THE WILES OF WOMEN IN OTTOMAN AND AZERI TEXTS

David Selim Sayers

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
NEAR EASTERN STUDIES
Adviser: M. Şükrü Hanoğlu

June 2014
Abstract

The wiles of women are a literary theme that has been treated from ancient Egyptian narratives to twenty-first-century TV series. The theme reached its greatest flowering in literatures of the Islamicate world, beginning with Surat Yusuf of the Qur’an and inspiring entire literary traditions in Arabic (Kayd al-Nisa’), Persian (Makr-e Zanjan), and Turkish (Mekr-i Zenan). While some scholarly work exists on the Arabic and Persian traditions, the Turkish tradition has not received significant scholarly attention to date. The present study aims to fill this gap. In so doing, the study presents, transliterates, and translates into English seventeen hitherto-unexamined prose stories on the wiles of women in Ottoman and Azeri Turkish. The first part of the study establishes a morphology for the stories and proposes a definition of the literary genre they represent. Both the morphology and the genre definition are designed to accommodate future additions to the corpus. The second part of the study engages in an in-depth analysis of the genre’s treatment of the wiles-of-women theme, extrapolating a broader worldview from this treatment.

The proposed morphology divides the genre into three main categories which present a wide spectrum on the treatment of the theme. For instance, stories may view the wiles of women as evil and dangerous; as frivolous and amusing; or as thoughtful and instructive. Still, the categories all share the a priori assumption that women are intrinsically and incorrigibly guileful. The same does not hold for men, whom the stories grant moral agency and the capacity to learn from their mistakes. Story arcs in Mekr-i Zenan often feature men falling for the wiles of women, suffering as a result, and learning a lesson in the end. Women, in contrast, showcase no personal development. What emerges is a view of the world as a moral testing ground for men, and of women as a divinely ordained obstacle/mediator between men and a morally upright life.
Nevertheless, many *Mekr-i Zenan* stories employ humor and ambiguity, for instance by casting men in the guileful role, to enable a more nuanced view of social and gender relations than generic conventions suggest.
As for the history of works of art, in any case, if they are great, the sense we give to them after the fact has issued from them. It is the work itself that has opened the field from which it appears in another light. It metamorphoses itself and becomes what follows; the interminable reinterpretations to which it is legitimately susceptible change it only into itself. And if the historian unearths beneath its manifest content a surplus and thickness of sense, the texture which was preparing for a long future, then this active manner of being, this possibility he unveils in the work, this monograph he finds there—are all grounds for a philosophical meditation.

– Maurice Merleau-Ponty
Acknowledgements

Academia is the closest thing I have to a family business. My grandmother, Nuran Gökhan, was one of the first female professors in Turkey, and my parents, Zehra Sayers and Ahmet Evin, are both outstanding scholars and mentors in their fields. In my twenties, academia was a safe haven for me, a place to which I would conveniently retreat—and which I would desert without a second thought—while engaged in more thrilling adventures such as presenting TV or writing my first novel. As I slowly became more serious about the family business, my father introduced me to two extraordinary mentors: Talât Halman at Bilkent, who flung the gates of Turkish literature wide open for me; and Robert Finn at Princeton, who ushered me into academia’s inner chambers. If today, in my thirties, I am finally settling down into the family business, it is only thanks to this personal and academic family that encouraged, financed, and stubbornly insisted on my future as a part of it.

While writing this dissertation, other mentors entered the picture. When Robert left the Near Eastern Studies department at Princeton in the early stages of my dissertation, Şükru Hanoğlu adopted my project, showing me great trust by accepting to become my adviser on a topic that lies outside his strict field of expertise. Ever since, Şükru Bey has provided invaluable advice and support regarding my dissertation and other academic endeavors. Finally, as chapters materialized while time (and funding) became scarce, Michael Cook lent his guiding hand, helping me bring the project to fruition as well as figure out how to balance it with the other priorities and necessities of life. I could not have asked for better mentors at Princeton than Professors Finn, Hanoğlu, and Cook, and it has been a great privilege to know them and work with them.
As the project developed, two other names were added to the list of my closest advisers: Shaun Marmon at Princeton and Leslie Peirce at NYU. Shaun Marmon organized the 2012 Princeton Symposium on Slavery, Race, and Gender in Islamic Societies. This symposium was where I found out, to my horror, that *Mekr-i Zenan* was more than just a Turkish genre, but where I also found, to my delight, two invaluable mentors in Professors Marmon and Peirce. These two advisers have since read my drafts, provided ample feedback, and gracefully consented to take part in my oral defense.

Thanks to all these scholars, it became clear to me that good academic work is rarely the product of a “little brain” sitting alone in a room and pouring out its contents onto a page, and much more likely to spring from a “big brain” made up of colleagues, friends, and relatives, convening in seminar rooms, chatting at cafés, and networked via whatever means of distant communication are available to the age. Beyond the inner circle listed above, I am particularly indebted to everyone who enabled me to give presentations on *Mekr-i Zenan*, and all those who attended, listened, and provided feedback at the following events:

On November 8, 2011, I spoke on “The Guiles of Women: *Mekr-i Zenan* Literature in the Ottoman Empire” at the Gender, Sexuality, and Religion Working Group, Princeton University. I am grateful to Jessica Delgado for providing me with this opportunity and for her valuable feedback and advice. On November 22, 2011, I gave a talk entitled “What is Inside the Trunk? Female Subversiveness in Ottoman *Mekr-i Zenan* Literature” at the Graduate Student Colloquium of the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies, Princeton University. I have Hartley Miller to thank for her organization of this event and her extensive feedback. Finally, on November 15, 2012, I presented the paper, “A Morphology for Literature on the Wiles of Women in Ottoman and Azeri Texts” at the Princeton Islamic Studies Colloquium, Princeton
University. Simon Wolfgang Fuchs and Aaron Rock-Singer were involved with organization, Faez Syed acted as moderator, and Shaun Marmon was my respondent for this event at which I received excellent feedback from a room full of exceptional scholars in my field.

This dissertation was written in four main locations. The first of these was Leuven, Belgium, where, in Spring 2010, I made the first evaluation of the Mekr-i Zenan texts I had assembled during my research. This stay was made possible by Evrim Emir-Sayers, who went from being my friend to my partner to my wife over the years that I have been working on my dissertation. Evrim, at the time, was getting her MPhil from the Catholic University of Leuven, and enabled me to audit a course on the philosophy of art of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze, taught by Rudolf Bernet at the abovementioned institution. My first thoughts on Mekr-i Zenan—the bedrock of all my subsequent work—were heavily influenced by that course.

After writing some draft chapters at Princeton, I completed the first draft of the dissertation in the summer of 2013 on the island of Cunda, off the coast of Ayvalık on Turkey’s Aegean shore. I am grateful to Selim Kuru for inviting me to Cunda to serve as an instructor at the Intensive Ottoman and Turkish Summer School of the Ottoman Studies Foundation, where I was provided with an office, plenty of time, and a matchless environment of natural beauty and scholarly immersion for over a month. During this time, Evrim, my mother-in-law Leman Emir, and myself found a welcoming home as well as nourishment for body and soul with Gülseren Şafak, our dear friend and abla.

The final draft of the dissertation was finished at San Francisco State University, where I have been working as Founding Director and Lecturer of the newly established Turkish Studies Program since Fall 2013. I am indebted beyond words to Lucia Volk, my boss, confidante, and mentor at SF State. Lucia brought me to San Francisco, judged me capable of founding the
program and finishing my dissertation at the same time, and toiled above and beyond the call of duty to help me achieve these goals. It was at SF State, among my wonderful students and remarkable colleagues, that I finally became ready to let the dissertation go and say goodbye to being a student—a psychological process more difficult for me than writing the text itself.

Many other scholars provided me with advice, suggested readings, and offered feedback during various stages of the dissertation. In no order other than the alphabetical, the doubtlessly incomplete list of their names includes Fatma Akman, John Borneman, Marina Brownlee, Mark Cohen, Jill Dolan, Molly Greene, Christina Halperin, András Hámori, Katharina Ivanyi, Katherine Jansen, İrfan Karakoç, Amy Motlagh, Gayle Salamon, Ramya Sreenivasan, Lindsey Stephenson, Sarah Thébaud, and Lev Weitz. On the administrative front, Mirjam Künkler, my Director of Graduate Studies, and James LaRegina, the NES Graduate/Undergraduate Administrator at Princeton, guided me step by step through the process of making my dissertation conform to Princeton standards. On the logistical front, my friends and fellow Princeton PhD candidates Jonathan Glassman and Michael Sockin provided my advisers with printed drafts while I was away from Princeton. I apologize to everyone who was left out of this list due to my spotty memory and insufficient efforts at keeping track.

During my initial research, I made use of various Turkish and European libraries housing Ottoman collections. For this dissertation, I ended up drawing on texts from the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid, and the Atatürk Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi in Erzurum. Nonetheless, I was also supplied with material from the Österreichische Staatsbibliothek in Vienna; the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz; the Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Kütüphanesi in Ankara; and the Millet Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, and the İstanbul
Universitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi in Istanbul. My thanks go out to all those who facilitated the process of obtaining texts from these institutions.

Whenever I needed it most, I was able to draw on the generous and unconditional support of those nearest to me—family, friends, and mentors such as Leman Emir (who flew in from Turkey in Spring 2014 to run my family’s life while I went mentally AWOL trying to meet my dissertation deadlines), Ahmet Evin, Peter and Sylvia Golden, Michel and Ulrike Koch, Nat Riley, Zehra Sayers, and, above all, my wife Evrim Emir-Sayers, without whom this dissertation would not have been written, and whose own PhD in Continental Philosophy we will be celebrating in the near future.

This dissertation is humbly dedicated to the memory of my Turkish grandparents, Nuran and Selim Gökhan, who both passed away in 2013, mere months before the completion of this project. In the 1980s, when both my mother and father were away, these two raised me as their own child. I owe them everything, from my languages to my character to my ambitions to this fruit of my ambitions.

David Selim Sayers

San Francisco, CA

Sunday, April 20, 2014
# Table of Contents

Introduction .............................................. 1

1. Morphology and Genre ................................. 19
   1.1. The “Mistake” Stories ................................. 19
       1.1.1. Women (and Men) ................................. 19
       1.1.2. Moral and Message ................................. 30
       1.1.3. Hybrid Stories ................................. 35
   1.2. The “Complicity” Stories ................................. 37
       1.2.1. Women (and Men) ................................. 37
       1.2.2. Moral and Message ................................. 46
       1.2.3. Hybrid Stories ................................. 50
   1.3. The “Transgression” Stories ......................... 52
       1.3.1. Women (and Men) ................................. 52
       1.3.2. Moral and Message ................................. 60
       1.3.3. Hybrid Stories ................................. 62
   1.4. *Mekr-i Zenan* as a Genre ....................... 64
       1.4.1. The Origins and Development of *Mekr-i Zenan* ................................. 64
       1.4.2. The Limits of *Mekr-i Zenan* ....................... 69
       1.4.3. Changes over Time ................................. 72
       1.4.4. The Unchanging Thematic Core ................................. 76
## 2. Underlying Worldview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1. This is a Man’s World</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1. The Male Audience</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2. The Guilelessness of Men</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3. Men as Morally Asleep</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.4. The Self-Awareness of Women</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.5. The Moral Agency of Men</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.6. Women as Part of the World</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.7. The Lessons Men Must Learn</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. The Social Construction of Gender</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1. The Wiles of Men</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2. Men as Women, Women as Men</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3. A World for Women, a World for Men</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Individuals and Society</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1. Are There Any Anti-System Stories?</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2. Social Cohesion in <em>Mekr-i Zenan</em></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conclusion: Us and Them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bibliography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix A: Transliterations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erzurum</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Madrid**

M1: “The Buried Fish” 140

**Paris**

P1: “The Duped Officer” 143
P2: “The Reluctant Conjurer” 155
P3: “The Adulteress and the Wife” 168
P4: “Bound by His Own Hair” 176
P5: “The Cuckolded Princes” 179
P6: “The Resurrected Wife” 190
P7: “The Three Wishes: Size” 194
P8: “The Three Wishes: Beauty” 195
P9: “Coffee, Melons, and Marble” 196

**Erzurum**

E1: “The Fake Adultery” 199
E2: “The Book Within the Book” 201
E3: “The Plucked Beard” 203
E4: “The Ruler Reminisces” 205
E5: “The Deceitful Wedding” 207
E6: “The Lazy Husband” 208
E7: “The Fruit of Rape” 210
Appendix B: English Translations . . . . . . 214

Madrid . . . . . . . . . . . . 214

M1: “The Buried Fish” . . . . . . 214

Paris . . . . . . . . . . . . 218

P1: “The Duped Officer” . . . . . . 218
P2: “The Reluctant Conjurer” . . . . . . 233
P3: “The Adulteress and the Wife” . . . . . . 249
P4: “Bound by His Own Hair” . . . . . . 259
P5: “The Cuckolded Princes” . . . . . . 263
P6: “The Resurrected Wife” . . . . . . 276
P7: “The Three Wishes: Size” . . . . . . 281
P8: “The Three Wishes: Beauty” . . . . . . 282
P9: “Coffee, Melons, and Marble” . . . . . . 284

Erzurum . . . . . . . . . . . . 287

E1: “The Fake Adultery” . . . . . . 287
E2: “The Book Within the Book” . . . . . . 289
E3: “The Plucked Beard” . . . . . . 291
E4: “The Ruler Reminisces” . . . . . . 293
E5: “The Deceitful Wedding” . . . . . . 295
E6: “The Lazy Husband” . . . . . . 297
E7: “The Fruit of Rape” . . . . . . 299
The wiles of women offer many temptations. One is to claim that stories about them are as old and widespread as storytelling itself. Certainly, scholars have located the theme in stories dating as far back as ancient Egypt,¹ and reaching from at least India to Europe.² However, the theme experienced its perhaps greatest literary flowering and clearest formulation in the Islamicate world, where it can be traced back to the Qur’an itself and survives in multiple genres and languages to this very day. And while a comprehensive scholarly monograph on the wiles-of-women theme as treated in either Arabic or Persian literature is still outstanding, pioneering chapters and articles by scholars such as Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Gayane K. Merguerian, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Margaret A. Mills convey a sense of the scope as well as the milestones of the traditions in question. Let us then begin with a very brief historical sketch of these traditions, drawing heavily on the work of the abovementioned scholars.³

The Qur’anic basis for the wiles of women is the sura of Joseph (Surat Yusuf). In its most rudimentary form, the temptation of Yusuf occurs as follows: as part of his divinely decreed ordeals, Yusuf is sold to an Egyptian referred to as al-‘Aziz.⁴ In his master’s home, the wife of al-‘Aziz tries to seduce Yusuf, but he rejects her advances. She decides to slander him in

³ For the purposes of this analysis, “theme” denotes the idea of the wiles of women as treated in literature, “genre” denotes a specific literary form/trend that treats this theme, and “tradition” denotes a totality of interconnected genres and other outlets through which the theme has been expressed.
⁴ Presumably a title rather than a name; Merguerian and Najmabadi point out that it has been translated as “the governor” or “the prince” (p. 504).
retaliation, claiming that he tried to force himself upon her. Yusuf is imprisoned, but eventually, the truth of the matter is revealed, and he is freed. At this juncture, al-‘Aziz, addressing his wife, utters these fateful words: “This is but one of your tricks. Surely your guile is great” (12:28).

Merguerian and Najmabadi have noted that al-‘Aziz addresses his wife in the second person plural, hence transferring her wiles onto women as a whole. It is at this exact point that the merger between the wiles-of-women theme and Islamic thought occurs. The word al-‘Aziz uses to describe these wiles is kayd. Henceforth, in the Arabic-speaking world, the wiles of women will be known as kayd al-nisa’, and the story of Yusuf’s temptation itself will become the basis of countless retellings “in literary and historical texts of various genres, including books of advice, mirrors of princes, and tales of the prophets […]. It has inspired erotic/mystical love poetry in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic; it constitutes one of the most narrated popular tales of the oral tradition”.

This Qur’anic Urtext on the wiles of women is complemented and reinforced by a number of hadiths, traditions concerning the life and sayings of the prophet Muhammad. In one such hadith, women are described as “deficient in reason and faith”. Another states that “a people who entrusts its affairs to a woman will never know prosperity”. A third hadith asserts that women “make up the largest percentage of the inhabitants of Hell”. And finally, a fourth hadith advises men “to take care of the women, for they are created from a rib and the most

---

5 Ibid., p. 488.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid, p. 485.
crooked portion of the rib is its upper part; if you try to straighten it, it will break, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked, so I urge you to take care of the women”. As we will see below, such hadiths inspired and found their way into a great deal of literature on the wiles of women.

While Islamic commentaries on the Qur’an, such as the work of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 AH / 923 CE), greatly extend and elaborate on the Yusuf story itself, the wiles of women take on a life of their own in Arabic literature. Indeed, some of the most widely-known examples of Arabic literature bear the mark of this tradition: The frame story of The Arabian Nights is set in motion by incidents involving the wiles of women, as are other story cycles such as the Sindbad-namah and Tuti-namah. At the same time, the wiles of women become a theme of Arabic adab literature, taking the form of collections of brief anecdotes compiled from various sources, adapted by each compiler/author to suit his own preferences, their content sometimes subject-specific, sometimes encyclopedic, sometimes mere entertainment, sometimes more didactic. In adab literature, the wiles of women remain alive throughout medieval Arabic literary production, reaching a peak of notoriety in the fifteenth-century Kitab al-‘Unwan fi Makayid al-

---

12 Merguerian and Najmabadi, p. 490.
13 Daniel Heller-Roazen, selected and ed., *The Arabian Nights: The Husain Hadaway Translation Based on the Text Edited by Muhsin Mahdi* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 5-13. Fedwa Malti-Douglas points out that the frame story of the Nights employs the precise quote from Surat Yusuf to describe the wiles of women: “inna kaydakunna ‘azim” (p. 19). The phrase is translated in Heller-Roazen as “Great is women’s cunning” (p. 11).
14 Merguerian and Najmabadi, p. 486.
15 Malti-Douglas tells us that adab literature is “always the responsibility of male scriptors” (p. 29).
Niswan of Ibn al-Batatuni, an adab work devoted in its entirety to the wiles of women and to situating these wiles in the context of Islamic sacred history.16

Arabic is not the only language of the Islamicate world to have proclaimed the wiles of women, either. The Persian-speaking realm has developed its own take on the theme, rebranding it with the name of Makr-e Zan(an). The Persian tradition is somewhat less well studied than its Arabic counterpart, but remarkable for continuing up to the present day: Margaret A. Mills has recorded and studied numerous oral performances of Makr-e Zan stories, recounted “by Persian speakers from Herat and Kabul, from the mid-1970s into the 1990s”.17 As stated, to date, we do not have a comprehensive, monographic study of either wiles-of-women-literature as a whole, or of individual strands and stories belonging to this literature.18 Still, the work of the abovementioned scholars offers us a glimpse into the manifestations and development of this formidable literary theme in Arabic and Persian.

To the best of my knowledge, no similar work has been produced on wiles-of-women-literature in the Turkic languages, the third major language group of Islam in the Near East. It is not that there are no stories about the wiles of women in Turkish. As we shall see, such stories are quite numerous. It is rather that the Turkish stories often take the form of popular prose literature, a subject hardly explored by literary scholars from the Ottoman Empire, who were mostly concerned with divan poetry. Similarly, modern Turkish scholars of Ottoman high and

---

16 See Malti-Douglas, pp. 54-67.
18 With the possible exception of the story of Joseph itself, studied by Goldman in book form. However, it is debatable to what extent the story, in its entirety or its intent, is actually about the wiles of women. For this debate, see Merguerian and Najmabadi, who maintain that the emphasis of the story shifted from the trials of a prophet to the wiles of women only in the commentary tradition subsequent to the Qur’an (Merguerian and Najmabadi, pp. 489-490).
folk literature, ranging from Mustafa Nihat Özören to Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar, from Pertev Nilüfer Boratav to İlhan Bağöz, seem not to be aware even of the existence of Turkish literature on the wiles of women.

The main aim of the present study is to fill this gap. In so doing, it will proceed from a corpus of seventeen Turkish-language stories on the wiles of women that I have been able to compile from various sources, all bearing the title of *Mekr-i Zenan*. One of these is an undated story, in Ottoman Turkish, from a manuscript preserved in the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid. A set of nine stories, again in Ottoman Turkish, and read in Istanbul as early as 1177 AH / 1763 CE, is found in a manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. Finally, seven stories are interspersed throughout a printed pamphlet produced in Tabriz, presumably at the beginning of the twentieth century, and written in Azeri Turkish using the Arabic script; the pamphlet is today preserved in the Atatürk Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, Erzurum, Turkey.

It should be noted from the outset that this corpus is far from exhaustive. Perhaps the most glaring omission is the *Bedayi-ül-asar*, a collection of prose stories by the Ottoman storyteller Cinanî (d. 1004 AH / 1595 CE), which contains a subset of 24 stories devoted to the

---

19 A somewhat Turkified spelling of the generic Persian name. In my study, I will use this spelling to denote the Ottoman and Azeri stories under consideration. Sometimes, *Mekr-i Zenan* is the title of an entire document rather than of the individual stories contained in it, while at other times, it is a phrase occurring within the title of a story. In one way or another, though, all the stories I will be working with have been explicitly titled *Mekr-i Zenan*. While there are many more Turkish stories that showcase guileful behavior on the part of women, for this introductory work I have considered it prudent to limit myself to works that directly bear the name of the genre.


wiles of women. Sadly, I became aware of the *Mekr-i Zenan* content of this work at too late a stage to include it in the present study. Further, a more comprehensive search of libraries both in and outside Turkey is likely to yield many further additions to the corpus established here. The main reason for the elusiveness of *Mekr-i Zenan* stories is that often, as in the Erzurum document, they are interspersed throughout collections that contain a lot of other material besides *Mekr-i Zenan*. The Paris and Erzurum documents bear the the title *Mekr-i Zenan* as a whole, but many other sources, such as the Madrid manuscript or the Cinani collection, make no reference to *Mekr-i Zenan* in their titles. This, in turn, means that *Mekr-i Zenan* stories can be very hard to locate.\(^{23}\)

In light of the incomplete nature of the corpus at my disposal, as well as the utter lack of any secondary literature on the subject (at least in its Turkish incarnation), the scope of the present study will necessarily be quite circumscribed. I have found two ways to approach the subject that I hope will remain of relevance, and even provide some guidance, when further stories, whether in Turkish, Arabic, or Persian, are unearthed or analyzed in the future. The first approach, which will cover approximately the first half of this study, is the establishment of a basic, tentative morphology.

The issue of morphology addresses a central question that studies on the theme as treated in Arabic and Persian have sought to answer: What kinds of guileful behavior do women exhibit in these stories, or, phrased differently, of what exactly are the wiles of women supposed to consist? The first approaches to this question, by Fedwa Malti-Douglas as well as Merguerian and Najmabadi, have equated women’s wiles with their sexuality. Pinpointing Surat Yusuf as the

\(^{23}\) I owe my knowledge of existing *Mekr-i Zenan* stories largely to a Turkish catalogue of Ottoman prose literature, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında Mensûr Hikâyeler* by Hasan Kavruk (İstanbul: Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1998).
locus classicus of the tradition, Malti-Douglas maintains that “when the Egyptian ruler, addressing his spouse, declares, ‘Indeed your guile is great’, he has immortalized not only his lustful wife but all of womankind in the role of uncontrollable sexuality”. Similarly, Merguerian and Najmabadi state that Surat Yusuf and literature on the wiles of women share a “concept of female sexuality as an uncontrollable threatening force that men have to be wary of”.

In her studies of orally transmitted and/or performed stories on the wiles of women, Margaret A. Mills complicates this equation of wiles with sexuality. In the stories she has collected, wiles can be about many things besides sex. Thus, she examines stories in which wiles are employed as an “art form” in a contest between various women, or between a woman and a man, to establish who can use them most artfully. She further points to a group of stories, sometimes labeled as Makr-e Zan, sometimes not, in which women use wiles in self-defense against powerful male opponents who wish to exploit them sexually or otherwise. Finally, she maintains that in both cases, rather than condemning the wrongful sexual appetite of women, the stories contain a strong critique of class and power structures in which women vis-à-vis men, and women vis-à-vis other women with stronger social standing, assume the position of the subaltern.

