merits of the book, emphasizing its cultural, didactic, and religious significance. Throughout the frame story and the tales, the author interweaves moral reflections and commentary, guiding readers toward ethical interpretation and reinforcing the text’s didactic purpose.

This thesis examines *Mar’ot ha-tsovo’ot* within the context of early modern Yiddish literature, offering both an introduction to and an analysis of central themes of the text and an

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. (London, 1994), 68.

<sup>5</sup> Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Tetsuo Nishio, “A Bibliography of the Arabian Nights in the 18th Century,” *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 36, no. 4 (2012): 561–573.

<sup>7</sup> *Die tausend und eine Nacht*, [. . .] erstlich vom Hrn. Galland aus der Arabischen Sprache in die Französische, und aus selbiger [. . .] in Teutsche übersetzt (Leipzig, 1710. Repr. 1730)

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Benjamin Koch, “‘Many books on issues of divine service’: Defining *musar* in early modernity,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020): 1–4.

English translation of its frame story. The central focus of this study is the frame story, an independent narrative adapted by the author and one that introduces new characters, themes and perspectives absent from *One Thousand and One Nights*. This Yiddish adaptation shifts the thematic emphasis from Orientalist spectacle to ethical reflection, with a particular focus on gender. Rather than centering on exoticized settings and narratives of the East, *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* foregrounds moral instruction, using its stories to explore issues of virtue, deception, and character. Gender plays a more prominent role in the text than Orientalist imagery, as the author devotes significant attention to female virtue, agency, and wisdom. By analyzing both the Orientalist and gendered dimensions of the text, this study highlights the complexities of Jewish engagement with non-Jewish cultural works during this period and situates *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* within the broader traditions of early modern Yiddish literary production and translation in the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

### Context and Origins

*Mar'ot* was published anonymously in 1718 in Wandsbek (in present-day Hamburg). The book's author/translator made no mention of his source. It was only in 1977 that Hayim Liebermann identified the book as a translation of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, speculating, based on the use of Hebrew transliterations of French terms that appeared in the translation, that the translator may have relied on Galland's French text.<sup>10</sup> However, recent research by Iris Idelson-Shein suggests that the work is a near-transliteration of the German translation of Antoine Galland's *Nights*, first published in 1710 and reprinted in multiple editions throughout the eighteenth century. The Yiddish translator rendered a faithful adaptation of the German text, with occasional Hebraisms. However, as discussed in detail below, the frame story of *Mar'ot* deviates entirely from Galland's tales and is as an original narrative unique to this Yiddish text.

The book's title page states that the text was printed in Wandsbek in 1718 at the printing house of Israel ben Abraham, who was likely born in Amsterdam and became a major publisher of Hebrew books in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> However, this date and location remain disputed, as historical records indicate that Israel did not establish a printing house in Wandsbek

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<sup>9</sup> Hereafter, *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* will be referred to as *Mar'ot*, and *One Thousand and One Nights* as *Nights*.

<sup>10</sup> Hayim Liebermann, "Tirgum Yidi bilty yadu'a shel sefer Elef layla va-laya," *Aley sefer* 4: 156–62.

<sup>11</sup> Marvin J. Heller, *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*, vol. 37 of *The Brill Reference Library of Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 169–173.

until 1726. Scholars such as Hayim Liebermann and Marvin Heller have offered differing opinions on the matter. Liebermann suggests that Israel may have briefly stopped in Wandsbek while relocating from Köthen to Jeßnitz and printed *Mar'ot* at that time.<sup>12</sup> Heller, however, argues that the stated date is incorrect and that the work was likely printed after 1726, when Israel had fully established his press there.<sup>13</sup>

A recent discovery by Iris Idelson-Shein may perhaps resolve this mystery.<sup>14</sup> Based on a newly examined copy from the Royal Danish Library, Idelson-Shein suggests that *Mar'ot* may have been printed in 1718 Blankenburg, but that the printer used a false Wandsbek imprint to thwart potential censorial scrutiny. Significantly, this was the only time Israel turned to Yiddish translation, and he seems to have chosen *Nights* specifically for its broad appeal. Moreover, Idelson-Shein suggests that Israel ben Abraham also authored *Mar'ot* due to the discussion of financial difficulties in the preface, the book's false Wandsbek imprint to evade censorship, and the reuse of unused folios from a different book in its binding—circumstances that would have led him to write this book.<sup>15</sup>

According to the translator's preface, the original plan was to publish the book as a series of 365 tales (שס"ה מעשיות), printing seven stories each week over the course of a year. Each weekly booklet was designed to include a story for each day of the week and was to be sold at an affordable price of "one or two shillings per sheet."<sup>16</sup> This gradual publication approach was designed to ease the financial strain of printing the entire collection at once, making it easier for readers to purchase the book in installments and provided them with a steady stream of new content. At the end of the year, the individual weekly booklets would be compiled into a complete volume, offering readers a comprehensive collection of all 365 stories. *Mar'ot* is, however, the only known booklet in this ambitious series to have been printed. It includes seven tales, five of which conclude with a moral lesson (*musar*) derived from the story. The moral lessons for the sixth and seventh tales were intended to be printed in the following week. On the final page, the translator writes, "The story continues on the eighth day [*di historye folgt fun akhten tog*]"<sup>17</sup> indicating his plan to continue the

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<sup>12</sup> Hayim Liebermann, "Tirgum Yidi bilty yadu'a shel sefer Elef layla va-laya," *Aley sefer* 4: 156–62.

<sup>13</sup> Heller, *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*, 169–173.

<sup>14</sup> Iris Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound: The Staunch Vernacularity of the First Yiddish Arabian Nights," forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 2b.

<sup>17</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, (Wandsbek, 1718), 81b.

series. However, no additional booklets have been found, suggesting that no further installments were ever printed.

### Musar Literature

*Mar'ot* opens with two introductions, each serving a distinct purpose. In the first introduction, the author shares a personal account, explaining that he was once a wealthy and honorable man, but now, while still honorable, is no longer wealthy.<sup>18</sup> To sustain himself, he decided to earn his livelihood through the sale of this book, expressing his hope that readers will find joy and gain valuable insights from the moral lessons in the stories and purchase the work to support him. The second introduction addresses potential criticisms about the book. Anticipating questions about whether the content adheres with prevalent moral standards, the author defends the value of the tales by emphasizing their significance.<sup>19</sup> Later, the author introduces a frame story to the translated tales, which differs from the original frame narrative of the *Nights*. The tale introduces Melela, an Indian girl who wished to marry a king, and her father, an advisor of the king and the tale's storyteller who hopes to dissuade her from the marriage.<sup>20</sup> This frame story spans thirty-nine pages and constitutes nearly half of the entire book. Following the frame story, are the seven tales from Galland's *Nights* narrated by Melela herself, which are a close translation of the German tales, with the first five tales ending with a moral lesson added by the author.

In the preface to *Mar'ot*, the author offers an explanation for the book's title, stating: "The Hebrew title of the book references the biblical phrase "מְרִאוֹת הַצּוֹבְאוֹת", which appears in Exodus 38:8 and refers to the bronze mirrors donated by the women who assembled at the entrance of the Tabernacle.<sup>21</sup> Given that women were a significant focus for the author — who wrote extensively about them in the introduction — this biblical reference is particularly fitting.

As Lieberman and Idelson-Shein have noted, assigning Hebrew titles to Yiddish books was a common practice, often unrelated to the content of the work.<sup>22</sup> In this case, however, the title's connection to a biblical episode involving women may not be entirely coincidental, as it reflects

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 5v.

<sup>19</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 1a-2b.

<sup>20</sup> See the following chapter: The Structure and Content of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*.

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 38:8 (King James Version): "And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the lookingglasses of the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation".

<sup>22</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound."

the author's thematic emphasis on gender.<sup>23</sup> The author opens the book with the following words on the front page: "This book a mirror of the world [*shpigel for der Welt*] or *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* because[...] it reflects the entire world, in all its flaws and glories."<sup>24</sup> Over the course of the two extensive introductions, the translator elaborates on the moral, educational, and religious value religious significance he attributed to his work. He presents the book as a means of offering readers knowledge about the world, helping parents educate their children, and delivering moral and religious insights.<sup>25</sup> The translator does not shy away from admitting his commercial motivations, acknowledging that financial considerations played a role in the production of the book. He also emphasizes the importance of entertainment, arguing that it serves as a remedy for idleness, which he associates with undesirable behaviors such as crime, promiscuity, and blasphemy.<sup>26</sup> To address potential criticism from detractors who might dismiss the book as mere storytelling, the translator defends the use of tales and fables as moral tools and refers to Jewish tradition, pointing out that the sages of old used stories and allegories "to bring people to morality [*den mentshen in (musar) tsu brengen*]" reinforcing the idea that such narratives can serve a higher ethical purpose.<sup>27</sup>

*Musar* literature is a genre of Jewish religious and ethical writings focused on moral guidance and religious conduct, with roots dating back to the early Middle Ages. In the early modern period, *musar* literature grew increasingly concerned not only with the study of ethics but also with practical religious behavior and moral practice, aimed at both educated and non-educated audiences. While many works were written in Hebrew, some *musar* literature was composed in the vernacular, such as Yiddish, to reach a broader audience. This genre, rooted in Jewish ethical writings, served as a tool for promoting religious observance among those unable to read Hebrew, making moral and religious teachings more accessible to common Jewish communities.<sup>28</sup>

Moral instruction is central to *Mar'ot*, as clearly evident in its two introductions, the moral interpretation of the frame story told by Melela's father, and the moral lessons concluding the transliterated tales. These moral reflections show the author's intentional integration of religious and moral themes, which position the text within the tradition of early modern *musar* literature.

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<sup>23</sup> See the chapter: Transforming Identities: Gender Roles and Narrative Agency.

<sup>24</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 1a.

<sup>25</sup> I refer to the translator of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* using a male pronoun, following Idelson-Shein's suggestion that the book's printer, Israel Ben-Avraham was likely also its author. See Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound."

<sup>26</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 4b.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 5a-5b.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, edited and translated by Jerold C. Frakes (Oxford, 2005), 207-211.

By incorporating ethical messages, *Mar'ot* demonstrates how translated literature in the early modern Yiddish tradition functioned to reinforce religious principles and guide readers toward moral reflection.<sup>29</sup> However, such moral ambitions were not unique to Jewish readers. Similar tendencies shaped early modern European literature, as seen in Galland's *Nights* and its 1710 German translation, which likewise emphasized ethical instruction.<sup>30</sup> Hence, *Mar'ot* functions both as a work of musar literature—guiding readers toward ethical and religious reflection—and as a text that engages with broader literary conventions of its time. Rather than introducing a uniquely Jewish moralizing framework, the author followed the precedent set by his direct source and adhered to the genre expectations of the period.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, *Mar'ot ha-* is not purely didactic. Like much of early modern Yiddish literature, it combines moral instruction with entertainment, adventure, and elements drawn from popular European narratives. Rather than removing the engaging qualities of the source text, the Yiddish adaptation preserves its dramatic and adventurous aspects, showing how musar and entertainment frequently coexisted. This blending of instruction and amusement corresponds with a broader practice in early modern Yiddish literary culture, where moral teachings were often interwoven with captivating storytelling to reach a wide readership.<sup>32</sup>

### The Structure and Content of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*

The text of *Mar'ot* is structured into numbered sections, with each segment clearly marked by a sequential number. This organizational method appears consistently throughout both the frame story and the translated tales, creating a structured reading experience. The numbers are set apart from the main body of the text, often appearing in parentheses or bold, helping to delineate different episodes or narrative shifts. The first five pages contain the two introductions, which are followed by the frame story, and then the translation of seven of Galland's tales from German. The book is written in Yiddish with the use of Hebraisms for Jewish terms and the names of characters are also written in Hebrew letters in parentheses. The layout and language of the text in *Mar'ot*

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<sup>29</sup> Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 207-211.

<sup>30</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound."

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 207-211.

reflect the hybrid nature of Yiddish as it is interwoven with Hebraisms, showing fluid relationship between the two languages for its readers.



Figure 1 Israel Ben Abraham. *Mar'ot ha-Tsov'ot*. Wansbeck, 1718. Photograph: National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

The frame story is in fact the central focus of *Mar'ot* as its length surpasses the combined length of the seven translations of Galland's tale.<sup>33</sup> Unlike these translations, the frame story is an original addition by the author, making it a distinctive feature of the text.<sup>34</sup> The story introduces readers to an Indian king named Bendrari (who replaces Sultan Shahryar from Galland's *Nights*) has been betrayed by his wife and therefore he now deeply distrusts all women. The king who is originally depicted as an evil wife-murderer in the *Nights*, is transformed in *Mar'ot* to a beloved ruler who deeply distrusts women, making him reluctant to remarry. He agrees to marriage on the condition that if his bride be proven unfaithful, he will have the right to kill her and her entire family. Unsurprisingly, no woman is willing to accept such terms — except for Melela, the

<sup>33</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

daughter of one of the king's advisers, who is determined to prevent the kingdom from falling into foreign hands. Confident in her loyalty, Melela proposes a test: for an entire year, she will meet with the king daily to tell him stories that demonstrate her faithfulness and the trustworthiness of women. If he finds any fault in her during those 365 days, he is free of marriage agreement. After sharing 365 stories, Melela wins the trust of the King, and they marry, eventually bringing forth an heir. Her father, attempting to dissuade her from her plans, tells her a tale — the frame story — in hopes of changing her mind. This frame narrative introduces a diverse set of characters, unexpected plot twists, and various locations.<sup>35</sup> Following the frame story are seven translated tales (*mayses*)<sup>36</sup> adapted from Galland's collection.

Melela's father's tale unfolds as follows: In the kingdom of Zidon, King Akris rules, yet a troubling prophecy looms over him — astrologers predict that his own grandson will one day cause his downfall. Determined to prevent this fate, Akris confines his only daughter, Princess Libia, within a secluded tower, ensuring that no suitor can ever reach her. Meanwhile, an exiled Arabian prince from the kingdom of Sheba, fleeing his brother, comes across a portrait of Libia. Enchanted by her beauty and the stories of her wisdom, he becomes determined to meet her. To do so, he devises a daring plan and disguises himself as a noblewoman named Karmolia. He gains the trust of Libia's court mistress, Izabel, and is granted access to the princess. Over time, Karmolia and Libia form a close friendship, but their happiness is disrupted when Prince Be'or of Moabshi attempts to abduct Libia. Karmolia bravely defends the princess but suffers grave wounds and when tending to Karmolia's wounds, Libia makes a shocking discovery—her dear friend is, in fact, a man. Though initially shaken, she agrees to keep his secret on the condition that he leaves once he has recovered. However, as time passes, Libia falls in love with Karmolia, and they secretly marry. King Akris himself also falls in love with Karmolia, while Izabel, having uncovered Karmolia's true identity, attempts to blackmail him into marriage. When the truth is finally revealed, Akris, enraged by the deception, orders both Karmolia and Libia to be cast adrift at sea. Each find refuge in different lands, Karmolia washes ashore in the land of Granokshia, and Libia, disguising her identity and assuming the name Princess Dana, seeks refuge with King Paris and Queen Kartusa. There, she gives birth to a son, Berzis, who grows increasingly curious about

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<sup>35</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 7a, 31b.

<sup>36</sup> In Yiddish, מעשה (*mayse*) generally means “story” or “tale”. It can refer to a narrative, often with a moral or religious lesson, and is commonly used in Jewish folklore and Hasidic storytelling. See Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 298.

his father as he matures. When his mother finally reveals the truth, that his father is the Arabian prince Tauruz (טייארז or טייזוריש), Berzis embarks on a journey to find his father and his quest ultimately leads to the family's long-awaited reunion. With the passing of King Akris, Tauruz, Libia, and Berzis return to Zidon to reclaim the throne.

Though *Mar'ot* is known as the first Yiddish translation of Galland's *Nights*, a recent discovery by Iris Idelson-Shein reveals that its frame story, previously assumed to be an original creation by the author,<sup>37</sup> is in fact an adaptation of the Greek myth of Acrisius and Danae.<sup>38</sup> To this, I would add that the name of the prince, Tauruz, seems to be a reference to another figure from Greek mythology, that is Tiresias, the blind priest who was transformed into a woman for seven years.<sup>39</sup> Given the author of *Mar'ot*'s engagement with classical traditions, it is likely that he was familiar with Tiresias' story and wove elements of it into the frame narrative. Both Acrisius and Danae's story, as well as Tiresias' story, appear in the book *Mythologiae* written by the Italian humanist Natale Conti (1520-1582)<sup>40</sup> (first published in 1567), a comprehensive mythographical handbook that circulated widely throughout Europe in multiple editions during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Idelson-Shein has argued, Conti's book, was popular among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers and was recommended by Talander in his introduction to the German translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>41</sup> This suggests that the author of *Mar'ot* may have drawn directly from Conti's widely known compilation, further reinforcing the notion that the text was shaped by diverse literary influences beyond its Eastern sources.

The choice of a Greek source is particularly significant, given that eighteenth-century Greece occupied a unique cultural position at the crossroads of European and Eastern influences under Ottoman rule.<sup>42</sup> Maria Koundoura, for instance, examines how Lady Mary Montagu's travel writings reflect the complexities of emerging East-West binaries, portraying Greece as a liminal space where classical heritage intertwined with Ottoman influences.<sup>43</sup> Koundoura highlights how

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<sup>37</sup> Hayim Liebermann, "Tirgum Yidi bilty yadu'a shel sefer Elef layla va-laya," *Aley sefer* 4: 158.

<sup>38</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound."

<sup>39</sup> Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*, (1942, rev. ed. New York: Little, Brown and Company, Hachette Book Group, 2013), 33, 103, 138.

<sup>40</sup> Natale Conti, *Mythologiae* (Venice: Comin da Trino, 1567), Book VI, Chapter VII.

<sup>41</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound." See also *Tausend und eine Nacht*, preface.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Koundoura, "Between Orientalism and Philhellenism: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's 'Real' Greeks" *The Eighteenth Century* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 249–264.

Montagu's observations contributed to the evolving discourse of Orientalism by framing Greece as both a remnant of the ancient world and an exoticized, backward space. At the same time, Montagu's emphasis on the survival of classical elements in modern Greece connects with the later philhellenic movement, which sought to revive Greece's ancient glory. This dual portrayal of Greece as both a remnant of antiquity and an Orientalized space, demonstrates the fluidity of cultural categories in early modern discourse, challenging strict divisions between East and West.<sup>44</sup> This interpretation is particularly relevant for understanding the adaptation of Danae and Acrisius, and Tiresias in *Mar'ot* as it highlights the connection between Greek mythology and Eastern influences. Just as Montagu's Greece existed at the intersection of European and Orientalist imaginaries, the inclusion of Greek myth in *Mar'ot* suggests a similar blending of narratives within the text.

The Greek myth of Acrisius and Danae recounts how Acrisius, the king of Argos, sought an heir and consulted the oracle at Delphi. The oracle foretold that Acrisius would not have a son but a grandson, and that his grandson, born to Danae would eventually kill him. In an attempt to thwart this prophecy, Acrisius locked Danae in a chamber, isolating her completely from the outside world to keep her away from potential suitors. Danae is the mother of Perseus, who is famous for slaying Medusa, and for rescuing Andromeda from a sea monster.<sup>45</sup>

The Greek myth of Acrisius and Danae, and the story of Tiresias are adapted into a new narrative in *Mar'ot*, which reflects the hybrid nature of the text. Princess Libia is locked in a tower by her father, King Akris, much like Danae, as a means of preventing a prophecy from being fulfilled. Danae's confinement results in divine intervention with Zeus fathering Perseus, Libia too is impregnated from the Arabian prince. Notable differences set apart the classical versions of the tale from its Yiddish adaptation in *Mar'ot*. Among them, Danae in Greek and Roman mythology is impregnated by Zeus and not an Arabian prince and the prophecy predicting Acrisius's death is fulfilled when Perseus inadvertently causes his grandfather's demise. There are also alterations in certain names—Akris instead of Acrisius, Dana replacing Danae, Sudeno for Stheno, Heyela for Euryale, Berzis for Perseus—appear to be the result of sound-based transcriptions rather than any intentional attempt to disguise the story's roots in classical mythology.<sup>46</sup> Tiresias is reimagined as

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<sup>44</sup> Koundoura, "Between Orientalism and Philhellenism", 250-5.

<sup>45</sup> Hamilton, *Mythology*, 89-94.

<sup>46</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

Tauruz (Karmolia), an Arabian prince who, like his Greek counterpart, undergoes a gender transformation.<sup>47</sup> However, while Tiresias' metamorphosis is a divine punishment, Tauruz's transformation is a conscious choice driven by his desire to meet Princess Libia. Whereas Tiresias gains prophetic insight through his transformation, Tauruz uses his to navigate social barriers, ultimately reuniting with Libia and securing a happy life with her. This transformation reflects themes of disguise and altering of identities to achieve personal goals in the plot, as Libia also undergoes a shift in identity.

The frame story presents an entertaining narrative following the adventures of Princess Libia and the disguised Arabian prince, Karmolia and conveys religious themes as the story incorporates moral lessons. Through prayers and spiritual introspection, such as Libia's plea for divine mercy in moments of distress<sup>48</sup>, the narrative mirrors the ethical and moral undertones characteristic of Yiddish *musar* literature. This dual structure allows the story to function both as a source of entertainment and as a medium for lessons on faith, and reliance on the divine.

#### Between East(s) and West(s): *Mar 'ot ha-tsov 'ot* in the Context of Orientalist Discourse

Antoine Galland's *Nights* marks a transformative period in European intellectual history.<sup>49</sup> Its initial publication in 1718, and the numerous translations and editions it spurred demonstrate the increasing interest of European audiences in “the East”, and the rise of what would become known as Orientalism. Orientalism refers to the Western academic, cultural, and political tradition of studying, depicting, and constructing representations of the East, particularly the Middle East and Asia. This phenomenon was first identified by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978).<sup>50</sup> He argued that Orientalism was not an objective study of the East but a Western construct that defined and exerted control over “the Orient”. As European interactions with Eastern cultures increased through trade, travel, and diplomacy, the West's fascination with the “exotic” Orient reinforced stereotypes that justified imperial dominance.<sup>51</sup> Said's critique of Orientalism exposed how these representations were entangled with power dynamics as they provided a justification

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<sup>47</sup> Hamilton, *Mythology*, 33, 103, 138.

<sup>48</sup> *Mar 'ot ha-tsov 'ot*, 37a-38b.

<sup>49</sup> Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 11-15.

for cultural and political dominance of the West. This process drove the West to position its own literary canon as rational, structured, and superior, while Eastern texts were often dismissed as exotic, irrational, or primitive. These distinctions, such as realistic vs. fantastic, East vs. West, and oral vs. written traditions, played a crucial role in determining how literature was classified and valued in the Western world.<sup>52</sup> As Suvir Kaul observes,

Orientalism is far from being the product of disinterested intellectual enquiries into the religious practices, social systems or economic organization of Oriental peoples. Rather, its characteristic flourishes, its hyperbole and its repressions, can be traced back to the libidinal and affective energies, the irrational fears and desires, of Westerners as they came into contact with unfamiliar commodities, bodies and cultural forms.<sup>53</sup>

However, Said's *Orientalism* has been criticized on various grounds, among them its binary framework, which generalizes the "East" and "West" as fixed entities in a singular power dynamic. This framework fails to account for the complex internal diversity within both contexts — the various cultures, societies, and power relations that exist across Asia, from the Middle East to China and Japan, as well as the different traditions and perspectives within Western societies.<sup>54</sup> Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar argue that “Orientalism is an instance of colonial discourse, but it is also more than that[... This holds true for Orientalism in general, and certainly for Orientalism where it concerns the Jews.”<sup>55</sup> Other scholars, such as Aijaz Ahmad, argue that Said's framework oversimplifies both the East and the West, reproducing the same essentialism he critiques. Ahmad contends that by isolating Western views of the East from how these representations were received, challenged, or adapted by colonized peoples, Said inadvertently replicates the silencing he condemns.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Ahmad argues that by asserting a timeless European impulse to dominate the non-European Other, Said promotes the idea that Europeans are fundamentally incapable of producing genuine knowledge about non-European cultures — an assertion that Ahmad finds problematic because it dismisses critical European scholarship.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Avi-ram Tzoref, “Reading the Arabian Nights in Modern Hebrew Literature: Judaism, Arabness and the City,” *Philological Encounters* 5 (2020): 223–253.