In her move beyond stories which seem to simply serve the condemnation of women for sexual voracity, Mills distinguishes between stories which “celebrate” women for “play[ing] with the patriarchal system, even turn[ing] it inside out, without being destroyed”, and stories in

---

24 Malti-Douglas, p. 53.
25 Merguerian and Najmabadi, p. 487.
27 Ibid., p. 267.
28 Ibid., p. 263.
29 Ibid., pp. 268-69.
which women use wiles to prop up this very system when it is under threat, the implication being that “no patriarchy can stand without the support of women: a kind of strident pseudo-complicity with the ideal of male dominance, which nonetheless denies it at the pragmatic level”.\textsuperscript{30}

Eloquently, she states that “a topos of the scale and pervasiveness of \textit{makr-i zan} challenges us to come to terms with such multivocality. It is a rich vein in which to explore the multiplexity, including the ironic dimensions, of a popular ideology, albeit one that seems on preliminary inspection to be rather monolithic”.\textsuperscript{31} Her hope is for monographic studies that will demonstrate and analyze the fluidity and flexibility of the tradition, as it moves between “conservatism, […] critique and subversion”.\textsuperscript{32}

In the time I have spent with Turkish \textit{Mekr-i Zenan}, I have formed the opinion that an analysis as proposed by Mills can be effectively undertaken through morphology. By looking at the ways in which different kinds of stories diverge from each other in terms of plot fundamentals, I think we can draw semi-permeable boundaries between categories of \textit{Mekr-i Zenan}, categories which in turn help us to determine the spectrum of positions the genre can take vis-à-vis the issue of male-female relations in particular, and social order in general. Strangely, the categories that seem most useful to me are formed not according to the portrayal of women, but that of men. While this may seem ironic for a genre supposedly devoted to women, it becomes more understandable once we realize that the writers and primary intended audience of \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} were men, and in many ways, male characters are at the center of these stories.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 269.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 262.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} The male authorship and audience, as well as the male-centeredness, of \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} will be discussed in detail below. Suffice it to say at this point that Turkish \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} is hardly unique in this respect. Malti-Douglas tells us that in the Arab context “stories involving women’s ruses are discourse-controlled by male narrators” (p. 33). A caveat in the case of oral
I have called my three proposed categories *mistake, complicity,* and *transgression.* In the
“mistake” stories, men cause no offense to anyone. Their mistake is simply to trust a guileful
woman, who then lands them in trouble. In the “complicity” stories, men do cause offense to
someone, but they do so because they become embroiled in the schemes of a guileful woman. In
the “transgression” stories, finally, men cause unprovoked offense to someone, either the woman
herself or someone else, and the wiles of women are set in motion as a result of this offense. Of
course, the distinctions between stories are not always clear-cut, and some of the most
fascinating stories represent points of overlap between one category and another.

This may be a good point at which to introduce the stories. What follows is a table
containing the classification numbers of the stories, their names, the sources from which they
hail, and my categorization of them as mistake, complicity, and/or transgression. The stories
themselves have no readily distinguishing names; I have given them the present names myself
for the sake of this analysis. Since complete transliterations and English translations of all stories
are given in the Appendices, and since the stories are of easily manageable length, I have not
found it necessary to include summaries. As a matter of fact, if any readers have come this far
without having read the stories first, I would strongly urge them to turn to the stories after

performance is introduced by Mills, who mentions stories about the wiles of women being orally
performed by both male and female narrators before audiences of both genders (“Whose Best
Tricks?”, p. 263).

For the sake of convenience, I will be using these alpha-numeric classification numbers in the
footnotes when citing from the stories. For instance, “The Duped Officer”, the first story in the
Paris manuscript, will be cited as “P1”. Page four of “The Duped Officer” would be cited as “P1,
p. 4”. The page numbers refer to the original texts rather than to pages of this study, and can be
found in brackets throughout the transliterations and translations alike.

Finally, a note on the usage of translations and transliterations in the analysis: The main text only
quotes passages in English translation. Such quotes are accompanied by footnotes providing
Turkish transliterations of the same passages. If the main text paraphrases or alludes to a
passage, rather than directly quoting it, the corresponding footnote provides the relevant passage
in English translation rather than Turkish transliteration.
finishing this introduction. That way, readers will be able to form their own ideas about the stories and enjoy them without becoming too prejudiced by my interpretation.

Madrid (location and date of origin unknown)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>“The Buried Fish”</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paris (read in Istanbul from 1177 AH / 1763 CE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>“The Duped Officer”</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
<td>5-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>“The Reluctant Conjurer”</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
<td>33-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>“The Adulteress and the Wife”</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
<td>63-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>“Bound by His Own Hair”</td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>82-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>“The Cuckolded Princes”</td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>89-115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>“The Resurrected Wife”</td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>115-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>“The Three Wishes: Size”</td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>125-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>“The Three Wishes: Beauty”</td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>127-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>“Coffee, Melons, and Marble”</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
<td>129-35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35 The Madrid manuscript contains the opening lines to a second Mekr-i Zenan story. However, in the copy at my disposal, this story is cut off too early to yield many insights into Mekr-i Zenan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>“The Fake Adultery”</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
<td>28-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>“The Book Within the Book”</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
<td>30-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>“The Plucked Beard”</td>
<td>Transgression/Complicity</td>
<td>32-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>“The Ruler Reminisces”</td>
<td>Transgression/Mistake</td>
<td>33-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>“The Deceitful Wedding”</td>
<td>Complicity/Mistake</td>
<td>35-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>“The Lazy Husband”</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
<td>36-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>“The Fruit of Rape”</td>
<td>Complicity/Mistake</td>
<td>37-42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first half of this study will proceed by introducing each of the three categories and the stories that fall into them, highlighting features of the category as a whole while citing examples from relevant stories. Since mistake stories are often the most basic in plot and message, while some transgression stories are the most nuanced, I will proceed from simple to complex, starting with mistake, then turning to complicity, and finally to transgression. In this way, I hope to gradually complicate issues raised by the earlier story types as I move ahead. Within each story type, I will look first at the roles of female (and, to an extent, male) characters, then at the message presented by the stories, and finally at hybrid stories that show characteristics of another category, and therefore serve as convenient as points of transition between categories.

At the end of my morphological analysis, I will have the chance to formulate a tentative theory on Turkish *Mekr-i Zenan* as a literary genre. Since the mistake stories will have been shown to contain traces of various literary traditions, no common plot conventions, and a lacklustre focus on the wiles-of-women theme, I will propose that these stories stand at the
beginning of the genre’s development. In contrast, I will argue that complicity and transgression stories, with their more detailed and focused exploration of the theme as well as their homogeneous plot structures, point to a phase during which the genre became less dependent on preceding literary traditions and more crystallized in plot and theme.\textsuperscript{36} At this point, I will also have the opportunity to talk about the structural and thematic limitations of the genre, as well as possible ways in which developments in the genre might be mapped onto the historical periods during which the various source documents appeared.

The picture that emerges from this analysis will confirm Mills’s idea that the stories cover a broad range of stances vis-à-vis the wiles of women, ranging from conservative condemnation to playful subversion. However, there appear to be limits, at least within the present sample, to the possible breadth of this spectrum. In other words, it seems that all \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} stories, no matter how subversive they may appear, share significant common ground on which their differences play themselves out; it is this common ground that defines \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} as a genre. The second half of the study will be devoted to exploring this common ground, partly by pondering the deeper implications of the data put forth in the first half, partly by offering new examples, with the goal of determining the extent to which the surface divergences between story types really rest on an underlying and unifying worldview.

My first step in this direction will be to take a deeper look at the men in these stories. As it turns out, \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} men are often nowhere near as creative, entertaining, or intelligent as the women. On the other hand, these men possess something that \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} women simply do not: the capacity to evolve over the course of a story, the capacity to learn from the wiles of women, change their minds, mend their ways. In trying to account for this fundamental

\textsuperscript{36} The historical development of the Yusuf story from prophetic narrative to wiles-of-women story, as outlined above, seems to support this theory.
difference between the moral capacities of Mekr-i Zenan women and men, I will argue that all Mekr-i Zenan stories, no matter how subversive some may appear, proceed from the basic, and religiously informed, assumption that humankind equals mankind, that women are an unchanging, predetermined part of men’s worldly environment, and that their wiles are part of the worldly trials that men have to pass through in order to prove their worth in the eyes of the deity.

On the other hand, the stories contain elements that seem to subvert this message, most importantly among them, the wiles of men. Many stories show men behaving guilefully as well, so that the definition of guilefulness as an attribute intrinsic to women, and designed as a trial of men, seems to be negated by the evidence at hand. Upon analysis, it emerges that men only employ wiles when they are trying to overcome other men (or, rarely, women) who have a higher standing in the societal power hierarchy than themselves. Of course, the same can be said about guileful women outsmarting men, so that the overall picture suggests that wiles, rather than being an essential characteristic of women, are a universal “weapon of the weak”,37 employed by whoever finds his or her interests threatened by a more powerful opponent. On top of this, we encounter stories in which guileful men are presented in a “feminized” manner, while others show us women who conform to societal norms taking on masculine roles vis-à-vis non-conforming men. It seems, then, that not only guilefulness, but even gender itself, is not set in stone, but rather assigned and performed according to one’s position in the societal power hierarchy.

Are we, then, in Mekr-i Zenan, faced with a literary genre that cannot practice what it preaches, that proposes a certain worldview but undermines this very worldview through the

---

actions of its cast? The answer to this question, concluding the second half of my study, will be yes and no. Yes, but only if we view *Mekr-i Zenan* from a contemporary perspective, a perspective that presupposes the imperfection of any given societal hierarchy, and that regards individual efforts to subvert such hierarchy with sympathy and even endorsement, in the expectation that such subversion may eventually lead to more equitable societal rules and roles. But no, if we concede the imperfection of humans (in the case of *Mekr-i Zenan*, men) on the one hand, but maintain the perfection of the divinely decreed societal system on the other.

In the former case, while humans are imperfect, the system is imperfect as well, and carries the onus for bringing itself into greater conformity with human realities and ideals. In the latter case, only humans are imperfect, and the onus for bringing themselves into conformity with the divine ideal rests squarely on them. In such a case, men and women may well employ wiles, but the system is not at fault: it already ensures the maximum possible advantage for all as long as all follow its rules, and the existence of wiles, rather than pointing to flaws in the system, simply indicates that humans are flawed in their implementation of the system. This is the perspective assumed by *Mekr-i Zenan*, and leads me to assert that while *Mekr-i Zenan* may be open to deconstruction from a contemporary perspective, it nonetheless presents a worldview that is internally consistent.

A worldview that is broadly consistent may still leave room for ambiguity. As Mills has asserted, “in the contemporary oral performances […] I have been able to examine, it is not just women who tell stories in defense of women's tricksterish agency, or who appear to enjoy its subversive dimensions”. While it is hard to make such assertions for centuries-old texts about the audience reactions to which we know virtually nothing, it is equally hard to imagine that the

---

38 Ibid.
more complex, more ambiguous stories which cast doubt, in however limited and oblique a fashion, on existing norms of society and interaction, should have been any less enjoyable than they are now.

In light of the above, it should have become clear what this study is trying to provide, namely an in-depth thematic analysis of a limited set of Mekr-i Zenan stories, and an extrapolation of a broader worldview from the wiles-of-women theme as found in these stories. This analysis, in turn, is built on the foundations of a morphology and definition of genre that is designed to accommodate further stories in the future and thus allow for an expansion of the analysis itself. This narrow set of aims falls far short of presenting or analyzing all that the present sample of stories has to offer. Fascinating topics such as religion, sexuality, setting in time and place, literary strategies like realism and humor, marginal comments, and the role of some stories in larger collections which contain non-Mekr-i Zenan material as well, do not receive their own headings and stand-alone treatment, but rather enter the discussion only when relevant to the morphological and thematic analysis.

The study has no ambitions of offering a linguistic appraisal, either. There are notable linguistic differences from source to source, especially between the Paris and Madrid manuscripts on the one hand, and the Erzurum document on the other. The most obvious difference is between the Ottoman Turkish employed by the former sources and the Azeri Turkish employed by the latter. But it should also be noted that the former sources avail themselves of a “street Turkish” that incorporates colloquialisms, sayings, and slang, a linguistic stratum that co-existed, and strongly contrasted, with the literary language of the Ottoman court, which makes heavy use of Persian and Arabic vocabulary and grammar elements. Except for some trappings of modern grammar absent from these texts, this street Turkish is very easily
converted and comprehensible in terms of modern Turkish. The Erzurum document, in contrast, clearly shows the effect of 19th-century Turkish language reforms, which attempted to steer a middle course between the street and court languages mentioned above. I have had the chance to analyze these strata of Turkish extensively in my book *Tıflî Hikâyeleri*.39 In the present study, however, linguistic characteristics only enter the picture when they directly relate to morphology and theme. Also, I have elected to use modern Turkish orthography and punctuation in my transliterations in order not to detract from the easy accessibility of the original stories.40

Neither is this a comprehensive or comparative analysis spanning different languages and literary traditions. As is evident from the very brief historical overview above, Turkish *Mekr-i Zenan* was preceded by centuries-old traditions in Arabic and Persian and paralleled by similar traditions from India to Europe. In addition, while Turkish *Mekr-i Zenan* was being produced, the Ottomans created other, related genres such as the Tıflî Stories. And finally, narratives on the wiles of women continue to be penned to this day, for instance in the form of a 2011 Egyptian TV series entitled *Kayd al-Nisa*.41 Sadly, trying to go further than the present story sample would have strained my limitations of time and space. Still, as mentioned above, I hope that the modular framework presented here will be applicable to other stories and traditions concerned with the wiles of women.

Having begun this introduction with one temptation, let me end, in the spirit of guilefulness, with another: the temptation to analyze the relationship between the world of *Mekr-*

---

40 I have, however, diverged from modern Turkish orthography in often using commas before the conjunction “ve”. I found this measure necessary in order to break up the exceedingly long and otherwise hard-to-punctuate sentences in the original texts. Grammar and spelling inconsistencies in the transliterations reflect the original texts.
41 *Kayd al-Nisa*, dir. Ahmed Sakr, 2011-. I owe thanks to Shaun Marmon for pointing this series out to me.
and the real world in which these stories were crafted and enjoyed. We can glean from the marginal notes of the Paris manuscript that it was read aloud, as were many Ottoman literary texts, in private households as well as public gathering spots. But how widespread were these stories—what was the print run, for instance, of the Erzurum document? To what extent did literature on the wiles of women reflect actual social attitudes? To what extent did it, in turn, influence such attitudes? A hadith quoted by Malti-Douglas relates the reaction of the prophet Muhammad to a situation in which he perceived ‘A’isha, one of his wives, to be meddling in political affairs. “You”, the prophet declared, addressing ‘A’isha but including all women, “are the companions of Joseph”.

In a similar way, it is tempting to connect the emergence of Mekr-i Zenan literature in the Ottoman Empire to the “Sultanate of the Women”, starting during, and following on from, the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 926-74 AH / 1520-66 CE), a period in which a discourse of Ottoman decline started to be formulated by Ottoman historians, who tied this decline to the guileful way in which they perceived the imperial harem to be meddling in the affairs of state. Is it a coincidence that Cinanî (d. 1004 AH / 1595 CE) penned his Mekr-i Zenan stories in roughly the same period? Was there perhaps even some overlap between, say, historians, legal scholars, and Mekr-i Zenan storytellers? Were historians and storytellers of the age induced to talk about the wiles of women because of actual intrigues taking place in the palace? Or was the

42 “Elhac Mehemmed Ağa’nın hanesinde kıraat olmışdır” (P1, p. 7); “efendinin dükkanında kıraat olmışdır” (P5, p. 90).
43 Malti-Douglas, p. 51. The specific circumstances involve ‘A’isha trying to influence the decision of who should lead the prayer at the time of Muhammad’s sickness.
44 The palace politics and historiographical attitudes of this age are most eloquently laid out by Leslie Peirce in her seminal work, The Imperial Harem. A brief example: “Writing at the end of the sixteenth century, Mustafa Âli, one of the greatest and most influential of Ottoman historians, openly blamed the execution of [Süleyman’s son] Mustafa on ‘the plotting of women and the deceit of the dishonest son-in-law’” (p. 84).
central theme of *Mekr-i Zenan* already so embedded in sixteenth-century Ottoman minds that it offered a convenient scapegoat in politically troubled times?

Finally, as hinted at above—and as will become much clearer in the course of my analysis—the Paris manuscript, read in Istanbul as early as 1763, and the Erzurum document, printed in Tabriz at the beginning of the twentieth century, show significant differences in their treatment of the wiles-of-women theme. It is highly tempting to attribute these differences to those in time and location, and some tentative ideas regarding how the latter may have affected the former can be found in my analysis. However, the truth is that we simply do not know enough about *Mekr-i Zenan* to be able to answer any of the above questions in more than a speculative fashion. Most importantly, the present story sample is too widely scattered across centuries, with too many “missing links” and too much uncertainty regarding the provenance of individual stories—many of them adaptations of earlier works—to meaningfully talk about the development of the genre across cities and centuries. Therefore, I will avoid mapping these narratives too closely onto specific historical periods, events, and circumstances.

In sum, I have tried to let prudence reign and resist most of the temptations offered by the wiles of women in favor of a sharply focused study with clear goals and fluid progression. My hope is that future studies grander in scope and ambition will tear down most of my prudently erected walls and revel in these temptations.
1. Morphology and Genre

1.1. The “Mistake” Stories

The stories I will examine in the “mistake” category are as follows:

- “Bound by His Own Hair” (P4) Mistake
- “The Cuckolded Princes” (P5) Mistake
- “The Resurrected Wife” (P6) Mistake
- “The Three Wishes: Size” (P7) Mistake
- “The Three Wishes: Beauty” (P8) Mistake
- “The Ruler Reminisces” (E4) Mistake/Transgression
- “The Deceitful Wedding” (E5) Mistake/Complicity
- “The Fruit of Rape” (E7) Mistake/Complicity

1.1.1. Women (and Men)

As mentioned above, the “mistake” from which this story type gets its name is simply that, mostly on the part of its men, of loving or trusting its guileful women. “The Resurrected Wife” puts it quite succinctly: “One must not put his trust in womenfolk, for they are deceivers, and many heedless ones have lost their heads and lives on account of their trust in women”.

45 These women usually betray the men in question to achieve worldly ends. While in “The Three Wishes:

45 “Kişi avret kısmına itimad etmemek lazımdır, zira anlar mekkârelerdir. Nice gafiller, avrete itimad sebebinden baş can terkin urmuşlardır” (P6, p. 125).
Beauty” and “Bound by His Own Hair”, these ends include beauty, riches, and status; most of the stories make a point of equating their guileful women’s aims with sex, especially of the illicit, adulterous variety. With “The Cuckolded Princes”, nomen est omen: both princes, brothers no less, are being cheated on by their wives. “The Resurrected Wife”’s female protagonist exploits her chance at a second life by immediately deserting her husband for another partner. While the wife in “The Three Wishes: Size” may not be adulterous, she uses her husband’s divinely granted wishes to manipulate his penis size. And in “The Deceitful Wedding”, an old woman nets an inappropriately young husband under false pretenses.

At this point, I would like to introduce a distinction between the ends of a Mekr-i Zenan woman’s guilefulness, i.e., her reasons for performing a guileful action, and her means of guilefulness, i.e., the particular form that the guileful action takes. This distinction will help me

46 “My dear, my sultan, my husband; pray that I may become so beautiful that my like cannot be encountered anywhere in this world!” (P8, p. 127); “How could I deign to be with this person when I am so fair and exceptional? I am worthy of the padişah!” (P8, p. 128).
47 “We came to offer you possessions and jewelry; further, you shall become the padişah’s wife and attain prosperity” (P4, p. 84).
48 “His uncle’s daughter, by love for whom he was consumed, was lying in the embrace of a cook’s apprentice, buried in the padişah’s own bed” (P5, p. 95); “Before the eyes of Mülk-Cabbar, he inserted his erect member in her filthy vulva with some difficulty, and started having his way with her” (P5, p. 110).

The explicit sexual language in this story makes one wonder whether erotic titillation of the audience may have been among the author/compiler’s intentions. Irvin Cemil Schick mentions a connection between Mekr-i Zenan and erotic literature in his article, “Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Ottoman and Turkish Erotic Literature”, The Turkish Studies Association Journal, vol. 28, no. 1-2 (2004): pp. 85-86. However, Schick does not elaborate on this connection, and I must remark that the sexual content of the present Mekr-i Zenan sample is very tame compared to some other, more clearly pornographic, Ottoman stories, such as “Tifli Efendi Hikayesi” (Sayers, pp. 167-89).
49 As we shall see below, this story is a version of the frame story of the Arabian Nights.
50 “At once, that woman showed the youth her inclination” (P6, p. 122).
51 “Soul of my soul, since your wish will be granted, pray, my dear, that your penis may become large” (P7, p. 126).
52 “In the house, I suddenly saw a very beautiful girl. I fell in love with her, and told the old woman. She said, ‘this desire is easily fulfilled’, and, “I asked the old woman, ‘where is my bride?’ She said, ‘it is I.’” (E5, p. 35).
compare and contrast my three story types as I move along, because means and ends play out quite differently from one category to the next. With the mistake stories, more often than not, means and ends overlap: just as a woman is guileful with the ultimate goal of sex, the means she employs to reach this end are sexual in nature, as well. In many stories, women simply exploit their husbands’ infatuation with them. Thus, “Bound by His Own Hair” informs us that the male protagonist “loved that woman very much, and she never had to ask for anything twice around him”.\(^{53}\) There are also stories that use sex, or at least the promise of sex, as an open means of guilefulness. The female protagonist of “The Resurrected Wife” does so by refusing to consummate her marriage until her husband consents to certain marital rules,\(^{54}\) while “The Deceitful Wedding” takes place because the old woman poses as a young, desirable girl.\(^{55}\)

This outright equation of women’s guilefulness with their sexuality is given an added dimension in stories which portray women as compulsively sex-driven, and therefore compulsively guileful. In “The Resurrected Wife”, Jesus consoles the grieving husband with the assertion that women cannot be faithful.\(^{56}\) The same moral is stated at the end of “Bound by His Own Hair”.\(^{57}\) But the most striking expression of this principle is found in “The Cuckolded Princes”, where the wife of the first prince cheats on the dashing, young, and powerful monarch with a hideous, poor, and uncouth cook’s apprentice. She tells her lover the reason for this preference in no uncertain terms: “Whenever you get together with me, you fuck me twelve or

\(^{53}\) “Ol avreti gayet pek severdi, asla yanında bir sözi iki olmaz idi” (P4, p. 84).
\(^{54}\) “That graceful youth deemed these words becoming, and so they drew up their conditions, making a solemn vow. Afterwards, the girl gave herself to him.” (P6, p. 84).
\(^{55}\) “Once I went to Shiraz, arriving at an old woman’s house. In the house, I suddenly saw a very beautiful girl. I fell in love with her” (E5, p. 35).
\(^{56}\) “The exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, said, ‘come, young man, and renounce this passion, for there is no loyalty with them.’” (P6, p. 119).
\(^{57}\) “It has become clear that there is no loyalty on the part of womenfolk; indeed, it is unimaginable that there should be any loyalty with them” (P4, p. 89).
fifteen times. The padişah, on the other hand, would only fuck me five or six times, and then go to sleep, not getting up before dawn”.  

By the end of the story, the distraught prince has drawn the conclusion that “if a woman has a cunt, she will offer it, unless she happens not to have the cunt on her”.  

Of course, the above mainly concerns Mekr-i Zenan women in the sexual realm, i.e., sexually active women who are objects of sexual attraction to the male characters in the stories. But these stories also present women at other stages in their lives, or in other positions in society. Thus, we encounter virgins, older women, and at least one mother. And while all these characters may be guileful, each has different means and ends of guilefulness, and each receives a different treatment at the hands of her narrator.  

Let us turn to virgins first. In “The Resurrected Wife”, the female protagonist is an unmarried virgin before she becomes a wife. This story suggests that something about morality changes with the onset of sexual activity: as a virgin, the woman “held to the path of Mary, and was so chaste that she had not once let an unfamiliar person catch even a glimpse of her back”, while as a wife, she uses the pretext of having died and been reborn to find herself a new partner. We encounter another virgin in “The Fruit of Rape”: again, this girl is extremely cautious when it comes to dealings with men. When she is raped, the story clearly absolves her from any  

58 “Her kaçan sen benim ile bir yire gelsen on iki veya on beş kere beni sikersin, padişah ise beş altmış kere beni sikerdi, andan sonra uyrdu, bir de sabah kalkar idi” (P5, p. 97).  

59 “Amı olan avret vallahi virirmiş, meğer kim amı yanında olмиya” (P5, p. 105). This story seems to have set itself something of a sexual ego-repair mission for men. “Don’t worry about whether you are satisfying your wife”, the message appears to be, “because no matter what your sexual prowess may be, she would always want more”.  

60 This equation, or at least inseparable commingling, of female wiles and sexuality is also found in the material examined by Merguerian and Najmabadi, and Malti-Douglas. More creative and multi-faceted explorations of wiles, apart from the stories we will encounter in the next two sections, are only found in the oral narratives recorded by Mills.  