<sup>53</sup> Suvir Kaul, “Styles of Orientalism in the Eighteenth”, *Orientalism and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 35.

<sup>54</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1992), 171-174.

<sup>55</sup> Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 12-3.

<sup>56</sup> Ahmad, *In Theory*, 172-174.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

Said's analysis primarily focuses on nineteenth and twentieth-century Orientalism and scholars have charted the development of Orientalist discourse in earlier periods.<sup>58</sup> In the eighteenth-century specifically, Oriental tales were a widely popular literary form, with the *Nights* standing out as perhaps the most influential Eastern text in shaping Western perceptions of the Orient.<sup>59</sup> The reception of Galland's book during this period exemplifies Orientalism's paradoxical impact; Galland, and his numerous translators and publishers emphasized the tales' value as a source of moral instruction, at the same time, they positioned the work as fundamentally foreign — a framework that allowed for the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of Eastern literature in the European canon. As Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum argue, the *Nights* “offered a particularly powerful vision of an Asiatic culture seemingly saturated with references to sensuality, extravagance, indulgence, violence, supernaturalism, and eroticism: the very things that the rising European powers were – for all their own obsessive interest in them – keen to disavow as elements in their own cultures as they sought to find ways to justify their conquest and rule over other peoples, particularly in Asia.”<sup>60</sup>

This paradox is further reflected in eighteenth-century critiques of the *Nights*, which reveal ambivalence toward the text's authenticity and origins. James Beattie (1735-1803), a contemporary of Galland's, expressed skepticism regarding whether the stories in the collection were truly of an Arabic origin or instead an original work crafted by Galland himself:

Whether the tales be really Arabick or invented by Mons. Galland, I have never been able to learn with certainty. If they be Oriental, they are translated with unwarrantable latitude; for the whole tenor of the style is in the French mode: and the Caliph of Bagdat, and the Emperor of China, are addressed in the same terms of ceremony which are usual at the court of France.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly Edward Lane (1801-1876), a British translator and lexicographer who produced his own English translation of the *Nights*, similarly stated that Galland had “excessively perverted the work” and that his understanding of Arab culture was “insufficient always to preserve him from errors of the grossest description.”<sup>62</sup> These critiques suggest that even in Galland's time, questions of the representation of the East were already points of contention and reveal an early

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<sup>58</sup> Suvir Kaul, *Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Ros Ballaster *Fabulous Orient* (Oxford, 2005), 10-12.

<sup>60</sup> Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, *The Arabian Nights*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Allen Lane, 1994), 17.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Robert Mack, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

awareness of the complexities involved in translating and adapting foreign narratives for European audiences.

Adapted for a Jewish audience, *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, which was published in 1717, emerged at a pivotal moment in the development of Orientalism, when European intellectuals and institutions were formalizing systematic approaches to studying, translating, and interpreting Eastern texts and cultures. Its publication reflects the growing European fascination with the East and the expanding networks of cultural exchange that shaped early modern literature. Translation is a particularly powerful tool for examining Orientalism, as it not only transfers the original narrative from one language to another, but the translated text absorbs the translator's cultural assumptions and biases. Through translation, the narrative becomes a site of dynamic cultural interaction, where the original text is both preserved and revised, as it reflects the complexities of cross-cultural encounters.<sup>63</sup> As texts move across languages, they acquire layers of meaning and interpretation, adapting to the shifting perceptions and expectations of each readership. This is evident when examining Galland's *Nights* and *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, and raises the question — what can this Yiddish translation of Galland's tales tell us about Orientalism? How does it complement or perhaps complicate Said's notions of Orientalism and the West?

Translating an Orientalist text into a Jewish vernacular, Yiddish, within the context of Western Europe undoubtedly complicates Said's framework of strictly positioning the West and the East. Jews occupied a unique position—both integrated into the broader Christian society in which they lived and simultaneously marginalized as a minority group. Yiddish, viewed by the Jewish cultural elite as a language for both men and women who could not read Hebrew, the Holy Tongue, further highlights this complexity. Yiddish literature primarily targeted women and uneducated men and was regarded as a mechanism for moral instruction, intended to bring Hebrew knowledge to the Jewish masses. In the early modern period, Yiddish developed into a “vibrant, versatile literary language[...] this development was largely facilitated by Yiddish literature's extensive reliance on the translation and adaptation of works from Hebrew, on the one hand, and from European language, on the other”.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Yiddish literature had both Jewish and Christian cultural influences, combined old and new literary forms and was targeted for both men and

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 15-20.

<sup>64</sup> Idelson-Shein, *Between the Bridge and the Barricade*, 34.

women. Though marginalized within the Jewish literary hierarchy, Yiddish flourished as a language of storytelling and creative expression, and this very marginalization allowed it to experiment with new genres and styles, making it an evolving medium for cultural exchange and adaptation.<sup>65</sup>

An examination of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* alongside its direct source, the German translation *Die Tausend und eine Nacht*, reveals how adapting foreign narratives for Jewish audiences complicates Said's paradigm as Jews occupied a liminal position between the West and the East. The earliest known German translation of Galland's work, *Die Tausend und Eine Nacht*,<sup>66</sup> on which the author of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* relied, reflects an orientalist motivation similar to Galland's own approach to depicting the East in his book. The German preface, written by *Herr Talanders*, a pseudonym for the eighteenth-century German writer August Bohse (1661–1730),<sup>67</sup> introduces the text as one: “In which strange Arabic stories and wonderful events are told, including charming love intrigues as well as customs and habits of the Orientals [*Morgenländer*], in a very pleasant way.” Bohse acknowledges the book's Arabic origins and contextualizes the work within its Eastern context. In the introduction, he notes that the decision to release a German edition of *One Thousand and One Nights* was driven by the growing popularity of the French translation, which had: “gained popularity and found more and more admirers day by day”.<sup>68</sup> But the work's popularity wasn't its only merit, Bohse explains:

The work provides a detailed description of Oriental peoples, their customs, religions, ceremonies, inclinations, and behaviors, from the highest-ranking individuals to the most humble. It includes depictions of Persians, Tartars, Turks, Indians, and others, portrayed in diverse representations rarely found elsewhere... Translated into our German language, along with the instruction about all that belongs to the knowledge of the customs and manners of the Orientals, has awakened a special desire to follow virtue and created an aversion to vice noting here and there their reward and unfortunate outcome according to their practice[...]<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 36-7.

<sup>66</sup> *Die Tausend und Eine Nacht, Worinnen Seltzame Arabische Historien und wunderbare Begebenheiten...erstlich vom Hrn. Galland aus der Arabischen Sprache in die Französische, und aus selbiger... in Teutsche übersetzt* (Leipzig, 1710; repr. 1730). See also the English translation: *Arabian Nights Entertainments: Consisting of One Thousand and One Stories . . .* Translated into French from the Arabian Manuscript by Mr. Galland of the Royal Academy and Now Done into English (London, 1706).

<sup>67</sup> Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, “1001 Nacht: Übersetzungen,” <https://blog.sbb.berlin/1001-nacht-2-1-uebersetzungen/>.

<sup>68</sup> *Die Tausend und Eine Nacht*, introduction.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Through this description, Bohse constructs a European portrayal of the Other, presenting these cultures as both foreign and inherently different. He emphasizes the work's value particularly noting how the Persians, Tartars, Turks, Indians, and other "Oriental peoples" are portrayed in ways. Bohse connects this didactic purpose to literary tradition, citing how ancient Arabic writers employed similar techniques and drawing parallels to Greek mythology's role in "sweetening the teaching of morals."<sup>70</sup> Rather than simply satisfying Western curiosity, Bohse's introduction positions the tales as sophisticated literary works that employ "interwoven love entanglements and instructive fables"<sup>71</sup> to guide readers toward virtue and depict an exoticized world. This approach reinforces the perception that the stories belong to a world profoundly separate from the reader's own culture and experience. Bohse's introduction thus not only invites readers into this "foreign invention" but also implicitly reinforces a sense of European cultural superiority, suggesting that these depictions serve to satisfy Western curiosity about the unknown, rather than to foster a true understanding of Eastern cultures.

The Yiddish translator adopts a rather different perspective in describing the book's aims: "Readers of the book," he argues, "will learn [the] cultures, of the world. They will find knowledge of kings of the world, their lands, their customs, their beliefs, and their lives."<sup>72</sup> Notably, he does not specifically reference "the East" or "Oriental peoples," but rather presents a more general worldly knowledge. This suggests that the focus here is not on a precise understanding of a specific geographic entity (the East), but rather on the reader's cultural refinement, and their acquisition of a broad familiarity with world cultures and politics. The absence of any reference to the "Orient" in the Yiddish translation furthermore suggest that Yiddish audience was not interested specifically in the East as a cultural construct, that differed significantly from other realms—whether imaginary or real. Although this holds true for this translation, further research is required to assess whether other Yiddish works from this period also reflect such indifference to the Orient.

Drifting from Galland's tales that set in Persia and also in India, China and throughout the East, the translator of *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot* sets the tales in India [אינדיאה] and also Sheba, Zidon, Moab and even Greece.<sup>73</sup> In the very beginning of the frame story, where Melela is introduced and

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<sup>70</sup> *Die Tausend und Eine Nacht*, introduction.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 5v.

<sup>73</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 7v, 9r, 11v, 36r. For locations in Galland's *One Thousand and One Nights*, see Mack, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 9-11.

where she tries to convince her father to allow her to marry the king she says: “Now think, dear father, what kind of honor this will be for you and your daughter, that you have a daughter who will be Queen throughout India.”<sup>74</sup> After this initial reference to India, the word India [אינדיאה, אינדינאשי] appears only five times in the text,<sup>75</sup> suggesting that the author is not particularly focused on the location itself and implies that India serves more as a background detail of the tales rather than a significant cultural setting within the narrative. India was likely a distant, imagined place for both the author and his readers, as in early modern Yiddish literature, India is often portrayed as a land of mystery and wonder, and serves as an exotic and fantastical setting.<sup>76</sup> By setting the story in India, the author may have sought to incorporate a more foreign and distant location, as Persia is familiar to Jewish audiences, both through Jewish literature and Jewish history — as in the biblical book of Esther and the history of Babylonian Jewry — may have been seen as too culturally “close” or weighted with specific associations to the Jewish community. India appears to function primarily as a legendary setting, much like the fantastical realms of chivalric epics and romances, which were popular within early modern Yiddish literature.<sup>77</sup>

In the frame story, the author introduces the Arabian prince, who later transforms into Karmolia, the central figure in the narrative. After his father’s death, his brother seizes power, and the prince seeks refuge in the land of Zidon. In a later appearance, while in Zidon the prince walks in a garden near the temple of Astoria, where idols are being served and towards the end of the frame story, he becomes depicted with Jewish characteristics.<sup>78</sup> By portraying him as an Arab prince, associating him to idol worshiping and even suggesting a Jewish identity — his character as with other characters in the frame story, maintains fluid identities. Notably, the term *Arabian Prince* [אראבשין פרינץ] appears only three times throughout the tale, which suggest the term Arabian is used to identify the character rather than emphasize his ethnicity<sup>79</sup>. The terms “Arab” and “Arabia” [אראביע] recur several times throughout the tales,<sup>80</sup> primarily to emphasize the Arab

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<sup>74</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 8v.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 6v.

<sup>76</sup> Idelson-Shein, *Between the Bridge and the Barricade*, 120.

<sup>77</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 37. About exoticism in Yiddish literature, see Idelson-Shein, *Between the Bridge and the Barricade*, 146.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 9v, 51b. Unclear exactly which god is [אסטריע].

<sup>79</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 9r, 12 v, 18r, 38r.

<sup>80</sup> See *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 8v–11v, where the Arabian prince is introduced as the younger of two sons of a “great Arabian king” who has passed away. The author provides no specific details about the kingdom, nor about the king or his sons, maintaining a sense of ambiguity around their identities and surroundings.

Prince's heritage and homeland. The use of the term "Arabia" serves to establish the prince's origins and royal background, grounding his character within the idea of Arabia as a distant place of origin.

Incorporating both India, Arabia, Zidon and Sheba within the narrative suggests a deliberate ambiguity regarding geographic locations. By using these locations, the author may signal that the exact location — whether India, Arabia, Zidon or Sheba — holds little significance in the story. These locations are used interchangeably, as seen in the tale introducing King Akris, where the Arabian prince "comes to the Kingdom of Zidon, where King Akris lives."<sup>81</sup> The frequent changes of location in *Mar'ot*, suggest that these settings' function as elements of a fairytale or legend, providing a backdrop to the narrative rather than grounding it in a geographical area or demonstrating interest in Orientalist themes.<sup>82</sup>

Incorporating a Greek source, the story of Danae and Acrisius, into the translation of an Orientalist text further suggests that the author did not adhere to a strict division between Eastern and European traditions. As shown, the author of *Mar'ot* was not primarily concerned with the Orient; rather, this choice reflects a broader engagement with foreign narratives. Perhaps translating an Eastern text inspired the author to incorporate additional foreign elements, or his general interest in world literature led him to see the Nights as an opportunity to enrich the text with influences from various traditions. Given that the author acknowledged his commercial interests in producing the work, it is also plausible that the inclusion of an additional tale was intended to extend the text and enhance its appeal to readers.<sup>83</sup>

Engagement with foreign narratives and Orientalist themes in Yiddish literature can also be explored through a comparison with Glikl bas Judah Leib's memoirs, written in Yiddish between the years 1691-1719.<sup>84</sup> In addition to telling her life story, the memoirs incorporates folktales and fables, including a tale that is very similar to the Inkle and Yarico trope—a colonial

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<sup>81</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 9v.

<sup>82</sup> For further context on the change of location in another Yiddish mayse, see Osnat Sharon-Pinto, "Review of The Knight without Boundaries: Yiddish and German Arthurian Wingalois Adaptations, by Annegret Oehme," *In geveb* (June 2023), accessed March 17, 2025. Sharon-Pinto notes how Arthurian adaptations such as *Widuwilt* use location as a flexible narrative tool, highlighting cultural interactions and colonial perspectives—particularly through narrative relocations and the fascination with China as an exotic European imaginative construct.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 4b. See discussion in Zfatman, DISS, 1:90–91.

<sup>84</sup> For the full discussion about Glikl and her adaptation of a European folktale, see Chapter 1, "An East Indian Encounter," in Iris Idelson-Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind: Jewish Constructions of Race During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 13–54.

narrative depicting encounters between Europeans and indigenous peoples.<sup>85</sup> Although she was probably not directly familiar with Richard Steele's version her story of the pious Jew shares key thematic elements with these accounts yet rather than presenting a love story or colonial critique, Glikl transforms Inkle and Yarico into a brutal tale of rape and infanticide, diverging significantly from its European counterparts.<sup>86</sup> As Idelson-Shein shows, the Jewish protagonist shows no desire to domesticate or enslave the savage woman, displaying an almost indifferent stance toward colonial dilemmas. This indifference to colonial concerns reflects broader trends in early modern Ashkenazi Jewish literature, which rarely engaged with colonialist themes before the second half of the eighteenth-century.<sup>87</sup>

Most Ashkenazi Jews were initially indifferent to their countries' colonial policies. Removed from political centers of power, they had little opportunity or inclination to foster colonial ambitions.<sup>88</sup> Significant Ashkenazi engagement with colonization, only began to emerge later, during the second half of the eighteenth-century, particularly in the writings of the Haskalah.<sup>89</sup> As a result, their literary and cultural perspectives developed independently of the imperial ideologies that shaped much of contemporary European discourse. Glikl's memoir shows the limitations of interpreting early modern Jewish texts through a strictly colonial framework, as Ashkenazi Jewish writers were largely uninvolved in the colonial imagination that shaped much of European literature at the time.<sup>90</sup> Her story invites reflection on how Jewish authors, particularly women, interpreted representations of colonial encounters differently from their Christian contemporaries. Rather than adopting dominant colonialist or Orientalist frameworks, her work — like *Mar'ot* — demonstrates minimal engagement with such themes. This distinction may be rooted in the historical position of Jewish communities, who, often lacking direct involvement in colonial enterprises, approached foreign narratives from a different vantage point. Both texts reflect a perspective shaped primarily by Jewish cultural and religious concerns, setting them apart from the imperialist narratives that influenced much of contemporary European literature.

In his study on the translation of early Yiddish epics, Jerold Frakes examines medieval Jewish literature and the ways in which Jewish authors approached non-Jewish texts and cultural

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<sup>85</sup> Idelson-Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind*, 20-3.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5.

materials. In particular, he notes in that many Jewish writers in the early modern period were not primarily concerned with the exoticism or foreignness of non-Jewish sources.<sup>91</sup> This adaptation process often meant that the original context of the stories was changed or omitted. Frakes, gives an example of the Yiddish story *Vidvilt*, an adaptation of the German *Wigalois*. Frakes shows that the figure of the villain, who, in *Wigalois*, was depicted as a treacherous Muslim devoted to “Machmêt” (Muhammad), is completely transformed in the work’s Yiddish version. Instead of a monstrous Muslim, the Yiddish adaptation makes him the giant son of a sorceress, removing all religious and ethnic markers.<sup>92</sup>

This change reflects how Jewish authors adapted Christian epics by omitting anti-Muslim bias and preserving the heroic narrative. Unlike Christianity which defined itself in opposition to both Judaism and Islam and was inclined to engage in ideological conflicts with both religions, no comparable necessity shaped the relationship between Judaism and Islam.<sup>93</sup> This consequently led to more aggressive polemics and the widespread depiction of Muslims as enemies within Christian narratives.<sup>94</sup> As Mark Cohen observes, “A comparison between Islamic and Christian polemics with Judaism should yield substantial insight into the attitude toward and treatment of the Jews of Islam[...] neither the Christian preoccupation with the intellectual struggle against Judaism nor the bellicose Jewish response to Christian polemics has a counterpart of similar intensity in the Judaeo-Islamic context. Combating Judaism and Jewish interpretations of Scripture was essential in Christianity; it was incidental in Islam.”<sup>95</sup> Christianity viewed Judaism as a central theological challenge and sought to refute Jewish interpretations of scripture through sustained intellectual debates. Islam, on the other hand, treated Judaism as a minor theological concern.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, Christianity absorbed the customs of the European societies that adopted it, whereas Judaism remained more closely tied to its religious and historical origins in the East.<sup>97</sup> This distinction shaped Jewish perspectives on the East, which were influenced more by religious and historical connections than by the ideological rivalry that characterized Christianity’s

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<sup>91</sup> See full discussion in Jerold C. Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature: Cultural Translation in Ashkenaz* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 192–215.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 208–9.

<sup>94</sup> Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 145.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 145.

<sup>97</sup> Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination*, 4–5. Peleg observes, “But as they began to move into the greater, non-Jewish society during the Enlightenment, these differences became increasingly problematic.”

engagement with Islam.<sup>98</sup> Frakes argues that, as opposed to Christians, Jews did not need to construct Muslims as ideological adversaries since they were not part of the dominant Christian society. Consequently, they were less preoccupied with depicting Muslims as the “other”.<sup>99</sup> While Christian European powers used Orientalism to define themselves against the East, Jewish identity was already marked by its own distinctiveness within Europe. Therefore, Jews had less need to contrast themselves with the Orient. Islam was primarily concerned with maintaining social hierarchy and not in engaging in theological disputes with Judaism, leading to a more pragmatic coexistence between Jews and Muslims.<sup>100</sup>

A similar observation appears in the work of historian Yaron Peleg. Although he discusses a later period and context, he too discusses the complexity of situating the Jewish community within either Eastern or Western cultural frameworks. As he writes: “the distinction that always existed between Western cultures, such as those of England and France, and Eastern cultures, such as those of Egypt and Persia, was less clear in the case of European Jews, who were never fully regarded as an integral part of Western culture by other Europeans nor indeed by themselves for much of their history in Europe.”<sup>101</sup> This observation is relevant when analyzing how Jewish authors and communities in early modern Europe perceived and represented the East in their writings.<sup>102</sup> Jews, like Christians, were directly impacted by the rise of Islam and the Muslim conquests, but the life of Jewish communities underwent less disruption than Christian communities did.<sup>103</sup> Accustomed to living as minorities under various ruling powers and enduring periodic persecution in Christian territories, Jewish communities had already adapted to diasporic conditions and therefore were able to navigate life under Muslim rule.<sup>104</sup> The dual status of the Jewish community — being both part of European culture and yet perpetually viewed as foreign — may have influenced Jewish literary depictions of Muslims and the East. Peleg notes that Jewish interest in constructing the Orient only truly emerged in Jewish literature during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the Hebrew literary revival, when Jewish writers began reinterpreting the East through a Jewish nationalist lens.<sup>105</sup> If so, this may explain why *Mar’ot*

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<sup>98</sup> Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination*, 4-5.

<sup>99</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature*, 208.

<sup>100</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 85.

<sup>101</sup> Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>102</sup> Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature*, 192.

<sup>103</sup> Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination*, 4-5.

<sup>104</sup> Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature*, 192-3.

<sup>105</sup> Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature*, 9-10.

does not exhibit a strong fascination with the Orient and the exotic. Rather these elements, as many European adaptations did, the text integrates the tales into a Jewish moral and literary framework. In doing so, it repurposes an Oriental narrative without adopting the Orientalist framework prevalent in Christian European literature.

As demonstrated, *Mar'ot* reimagines multiple characters as Jewish figures, replacing their original non-Jewish identities. The portrayal of Muslims in the text is ambiguous, as Orientalist themes and depictions of the East play only a minor role in the narrative and instead the narrative draws on elements of legendary tales. Instead, the narrative draws heavily on legendary tales, presenting characters with fluid identities that shift between Arab, idol-worshipping, and Jewish characteristics. For instance, the story introduces Princess Melela and King Bendrari, with Princess Melela demonstrating her faith in God through the Jewish phrase “ha-shem yitbarah.”<sup>106</sup> This choice of phrase situates her character within a Judaized framework, subtly shaping her identity.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, her father expresses his trust in divine providence, stating that he is “rich enough by God [*ikh bin fun got raykh genugn*].”<sup>108</sup> Other characters also reference Jewish themes of faith and divine guidance. During a conversation with Libia, Karmolia declares, “Let us see then what love is: First, people must love God [*got libn*], wherever one encounters danger, we must consider ourselves guilty in God's eyes [*shuldik tsu zayn fun gotes vegn*], and accept all dangers as [if they were as sweet as] sugar and honey.”<sup>109</sup> Notably in the following section Karmolia also uses the term “God almighty [*got der almekhtiger*].”<sup>110</sup> Although implicitly Jewish, Karmolia’s words reinforce the story’s moral framework, drawing on Jewish ideals of humility and submission to divine will. Likewise, Princess Libia’s prayer in the frame story incorporates numerous Jewish expressions, including “kapparat va-‘avonot”, “haratah”, and “neshamah”.<sup>111</sup> She even goes on and quotes King David himself: “Therefore, King David also said about the sea: One must praise God every day.”<sup>112</sup> The theme of divine fear and reliance on God continues through Prince Berzis, and as he grows, he acquires great wisdom and masters many languages, “and above all, the fear of God [*gotes frukht*].”<sup>113</sup> When Berzis tells his mother that he must set on a quest to find his father,

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<sup>106</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 8v.

<sup>107</sup> See Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

<sup>108</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 8r.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 17v.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 17r.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 38v.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 37v.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 39r.

he states “God will be my support [*got vert mayn bayistand zayn*].<sup>114</sup> Finally, at the story’s conclusion, when Melela and her father reflect on the tales’ meanings, Melela points to Libia’s fate as proof of divine intervention, stating, “[...] God has helped Libia and her beloved to reunite. [*vil dokh got der Libia mit irn gemal viderum bay ayn ander geholfn hot.*]”<sup>115</sup>

It is worth noting that although the author of *Mar’ot* was not particularly concerned with Orientalist themes, this does not mean that later Yiddish translations of *Nights* do not engage with it. In fact, early Yiddish translators often showed a fascination with exoticism which is exemplified in the mere translation of prominent Orientalist works of the time.<sup>116</sup> *Mar’ot* stands out as an early translation, distinct from later adaptations that engage more directly with Orientalist motifs.<sup>117</sup> Further research could undertake a comparative analysis of the different Yiddish translations of the *Nights*, revealing the varying expressions of Orientalism within these texts.

### Transforming Identities: Gender Roles and Narrative Agency

Gender, and particularly the role of women, is central to the frame story of *Mar’ot*, taking precedence over Orientalist themes. Throughout the narrative, gender dynamics are explored in ways that challenge conventional perceptions, offering alternative expressions of agency and transformation through cross-dressing and disguise. Rather than reinforcing traditional gender roles, the text presents women (and men) as active participants in shaping their own destinies. This focus extends beyond the frame story, as the author dedicates significant attention to women in the second introduction, emphasizing their importance as both key figures within the tales and as the primary target audience.

The second introduction to *Mar’ot* offers a complex view of gender and sets the stage for understanding the frame story, where women and gender play a pivotal role. The book appears to have been intended for an affluent, bourgeois Jewish female readership, particularly those who would have valued its engagement with popular European literature and its endorsement of emerging bourgeois ideals of feminine virtue.<sup>118</sup> As discussed, the title “*Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*” references the Israelite women who “came to the tabernacle as we read in our Holy Torah, because

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<sup>114</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 40v.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 43r.

<sup>116</sup> Idelson-Shein, *Between the Bridge and the Barricade*, 146.

<sup>117</sup> See Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*.

they did not want to take part in worshipping the golden calf, and were unwilling to help their husbands in doing so.”<sup>119</sup> It seems that the author chose this title to associate his book with the biblical story of virtuous and devout women, ensuring that readers would connect the work with themes of piety and morality. In the first sentence of the introduction the author states “I made this book mostly because of women, since they are often denigrated in these times [ . . .].”<sup>120</sup> He explicitly addresses the prominence of women in the tales and emphasizes their positive portrayal throughout the narratives, “This book also teaches that much good comes from women and the wisdom they possess”.<sup>121</sup> He expresses concern over the mistreatment of women in Jewish society and argues that marriages are often reduced to a financial transaction, where a woman’s virtues or family background were often deemed secondary to the dowry she brought. Once married, women were often disrespected by their husbands, as reflected in the common saying that “there are naught but foolish women [*narshe froye*],” but in fact the author points, “often there are more foolish men than women [...] and all that is good in the world comes from pious women.”<sup>122</sup>

Yet, as might be expected, the author does not shy away from criticizing women himself, arguing that not all women are virtuous and that some even bring harm upon themselves and their families. However, he emphasizes that readers of *Mar’ot* will recognize the presence of virtuous, wise, and honorable women in the world. He also points to the significant redemptive roles that women have played throughout Jewish history, referring to figures such as Esther, Yael, Judith and our mothers (Rachel, Leah, Sarah) and refers to Talmudic teaching that much good comes through women and that Torah scholars treated their wives with great respect.<sup>123</sup> The author states that “[...] all goodness in the world comes from righteous women [*nashim tzadkaniot*].”<sup>124</sup> Given these examples, the author argues that it is only natural for so many of the tales in his work to focus on women. The author then elaborates on whom these stories are intended for and states that although much of the narrative revolves around women, the moral lessons they convey are directed at men as well. He makes clear that the book is not intended for *lomdim*,<sup>125</sup> but rather for the common

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<sup>119</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 1v.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 3r. As Idelson- Shein notes, directly challenging misogynistic portrayals was rare in Old Yiddish literature. See discussion in Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 3r.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 3r.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 3r.

<sup>125</sup> *Lomdim* (לומדים), meaning “students,” refers to Jewish men who study Torah, are proficient in Hebrew, and have devoted themselves to religious learning. Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Yeshibah,” The Jewish Encyclopedia, accessed March 16th, 2025, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12890-rosh-yeshibah>.

people. It also serves an educational purpose for young boys and girls, teaching them to respect their parents, teachers and elders. Furthermore, for those who have found themselves serving in the homes of strangers, these stories offer guidance on humility, avoiding arrogance, and remaining loyal to their masters. By conducting themselves in this manner, they will be treated with kindness and respect and will increase their prospects for securing good matches in marriage.<sup>126</sup>

The author of *Mar'ot* addresses the presence of erotic and romantic elements within his moralistic text and attempts to justify. His justification reveals an awareness of contemporary attitudes toward gender roles and the possibility that readers might criticize the depiction of romantic and sensual relationships.<sup>127</sup> By explicitly situating themes of love and attraction within a religious and ethical context, the author attempts to ensure that readers interpret these elements as moral examples rather than sources of mere pleasure or entertainment.<sup>128</sup> Through this framing, he carefully guides readers away from purely sensual enjoyment and toward a view of love that is deeply tied to moral virtue and proper behavior. “[...] You will find many stories of love in which a man and a princess fall in love with beautiful women[...]”.<sup>129</sup> Yet, he warns the reader not to dwell on “impropriety” or “worldly vanities” but rather to approach these narratives with a sense of “awe and moral teachings.”<sup>130</sup> This might also reflect anxieties about gender roles, particularly in relation to the portrayal of female beauty and desire.

This moral framing extends throughout the text, including in the portrayal of characters in the frame story. Melela, for instance, is depicted in a highly favorable light and is described as a young woman “well informed in all good things, in all languages, and plays all instruments, as well as writes, reads and dances[...] familiar with all manner of sciences”.<sup>131</sup> King Bendrari is depicted as a just ruler unlike the Persian Sultan Shahryar in the *Nights* who is depicted as a ruthless wife-killer. Bendrari’s only flaw is his distrust of women as he believes they are all unfaithful. By portraying Bendrari as a just ruler rather than a wrathful one, the story presents a ruler who needs to overcome his personal failing. Women are not killed in this story, though the possibility of such a punishment looms if Melela is deemed disloyal. This reinforces the author’s stated intent in the introduction to depict women as virtuous and deserving of greater respect. These elements are

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<sup>126</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 4r.

<sup>127</sup> Liebermann, “Tirgum Yidi bilty yadu‘a shel sefer Elef layla va-laya”, 162.

<sup>128</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 4r-4v.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 5r.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 5v.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 8v.

literary constructs shaped by the narrative and serve primarily as storytelling devices designed to advance the plot, rather than as faithful representations of societal norms. Melela, the storyteller, offers to marry King Bendrari to ensure the kingdom has an heir, challenges his assumption that all women are unfaithful, and despite her father's repeated pleas to abandon her plan, she proceeds with her decision. Her father attempts to change her mind, but Melela insists on continuing with her plan, and her father resolves to convince her with a fable.

In both *Mar'ot* and the *Nights*, the characters of Melela and Scheherazade risk their own lives by telling stories that captivate the kings and compel them to keep listening. Through their storytelling, they reshape the kings' worldviews and end their harmful patterns—whether it be King Bendrari's reluctance to marry or King Shahryar's cycle of marrying and executing one woman after another. Scheherazade's character in Galland's *Nights* has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate.<sup>132</sup> Some scholars, such as Felicity Nussbaum, argue that she subtly critiques King Shahryar's misogyny, as she uses her intelligence and rhetorical skills to transform his perspective on women.<sup>133</sup> In her 1927 book *Le Féminisme de Scheherezade*,<sup>134</sup> Marie Lally-Hollbecque portrays Scheherazade as a feminist figure who actively seeks to civilize and reform Shahryar through storytelling, and therefore sees her as an agent of change.

A similar representation can be found in the work of Rana Kabbani argues that although Scheherazade is described as intelligent, virtuous, and beautiful in Galland's tale, she is “exemplary in all the domestic roles; dutiful daughter, considerate sister, loving wife and caring mother”.<sup>135</sup> Kabbani contends that Scheherazade is “only superficially powerful; her feeble spell is piteously inconsequential, for one word from the king could defeat the whole range of her story and take her life”.<sup>136</sup> She asserts that representations of women in *One Thousand and One Nights* reflected broader prejudices, which framed Eastern women as submissive and domestic while

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<sup>132</sup> Notable studies include Ferial Ghazoul's *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context* (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1996), and Muhsin Mahdi's *The Arabian Nights*, translated by Husain Haddawy (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008). Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (rev. ed., London: Tauris Parke, 2004) provides a historical and cultural overview of *Arabian Nights* and Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), examine its impact on Western literary traditions. Additional perspectives on narrative structure and adaptation are discussed in Wen-Chin Ouyang and Geert Jan Van Gelder's *New Perspectives on Arabian Nights* (London: Routledge, 2005) and Ulrich Marzolph, ed. *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007).

<sup>133</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, “Risky Business: Feminism Now and Then,” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 26, no. 1 (2007): 84.

<sup>134</sup> Marie Lally-Hollbecque, *Le Féminisme de Scheherezade* (Paris: Radot, 1927).

<sup>135</sup> Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 51.

<sup>136</sup> Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 51.

simultaneously exoticizing them as objects of desire. Early European adaptations, influenced by their own societal norms, often reshaped Scheherazade as weaker and more submissive than her original character.<sup>137</sup> She argues that these portrayals reinforced the notion that Eastern women were framed as “part of the goods of the empire, the living rewards that white men could, if they wished to, reap.”<sup>138</sup>

However, Eva Sallis contends that “Scheherazade fills always the proactive role, Shahriyar the reactive. Their relationship is one of complex mixing of power, where hers is manifest and transforming, his latent and destructive.”<sup>139</sup> These perspectives, whether strictly feminist or submissive, risk oversimplifying Scheherazade’s character and reveal the limitations of viewing her through a singular lens. Her complexity lies in her ability to navigate and manipulate traditional gender expectations, both conforming to and subverting them. Through her wit and storytelling, she exercises a distinct form of power within a male-dominated world.<sup>140</sup>

Similarly, *Mar’ot* presents storytelling as a transformative force that allows women to challenge authority and shape moral and social structures. Like Scheherazade, Melela demonstrates intelligence and agency through her dialogue with her father and later with King Bendrari. She too is subject to the threat of death at the hands of a king, yet she wields far greater influence, not through mere survival, but by outsmarting her father and proving his judgments wrong. Throughout the frame story, Melela’s father repeatedly dismisses her as foolish using the Yiddish term “narish.”<sup>141</sup> The author uses this same term in his second introduction when criticizing society’s ridicule of women as “narishe froye”. By applying “narish” both to Melela and women in general, the author connects his societal critique directly to the narrative, emphasizing that men are often more foolish than women—a point explicitly stated in the preface.<sup>142</sup> Melela, portrayed as wise and perceptive, proves her father’s assumptions wrong, whereas King Akris, guided by astrologers’ flawed prophecies and his own misguided fears, ultimately appears as the foolish one.<sup>143</sup> The term “narish” appears in Karmolia’s speech when she criticizes Akris’ belief in false prophets and also in Libia’s prayer, where she includes the word

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<sup>137</sup> Kabbani, *Europe’s Myths of Orient*, 51.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Eva Sallis, *Sheherazade through the Looking Glass: The Metamorphosis of The Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 103.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 93-4.

<sup>141</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 4v.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 5v.

<sup>143</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

*narishkeit* among the list of evil things she condemns.<sup>144</sup> Both characters — Karmolia and Libia — use *narishkeit* to reject misguided beliefs. By highlighting women’s wisdom and agency, particularly through Melela’s storytelling and Libia’s eventual rule, the narrative reinforces the author’s critique of societal prejudices against women. Scheherazade’s dynamic with her father also shows the power of storytelling as resistance. When he tries to dissuade her from marrying Shahryar with a parable, she counters with her own, engaging in a verbal duel that renders his authority ineffective. Despite his power and the physical threat of beating her into submission, he cannot change her mind.<sup>145</sup>

The portrayal of women in *Mar’ot* can be understood in the context of the tales’ intended readership. As Idelson-Shein noted, the female figures depicted in *Mar’ot* appear to be crafted with a specific audience in mind.<sup>146</sup> The text seems to resonate with an educated, upper-class Jewish female readership, particularly bourgeois German-Jewish women who would have been interested in both tales of Greek mythology and a translation of a popular Parisian novel.<sup>147</sup> These women may not have rejected traditional notions of female virtue, such as managing the household and caring for children, but they would have embraced a broader set of ideals — ones that balanced piety and domesticity with intellectual curiosity, cultural refinement, and resilience.<sup>148</sup> The portrayal of women both in the introduction and frame story suggests an attempt to expand women’s roles beyond the household, offering models of perseverance, wit, and wisdom that would have appealed to a readership eager for narratives that reflected their own aspirations.<sup>149</sup> The author of *Mar’ot* appears intent on portraying women as honorable and virtuous as discussed and therefore the text presents women as figures of wisdom, dignity and agency.

This framework of female characters also establishes a thematic foundation for the broader gender dynamics in *Mar’ot*. Within this framework, the most distinctive and complex figure emerges: Karmolia (Tauruz), whose fluid identity challenges conventional gender roles and further expands the narrative’s engagement with power, agency, and transformation. The depiction of a male prince assuming the guise of a princess represents a rare and noteworthy motif in folk and

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<sup>144</sup> *Mar’ot ha-tsov’ot*, 21r.

<sup>145</sup> Sallis, *Sheherazade through the Looking Glass*, 93.

<sup>146</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

fairy tale literature.<sup>150</sup> Typically, gender transformations in mythology and folklore, such as Tiresias' metamorphosis, frame gender shifts as curses or punishments.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, in tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*<sup>152</sup>, the wolf's disguise as the grandmother highlights deceptive and malicious intent, and in *Jane Eyre*<sup>153</sup>, Mr. Rochester's disguise as a Gypsy woman serves to manipulate and test the protagonist's character. In contrast, Karmolia's gender disguise is not imposed upon him, nor is it an act of harm — rather, he deliberately assumes a female identity for strategic purposes, using it as a tool to gain access and to meet Libia. Unlike the Tiresias myth and its variants, which tie gender transformation to prophecy or punishment, Karmolia's shift is a deliberate choice rather than an imposed supernatural fate. The character's self-determined transformation reinforces his resourcefulness and adaptability, positioning as an active agent who manipulates the expectations of gender for his own advantage.

This type of gender transformation and disguise can be better understood by examining the tale type ATU 514, “The Shift of Sex”<sup>154</sup>, in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU)<sup>155</sup> motif index. ATU 514 specifically focuses on tales where a protagonist adopts the appearance of another gender — often in which a young woman disguises herself as a man to embark on an adventure, where she undergoes a magical transformation into a man, marrying a woman, and achieving a happily-ever-after ending. Some of the most well-known examples of this type of folktale are “Iphis and Ianthe” in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *A Girl Who Became a Man* and *The Girl Soldier*.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 4.

<sup>151</sup> Maja Pan, “Introduction to the Analysis of Gender in the ATU 514 Fairy Tale Type on Examples from the Balkans,” *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 16 (2013): 169.

<sup>152</sup> Countless versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” exist, the earliest known written version, “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” (Little Red Riding Hood), was published in 1697 by the French writer Charles Perrault. Another well-known adaptation is “Rotkäppchen” (Little Red Cap), written by the Brothers Grimm, which appeared in their 1812–15 collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales, also known as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*). See “Little Red Riding Hood,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed March 15th, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Little-Red-Riding-Hood>.

<sup>153</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1847).

<sup>154</sup> Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, 2nd rev. ed. (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961), type 514.

<sup>155</sup> Folktales are classified in Hans-Jörg Uther's *Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, commonly referred to as the ATU Index. This system, developed and by folklorists Antti Aarne (1910), Stith Thompson (1928, 1961), and Hans-Jörg Uther (2004), categorizes folktales based on recurring motifs—key narrative elements that appear across different stories. Tales that share similar motifs are grouped under the same tale type, while variations of a specific tale fall under the category of variants.

<sup>156</sup> See bibliography entries in Maja Pan, “Introduction to the Analysis of Gender in the ATU 514 Fairy Tale Type on Examples from the Balkans,” *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 16 (2013): 169. The three mentioned here are: Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, 9: 666-797: The Story of Iphis and Ianthe. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/ovid-met9.html> /accessed: March 10th, 2025. J. Kerkez, ed., *Delija devojka* (A Hero Girl – The Anthology) (Beograd: Deve, 2006); N. T. K. Sarajlija, “Devojka postala muško (A Girl Who

*Mar'ot* subverts the typical pattern of a female character disguising herself as a male by instead depicting a male character transforming into a female. Fairy tales use magical elements such as transformations, disguises, and impossible tasks to explore and reinforce societal norms, particularly regarding gender roles and moral boundaries.<sup>157</sup> This distinction of male-to-female cross-dressing is significant as it highlights a rare literary motif — one that challenges conventional gender roles and disrupts established expectations.<sup>158</sup> Karmolia's dual identity — functioning both as a vulnerable woman and as a chivalrous prince — creates a complex gender performance. The pronouns used for Karmolia shift between male and female depending on the context: when the character performs heroic actions, such as saving Libia<sup>159</sup>, the text adopts male pronouns, while in everyday situations, Karmolia is referred to with female pronouns.<sup>160</sup> Though his disguise appears to subvert gender boundaries, it ultimately serves to reinforce existing hierarchies. Karmolia strategically adopts femininity as a temporary, tactical tool, yet his core identity as a prince remains intact, illustrating how the narrative both challenges and upholds conventional gender roles within the courtly setting.

Unlike many ATU 514 tales, where female characters face severe consequences if their disguises are uncovered — the threat of exposure is not a central source of tension in the narrative. When Karmolia's true identity is revealed, Libia's reaction is one of betrayal but also gratitude, as she recognizes that he saved her life and eventually falls in love with him. In many ATU 514 tales, gender disguise serves as a strategy for survival and is used to escape danger, avoid forced marriage, or gain protection in a male-dominated world.<sup>161</sup> However, in *Mar'ot*, Karmolia's disguise is chosen freely and carries no lasting consequences, positioning it not as an act of desperation but as a deliberate exercise of agency and control, further distinguishing *Mar'ot* from conventional gender-disguise narratives.

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Became a Man,” in *Bosanska vila* 1, part I (Sarajevo, 1886), 9. J. Hadalin, “Deklica vojak (The Girl Soldier),” in *Folklorna pripoved – od pripovedovalcev k bralcem*, Traditions 23 (1994): 161–176.

For detailed descriptions and comparative analysis of these tales, see Stith Thompson and Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, ATU 514, “The Shift of Sex” (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004).

<sup>157</sup> Diane Tye and Pauline Greenhill, *Unsettling Assumptions: Tradition, Gender, Drag* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2014), 56.

<sup>158</sup> Norman Brown, “Change of Sex as a Hindu Story Motif,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47 (1927), 12–3.

<sup>159</sup> Karmolia saves Libia both from an attempted abduction, as aforementioned (see *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 17r–18v) and in a later incident from a lion and a tiger (see *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 24v–25v).

<sup>160</sup> For change of pronouns *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 11r–12v.

<sup>161</sup> Pan, “Analysis of Gender in the ATU 514 Fairy Tale Type”, 170–2.

By heroically saving Libia from abduction<sup>162</sup>, Karmolia follows the traditional motif of a prince rescuing a princess from a tower, as seen in ATU 310 – The Maiden in the Tower.<sup>163</sup> This folktale type typically features a young woman imprisoned in a tower by a male authority figure — often a father or a king — until a heroic rescuer, usually a prince, arrives from the outside to free her, often leading to marriage. Yet, Karmolia’s role differs from the conventional pattern, as he does not arrive as an outsider but rather from within Libia’s world. Unlike the typical rescuer who forcefully invades the tower, Karmolia gains access through disguise and assimilation, subverting expectations while still fulfilling the archetypal role of the heroic liberator. As Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill argue, folktales function as spaces for social experimentation, using their fantastic and imaginative nature to explore alternative realities and challenge societal norms.<sup>164</sup> By disrupting conventional structures, folktales create a space where gender, identity, and power can be questioned, reimagined, and even subverted, allowing storytellers and audiences to engage with ideas that may not be openly expressed in their own societies.

In *Mar’ot*, the story positions gender as both a limitation and a source of power. Though social structures restrict movement and power based on gender, the ability to manipulate these roles — particularly through disguise — offers a way to subvert these constraints. Karmolia gains access to Libia because he transforms to a woman, yet this access is predicated on deception, challenging the restrictive roles assigned to men and women in the narrative world. Deception and femininity have long been intertwined in narratives, dating back to the biblical story of Eve, who deceived Adam in the Garden of Eden. This association appears across various traditions, where women are often depicted as wielding influence through cunning, concealment, and strategic deception.<sup>165</sup> Deception, traditionally associated with femininity, is challenged through Karmolia’s character, as he is a male figure who relies on manipulation and disguise to achieve his goals. Karmolia’s assumed femininity grants him temporary access to spaces denied to men, but it is his return to masculinity and the revelation of his true identity that brings narrative closure—a pattern

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<sup>162</sup> In another instance in the tale, Karmolia saves Libia from a dangerous tiger and lion. See *Mar’ot ha-tso’vot* 24r-24v.

<sup>163</sup> Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 310. A well-known example of this motif is Rapunzel, popularized by the Brothers Grimm. See Jack Zipes, *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>164</sup> Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill, *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 22.

<sup>165</sup> Karen E. Rowe, “To Spin a Yarn: The Female Vice in Folklore and Fairy Tale,” in *Fairy Tales and Society*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 68, 71.

frequently observed in gender-shifting folktales.<sup>166</sup> The story ultimately reaffirms traditional masculinity, with Karmolia reclaiming his male identity and assuming his rightful place, it simultaneously challenges the stability of these roles. Through disguise and storytelling, the narrative demonstrates how gender can be both a social construct and a strategic tool, capable of being reshaped and redefined within shifting power structures.

The author of *Mar'ot* explicitly clarifies in the conclusion of the frame story that the gender transformations in the narrative are not merely a plot device but serve a deeper moral purpose. He states: “[...] This is the parable: Karmolia behaved in the same way as the (**yezer ha-ra‘**) does with a person. It hides and disguises itself in other appearances.”<sup>167</sup> This explanation suggests that the shifting gender identities within the tale symbolize the deceptive nature of the evil inclination, which disguises itself to mislead individuals. By framing gender transformation as a metaphor for moral struggle, the author adapts mythological narratives and weaves the theme of disguise into an ethical framework. As evident in both the introduction and the frame story, the author’s primary goal is to offer moral reflection through the narrative, shaping the plot to reinforce his overarching message of perseverance in faith amid hardship.