61 “Tarîk-i Meryem’i tutub ol mertebe barsa idi kim asla ve kat’a namahreme ve kimseye ardanın bile göstermiş değil idi” (P6, p. 116).
wrongdoing in the matter; indeed, she goes as far as killing her rapist when he falls asleep after
the act.\footnote{He collapsed on account of his intoxication and was not able to move. There was a knife at
his waist; I pulled it out and cut off his head” (E7, p. 42).}

No virgin, in any of these stories, acts with the motivation of wanting sex. When virgins
enter a “pre-married” stage, i.e., are courted for marriage,\footnote{I encountered the term “premarried” in Andrews and Kalpaklı (p. 216).} they may use their virginity as a
bargaining chip in order to dictate terms for the married relationship to follow. Thus, the marital
rules set out by the woman in “The Resurrected Wife” and mentioned above are as follows: “If I
die before you, you are not to marry another after me, and further, you must vow not to take any
other women in my stead”.\footnote{“eğer ben senden evvel vefat idersem benim üzerine gayrısın evlenmiyesin. Ve andan saniyen yerime, ahd eyle kim, ayruk avretleri getürümeyesin” (P6, p. 117). It is not entirely clear whether
the second marital rule reiterates the first one, refers to the husband divorcing the woman and
marrying another while she is still alive, or refers to him taking other wives in addition to her.
The subsequent exclusivity of the marriage, however, seems to suggest that all these options are
covered.} However, only married women use their wiles to engage in illicit
affairs. Thus, the awakening of guilefulness with sex as an end is clearly associated with the
onset of sexual activity. In other words, until a Mekr-i Zenan woman has had sex, she does not
desire sex.\footnote{Leslie Peirce makes the same argument in reverse order: Ottoman women, she states, were
expected to marry “upon physical maturation so that the awakening of sexual desire occurred
within marriage” (quoted by Andrews and Kalpaklı, p. 216).}

Older women are the most vilified of all female types in Mekr-i Zenan. While even
“Bound by His Own Hair”, a story extremely critical of women, only goes as far as calling the
protagonist’s wife “accursed [and] unfaithful”,\footnote{P4, p. 87.} older women are described in various stories
with such epithets as “she-demon”, “unbeliever”, and “enemy of God”.\footnote{“ifrite” (E5, p. 35); “imansız” (M2, p. 4); “Allah’un düşmeni” (E7, p. 42).} In “The Decetful
Wedding”, this kind of insult goes hand in hand with an unfavorable description of the woman’s
physical attributes: “I looked and saw that her body was like a dried-up tree, many of her teeth were in ruins, and the hair on her head had turned gray”\(^{68}\).

While older *Mekr-i Zenan* women are also portrayed as guileful, they lack the means of sexual attractiveness, and thus can only employ wiles if someone (a man or a woman) wants something other than sex from them. Thus, in “The Fruit of Rape”, an older woman helps the rapist enter the girl’s room by earning her trust and smuggling him in, and in “The Deceitful Wedding”, the older woman exploits the fact that she is the only go-between between the man and the girl he desires. But since the older woman does not have something “of herself” to offer (i.e., sex), it is difficult for her to make her wiles work purely for her own ends; this is why she is often seen as a go-between or part of a guileful duo\(^ {69}\). On her own, her wiles are likely to fail. A prime example of this is “The Deceitful Wedding”, in which the older woman achieves her aim by faking sexual attractiveness, and loses her achievement as soon as her deception is revealed.

We might take a moment to speculate on why older women seem to receive this “special treatment” at the hands of *Mekr-i Zenan*. One reason could be that older women, as ostensibly post-sexual members of society, have free access to both men and women\(^ {70}\). Societal authority over them has waned, and they can exploit this in a way that more secluded, younger women cannot. Another reason might be a perceived gap between the “ideal” and “real” dispositions of

---

68 “gördüm, bedeni kuri ağac, kimi dişleri harab, ve başının tüği ağaṙub” (E5, p. 35). This is but one example of uncharitable descriptions of older women’s physical attributes in Ottoman and related Turkic literatures. For a more extreme example, see “Tayyarzade Hikâyesi” (Sayers, p. 213, 215).
70 See Andrews and Kalpakli, p. 216.
such women: expected to have reached a kind of moral maturity and asexuality, it could have seemed doubly irritating when they acted in sexual and deceitful ways nonetheless.\textsuperscript{71}

If we put sexuality into relation with the means and ends of guilefulness across the stages of a \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} woman’s life, the following picture emerges: for a virgin, sexuality is a means of guilefulness, but not an end. For a sexualized woman, it is both means and end. Finally, for an old woman, sexuality can still be an end, but no longer a means. Completely outside of this scheme stands the \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} mother, who might act guilefully, but is fully desexualized.

Most wives in \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} are never mentioned in their aspect as mothers; children almost never come up, so that this dimension of a wife’s existence is ignored. The implication might be either that these sexualized wives have not yet reached the stage of motherhood, or that it was possible for the writers of \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} to see a woman as wife and a woman as mother as two separate entities, perhaps joined in the same person at the same time, but nonetheless operating according to entirely different rules of behavior.

The only mother in the \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} stories analyzed here is found in “The Fruit of Rape”. This woman starts out as a virgin, is raped, and directly skips forward to (single) motherhood, thereby conveniently bypassing the treacherous grounds of premarital courtship and sexualized married life. As a mother, she is asexual, and governed by a different set of emotions, those of motherly love. She does employ wiles: she kills her rapist and hides the fact that she has done so; she abandons her baby and tries to hide her identity as its mother; and she visits the baby but bribes its attendant not to reveal that fact to the authorities. However, these wiles are in

\textsuperscript{71} For a detailed analysis of this type in Persian literature, see “The Mediating Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance” by Farzaneh Milani. As Milani puts it, “Persian literature abounds in crafty men and women few of whom can match the creative deceptiveness of the nanny. (I am using ‘nanny’ as a generic term referring to maidservants, slave girls, attendants, nurses, and wet-nurses.) A guileless nanny is a rarity, even an oxymoron, in classical Persian romances” (p. 185).
the service of a goal that, in the world of this story, is morally defensible: she is trying to conceal the shame of her defilement. At the end of the story, she is fully exonerated, and reunited with her baby.

It is telling that “The Fruit of Rape” is the only Mekr-i Zenan story in the current sample that features a mother. The special, sanctified, asexual status of a mother does not offer good opportunities to paint women in the negative light that most Mekr-i Zenan stories strive for. In many mistake stories, sexuality is morality, or, in the case of women, amorality. Women are placed in a narrative wherein their amoral phase coincides with their sexual phase, and their at least theoretically and potentially moral phases coincide with phases of socially ascribed asexuality.\(^\text{72}\)

Let us now turn to the resourcefulness ascribed to women in these stories. If one assumes that resourcefulness is a concomitant of guilefulness, it is curious how short the mistake stories come up on intelligent women. As we have seen, the ends of these women’s guilefulness usually consist in obtaining illicit sex, and this aim they pursue in the simplest way possible, namely by grabbing the next available man and being unfaithful with him. The cuckolded princes’ wives sleep with a cook and a slave,\(^\text{73}\) the same story features another female character who sleeps with literally every man to show up while her husband is distracted,\(^\text{74}\) and the resurrected wife goes after the first man she sets eyes on following her revival.\(^\text{75}\) Since, with the exception of the serial

\(^{72}\) As Peirce puts it, “sexual maturity […] was defined for [Ottoman] women as the absence of sexual activity. At issue was not virginity, which implied latent or repressed sexuality, but rather postsexuality. There were two essential elements to postsexuality: the cessation of childbearing, either through postmenopausal incapacity or forced sexual abstinence, and motherhood. The raising of children, especially sons, and the management of a multigenerational household conferred status and knowledge on both parents, male and female” (p. 23).

\(^{73}\) P5, p. 95, 104.

\(^{74}\) P5, p. 113.

\(^{75}\) P6, p. 122.
adulteress in “The Cuckolded Princes”, they take virtually no precautions to ensure they are not caught in the act, their adultery is easily uncovered.

When it comes to sex, it seems, the women of the mistake stories take leave of their senses. The resurrected wife, while aware that divine powers have brought her back to life, sees nothing wrong with incurring the wrath of these powers through her unfaithfulness. In “The Three Wishes: Size”, the wife uses her husband’s wishes to (1) make his penis too big to fit, (2) make it too small to give any pleasure, and (3) make it too big once again. And “The Cuckolded Princes” ends on a note that spells out, for those who had missed it, the essential point of the story: “There is never, not ever, any loyalty on the part of womenfolk. Women will not judge by beauty or squalor, and neither will they distinguish rich from poor. As soon as they get a chance, they will converse and fuck with others”.

Even a mistake story that does not revolve around sexual gratification, namely “The Three Wishes: Beauty”, does not portray the wife as any smarter. Knowing full well that her husband has been granted three wishes, she deserts him after he has fulfilled her first wish to become the most beautiful woman alive, thus giving him reason to turn her into a hideous hag with his next one. It is also no surprise that men do not become complicit in women’s guileful schemes in these stories, since there are hardly any such schemes in evidence. As opposed to their counterparts in the complicity and transgression stories, the women of the mistake stories are often simply not portrayed as intelligent enough to carry out such a scheme.

In addition to not being very resourceful, the women of the mistake stories are not even particularly self-motivated in their wiles, except when it comes to sex. “Bound by His Own

---

76 “Asla ve kat’a avret taifesinde vefa yokdır. Ve avret taifesi güzel dimez ve çirkin dimez, ve andan saniyen zengin dimez ve züğürt dimez, heman eline firsat giricek gayriler ile konuşub ve sikişir” (P5, p. 115).
Hair”, for instance, shows the wife being persuaded to betray her husband by his enemies: “They said, ‘we came to offer you possessions and jewelry; further, you shall become the padişah’s wife and attain prosperity.’ The woman was willing at once”.77 Similarly, while “The Ruler Reminisces” features a woman who tricks the legendary monarch Al-Ma’mun, the end of the story reveals that she was working for another man, Al-Ma’mun’s uncle İbrahim.78

What the women of the mistake stories are not granted in intelligence and resourcefulness, they more than make up in cruelty and plain wickedness. The old woman in “The Fruit of Rape” knowingly sets up a young girl for rape. The wife of the first cuckolded prince wishes nothing less than death on her hapless husband, assuring her lover that “even if the padişah does not die and returns alive, I will poison him and marry you”.79 And the wife in “Bound by His Own Hair” does not bat an eyelid as her husband is torn limb from limb by his enemies: “They cut off the hands he used to battle and slaughter the infidels and the feet that carried him to holy war, and hacked them to pieces. [88] And that traitor to the bread he had fed her, that accursed woman, watched the spectacle, never once showing any mercy or compassion upon seeing her husband like this”.80

In keeping with the portrayed wickedness of these women, their offenses are often depicted as very serious, and can lead to quite gruesome results both for themselves and for those around them. In “The Cuckolded Princes”, there is a threat of murder, “The Fruit of Rape” leads to rape and murder, and “Bound by His Own Hair” ends in murder, dismemberment, and an

77 “Bunlar dahi eyitdiler, “anın içün geldik ki sana mal ü cevahir virelim, ve hem padişahın avreti olub devlete irersin” dediler. Heman ol avretin dahi gönlü olub” (P4, p. 84).
78 E4, p. 35.
79 “Eğer padişah ölmüyüb sağ gelürse ben ani zehirliyüb sen efendime varırım” (P5, p. 97).
80 “zahidin boynın kesdiler. Andan saniyen ol abid-i zahidin mübarek gözlerin oyub çikardılar. Andan ol küffar ile ceng îdüb kâfirleri kirdiği ellerin ve gazaya gitdüyü ayakların kesüb pâre pâre etdiler. Ve ol etmek haini melune avret, kocasının böyle olduğunu gördükde asla ve kat’a merhamet ve şefkat etmiyüüb seyrine bakardi.” (P4, pp. 87-88).
apocalyptic scene of mass killing: “that devout ascetic grabbed the pole in the middle of the house, said ‘by God!’, and tore it from its place. The pole collapsed onto the infidels who were in the house at that time, and all those infidels perished at once, and that accursed woman also perished along with the infidels and got what she deserved”.  

Finally, as the last example shows, it is rare for the women of the mistake stories to benefit from their wiles. The serial adulteress of “The Cuckolded Princes” does get away with her scheming, and the female protagonists of “The Fruit of Rape”, “The Deceitful Wedding”, and “Three Wishes: Size” get off relatively lightly (one merely has to confess to her wiles; the next ends up with nothing gained and nothing lost, and the latter finds herself with an impractically well-endowed husband). Otherwise, though, the women are punished quite severely. The wife in “Three Wishes: Beauty” is forced to spend the rest of her life as a hideous creature, the wife in “Bound by His Own Hair” is crushed by the debris of a building, the wives of the cuckolded princes are killed by their husbands, and the old woman in “The Fruit of Rape” is executed: “His excellency commanded, ‘throw her out into the wilderness and stone her.’ And so they stoned her”.

---

83 The seriousness of these women’s offenses, as well as the grave punishment they are subjected to, parallels Batatunian accounts of Kayd al-Nisa’. Malti-Douglas points out that while “normally, adab character types are much less consequential and their role-defining actions do not affect the larger mythic constructs of the civilization”, Ibn al-Batatuni’s women are different and “effectively recast” sacred history. In retaliation, they must suffer accordingly: a would-be adulteress, for instance, is hanged by her husband once her intentions are discovered (p. 56).
1.1.2. Moral and Message

The moral structure of the mistake stories is usually simple and uncompromising, backed up by a serious and black-and-white worldview. One rarely encounters moments of humor or ambiguity; the “truth” about women is often handed down in a fully straight-faced manner. Also, these stories cut to the chase: they are usually very short and devoid of plot elaboration, proceeding in the most direct way possible to their inevitable conclusions.

These conclusions are generally along the lines that women are creatures best avoided, associated with the material world in its most unspiritual and unreligious form, and that women should at least be kept under very strict surveillance. The mistake stories postulate that there is nothing men can change about their behavior to avoid disaster in gender relations; even (or especially) the most honest and loving man will experience the wiles of women.

This message can easily be inferred from the plots of the stories, and is heightened by depictions in which society and men are fundamentally good and the woman is the odd one out, the singularity that disrupts this perfect world. While men are viewed as nobler and better than they might appear in real life, women’s perceived shortcomings are depicted in an extreme way, widening the gap between a good, male society and women as a source of disturbance. “The Cuckolded Princes” offers examples of this, treating us to extended descriptions of the pomp and circumstance surrounding meetings between the two princes, thereby sharpening the contrast with their wives’ base sexual relationships with men of humble origin.

Still, most stories feel the need to reinforce their message by way of a passage uttered by a male (or female) protagonist or the narrator himself. This passage can take the form of a diatribe when the catastrophe of betrayal occurs, or be a specific section summing up the moral

---

84 See especially P5, pp. 89-93.
of the story at the end. We already encountered some of these passages above. And while I will undertake a more detailed evaluation of the nuances in these passages in the sections that follow, it may be helpful to take a look at some more of them here:

Now, my dear, observe just how ruthless and merciless women are. For seventy years, that woman had lived in one place with that devout ascetic, and she had received so much of his bread and blessings. Still, she disdained the salt and bread he had fed her, put her husband in such a state, never showed any mercy, and toiled until she had him hacked to pieces, whereupon she herself got what she deserved. It has become clear that there is no loyalty on the part of womenfolk; indeed, it is unimaginable that there should be any loyalty with them.85

And since a woman will not tell handsome from ugly once given a chance, you must give her no licence at all, and never avert your glance. And if, my dear, you proceed in this way, be heedful to the extreme; never fail to keep your eyes on your woman; and comprehend well; for they say, “do not trust in water, and do not believe in a woman”.86

85 “İndi benim canım, avretler gör ne mertebe merhametsiz ve şefkatsiz olur imiş. Yetmiş yıl ol abid ü zahid ile bir yirde ömür sürmüşler de ve bu kadar nan ü nimetin yemiş iken gene tuz etmeği basub kocasını ne hâle girifftar idüb, asla merhamet etmiyüb, ahir pâre pâre etdirince çalışub, kendü dahi etduğünü buldu. Malum oldü ki avret kısmında vefa yokdur, vefa olmak dahi mutasavver değildir” (P4, p. 89).
And, from that time onwards, he knew there is no sincerity with women and that they have no loyalty. Thus, he became enlightened, withdrew from the struggles of the world, and started leading the life of a hermit. [...] Those who have true knowledge of God will learn many a lesson from this tale, and not be inclined towards the world, either. For the world is precisely like that woman.  

Now look, my dear, women are deficient of mind. Behold what kind of penis trouble awaits those who heed a woman’s word. And once you comprehend this, show extreme caution, for one must not go along with a woman’s word.  

In nearly all cases, mistake stories back up their message by resorting to, or at least incorporating, religion. Many of them are set in religiously significant times: “Bound by His Own Hair” and “The Three Wishes: Size” are set in the time of the “Children of Israel”."The Resurrected Wife” and “The Three Wishes: Beauty” respectively take place during the lifetimes of the prophets Jesus and David. Lastly, “The Fruit of Rape” is set in the time of Ali, soon to become the fourth ruler of the Islamic Caliphate. Religious characters are commonplace: “Bound by His Own Hair” features a version of Samson; Jesus and Ali play significant roles in their respective stories; and the “Three Wishes” stories feature religious recluses near and dear to God. Further, three mistake stories reference Surat Yusuf by describing their protagonists as

87 “Ve andan sonra bildi, avretlerde hakikat olmayub vefa mamul olmadugun fehm-i idrak idub irsad oldi, dunyanin gavgasindan elcekdi, kuse-nisin oldi. [...] Bundan arif-i bi-illah olanlar nice iberet alurlar, dunyaya dahi meyl etmezler, zira dunya da heman ol avrete benzer” (P6, pp. 124-25).
89 “Beni Israil zamaninda” (P4, p. 82; P7, p. 125).
second comings of either Yusuf or Zulaykha (the name given by post-Qur’anic tradition to the wife of al-‘Aziz).  

Similarly, direct divine intervention in the form of miracles is an integral part of most mistake stories. In “Bound by His Own Hair”, God intervenes time and again, providing food and drink for the male protagonist out of a camel’s jawbone and restoring him to life and health after he has been torn to shreds. “The Resurrected Wife” features Jesus bringing a mourning husband’s wife back to life (and disposing of her again when she proves to be unfaithful). Both “Three Wishes” stories feature wishes granted to their protagonists by God. Finally, “The Fruit of Rape” includes a kind of clairvoyance on the part of Ali as well as the miraculous revelation of the old woman’s guilt: “[Ali] commanded, ‘place your forehead on the tomb of the Prophet, and state, ‘I have no knowledge of this matter.’” That old woman swore, and her face went black.”

---

90 P4, p. 84; P5, p. 98; P8, p. 128. 
91 “Whenever he was hungry, he would hold that camel’s jawbone to his mouth, and from that jawbone, all manner of heavenly nourishment would flow into his mouth, and he would be sated. And whenever he was thirsty, he would hold that camel’s jawbone to his mouth in the same way, and waters as if from the fountain of youth would flow from its teeth, and he would drink until his thirst was quenched” (P4, p. 83); “Finally, a voice came from the beyond, pronouncing, ‘o my slave, wish of me whatever you will, and I will provide a cure.’ At once, that ascetic prayed, ‘o Lord, I wish of you to give me the strength to destroy these infidels.’ That very instant, those organs of the ascetic that had been cut off became healthy and hale as before, returning to their places, and his strength returned, as well” (P4, p. 88). 
92 “The exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, said, ‘by permission of God, the exalted, arise!’ And at once, by permission of God, the exalted, he restored life to the woman lying in the grave” (P6, pp. 119-120); “The exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, raised his hands and prayed. At that point, by the command of God, the prayer of the exalted Jesus was answered, and that woman, having reaffirmed her faith, gave up her ghost” (P6, p. 124). 
93 “One day, my dear, this righteous person heard a voice in his dream, and it said to him, ‘my slave, I will answer three prayers of yours. Ask of me what you will!’” (P7, pp. 125-26); “One day, he heard a voice from the beyond proclaim, ‘o my righteous slave, I will answer and grant three prayers of yours in this world; ask of me what you will!’” (P8, p. 127). 
This religious emphasis colors both the tone and the moral of these stories. By incorporating religion, the stories also incorporate an appeal to a timeless law and order which applies both within the stories and in the real-life worlds of their audiences. The religious subject matter brings with it a connotation of respect, going some way towards explaining the sober tone in most of these stories. And the simple, black-and-white moral attitude of the stories is both justified and reinforced by the appearance and agency of religious figures who speak and act with total, unquestionable authority based on divinely revealed truth.

“The Cuckolded Princes” does not feature religion in this overt way. However, it makes its own claim for the timelessness of its moral through an inclusion of the supernatural. While the events involving the wives of the two princes take place in a relatively “realistic” context, once the wives have been eliminated, the princes embark on an adventure that confronts them with otherworldly beings. Hiding in a tree by the shore, they observe “a majestic giant emerged from the sea, a trunk on his head. He took the trunk down from his head and put it on the ground at the foot of that tree. Then, he opened the lid of the trunk, took out a young girl […] and kissed and embraced that girl for a while. After that, he put his head on that girl’s knees and fell fast asleep”.

This girl, the giant’s wife, turns out to be the serial adulteress we encountered above. Under threat of waking up her husband, she forces both of the princes to have intercourse with her, takes their rings, and puts the rings in a pouch which, as she claims, contains no less than

95 The “Three Wishes” stories are exceptions in that they combine an emphasis on religion with a humorous tone. In this, they follow the conventions of mystical allegories as found, for instance, in the Mathnawi of Jalal ad-Din Rumi.
96 “Anı gördiler, deryadan bir mehibdiv çıkub, başına bir sanduk, ol ağacın dibinde sanduğu başından indirüb yire kodı, ve andan ol sanduğun kapağın açub, içinden bir mahbub fitne-i zaman bir kız çıkarub, biraz ol kızı öpüb ve kucub, andan ol kızın dizine baş koyub alâ yolından uyudi” (P5, pp. 111-12).
ninety-nine rings now. Once finished, she lets the princes know that “one can never contend with women in this world. There is no limit to the wiles of women, and no mind can fathom them”. In this way, the story abstracts its message from the world of mundane reality, turning it into a supernaturally verified absolute truth, much akin to the truths presented by the stories grounded in religion.

1.1.3. Hybrid Stories

While the characteristics set out above broadly apply to most mistake stories, there are aspects of certain stories that defy my rough and easy categorization. These exceptions show that there is much to be discovered by analyzing each of these stories on its own merits, and much that is lost in a general overview like the one attempted in this chapter. One such exception, significant in a number of ways, is “The Fruit of Rape”, both for the fact that the person suffering from the wiles of women here is not a man, but another woman, and for complicating the simple dyad of male and female by including other categories of identity, most importantly that of ensar. I will deal more closely with this story below, when discussing the limitations of Mekr-i Zenan as a genre.

For now, let us focus on another exceptional mistake story, namely “The Deceitful Wedding”. The feature that renders this story most exceptional at the same time points the way towards my next story type, that of complicity stories. It is true that in this story, just like every other mistake story, the man gets into trouble by making the simple mistake of trusting a woman. But the way he extricates himself from this mistake is not so simple. Unlike any other male protagonist in the mistake stories, this one uses wiles to outsmart a guileful woman. Thus, while

97 “Dünyada her gez avretler ile başa çıkılmaz ve avretlerin mekrlerine karar olmaz ve akl iриşmez” (P5, p. 113).
98 Turkish spelling of the Arabic ansar, denizens of Medina who supported the prophet Muhammad following his migration from Mecca to Medina.
not exactly becoming complicit in the woman’s scheme, he proves himself to be at least as
guileful as her.

Earlier, we saw how the old woman in “The Deceitful Wedding” gets the male protagonist
to marry her by posing as a young, attractive girl. The man uses an ingenious trick to get out of
this marriage. First, he convinces the woman that it was she he was really after all along: “thank
God, my desire has been fulfilled! I wanted you, but was embarrassed, and had mentioned that
girl as a pretext!”. Then he, a new arrival in the city, tells her why he came in the first place: “I
was a washer of the dead in my hometown; I heard that the dead-washer of this city had died,
and came here to fill the position. Since I was on my own, I married you so that you would help
me”. He is lying, but the woman believes him and not only releases him from the marriage,
but even offers him money to get rid of him.

In later sections, I will discuss exactly what may be concluded about the worldview of
Mekr-i Zenan if the genre contains men that can beat women at their own guileful game. For
now, I will simply let “The Deceitful Wedding” open the gates to the complicity stories, a story
type which harbors many a male protagonist going beyond the straightforward, naïvely virtuous
men found in most mistake stories.

99 “El-hamd-illah, menim matlabım amele geldi! Men seni istirdim ve hecalet çekürdim, o kızı
bahane eylemişdım” (E5, p. 35).
100 “Men öz şehrinde mürde-şûr idim, [36] ve işitdim ki şehrin mürde-şûrû ölüb, geldim bu
şehirde mürde-şûrlık eyliyim. Çün yalkuz idim, seni kumek eylemekdan ötiri aldım ki mene
kumeklik idesin” (E5, pp. 35-36).
101 “Leave me be, and I will […] give you this much money on top!” (E5, p. 36).
1.2. The “Complicity” Stories

The following stories fall under the category of “complicity” for the sake of this analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Duped Officer”</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Reluctant Conjurer”</td>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Adulteress and the Wife”</td>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Coffee, Melons, and Marble”</td>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Complicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Plucked Beard”</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Complicity/Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Deceitful Wedding”</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Complicity/Mistake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Fruit of Rape”</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>Complicity/Mistake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.1. Women (and Men)

The complicity stories can be summed up as stories in which the man becomes complicit with the woman’s wiles and ends up behaving in a guileful manner himself. The plot often takes its cues from the guileful woman’s plans and instructions, and these are usually both convoluted and very intelligent. Men, on the other hand, are often deliberately ridiculed in these stories as dull pawns, literally guileless, tricked into following a woman’s suggestions without realizing how these will get them into trouble. This trouble, in turn, then leads to the men having to extricate themselves by resorting to wiles themselves.

The major players of most complicity stories are the “instructing woman” and the man who follows her instructions. This conveying of instructions is a generic, almost ritualistic
opening that sets up most of these stories. At this point, it is worth taking a few paragraphs for an extended summary of a complicity story, showing us the process of instruction and the unexpected results it may yield. In “The Duped Officer”, a wealthy woman bribes and beguiles a high-ranking police officer into a seemingly harmless scheme:

I am but a feeble woman. One day, I chanced upon the daughter of the judge \textit{efendi} in a bathhouse and became addicted to her love [...]. That girl’s inclination and love for me also exceeding bounds, we made many a vow and oath among ourselves. Alas, I have not seen this coquette for quite a while now, and it is not possible to visit and enter the judge’s house without a pretext. [...] If only I could get into her home by some means, see that coy one, and converse with her for a while.\textsuperscript{102}

Securing the officer’s agreement, the woman goes on to explain her plan: She will show up in the neighborhood of the judge (\textit{kadi}) one night, dressed in expensive clothes and covered in jewels. When the officer and his colleague chance upon her during their rounds, and ask her where she is headed, she will tell them that she is from the fortified part of the city, but has missed the closing of the gates and has no place to spend the night. She will ask them to suggest

\textsuperscript{102} “Ben bir zaife avretim. İttifak bir gün bir hamamda bir gün kadi efendinin kızını görüb annin aşkına mubtelä oldum […]. Ol kızın dahi bana meyl-i muhabbeti hadden efzûn olub, bu kızı sevüb, mabeynimizde ahd ü yeminler kildik. Amma hayli zamandır ol næzenini görmedim, ve şöyle sebebsiz kadının evine girmek ve varmak mümkün değil. [….] Bir takrîb ile evine girüb ol næzenini görüb bir mikdar sohbet kilam” (P1, pp. 9-10).
a place where a wealthy, unprotected woman like her may spend the night safely. And, quite naturally, the officer will suggest the judge’s house, and arrange for the woman to be taken in.\footnote{103}{P1, pp. 11-12.}

Following the woman’s instructions \textit{verbatim}, the officer secures her entry into the judge’s house, becoming complicit in what he assumes is nothing more than a harmless lovers’ tryst.\footnote{104}{Scholars such as Andrews and Kalpaklı and Dror Ze’evi have pointed out that the known Ottoman legal tradition contains no mention of female homosexuality as a crime (Andrews and Kalpaklı, p. 172; Dror Ze’evi, \textit{Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900} [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006], p. 65).} Thus, it is much to his dismay when the following day brings a visit by the judge, furiously proclaiming that his treasure chest has been emptied the night before. Unaware of the officer’s involvement in the scheme, the judge declares that “verily, you must find her, or I will go and report you to the sultan!”\footnote{105}{“Elbetde bulunmak gerekdir, yohsa varub sizden sultana şikâyet iderim!” (P1, p. 16).} This, of course, puts the officer in an impossible situation: if he does arrest the woman, she will reveal his complicity; if he does not, he will lose his job, and possibly more, depending on the mood of the sultan.

The officer’s plight is compounded by the fact that even if he wanted to find the woman, he has no idea where she might be, or even what she looks like, since she has conducted all of her business with him from behind the veil. Aimlessly, he wanders the streets for days, until one day, a woman calls out to him from a window. Entering her house, he does not even realize this is the same woman until she identifies herself. “I pitied you”, she proclaims, “and further, my heart fell for you, and I felt an inclination and affection towards you. This matter is straightforward; I called you here so that we may resolve this affair and you may be free”.\footnote{106}{“Sana acıdım ve bir de sana gönlüm düşüb meyl ü muhabbet eyledim. Bu iş emr-i sehildir, bu iş tedbiri ve senin halâs olman için çağırdım” (P1, p. 21).}

And thus begins the second phase of the officer’s instruction. This time, the guidelines are as follows: the officer is to confront the judge in front of witnesses and state the following:
The other night, I left a woman for safekeeping at the judge’s house. She was wearing ornaments worth more than a thousand gold coins. That woman never left the judge’s house. No clue or trace of her was found, she disappeared, and no one has heard any news of her since. Now, the judge efendi comes and makes claims, saying that goods entrusted to him and worth six thousand gold coins are gone. This is a staggering affair. Perhaps that woman became the victim of some perfidy in his house. If the judge’s house were to be searched, it is possible that a trace of the woman would be found.107

Once again, the officer follows the woman’s instructions verbatim, and, once he “discovers” the bloodied clothes the woman has hidden in the house, takes great pleasure in humiliating the judge in front of all present.108 The judge hushes the whole affair up, the woman disappears, now completely free from any fear of prosecution, and the officer ends up with nothing lost and nothing gained except a good lesson in the wiles of women.

It is telling that with the mistake stories, a few broad strokes are enough to outline both plot and character motivation, while even a single complicity story requires an extensive (though still far from exhaustive) summary in order to convey the richness of its plot and the cleverness of its female protagonist. “The Duped Officer” is typical for complicity stories. In “The Reluctant Conjurer”, it is an old woman, acting as a go-between for a wife and her lover, who

108 “In this manner, he ranted on for a while, sounding off as much as he liked” (P1, p. 31).
gives the instructions, resulting in the cuckolded husband carrying the trunk containing his wife’s lover in and out of his house with his own hands. In “The Adulteress and the Wife”, a wife gives her clueless husband minute instructions on how to arrange a tryst with a woman he desires, expecting him to be caught in the act and imprisoned along with his lover. In “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, a woman makes her marriage vows dependent on her husband swearing to follow a set of instructions she knows he will ignore one day, the mechanism to catch him in the act in place from day one. And in “The Plucked Beard”, a woman gets her male companion out of a life-and-death situation through a plot so devious that he fears her to his dying day.

While none of these two-line summaries can convey the sheer delight of watching the plans concocted by these women unfold, they make a few points eminently clear. The female protagonists of the complicity stories show none of the simple-mindedness in evidence with their counterparts in the mistake stories. They are extremely intelligent, resourceful, and show great agency and self-motivation in their wiles; they do not wait for someone or something to suggest a guileful act but often actively create the circumstances to achieve their own personal ends.

The means and ends of guilefulness associated with women also show a much wider range in the complicity stories than in the mistake stories, where, as we have seen, both the means and ends of guilefulness are often sexual in nature. The female protagonist of “The Duped Officer” desires money. The wives in “The Adulteress and the Wife” and “Coffee, Melons, and Marble” seem to want nothing so much as to teach their husbands a lesson. And for the wife in “The Plucked Beard”, wiles are just a way to protect the man she loves.

The means of guilefulness here, too, go far beyond the promise of sex. More often than not, the women here achieve their ends by subverting a societal rule that is in place to restrict them, or a social situation born out of such restriction, using this very restriction to their
advantage. The restriction may be as simple as the veil. Both in “The Duped Officer” and in “The Adulteress and the Wife”, women use the veil to hide their identity, the second woman using it to change places with the adulteress when she visits her husband in prison, helping the former escape and causing charges of adultery against the latter to be dropped.109

Even more fascinating are instances in which women use “women’s lore” unknown and unavailable to men in order to advance their schemes. “The Reluctant Conjurer” shows the old woman buying time for the wife and her lover by telling the husband his wife is ill and sending him off to assemble the ingredients for a putative “hags’ remedy”: “My son, in order to cure this, you must bring me water from a graveyard’s well, and also some soil from an old Jewish grave”.110 In “The Adulteress and the Wife”, the husband’s would-be lover puzzles him with a set of signs and gestures he can make neither head nor tail of; it is his wife who decodes them for him: “when that woman took the mirror from her headdress and showed you first its front and then its back, she said to you, ‘it’s daytime now, so you should come back at night.’ And when that woman did not linger and went back inside that instant, she told you that you, too, should

109 “The jeweler’s wife said to that wanton woman, ‘don’t just stand there; quickly tie us up with this rope, put on all my clothes, tie that rope around your waist, and call the jailkeeper so he may pull you out. Don’t say a single word to him, and go home without looking back’” (P3, p. 78); “‘O sultan of ours, may God, the exalted, be pleased and content with you; you meted out justice to these people in our case.’ Speaking thus, and praying for the judge, the woman and her husband returned home” (P3, p. 82).
110 “Benim oğlım, buna bir gürdan kuyudan su getürüb, dahi bir eski Yahudi makberesinden tobrak getürmek gerekdir” (P2, pp. 41-42).
111 The narrator takes a moment to point out that this remedy is “aslı yokdan”, i.e., groundless and arbitrary (P2, p. 42). A similarly disparaging attitude towards traditional women’s medicine is spotted by Malti-Douglas in a text as recent as Al-Ayyam, the biography of Egyptian author and intellectual Taha Husayn (1889-1973). The young protagonist has fallen ill, but “if his mother does concern herself with him, she belittles the physician or ignores him. She relies on that criminal knowledge, the knowledge of women and their likes” (Woman’s Body, pp. 128-29).
not linger there, but leave at once”.112 Finally, in “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, the wife exposes a judge to public ridicule by confronting him with a riddle: “o lord, is it meat, is it sugar, or is it bone?”113 The judge cannot find the answer, which is supplied by his daughter when he returns home. And the following day, when he proudly announces his solution to the woman in a session of the court, she retorts by publicly announcing that the judge’s daughter is promiscuous enough to know the difference between a man’s capacity for erection in old age, middle age, and youth!114

In terms of stages in women’s lives, the complicity stories add little to the picture presented by the mistake stories. “The Reluctant Conjurer” gives us a typical adulterous wife and meddlesome old woman, and “Coffee, Melons, and Marble” again features a “pre-married” woman making the consummation of marriage contingent upon certain preconditions, albeit somewhat frivolous: “My first condition is that you never drink coffee. My second condition is that you not eat watermelons. And my third condition is that you never sit down on marble”.115

While compliant for a long time, one day the husband breaks all his promises at once, unable to fathom how he could be found out. Little does he know he has consumed the three ingredients of a recipe for premature ejaculation!

112 “Ol avret başından ayineyi çıkarub, evvel yüzün gösterübü sonra ardın gösterdiği, ol sana demiş ki, ‘şimdi gündüzdir, amma gice gelesin’ demiş. Ol avret hiç eğlenmiyüb heman-saat içерü gitüğü, ‘sen de bu arada hiç eğlenmiyüb gidesin’ demiş” (P3, p. 74). Yet another, lengthier example: “‘That woman gave you a sign, saying, ‘our house is by the grain bazaar.’’ The jeweler asked, ‘how did you know?’ The woman replied, ‘the wheat, beans, lentils, chick peas, horse shit, cow shit, and camel shit that you found tied inside that cloth—all of that only comes together at the grain bazaar, and nowhere else’” (P3, pp. 71-72).
113 “Ey efendi, et midir, şeker midir, kemik midir?” (P9, p. 133).
114 P9, pp. 134-35.
115 “Evvel şartım oldır ki hiç kahve içmiyeb. İkinci şartım oldır ki karpuz yemiyesin. Üçinci şartım, mermer taş üzerine oturmyebin” (P9, p. 130).
While these female characters fit the patterns encountered in the mistake stories, in “The Duped Officer”, “The Adulteress and the Wife”, and “The Plucked Beard”, the complicity stories give us three female figures who, while at a sexually active stage in their lives, do not use sex as a means or an end. The first reaches her aims through money and lies; the wife in the second story schemes with the very end of dissuading her husband from adultery; and while the third woman does break her promise to be true to her deceased husband, she only does so because she has been tempted by a man: “he said as many of these words as it took to make that woman inclined towards himself”. Women are still guileful in these stories, but this guilefulness is significantly less often connected to sexuality than in the mistake stories.

Another contrast to the mistake stories is that complicity stories view women as essentially harmless: they may be clever and trick men, but their wiles and schemes, in the end, never amount to anything seriously problematic or upsetting. Their aims and achievements are ultimately minor and frivolous, and no one comes to any serious harm as a result of their actions (or at least, no one who is patently innocent). In “The Duped Officer”, as we have seen, the woman actually goes out of her way to save the officer she got into trouble. “The Reluctant Conjurer” ends with the husband discovering his wife’s adultery and simply divorcing her. “The Adulteress and the Wife” ends with the wife saving both her husband and his lover from prosecution, content with having taught them a lesson. The wife in “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, even though within her rights to divorce her husband based on their “prenuptial agreement”, is persuaded to take him back. And in “The Plucked Beard”, the male protagonist

---

116 “O kadar bu sözlerden didi, ta o avreti özine mail eyledi” (E3, p. 33).
117 “[H] cut and run without delay, breathlessly arrived at his own house, opened the door and went inside, divorced his wife that instant, and went about his own business” (P2, p. 62).
118 “[T]ook pity upon the young man and entreated the woman until she said, ‘alright, but may he never do this again.’ And thus, they reconciled the woman and the youth” (P9, p. 132).
is saved from severe punishment by his female counterpart, and gets to live out the rest of his
days with her in a healthy (albeit somewhat wary) state.119

In complicity stories, more often than not, women get to flaunt and subvert societal rules
for their own ends without being punished: unlike their counterparts in the mistake stories, most
of them “get away with it”. The adulterous wife of “The Reluctant Conjurer” gets off with a
divorce, the husband’s lover in “The Adulteress and the Wife” gets off with a scare, and nothing
happens to any of the other female protagonists who employ wiles to reach their ends. In fact, by
the time the stories conclude, they often convey a sense of deep satisfaction at a cunning plot
well-planned and well-executed. The complicity of men is often crucial here: since men have
become embroiled in these women’s schemes, the women need to get away for the men to be
able to get away, as well. As much as they might like to, neither the male protagonist of “The
Duped Officer” nor that of “The Plucked Beard” can give his female counterpart’s wiles away
and avoid going down with the ship.

The men of the complicity stories may often start out with the same kind of naïveté found
in men of the mistake stories. However, in contrast to the generally virtuous and unimpeachable
character of the latter group, the men here are painted as easily persuaded to be part of a
duplicitous scheme, not above concocting schemes of their own, and often relishing their own
guileful ways once they get into the swing of things. A fine example is the one given above,
namely the duped officer who ends up haranguing the innocent judge with gusto. Another can be
found at the end of “The Reluctant Conjurer”, where the cuckolded husband carrying his wife’s
lover in a trunk must perform a bizarre and elaborate spectacle of deception to escape an irate

119 E3, p. 33.
police officer.\textsuperscript{120} Thus, the failings of the men in these stories are on a level quite different from their counterparts in the mistake stories, whose downfall, even, is based on ostensibly positive attributes such as love and trust (even if misapplied to a woman).

1.2.2. Moral and Message

Continuing the series of features that set complicity and mistake apart, complicity stories make very little mention of religion, and do not use religious figures as characters or acts of God as plot devices. God and prayer are mentioned occasionally, but often in passing, and sometimes even to comic effect. In “The Reluctant Conjurer”, the adulterer in the trunk is gripped by mortal fear when he hears the police officer threaten to break open the trunk with an axe:

The fellow inside the trunk said to himself, “o mercy, what a confounding state I find myself in! If this fellow strikes the trunk with the ax and breaks it apart right now, it will collapse onto me, I will be revealed stark naked, and my throat will be forfeit. And if the captain of the guard were to ask me, ‘wretch, what are you doing in this trunk?’, what could I possibly answer?” And, saying this, he was filled with repentance and began praying for forgiveness, his heart starting to beat, boom, boom, like a drum.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{120} P2, pp. 50-63.

\textsuperscript{121} “Herif eydür, ‘hay meded, ne acerb hâla uğradım! Eğer şimdi bu herif balta ile bu sanduq urub pârelerse sanduk başına uşanur ve yalançak meydane çikub boğazı ele virürim! Ve asesbaşı sorarsa, ‘be herif, bu sanduk içinde ne ararsın?’ diyicek ne cevab virürem?’ diyüb, tövbe ve istişfar idüb tazarru’a başladı ve yüreği davulcu bargiri gibi tob tob atağa başladı” (P2, pp. 50-51).
Religious authorities can also appear as hypocrites in such stories. The judge in “The Duped Officer”, a religious figure administering sharia law, bribes the police in order to avoid possible implication in a murder case.\textsuperscript{122} And the imam and religious congregation in “The Adulteress and the Wife” are depicted as sanctimonious buffoons, “filled with righteous zeal”,\textsuperscript{123} whose haughtiness results in them getting punished instead of the actual offenders in the story.\textsuperscript{124}

As a matter of fact, in contrast to the stark and sober tone of most mistake stories, complicity stories are humorous at their core. These stories parody society: while in the mistake stories, men seemed exaggeratedly virtuous and women exaggeratedly wicked, in complicity stories, everyone comes off similarly badly, including not only men as men but also as, say, representatives of the justice system, so that the parody comes to encompass the entire society. It seems that every character in these stories is expected to behave in a way that is the opposite of the ideal. Thus, judges and police officers are corrupt and incompetent, not necessarily because they are perceived to be that way in the real world, but because this is a topsy-turvy fictional world upon the rules of which storyteller and audience are in a priori agreement.\textsuperscript{125}

The humorous intent of the complicity stories is confirmed by a number of factors. While mistake stories often take pains to locate their events in a historically (and religiously) specified

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{122} “The wretched judge started begging and imploring the superintendent and the captain in the most acute manner, apologized repeatedly, granted them many riches, and said, ‘do me this favor, and do not expose this secret to anyone’” (P1, p. 32).
\item \textsuperscript{123} “İmamın ve cemaatin buyıkların balta kesmes” (P3, p. 79).
\item \textsuperscript{124} “The judge became enraged at the congregation and had the imam efendi, then the müezzin, and then the headman flogged [?]. When the rest of the congregation saw this turn of events, they quickly dispersed even as those three were being flogged [?]; when it was the next person’s turn, none could be found” (P3, p. 82).
\item \textsuperscript{125} This humorous tone overlaps with Mills’s observations about a specific subset of Persian, orally narrated Makr-e Zan stories: “The afsanah-type tales designated makr-i zan by their tellers do seem to have one characteristic in common, and that is [...] humor. This humor specifically involves an ironic reflection on the imperfect nature of gendered social order. This may take the form of questioning either male intentions where patriarchy is concerned, or male intellectual capacity to function as authorities, or both” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 264).
\end{enumerate}
time, most complicity stories leave time indistinct. While mistake stories often feature known mythical or historical characters such as prophets and princes, most complicity stories feature nameless everymen and everywomen with mundane occupations like jeweler and weaver. And in contrast to the mythical/religious times and settings of mistake stories, most complicity stories take place in mundane settings within the cultural orbit of the stories’ readership. Thus, “The Duped Officer” takes place in Cairo, “The Reluctant Conjurer” in Nishapur, and “The Adulteress and the Wife” in Basra. Overall, the stories create a feeling of timeless, ahistorical relevance of the sort summoned by jokes, a feeling that this is a parody of ordinary people just like us, in ordinary times and places just like ours.

Of course, if these stories are really intended as parodies of society, and everyone is supposed to be on their worst behavior, this implies the stories granting that women in real life are not quite as treacherous and guileful as their fictional counterparts, just as judges and policemen in real life are not quite as corrupt. If society as a whole is not really this bad, then surely women cannot be this bad, either. Thus, the humorous aspect of the complicity stories opens the door to a much more positive view of women than seemed possible with the mistake stories.

Further reinforcing such an interpretation is the fact that most complicity stories do not contain a diatribe or passage of the sort we commonly encounter in mistake stories, condemning women in explicit terms. The unstated message seems to be that while women are guileful, men can be, as well (not to mention simple-minded); and that society might be better off by finding ways to accommodate the wiles of women, since women will always manage to wiggle out of

---

126 In “The Adulteress and the Wife” and “The Reluctant Conjurer”, respectively.
127 P1, p. 5; P2, p. 33; P3, p. 63. These mundane settings stand in sharp contrast to those mentioned in the mistake story “The Cuckolded Princes”, where we hear of semi-mythical settings such as Samarkand, India, and “the islands of China and its South” (P5, pp. 90-91).
societal constraints one way or another. Women are not evil here, and the overarching moral is that while guilefulness is in women’s nature, men must still find ways of living with them. The one complicity story with an explicitly stated moral, “The Reluctant Conjurer”, takes just such a view:

The purpose in telling stories, my dear, is to impart a moral. So do not tie down your wife too tightly, and neither leave her too free. For she has sprouted from a crooked root, and if you try to straighten it out too much, it will break. May God, the exalted and sublime, deal with the wicked among them, for there is no one else who can; and may God, the exalted, reform the wicked ones, for their tales are widely retold.

However, while complicity stories may be viewed as more positive in their attitudes towards women than mistake stories, there is another way to interpret their stance. By portraying guileful women as reaching their desired ends, and implicitly applauding these women’s shrewdness, complicity stories reinforce a societal status quo that perceives women as inherently guileful: if their wiles are harmless, amusingly clever, and ultimately successful, then women should be guileful. In effect, the female protagonists of these stories are rewarded for playing into a prejudice that male society harbors about them. Subversion of the system here becomes

\[\text{\textsuperscript{128}}\text{Overall, the complicity stories come close to Mills’s description of “tales of subversion [that] celebrate women who can play with the patriarchal system, even turn it inside out, without being destroyed” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 269).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{129}}\text{“Benim canım, kíssadan murad olan hissedir. Avretin üzerine gayet pek mukayyed olma ve pek de boş koma. Zira eğri kökden hasil olmuşdur, pek doğruldayımdirsén kırılur. Heman Hakk-i sübhane ve teala yaramazlarının haklarından gele, ve yohsa yaramaz ile başa çıkılmaz. Ve yaramazları da Hakk-i teala i̇slah eyleye, kıssaları meşhurdir” (P2, p. 63).}\]
both internalization and justification of the system since, after all, what a woman does by subverting the system is exactly what the system expects her to do in the first place.

1.2.3. Hybrid Stories

Turning to outliers within the field of complicity, we encounter two interesting motifs. The first one has the woman using her wiles not for self-serving and socially disruptive ends, but rather for an end that, albeit self-serving, also serves the preservation and enforcement of societal rules. In “The Adulteress and the Wife”, the wife uses all her wiles to make her husband forswear the idea of adultery. As we have seen above, she even goes as far in this endeavor as enabling her husband to commit adultery, expecting him to be caught in the act and learn his lesson. The happy ending of the story confirms her both in her means and ends: “The woman and her husband returned home. Bending down, the jeweler kissed his wife’s hand that very instant, and the two of them passed their lives together in pleasure and affection for many a year to come”.130

The second motif shows the wiles of women not originating in the conniving of some third party or the woman’s own mind, but rather being provoked by some action on the part of the male protagonist. The judge whom we saw humiliated by the woman’s riddle in “Coffee, Melons, and Marble” brings it upon himself by calling her guileful: “The woman resented the judge for talking to her like that in front of all the people”,131 and her desire for revenge is awakened. And it stands to reason that the wife in “The Adulteress and the Wife” would not have

130 “Avret ile kocası dönüb eve geldiler. Kuyumcu heman eğilüb avretinin elin öpdi. Nice yıllar bunlar birbirileyle ömürler sürüb zevk-i safalar eylediler” (P3, p. 82).
131 “Efendinin bu kadar halkın içinde buna böyle söylediği avretin gönline yer eyledi” (P9, pp. 132-33).
made her husband walk into a honey trap if he had not revealed his interest in another woman. Still, in both “Coffee, Melons, and Marble” and “The Adulteress and the Wife”, initial blame lies with a woman. In the former story, the judge has good reason to call the woman guileful: she has tricked her husband into a humiliating situation, dragging him into court to get a divorce on quite frivolous, if legally solid, grounds. And in the latter story, while the wife is hardly to blame for her husband’s wandering eye, a woman (the adulteress) is at fault nonetheless: she is the one who leads the husband on.

The complicity story that breaks the rule of ascribing initial blame to a woman is “The Plucked Beard”. In this story, the male protagonist has only himself to blame for the wiles he unleashes. The story begins with him standing guard over a hanged criminal. Carelessly, he lets the criminal’s companions make off with the corpse. Fearing punishment, he flees and happens upon a beautiful woman who is mourning her recently deceased husband. He seduces her. Later, when he reveals his plight to her, the woman comes up with a plan: They will dig up the woman’s husband and hang him instead of the criminal. The only problem is that while the husband has a beard, the criminal had none, a problem solved when the woman blithely proceeds to pluck out her husband’s beard, hair by hair. The male protagonist is saved, but he lives the rest of his life in fear of receiving the same treatment once dead.

Both motifs, namely the wiles of women being put to ends endorsed by society, and the wiles of women coming into play as the result of a transgression on part of the man, mark the transition to my third story type, that of transgression stories. As we will see, both motifs feature quite prominently in this, the final category.