This thematic approach can also be observed, albeit differently, in the rhymed Yiddish romance *Shteyrmark* printed in the early seventeenth-century, which narrates the tale of an adulterous knight named Trinimutis, rescued from execution by his loyal wife Fortebel. Originally translated from an early sixteenth-century German poem, “Ein schön lied vñ einem Ritter auß der Steyr”, the story describes how Trinimutis travels from Denmark to France driven by curiosity about the beauty of the French queen, ultimately committing adultery and becoming imprisoned.<sup>168</sup> His wife, Fortebel, bravely arrives disguised as a man, cleverly swaps clothing with him, and frees him by convincingly claiming that she herself was the disguised visitor who seduced the queen. After proving her femininity and noble status, she is honored by the French royal couple, and the spouses return happily to Denmark, where they inherit the throne. The character Fortebel can be compared to Karmolia as both heroines disguise themselves, navigating to rescue their counterparts and are both described as clever and brave. However, while Fortebel saves her husband following his infidelity and legal jeopardy, Karmolia's disguise in carries greater moral

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<sup>166</sup> Psyche Z. Ready, “The Case of ATU 514, ‘The Shift of Sex,’” *Open Cultural Studies* 5 (2021): 226-229.

<sup>167</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 45v.

<sup>168</sup> A chapter on this topic will appear in a forthcoming handbook on the subject of Yiddish translations, by Aya Elyada, Astrid Lembke and Ossnat Sharon-Pinto.

and religious significance. Karmolia's disguise and gender transformation are framed as moralistic lessons, emphasizing religious redemption, whereas Fortebel's disguise primarily emphasizes marital loyalty and resourcefulness.

Vern L. and Bonnie Bullough have shown how cross-dressing functioned as a literary and cultural device in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reflecting both fascination with and anxiety about gender fluidity.<sup>169</sup> Several early modern texts featured gender disguise, often leading to mistaken identities and unintended romantic entanglements, as seen in *Orlando Furioso*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Calandria*.<sup>170</sup> These narratives frequently depicted women experiencing greater freedom and power when disguised as men, suggesting a recognition that gender roles were more flexible than rigid binaries allowed. However, cross-dressing also carried erotic implications, particularly in moments of same-sex attraction that were ultimately resolved through a return to heterosexual norms. For instance, *Orlando Furioso* presents a relationship between Bradamante and the princess Fiordispina, the resolution ensures that the encounter is framed within a heterosexual context.<sup>171</sup> This recurring pattern reveals cultural discomfort with openly addressing homosexuality, using disguise and transformation as narrative tools to explore and contain such themes. At the same time, the prevalence of gender reversals in literature may reflect broader anxieties about masculinity and changing social structures.<sup>172</sup>

Writers like Ambroise Paré and Baldassare Castiglione expressed concerns about gender instability, fearing that men engaging in “womanly” pursuits might become effeminate.<sup>173</sup> These fears were also evident in anti-theatrical discourse, where male actors playing female roles were seen as a potential threat to stable masculinity. In Sir Philip Sidney's *Aracadia*, written in the late sixteenth-century the male hero disguises himself as the Amazon Zelmane to gain access to a secluded princess, leading to unintended romantic entanglements.<sup>174</sup> His disguise is so convincing that not only the princess but also her mother and father develop feelings for him and this scenario plays with the comedic and erotic possibilities of gender disguise, then reaffirming traditional

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<sup>169</sup> Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 95-106.

<sup>170</sup> Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, 96-7.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 97-104.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 99-103.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 99-105.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 87-92.

gender roles when the hero's true identity is revealed.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, Karmolia adopts a female identity to gain access to Libia, and both Akris and Izabel fall in love with him/her. Both *Arcadia* and *Mar'ot* use gender disguise to facilitate access to women and both eventually reaffirm traditional gender roles when the hero's true identity is revealed. However, while *Arcadia* focuses on romantic confusion and social satire, *Mar'ot* frames gender transformation within a moral parable. As the author explicitly states, Karmolia symbolizes the evil inclination, and his shifting gender identity serves as a metaphor for deception.

As shown, Karmolia's transformation is central to the tale, and yet Libia's character also allows an exploration on themes of gender and power. Libia is first introduced when the prince discovers her portrait and enquires about her, captivated by both her beauty and wisdom. She is described as possessing unparalleled beauty and wisdom: "For as long as the world has existed, such beauty has never been created. She shines as brightly as the sun itself. She possesses all the wisdom of the world and masters every craft. In short, there is nothing lacking in her."<sup>176</sup> The depiction of Libia's character is similar to that of both Melela and Karmolia, as all three characters are presented as exceptional figures which possess beauty, wisdom, and abilities. Libia's character undergoes a remarkable transformation throughout the tale, reflecting both the constraints and possibilities of her world. Initially confined to a tower, Libia's character corresponds with the archetype of the imprisoned maiden found in ATU 310: "The Maiden in the Tower," alongside figures like Rapunzel and Danae.<sup>177</sup>

However, unlike these heroines, Libia actively defies her father's authority, marries the prince despite his opposition, and carries their child, asserting her agency in ways that set her apart from traditional portrayals of imprisoned princesses. Rather than passively revealing her identity when she is rescued by King Paris and Queen Kartusa, she strategically assumes the identity of Dana, presenting herself as a young woman exiled by her parents. Like Karmolia, she demonstrates wisdom and resourcefulness, crafting a new identity that ensures her survival and secures a future for her son. From a princess locked in a tower with no control over her future, she transforms into an active agent of her own destiny by strategically leveraging her class and status to gain

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<sup>175</sup> Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912). A more recent edition has been written by Victor Skretkovicz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

<sup>176</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 11v.

<sup>177</sup> Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, 2nd rev. ed. (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961), type 310.

protection. Rather than remaining a passive figure subjected to fate, she actively reshapes her circumstances by adopting a new identity that grants her access to power.

This mirrors Karmolia's use of gender disguise, as both characters manipulate societal structures—one through social rank and the other through perceived femininity—to navigate challenges and assert control over their lives. In the royal court where she finds refuge, Libia's son Berzis is raised as a noble prince and is depicted as possessing vast wisdom and a deep reverence for God.<sup>178</sup> His upbringing as a prince, along with his moral character, reflect his mother's wisdom and resourcefulness and reinforces Libia's (Dana) depiction as a wise and strategic figure. When she reveals Karmolia/Tauruz as his father, Berzis embarks on a quest to find him. Ultimately, the family reunites and rules the kingdom of Zidon. Libia does not remain a figure of suffering or loss—she returns to Zidon with Tauruz and Berzis, assumes the throne, and the three “rule it with such great wisdom that everyone could not praise it enough and also had great joy from it”.<sup>179</sup> Libia's actions do not fully subvert the expected roles of women but rather demonstrate a form of wisdom and agency that reinforce the broader affirmation of female intelligence in *Mar'ot*. Her character can be placed within the tradition of virtuous and capable women who shape their destinies through intellect as mentioned in the introduction by the author. Unlike Karmolia, whose gender disguise carries moral implications tied to deception and the evil inclination, Libia's self-determination is presented as virtuous, reinforcing the idea that a woman's wisdom is admirable. In this sense, through Libia's character, the text acknowledges the limitations imposed on women while simultaneously presenting an idealized vision of female agency that reinforces traditional values.

The fluidity of gender in *Mar'ot* mirrors the broader cultural fluidity present throughout the text, where characters embody Muslim, idol-worshiping and Jewish elements, and the narrative itself blends diverse storytelling traditions—mythology, oriental tales, fables, folktales, chivalric romance, poetry, and prose.<sup>180</sup> Much like Yiddish itself which straddles multiple linguistic and cultural spheres, drawing from both German and Hebrew, vernacular and scholarly traditions, the text navigates fluid identities, reinforcing the theme of transformation and adaptation.<sup>181</sup> Just as gender boundaries blur within the tale, so too do the names of characters, and religious and cultural

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<sup>178</sup> *Mar'ot ha-tsov'ot*, 39r.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 43v.

<sup>180</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*.

distinctions, creating a narrative space where the divisions between Jewish and non-Jewish, male and female, are fluid and constantly in flux.<sup>182</sup> The author of *Mar'ot* deliberately chose to adapt the myths of Acrisius and Danae as well as Tiresias—narratives rich in themes of gender transformation, prophecy, and fate. This choice suggests an awareness of the thematic flexibility that an Orientalist framework offers, where transformations—whether physical, gendered, or social—are to be perhaps expected. By embedding these myths within an Orientalist setting, the author may have been leveraging the genre's conventions to explore gender in ways that would have been more constrained in other literary traditions. If so, the gender fluidity in *Mar'ot* is not just a product of Yiddish literature but also of the broader fantastical possibilities that Orientalist narratives enable.

*Mar'ot*, offered Jewish vernacular readers a Judaized adaptation of contemporary intellectual currents. Through both its content and structure, the text challenges rigid distinctions between male and female, between character names, and between religions demonstrates the fluid exchange between identities and the dynamic nature of vernacular literature. The frame story provides valuable insight into the complexities of gender and identity, revealing the ways in which narratives can serve as an instrument of transformation. *Mar'ot* challenges the prevailing literary and gendered hierarchies of early modern Ashkenazi literature by positioning female characters as figures of wisdom, depth and discernment, surpassing the traditional male counterpart.

#### *Translation Method*

My decision to translate the frame story of *Mar'ot* was motivated by the story's complexity and originality. As discussed above, the frame narrative is distinct from the tales themselves, which are a close translation of the German translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Printed in Yiddish in the early eighteenth-century, the narrative presents significant challenges due, in part, to its length, language and complexity. By translating it, I aimed offer an accessible resource for researchers and readers interested in either early modern Yiddish literature or in the *Nights*. Translating the frame story of *Mar'ot* into English expands access to this text, allowing scholars to explore Jewish interpretations of foreign works and early modern Yiddish literature. It also enables researchers of the *Nights* and eighteenth-century European literature—including German

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<sup>182</sup> Idelson-Shein, "Anon. Unbound".

literary traditions—to engage with Yiddish sources. Beyond literary studies, this translation can serve as a resource for a different research fields, including translation studies, foreign literature, and cultural history. By making this text available, it supports comparative research and further integrates Yiddish literature into broader academic discussions.

Translating *Mar'ot* from Yiddish to English required careful reflection to my own translation approach and translation process. I chose not to translate the text word for word but to create a translation that is readable, mirroring the narrative flow of the Yiddish tales themselves. I aimed for a translation that would be respectful to the source but also be able to communicate its essence as a book that aims to entertain. In this work, I use the YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute) standard for Yiddish transliteration, as it is the most widely accepted and standardized system and provides an accurate representation of Yiddish phonology and is commonly used in academic settings. Further, I transliterated the Hebraisms in the text according to the conventions of the Jewish Encyclopedia rather than their Yiddish pronunciation. Given that the publisher Israel Ben-Avraham was fluent in both Yiddish and Hebrew, preserving the Hebrew forms of these words helps maintain the relationship between Yiddish and Hebrew as it might have been perceived by the book's original readers. At times, the text presents variations in the spelling of names (notably, ליבא/ליביא, קרמולא/קארמוליא/קרמוליא), and I transliterated them according to the spelling found in the source text. The distinct font used for Hebraisms in the original text visually differentiates them from the surrounding Yiddish, a distinction I have replicated in the translation by using parentheses and bold text when parentheses appear in the source, and bold text alone when they do not.

Placing these Hebraisms in parentheses, as they appear in the source, emphasizes the uneven transition between Yiddish and Hebrew and highlights the linguistic and cultural distinctions between the two languages. The two languages coexistence reveal power structures embedded within Jewish society as Hebrew was traditionally associated with religious scholarship and sacred authority, holds the status of the educated and scholarly class, while Yiddish, the vernacular of daily life, has historically been regarded as the language of the common people—children, women, and uneducated men. By preserving the original formatting choices, this translation highlights the hierarchy within the text where Hebrew terms, may indicate a sense of foreignness. My translation approach to the translation of Hebraisms is influenced by Lawrence Venuti's theory of foreignization in translation, as articulated in his seminal book *The Translator's*

*Invisibility*. Venuti draws on the translation strategies first introduced by the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who proposed two primary approaches to translation: bringing the author to the reader—which Venuti terms domestication—and bringing the reader to the author, which he refers to as foreignization. Venuti argues that translation is not merely the transfer of text from one language to another but an interpretative act that shapes meaning. He advocates for preserving linguistic and cultural differences to heighten the reader’s awareness of the context of the original text. Venuti expands on these ideas, arguing that domestication, which adapts the text for accessibility, diminishes the foreignness of the source text to conform to the norms of the target culture, a process he critiques as a form of “ethnocentric violence.”<sup>183</sup> In contrast, foreignization challenges the reader by maintaining the cultural nuances of the source text, disrupting the expectation of fluency and drawing attention to the cultural and historical context of the source text. Venuti presents two approaches: domestication, which adapts the text for accessibility, and foreignization, which challenges the reader by maintaining the original’s cultural nuances. Through foreignization, the translator disrupts the reader’s expectation of fluency, drawing attention to the cultural and historical context of the source text.

Applying foreignization techniques to my translation of *Mar’ot*, such as my choice to retain Hebraisms in their original form, visibly displays the relationship between Yiddish and Hebrew, and the text’s historical moment and readership. As a work that blends European Orientalist storytelling with Yiddish literary traditions, it exemplifies the hybrid nature of early modern Jewish European literature which was shaped by multiple cultural influences. Thus, translating *Mar’ot* requires recognizing both its historical and cultural aspects.

To translate *Mar’ot* from Yiddish into English, I followed a multi-step process. While acknowledging the inevitable transformations inherent to the act of translation the process involved several steps to render the original Yiddish text. First, I transliterated the Hebrew letters of the Yiddish text into Latin script using a Germanized transliteration system. Given the close linguistic proximity between Old Yiddish and German, which provided an accessible format for translation to English. Old Yiddish, particularly in its earlier forms, evolved from a High German dialect with significant influences from Hebrew and Aramaic, and as a result shares substantial

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<sup>183</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 15-20.

grammatical structures, vocabulary, and phonetic characteristics with Middle High German.<sup>184</sup> I transliterated each numbered section separately into German and then translated it into English using ChatGPT. I approached the numbered sections, which range in length from a single paragraph to two pages, one at a time to ensure a thorough understanding of the content. After completing the translation of each section, I carefully reviewed the English version by cross-referencing it with the original Yiddish text before moving on to the next section. In the text, I introduced paragraph breaks to the text to facilitate more fluent reading, but the source includes only a few paragraph break apart from the numbered subchapters. Additionally, I inserted parentheses, commas, and period marks where needed to improve the flow of reading. I used square brackets for clarifications and round ones for Hebraisms. Although the source text alternates between past and present tense, I have chosen to translate the entire text into the past tense for clarity and consistency.

To determine Yiddish words that had multiple translations or meanings, I referred to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch*<sup>185</sup>, an extensive German dictionary that provides definitions and traces the etymology of words. Currently, no dedicated dictionary exists for Old Yiddish, and modern Yiddish dictionaries primarily focus on Eastern Yiddish dialects, leaving a gap in resources for earlier forms of the language. As noted by scholars such as Jerold C. Frakes, this absence requires researchers to turn to German linguistic resources.<sup>186</sup> However, in the absence of an Old Yiddish dictionary, I consulted a contemporary resource, the *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary* by Uriel Weinreich, a prominent twentieth-century Yiddish scholar.<sup>187</sup> Weinreich's dictionary is widely recognized as a comprehensive and authoritative resource for Yiddish terms.

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<sup>184</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, *A Guide to Old Literary Yiddish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xii-xiii.

<sup>185</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1854–1961), <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/>.

<sup>186</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, *A Guide to Old Literary Yiddish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 309–310.

<sup>187</sup> Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary* (New York: Schocken, 1977).

A Critical Translation of the Frame Narrative of *Mar'ot ha-tsovo'ot*

Introduction to [the] tales [*ayngang tsu di maysiyes*]

There was in the land of India, a (**melekh**) named the great (**Bendrari**) [who] was a powerful and wise (**melekh**). Few like him existed in the (**olam**) in all virtues, whether in (**milhamot**) or other (**hokhmot**). He ruled his subjects very well, and all people loved him dearly, from big to small. Bendrari found (**simha**) in seeing how **be-hokhmah** he governed and managed his (**malkhut**). He had (**shalom**) with the surrounding (**melakhim**). Because it is a great novelty to rule a (**medina**) in peace, not in war. He was renowned in all stories/histories.<sup>188</sup>

(1) There was only one thing lacking in him, that he refused to marry a (**malka**), for he once had a (**malka**) whom he had [killed] **um (hayut) bringen**<sup>189</sup> as she had been unfaithful to him and did not have children with him. Thus, he refused to marry again, believing that all women were unfaithful and that a virtuous, faithful woman could no longer be found. His ministers could not persuade him otherwise. Therefore, his subjects were constantly filled with (**za'ar**), for the (**melekh**) did not wish to take a (**malka**) and had no children. Consequently, the (**malkhut**) would have to be taken over by foreigners. But he always declared that he had believed he had the most faithful and virtuous (**malka**) in the (**olam**). Yet, she turned out to be unfaithful, and thus he regarded all women as unfaithful.

(2) The (**yo'azim**) begged him for a long time, and finally, the (**melekh**) resolved to give a (**tshuva**), (**dehaynu**) that if his (**yo'azim**) would be (**'arev**) with their lives [*bay ir (hayut)*], [that] if it turned out that the woman turned out to be unfaithful they would all pay with their lives, as would the woman's entire household. Should the ministers sign off on this, he would finally resolve [to marry]. However, this caused great (**za'ar**) for the (**yo'azim**), for how could one find a woman who would agree to such (**tna'im**)? Since no one could guarantee that when she spoke with a man [*ayn mens person*], that the (**melek**) would immediately become suspicious and deem her unfaithful, and [*um ihr (hayut) bringen*] kill everyone. Thus, many years passed without anyone managing to convince the (**melekh**) to marry. He remained without a (**malka**), and his (**hazer**) was always filled with sorrow.

(3) In the same (**makom**), there was a (**yo'ez**) of the (**melekh**) among his (**yo'azim**). This counselor had two daughters who were both very beautiful and clever. One day, the youngest began to speak

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<sup>188</sup> "Historie", can translate either to historical tale or narrative. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "*Deutsches Wörterbuch*" (DWb), s.v. "Historie".

<sup>189</sup> "Um hayut bringen" is a Yiddish phrase that appears throughout the tales. Though it literally suggests "to bring vitality," it is used idiomatically to mean "to kill". For discussion of the phrase, see Glikl bas Judah Leib, *Zikhronot Glikl*, 1691–1719, bilingual ed., Hebrew trans. Chava Turniansky (Jerusalem, 2006), 588.

to her father, saying: “I ask you, dear father, (**moḥel**) my audacity,<sup>190</sup> for I have a request to make [ . . . ].” The father replied: “Dear child, you know how much I love you. Therefore, you may boldly [*kanst du drist*] say what is on your mind.”

(4) There the daughter falls to her knees before her father and began (**b’zeh ha-lashon**): Dear father, I will tell you something strange<sup>191</sup> that you have not thought of. I ask you once again not to be (**brogez**) with me. I have resolved to place myself, the (**melekh**), and the entire (**malkut**) in a state of joy: therefore, dear father, you will present me to the (**melekh**) and allow me to become his (**malka**), if he wishes to take me. I ask you, dear father, please be willing/agree to my request.

(5) Then the father was greatly startled and can hardly respond, struck with fear. He thought to himself: I will first try to speak calmly with her and remove these foolish ideas from her mind, and he began [*fangt an* = began/said]: Dear child, you must come to your senses; how can you put such thoughts in your head? You surely know under what conditions the (**melekh**) wants to have a (**malka**). All the ministers must guarantee with their (**ḥayut**), that the (**malka**) must be faithful, and if the (king) has even a single doubt about her, all the advisors, along with your father, mother, and siblings, will be put to death. [ . . . ] Where, then, is your (**sekhel**)? And especially as you are a beautiful person [*ayn sheyn mensh*] . . .

(6) Then the daughter said: Dear father, I know all of this well . . . . [But] I have my (**bitakhon**) in (**ha-shem yitbarakh**). He will ensure [*er vird mayn bayshtand zayn*] that the (**melekh**) will not consider me unfaithful, and I will live well. Think, dear father, what a (**kavod**) it will be for you and your daughter, that you have a daughter who will be the (**malka**) of all India. Apart from the (**simḥa**), they will see that this (**malkhut**) will not fall to strangers. And the Dear God will give me children with the (**melekh**). I know [how to] present myself before the (**melekh yerom hodo**) so that he does not consider me unfaithful. Do not worry, my dear father.

7) Dear daughter Melela, that is what the daughter’s name was—Do not imagine such things, that my (**de’a**) should be given on matters of foolish words. And [that] so many (**yo’atzim**) and my whole household [will be] disturbed because of you. What are you thinking? You are a beautiful person, skilled in all good qualities, informed in all languages, knowledgeable in all (**klei zemerim**); you can play, write, and read, dance, and have read all stories [*histories*]. In (**ḥokhmot**), you are renowned, and [there are] few like you in the world. I am rich enough [by] God, that with time you can find a prince who will bring happiness to you and me. For the prince will also become a (**melekh**), and thus you will be a (**malka**) with great (**simḥa**). And if [**ḥas ve-shalom**], things turn out differently, then sorrow will arise, as I have said. How will you be able to take upon

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<sup>190</sup> “Dreistigkeit”- can translate either to determination, confidence in demeanor or presumption, insolence, audacity. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, “*Deutsches Wörterbuch*” (DWb), s.v. “Dreistigkeit”.

<sup>191</sup> “פרעמדה” [*fremde*], “strange, another’s, someone else’s; foreign, alien s.v. Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary*.

yourself the responsibility for so many lost lives [*das azo fil um ihr (ḥayut) komen iber dir*]? Therefore, I ask you, think no more about this and dismiss your foolish thoughts

(8) Dear father, all your words are in vain to change my thoughts. [. . .]. I ensure you that with God's help, you need not have any (**d'agah**). [. . .] **Adraba**, the (**melekh**) will be very pleased with me. And I will ensure that the (**melekh**), on all his days, will have no concerns about my disloyalty. It is **emet** what you say—that I have read all the history books, and I know how one should conduct oneself. And the (**melekh**) will hold no thoughts of disloyalty towards me throughout his life. Therefore, dear Father, give me your consent.

(9) Then the father answered: Dear daughter, it will go for you as it did when you do not wish to obey me, and follow your foolish mind in everything, just as a (**melekh**) once went with his daughter, and you will be punished just like that very daughter, whose father's (**ḥayot**) was at stake.<sup>192</sup>

(10) The daughter then said: Dear father, tell me the story of the daughter and the father. The father replies: Gladly, dear child, pay attention and take an example from it. Then the father thought: I want to tell her a long and considerable<sup>193</sup> story so that she will not forget it, and he begins to speak and tell the story.

(11) There was a young prince, the son of a great Arabian king. The king died and left behind two sons. The older prince became (**melekh**) in his father's palace. However, he has (**mora**) because the younger prince his brother, is more pretty and smarter than he is and is greatly loved by the people, so he fears that his brother might claim the (**malkhut**) from him. Thus, he planned to take the life of the young prince [*im zayn (ḥayut) tsu brengen*]. Good friends had told him about his brother. Therefore, the prince gathered what he can and (**be-sod**) leaves the (**medina**) under an unknown name with his court master and he traveled through many (**malkhuyot**) and (**medinot**), where he received great glory, for he was one of the most capable princes in the world. In fighting and knight game [*fekhtn un riter shpil*] there was none like him. He remembers that he was excluded from his (**malkhut**). About his eldest brother, he wants to see that he establishes himself in another (**malkhut**), proving himself with his (**ḥokhmah**) and bravery.<sup>194</sup>

(12) He arrived in the (**malkhut Zidon**), where (**melekh Akris**) still lived . . . In a fine tavern<sup>195</sup> he heard much talk about the beautiful princess (**Libia**), the only daughter of (**melekh Akris**). So

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<sup>192</sup> "Angelegen", of concerns, often used as an adjective: when something was important to the people. s.v. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "*Deutsches Wörterbuch*" (DWb).

<sup>193</sup> "היפשי" [*hipshei*] considerable, substantial, appreciable s.v. See Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary*.

<sup>194</sup> "Taperigkeit", bravery, courage, boldness, s.v. *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (DWb).

<sup>195</sup> "ווערטש הויז", inn, house, s.v. *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (DWb) "Wirtshaus".

people speak of her beauty and wisdom [*shonhayt un' klughayt*], that she has no (**dome she-ba-olam**).

(13) The Arabian prince did not take it much to heart for he always thought of his suffering. How he is an exiled prince, without God, people, and land. One evening, he was walking in the garden near the Temple of Astoria/Ostoria [אסטאריע]<sup>196</sup>, this is the temple where they serve their idols. While walking, lost in thought, a certain prince passed by him quickly and tried to put something in his pocket, but it fell to the ground. This was the prince (**Be'or**) from the (**malkhut**) of Moabshi.

(14) The Arabian prince bent down and picked it up. He saw that it was a richly decorated box, set with diamonds. He ran after Prince **Be'or** to return the empty box to him, but the prince was moving quickly that he lost sight of him. So, he returned to his chamber to consider what fortune had put in his hands.

(15) So, he discovered it was a beautiful golden box, adorned with diamonds. He opened the box and found inside it a portrait of a woman whose beauty immediately captivated him. He imagined that it must be the image of a goddess from Astoria/Ostoria's temple, as it seemed impossible to find such beauty in a human. He examined the box closely and found some golden (**otiyot**), which he read and learned that it was the image of the beautiful princess (**Libia**), the only daughter of (**melekh Akris**) of (**Zidon**).

(16) How he [*loyt kumt*] after this, he soon comes to himself, and the flames of her beauty strike his eyes. And he cannot come back to himself. So that he cannot collect<sup>197</sup> himself and just stares at her. He stood there and had he not been called to eat dinner; he would have remained standing for a long time with thoughts. He went to dinner, lost in thought, and went to bed with many thoughts.

(17) Early in the morning, he got up and thought to himself: Perhaps the light at night deceived me; I want to see her in daylight now. He took the box out of the bag, and he examined her again. So, he finds her even more beautiful than he had last night, and it is not possible for him to resolve, to hand [it] over again [to] Prince (**Be'or**) as he had intended the previous day. Even the following day, he was so taken with the box that he could not let it go and he thinks: "I must see the princess in person, to see whether the painter has not flattered her too much and whether she does not appear in [it] as she usually is, because painters often make many changes, (**u-be-frat**) with princesses, and he imagines it would be worth asking how one could see the princess.

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<sup>196</sup> The name "Astoria" might resemble the name "Astraea," a figure from Greek mythology, often described as the daughter of Zeus and Themis (or, in other versions, of Astraeus and Eos). She was a maiden associated with justice and purity, who lived among humans during the Golden Age. See William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, s.v. "Astraea" (London: John Murray, 1870).

<sup>197</sup> "געזיכט" [*gezicht*] countenance. s.v. See Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary*.

(18) In the afternoon, after the meal, he very politely asks the man to join him for a cup of coffee. While they are drinking, the prince says, “I have heard much spoken about the beauty of the princess (**Libia**). But tell me the truth and where might one see her, and why has she not yet been promised to a prince, given that she is so beautiful, and that (**melekh Akris**) has no other children to be an heir for the (**malkhut**).”

(19) The host replied, ‘I see that you are a stranger and have become curious. Our (**melekh Akris**) has no (**be’emet**) other children but the only princess, (**Libia**), his daughter. Worries and great fears troubled him that he might someday have to fear for his life because of a son of his daughter (**Libia**)—that is, through his own grandson. The (**melekh**) (**‘ezah**) with his advisors (**yo’atzim**) and decided to never marry off his daughter and to give her no husband, to ensure his own safety. So, he has locked her in the strongest fortress, which is called “The Tower.” There he has confined her with her chambermaid, named (**Izabel**), all alone and guarded so that no man come near her. The (**melekh**) visits her himself; otherwise, no one goes to her. It has already been told here that many princes came to free her, sent by many great (**melakhim**), but all of them were rejected. There are still many here, and the most notable and persistent of them is Prince (**Be’or**) of (**Maobsi**), the king’s only son. He refuses to give up on winning her, but it is all in vain. He has been waiting for many years and cannot even to see, (**mekol sekhel**) to receive [her].

(20) Of her beauty, said the nobleman: ‘I cannot tell you enough, for as long as the world has existed, such beauty has never been created. She shines as brightly as the sun itself; she possesses all the **hokhmot** of the world, and she possesses all the knowledge in the world. She also master’s every craft. In short, there is nothing lacking in her—thus it is with our princess Libia.

(21) The prince is greatly startled, does not accept it, and walks around his chamber, thinking to himself what should be done. He curses the cruel superstition<sup>198</sup> that made the king resort to such an act—that her son would one day kill him. The next day, he goes to view the tower. He sees the big fortress and the guards, and it seems impossible even to think about getting to the tower and seeing her.

(22) He convinced himself that he must have princess (**Libia**) along with her (**malkhut**), or he will give up his own (**hayut**). He finally thought about this for so long, it feels to him on the same night as if a year or two have passed. [Since] he was young and in appearance still unrecognized as a man, thus he wants to disguise himself in women’s clothing and see if he can approach her at night, just to see her.

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<sup>198</sup> איבר גלאבן, Aberglauben, superstitious. *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (DWb), s.v. “Aberglauben”.

(23) So, he ordered his court master<sup>199</sup>, whom he can trust and who is loyal to him, to go to the nearest place and have an Arabian women's dress made, that will fit him well. He plans to come [back] in a few days. The court master follows all his instructions.

(24) The prince tells the good man to prepare his bill, as he intends to travel back home soon. There upon, he pays and leaves. But the good prince travels to his court master and finds everything ready according to his wishes.

(25) He immediately gets dressed to see how the women's clothes fit him and to get used to them. The court master must pretend to be her<sup>200</sup> mother's stepbrother, as he is much older than she<sup>201</sup>. So, they traveled and arrived at a place where he<sup>202</sup> encountered an Arabian maidservant. He told her, "My chambermaid has died, whom I brought from my fatherland. If you wish to be loyal to me, I will take you in her place." The maidservant promises him, and she cannot betray him, as she has never seen him dressed otherwise than in women's clothes. Thus, he hires her as a chamber servant, calls himself Karmolia, and introduces the [his] court master as his uncle, as his mother's brother with the name (**Abin**).

(26) So I<sup>203</sup> wrote a letter to (**Izabela**)<sup>204</sup>, the head mistress of Princess (**Libia**), and send it through my uncle (**Abin**).

In the letter, I wrote the following:<sup>205</sup> The (**yo'etz**) says to his daughter, 'It is already late in the night.' Then the (**yo'etz**) says to his daughter (**Melela**), 'Take an example from the (**melekh Akris**). He had (**morah**) for his daughter, that she would bring about his death. So, he locked her locked in a tower. (**efshar**) it is all false about the princess, yet he was still afraid. How is it possible that you let such foolish thoughts into your head, why should one punish others to bring about their death (*um des ḥayut*) *tsu brengen*]?' Therefore, I ask you, think no more of it.'

The daughter responded, 'Tomorrow, you must tell me the story. After that, I will answer you, for until then, I can think of nothing more to say. Perhaps the (**melekh**) acted wrongly; that is why I want to hear the end (**sof**) of the story.' The next day, the daughter asks her father to tell her the story. He went with her into the garden, sat beside her in a beautiful summer pavilion, and began as follows: 'Yesterday, I held the letter that (**Karmolia**) wrote to (**Izabela**). The letter read as follows.

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<sup>199</sup> Hofmeister refers to the overseer of a prince's household. I chose to use the term "court master" as it incorporates the element "meister," reflecting both the role's authority. *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (DWb), s.v. "Hofmeister".

<sup>200</sup> The first description of the Arabian prince in a female pronoun using "ihem".

<sup>201</sup> Another reference to the prince in a female pronoun using "sie".

<sup>202</sup> The tale goes back and describes the prince in a male pronoun here, using "er".

<sup>203</sup> The text shifts to the first person here using "ich".

<sup>204</sup> The character's name appears inconsistently throughout the text, alternating between "Izabel" (איזאבעל) and "Izabela" (spelled both איזאבעלא and איזעבלה).

<sup>205</sup> The minister (Melela's father) interrupts the narration of the tale here and speaks to his daughter.

(27) (Letter from (**Karmolia**) to (**Izabela**))

You should not be surprised, my lady, that your fame and virtue are known not only in Arabia and your wisdom is renowned in distant lands. As King Akris has chosen you, to educate his only daughter, it cannot be otherwise than that he has selected the wisest woman in the entire land and appointed her for this difficult task. Thus, you must be the most virtuous woman in the world. This has also brought me to the land of **Zidon**, after fate has tested me in every way and taken everything away from me, only this one hope remains for me— to find solace with you [*bay ir*] and bring peace to my heart.

The name (**Karmolia**) will [perhaps not] be well known to you, as my fatherland is so far from here. Nonetheless, I must inform you that my father ruled over Sheba, and there he was deceitfully and dishonestly betrayed, which eventually brought misfortune upon me. A neighboring prince took interest in me, seeing me as beautiful. For even if I am not beautiful, love blinds. He made a proposal to my father to take me as his wife. But since he had a tyrannical and cruel nature, my father did not want me to be so unfortunate as to have such a tyrant for a husband, and he rejected the prince's offer. This drove the prince to despair, and he suddenly attacked my father with all his forces. It was an unfortunate battle, in which my father and my only brother had to sacrifice their lives. The loss caused my dear mother great sorrow, so that within a few weeks she finally passed away. She still had enough time before her death to instruct her stepbrother (**Avin**) to take all the wealth for himself and to lead me away from the place, so that it would not fall into the tyrant's hands, only through the loyalty of my court master.

From this letter, I learned that after my mother's death, as the tyrannical murderer of my parents had already taken over the city of (**Sheba**), I escaped and have come here. I have approached the beautiful and wise (**Izabel**), not because I doubted that the king of Sidon would equally [*glaykh fals*] grant me refuge, but rather because I no longer love the great noise of the court and have become entirely estranged from it. And I have a sense [that] I want to spend the rest of my life in solitude, always mourning my misfortune and the death of my dear parents, and to remain far from human connection for the rest of my life. Whoever will help me achieve this, shall inherit all my treasures that I possess, and I will grant them freely. I trust the wise (**Izabel**), that under her protection, I can live away from the bustle of the court, and find solace in quiet, recovering from the great loss of my parents. With her, I will be safe and free. And I will never again be pursued while under her protection.

(28) With this letter, I appointed my court master under the name (**Avin**).

I gave him a pretty envelope beautifully adorned with diamonds, and other diamond jewelry, along with golden Arabian pieces to present to (**Izabel**), for I thought that this gift would be more valuable to her than the letter. . . . When my good uncle Avin returned to me, where I had been staying, he told me how (**Izabel**), at first, doubted my intentions regarding my letter and hesitated

to respond to him. Since the (**melekh**) had instructed her to take care of his only daughter, so she cannot [also] mind my safety. But when he gave her the gift, she reacted differently and thanked him kindly, immediately inquiring about my position, and at once saying that I should come to her whenever I wish. (**Avin**) was shown her residence, where she lives, but not specifically in the palace near the princess.

I could not ensure my own safety, but when she received the gift, her perspective changed. She thanked me kindly and immediately inquired about my status. She promptly said I could come to her whenever I wished, and (**Avin**) showed me her quarters, where she resides, though not in the princess's sleeping chambers.

(29) After this, to calm (**Izabel**)'s doubts [*ir gedanken tsu bagirign*], [I filled] three cases with stones and other small/worthless things [*lumpn<sup>206</sup> zakhn*], to make her believe over time she will possess a great fortune. And I set out on my way in my Arabian clothing until I reached the residence of (**Izabel**). Where it took a long time to unload the cases, she welcomed me very kindly and arranged her beautiful (**hadarim**). I did not lack anything upon my arrival, as she once again received great gifts, which made her eyes sparkle with delight, and she presented herself to me in a very friendly manner, promising me all services and security.

(30) I remained a good while in her residence, because she spends every day with the princess. And I remained in her house, where she occasionally visits me, and finds me lost in melancholy thoughts [*in melankholishe gedenken findstu*]<sup>207</sup>. I thought about how to get to see the princess, [but] (**Izabel**) assumed that I was sad about my lost parents and kingdom.

So she said to me, and advises me: “You must not be so sorrowful if you will stay with me, and I will try to speak with the (**melekh**) on your behalf, so that I may obtain permission to bring you to the princess (**Libia**) (**kedei**) for you to spend your time better and with more enjoyment, since the princess is also alone, she will surely enjoy the company of such a beautiful and wise person as you.

(**Karmolia**)<sup>208</sup> replied, “It does not matter much to me where I spend my troubled time and mourn my misfortune, but since you command, I will obey you.”

(31) (**Izabel**), once when the (**melekh**) came to visit his daughter, conveyed to him the news of my arrival. And she recounted my departure as described in the letter above and asked him if he

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<sup>206</sup> לומפין, s.v. “לומפ” rogue, scoundrel; beggar, rags. Also, worthless. See Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary*.

<sup>207</sup> For a discussion about melancholy and melancholic thoughts, see Glikl bas Judah Leib, *Zikhronot Glikl*, 1691–1719, bilingual ed., Hebrew trans. Chava Turniansky (Jerusalem, 2006), 38-40.

<sup>208</sup> The text now shifts to the third person and refers to the prince as Karmolia (קרמוליא or קראמוליא).

would allow her to take me to his daughter from time to time, so she might spend her time more favorably. My beauty and intelligence were also highlighted to the King. Now, because (**Akris**) fully relied on her and imagined this could lighten [*far laykhtern*] his daughter's miserable life, spending her time with such a beautiful foreign princess, he quickly agreed to grant her permission. So, the (**melekh**) gave her permission to bring Karmolia to his daughter.

(**Izabel**) came to me and said that she had received permission from the (**melekh**) to bring me to his daughter. I was overjoyed to hear this, and to remove any doubts she might have, I said, "Dear lady, I have written to you, after all, seeking your protection so as not to suffer the gossip and commotion of the court. However much he wishes to honor me by bringing me to the princess, this esteemed person will help me spend my time well. I fear however, that the King often visited her, making a lot of commotion, while I would prefer to avoid that.

She answered, saying that no one comes with the King when he visits his daughter, but he comes alone, and I need not worry. I agreed to her request and gave her several more gifts in gratitude for her efforts on my behalf. I then asked her what servants attended to the princess, to which she replied that she had only a few chambermaids to assist her. I agreed with a small amount of reassurance, so she would not feel the need to spare anything on my account, and thus it was to happen the following day.

(32) Izabel told the princess of my arrival the day before, recounting my entire story as mentioned in the letter, as well as the permission the King had given her to bring me to her. The princess longed with pain to see me.

Then, when the next day came, she brought me to the castle. I had long prepared myself for the joy of seeing the beautiful (**Libia**), but when I came to her, I froze. In my thoughts, I cursed the painter, for the way he painted, as her beauty surpasses the painting by far. And I almost died, so I threw myself on my knees before the princess. Then the princess embraced me with her open arms and said to me: "Welcome, most beautiful (**Karmolia**). You are also a princess like me, so it is not fitting for me that you should lie before me on your knees. Your expression and appearance are so dear to me that, in my troubled state, I take solace in finding your presence [*azo eyn ergetslekhkeyt on oykh tsu finden*]."

(33) Then (**Karmolia**) said: "Most gracious and kind princess, please do not be angry that I, the unfortunate (**Karmolia**), tell you of my misfortune that follows me so. My parents have died and were taken from my homeland, and now I must lead a sorrowful life in the world. And now, I have received the grace of such a princess as You<sup>209</sup> [*vi zi*] I have found such grace and security, that my very first glance of you has erased all my sorrow. And the heavens, in their mercy, have granted me such a joy to experience."

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<sup>209</sup> You, capitalized, as this corresponds to the polite Sie in German, used for formal address of an individual.

(34) So (**Libia**) replied: “Dear (**Karmolia**), Your sweet and polite words bring me great joy, the likes of which I have never before found such in this castle. Your parents must have undoubtedly raised you with all virtues and taught you well. And from your very first words, as you show me kindness, I feel such a deep affection for you, as if you were my own sister, and I ask you to show me your loyalty and to remain by me.”

(**Karmolia**) responded: “The honor is all mine, and I have reason to be proud, for no one could consider themselves luckier than I am, that such a high, great, and renowned princess shares such suffering with me. And at this moment, I find my pain eased and feel such deep joy that my mouth is not skilled enough to express it.”

(**Karmolia**) said the princess: “You must have experienced much love to possess such a noble soul and to speak such sweet, smiling<sup>210</sup> words that touch my heart. I feel the desire to offer you my heart, for throughout my life, I will wish for nothing else but to accept you as my sister—if you do not refuse.”

Then (**Karmolia**) replied: “Because I am in this state, deprived of my parents, my homeland destroyed, I wish for no greater happiness in my life than to begin anew with you. My heart shall belong to no one else, and until my dying breath, I will serve and honor you as long as I live, and I will offer every drop of my blood for you.”

(**Karmolia**), said the princess: “You must truly have encountered much love, for you have such a kind and comforting nature that it stirs my heart, and I wish to return it, for I desire no other treasure in my heart throughout my life than you. So, I accept you as my sister, if you would not refuse it.”

(**Karmolia**) replied: “As I now find myself without my parents and my homeland abandoned, I wish for nothing else in my life than to begin anew with you. My heart will belong to no one else until my death, and I will serve and obey you as long as I live and have a drop of blood within me. All that I am, I will sacrifice for you.”

(35) As (**Karmolia**) and (**Libia**) were having their very friendly and graceful conversation together, the court mistress Izabel lay by a window and thought to herself, “What a great favor I have done for these two princesses!” Then (**Libia**) began to say to (**Izabel**), her court mistress, “To you, my beloved Izabel, I give special thanks for the great favor you have done for me, by bringing me such a princess, who brings such joy to my otherwise miserable state.”

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<sup>210</sup> Shmeykhl [שמייכל] smile s.v. See Shalom Beinfeld and Chaim Bokhner, *Arumnemik Yidish-English Verterbukh (Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

So (**Karmolia**) began: “Dear lady (**Madame Izabel**), I am indebted to you for the rest of my life for this great service and kindness you have shown me, leading me to such a wise princess so that I may not perish in my sorrow and that my spirits have been revived, so that I now feel completely relieved from my misery.”

**Then** the two princesses began, and both gave her beautiful gifts and large sums of money, and they told her that even more would follow. (**Libia**) asked (**Izabela**) to arrange a room for (**Karmolia**) in the palace so that she could settle in and be allowed to stay there, enabling her to converse with her often. And so, it happened immediately— Karmolia was given a lovely room for her bedchamber. However, throughout the day, she had to [*di gantsn tog muz zi*] go to Princess (**Libia**) and spend her time conversing with her.

(36) One day the (**melekh Akris**) came to visit his daughter (**Libia**). He had not yet seen (**Karmolia**). When he arrived, he found Karmolia with his daughter. When (**Karmolia**) saw the (**melekh**) approaching, she quickly rose and wanted to fall to her knees before the (**melekh**), but the (**melekh**) held her back and said to his daughter Libia, “Dear daughter, you are fortunate to have such a (**kompania**) with you. I can see from Karmolia’s beauty that she also possesses great wisdom and can help to shorten your time.”

And to you, dear (**Karmolia**), it pleases me that I have the grace to grant you protection in our land. As I have been told of your story, it must have been a great tyrant who inflicted such suffering upon you. He has insulted you in such a way, and where he as close to me, as he is far from me, I would exact your revenge on him, but I promise you by my royal grace, that I shall offer you protection and honor so that you need not fear your tyrant”.

(37) Then (**Karmolia**) fell to her knees once again and, with many tears streaming down her beautiful cheeks, began to say, “I beg your (**mayistat**) forgiveness that my tongue is not skillful enough to properly express my thanks for such great royal grace, that you have taken me in and are willing to protect me and listen to my sorrowful, miserable life. I shall remember for the rest of my days the great mercy of your majesty, that you have shown me, a small, mute, poor, wretched princess, without father, mother, or brother, without land or time, to have found such kindness from your majesty.”

(38) The (**melekh**) lifted her from the ground and said: “Do not be so fearful my beautiful [*nit alzo klayn mutig mayne sheyne*] Karmolia. We are all subject to fate, and I know not where in the world it would be possible for me to deny you what I can grant you.”

Then (**Libia**) began: “Dear Father, I thank you especially for your fatherly loyalty and love that you have for me. You have restored Princess (**Karmolia**) to me as a companion. I cannot let go of the joy I have had these past few days with (**Karmolia**) by my side. Her beauty is nothing

compared to her wisdom and understanding. As I see her wisdom, I feel that Heaven has shown mercy on me [*der himl iber mir er barmung hot*] by blessing me with such a wonderful (**komapnia**).”

(39) Then the King asked if (**Karmolia**) had been given a room in the castle. He was shown the room, but it did not suit him. He therefore ordered that she be given a splendid room, just as grand as Princess Libia’s. Then the (**melekh**) took his leave of his daughter and (**Karmolia**), returning to his castle, with orders for the court mistress (**Izabel**) to look after Karmolia as well as his daughter, ensuring the princesses would be taken care of with great regard.

(40) The (**melekh**) returned to his (**kheyder**), finding himself half in love [הלב פאר ליבט] with (**Karmolia**), and thought to himself, “It is astonishing that such a beautiful princess would spend her time in misery without love, wanting to live her life alone. Her beauty left an impression on my heart.”

(41) Thus, the two princesses spent their days in pleasant company, together day and night, until they went to bed. Every night, (**Karmolia**) went to her chamber, bearing in mind the dangers he faced [*in vash gepar er shvebt un shti’et*]<sup>211</sup> [ . . . ] but he paid no heed to any danger; all he cared for was spending his time with the beautiful (**Libia**). He even thought that he would rather die than leave his beloved Libia.

(42) One day, as they were in conversation, they began talking about love. Princess Libia said, “How dangerous love is! Many wise men and women, both high and low, have lost their minds and have been robbed of their understanding because of it. Many have even lost their lives in such peril, in ways that are hardly human, as may be found in many histories/stories.”

Karmolia replied and said, “Dear Princess, you are right. But people also say that the the more one endures love, the sweeter the afterlife when man reaches his purpose, and every danger becomes as nothing. Let us see then what love is: First, people must love God, wherever one encounters danger, we must consider ourselves guilty in God's eyes, and accept all dangers as [*if they were as sweet as*] sugar and honey. A father and mother love their children, and children love their parents. Even the irrational creatures, birds, and animals that were created under the sun love each other faithfully. An eagle carries its young on its wings so that no one can shoot them. He even offers his life for his children. As for human love, I know not what to say, but why should it not also be like that? I imagine it is even more [powerful] than the others.”