---

132 The passage that concludes his ill-considered confession to his wife reads, “And the unfortunate jeweler wept, ‘I don’t know what is to become of me at this rate’” (P3, p. 70).
1.3. The “Transgression” Stories

In discussing the category of “transgression”, I will look at the following stories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Fake Adultery”</td>
<td>(E1)</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Book Within the Book”</td>
<td>(E2)</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Lazy Husband”</td>
<td>(E6)</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Buried Fish”</td>
<td>(M1)</td>
<td>Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Plucked Beard”</td>
<td>(E3)</td>
<td>Transgression/Complicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Ruler Reminisces”</td>
<td>(E4)</td>
<td>Transgression/Mistake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3.1. Women (and Men)

Our third subset, the transgression stories, resembles the complicity stories in many ways. Like complicity stories, transgression stories are humorous and devoid of earnest religious undertones. Also, like the former category, transgression stories show women as very intelligent. On the other hand, we do not come across the “instructing woman” as often as we do in the complicity stories, and neither do men usually get embroiled in such a woman’s schemes. This fact is related to the main feature that sets transgression stories apart from my second category. Most complicity stories, often through the device of the instructing woman, ascribe initial blame for wiles to women. Transgression stories do not. In all transgression stories, the guileful acts of women are triggered by men. Men, here, are presented as the initial transgressors, as persons who did things they should not have done, and, in so doing, provoked the wiles of a woman.
Usually, the man’s initial transgression consists of causing offense to someone, either the woman herself, or a third party. Some stories examined above show instances of the latter pattern. In “The Ruler Reminisces”, the process setting the wiles of a woman in motion is the rivalry between her male companion and another man: she tricks Al-Ma’mun because he is hunting down her companion İbrahim. Another example is “The Plucked Beard”, in which, once again, a woman sets her wiles in motion to protect her male companion against an enemy: in this case, the sultan who would have him hanged instead of the criminal whose corpse was stolen on his watch. And in the transgression story “The Lazy Husband”, the male protagonist’s behavior is an offense to society as a whole:

There was a highly impertinent young man in Isfahan who would always seek the company of goons and thieves, and would never do a day’s work. And every woman he took, he would only keep for three days, and then divorce. Finally, one day, a woman from among the people of Isfahan said, “if I were to become his wife, I would not allow him to remain unemployed or to divorce me.”

The rest of the story revolves around the wiles she employs to reach this end.

More often in the transgression stories, however, the male protagonist causes direct offense to his female counterpart, who uses her wiles to take revenge and teach him a lesson.

---

133 “İbrahim menim yanıma geldi. Ahvalati ondan haber aldım. Didi ki, ‘bizim harcımız tamam olmuşdu, bu hile ilen niçe dinar ele getürdürh ve güzeran eyledüh’” (E4, p. 35).
134 “And the padişah had said, ‘if they steal his body, I will string you up in his stead.’” (E3, p. 32).
135 “İsfa han’da bir civani var idi, çoh bí-ar, ve hemiše elvâtlan ve uğrâhlan refakat, ve hiç işe gitmezdi, ve her avret ki alurdu, iki üç gün sahlardı, onun talakin virirdi, ta ğike bir avret İsfa han ehlinin didi, ‘eğer men ona avret olam, koymaram bikăr kala ve talak vire’” (E6, p. 36).
Remarkably, in two out of three such stories, the offense caused by the man is connected to the very theme of the wiles of women. We saw an example of this in “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, where a judge accuses a woman of guilefulness, and the woman goes on to take revenge by proving him absolutely right.

A slightly more subtle dynamic is at work in “The Book Within the Book”. Here, we encounter “a man, traveller by vocation, who would always record the wiles of women. He had put together a book on this subject—its name was The Subterfuge of Women” 136 This man, while guest in a woman’s house, makes the fateful mistake of mentioning his project to her, thus provoking her into showing him just how guileful women can really be. 137 Finally, “The Buried Fish” starts with the male protagonist praying to God to “protect and shelter [him] against misfortune and accident and the wickedness of the devil”. His wife, overhearing the prayer, asks him, “o fellow, why do you not say, ‘o Lord, protect the Muslims against the wiles of women’?”. His answer is his downfall: “What are the wiles of women that I should pray on account of them?” Not satisfied, he adds, “women are deficient of mind. How could they possibly beguile those whose minds are whole, and how could they possibly come out on top?” 138

The last instance of male provocation is perhaps the most remarkable one in the reaction it incurs. In “The Fake Adultery”, the male protagonist is a jealous husband who, we read,

136 “Bir nefer, ehl-i siyahetden, hemişe avretlerin mekrin tetebugu eylerdi, ve bu babda bir kitab cem eylemişdi ki adı Hiylet-ul-Nisa idi” (E2, p. 31).
137 It appears that the motif of peripatetic wiles-of-women-chroniclers running into such trouble was quite widespread. Margaret Mills claims to have identified a whole “cluster of stories” that fit this description (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 269), while Goldman locates such a story “in the Mishe Sendlebar, a Hebrew version of the Sindibadnama”, produced in thirteenth-century Provence (p. 54).
would never allow the woman to leave the house on an errand, and when that person went to work, he would lock his door firmly and allow no one passage into the house. The woman said, “why do you confine me so strictly? If a woman has no chastity, a person cannot find a remedy for this. It is well-known that if a woman desires to engage in some impropriety, she will conduct this business even through the hole in her door, [29] while if she is chaste, such stringency is fruitless.” That man did not pay attention to the woman’s word, and confined her very strictly. The woman wished to edify her husband, and offer proof for her own claim.\textsuperscript{139}

Thus, in “The Fake Adultery”, the wife uses wiles to prove to her husband that he has no choice but to trust in her goodwill. The full implications of this exceptional stance will be discussed some paragraphs below.

We have seen how in most mistake stories, the wiles of women are viewed as truly harmful, while complicity stories often portray these wiles as clever, amusing, and harmless. In most transgression stories, the wiles of women are actually useful, in that they get the transgressive men to mend their ways, or at least teach them an important lesson. If the matter is put in terms of the means, and especially the ends, of guilefulness, it becomes clear that these stories considerably expand the spectrum we have been working with so far.

\textsuperscript{139} “her gez koymazdı ki avret ivden işine çiha, ve o kişi işine gidende kapını mukhem bağlardı ve hiç kesi ıve yol virmezdi. Avret didi ki, ‘niye bu kadar mene teng dutursan? Eğer avretün ismeti olmıyı, kişi ona çare eyliye bulmaz. Meşhur, eğer avret istiye bir amele mürtekib ola, kapunun surahında o işin görür, ve eğer ismeti olsa bu muhafazatun semeri yohdur.’ O kişi avretün sözine itina eylemedi, ona çoh saht dutdı. Avret istedi o kişini ayıtsun ve öz müddeasına bir delil getürsün” (E1, pp. 28-29).
In “The Book Within the Book”, the end of guilefulness is simply to offer an object lesson in guilefulness itself. The woman behaves guilefully just to prove that she can, and that she can best any man while doing so. The lesson she offers the man at the end is: “write this in your book as a postscript, and repent, so that from now on, you may never write about the wiles of women again”. The implication is that any man who still falls for the wiles of women has no authority to write about them.

“The Buried Fish” takes this theme one step further. The assumption made by the husband, namely that women are “deficient of mind”, is a well-known and widespread one in the Islamic world, and is based on a hadith discussed in the introduction. This assumption leads the husband to underestimate his wife and show hubris and complacency in his dealings with her. And by managing to outsmart him, the wife teaches her husband that such an attitude will simply not do, and that it behooves men to beware of the wiles of women. It appears, then, that widely accepted societal norms are not always beneficial for men or women, that these norms can, under circumstances, encourage men to behave in undesirable ways, and that in such circumstances, it may be up to the wiles of women to rectify the situation (in this case, the wiles of women are used to warn against underestimating the wiles of women themselves). The end of the story testifies to a lesson well learned: “From that day onwards, whenever he prayed, he would pray thus: ‘o Lord, shelter the ümmet of Muhammad from the wiles of women!’ And thus, my dear, it is related that they became hand in glove with that woman, and lived a long life together”.

---

140 “bunu da kitabun hasıyesinde yaz ve tövbe eyle ki bundan sora bir de avret mekri yazmiyasan” (E2, p. 32).
141 The hadith describing women as “deficient in reason and faith” is quoted, among others, by Andrews and Kalpaklı (p. 136).
142 “Badehu dua eyledikçe, ‘yâ Rab, mekr-i zenan şerrinden ümmet-i Muhammed’i sen hifz eyle!’ diyü dua ider idi. İşte canım, bunca eyyam ol avret ile hemdem olub muammer oldılar” (M1, p. 4).
While “The Buried Fish” thus offers an example of the wiles of women correcting a societal perception or norm, “The Lazy Husband” sees these wiles enter the service of such norms. Once the female protagonist marries the good-for-nothing loiterer, she forces him into three jobs at once, occupying him day and night and thus trapping him in a vicious circle: he cannot divorce her because he is always working, and he cannot stop working because he cannot divorce her. Most of the woman’s leverage in this story is based on societal norms: Women and men have clearly defined roles, and while women are expected to remain at home and do their duties there, men are expected to go out and provide for the women. Both sides are charged in this contract, and just as a man has a right to enforce proper behavior in his wife, a woman apparently has a right to enforce the same in her husband, at least as long as what she deems proper and what society deems proper overlap, and the man’s behavior stands outside of both in equal measure. In a happy coincidence uniting society and selfishness, the woman puts her wiles at the service of societal norms, while at the same time using these very norms as a means of guilefulness.

Another fascinating aspect of some transgression stories is that they deliberately question the equation of guilefulness with sexuality so often found in the mistake stories. While the complicity stories offered examples of sexually active women simply not mixing sex with their wiles, in the transgression stories, we find women employing their sexuality as a means of guilefulness, but not with sex in mind as an end. Both “The Fake Adultery” and “The Book Within the Book” subvert expectations about sexually active women as intrinsically adulterous.

---

143 “The young man replied, ‘o companion, she does not give me a moment off work to find time and divorce her’” (E6, p. 37).
144 The woman makes her expectations perfectly clear by telling her husband, “I don’t approve of you being unemployed; I desire food and clothes” (E6, p. 36).
In these stories, women orchestrate adulterous situations without any intention of actually committing adultery, but in order to teach a man a lesson.

In “The Book Within the Book”, the woman seduces the traveller, pretending she wants to sleep with him, then hurriedly hides him in a trunk when her husband arrives. She then proceeds to tell her husband exactly what has transpired, making sure that the traveller can hear, and hands her irate husband the lock of the trunk. Just as he is about to open it, though, she shouts, “bear in mind!”. The husband turns red, releases the lock, and storms out of the house. It turns out that the husband and wife had been engaged in a game, the rules of which stipulate that neither player is allowed to take anything that the other player offers them by hand. The game ends when one player forgets this rule and takes something from the other, prompting the winning player to exclaim, “bear in mind!”.

Thus, the woman kills multiple birds with one stone: she wins the game, proving that she can outsmart her husband; she saves both the traveller and herself by making her husband believe she lied about the traveller; and she teaches the traveller a lesson about the wiles of women.

In “The Fake Adultery”, the wife smuggles a would-be lover into her house in a trunk. But then, instead of committing the adultery, she exposes the man to her husband. “I wished to make evident to you my claim”, she tells her husband, “that if a woman is ill-intentioned, her husband will not find it possible to suppress her. What is needed is for the woman to preserve herself.”

Thus, “The Fake Adultery” presents a perfect refutation of the idea that sexually

---

145 P2, pp. 31-32.
146 A version of this game is still played in modern Turkey, mostly by children. These days, the winning player exclaims, “ladies!”, a colloquial form of the “yâd est!” (“bear in mind!”) found in this story.
147 “Men istedim o matlabımı sene malum idem ki eğer bir avret bed-kâr ola, eri eyliye bulmaz onı sahlıya. Gerek avret özün hifz ide” (E1, p. 29).
active women must therefore be sexually promiscuous. In attracting a lover but not consummating the affair, the wife uses her sexual attractiveness to prove that she does not intend to misuse it, to prove that she has the potential to misuse it, and to prove that the potential and the actuality are not the same.

Since, more often than not, the wiles of women serve “useful” ends in the transgression stories, it is not surprising to find women regularly succeeding in their guileful schemes. In fact, far from ending on a punitive note for their female protagonists like most mistake stories—or women merely “getting away with it”, as is often the case with complicity stories—transgression stories sometimes leave us with men firmly subdued by women. “The Fake Adultery” and “The Book Within the Book” end on notes similar to complicity stories: in the former, the husband is powerless to control his wife’s behavior, while in the latter, the traveller is humbled by his hostess. “The Lazy Husband” goes further. Here, the wife ends up driving her husband from job to job: “Unless”, he complains to a friend, “the Lord of the World sends me death to deliver me from the hands of this merciless one; there is no cure!” But perhaps the most remarkable instance of male subjugation occurs in “The Buried Fish”.

Confronted with her husband’s arrogance regarding women’s “deficiency of mind”, the wife implements the following plan. First, she visits the market and buys some fish. Then, she proceeds to secretly bury the fishes in the field tilled by her husband. The next day, while busy in

---

148 Mills examines a somewhat similar story in which the female protagonist “is the one who not only perpetrates, but diagnoses and counters, makr-i zan. Of course her actions sustain patriarchal family structure, but one implication of this plot seems to be that without the competent initiatives of such a woman, patriarchy could not survive. Thus such a story may be interpreted both as subversion of patriarchal values, and as support for them: female sexual disloyalty to husbands is punished, but effective surveillance depends on women” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 267).

149 “İlac yohdur, meğer Hudavend-i âlem mene ölüm vire ki bu bî-insafun elinden kurtulam!” (E6, p. 37).
the field, the husband discovers the fishes and drops them off at home, ordering his wife to cook them for him and his friends that night. However, when he returns with his guests, his wife flatly denies any knowledge of the fishes. Bewildered, he repeats the story of the fishes he found in the field in front of his friends. Once again denying any knowledge, his wife calls him insane: “o imam efendi, bear witness, my husband has gone mad! How could fishes ever grow out of the soil in a field?”\textsuperscript{150}

Finally, the husband flies into a rage, beats his wife with a cudgel, and is carried off to a mental asylum: by now, everyone is convinced he truly is insane. After a while, his wife takes pity on him, explains to him what she has done, and offers to get him out if he promises not to harm her. Her offer is accompanied by a threat: “if you hurt me, I will put you in a worse state than this until the day you die!”\textsuperscript{151} Promise extracted, she tells him what they will do: “I will go now and send the neighbors to you. When they come and ask you about the fishes, you answer, ‘have you gone mad? I haven’t seen any fishes.’ Say only this, and no other word, and then ask them how they have been”.\textsuperscript{152} He follows her instructions, is released shortly after for having come to his senses, and, as we have seen, never again omits the wiles of women from his prayers.

1.3.2. Moral and Message

As mentioned above, in terms of their distance from the religious and/or supernatural, transgression and complicity stories are quite similar—as a matter of fact, “The Buried Fish”

\textsuperscript{150} “İmam efendi, şahid olin, kocam divane oldı, hiç tarlada toprak içinde balık biter mı?” (M1, p. 2).
\textsuperscript{151} “Sen beni incidir isen seni ölince bundan beter ıderim” (M1, p. 3).
\textsuperscript{152} “Şimdi ben varub konşuları sana gönderirim. Anlar gelüb sana balıkları sual eylediklerinde cevab vir ki, ’siz deli mi oldınız? ben balık görmedim’ de, gayrı söz söyleme, hâl hatırl sorîl” (M1, p. 3).
even goes as far as implicitly questioning a *hadith* that had been accepted at face value by a mistake story.\(^{153}\) The same goes for their shared emphasis on unnamed, mundane protagonists. Time is as unspecified in transgression as in complicity stories, while setting is even more indistinct in the former: out of four “pure” (i.e., not hybrid) transgression stories, only “The Lazy Husband” tells us where it takes place, namely in Isfahan.\(^{154}\) The use of humor, while present in transgression stories, takes a slightly different form from the humor of the complicity stories. The transgression stories have a sense of humor that is more straightforward, and not as sly and refined as that of the other category. In a sense, then, like complicity stories, transgression stories as a category lay claim to a timeless value. However, while with the former, more emphasis rests on “humorous value”, transgression stories seem to highlight their “wisdom value” or message more than their humor. In this, they are close to the mistake stories: both story types emphasize outcome over process, while with complicity stories, it is the process that is of the essence.

One of the main reasons humor is not as pronounced in these stories is that the instructing woman, with her convoluted plots, has largely fallen by the wayside. In her stead, we often see women using their wiles to rectify a social or personal situation gone awry. And while this may seem like a “positive” feature of these stories vis-à-vis women, there is another perspective one might take that at least warrants a mention. Arguably, transgression stories do not grant women as much agency and self-motivation in the exercise of their wiles as the complicity stories do; after all, in most cases here, women do not *act* guilefully; they merely *react* guilefully to some kind of outside impetus. In this sense, again, transgression stories interestingly seem more similar to mistake stories than to complicity stories.

\(^{153}\) “The Three Wishes: Size” tells us unambiguously that “women are deficient of mind” (P7, pp. 126-27).
\(^{154}\) P6, p. 36.
However, this reactive stance opens up a new and interesting perspective on the wiles of women: unlike mistake (and even complicity) stories, transgression stories seem to suggest that women may not be compulsively guileful, that they may leave the “guileful switch” turned off as long as there is no outside provocation, that there is a difference, as mentioned above, between guilefulness as potential and guilefulness in action. Women, it seems here, might very well behave (as long as men behave, as well): hence, the “happily ever after” ending of “The Buried Fish” and the lesson about faithfulness that “The Fake Adultery” tries to teach.\footnote{Paradoxically, this lesson about faithfulness is taught through wiles, and is therefore not so much a lesson of trust but one of fear: he should fear provoking his wife into guileful acts.}

1.3.3. Hybrid Stories

Undoubtedly, “The Fake Adultery” is the story that takes this idea the furthest. And in so doing, it actually leads us to question the whole theme of the wiles of women. If, as this story seems to suggest, women have moral agency after all, does this not mean that the idea of women’s wiles, and all the societal rules and norms deriving from it, are unnecessary at best and unjust at worst? At the same time, can a story that questions the wiles of women still be called Mekr-i Zenan?

However, while the foundations of the genre may shake in this story, they ultimately remain intact. Even in “The Fake Adultery”, women are, after all, guileful, and it is up to men whether they trigger or contain this guilefulness; the story never questions these assumptions. Perhaps, the wife in “The Fake Adultery” may even be called the most guileful of them all, for through her wiles she manages to subvert the very concept of women’s wiles. But both a woman who uses wiles to subvert the system, and one who uses them to prop up an aspect of it, such as marital fidelity, ultimately remain within the system. The former, because her wiles justify the
system, the latter, because her wiles are in service of it, and both of them, because they both use wiles.\textsuperscript{156} 157

\textsuperscript{156} Transgression stories, and “The Fake Adultery” in particular, seem close to Mills’s “righteous trickster” tales that “might imply a subtext to the effect that no patriarchy can stand without the support of women: a kind of strident pseudo-complicity with the ideal of male dominance, which nonetheless denies it at the pragmatic level” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 269). Still, I would argue that while male dominance may be denied in these stories, the underlying assumptions that justify male dominance (namely, the wiles of women) are not.

\textsuperscript{157} It might be argued here that wiles in the service of the greater good cannot, on account of their noble ends, truly be called wiles. Still, I am inclined to distinguish means from ends: just because the ends are not guileful does not mean the means cannot be, either. After all, one could imagine ways for women to achieve the same socially desirable ends without resorting to trickery and deceit.
1.4. *Mekr-i Zenan* as a Genre

1.4.1. The Origins and Development of Mekr-i Zenan

Most mistake stories bear the hallmarks of other literary traditions besides *Mekr-i Zenan*. “Bound by His Own Hair” is a version of the story of Samson and Delilah.\(^{158}\) “The Cuckolded Princes” is based on the frame story of the *Arabian Nights*, while “The Ruler Reminiscces” takes place during the times of Al-Ma’mun, the son of Harun al-Rashid. “The Resurrected Wife” features the prophet Jesus as a participant, and “The Fruit of Rape”, complete with a source of transmission,\(^{159}\) takes place during the lifetime of Ali, prior to his succession to the Islamic Caliphate. Finally, the two “Three Wishes” stories are mystical allegories of the kind found in Sufi traditions. In fact, out of all mistake stories, only “The Deceitful Wedding” shows no signs of another literary tradition, and as we saw above, “The Deceitful Wedding” is an exceptional mistake story in that its male protagonist, unlike all his other counterparts in the group, resorts to wiles. It appears that traditions of religious literature were a particularly rich mining ground for mistake stories: more than half seem to have had origins in such a tradition.

Further, the plots of many mistake stories do not revolve mainly or exclusively around the wiles of women. For instance, while complicity and transgression stories often feature elaborate schemes concocted and enacted by women, mistake stories are often curiously blunt in this respect. “The Cuckolded Princes”, “The Resurrected Wife”, and the two “Three Wishes” stories contain no such schemes at all; instead, they simply feature women who pursue foolish desires and end up paying for them.

The other mistake stories contain at least rudimentary scheming on the part of their women: In “Bound by His Own Hair”, it takes the wife a few attempts to figure out how to

\(^{158}\) A story, one might remember, not found in the Qur’an.
\(^{159}\) “It is related by Ibn Abbas in the *Book of the Witnesses of the Prophets*” (E7, p. 38).
immobilize her husband. “The Ruler Reminisces” contains a woman with a plan, although the ending is ambiguous regarding whether she, her male companion, or both of them together came up with it. And in “The Fruit of Rape”, the old woman schemes to get the rapist into the virgin’s room. But even in these stories, the overarching conflict is not between a guileful woman and a man: “Bound by His Own Hair” is built around the conflict between the male protagonist and his infidel enemies; “The Ruler Reminisces” is similarly framed by the conflict between Al-Ma’mun and his uncle İbrahim; and in “The Fruit of Rape”, the old woman uses wiles against another woman, not a man, and the real point of interest is Ali, the religious authority, as well as the way he manages to mete out impeccable justice in a difficult situation.

Some mistake stories are manipulated and streamlined versions of earlier stories with plot elements that in fact diverge from and diminish the wiles-of-women theme. One such story is “The Three Wishes: Beauty”. The name might seem a misnomer, since the male protagonist actually only ever uses two wishes (the first, to make his wife beautiful, and the second, to make her ugly) even though God makes clear at the outset that three wishes may be used: “o my righteous slave, I will answer and grant three prayers of yours in this world; ask of me what you will!” The story ends on a somber note: “That woman regretted the thing she had done, but what was the use? She perished in the wilderness and the stokeholes of bathhouses”.

There is at least one version of this story in which the man actually uses his third wish: found in a different collection and not labeled as Mekr-i Zenan, this story ends with the man not being able to cope with his household in the absence of his wife, and using his third wish to

160 “Our funds had run out, and with this trick we made many a dinar and passed the time” (E4, p. 35).
162 “Yine ol avret ettiği işe nedamet yiyüb, amma çe faide? Andan saniyen il ve külhan bucaklarında ölüb gidi” (P8, p. 129).
The writer of “The Three Wishes: Beauty” might have felt that the last part of the story lightened the culpability of the woman, and left out the third wish for this reason.

A second story that has been modified in order to highlight and emphasize women’s culpability is “The Cuckolded Princes”, a retelling of the frame story of the *Arabian Nights*. The events of the former story—namely the cuckolding of both princes by their wives, their subsequent encounter with the princess in the trunk, and, finally, their forswearing of female companionship—only form the prelude to the latter story, in which Shehrazad the storyteller eventually shows the princes the error of their ways and reconciles them with the institution of matrimony, marrying one of the princes herself. In “The Cuckolded Princes”, the central and redeeming female figure of Shehrazad is omitted, thus rendering the princes’ harsh verdict regarding the wiles of women final and authoritative.

There is one more strategy the mistake stories employ to put pre-existing content in the service of *Mekr-i Zenan*. This strategy is the rewording of folkloric sayings to reflect the wiles of women.

---

163 “Ol anda hırs, evvelki beşeresi ile âdem, lehçe-i kadımı ile müteşekkil ve ‘âbide mahrem oldu, çebin-i niyazi hâk-i mezellete koyup, vesvese-i iblise imtisal ettiği nadim ve pişman olup can ile etfalinin hidemâtna kiym gösterdi” (“At that moment, the bear once again became human, in her previous skin; became the wife of the devout one, with her previous appearance. Humbly touching her forehead to the ground in supplication, she gave praise, and, contrite and repentant for having heeded the whisperings of the devil, she devoted herself to the service of her children”). (Sayers, pp. 361-62).

164 This recasting is all the more remarkable since the frame story of the *Nights* is regarded as a classic wiles-of-women tale by scholars such as Merguerian and Najmabadi (p. 486), but was clearly not sufficiently negative towards women in the eyes of the author of “The Cuckolded Princes”. For a detailed discussion of the *Nights*’ frame story, see Malti-Douglas, pp. 14-29. An interesting side note is that while the princes in the *Nights* story directly quote Surat Yusuf in deploiring the wiles of women, “The Cuckolded Princes” relies on a self-condemnation by the princess in the trunk, roughly paraphrasing and elaborating upon the Qur’anic original: “Dünyada her gez avretler ile başa çıkmaz ve avretlerin mekrlerine karar olmaz ve akl irismez” (“One can never contend with women in this world. There is no limit to the wiles of women, and no mind can fathom them”) (P5, p. 113).
women. “Bound by His Own Hair” tells us that “there are three things in the world that possess no loyalty. One of them is the woman, the next is the sword, and the final one is the horse”.165 “The Cuckolded Princes”, in turn, admonishes us to “not trust in water, and [...] not believe in a woman.”166 Both of these passages are based on Turkish sayings that survive to this day. The first one is “horses, women, and weapons cannot be entrusted to anyone”,167 meaning that these three are too important for a Turkish man to leave out of his sight. The second one is “don’t believe in flowing water, and don’t trust the son of of a stranger”,168 emphasizing kinship loyalty by comparing the dependability of strangers to the fickleness of the currents in a river. This somewhat crude refashioning of Turkish sayings unrelated to the wiles of women, and their integration into the framework of Mekr-i Zenan, is only found in these two mistake stories.169

Another reason that mistake stories make a somewhat uncomfortable fit with the Mekr-i Zenan canon is their lack of consistent plot conventions. Complicity stories place great value on the convolutedness of their plots: most of them feature instructing women who set up plans with at least one surprising twist. Similarly, transgression stories mostly follow a standard progression from the man’s offense to the woman’s guileful retaliation. With mistake stories, however, plot devices change almost from story to story, reflecting the diverse origins of the texts collected in this group. Thus, for instance, the “Three Wishes” stories (mostly) follow the three-wish setup; “The Ruler Reminisces” is told by two story characters who take turns recounting their reminiscences; and “The Cuckolded Princes” features a drawn-out narrative with long pieces of flowery exposition—thus, the first five of twenty-six pages recount the rituals accompanying the

165 “Cihanda üç şeyde vefa yokdur, biri avret, biri kılıç, biri at” (P4, p. 89).
166 “Suya inanma, avrete dinme” (P5, p. 115).
167 “At, avrat, silah emanet edilmem.”
168 “Akan suya inanma, el oğluna güvenme.”
169 Given the mistake stories’ religious emphasis, this reappropriation could perhaps also be viewed in the context of the conversion of Turkish peoples to Islam.
arrangement of a meeting between the princes, and are completely incidental to the plot.\textsuperscript{170} This absence of consistent plot conventions makes it difficult to describe the mistake stories as part of a clearly defined genre, while it is easy to defend such a claim for the complicity and transgression stories.

Overall, the mistake stories display heterogeneity in terms of literary origins and plot conventions. They also display lack of focus and elaboration when it comes to the wiles-of-women theme, containing plot elements that are unrelated to the theme and/or depicting female protagonists who might be foolish or evil, but not particularly guileful. It is even conceivable that the strong moral diatribes that conveniently wrap up many mistake stories serve the purpose of refocusing these heterogeneous stories on the wiles of women. All this is in stark contrast to the complicity and transgression stories, which do not seem to draw nearly as heavily on other literary traditions, are consistent in terms of plot progression, are almost exclusively focused on the wiles-of-women theme, and do not need concluding diatribes to reinforce their theme.

This does not mean that mistake stories are somehow less “authentic” than complicity and transgression stories. Quite the contrary, they are likely to have been the first steps in a long process of genre elaboration and crystallization. The wiles-of-women theme probably found its original expression in stories which only included the wiles of women as subplots.\textsuperscript{171} Over time and many retellings, the wiles-of-women theme is likely to have shifted to the center of these stories, eventually resulting in the mistake stories that form part of this sample. This development, in turn, probably triggered the evolution of stories originally and exclusively designed around the wiles of women in plot and theme. Finally, the evolution of these new

\textsuperscript{170} P5, pp. 89-93.
\textsuperscript{171} Witness the gradual transformation of Surat Yusuf from a story about a prophet undergoing divinely ordained trials to a story about the wiles of women, as outlined in the introduction.
stories is likely to have resulted in more complex and nuanced treatments of female protagonists, their means and ends of guilefulness, and their culpability or lack thereof, resulting in the categories of complicity and transgression. While many of these assertions cannot be backed up by hard evidence due to the incomplete nature of the corpus at our disposal, they present a likely and workable hypothesis as to the origin and development of Mekr-i Zenan as a genre.

1.4.2. The Limits of Mekr-i Zenan

In different ways, Mekr-i Zenan stories of various categories also tell us something about the limits of the genre. The best examples of such stories are “The Fake Adultery” and “The Fruit of Rape”. Earlier, we saw how “The Fake Adultery” proposes a situation in which a woman, although innately guileful, still has moral agency in that she can choose to employ wiles or not. This situation was at odds especially with the mistake stories, which seemed to imply compulsive guilefulness on women’s part, and generally with an idea implicit in all Mekr-i Zenan stories, namely that societal constraints on women are in place precisely because they are guileful. The story ultimately “redeems itself” in that its female protagonist actually employs wiles, rendering the point of moral agency somewhat moot. However, the question remains: what if she is right, and women have moral agency? How then would one go about justifying the constraints society places on them?

172 In particular, it seems that stories from religious traditions are much more likely to present a straightforward and wholly condemning view of women than stories in which religion is not a significant element. The Paris manuscript demonstrates, however, that the authors/compilers of the genre saw nothing wrong with having stories of the most diverse length, plotting conventions, and messages stand right next to each other as part of the canon.

173 This exact idea is voiced, in a generalized fashion, by Fatima Mernissi: “The whole Muslim organization of social interactions and spatial configurations can be understood in terms of the woman's qaid [kayd] power […]. The social order then appears as an attempt to subjugate her power and neutralize its disruptive effects” (quoted in Milani, p. 183).
This is where *Mekr-i Zenan* comes up against one of the limits of its restricted worldview. In the real world, there would be many ways to justify constraining women without having to ascribe wiles to them. For instance, there is the danger that women be abducted, raped, or in general, forced to do things against their will, making an argument possible in which constraint is not for the sake of protecting men against women, but vice versa. However, *Mekr-i Zenan*, in its mission to prove the wiles of women, never paints its female protagonists as victims. Thus, while women employ wiles to reach their own ends or as the result of persuasion or provocation, we do not encounter a single woman who uses wiles because someone forces her to. As a result, for the sake of strengthening its own argument, the genre leaves itself open to a counter-argument like the one presented by the female protagonist of “The Fake Adultery”.

While this story reaches the limits of the genre’s restricted worldview, a heterogeneous story is more likely to exceed the limits of the genre’s restricted subject matter. “The Fruit of Rape” gives a good example of this. The “problem” with this story is that it goes beyond the simple dyad of women and men used to define the identity of most players in *Mekr-i Zenan*, and introduces other categories of identity that complicate and muddle the picture. The most important of these categories is that of *ensar*. The story makes a point of letting us know that

---

174 An obvious exception is the virgin (and later mother) in “The Fruit of Rape”, but even in this case, the person by whom she is victimized is a woman, so that ultimate blame once again lies with women.

175 In Mills’s research, as mentioned above, we come across a group of stories in which women use wiles to outsmart powerful men who are trying to exploit them sexually. However, Mills also points out that not all storytellers label such stories *Makr-e Zan*. As she puts it, “it may be that *makr-i zan* as a topic for at least some male storytellers implies the female trickster being in a transgressive, rather than a supportive, position vis-a-vis patriarchy” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 267).

176 Turkish spelling of the Arabic *ansar*, denizens of Medina who supported the prophet Muhammad following his migration from Mecca to Medina.
both the virgin/mother and the woman her abandoned baby is entrusted to are ensar. What are we to make of this identification? Both the mother and the baby’s caretaker demonstrate wiles. The wiles of the former were discussed. The latter, in turn, double-crosses both the mother, who wants to visit her child but remain unidentified; and Ali, who is trying to determine the identity of the mother; accepting instructions from Ali to find the mother, and money from the mother to keep quiet. Is belonging to the ensar a “strong precondition” for acting guilefully, just as being a woman is? If so, could guilefulness on part of the ensar be expected to transcend gender and apply to men, as well?

While it is not within the scope of this study to try and answer these questions, the point is that once a Mekr-i Zenan story goes beyond identifying its protagonists as simply “men” and “women”, introducing other categories such as ensar, these categories may well play into determining the stereotypical kind of behavior expected of the characters. Things get complicated when messages are mixed, which may explain why complicity and transgression stories often stay as close as possible to the simple realm of men and women defined as such and nothing else, and mistake stories, bearing the conventions of other literary traditions, are of limited use at best as Mekr-i Zenan.

Mekr-i Zenan is a genre that closes both its argument and its characters off from many aspects of reality. It is through this reductionism that the genre tries to shore up its argument

---

177 “They produced a woman, from among the ensar, whose child had died, [and] gave her that child” (E7, p. 38); “The woman submitted, ‘I am a girl from among the ensar’” (E7, p. 40).
179 Another complicating factor in this story is the role played by Ali himself. Malti-Douglas points out that some Batatunian Kayd al-Nisa’ stories are also set in the time of Ali (p. 60, 62). In both stories mentioned by Malti-Douglas, Ali is compared favorably to the caliph Umar, who also makes an appearance. Umar gets a cameo in “The Fruit of Rape” as well, only to be sidelined by Ali. These stories may originally have been intended at least as much for the glorification of Ali as they were for the demonstration of the wiles of women.
about the wiles of women; however, the same reductionism creates clearly defined limits for the
genre beyond which it cannot advance without compromising this argument and, in effect,
ceasing to be Mekr-i Zenan.

1.4.3. Changes over Time

As mentioned in the introduction, the stories that form part of this analysis hail from different
documents, written and read at very different times in different places. And while the documents
are too far apart in time and place of origin, with too many “missing links” in between, to present
a convincing timeline of genre development, they still allow for some, hopefully fruitful,
speculation.

Our oldest dated document is from a manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale
de France in Paris. We can date readings of this manuscript, which circulated in Istanbul, from
notes inscribed by readers in the margins; the oldest such dated reading is from 1177 AH (1763-
64 CE). This document is made up of nine Mekr-i Zenan stories. The newest document at our
disposal was typeset and printed in Tabriz, and uses Azeri as its language. While this document
is not dated, a comparison to similar documents printed in Istanbul makes it appear likely that it
was printed in the early 20th century. Today, this document is preserved in the Library of the
Atatürk University in Erzurum. It contains seven Mekr-i Zenan stories among various stories and
anecdotes of different kinds. Finally, we are working with one story from a manuscript preserved
in the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid. I have not been able to ascertain date or place of
origin for this story.

180 “Asitane-i Aliyye’de, Sultanahmet kurbunda” (P1, p. 4).
181 P1, p. 20.
182 The back cover of the document features price lists similar to those found on books printed in
Istanbul in the 1920s (Sayers, p. 14, 22).
When we correlate the three story types, namely mistake, complicity, and transgression, with the different documents the stories hail from, a telling picture emerges. All stories that we can unambiguously label as mistake or complicity are from the Paris manuscript. At the same time, this document does not contain a single transgression story. All transgression stories (with the exception of “The Buried Fish”, which is in the Madrid document) are found in the Erzurum document. The same document also contains all hybrid stories: “The Plucked Beard”, a complicity story that crosses over into transgression since the initial offense lies with a man; “The Ruler Reminisces”, a mistake story that could be interpreted as transgression since the victim, Al-Ma’mun, is the enemy of the guileful woman’s male companion; “The Deceitful Wedding”, a mistake story with traces of complicity in that the man ends up behaving guilefully as well; and, finally, “The Fruit of Rape”, a mistake story that is exceptional because the victim is a woman, and because it contains traces of complicity in that the victimized woman resorts to wiles, as well. It might be helpful to visualize this information in the form of a table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Paris</th>
<th>P4, P5, P6, P7, P8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgression</td>
<td>Erzurum</td>
<td>E1, E2, E6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>M1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Erzurum</td>
<td>E3, E4, E5, E7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

73
It appears that a fundamental fault line divides the Erzurum and Paris documents. The Erzurum document sets itself apart by two main features. Firstly, it introduces the category of transgression into my analysis. Secondly, even the Erzurum stories that contain elements of the mistake or complicity narratives, which lay initial blame for wiles at a woman’s feet, complicate this picture by including a level of culpability for men, at the very least adding complicity to mistake or transgression to complicity or mistake. Thus, the Erzurum document presents a “united front” in that none of its Mekr-i Zenan content exclusively blames women for wiles.

The Paris manuscript, on the other hand, is very much an affair of two halves. Its complicity stories (“The Duped Officer”, “The Reluctant Conjurer”, “The Adulteress and the Wife”, and “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”) are “pure” complicity; and its mistake stories (“Bound by His Own Hair”, “The Cuckolded Princes”, “The Resurrected Woman”, and the “Three Wishes” stories) are “pure” mistake. This division is reflected in the document’s physical composition: Complicity stories are at the beginning and the end of the document, and mistake stories in the middle.

Further, this manuscript was penned by two different people: The initial pages of the first story and the final pages of the last one are in a different handwriting than the rest. It seems clear that this “frame” predates the main part of the manuscript, and that the author/compiler of the main part did not have access to the same sources as the author/compiler of the frame. The best indicator of this is the last story, “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, which contains inconsistencies from one half to the other. While the second half, supplied by the frame author/compiler, names the male protagonist as “Mehmed Şah” and mentions a different

---

183 Of course, it shares this distinction with “The Buried Fish” from the Madrid manuscript.
184 P1, pp. 11-12; P9, pp. 131-32.
marriage condition, namely abstinence from smoking the pipe rather than from eating
watermelons, the first half, supplied by the main author/compiler, forgets the name the male
protagonist and lists watermelons instead of the pipe.\textsuperscript{185} I suspect that somewhere in the
manuscript’s history, its midsection was lost, and, in due time, resupplied by a different
author/compiler.

Since both stories in the frame part of the manuscript fall in the category of complicity,
one may speculate about whether the original document only contained complicity stories. And
while this question cannot be answered, it is still striking that two story types as seemingly
different as the mistake and complicity stories can coexist in one document. An answer to this
apparent riddle can be found when we contrast mistake and complicity stories on the one hand
with transgression stories on the other. As mentioned, the Paris manuscript contains no
transgression stories. Even in “The Adulteress and the Wife” and “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”,
where women commit some guileful acts in reaction to men’s behavior, that behavior in turn
would ultimately not have taken place if it had not been for an initial provocation on the part of
women. This is the factor that unites mistake and complicity stories: in all of them, ultimate
blame for wiles lies with a woman.

It is striking that all stories in which women initially cause the trouble come from the
Paris manuscript, while all stories that complicate this picture are in Erzurum.\textsuperscript{186 187} And it seems

\textsuperscript{185} P9, pp. 129-35. While the naming of “Mehmed Şah”, a detail lost on the mistake
author/compiler, suggests that the complicity stories in this collection were penned before the
mistake stories, the substitution of eating watermelons for smoking the pipe might point to
historical developments such as a ban on tobacco, or the preferences of the mistake
author/compiler.
\textsuperscript{186} Again, with the exception of “The Buried Fish”, the sole story from the Madrid manuscript,
and a “pure” transgression story.
\textsuperscript{187} As here, the city names “Paris”, “Madrid”, and “Erzurum” are mostly used to denote the
documents that hail from the respective cities, rather than the cities themselves.
hard to imagine that this divergence has nothing to do with the dates at which the documents appeared. One might, after all, expect a document from the early twentieth century to feature different attitudes towards women than one that was read as early as the 1760s. However, such a correlation between attitudes and times can only be made with the utmost caution at this point in the genre’s analysis. Firstly, there is reason to assume that many of the stories in the Erzurum document had been in circulation for a long time before being compiled there (and the same applies to Paris). The Erzurum document itself explicitly claims to have taken three of its stories from an earlier collection named Ziynet-ül-mecalis and one from a book named Kitab-ı Şevahid-ül-nübüvvet. Secondly, as mentioned above, the Mekr-i Zenan stories at our disposal are likely just the tip of the iceberg. Many more stories will probably surface from libraries and collections, showcasing different attitudes at different points in history. These two arguments render it unwise, at this point, to make anything but the most tentative assumptions about the milestones of the genre in history. Finally, even the Paris and Erzurum stories actually have much more in common with each other than might appear at first.

---

188 Even a recurring motif such as a wife smuggling her lover into the house in a trunk may have evolved from versions like “The Reluctant Conjurer”, in which the wife is clearly ill-intentioned, to versions like “The Fake Adultery”, in which the wife’s actions are intended to edify her husband.

189 These stories are “The Fake Adultery” (E1, p. 28); “The Book Within the Book” (E2, p. 31); “The Ruler Reminisces” (E4, p. 33); and “The Fruit of Rape” (E7, p. 38).

190 Correlating the change with place of origin poses another challenge not addressed in this study: was there anything special about early-twentieth-century Tabriz that facilitated the publication of transgression stories? And where did the Madrid manuscript, also containing a transgression story, originate? Once again, I consider the current Mekr-i Zenan corpus too scattered and incomplete to fruitfully explore the correlation between story type and place of origin.
1.4.4. The Unchanging Thematic Core

*Mekr-i Zenan* stories often leave us wondering whether to applaud the guilefulness of their female protagonists, or to abhor it. About one thing, though, there can be no question: whether we laugh at their adventures and wiles, marvel at them, admire them, or get enraged, in *Mekr-i Zenan*, guileful is what women are. Even though some stories, especially “The Fake Adultery”, suggest that women’s wiles may remain at the level of potential without necessarily being put to use, no story steps outside the idea that all women are at least potentially guileful and that men should always watch them, and themselves also, in order not to provoke their wiles.

No *Mekr-i Zenan* story in this sample contains an instance in which the woman, even though provoked, or in a pickle, or with some profit in sight, shies away from guilefulness just because it would be the morally right thing to do.191 And there are also no stories in which women are literally coerced into guilefulness. There is always an aspect of the voluntary involved; we cannot ever fully absolve a woman of her wiles for extenuating reasons.

Even when a woman is described as good, this is firstly so only within the limits already circumscribed by societal and religious proscriptions; she is only good as long as she acts within those boundaries. Secondly, she is “good” not in the sense that she is fundamentally different from other guileful women, but only in the sense that she directs her wiles towards some goal that others in society (mostly men) might be able to support and empathize with.192 But no matter what her ends might be, her means are always questionable.

---

191 As stated earlier, one might argue that a story containing such elements would not be labeled as *Mekr-i Zenan* to begin with.
192 Similarly, Margaret Mills identifies “two possible forms of female power […]”, both ultimately supportive of patriarchy. In the first, the virtuous wife is ultimately subsumed into the identity of the […] husband, while in the second, the woman transcends the female role and in the process shores up a patriarchy which conspicuously lacks the capacity to secure its own best interests”. In the case of Turkish *Mekr-i Zenan*, “The Fake Adultery” seems to correspond most
A few points, then, emerge as necessary preconditions of the genre. Firstly, women are inherently guileful; and even their most praiseworthy accomplishments are reached by guileful means. Secondly, the status quo of societal and religious norms is unquestioningly accepted in all stories: we are talking about an unchanging society ostensibly the same in Samson’s times as at the time these stories were composed. This acceptance includes the position of women within society: by being guileful, women in these stories essentially justify their questionable, inferior position. Thirdly, there is a spectrum of ways in which women’s wiles work themselves out against the backdrop of society, ranging from instances of harmony to instances of clash, with different stories basically mapping out this spectrum.

The very diversity in terms of how the stories treat the wiles of women, whether they make women seem intelligent or merely evil, deserving of our sympathy or not, and their wiles, in outcome, positive or negative, reinforces the basic theme of the wiles of women. Repetition of the genre through various stories, then, serves two simultaneous ends: firstly, it serves the reinforcement of the basic theme. Secondly, it serves to work out a space, a realm of interpretations, of different ways in which one can take position vis-à-vis the theme. Each story thus reinforces the theme while also expanding the range of ways in which one may interpret and react to the theme.

closely to the former kind, and “The Lazy Husband” to the latter. In both cases, Mills states, “positive portrayals of the female trickster […] involve different forms of absorption of the female into male consciousness and social categories, rather than male projection into what might be deemed female consciousness” (“The Gender of the Trick: Female Tricksters and Male Narrators”, Asian Folklore Studies, vol. 60, no. 2 [2001]: p. 255).

193 The guilefulness of women is by no means a given in all Ottoman literature. The Tıflı Stories, a popular Ottoman prose genre in circulation at least from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, contain plenty of female characters who are not guileful, such as the heroine of “İki Biraderler Hikâyesi” (Sayers, pp. 72-74).
One cannot have, at least extrapolating from the stories discussed here, *Mekr-i Zenan* stories in which women are not inherently guileful (and, as we shall see, men are not ultimately redeemable). It is this thematic core that allows the heterogeneous mistake stories to fit into the *Mekr-i Zenan* mold, to be given the title of *Mekr-i Zenan*, regardless of how awkward their inclusion may otherwise be. If a literary genre is, as Michael McKeon puts it, a historical entity that can “change without changing into something else”,¹⁹⁴ this thematic core is what renders *Mekr-i Zenan* a genre.

2. Underlying Worldview

2.1. This is a Man’s World

2.1.1. The Male Audience

*Mekr-i Zenan* stories are not just about women. In fact, while their divergent treatment of women enables us to view them in separate categories, their treatment of men shows the ways in which these categories are complementary rather than contradictory. As we have seen, the stories’ morals are directly addressed to men, which makes it clear that *Mekr-i Zenan* was primarily intended for male audiences. Another phenomenon that demonstrates this same point is the way in which some of the stories build suspense.

In many *Mekr-i Zenan* stories, we are left in the dark as to the motives of the female protagonist. The most striking example of this is the instructing woman, found mostly in complicity stories, who gives instructions to a man as part of her guileful plan, with the man and the audience equally clueless as to the eventual results of these instructions. Even where the instructing woman is absent, we often encounter women who perform inscrutable actions, only to be explained by their eventual outcomes, without having been given a glimpse into their minds. “The Buried Fish” offers a good example of this: we are simply told that the woman “went out, bought some fresh fishes, and buried them one by one in the soil of the field that the

---

195 A similar strategy was employed by authors like Ibn al-Batatuni, who uses moral diatribes, as well as claiming to have composed his treatise in response to a request from a “brother”. As Malti-Douglas puts it, “The appeal to a brother expresses a need for male bonding and solidarity” (p. 54).
fellow would be ploughing. Then, she went back home.” 196 What will become of the fishes is as much a mystery to us as it is to the husband once he finds them.

Such motivations, in contrast, are never hidden with men: even when men are up to no good, their intentions are made transparent to us from the beginning, and we are often made to share in their thoughts. Thus, “The Duped Officer” begins with the male protagonist falling asleep for his mid-day siesta and waking up with a pouch of gold on his belly. His astonishment is equally ours: “[He] was filled with bewilderment, and, getting up at once, went home. That evening, he went to sleep, thinking, ‘I wonder who it might be that is dropping this gold on me, and what his aim might be.”” 197 Through this privileged access to male protagonists’ minds, the audience is made to empathize with them, to the extent of experiencing what it must feel like to be at the mercy of a guileful woman.

Of course, this plot device also indirectly intensifies the message concerning the wiles of women. Women come across as more guileful because we are not told straight away what they are up to. But more importantly, this device automatically equates “us”, as the audience, with the male protagonist: whatever happens to him will vicariously happen to us, because we know as little as he does about the woman’s true intentions.

There are many story traditions in Ottoman literature that do not use such a suspense-building device. Often, the motivations of each character are pretty much spelled out from the beginning; if a character has placed incriminating evidence somewhere, we are told so when they

196 “Varub birkaç dâne taze balık aldı, herifin çift sürecek tarlasının toprağı altına birer birer gömdü, gelüb evine gitdü” (M1, p. 1).
197 “Ta’accüb eyledi, heman oradan kalküb evine geldi. Fikr idüb, ‘acaba bu altüm benim üzerine atan kim ola ve muradı ne ola?’” (P1, p. 6).
do it; and we are not left to wonder whether what a character says is true or not.\footnote{Here is an example from the Tifli Stories: “Ol mekkârenin ziyade ağır paha eder kitapları vardı, yüz her yüz kuruşuk, hemen kitabın birini eline alıp sokak kapısının yanna gelip, kitap elinde, Tifli Efendi’ye eyitti, ‘efendi, bir miktar kapının yanna gelin’ dedi. Bu kere Tifli Efendi, kapıının yanna geldi, onlara eyitti, ‘siz gidedurun, ben bakayım ne söyler’ dedi. Kanlı Bektaş eyitti, ‘efendi, şu kitap ne kitapı? Ne aslî kitapı? Pederimin kaldığı, üç dört kuruş eder mi, çarşıya göndersem gerek’ deyip bilmemekten geldi.’ (“That deceiver owned books worth a great deal of money, one or two hundred kuruş each. At once, she took one of them, came to the door of the house, and said to Tifli Efendi, ‘o efendi, come to the door for a while.’ Tifli Efendi obliged, telling them [his companions], ‘you go ahead; let me see what she has to say.’ Bloody Bektaş said, ‘o efendi, what kind of book is this book? It was left to me by my father; is it worth three or four kuruş? I need to send it to the marketplace.’ In this way, she pretended not to know”.) (Sayers, p. 173). In this example, while a woman is engaged in concocting a guileful plan, we are told from the outset how it will work out: she is luring a man into a trap by trying to sell him a book of hers under its actual value, thus appealing to his greed.\texttrademark; On this evidence, it would seem that such stories address a much more gender-neutral audience than \textit{Mekr-i Zenan}.}

The mere fact that \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} was geared towards men does not mean that women never got to read or listen to such stories. Clearly, female audiences might have found these stories suspenseful as well. However, one suspects that while male audiences could have easily assumed real women to be just as guileful as the women in the stories, some actual female audiences would have been just as perplexed by the wiles of their fictional counterparts as men were.