Princess Libia said, “Since we are both not in love, let us turn to another topic.”

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<sup>211</sup> Here is another instance in which the narrator uses masculine pronouns for Karmolia.

(43) (**Karmolia**) said, “I have a riddle to give you. What does a common man see every day, a king only rarely, and the almighty never [*in ibkayt nit*]?”

(**Libia**) “Karmolia, what could it be?” (**Libia**) answered (**Karmolia**), “an ordinary man sees his own kind every day; a king rarely sees another king. God, the Almighty, being singular, never sees his equal, for none like him exists.”

It was late at night when (**Karmolia**), half-dressed, heard a great noise and commotion in the courtyard and heard cries that (**Libia**) was being abducted. He quickly dressed and rushed to her room, where everything was in chaos, and (**Libia**) was gone. He ran like a wild beast, like a lion rushing after its cub. Knowing all the passages, he hurried to a back door and cut off the kidnappers’ path. He found a good, strong stick by chance, took it in hand, and came to the gate, where he found two armed men on guard. He struck one on the head, causing him to fall immediately, and took his sword. The other tried to help his comrade, but (**Karmolia**) stabbed him in the heart, killing him instantly.

Meanwhile, three men came to Princess (**Libia**) to abduct her. Seeing this, (**Karmolia**) doubled his strength and struck off the arm of one who was holding the princess. Another tried to retaliate, but (**Karmolia**) fought so bravely that he killed one of them. However, he received a stab in the back, causing blood to pour from him. He would have succumbed if the palace guards had not come to his aid. They rescued Princess (**Libia**) and captured many of the abductors, though the chief of the kidnappers escaped.

(**Libia**) was not surprised by (**Karmolia**) that she was so brave with the sword, therefore she stood in pure trembling because she loved Karmolia more than herself when she saw that she risked her life for her.

(45) (**Karmolia**) lost a great deal of blood from her wounds, so much so that she barely had the strength to go to the princess’s chamber and nearly collapsed in (**hulshet**).<sup>212</sup> If the princess had not immediately helped her, offering her both hands, she might not have regained herself. Gradually, she recovered a little and regained some strength, then asked the princess to speak to her alone.

My<sup>213</sup> greatest fortune is that Izabel is not with the princess right now. Meanwhile, the princess had stanchd my bleeding. Then I fell to my knees before the princess, handed her my sword, which I still had with me, and said to her: “I open my chest so that you may pierce it, the heart of a traitor. For I have betrayed and deceived you, hiding under the name (**Karmolia**). Your beauty,

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<sup>212</sup> The word *hulshet* (חולשת) follows Yiddish orthographic conventions rather than Hebrew ones, as it reflects the typical Yiddish pronunciation of words derived from Hebrew.

<sup>213</sup> The narrator shifts to first person narration here.

fame, and wisdom drew me to this. Thus, I accept death and would rather die by your hands than be revealed by the (**rofe'im**) who must tend my wounds and thereby place us both in danger. So, let me die by your hands if you do not forgive me. I deserve death for insulting and betraying a princess like you.” And (**Karmolia**) revealed his true name and his origins, as he is a prince from Arabia.

(46) The princess looked at me with conflicted eyes. At times, she seemed intent on killing me, yet she also remembered the loyalty I had shown her and felt compassion toward me. She saw the danger we were both in and saw the blood flowing before her eyes. Finally, she resolved to save me and be merciful, devising a plan on how to do so, as follows.

(47) She began to speak to me: “You must say that, ever since your sorrow began, no man has been allowed to touch your bare body, and you swore this by God. Now, as I am skilled in all medicines, I will personally take charge of healing your wounds and bind them with my own hands.” And so, she held to this decision.

(48) Then princess (**Libia**) summoned her attendants, and they brought (**Karmolia**) onto a resting bed, and the princess (**Libia**) examined Karmolia’s wounds, finding none of them dangerous, except for one wound in the side, which was very deep and dangerous. Meanwhile, she stopped the bleeding and carefully tended to each wound. At this moment, (**Libia**) was deeply troubled and filled with worry, thinking that I might die from the severity of my wounds, which would could her great pain because of my true service to her. On the other hand, there is great peril that in my death would she too would be betrayed, and more so her father. And she would be humiliated [*eyn grushi shagrin kemin*], and her name would be forever dishonored.

(49) Meanwhile, all the (**rofe'im**) sent by (**melekh Akris**) arrived to examine (**Karmolia**)’s condition. The princess began telling them about (**Karmolia**)’s situation and all her injuries, especially the worst wound in her side. She explained how (**Karmolia**) had risked her own life without hesitation, sparing no effort and risking her own body to protect her from harm.

She requested that, since (**Karmolia**) had sacrificed herself on her behalf, she herself should bandage (**Karmolia**)’s wounds, or else let her die rather than entrust the task to the doctors. The doctors agreed to her wishes and followed her instructions precisely, allowing the princess (**Libia**) to care for (**Karmolia**) personally. Although the doctors recommended rest, (**Libia**) remained vigilant by (**Karmolia**)’s side, disregarding their advice.

[At this point] the father began to speak to his daughter (**Melela**): “Now it is already very late, let us go to rest, and tomorrow we will continue our discussion. Just consider, dear daughter, the example of how Princess (**Libia**) fell into such danger, merely because her father, the (**melekh**), thought only of the possibility of losing his own life. Now, how could you place your foolish thoughts and our lives so lightly on the scales?”

The daughter (**Melela**) replied, “Dear father, I have not yet heard that the father or the daughter were in any kind of mortal risk. And I imagine that if the story were carefully read, we would learn that the father had wronged his daughter, in heeding the priests’ foolish advice, for everything is in God’s hands and not in the hands of us humans. If it is God’s will, He shall surely help us. I would thus like to hear the the rest of the story. With this, they went to sleep.

The next day, after lunch, they went again to their summer hut in the garden. The daughter began, “Dear father, I ask you, please finish the story for me today so that afterward we can discuss our own matters.”

The father said: So, to continue our story, (**Karmolia**) as you [know?], was alone, and because rest was crucial for her, everyone left the room where (**Karmolia**) lay, except one of the princess’s attendants, named (**Elisye**), who was highly trusted.

The princess [Libia] sat by the bed and looked at me with worried eyes [ . . . ] and began, with a sorrowful voice: “Dearest princess, why prolong the wait for my death and punishment? [ . . . ] Karmolia,” she lifted herself so that (**Elisye**) would not understand, “how unlucky you are, that you have fallen in love with such a miserable princess who, because of a priestly prophecy, which she would without doubt break, must remain loveless. [ . . . ] Yet, I have one request for you dearest (**Karmolia**), despite this, whom I will call by no other name, so that we may not be exposed. Promise me that when you are well again, you will leave here and think of me no more.”

(50) So the princess left my room without hearing an answer from me and went to rest and commanded (**Elisye**) that she should watch over me and lay down to rest in the adjacent room and awaited the morning thinking even if (**Karmolia**) is a deceiver so she is still worthy that she remains connected to her with friendship because she has shed much blood for my sake.

As soon as the morning broke the king came into her chamber and he turned pale because of the situation and also about (**Karmolia**) because he saw her so wounded he thought there was danger of losing my life was in great anxiety. As weak as I was, I still observed everything well and was therefore of the opinion that he showed me great love. He spoke with great concern about my condition after he let himself be heard with many words of praise for my courage and bravery, he ordered the (**rofe’im**) to look at my wounds. (**Libia**) told him what had already happened before and that she herself would like to take care of my wounds whereupon (**Akris**) against my will let it be known that he highly esteemed me and went with the (doctors) to another room so that meanwhile the princess could look at my wounds without hindrance.

(51) She, also reported with fear and trembling. As she later told me, she wished she had sustained a mortal wound, since the others had been of little consequence and posed no real danger. The side

wound, however, could not be definitively assessed, no one could say for certain whether it threatened her life. She went to the chamber where the king and the physicians (**rof'eim**) were and explained her condition.

She went to the chamber where the king and the (**rof'eim**) were, and explained her condition. Together with the (**rof'eim**) they discussed how her recovery might best be supported from the outset. Once everything necessary and beneficial for her healing had been provided, the king returned to her, accompanied by the princess. He showed his compassion once more but spoke to her sharply, saying that what she had done, refusing to let a man's hand touch her body, would not please her lover unless she revoked it.

The king then went to interrogate the prisoners. They were compelled by force to confess. They revealed that the (**Moabitische**) prince, (**Pe'or**<sup>214</sup>), had been the instigator. He had bribed one of the guards with lavish gifts to gain his loyalty. This guard had opened the gate of the palace and let them in. The prince himself had been present during the abduction. Meanwhile, on the other side of the palace, the approaching guard had been struck down but managed to escape.

(52) King Akris ordered Prince Be'or to be searched for in all places, but it was all in vain. For he had already fled and left the land. So the king released his rage on the prisoners.

Meanwhile, **Libia** tended to her wounds every day, and it showed great improvement. Since there was no longer any deadly danger from the side wound, **Libia** was greatly relieved. **Karmolia** could certainly feel this, but she did not know whether it was because she had escaped danger [ . . . ] . Or whether some love was felt within her towards her [*ayninge lib bay ir gegen ir geshpirt*], which often caused me deep melancholic thoughts. And I wished rather not to be healed and to remain with the beautiful Libia than to be completely healthy again and have to part from her.

(53) It happened one day [*es war mol eyn tog*] that **Libia** found me completely recovered and said to me: “Now, have courage, my beloved (**Karmolia**), you will soon be healthy, and God [*got*] has given you the strength to bring you back to your former state and to repay you, even if only a little, for the great service you have shown me.

(**Karmolia**) replied: “Ah, dearest Princess **Libia**, you are living in great error if you think you are making me well. But of the wound that is in my heart—you think little and do not wish to help me. Your beauty is imprinted in my heart, and I remember the bitter verdict [*bitern betribtn*] that you pronounced upon me, separating me from you, which will surely cost me my life. For without you, I cannot live. Thus, all your efforts on my behalf have been in vain.

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<sup>214</sup> His name here appears as פּעאָר and not as בעאָר.

(54) Then **(Libia)** spoke: Dear **(Karmolia)**, what are you thinking to yourself, that you would insult me like this. You must not love me, for you know well what heaven has decided for me—that I must remain without love. Therefore, I beseech you, since I am subject to heaven and my father’s command. Otherwise, I would gladly please you in everything. So please, dearest **(Karmolia)**, put aside this foolish love and preserve your life, from which much good can still come into the world.

(55) “It is not heaven” said **(Karmolia)**, “that has decided this for you, but your father’s superstition [and belief] in the false priests, or perhaps even **Etrie**<sup>215</sup>, your father’s brother’s son, who has perhaps bribed the priests to utter the prognostication. For if **Libia** dies without heirs, he is the rightful heir to all your father’s kingdom. That is why he has bribed the priests with much money, to convince the king that he would be the successor after your father. Is it human to think that Heaven would create such a being as yourself, with all beauty and perfection, only for nothing? Therefore, I cannot believe this and must be [in love] as I have said.”

(56) Then **(Libia)** said, “If my father dies, then I can inherit the kingdom, as I am his child. If I am not yet married, **(Etrie)** will not inherit. Your thinking is misguided and must come from heaven.” **(Karmolia)**, replied: “When your father dies, **(Etrie)** will surely act immediately to claim the kingdom, and he will restore the old Sidonian law that states no kingdom can be inherited without a male heir, excluding female heirs. So, I tell you that **(Etrie)** will come and that he has bribed the priests. Your father wanted to marry you into other kingdoms and send you away from his realm, requesting that neither you nor your heirs would enter **(Zidonishe)** kingdom until after his death. But even if you are married here, it was said that your son should inherit him. You might have daughters and no son, but if you have a son, he would secure you and your kingdom, as it should be, until after his death. Then, he would not have to worry because someone would always be there to preserve the kingdom. Therefore, dear Princess Libia, ignore the foolish sayings of the priests about your father and his heir, and heed my advice, for it secures my life and yours.”

(57) **(Libia)** saw that **(Karmolia)** spoke much good reason, and her words were somewhat calming. She said: “Dear **(Karmolia)**, let us speak of something else, and when you are fully recovered, we will talk more about this matter.” Meanwhile, the king came every day to visit **(Karmolia)** and developed a deep affection for her. **(Karmolia)** also grew accustomed to this, as the king gave her such gifts daily that she herself was amazed, and Libia was also astonished.

(58) Meanwhile, **(Karmolia)** gained much more freedom from the king than the princess **(Libia)**, so that she could go to the temple every day to worship God and also spend time in the temple garden and the animal garden to make her time a bit more pleasant, which did her well.

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<sup>215</sup> First reference to this name. Unclear who this character is.

(59) Now, the king had often in the darkness allowed (**Karmolia**) to understand his affection [for her], but one time, when (**Karmolia**) was lying on her bed, the king came and asked her to go for a walk with him in the garden, to which she obediently agreed. There he began to confess his love for her, which he wanted to express openly, and he said: “Dear (**Karmolia**), your beauty has made me fall in love with you for a long time, but I didn’t want to trouble you during your illness and have waited with pain and great patience for your recovery. Now that God has made you fully healthy again, you should also think of healing my suffering, and that can only happen if you give me your love and allow me to enjoy your affection.”

(**Karmolia**) replied: “Your Majesty [ . . . ] I have only little beauty, and you know of my unfortunate fate, and that I have sworn never to speak of love with any man. Therefore, think no more of love.” The king replied: “What you have sworn has naught to do with me [ . . . ] But, I cannot help loving you, and I want to take you as my wife, to bestow on you a queen’s crown, even if, as our customs and manners permit, a king should have two wives. And since I have no children with my queen, nor will I have more than Libia, who shall not be married in her lifetime, you shall be my beloved queen. And God will grant that I shall have children with you. In this way, you will bring joy to me and to the entire kingdom. Therefore, I ask you not to scorn my faithful love.”

(60) Then (**Karmolia**) thought to herself: If she refused the king, she might make him angry, and perhaps great harm could come from it. He could also force himself upon her. So she thought: I will speak kindly to the king and let him have hope. Then he will give me time, and with my kind words—time will bring counsel.

So (**Karmolia**) answered the king and said: I am speechless, that I do not have enough tongues to properly express before your majesty my gratitude, for the great honour you bestow on me, that you would take me as your wife. Thus, I do not find myself capable enough to properly express my thanks for the great honor bestowed upon me. Therefore I ask your Majesty to give me some time to prepare myself, before I give you my answer[...]  
I am not capable of refusing even the smallest thing, and with both hands I would embrace your offer with both hands.

(61) The king answered her: “Dear (**Karmolia**), your sweet, lovely words already bring me pleasure. You do not need to humble yourself so before me. Your beauty has long captured my heart. I rejoice in your good decision and will give you time as you wish, so that I may also make preparations for our joyful wedding. In the meantime, I will content myself with our heartfelt, loving conversation and the promise you have given me.” And so they parted from one another.

(62) (**Karmolia**) went into her bedroom, deeply and bitterly troubled, and threw herself onto her resting bed to seek counsel with herself about what was to be done in this situation. She thought: “I will not reveal anything to Princess **Libia** either, because of the great danger that could arise

from it, which might affect both **Libia** and **Karmola** [!].” And so (**Karmola** [!]) lay in deep thought. Suddenly, she heard her chamber door slowly open. Someone came gently forward to her bed and knelt beside it. It was (**Elise**), Princess Libia’s chambermaid, and she began to speak:

(63) I do not doubt that You will be surprised that I, a chambermaid, have taken the liberty and dared to come to You and disturb your rest—but I am compelled to do so. The deep love I have for you has made it necessary. And I must tell you that I know you are not who you claim to be. I know you are a man disguised in women’s clothing. In short, I know everything—and your suffering should be enough to show you that I know. That is why the poison of love [*gift der liebe*] has taken root in me. My life and death are now in your hands. Think, my dear prince—if you were to reject me, I would have to lose my life. And with it, your life and that of Princess Libia would be placed in danger. So I beg you: declare your love for me.

(**Karmolia**) was nearly paralyzed upon hearing these words and at the danger they posed. She looked at (**Elisye**) with a harsh gaze and said, “My dear (**Elisye**), you must be gravely mistaken to have such thoughts about me. You will regret your strange, foolish, and defiant words. Who has put such ideas into your head? Leave now, or you shall pay the price for your impudent speech.” “Dear Prince,” said **Elisye**, “you may say what you wish, but you are not (**Karmolia**) of Sheba—you are the Arab prince. And believe me, I know it well. I am not hasty; I will give you a few days to choose between my life or my death. For I cannot live without your love. So think carefully about how you are endangering your life and that of the princess if she learns who you really are. Until then—farewell, my beloved.” And with that, she left the chamber.

(64) Now one can easily imagine the distress in which the sorrowful (**Karmola**) found herself, as sweat broke out on her from fear. And more than that, the danger in which she had placed Princess **Libia**. Yet she could say nothing about any of the aforementioned matters, for **Libia** might worry too much—and might even turn away from her—if she were to learn the truth. On one side, she had the deep love of the king, who was under the illusion that she was truly **Karmolia** and wanted to claim her as his own. On the other side, there was the love of **Elisye**, as already mentioned. With such thoughts, (**Karmolia**) lay down and drifted into sleep on her bed.

(65) She suddenly awoke and could not remember what had caused it, as sweat poured from her face due to the intense dream she had experienced. She had dreamed that a (**tiger**) and a (**li’ab**) came toward Princess **Libia** to devour and tear her apart. He<sup>216</sup> stood in their way, but it was of no use: the (**tiger**) and (**li’ab**) seized them both and threw them into deep water. With that, he awoke and, overcome with fear, did not know what to make of the dream.

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<sup>216</sup> **Karmolia** is referenced using a male pronoun when saving the princess.

(66) As (**Karmolia**) was lost in thought, she<sup>217</sup> went to Princess **Libia** and began to speak with her, as was her usual custom. Princess **Libia** began: “Dearest (**Karmolia**), something must have happened to you—you look so unwell. Even your speech is not as it usually is, and you do not treat me as sweetly as you are accustomed to. Tell me what is troubling you, dearest Princess?” Said (**Karmolia**): “Why do you ask me? Because of the love I have for you, I cannot give an explanation. I must endure such torment, as my mouth is not fit to express it to you [*dos mayn moyl nit geschickt iz es aykh far tsu shteln*].”

“Dearest (**Karmolia**), you see that you are well again, and your wounds have all healed with God’s help. And though I had ordered you to leave, I still keep you by my side. Even though we are in the greatest danger, you must believe that I gladly wish to have you near and do not care about the danger. So calm your thoughts and be patient. Heaven will guide us and give us counsel against those cursed priests and their proclamation. Therefore, dearest **Karmolia**, let us go tomorrow to our animal garden to hunt some small game and lift our melancholy spirits.”

To this, (**Karmolia**) gladly replied: “Dearest **Libia**, I will make all the arrangements so that we may enjoy ourselves tomorrow.”

(67) The next day, they prepared to enjoy themselves in the game park. **Libia** went with all her companions to go hunting, and they began their hunt, which brought them great delight for several hours, until they became tired. Princess **Libia** wandered off to one side and lay down under a tree that provided good shade near a small stream, due to the intense heat of the day. Because she was tired, she fell asleep.

(**Karmolia**) looked around and, not seeing **Libia**, separated from the others and found her peacefully sleeping under a tree. He stood there, taking pleasure in watching her. As he stood and admired her, he suddenly saw a ferocious tiger charging at Princess **Libia** in full speed. (**Karmolia**) quickly jumped from his horse and barely had time to raise his spear to meet the beast. The tiger, ran so fast, impaled itself on the spear and fell over immediately. I drew my sword and ended its life, leaving it dead at my feet.

But just as I thought the danger was over, a fierce lion appeared and charged toward the princess. I quickly grabbed another hunting spear and stood in its path, but the lion was so strong that it shattered my spear into pieces. As it ran again toward her, by luck, some broken shards from the spear got caught between its feet, slowing it down. I quickly seized my sword and struck a powerful blow that caused the lion to stumble and fall. I struck again and was fortunate enough to pierce him, killing the lion.

(68) Princess **Libia**, who had witnessed most of the fight from behind, was deeply shaken to see herself in such danger. When the battle came to an end, she ran toward me, threw her arms around

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<sup>217</sup> Karmolia is referenced using a female pronoun.

me with open hands, and said: “Oh, savior of my life! How can I ever find enough in my power to repay all the goodness you have done for me? If only Heaven had not already made its decree, I would gladly give you my heart, if that were enough to reward your great service.” (**Karmolia**) replied: “Dearest **Libia**, do not blame Heaven, for it is the cursed (**Etrie**) who influenced the priests to make that decision.” Then Princess **Libia** said: “Let it be what it may. I embrace you, give you my hand, and offer you my heart. You shall possess it, and no one else in the world. Let come what may, this is my eternal and unwavering decision.”

(69) One can easily imagine what kind of joy this caused for (**Karmolia**). She fell to her knees and thanked Princess **Libia** most graciously, and said they did not have much time because their companions were coming. All those who had been with them on the hunt arrived and were astonished by the two great animals, the lion and the tiger. They said, “The two big beasts must have forced their way in somehow. When the gamekeeper released the little deer, they must have slipped in with it. [ . . .].” They let the matter rest, but (**Karmolia**) thought otherwise and was uneasy.

First, she thought to herself: her dream had now come true—she and Princess **Libia** had been in danger, and the danger had been overcome. So now the danger was past. On the other hand, the friendly declaration from **Libia**, made because of her love, had so overwhelmed him that he could hardly express what he felt. He remembered that in his dream they had been thrown into water, but that hadn’t happened. And after all, dreams can also be fables. Still, (**Karmolia**) thought, there must be a place in the garden where the great beasts had entered. I must see and investigate. So he searched near the water and found, beneath the wall, a place where a piece of earth had sunk and created a deep, large hole, from which the two beasts must have come. He thought, “This hole may someday be useful to me,” and so that no one would stumble upon it or notice it, So he took branches, twigs, and earth and covered up the hole so that no one could stumble upon it. Then he returned to the others and acted as if nothing had happened.

(70) The two princesses returned to their palace and went to rest, but (**Karmolia**) had no sleep that night because (**Libia**) had spoken to him about her love. Now (**Karmolia**) had to lie about the king’s love for her. And worst of all was (**Elisye**) — also because of her love. The next day, the king went walking with (**Karmolia**) in the garden and began again to speak of his love. (**Karmolia**) responded, “I have considered it, and it is impossible for me, Your Majesty, to reject your love. Therefore, I speak to you because of my royal love [*kegn lib*] and give you my heart. But regarding the marriage, I ask that you take me in honesty. So I ask for one month’s time to reflect on how we shall arrange our wedding.”

(71) The king responded and said to (**Karmolia**), “Out of great joy, I do not know what to say, for you have given me your love, which is dearer to me than all the crowns in the world.” He granted her the requested month of time and richly gifted her with diamonds and precious jewels of great

value. After many pleasant words and conversations, they parted joyfully. Now, as **(Karmolia)** returned to her chamber, **(Elisye)** came again and said in very defiant words: “Here I come once more to hear my and your fatal judgment. It is nearly decided for me: will you now yield to my love, according to [my] condition? I know of your love for Princess **(Libia)**. I do not presume to compare [with her]. I only ask to serve you with my blood, and to help you reach your goal, that you may marry **(Libia)** and become king while she becomes queen, and then take me as your concubine, as is common. But if you will not as I ask, then I shall help bring about your and Princess **(Libia)**’s downfall. For I must surely die if you do not give me your love—and your destruction must follow along with mine.”