\subsection*{2.1.2. The Guilelessness of Men}

If \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} is at least as much about men as it is about women, it might pay off to take a closer look at how the men in the stories are presented to their counterparts in the audience. Perhaps the first, most obvious thing one notes is that in general, \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} men seem much more at peace with the way society works than women are. They are at home in a societal structure which they inhabit, and for which they supply the institutional representatives, at all
levels: *Mekr-i Zenan* men are princes, judges, police officers, farmers, jewellers, conjurers: they are society itself.

*Mekr-i Zenan* men often seem eager to follow orders. Once they have made a promise or contract of some sort, they usually consider it binding, and rather than questioning the reasoning behind the contract, they try to follow it to the best of their abilities. Good examples for this are the “prenuptial agreements” that some women manage to extract from their future husbands. In “The Resurrected Wife”, the husband keeps his promise to be faithful even after his wife’s death, which makes him all the more incensed that his resurrected wife will not do the same: “What, my soul, has become of all our intimacy and affection, and of your vow and contract?” In “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, the husband does break the nuptial rules; but once he has been found out, he makes no attempt to defend his actions by referring to the frivolity and arbitrariness of the conditions imposed upon him, and rather meekly accepts that because he has violated his wife’s contract, she has the right to divorce him: “the hapless one knew that harlot of the age had caught on to him. He became sorry and remorseful for the thing he had done, but since he could not undo it, what was the use?”

Some stories take this portrayal of men as guileless, law-abiding creatures so far as to suggest that men are unable to formulate a deceitful plan, or even to lie, unless forced into a difficult situation by a woman, or instructed to do so by a woman. In “The Buried Fish”, the husband is eventually put into a mental institution because he maintains his truthful claim that he found the fishes in the field he was tilling. Even in the asylum, no matter how many times he is asked, it simply does not occur to him to lie, to pretend the whole fish story was untrue, in order

---

199 “Benim canım, kani senin ile olan aşinalık ve dil-rübalık, ve ahd ü emânınız arada nice oldı?” (P6, p. 123).
200 “Bildi kim ol kahbe-i rüzgâr duyub anladı. İttiği işe nâdim ve peşiman oldı, ne çare, etmiş bulundu, elinden ne gelir?” (P9, p. 131).
to regain his freedom: “They grabbed the man and sent him to the mental asylum, putting him in chains. From time to time, his neighbors would visit and inquire about his health, asking the fellow, ‘brother neighbor, where did you find the fishes?’ And again, the fellow would answer, ‘in the field.’ And again, the neighbors would say, ‘he has not come to his senses yet’”. The man only manages to get out of the asylum after his wife suggests that he pretend to have forgotten the whole fish incident, and he takes her advice.

In general, then, *Mekr-i Zenan* men come across as creatures who display a bovine satisfaction with the way things are without seeming to see any reason for questioning or change: the husband in “The Buried Fish”, for instance, gets into all this trouble in the first place because he unquestioningly accepts the widely-shared maxim that women are deficient of mind. It is this satisfaction, crossing over into self-satisfaction, that makes men fall into a complacency that in turn renders them gullible, naïve, literally guileless, and that women find easy to exploit.

Of course, there are many stories in which the men are quite guileful or otherwise immoral. In the previous chapter, we encountered choice examples of such behavior, for instance in “The Lazy Husband”, in which a male social misfit is brought to heel by a woman, “The Plucked Beard”, in which a male soldier enlists the help of a woman to escape punishment for his crime, and “The Deceitful Wedding”, in which a guileful woman is outsmarted by an equally guileful man. We will focus on this male guilefulness later, but even when men do display wiles or other forms of immorality, they are given far better reasons for doing so than women. In the mistake stories, we encounter no guileful men. In the complicity stories, men only become guileful if compromised by women. And even in some transgression stories, namely “The Fake

---

Adultery”, “The Book Within the Book”, and “The Buried Fish”, male transgression is due to an error or misapprehension rather than a wilful and destructive scheme (as is often the case with guileful women), while in “The Plucked Beard”, the man’s resorting to wiles is somewhat understandable in light of the mortal danger he is in. The only two central male characters who are immoral without some kind of excuse are the misfit in “The Lazy Husband” and the rapist in “The Fruit of Rape”. And even these characters, as we shall see, are eventually redeemed.

2.1.3. Men as Morally Asleep

Still, overall, the stories convey the sense that men are imperfect creatures, that there is a misalignment between what men are and what they should be. And, this being Mekr-i Zenan, the misalignment shows itself most strongly with regard to women. In some scenes, such as the opening scene of “The Duped Officer” described above, we find the woman performing her guileful acts while the man is literally asleep. This state of sleep, read metaphorically, can be applied to most stories: men are “asleep” to the threat that women pose; perhaps they are even asleep if and as long as they trust women at all. The implication seems to be that a man fully at his senses might not fall for the wiles of a woman, but that women are experts at making men take leave of their senses.

Especially when it comes to sexual attraction, and acting on that attraction, Mekr-i Zenan men seem quite helpless and unable to control themselves. Even some adulterers, like the first queen’s lover in “The Cuckolded Princes”, seem to be rationally aware that what they are doing is wrong, but do it nonetheless: “How could I dare to presume”, the lover asks the queen while they lie in each other’s arms, “to be worthy of a sultan like you? May God, the exalted and

---

202 Other men who are literally asleep while the women around them commit guileful acts are the giant in “The Cuckolded Princes” and the male protagonist of “Bound by His Own Hair”.

85
sublime, grant you to our padişah; and may He grant our padişah to you”.

Sexuality is such a pronounced weak spot for men that Mekr-i Zenan stories simply accept this weakness as a part of life rather than questioning it. It seems that men are categorically excused for transgressing in a sexual way; no moral ever admonishes them to be less promiscuous, only, in some cases, to stay away from women altogether, once again placing the blame for sexual transgression squarely at the feet of the latter. “The Adulteress and the Wife”, in which the husband naïvely tells his wife about his sexual attraction to another woman, while the story maintains that he “loved his wife very much and had plenty of affection for her”, is a good example for just how accepted the promiscuity of men is in Mekr-i Zenan.

Mekr-i Zenan men seem to approach women primarily through physical senses and emotions, rather than reason. A scene illustrating this beautifully occurs in “The Duped Officer”, where the police officer catches the guileful woman’s scent before he sets eyes on her:

As they drew near the spot where the woman was, a fragrance of musk and ambergris perfumed their palates. They looked around, asking themselves where this beautiful smell might be coming from, when an object—like a mirage—

---

203 “Benim ne haddim vardır senin gibi sultana layık olam? Heman Hakk-i sübhane ve teala hazretleri seni padişahımıza ve padişahımızı sana bağışlıy” (P5, p. 98).

204 Such morals were discussed in the previous chapter. Some male characters, like the queens’ lovers in “The Cuckolded Princes”, do pay with their lives for their adultery. Even then, however, women are presented as the instigators of the offense.

205 See also Andrews and Kalpakli: “From the [Islamic] notion of a woman as a ‘private part,’ that is, as a body part that causes arousal in others, it follows naturally that rational beings—men—will be inadvertently aroused by the sight of a woman” (p. 168). By “private part”, the authors are referring to the Islamic description of women as ‘awra, which Malti-Douglas translates as “at the same time something shameful, defective, and imperfect; the genitals; and something that must be covered” (p. 121). The word routinely used for “woman” in Mekr-i Zenan is “avret” (a Turkified spelling of the same word; modern Turkish spells the word as “avrat”, based on colloquial pronunciation).

206 “Avretini pek sever idi ve gayet ile muhabbeti var idi” (P3, p. 68).
caught their eye from afar. The superintendent said, “go and check what that
darkness over there might be.” At once, the captain of the guard went forward and
said, “I saw it, it is a beautiful woman”.207

Feelings take over when women are involved, be it feelings of lust, feelings of a “purer”
love, or even feelings of jealousy. It is these feelings that overpower otherwise potentially
virtuous men and lead them astray, and it is these feelings that are manipulated by women. The
problem is not the fact that men have these feelings, though. The problem is the misapplication
of these feelings to women. One reason the mistake stories seem especially harsh is that they do
not limit the feelings that men should avoid vis-à-vis women to lust or jealousy, but advise
against a lot of seemingly more positive feelings as well, such as love, and affection. In “The
Resurrected Wife”, it is none other than Jesus himself who utters such advice: “come, young
man,” he tells the husband who is mourning his wife, “and renounce this passion, for there is no
loyalty with them [i.e., women]”.208

The women in the mistake stories seem especially vile partly because they toy with these
“purer” feelings of men, not with feelings like lust and jealousy that already carry a hint of the
transgressive. But even “The Fake Adultery”, perhaps the most female-friendly story in the
entire oeuvre at our disposal, displays the same basic issue: yes, the husband acts in a jealous,
irrational way, but he only does so because his wife, through her very presence and the feelings
she engenders in him, has disabled his capacity to think and act rationally.

207 “Çün avret olduğu yire yakın geldiler, misk anber kokusu bunun damaglarin mu‘attar eyledi.
Bunlar eyitdiler, ‘acaba bu güzel koku nereden gelir ola?’ diyüb etraflarına nazar iderken,
karşidan gözlerine bir hayal gibi nesne görindi. Subaşi eyitdi, ‘görin, şol karşuda görünen
karalik ne ola’ dedi. Heman asesbaşi ilerü varub, ‘gordim, bir cemile avretdir’ [dedi]” (P1, p. 13).
208 “Gel, yiğit, bu sevdadan fariğ ol, zira bunlarda vefa olmaz” (P6, p. 119).
2.1.4. *The Self-Awareness of Women*

In contrast to the sleep of morality and reason men fall into when faced with women, *Mekr-i Zenan* women seem perfectly aware, and in perfect control, of what they are doing and why. Women in these stories are never as involved with their male counterparts as men are with them. Men may be romantic or jealous, fall in love, and generally act irrationally for the sake of a woman. But *Mekr-i Zenan* women never make the same mistake; they do not form emotional attachments the way men do. Examples are the wife in “The Adulteress and the Wife”, who coolly orchestrates a chance for her husband to cheat on her just so he can be caught in the act, and the wife in “The Reluctant Conjurer” who, at the outset of the story, is described thus:

> There was a woman who had two lovers. That woman would tell both her lovers, “when my husband dies, I will marry you instead.” [...] One of her lovers [...] left the city. Now, the lover who had stayed behind in the city was a young weaver. And before long, while the other lover was abroad, the woman’s husband died, and she got married to that weaver.²⁰⁹

Even when it comes to sexual desires, women seem much more in control, or at least able to channel such desires, exploiting male sexual hunger to deceive men or pit them against each other. As we saw above, *Mekr-i Zenan* women often regard sex as a means, not just as an end; this is something that men never do in these stories. When it comes to the cold exploitation of male sexual desire for their own ends, women in transgression stories such as “The Fake

---

Adultery” and “The Book Within the Book” fare no better than the worst women in the mistake stories. And while some mistake stories do feature serial adulteresses who seem compulsively sex-driven, even in such cases, what makes women cheat on their husbands seems to be a calculation aimed at maximizing sexual pleasure rather than some irrational, emotional drive. The first queen in “The Cuckolded Princes”, whom we have already seen compare the number of times her lover satisfied her per night to the number her husband could manage, is a prime example of this level-headed approach.

However, while men’s unawareness and complacency is seen as a flaw in Mekr-i Zenan, women, with their calm self-possession, do not come across as having overcome that flaw in themselves, and therefore as superior to men. Rather, they appear cold and ruthless, beings with no care for whom they put in harm’s way to achieve their desired ends. This shows itself especially when we see women across Mekr-i Zenan endanger and compromise not only men, but also other women in pursuit of their goals. In “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”, as we have seen, the wife is not above implicating the judge’s daughter just to get back at him for an insult. In “The Fruit of Rape”, an older woman deceives a girl into letting an unknown man into her home, resulting in the girl getting raped. And while the wife in “The Adulteress and the Wife” does secretly free her husband’s lover from the prison into which the latter and her husband have been put after being caught in the act of adultery, she only does so because otherwise, she wouldn’t be able to free her husband, either: she has to take the lover’s place in jail so that the charges against her husband will be dropped.

In contrast, while men are presented as flawed, they also show empathy and emotional depth, in their dealings not only with women, but also with other men. An example for the latter
is “The Cuckolded Princes”, in which the second prince expresses his worry over the first prince’s troubled state of mind in the following way:

look, o brother of mine, you have been conversing and drinking with us since you came to our city and met up with us. However, my dear, you are never free from sorrow and gloom. What, my esteemed brother, is the reason for this sorrow and gloom? Make me privy, my soul, to this mystery, so that I may suffer along with you. Since I have been seeing you in such gloom, my nights are no longer nights, and my days no longer days.²¹⁰

The narrators of *Mekr-i Zenan* also flaunt their own sympathies in order to make sure that audiences empathize with the male, rather than the female, characters. While we saw above how women are regularly described with negative epithets, men regularly receive pitying or favorable appraisals, such as the itinerant collector of *Mekr-i Zenan* stories in “The Book Within the Book”, whom the narrator sees fit to describe as “hapless”²¹¹ in light of the female wiles to which he is exposed.

The point of female self-possession and self-awareness is worth examining at more length. In many *Mekr-i Zenan* stories, female characters self-identify with the attribute of guilefulness; they recognize their own character, and “know what they are”. Sometimes, they state their guileful nature directly, as when the giant’s wife at the end of “The Cuckoled

²¹⁰ “Bak a birader, sen bizim şehrimize gelüb ve bizimle görüşeli, gerçi bizimle sohbet ve işret idersin, ve lakin, benim canım, daima gam ü kasavetden halî değiliz. Ve benim karındaş-i azizim, bu gam ü kasavete sebeb nedir? Ve benim canım, beni dahi ol esrara vâkip eyle ki ben dahi seninle bilece gam çekeyim. Ve seni böyle gamda gördükçe benim dahi ne gicem gice ve ne günüm gündür” (P5, pp. 101-02).
²¹¹ “biçare” (E2, pp. 31-32).
Princes” asserts that “one can never contend with women in this world. There is no limit to the wiles of women, and no mind can fathom them”. At other times, women confirm their wiles in the person of another woman, such as in “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”. When the wife in this story, offended by the judge calling her a mekkare (guileful schemer; derived from mekr), demonstrates to the judge that his own daughter is just as much of a mekkare, she does not absolve herself of the pejorative. She merely extends it to another woman and, by implication, all women. If even the judge’s daughter is guileful, one might think, perhaps it is wrong to insult women for wiles. Perhaps wiles are in women’s nature, and it is futile to fault anything or anyone for its inherent nature. In that sense, then, the woman does indeed absolve herself of the pejorative, but does so by universalizing and thus invalidating the pejorative itself.

Finally, a recurring theme across many stories is that women behave guilefully just to show that they can, to prove their guilefulness in action to an unconvinced man. Even “The Fake Adultery” gives an example of such behavior, no matter how well-intentioned the female character seems to be here. You can’t stop me from being guileful, she appears to be telling her husband, so best at least not provoke me to it. Especially when a man does not believe that she is capable of outsmarting him, the woman will take it into her head to prove him wrong, like the wife in “The Buried Fish”, who orchestrates an inspired and diabolical scheme just because her husband refuses to believe how guileful women can be. What this kind of behavior means, once again, is that the female character accepts, and actively claims, the quality of guilefulness assigned to her by the narrator.

Why do these female characters not try to live down their reputation? Why do they even take pleasure and pride in it? Why do they set out to claim it when men seem to deny it to them?

212 “dünyada her gez avretler ile başa çıkılmaz ve avretlerin mekrlere karar olmaz ve akl irismez” (P5, p. 113).
One answer might be that guilefulness is one of the few attributes male society is willing to cede to women, an area in which women can perceive themselves as the equals, or even betters, of men. Also, of course, guilefulness is a way in which women have power over men, and perhaps they wish men to be aware of this power, to fear and respect it. We could also be faced with the appropriation and glorification of a pejorative, similar to the latter-day example of black American rap artists’ self-identification as gangsters, pimps, and drug dealers.

But assigning such motivations to the women in *Mekr-i Zenan* may be thinking into things from too contemporary a perspective. I believe that a “fairytale model” may be more appropriate in explaining the unquestioning self-identification of *Mekr-i Zenan* women as guileful. Self-awareness, as granted to women in these stories, is more akin to the self-awareness of a mute object or animal temporarily endowed with speech in a fairytale. If, in such a tale, an animal or a stone is given the ability to speak, and asked to describe itself, it will simply list its own attributes, attributes that are readily apparent even without expression in speech and that have nothing to do with the animal’s or stone’s volition. Similarly, in *Mekr-i Zenan*, women are not guileful voluntarily but rather guileful intrinsically, just as a stone is hard, not because it wants to be, but just because it is. At best, as in “The Fake Adultery”, women may use their wiles selectively and positively, but they are guileful nonetheless. The ability to consciously articulate one’s nature, here, does not necessarily imply the ability to change it.

---

213 This “essential” nature of female wiles is also highlighted by Malti-Douglas: “The male gender of the medieval Arabic character type is a philosophical accident, as it were, whereas the gender of the counter female character type is a philosophical essence. It is as a female that the women in the *adab* work accedes to the rank of trickster figure” (p. 31).
2.1.5. The Moral Agency of Men

Often, when it comes to specific behavior, Mekr-i Zenan men may come across as much more rigid than women: while the latter can come up with a seemingly infinite variety of deceitful plans, men seem much more straightforward. However, women can be viewed as equally rigid when it comes to the principle underlying their behavior, namely guilefulness. The process by which their guilefulness manifests may draw on flexibility, but the actual behavior pattern is quite rigid. Men, on the other hand, while superficially more straightforward, have a much more important flexibility at their disposal: they can theoretically mend their ways and learn lessons from past behavior. In Mekr-i Zenan, this ability is not granted to women.

This can be seen very clearly in the way Mekr-i Zenan stories end. Often, a story’s ending will involve a man changing his attitude, be it towards women, adultery, or societal values. At the end of “The Adulteress and the Wife”, the formerly adulterously inclined husband forswears his illicit desires and embarks on a life of “happily ever after” with his wife.214 Similarly, the husband in “The Buried Fish”, having learned his lesson about the wiles of women, decides to henceforth pray to God to protect him from them.215 Women may be instrumental in bringing about this change in men. But the women themselves never change at the stories’ end. Men rise and fall, while women are always the same, engaging in guileful behavior unpredictable in pattern but predetermined in principle.216

---

214 P3, p. 82; see above.
215 M1, p. 4; see above.
216 It is interesting to note that in the Islamic commentaries on Surat Yusuf, al-‘Aziz’s wife, or Zulaykha, is made to change by the end of the story. As Merguerian and Najmabadi point out, Zulaykha “repents, converts into a faithful believer, is saved, and is rewarded with marriage to Yusuf and the birth of children” (p. 490). No such development is witnessed in any of the Mekr-i Zenan stories included in the present sample.
This is why, when *Mekr-i Zenan* women behave immorally, they might be harshly punished, as in the mistake stories, or “get away with it”, as in the complicity stories, but there is no corrective element to either outcome. In mistake stories, women are killed (e.g., “Bound by His Own Hair”), banished, (e.g., “The Three Wishes: Beauty”), or otherwise harmed in a permanent way. In complicity stories, they are often left to glory in the success of their devious schemes. But in neither case is it implied that women could ever mend their ways. Men, in contrast, are expected to know better. They are the true actors in *Mekr-i Zenan*, the ones who are seen as possessing moral agency and free will. They are perfectly capable of noticing and avoiding their own transgressions, as they are of grasping the inherently guileful nature of women and taking their precautions accordingly in order to make sure that they do not get ensnared by these guiles. They are moral creatures, and are expected by the stories to hold themselves to a high moral standard. In mistake stories, men are already highly moral. In complicity and transgression stories, they may not be, but they are disciplined and ridiculed when they fall short, with the expectation that they will improve.

Many *Mekr-i Zenan* men do not know how they should behave, but this merely means that their actions, behavior, beliefs, and degree of virtue can change: they have the capacity to lapse or improve. Women do not have this capacity. They are fixed in what they are, and therefore, their self-awareness is not an awareness of the sort that men may gain by the end of these stories if they learn their lesson: a true, spiritual, metaphysical, deeper awareness that leads them onto a more righteous path. Women have insight into their own nature, but this insight does not translate into an ethical way of behaving or a spiritual life. Their insight is, in this sense, an awareness that is inferior even to men’s unawareness, because that unawareness at least implies a
potential for change and improvement, while women’s self-identification as intrinsically guileful automatically excludes such potential.

2.1.6. Women as Part of the World

Of course, *Mekr-i Zenan* does not give us a rounded picture of men’s lives as a whole; it limits itself to a very specific segment of these lives, namely the segment that entails interaction with women. This is not all that men are about, and *Mekr-i Zenan* is clear on that point: as we have seen, men are presented in myriad vocations and social positions, ranging from peasant to prince. An interesting question would be whether the same is assumed for women, i.e., that this is not all there is to them, that women’s lives also have many complexities and aspects besides the ones on display in their interaction with men.

As we have seen, *Mekr-i Zenan* presents us with different types of women, such as the virgin, the “vamp”, the mother, and the crone. It would be wrong, though, to equate these divisions with the diversity of occupations encountered in men. Rather, the divisions are based on a particular woman’s stage in the reproductive cycle, with different women defined via different stages. Women, thus, have a function, namely that of reproduction, and they are defined by their relation to that function. But of course, women have this function *for men*. Thus, while men can be many things in life apart from their involvement with women, women themselves only are as they are in relation to men.\(^{217}\)

\(^{217}\) Malti-Douglas quotes a vignette related by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH / 1201 CE), neatly illustrating the instrumentality of women in such a worldview: “A poet, passing by a group of women and being pleased by their appearance, began to recite, *Women are devils who were created for us.*

_God save us from the evil of the devils._

But one of the women answered him and began reciting, *Women are aromatic plants who were created for you.*
Women’s lives are not the only thing in *Mekr-i Zenan* that revolves exclusively around men. The same seems to hold true for religion. In stories with a religious dimension – as we have seen, these are primarily the mistake stories – there is never an indicator that God favors, or indeed has any kind of relations, with women: except for purposes of punishment, God or his messengers always and exclusively interact with men. In the “Three Wishes” stories, God speaks, and grants wishes, to men. In “Bound by His Own Hair” and “The Resurrected Wife”, God and the prophet Jesus respectively interact with, and grant wishes to, men only. And in “The Fruit of Rape”, while the religious figure, Ali, does have dealings with women, he, not the women, is the recipient of divinely granted favors, while women only witness the manifestation of Ali’s powers in the form of justice and punishment. As far as *Mekr-i Zenan* women are concerned, God might as well not exist except as some kind of abstract force, whereas to men, he is physically and personally present in their lives.

While God, in *Mekr-i Zenan*, never tries to establish contact with women, women are quick to return the favor. Even when God, his prophets, and miracles are quite clearly involved in the proceedings, *Mekr-i Zenan* women still go ahead and behave in ways they ought to know will displease God. The resurrected wife acquires a new male companion despite the fact that the Jesus has revived her to reunite her with her husband; in fact, throughout the whole story, she does not once acknowledge Jesus’ involvement, or even give a sign that she is aware of his physical presence. The wives in the “Three Wishes” stories use the wishes for selfish, worldly

And all of you desire the most aromatic of aromatic plants” (p. 48).
Of course, whether women were created as devils or aromatic plants makes no difference whatsoever to the central assertion that they were created “for” men.
This view of women is hardly limited to Islam. One need go no further than the Bible to see its place in Jewish and Christian thought: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner’” (Genesis 2:18, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, accessed on March 26, 2014, available from http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible/).
ends. Even though they know the wishes come from God, they show no hint of awareness regarding the moral imperatives implied by God’s existence. And even though the wife in “Bound by His Own Hair” is aware her husband is divinely assisted, she does not think twice about the possible consequences of double crossing him.  

Still, Mekr-i Zenan women are not necessarily portrayed as irreligious. At least one of them shows a non-hypocritical awareness of religion: when Jesus takes away the second life he had granted to the resurrected wife, she expires with the confession of faith: “That woman, having reaffirmed her faith, gave up her ghost”. When Mekr-i Zenan women disregard God, his messengers, or societal laws that are divinely ordained, they thereby endanger their place not just in worldly society, but also in the afterlife. But they do not seem to care. Why? Once again, I would assert that this seeming contradiction between the awareness of the deity and religion on the one hand, and the lack of action appropriate to this awareness on the other, may not be as much due to an unwillingness to bring awareness and action into harmony, as to an intrinsic disconnect between awareness and action, just as was the case with women’s self-identification as guileful. Mekr-i Zenan women may know how to be proper Muslims at least in ritual, and they may well be the best Muslims they can be, but it seems that some intrinsic quality renders them incapable of thinking metaphysically. What could be at the root of this?