(72) Then **(Karmolia)**, [ . . . ] thought to herself, “I must speak good words,” and said: “Dear **(Elisye)**, I see your sincerity and understanding, and your deep loyal love, and that you want to help me in my love for **(Libia)**. I promise you something pleasing in return—only patience is needed, and careful thought about how we will arrange everything in great secrecy and with wisdom. So give yourself a few days of restraint.”

Then **(Elisye)** replied: “You give me my life back, and I ask for nothing more. Of course, you must carefully consider that this remains the greatest secret. I will gladly wait as long as you think well of me. But I ask that you also mean sincerely what your mouth promises, and that there is no deception behind it. Otherwise, it would not go well for me or for you. As the common saying goes<sup>218</sup>:

With the mouth man promises much [*fil*]/ that often have no measure or aim [*mas noch tsi*]/  
 Of this knows nother the heart [*herts*] / it thinks it was only a joke [*sherts*]. With such manners [*manieren*]/ man makes others servants [*faktiren*] /  
 But it does not last for good [*gut*]/ [and] often costs money and blood [*blut*].  
 Even the Almighty does not spare such people [*zolkhe loyt nit shenken*]/ and makes them pay for it all their life, during which they must think [*gedenken*] [ . . . ].  
 Such things God cannot allow to last long [*kenen nit got tun*]/and they will receive their reward — both in this world and in the next [*oyf dizer unt yentr velt iren* .

So I ask you, dear **(Karmolia)**, that you truly mean your promise, so that it will benefit both of us—and yourself as well.” **(Karmolia)** promised her again sincerely, and **(Elisye)** took her leave and returned to her chamber.

(73) Now that **(Karmolia)** found herself alone, she sought counsel with herself and thought about the burden she bears and how she might free herself from it. And she said: “Dear God, how mighty you are over the whole world and over us human beings! On one side, you make me happy with **(Libia)**, and on the other, unhappy with the king and **(Elisye)**.”

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<sup>218</sup> There follows a series of rhymed couplets that use contrast and repetition to warn against hypocrisy.

I don't believe I've committed any sin in my love—I seek nothing more than what is honorable: to marry (**Libia**) and to follow your commandments. God forbid that I should do anything dishonorable [*oykh got bhiti mikh epes in unherin tsu tun*]. You, dear God, created us to be like the wild beasts in some ways, but you gave us more understanding than them, so that we might recognize you and live honestly and uprightly. You have given us eyes in our heads and hearts within us. These are the two mediators of our sins—what the eyes see, the heart desires. The eyes show people the path, and the heart is meant to recognize the truth. The eyes are also meant to look upon your wise works and your commandments. And when they see, the heart must obey and live in service to the almighty God. Yet, we are still only human, like shadows, possessing human nature. And some seek only their own pleasure, even when it goes against your law. So I pray to you, dear God, strengthen my understanding so that I can free myself from this burden and live with my beloved princess in dignity and honor.” With that, (**Karmolia**) fell asleep.

(74) When (**Karmolia**) awoke again, she went to Princess (**Libia**)’s chamber, and they spoke together as usual. Then (**Karmolia**) said to (**Libia**): “Now my heart, my dearest, since you have shown me such grace and returned my love, we must now carefully plan how we will carry out our intentions. I will call upon my faithful steward, whose name is (**Abin**), whom I can trust completely, and I will ask him to arrange for a ship and everything else we need for our departure. We already have an opening in the garden—through which the lion and large tiger came—that we can use as our means of escape. Everything will be prepared and completed in a few days. Now, my beloved (**Libia**), since you have agreed to everything, it would not be proper before God, society, or the world for us to travel together without being married. [*alzo iz es nit ehrlich far got, gas un di velt, az mir mit eyn zamen rayzn aleyn on zikh farheiraten tsu zayn*]. Therefore, I suggest that we first marry here in this palace according to proper custom, as God has commanded, so that we may live together in honor and happiness. In this way, the almighty God will bless us with success and help us leave this place safely, without any misfortune. After that, we will hasten our journey in God’s name.” To this, Princess (**Libia**) replied: “I take great pleasure in your sweet words and speech, and I agree to everything you see fit, especially because you wish to do all things with God’s reverence and in honor. May God be with us on all our ways and journeys.” At that, (**Libia**) began to weep tenderly and was filled with fear.

(75) Dearest (**Karmolia**), please forgive me for needing to pour out my heart and pray to the Almighty that He will be our support in all our endeavors. And she knelt down and said:  
You, almighty God,  
who created heaven and earth,  
may You accept my sorrowful tears  
and grant me my request/  
that I should not be the cause of my dear father’s suffering/  
Let my father not be misled by the nobles who have been bribed by (**Etrie**) /

May (**Karmolia**)’s words be true, so that we will not fall into any anguish/  
 You know what is hidden in my heart, as well as all my troubled worries, for I do not believe that  
 I have committed any sin/  
 I would rather endure every torment and plague/  
 I would rather separate from (**Karmolia**) than be called the murderer of my father/  
 I do not wish to live in sin, and so we call heaven and earth as our witnesses/  
 Look at how your holy commandments instruct us; therefore, I beg you, deliver us from our  
 distress/  
 The story of our love, which we gave to each other, must surely come from you, dear God/  
 Our tale has unfolded in such a wondrous way that you will surely help us achieve our desires/  
 We beg for your gracious help—our thoughts are known to you/  
 A person can only see into another’s eyes, but they do not know what goodness lies in their  
 heart. But to you, almighty God, nothing is hidden/  
 You help all those who are in deep sorrow/  
 Should I not praise and glorify your miracles, even though I, as a lowly human, do not have the  
 power to understand even the smallest part of your wonders? /  
 We, in our sorrow, are not capable of grasping even the least of your creations/  
 When we only look up at the sun in the sky, our eyes are blinded by its great light/  
 The sun is 180 times larger than the whole world—what, then, is our honor and all our money  
 worth?  
 Therefore, dear God, see how I wet my face with tears so that you may grant my prayer and  
 deliver me and my beloved (**Karmolia**), and protect us from all harm/  
 Grant us happiness and blessing from your heavenly realm and prolong our lives/  
 We both resolve never to part again and to live together in reverence for God, to keep all your  
 commandments, and to give much **tzedakah** to the poor [*oykh ale dayn gebot tsu haltn un fil  
 tsedoke der armn tsu gebn*] /  
 For I have read in all the books that this brings great merit/  
 In times of trouble, **tzedakah** saves from death. My hope is only in you, my God. You will help  
 us escape safely/  
 With that, she rose from the ground and said: Dearest (**Karmolia**), let us place our hope in God  
 and now see how we may escape safely from here/

(76) Then (**Karmolia**) said: “Dearest (**Liba**), I am certain that God has accepted your prayer,  
 which came from the depths of your heart, by which you have opened all the heavens with your  
 tears [*yu durkh ir ale himl getfaltn hobt mit oyere trern*]. For tears never return empty [*den trern  
 geyen nit lir tsuruk*]. I will also make all the necessary preparations, and tomorrow I will have my  
 steward come to me through the secret passage in the garden and there I will give him all the  
 instructions. And it was just so that (**Karmolia**) did the following day, and issued orders so that as  
 soon as the wind is favorable, that it is possible to set sail swiftly, they be notified without delay.

That very night, (**Libia**) and (**Karmolia**) pledged themselves to one another and took God, heaven, and earth as their witnesses, vowing to remain faithful to each other for the rest of their lives. With that, they lay down with the greatest joy.

(77) The month had come to an end, and the king pressed strongly for his love from one side, and (**Elisye**) from the other. One time, (**Karmolia**) spoke with the king and said: “Your Majesty will grant me my request, for tomorrow night Your Majesty shall enjoy your love and we will be joined. But on the condition that you come entirely alone, with no one accompanying you, and without any light, into my chamber. I ask this so that your daughter (**Libia**) will neither notice nor know of our meeting, for the sake of avoiding much gossip.” The king praised her wisdom and promised her everything, agreeing to come the next night at midnight, just as had been discussed.

(78) (**Karmolia**) also went to (**Elisye**) and said to her: “Tomorrow night I will fulfill your desire, but on the condition that everything proceeds in secret so that (**Libia**) and no one else becomes aware of it. Then you may come at the appointed time without light into my chamber.” (**Elisye**) also praised her great wisdom and agreed to everything. I instructed my chambermaid, who is completely loyal to me. When the appointed night and hour came, both arrived, and love burned so strongly in their hearts that everything went according to plan. The king lay with (**Elisye**), believing she was (**Karmolia**). (**Elisye**) was also pleased, thinking she was with the disguised (**Karmolia**). But I lay even more contentedly with my princess, (**Liba**) [*ikh ober legte mikh mer far gnegter bay mayne printsesin Liba*].

(79) That went on for about fourteen days, during which everything proceeded smoothly. And because the wind had still not turned favorable for departure, my steward (**Avin**) came and informed me that we should prepare to depart the next day. We had to be completely ready. We went to bed with joy and hope, believing that everything had been accomplished and that we could leave in the morning.

But when (**Elisye**) began to suspect something—since she had supposedly enjoyed the company of her beloved for fourteen days—she cleverly realized something was off. She took a hidden lamp with her, concealed it beneath her clothing, and returned as usual to what she thought was her (**Karmolia**), lying in bed with the king. She drew out the lamp and turned it so the light would shine. She saw the king himself, and the king saw her. Both were completely shocked and did not know what to say. Then (**Elisye**) fell to her knees and said, “We have been deceived, Your Majesty. I beg Your Majesty’s forgiveness and pardon me for my mistake, which happened without my knowledge. But I will reveal something to Your Majesty that will astonish you and may even save your life—for your life is in danger.” To which the king replied, “I forgive you—just tell me the whole truth.”

(80) Then **(Elisye)** began to speak: “Your Majesty must know that **(Karmolia)** is not who she claims to be, but rather he is a prince—a man—who disguised himself in women’s clothing for the sake of your daughter **(Libia)**.” With that, she told the king the entire course of events. The king was struck with utter horror and immediately imagined that his daughter already had a son who would one day take his life and his crown. He gave the order to have **(Karmolia)** arrested immediately, and so it was done. But first, he went to **(Libia)**’s chamber, opened the door—since he had a key to all the rooms—and found the two of them, **(Karmolia)** and **(Libia)**, peacefully asleep together in the greatest comfort. The king stood frozen, unable to move, like a stone. Eventually, he decided not to have them killed on the spot but to first summon his council to determine the sentence and what kind of death they should suffer. He then ordered the guards to drag them out of bed and throw them into a dark underground pit, where neither sun nor moon could shine on them, and where they could see nothing. By then, **(Karmolia)** and **(Libia)** had woken up and saw the king, the guards, and **(Elisye)** standing before them—instantly understanding who had betrayed them.

(81) Then they jumped from their bed and dressed quickly. **(Libia)** immediately fell to her knees before her father and said, through bitter tears: “Gracious king and father, I deserve death, for I have disobeyed your command and betrayed you—and even more so, because your life is now at risk because of it. But this prince standing before you is not guilty. It was my face that led him to fall in love with me. Love causes much—he is not at fault. He is a great prince from **(Arabia)**. So please, direct your anger toward me and let me die [*er iz eyn groyser prints oyz (Arabye), deroyrn lozt oyern tsorn auf mikh oys*]. That way, you are freed from the priests’ prophecy, but let this innocent prince live.”

Then **(Karmolia)** also fell to his knees and said: “Most gracious king, Your Majesty should direct your anger at me and have me executed, for I am the deceiver who tricked you and your daughter, putting you both in grave danger. I deserve death. But your dear, only, innocent daughter—your only child—should be spared. She has committed no crime. She remained within the bounds of her innocence and would never have disobeyed your command. I was the one who misled her and deceived her. So I beg you—let my punishment fall upon me, and put me to death as I deserve. But let your innocent daughter live, so you may remain just before God and before all people.”

Then **(Libia)** added: “Dear king and father, you must put to death the source, the perpetrator, the cause of your downfall—and that is me. And if you were to kill the prince, you would still live in fear of the priests’ prophecy. Why should an innocent person have to suffer? Oh no! My father is far too just to kill someone innocent. You will kill me, the guilty one.”

Then **(Karmolia)** began to speak: “And what will the world say—that a father would let his only daughter be put to death, and allow a deceitful foreign trickster like me to live?”

(82) The king refused to listen to anyone and ordered that they be taken away immediately and each thrown into the most dreadful prison, where they were to receive only half a loaf of bread and a glass of water daily for sustenance. The same punishment was given to **(Elisye)** and **(Karmolia)**'s chambermaid, in accordance with the king's command. Before being separated, the sorrowful princesses **(Libia)** and **(Karmolia)** embraced one another and sang a farewell song that would remain with them for the rest of their lives. They exchanged tokens—each placing a keepsake around the other's neck and into their hands in secret, so that the king would not see. Then they were taken individually to their sorrowful prisons, where they had no light except for a small hole that let in a bit of daylight.

Every day, an unknown man came and passed **(Karmolia)** a piece of bread and a glass of water through the small hole where the daylight entered. **(Karmolia)** spent several months in this sorrowful prison [*btribtn gefengnis*]. One day, he pleaded with the mysterious man to bring him some news of his beloved princess **(Libia)**, but the man said nothing and refused to respond. Still possessing a diamond, **(Karmolia)** offered it to the stranger along with a gentle plea for any information about his beloved. Only then did the man begin to speak more kindly and promised to return in a few days with news.

(83) As fate would have it, the man returned after three days with news, after handing **(Karmolia)** his usual meal—though this time it was not dry bread, but several pieces of roasted meat along with a few bottles of good wine. He told him that the princess **(Libia)** was still alive and that she was pregnant by him. A council had been held concerning all of them, and even the priests in the temple had been consulted. It was decided that the king should not have him executed by human hands, so as not to disgrace his daughter before God and the world. Nor would he have his only daughter killed, since she had done nothing worthy of death. And **(Karmolia)** would not be executed either, as he was a foreign prince, and such an act could potentially provoke a great **milchamah**. Besides, he had not deserved a cruel death.

However, the final verdict remained: he would be disposed of in a way that would surely lead to his death by other means. "This," the man said, "is what I can tell you for now; I know nothing further. If I learn more, I will come and inform you without delay."

Then **(Karmolia)** thought of his dream and said, "Now I understand—when I killed the lion and the tiger in the garden, it was not just a test of bravery. The lion is the king, who now tears my beloved princess from my arms. The tiger is **(Elisye)**, who harbors as much venom as a tiger [*zi fil gift als ayn tigor tir*]. Now surely, our end will come through water—we must endure what awaits us."

(84) After six months had passed, someone suddenly appeared at the prison and ordered **(Karmolia)** to follow him. **(Karmolia)** obeyed immediately and was led to the great sea near

**Zidon**, where two small ships were waiting. They placed him into one of them—it had no rudder and no food—and bound his hands and feet.

He pleaded with his escorts, desperately asking for any news of his beloved princess (**Libia**), hoping to know whether she was still alive. But all his pleas were in vain—they gave him no answer and let him speak into silence. Then they tied his small vessel to their ship and sailed far out into the sea. Once they had reached a great distance from land, they cut his little boat loose, leaving him to drift alone in the open sea, with nothing before him but sky and water.

(85) So now (**Karmolia**), tossed back and forth among the waves of the sea, was completely weak and without strength, and with every passing moment, he saw his downfall before his eyes. [*zayn untergang fur oygn gezehn*]. Then he freed his feet as well. Once unbound, he tore a plank from the side of his little boat and began, in great misery, to row, aimlessly, through the stormy seas **yam** and **yabashah** toward the islands. Seeing no hope of rescue, he cried out to God, creator of heaven and earth. And as he prayed and rowed, a favorable wind from God carried him to the shore. When he reached land, he collapsed on the sand from exhaustion and hunger, falling into a faint. For several hours he lay there, unresponsive, save for the occasional shallow breath.

(86) One must know that his loyal steward (**Abin**), when he learned that his (**Karmolia**) and (**Libia**) had been imprisoned, fled in fear, thinking something might happen to him as well. Since he could no longer serve his prince, he left the city and took up lodging outside of it with a fisherman in a small fisherman's hut. He made this fisherman his trusted friend, to avoid being betrayed. For the common people and many others were deeply embittered with the king for how he had treated his daughter (**Libia**), whom they loved dearly.

(**Abin**) disguised himself so he could go into the city daily to learn what was happening with his prince or whether he might be able to help him in some way, as he still had much wealth in his possession, that was entrusted in (**Izabel**)'s house.

One morning, as he was preparing to set out for the city, and walked along the water as usual, he saw a person lying on the shore. Approaching, he was deeply grieved to see that it was his prince. He quickly called for his fisherman, and together they carried him back to the hut. They found no signs of life in him. They turned him upside down to drain all the water he had swallowed, anointed him with strong waters, and placed him near a large fire to warm him. It was not long before the prince began to show signs of life again and twitched his legs. Who could have been more overjoyed than the loyal (**Abin**)?

They laid him in a warm bed and gave him strong wine to help him recover fully. The prince began to speak, crying: "Oh God in Heaven, where am I in the world—or am I in the next world?"

(87) The court steward answered him: “Gracious sir, you are with your faithful court steward. I am overjoyed to have you with me and to have found you again out of all danger.” The prince asked him how he had come here and how he himself had come to be here. The court steward recounted how he had found him lying for dead by the water and how they had treated him, as was previously mentioned above.

The prince asked him for something to eat, as he had not eaten in three or four days, which was immediately given to him, and then he drank some good wine, after which he quickly fell into a good sleep and slept soundly through the entire night. By morning he felt completely refreshed and healthy.

Then the prince asked his faithful court steward (**Abin**) how far the city of (**Zidon**) is. (**Abin**) replied that it was not far from there. The prince said, “I must see how things stand with my princess (**Liba**). I want to go to the city.” (**Abin**) responded, “Oh gracious sir, what are you thinking, putting yourself in such danger? If they recognize you, it will go badly for you—perhaps worse than the first time.” The prince said, “I will disguise myself in fisherman’s clothing and also change my face so that I cannot be recognized. I would rather die than live without my faithful and beloved princess (**Liba**). Therefore, I beg you, my dear faithful (**Abin**), to provide me with fisherman’s clothing so that I can disguise myself and go into the city without being recognized.” The court steward gave him some clothes that he had borrowed from his fisherman. The prince dressed himself, took a certain ointment, and smeared his face so that he had an entirely different appearance and complexion. It was nearly impossible to recognize him.

So he set off with his faithful (**Abin**) and a fisherman’s basket in hand, walking along the water toward the city. As they walked, they again saw something lying by the water. (**Abin**) went over to investigate. He saw that it was a person—a woman. He looked closely and recognized her—it was (**Elisye**). He called the prince and said, “You are fortunate, my dear sir—here lies your betrayer, your enemy, the one responsible for all that has happened to you and your beloved princess.”

The prince looked at her and recognized her immediately as (**Elisye**), but his heart sank within him, for he felt that he too had been the cause and bore some blame for her fate. He then instructed the court steward and the fisherman to take her—since she showed no sign of life—and to bury her underground where she belonged. They obeyed and carried her away. The prince went with them as they prepared to lay her in the earth, and there they found a letter in her pocket, written to her, which read as follows:

A letter from (**Basira**) to her sister (**Elisye**).

(88) **Beloved sister**, today I have learned about my entire past and discovered what you so longed to know from me. Three days ago, Princess (**Libia**) and (**Karmolia**) were both sent out to sea,

each by different means and to a different place. Because (**Libia**) is pregnant and will soon give birth, they built a small chamber for her inside a little boat, leaving only a single window in the roof for light to enter. The princess was locked inside that chamber and supplied with all kinds of food and drink, treated as a princess should be. Then she was sent adrift on the sea, where it is all but certain that within a few days she will become food for the fish, as the boat cannot be steered.

(89) Then the prince clapped his hands together and said with a sorrowful heart: “Now I must die. What do I have left to do in this world, when my dearest Princess (**Libia**) no longer lives upon it? I shall throw myself into the water, so that I may die the same death my beloved (**Libia**) has died.” And he went toward the water. But his faithful steward (**Abin**) held him back and said: “Dear lord and prince, where is your great wisdom, that you would fall into despair? Have you forgotten that we humans may not take our own lives? We are mere mortals, subject to all fortune and misfortune, which is governed by the seven planets. Do you not remember how the Almighty God helped you in wondrous ways? He can help your princess just as well. Perhaps even now she has reached land safely, somewhere on another shore. The wonders of Almighty God are vast and mighty, so think instead on how to find your Princess (**Libia**).”

(90) The prince listened closely to his steward and said: “You are right, my faithful (**Abin**). I thank you deeply. But I swear that I will not rest—I shall cross every sea until I find news of my beloved Princess (**Libia**).”

He immediately ordered (**Abin**) to purchase a good ship equipped with all necessary supplies, for he still possessed many jewels, diamonds, and money. Since the steward had received instructions from (**Izabela**) concerning his lord, he obeyed his master and made arrangements so that everything was ready within eight days for their departure. They set sail and departed upon the sea. Of this voyage, we shall not write much—only that they traveled for several years along the shores of many lands, asking everywhere for his Princess (**Libia**), but without success. All their efforts and journeys were in vain.

One day, they were caught in a violent storm that drove them to the Gorgonian Islands. On one such island, Princess (**Medusa**) had her residence and ruled over the land. He was immediately brought before her. As soon as he saw her, he was astonished by her extraordinary beauty. Had he not already harbored such great love in his heart for his dearest Princess (**Libia**), he might easily have fallen for (**Medusa**), so striking was her appearance. She addressed him with the most gracious and gentle words, inquiring how he had come to her island and kindly asked him to share the full story of his journey. He could find no reason to deny her request and, out of great respect, told her his entire history, as has been previously recounted.

(91) Princess (**Medusa**) was greatly astonished by my tale and told me that we were actually related—that she was my close cousin, as her father had been the brother of my grandfather. She

kindly asked me to stay with her for some time, pointing out that all my wandering across the seas had been in vain and that I was clearly exhausted and worn down. I agreed to remain with her for a while.

From time to time, I also visited Princess (**Sudeno**) and Princess (**Heyela**), her two sisters, for the aforementioned islands were governed by these three princesses, each ruling over her own. Each of the sisters possessed not only great beauty but also remarkable intelligence, and together they had amassed such wealth and treasures that no kingdom in the world could rival them. They were frequently attacked by the black [*shvartsn*] (**Tuzaztin**), yet through my bravery and good fortune, I had always succeeded in defeating them with heavy losses on their side. These victories brought great gain and glory to the princesses.

Eventually, they persuaded me to such a degree—and since I found much pleasure and peace on the island—they appointed me as their (**governor**) and overseer [*shtat halter*] of all the islands. In return, I promised to remain with them for several more years.

(92) Let us now leave our (**Karmolia**) for a while, serving as governor on the (**Garkunishia**) Islands, and once again turn to recount what became of our Princess (**Liba**) aboard the ship in which she had been locked in a small chamber, as previously mentioned.

(93) Princess (**Liba**) sat in her little chamber while her small ship is tossed back and forth by the waves and wind—just as one might imagine a ship at sea without mast, rudder, or helmsman. There she sits and begins to weep bitterly and sorrowfully, praying the following prayer to God.

(94) I lay myself face down to the ground to beg you, eternal God, who eternally grants, you alone, great, strong, and awe-inspiring God, who hears the prayers of all and helps everyone—he sends his help in a moment and supports all those in need so that they may be refreshed. With Him, all people are regarded equally—whether poor or rich, whether kings, princes, or commoners—He helps them all, whoever calls upon Him with an anguished heart. He knows all the paths on the mighty sea; sincere prayers do not return unanswered.

Therefore, King David said: upon the (**yam**), one must praise God every day. The wonders of the (**yam**), what the Almighty does—He guides the ships with the wind so that they reach their destination. Sailors are helpless with all their strength—they are as nothing. The helmsman, with all his time and skill—against the strong winds, they cannot move; they often find no grounding and are in constant trembling. The captain and all his crewmates cannot withstand the powerful waves. When the storm wind breaks out, all their (**hakhmot**) are useless at that moment. Whether they lower or raise the sails—it does nothing. No matter how much effort they make—what good is the compass at that moment when the ship begins to sink?

Therefore, one must clearly recognize that only God is worthy of praise and should be named as the only helper. So I place my trust in you with all my heart—you shall take upon yourself all my troubled pain. I am in your power—just as you command the winds—so I will first confess all my sins. For when I was still at home, I often read in your holy books: if a person has committed many (**averot**) and is destined for (**le'olam habba**) as his reward, but if he has (**harata**) and confesses his sins, you forgive them and make him like a newborn.

What should I, a wretched sinner, begin to say? To speak of my sins—this is what I am compelled to do. Yet I cannot name them all, even if I had many days to do so. From (**alef**) to (**tav**) I have committed every **averot** (**has ve-shalom**), that you should justly punish me accordingly: with (\*<sup>219</sup>**akhila**), \*anger<sup>220</sup>, (\***devarim**), \*arrogance, \**veyber-gebot*\*, (\***znut**), (\***hanufa**), \***tumat**, (\***yezer ha-ra'**), \***kibbud** (**av va-em**), \*laughter, \***messirut**, \*foolishness, \***sur me'tov**, (**averot**), (**perizut**), (\***zar 'ayin**), (\***kalut**), (\***rekhilut**), (\***shem'ot**), (\***ta'anugim**) — I have transgressed all of them.

You are just in what has befallen me, and I am unjust—I am not among the righteous. Therefore, I beg the great, Almighty God, who made heaven and earth, water, fire, and all things—remember the child I carry, so that it will not perish with me in the grave. And if I must drown in the (**yam**), I ask you to forgive my (**averot**) and let my death be a (**kapparat avonot**), so that I may have a place in the (**le'olam habba**).

If you will grant me life and not let me drown in the (**yam**), I promise from this day forward to do good all my life, to (**teshuva**), to say (**tefillot**), and to give (**zedaka**) to poor people every day. If you do not do it for my sake, then let the (**zekhut**) of others be my support—on behalf of the small sins in my body, on behalf of my righteous prince, wherever he may be in the world, for he too is a pious and good man.

Now I will be silent and lie down—entrusting myself to Your power and mercy. I am ready for anything and accept everything (**mekabbel be-ahavah u-vechibah**), and hereby I give you my (**neshamah**)—it is yours. My (**guf**) may be eaten by the fish, but my (**neshamah**) you will not forget. And if you are (**matsil**) me, I will proclaim your great miracles across hundreds of miles. As long as I live, I will always dedicate myself to your service.

(95) As the Princess (**Libia**) thus floated about in her little ship on the **yam**, having just offered her pitiful prayer, it so happened that King (**Paris**) and his wife (**Kartusa**) were sailing for pleasure on the sea, as was often their custom. They spotted a small covered boat drifting on the sea—

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<sup>219</sup> The asterisk (\*) appears in the source, likely used as a marker for the various sins listed, although its exact purpose is unclear.

<sup>220</sup> The word *buzkeyt* (בזקייט) appears in the text. It may be a variant spelling of *bizkeyt* (ביזקייט), meaning malice, malevolence, or anger. Alternatively, it could derive from the Hebrew word *buz* (בוז), meaning contempt, and may suggest an attitude of scorn, disrespect, or brazen insolence.

without a sailor and without a rudder. Queen (**Kartusa**) asked King (**Paris**) to sail over to the little boat to see what was inside. The king agreed and they immediately sailed toward the small boat.

(96) When they reached the little boat, they looked through the window and saw a woman sitting alone inside, dressed in very beautiful and ornate clothing. The king and queen had the boat opened and spoke to her, asking who she was and where she came from. She replied that her name was **Dana** and said: “I married an Arabian prince without my parents’ consent and became pregnant. Because of this, my parents punished me and sent me away on this boat, as you see, casting me out to sea. Today is already the third day that I have been drifting on the sea. If you would now show me mercy and rescue me from my miserable condition, I would be indebted to thank you for your kindness for the rest of my life. And if you will not do it for my sake, since I have sinned against my parents, then please do it for the sake of the small child with whom I am pregnant.”

(97) Queen **Kartusa** immediately felt great compassion and brought her into her ship, taking her to her palace. She had a chamber cleared out and appointed several servants to attend to her. It was not even two days before **Dana** went into labor and safely gave birth to a young prince, whom she named (**Berzis**). He was a very beautiful child and was raised by King **Paris** and Queen **Kartusa** as if he were their own, for they had no children of their own.

(98) It should also be noted that King (**Paris**) had been appointed as king in that land by his elder brother, (**Aladin**), who was the supreme ruler over the realm. The beauty of (**Dana**) quickly became widely known, spreading across many lands, until King (**Aladin**) also heard of her. One day, he told his brother King (**Paris**) that he wished to see the foreign woman who was staying in his house. King **Paris**, well aware of his brother’s nature, feared that he would desire (**Dana**) for himself. Therefore, (**Dana**) had to feign illness and applied a special ointment to her face that made her appear very unattractive. Thus, she returned unnoticed to her quarters.

Meanwhile, the young prince (**Berzis**) was being raised with great care. King **Paris** ensured he received an education in all wisdoms [**hokhmot**] imaginable, including all (**leshonot**), and especially in the fear of God, as is fitting for noble children. In particular, he was also trained in all the arts of (**milhamah**) and the use of every weapon needed for battle. (**be-kizur**), he quickly grasped and mastered all these teachings. He showed such promise that it was clear he could become the most distinguished prince in the world — for one can often tell from a small tree what kind of greatness it may grow into.

(99) The prince had always believed that King (**Paris**) was his father and (**Dana**) his mother. But as he grew older, he began to realize that he had been misled in his youth and that King (**Paris**) was not his father. So one day, he began to speak with his mother: “Dearest mother, I know well that one of the Ten Commandments [*tsen gebet*] given by the one and only God is to honor one’s father and mother. Therefore, I beg your forgiveness for what I am about to ask, but I must know—

please tell me who my father is, so that I may honor him too, whether he is alive or dead, and what his name was, and who he was.”

Then his mother spoke: “Dear child, I rejoice from the bottom of my heart that you have reached such understanding and come to me with this question. So know, my child, that your father was a great prince from (**Arabia**). His name was (**Tauruz**), and his brother is the king of (**Arabia**).”

And (**Dana**) went on to tell her son the entire story of how she and his father had once met, as has already been recounted, and revealed to him who he truly was. This made the prince very happy—but at the same time, he fell into deep confusion and sorrow at the thought that he was such a noble prince, and yet had no homeland or place of belonging. Thus, he remained in a state of deep and melancholic reflection.

(100) One day, he began again to speak with his mother: “Dear mother, I am beginning to feel ashamed that I have grown so much and yet remain at home all the time. Perhaps my father is somewhere in the world—in some place or land—and maybe he is in need of help. Or at the very least, he may wish to know of our situation. Therefore, I am fully resolved to travel throughout the world and search for my father, as is my rightful and dutiful obligation.”

(101) The mother became very frightened and said to him: “Dearest son, your father has long been separated from me—who knows whether he is still alive or not? You are my only child and my only comfort, and now you also want to leave me and abandon me alone in a foreign land. This would cause me such sorrow that I would soon die from grief if you were to travel away from me.” To this, the prince replied: “Beloved mother, do not deny me this. I must go and search for my father—this is your **kavod** and my **kavod**. Have only a willing heart and do not despair. What value does my life have if I do not know where my father is? And what good is your life if you do not know where your husband, who loved you so dearly, is or in which land he dwells? God will be my support, and He will preserve my life and guide me on my way so that, with His holy help, I will find my most beloved father. So I beg you, dear mother, do not prevent my plan, and let me travel in God’s name [*in gots nomen rayzn lozn.*]”

Then she said, “Dear son, if you truly will not be deterred, then let us first speak with the **melekh Paris**, and we shall follow whatever advice he gives.”

(102) The next day, they spoke with King (**Paris**), who said: “It deeply touches me that your prince has taken it upon himself to search for his beloved father, as is also his duty [*vi zayne shuldigkayt oykh mit brengt*]. I want to help him personally and allow his equipment to be prepared first .”

The prince thanked him most graciously and said, “Your Majesty need not go to great expense, for I wish to travel anonymously, as if I were a simple **sokher**, which does not require any grand

display — at least until God Almighty aids me in my quest and I meet or find my dearly beloved father.”

The king then gave orders for a good ship to be prepared immediately, fully manned and armed, so that it would be capable of defending itself if needed. It was also to be stocked with plenty of provisions and money, everything that might be necessary for the journey was to be provided in abundance and with the greatest care.

(103) The mother (**Dana**) and her prince could not find enough words or expressions of gratitude to thank King (**Paris**) for all the kindness he had shown them. Now the time came when everything was ready for the departure, and the wind was favorable. So, all preparations for setting sail were made. When the prince took leave of his mother and of the melekh and malka, I leave it to the kind reader to imagine how many tears were shed and how much heartbreak it caused (**Dana**). They embraced many times.

Then she gave her son the diamond jewel that she had received from his father when they were separated by **King (Akris)**, who had taken her (**tafus**), so that, if the prince were ever to meet his beloved father, he could present it as proof of his identity. Thus, they parted ways, and the ship immediately cast off from the land. They set sail in God’s name and took a direct course toward (**Arabia**), for the prince supposed that his father might have returned to his homeland. That was where he wanted to begin his search for his beloved father.

(104) It is certainly true, as the common saying goes, that there are many thoughts in a person’s heart, but what God decrees must come to pass [*es zaynen fil gedankn in mentshns hertser, aber vos got beshlisht, dos muz geshehen.*]<sup>221</sup> After they had been sailing for several days, a great storm arose, and their ship was blown far off course. The storm cast it not far from the (**Garkonisia**) Islands, where his father was governor and steward, as already mentioned. At that time, his father had just sailed out with a warship to fight against the blacks [*kegn di shvartsn*] who were trying to invade the islands.

There, his father spotted a foreign ship on the (**yam**), which bore a shield featuring a winged horse. He immediately sent a messenger with some men to inquire what kind of people were aboard the ship—whether they were enemies or friends. They arrived at the ship of prince (**Berzis**) and asked him, as was their order.

The prince replied by asking who he was. The messengers returned to the governor and reported the prince’s response. Then, the governor sailed toward the prince’s ship and sent a message asking

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<sup>221</sup> Reference to Proverbs 19:21: “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.”

whether he would surrender, otherwise he would attack him and force him by violence. He told him to prepare himself and ready for battle.

(105) They immediately came toward each other and began firing at one another with great force. When they (**ba-sof**) came close together, they drew their swords and began to fight fiercely hand-to-hand. The prince indeed mounted a powerful resistance, but the governor would have gotten the better of him, only, as he placed one foot onto the prince's ship to jump aboard, he made a misstep and fell onto the deck. The prince quickly fell upon him, ordered his ship pushed away from the others, and thought, "It's enough that I've captured the commander."

The prince pounced on him at once, had him bound and taken prisoner, and ordered his ship to pull away from the others. He thought to himself, "It's enough if I've captured their commander."

He immediately had the governor bound and taken prisoner. Once this was done, he chased after the other ship, which he also seized and took under his control, along with all the other ships. He then restored order, rewarded each of his men according to their merit, and went straight to his chamber.

There he had the commander brought before him and asked who he was. But as soon as they looked at each other, both froze in place and (**mamash**) couldn't speak a word. They had no idea what it meant—something in the blood stirred.

Finally, the prince began to speak: "I don't know what to say—my heart is about to burst, and I'm truly sorry that I offended you, that I fought against you and made you my prisoner. I now return to you, this very moment, all your ships, along with your freedom and all your people."

(106) The governor thanked him very politely and said to the prince: "My dear friend, I have never seen you in my life, but I saw your brave fighting [*tapfer fekhten*], and your face appears so kind to me that I can hardly speak for joy. Because you have granted me my freedom, I thank you most sincerely and accept it from you with gratitude. But I want to give you great wealth in return, for you deserve a great treasure. Therefore, I will let you know that I am the governor of the (**Garkonisia**) islands." And he told him about three princesses who rule over the islands and the great riches they possess. "I will send a small ship ahead and let them know that I have been taken captive, and they will give much wealth and a great treasure for my release." The prince thanked him and said: "Since we still have one more day's journey to the islands, and I am very pleased with your company, I kindly ask you to tell me your story — how and in what way you came to be on these islands."

(107) Then the governor began and said: "Although I would really rather not tell my story, since it causes me too much pain whenever I think about what an unfortunate man I have become, but because I cannot refuse you and wish to please you in your request, I will begin and tell you my

entire story” Then he told him about Princess (**Liba**) and King (**Akris**)’s daughter, as has already been told, that he was a prince from (**Arabia**), and his name is (**Tauruz**). How he lost my wife (**Liba**), and how she was already pregnant by him at that time. The governor could speak no further because of his great sorrow and weeping, as he thought of his beloved wife. He continued and told the prince how he came to these islands, as has already been recounted.

(108) The young prince could hardly hold back his tears and said: “I can no longer listen to you, because you are my dearest father. I set out on this journey to find you. Your name and your story match exactly what my dearest mother (**Dana**) told me. Her name, indeed, is not (**Liba**), but (**Dana**), and the prince showed him the keepsake his mother had given him, the very one the governor had given her when she was captured by King Akris, and they had to part from each other at that time.

The governor immediately recognized it and embraced his son, saying: “Praised be God that I have merited to see you. **Dana** must be (**Liba**), for she must have given herself another name to avoid being recognized.” They embraced each other many times and wept greatly from joy. No one could separate them. Here I leave it to the kind reader to imagine the great (**simḥa**) they experienced—my pen is not skillful enough to describe it all [*mayn feder izt nit geshikt genugn zolkhes als tsu bashraybn.*]

(109) So they arrived at the islands, and the governor told the three princesses the entire course of events, how everything had happened. They were very joyful because of it and made great merriment, as one can easily imagine.

(110) The governor then asked for his leave, since he wanted to travel with his dear son to his beloved wife, which they could not deny him. After that, they made all the proper preparations for departure.

They gave him very great riches, beyond description, and they declared that the prince should become king after their death, since according to the customs of the islands, they were not allowed to marry men. They had everything written up officially. Then they took their leave and returned (**be-shalom**).

And since they had good winds, they arrived quickly and safely at (**Dana**)’s place. Now, regarding the joy that this arrival caused — anyone can easily imagine it; it is beyond what can be expressed on paper. They lived together in great joy, and had many more princes and princesses, and King (**Akris**) died, and they inherited the kingdom after his death and ruled the kingdom with such wisdom that all the subjects could not praise it enough and were greatly satisfied.

(111) Then the (**yo’etz**) said to his daughter (**Melela**):

“See now what King **Akris** did, merely because he heard from his priests that his grandson would take his life. How can you have such thoughts, to marry the king, for which all of us will have to guarantee our lives and limbs [*vu mir ale unter-shraybn muzn bay unzern layb unt lebn*]? Therefore, I beg you, my dearest daughter, to cast such thoughts from your mind and not to think of them any longer.”

(112) The daughter said: “My dearest beloved father, the story you have told only strengthens me even more in my resolve. For you can clearly see how the priests spoke lies and deceived King (**Akris**). Since God helped **Libia** and her husband to be reunited, God will likewise be my support. For the Almighty God knows my heart, and I am certain that He will help me in my endeavor.”

(113) “I now wish to ask you, my dearest beloved father, to present me to the king so that I may have the chance to speak with him. Then you shall hear on what conditions I intend to marry the king, so that no one will be in danger of losing their life. Therefore, I ask you once more, dearest father, do not waste any time.”

(114) Then the father said: “Dearest daughter, if you intend to present yourself to the king under such conditions that none of us will be in danger, then I am content and will bring this matter before the king yet today.”

(115) The father went to the king and told him. The king was astonished and said: “My good (**yo’etz**), what are you thinking, presenting something like this to me? You know well what the conditions are. Do you want to endanger your life along with your daughter’s?” The counselor replied: “Your Majesty must know that I am already aware of everything. But my daughter has long pleaded with me, asking for the honor of presenting conditions to Your Majesty, so that both Your Majesty and we may be satisfied.” Then the king said: “Very well, let her come to me with you tomorrow morning.”

(116) The next day, the father came with his daughter, who was beautifully dressed in the finest garments, richly adorned with diamonds. She made her curtsy before the king, knelt down, and began to speak: “Most gracious king and lord, please do not take it amiss that I, a humble woman, have the boldness to appear before your majesty and present myself [as a candidate] for your wife, should I be granted the honor and good fortune. I am also aware of Your majesty’s firm belief that all women are unfaithful. Therefore, I ask Your Majesty to give me a hearing and listen to what I have to say.”

The king ordered her to rise and not remain on her knees. He was greatly astonished by her beauty and intelligence, and commanded her to speak as she wished.

(117) She began: “Your majesty is right to have such thoughts about women, for they are unfortunate in the stories—just as (**Shlomo ha-melekh**) said, that among a thousand men one

might find a good one, but among women, none at all [*az unter toyznt manen gefindt man ayn gutn, ober unter vayber findt man gar kayne*].<sup>222</sup> Thus, people imagine things to be far worse than they truly are. Now, to please Your Majesty, I am willing to remain in the palace for one year and humbly request the favor of being granted half an hour each day to tell Your Majesty a story. In doing so, Your Majesty will hear and see that among us women—just as among men—there are both the faithful and the unfaithful. Thus, over the course of the year, I will tell you 365 stories, and by your great wisdom, you will come to understand how often we women are treated unjustly in many matters. You will also witness how I conduct myself throughout this year and whether you can find in me even a single reason to suspect dishonesty or betrayal. After that, Your Majesty may choose, according to your will, to take me as your wife—or, if not, to send me away from your palace.”

(118) The king was greatly astonished by her intelligence and her wise speech. He agreed to all her proposals and immediately had it written down that, if after the year he found her to be faithful, he would take her as his queen. He also agreed to listen to one hour of her stories every day after the meal.

He had a room prepared for her, befitting that of a queen. This caused great joy (**simkha**) for her father and for all who heard about it—everyone was very pleased.

Now we want to write what we promised in the (**hakdama**): that from each (**historie**), (**musar**) and (**hokhmah**) can be drawn. So we must write what (**musar**) comes from it.

King **Akris** locked up his daughter—that represents the (**yezer ha-ra‘**) within a person. It is locked deep in the (**be-ḥadare ḥadarim**) hidden, always plotting to tempt the person with its false logic and poverty, until it ensnares a person in its net.

Our (**sifrey musar**) present a (**mashal**): A man once traveled with a horse. They walked together along the road. The man became tired and said to the horse, “I’m already so tired. I envy you—you have four legs and are big and strong. You don’t get tired so quickly. Please let me place the pack that I carry on my back onto you. It won’t harm you.”

The horse said, “Gladly.”

The man placed his pack on the horse for half an hour. Then he said, “Let me rest my hand on you.”

The horse said, “Gladly.”

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<sup>222</sup> Reference to Ecclesiastes 7:28 (KJV): “Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

So he leaned on the horse for another half hour. Then the man said, “I can’t go any further. Let me sit on you for a bit—you’re strong, it won’t harm you.”

The horse said, “Gladly.”

So the man climbed on the horse. Though he sat on it alone, the horse could still walk wherever it wished. The man then said, “Let me place a little rope in your mouth so I can hold on—that way I’ll be more comfortable.”

The horse answered, “As you wish.”

So he put a rope in the horse’s mouth, rode it, and now guided the horse wherever he pleased.

The man asked the horse where it was headed. The horse said, “to France.”

The man replied, “I want to go to Ashkenaz.”<sup>223</sup>

The horse said, “Then leave me and go your way, and let me go mine.”

But the man said, “Now I sit on you; I have control and power to lead you wherever I desire. I’d be a fool to get off! You must go where I want.”

And so he led the horse wherever he pleased.

This is how the (**yetzer ha-ra**) behaves. The human being is the horse, a (**behemah**), if he does not apply his (**sekhel**) to (**yirah**) and (**musar**). The (**yetzer ha-ra**) first approaches the person like a friend and walks alongside him. Then it says: “You are a clever, good person—let me place my hand on you.” That’s a small sin. The person thinks it’s nothing and feels tempted, and he listens to him. Eventually the (**yetzer ha-ra**) climbs on him, and (**has v’shalom**), leads him into serious sins.

In the end, it places a bridle in his mouth and leads him wherever it pleases—into complete evil.

That is the (**mashal**). (**Karmolia**) disguised himself—and this is how the yetser hara disguises itself to trick people. It hides and dresses itself in other garments, first pretending to be a (**haver**).

This is called a (**yetzer ha-ra**). For example, it convinces someone to say **tehillim** during the **Shmone Esrei** prayer, and because of that, the person doesn’t hear the blessings and doesn’t

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<sup>223</sup> This choice of location may offer a clue to the book’s origins— France, where Galland is from.

respond amen, or he says amen like a **yetom**, who has neither father nor mother, and says amen without hearing the blessing.

That is a “pious **yetzer hara**.” There are thousands more examples. It seduces a person through something seemingly good, and in the end, it all leads to evil until it has full control over him.

We will elaborate on this in later stories.

From the story we have just written, a person can learn: Even if (**hakadosh barukh hu**) punishes someone, he must accept it with love (**be-ahava**), for (**hakadosh barukh hu**) helps again—as we see, in what a dire situation they were, and through heartfelt prayers (**tefillot hashuvot**), God heard and helped them.

We also learn of the (**gevurot**) of (**hakadosh baruch hu**) over the (**yam**)—how all the wisdom of the sailor, captain, and compass are useless if (**has ve’shalom**) God does not help. They were saved from the sea not by skilled sailors or human help, but through their (**tefillot un’mitvade**).

There are still many more (**musar**) lessons to be learned. We will continue to write the stories along with their moral teachings. This is just the beginning—you will find much (**hokhmah**) in it.

And since no book is printed without (**soneim**), who scorn and mock even (**sifrey lashon ha-kodesh**) written by the (**ge’onim**), how much more so will people (**mele’ig**) this one, saying it is just German stories and will find nothing of (**musar**), (**hokhmah**), and (**meshalim**).

Therefore, I ask the (**‘olam**), and each reader individually: Please do not judge me harshly for what I have written here. I hope everyone will receive it kindly, for it will bring great benefit and pleasure to the world, just as I mentioned in the (**hakdama**).

I take God as my witness that my (**edut**) is (**le-shem shamayim**), and nothing improper will be found in it, as has been said.

(119) In order to resume the narrative, the king went the next day, right after the meal, into his beloved royal garden, into a magnificent pavilion wonderfully built of precious stones.

There he sat down with his high-ranking company, each of whom took his seat according to his rank.

Here, Melela begins and tells the king the first story. Now begin the 365 stories, divided over the days of the whole year—one story for each day, as follows [...].

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