I believe that the key to understanding the disconnect between women’s awareness and their actions can be found in a sentiment expressed by one of the mistake stories’ morals: “Those

---

218 This view of women as somehow “ungodly” is also found in the work of Ibn al-Batatuni. As Malti-Douglas puts it, the former author’s work creates “an opposition […] between God and men, on the one hand, and women, on the other” (p. 56). Malti-Douglas further states that for Ibn al-Batatuni, “the exclusive religious experience belongs to men” (p. 65).
219 “Ol hatun tecdid-i iman idüb ruhünü teslim eyledi” (P6, p. 124). Rather than indicating a previous apostasy from Islam, this “reaffirmation of faith”, I believe, simply stands for the ritual reiteration of the confession of faith before death.
who have true knowledge of God”, the moral goes, will “not be inclined towards the world […]. For the world is precisely like that woman”.220 221 “The world”, of course, must here be understood in religious terms, as a testing ground for humans to determine their worth before they can enter the afterlife. I would reverse and intensify the moral of this story and assert that for Mekr-i Zenan, women are not merely like the world, but are, in fact, a part of the world, as opposed to—literally—mankind. They are only partially endowed with human attributes, and these attributes do not include a capacity for moral self-improvement.222

I would argue that to Mekr-i Zenan, women are, in effect, one of the worldly forces designed to test men’s character and worth.223 They are part of the deity’s plan for men and act out their roles accordingly. And even though the stories do not make this point explicitly, I would further argue that the reason for women’s curious lack of interest in conforming to morality and religion is that within the remit of the Mekr-i Zenan worldview, there seems to be no place for women in the afterlife. This appears to me the only reasonable and consistent explanation for the contradiction between women’s awareness and actions in Mekr-i Zenan.

220 “Ârif-i bi-llah olanlar […] dünyaya dahi meyl etmezler, zira dünya da heman ol avrete benzer” (P6, p. 125).
221 Andrews and Kalpakli elaborate on “the commonplace ‘this world-evil/that world-good’ mystical Neoplatonism that characterizes this world as a woman—the phrase zen-i dunya can mean both ‘this world is (like) a woman (this woman-of-a-world)’ and ‘the woman of this world’ (as opposed to a more ethereal woman)” (p. 135).
222 Dror Ze’evi’s Producing Desire contains a similar assessment regarding the view held of women in medieval Islamic literature: “Man in this scheme of things was the crowning achievement of terrestrial creatures, whereas woman was regarded as a less-developed version of man, physically and mentally” (p. 22). Elsewhere in the same work, Ze’evi describes how in this view, man is “a spiritual being adorned with the faculties of reason and devotion” (p. 141). This view of men stands in stark contrast to what Muslim writers like the thirteenth-century adab composer al-Jawbari have to say about women, who, according to such writers, “lack the spirit of decision, as well as the notions of faith and honor” (Malti-Douglas, p. 32).
223 This idea is paralleled in Merguerian and Najmabadi’s assessment of Surat Yusuf: “Although female seductive sexuality, woman as teaser and tester, is at the center of this plot, this test is one among many that Yusuf faces and passes throughout the story” (p. 489).
Women in these stories know that God, morality, and the afterlife exist. But they also know that these exist not for their sake, but for the sake of men. I believe that in *Mekr-i Zenan*, there is no human race to which men and women belong in equality. There are men, and there is the world, and women are part of the world.224

What, then, might be the specific purpose of women in a *Mekr-i Zenan* world? While the emphasis shifts somewhat between mistake, complicity, and transgression stories, we can still assert that women present a mix of temptation, test, and punishment for men. In all of these senses, though, women are an educational tool for men, and this is the ultimate sense in which these stories are about men rather than women. It is a case of total instrumentality, in that women are completely reduced to instruments in the moral education of men.

Even though only the mistake stories offer the religious framework that makes these larger conclusions possible, and even though religion is, for the most part, not directly addressed in complicity and transgression stories, I believe that the mistake stories help us here to understand a worldview that is implicitly shared by *Mekr-i Zenan* as a whole. Even when the deity and religion do not explicitly come into play, they are still the bedrock that underlies society in all *Mekr-i Zenan* stories, regardless of category. In all of them, we find judges, *imams*, religious customs and prohibitions, or some kind of other indicator that the societal order is based on a divinely decreed order, so that it is clear that the same wiles that place a woman beyond the pale in society also place her beyond the pale when it comes to religion.225

---

224 An Islamic literary convention showing women as actual outgrowths of this world is too fitting not to mention here. In the convention, as analyzed by Malti-Douglas, women are depicted as fruits growing from trees, for men to pluck and use for their sexual pleasure. Authors who have employed this convention include Ibn Tufayl (d. 581 AH / 1185-86 CE) and Ibn al-Wardi (d. 861 AH /1457 CE) (p. 83, 88).

225 The way in which religion long permeated the entirety of Ottoman society is summarized by Ze’evi as follows: “In the pre-nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, there was no Islamic religious
2.1.7. The Lessons Men Must Learn

Even though the subject of Mekr-i Zenan stories may be women, their object is to teach men. When it comes to what exactly the lesson is, though, the three categories somewhat diverge from each other. The mistake stories seem to teach that the temptation presented by women should be, at best, avoided altogether, and, at worst, very strictly contained. The complicity stories appear to teach that this temptation is a part of life, and men must succumb to it, and make mistakes, in order to learn from them. Finally, the transgression stories seem to teach that women are an aid rather than a temptation, and men should listen to them in order to correct misapprehensions about themselves and the world.

The main rift dividing the lessons of the mistake and complicity stories is that between a more strictly principled stance, and a pragmatic, somewhat casuistic stance. The mistake stories, at their most extreme, urge total separation from women: a properly moral life can only be led when away from temptation, away from challenges that will force men to move beyond pure principles and into the realm of the casuistic. The husband in “The Resurrected Wife”, who, at the end of the story, “became enlightened, withdrew from the struggles of the world, and started leading the life of a hermite”,\(^{226}\) is a perfect model for this lesson.\(^{227}\) The complicity stories, in

discourse. This may sound surprising, but it becomes obvious if we take into account the near-absence of any secular worldview. This meant that religion was omnipresent, although definitely not omnipotent. Everything that men and women did was outwardly imprinted with the stamp of faith and religiosity” (p. 77).

\(^{226}\) “İrşad oldı, dünyanın gavgasından el çekdi, küşe-nişin oldı” (P6, p. 125).

\(^{227}\) This position is carried to its extreme in utopian works such as Hayy Ibn Yaqzan by Ibn Tufayl, which depicts a two-man micro-society with no female participation at all, creating a “society of men and hence, by implication, of fellowship”. “Islamic society”, Malti-Douglas asserts, “favors homosocial (distinct from homosexual) relations”. Therefore, “the male couple is one of the ways of conceiving the ideal society in an Islamic context” (p. 82). Malti-Douglas further states that “The unusually strict, virtually monastic character of Ibn Tufayl’s utopia is startling in an Islamic setting. Unlike Christianity, Islam never enjoined celibacy […]". The
contrast, try to reconcile the ethical and the pragmatic; they are stories of negotiation and compromise. This is best exemplified in the moral that closes “The Reluctant Conjurer”: “Do not tie down your wife too tightly, and neither leave her too free. For she has sprouted from a crooked root, and if you try to straighten it out too much, it will break”. Finally, the transgression stories transcend – or perhaps merely avoid – the rift between principled and pragmatic by having women employ their wiles to ends that are useful for men, thus making a negotiation of the two stances unnecessary.

Mekr-i Zenan, then, presents a whole spectrum along which the relationship of the principled to the pragmatic can be negotiated, for the edification of men, regarding their relationships with women. In this context, it is not difficult to think of Mekr-i Zenan as just one of many possible genres aimed at the moral education of men. Similarly, we could have genres about “the temptations of money”, or the “wiles of young boys”, or any other obstacle/mediator

Andalusian physician’s positions apparently reflect some of that Greek, especially Platonic, influence so important in many branches of medieval Islamic philosophy” (p. 84).

228 This seems to be the stance favored by a hadith quoted, again, by Malti-Douglas: “The Prophet questioned ‘Ukaf ibn Bishr al-Tamimi about his marital status. The man being unmarried, the Prophet then inquired if he had a slave girl. Muhammad, spurred again by a negative answer, asked if the individual was well off. Since this was the case, the Prophet retorted that he was a brother of devils, and if he were a Christian would surely be one of their monks. The tradition of Islam is marriage, continues the Prophet. The Devil has no more effective weapon against holy men than women. Only married males are freed from fornication” (p. 52). This hadith clearly demonstrates the tension inherent in this stance, which postulates that, while women are dangerous, men must nonetheless “live with them”.

229 “Avretin üzerine gayet pek mukayyed olma ve pek de boş koma. Zira eğri kökden hasıl olmuşdur, pek doğruldayım dirsen kirilur” (P2, p. 63). This quote references a hadith as related, among others, by al-Bukhari and mentioned in the introduction. To reiterate, the relevant portion reads, “and I advise you to take care of the women, for they are created from a rib and the most crooked portion of the rib is its upper part; if you try to straighten it, it will break, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked, so I urge you to take care of the women” (volume 7, book 62, number 114).

It is possible that the word “kök” (root) in the text is based on a scribal misreading of “kemik” or “kemük” (bone) in a previous version. The latter word would be closer to the original hadith.
between men and a properly moral life, any other factor that needs to be negotiated by men in their quest for such a life.

In this sense, the stories are not just concerned with teaching men what women are. They are also concerned with teaching men what they themselves should be. The stories are about coaxing or pressuring real-life male audiences into certain kinds of behavior, making them conform to what the stories expect of them, and instilling certain values in them. As much as the stories may like to pretend otherwise, they are not just about confirming something that male audiences somehow already know; they are part of the process by which that knowledge is generated and imposed upon men. Women are not the only ones for whom something is at stake here; men are also expected to learn what is supposed to be in their own nature.

As Andrews and Kalpaklı put it, “in large part, it is in language—in poems and stories, legal or religious or medical or psychological texts—that we learn how and whom to love, what is normal and what is deviant” (p. 38).
2.2. The Social Construction of Gender

2.2.1. The Wiles of Men

“Look, my dear young men, you batter these poor girls so much. With all people, you can find uncouth and wicked ones as well as good ones. There are many men who are scoundrels and pimps, as well. Know this to be so”.\textsuperscript{231} This remarkable comment can be found in the Paris manuscript, on the margins of a mistake story, “The Cuckolded Princes”. Clearly, a reader (perhaps female?) had at this point become annoyed at the overly negative portrayal of women in the mistake stories, and felt the need to write down this comment in order to restore a sense of balance to the stories. And this reader was not alone in these thoughts, either: on the same page, immediately underneath this comment, we find another one, in a different hand, simply stating, “true, my dear, true”.\textsuperscript{232}

While this reader’s comment stages a very deserved criticism of mistake stories, \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} as a whole is not entirely oblivious, as we have seen, to men’s failures and shortcomings. And while I have not encountered a \textit{Mekr-i Zenan} story in which a male character is literally a pimp, there are plenty of stories in which male characters can come across as scoundrels of one sort or another. It is time now to look more attentively at these stories, or, in other words, to turn our attention to the wiles of men.

Some stories have men use wiles to trap or overcome women. In “The Deceitful Wedding”, the plot of which was outlined above, the male protagonist uses wiles to trick his newlywed wife into granting him a divorce. Another example of the wiles of men as used against women can be found in “The Reluctant Conjurer”. Here, a weaver has been tricked by an older

\textsuperscript{231} “Bak a canım, yiğitler, siz bu kadar kızçağızları darb itmişsiniz. Her kişinin arsız da fena da bulunur, iyü de bulunur. Nice pezevenk yiğitler de vardır, böyle bileşim” (P5, p. 107).

\textsuperscript{232} “Gerçekdir, a canım, gerçek” (P5, p. 107).
woman into carrying his wife’s lover in and out of his own house in a trunk, without, obviously, being aware of the trunk’s contents. While taking the trunk back to the old woman’s house, the weaver gets lost and finds himself outside the office of a ranking police officer. The guards ask questions about the trunk which the weaver cannot answer, and detain him on suspicion of being a thief. Later, in the officer’s private residence, the weaver espies the officer’s wife hiding a naked man—her lover—in a big urn. A scene of confrontation follows in which the weaver is faced by the police officer and the latter’s wife. The officer threatens to break open the weaver’s trunk with an axe if he refuses to open it himself. The weaver, who has by now realized the contents of his trunk, and wishes to hide the truth from the officer, threatens to break the big urn in retaliation. Out of fear that the officer will discover her lover hidden in the urn, the officer’s wife immediately starts begging the officer not to break open the trunk. Thus, by employing wiles, the weaver effectively turns the officer’s wife into an ally and accomplice.

We also find stories in which men use wiles to outsmart and overcome other men. Sometimes, this employment of wiles takes the simple form of going along with the actions of a guileful woman. In “The Adulteress and the Wife”, for instance, the husband has been caught in the act of adultery and thrown into prison with his lover. The same night, his wife manages to get into his prison cell and exchange places with his lover. The next morning, faced with the judge, the wife clamors for adultery charges to be dropped since they are, after all, husband and wife. The husband, in order to save himself, “started clamoring along with his wife”.  

Other stories show us men taking the instructions of a woman to outsmart another man, but going beyond these instructions in action, adding an extra touch of their own wiles to the proceedings. As we have seen, in “The Duped Officer”, the officer is charged by the judge with

233 “Kuyumcu avretiyle uredi feryadi” (P3, p. 81).
arresting the woman who stole the judge’s treasure chest. Since doing so would expose the officer’s own involvement in the crime, he needs another way out, and this way is provided by the woman: she has hidden her bloodied clothes in the judge’s house, and all the officer needs to do is search the house in front of witnesses, find the clothes, and charge the judge with murder in order to make him drop the search for the woman. The officer expertly implements this plan. But once the clothes have been discovered and the judge compromised, the officer takes things one step further than he needs to:

The captain of the guard immediately seized his opportunity and said, shouting and clamoring, “o master of ours! Finally, by the grace of God, the exalted, it has become clear, in front of the congregation and the deputy, whether my word is false or true! I entrusted a hapless woman to you with all her belongings, thinking that since you are the sultan’s judge, authorized to pass judgment, you would be dependable. But you betrayed that trust, killed that woman for her belongings, and gobbled up all her riches! This is a grave scandal; I must report this business to the sultan. Verily, this matter cannot remain unheard; this lance will not fit in the haircloth sack! Otherwise, once this affair reaches the sultan’s ears, I’ll be the one to lose my head.” In this manner, he ranted on for a while, sounding off as much as he liked.234

---

Finally, *Mekr-i Zenan* contains instances of men concocting schemes to outsmart other men without the instructions and advice of women. Above, we saw how the weaver in “The Reluctant Conjurer” finds himself in the house of a police officer who demands to know what is inside the trunk he is carrying. In order to obscure the true nature of the trunk’s contents, the weaver puts on an elaborate and fiendishly guileful show. Claiming to be a conjurer and illusionist, he offers to stage a performance for the police officer and his wife. Breaking into chants and gesticulations, he claims that he will manifest two naked beings from the realm of spirits in front of his audience – one from inside his trunk, and one from inside the police officer’s own urn. Hearing these words, and realizing that their only hope of escape lies with following the weaver’s instructions, the two naked lovers in the trunk and urn appear at the weaver’s command, perform a little dance, and, again at the weaver’s command, depart the officer’s house through the front door. The officer, completely taken in by the performance, applauds the weaver, and the officer’s wife, in order to conceal her own adultery, plays along. This is guilefulness at its best: the weaver’s scheme in “The Reluctant Conjurer” can easily compete with any scheme that women manage to concoct in *Mekr-i Zenan*.

2.2.2. *Men as Women, Women as Men*

It is striking how “feminine” the entire scenario enacted by the weaver in “The Reluctant Conjurer” appears in the broader context of *Mekr-i Zenan*. This appearance is not simply due to the fact that a reader has come to expect such wiles from women, not from men. There are direct textual indicators that point to a “feminization” of the weaver while engaged in his guileful scheme. One part of this feminization is noticeable in the almost telepathic communication the
weaver establishes with his one ally in the house, the police officer’s wife. Their tacit understanding is first achieved when the officer’s wife realizes that the weaver has seen her lover:

the weaver turned around [to the captain] and said, “master, if you shatter my trunk, I will have no choice but to break yonder urn in return!” As soon as the captain’s wife heard this talk from the weaver, she knew that he had seen her put her lover in the urn, and that, if her husband shattered the trunk, and this fellow went on to break the urn, her lover would appear and her secret would be revealed. At once, she turned to her husband and said, “have mercy and do not injure this hapless one by shattering his trunk! I do not need to behold a conjurer right now. Release this wretched one, so he may go back to his house.”

While she cannot get the officer to let the weaver go, she becomes his eager accomplice in the plan he subsequently carries out. First, the weaver makes a man appear out of his own trunk. When she sees that the officer suspects nothing and thinks the man to be an illusion, the officer’s wife decides to play along with the weaver’s game. “he must make one appear from the urn as well,” she tells the officer. “If he manages that, he will have put on a truly stupendous show.”

After this feat has been accomplished as well, and the two lovers sent out of the house, the weaver sets about planning his own escape. “O master,” he tells the officer, “it is no skill to make men appear from an urn and a trunk. That art truly requires no skill. True skill would be for

---

235 P2, pp. 51-52.
me to go outside, turn one of them into a monkey and the other into an ape, bring them back, and have them dance in front of you. Now, that would be a true show”. By now, the officer’s wife is completely tuned in to the weaver’s thoughts, and realizes at once that he is trying to escape. To facilitate his exit, she eggs on her husband, the officer: “so help me God, my lord,” she tells her husband, “this conjurer is a master, and truly adept and accomplished at his art! He has granted us an unparalleled performance. If he displays the art he just talked about as well, it will truly be a mighty exhibit of skill, and he will deserve great munificence!”. Right away, the narrator steps in to tell us why the officer’s wife speaks in this way: “The woman’s goal with these words was to fan the captain’s ardor so that the weaver could find a way to get outside and beat a hasty retreat so that her own secret would not be revealed, either”.238

Finally, after he has successfully managed to escape, the weaver earns the ultimate accolade, namely the respect of a guileful woman. The officer’s wife “understood that the weaver had fled, but never let on and did not utter a word, sending the weaver silent prayers and praise”.239

The feminization of the weaver does not just manifest itself in the unspoken communication and accord he achieves with the officer’s wife. It is also revealed in the usage of two specific words, namely hüner (skill) and hile (trick, ruse). The most telling employment of the words comes when the weaver says to himself, after having helped the two naked lovers

---

237 “Ağa efendi, küpden ve sandukdan âdem çıkarmak hüner değildir, ve bu sanat bir hüner değildir! Hüner öldür kim şimdi varam, taşradan birini maymun ve birini şebek idüb getürüb karşınızda oynadam! İşteseyir bu sayırd” (P2, pp. 60-61).
238 “Vallah efendi, bu hokkabaz, üstad ve dahi sanatında mahir ve kâmil hokkabaz imiş! Görülmek dellânlar gösterdi! Eğer bu dîdîği sanati da gösterir ise çok hünerdir ve azîm ihsana müstahkardir’ dedi. Avretin bu sözlerden muradi, asebsâyi heveslendirüb, bir yol çulha taşra çılbı ve taban kaldrub gide, kendî sîrî fâş olmîya” (P2, p. 61).
239 “Avreti duydî çulhanın firar eyledûğünü, amma hiç tınmayûb açmaz kodî ve çulhaya gönînden dualar ve aferinler eyledi” (P2, p. 62).
escape, that “true skill (hüner) does not lie in using trickery (hile) to save them; true skill would lie in saving yourself as well”. The terms are significant because in another, closely related complicity story, they are employed by the woman to describe her own guileful schemes. In “The Duped Officer”, after the woman has made off with the judge’s treasure chest and put the police officer in the impossible situation of having to find her without incriminating himself, she says to herself: “True skill (hüner) and cunning would lie in making myself known to the captain, and, if he has come to grief on account of me, releasing him from his predicament, setting him free”. In the same story, the word hile is used by the woman during her initial proposal to the officer: “would you be able to get me in by a trick (hile)”? Apart from the usage of these words, it is also notable that the weaver in “The Reluctant Juggler” and the woman in “The Duped Officer” similarly set themselves guileful tasks they seek to accomplish as a culmination of all the preceding wiles displayed in the stories. In effect, then, the weaver’s mindset in “The Reluctant Conjurer”, from his planning down to his usage of specific vocabulary, has become that of a guileful woman.

240 “Anları hile ile halâs etmek hüner değildir. Hüner öldür ki kendüni dahi halâs eyle” (P2, pp. 59-60). Hüner is used repeatedly by the weaver in the passages quoted above. Hile is also used by the weaver on two other occasions: “Kendünin ol aradan halâsına bir hile etmek fikrine varub” (“He determined to find a ruse that would deliver him from that place”). (P2, p. 53); “Çulha fehm ü idrak eyledi ki asesbaşı kendünin eylediği hile-yâbına ve sanatına akıl içirdirmiyüb hayrete vardı” (“The weaver realized that the captain could make neither head nor tail of the ruse and and artfulness he had put on”). (P2, p. 60).

241 “Hüner ve ayyarlık oldır kim asesbaşı ya kendümi bildüreyim, eğer benden ötüri kendüye bir şiitem olmuş ise kendüyi ol sitemden kurtarub halâs ideyim” (P1, p. 19).

242 “Bir hile ile beni anda iletüb misin?” (P2, pp. 10-11).

243 This conscious self-prescription of guileful tasks by both men and women in the framework of artfulness and skill also allows us to relate these stories to the cluster of narratives, described by Mills, which “explicitly showcases makr as an art form”, and which sometimes even portrays “a woman against a man, engage[d] in a contest to see who has superior powers in guile” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 263).
An even clearer feminization of a guileful man is found in “The Fruit of Rape”. The rapist in this story gains entrance to his victim’s dwelling by posing as a woman. At first, his victim falls for the ruse, describing him as “a tall person, a niqab over her head, and a veil before her eyes, so that no part of her could be seen”. Later, unveiling the rapist, she sees that “this was a man, his beard and moustache shorn, his eyebrows tinged with kohl, his face rubbed with white water, and his feet painted with henna, so that he looked like a woman”. Even after she has killed the rapist and deposited his corpse at the mosque, the ambiguity regarding his gender continues: the people who discover the corpse first think it male, and then female, before they finally determine it to be male, albeit in female attire. In his disguise as a woman, the rapist manages both to use women’s wiles for his pernicious ends, and to almost completely feminize himself in the process.

Just as Mekr-i Zenan offers us glimpses into the feminization of male characters when they employ wiles of their own, it also presents instances of the de-feminization, and perhaps even masculinization, of guileful female characters when certain special circumstances obtain. “The Fruit of Rape” features a woman who kills her rapist and hides the fact that she has done so, abandons her own baby and hides her identity as the mother, and maintains contact with the child while bribing its attendant not to reveal that fact. In this case, even though the story is listed as Mekr-i Zenan, we never see the narrator draw any connection between the woman’s scheming

---

244 The Turkish original renders the gender ambiguity even more acute by the absence of pronouns and suffixes indicating gender: “Bir uca boy şahıs […], çadire başında, ve gözlerinde sevayı, hiç yeri görmürdü” (P9, p. 41). Turkish makes no gender distinction in its personal pronouns; the Turkish pronoun “o” can mean “he”, “she”, and “it” alike.

245 “Bir kişidür, sakalı ve büyük kirılmış, ve kaşına sürme yahub ve üzine sefîd ab sürtüb ve ayakına hina koyub avretlere şebih” (P9, p. 41).

246 “But when they moved him, he did not budge, and they determined that it was a woman. Then, a woman from among the ensar came forward, beheld her, and saw that it was actually a man with a woman’s appearance, henna on his hands, dressed in women’s clothing, his beard shorn” (P9, p. 38).
behavior and her feminine gender. Her wiles are rendered “understandable” by her circumstances: it is implied that she has been put in an untenable situation due to the wiles of a woman (the old woman who let the rapist into her house), and has resorted to wiles in order to get out of a situation that someone else’s wiles had put her in to begin with. In this, she is just like the men in stories such as “The Deceitful Wedding”.

A much more outright masculinization of the woman takes place in “The Lazy Husband”.

As we saw above, this remarkable story features a woman who turns a lazy misfit into an upstanding member of society by trapping him in a vicious cycle. She marries him and immediately forces him to take on three jobs at once: he becomes too busy to divorce her, and too scared of her authority to quit his jobs. The woman asserts this authority in the most stereotypically masculine way imaginable: she resorts to physical violence. “I don’t approve,” she tells her husband, “of you being unemployed; I desire food and clothes.” Her husband retorts that he is no good at any job, whereupon she tells him to stand up, exclaiming, “I will show you a job!” Then, “the woman picked up a cudgel and hit him with this cudgel many a time.” After this show of force, the husband is left with no choice but to accept the jobs she finds for him.247 “I have become trapped in the clutches of such a woman,” he complains to a friend. “She doesn’t allow me to rest for long enough to even scratch my head. Whenever I let up a little, she beats me with the cudgel!”248 In this respect, then, the woman in “The Lazy Husband” has become

248 “Bir beyle avretün elinde giriﬂtar olmîşam, koymûr bir kadar ârâm olam ki baﬂını kaﬂîyam! Biraz müsamaha idende çomak ile virûr!” (E6, p. 37).
indistinguishable from the husband in “The Buried Fish”, who also beats his wife with a cudgel when she upsets him.\footnote{249}{“The fellow took up a cudgel and trounced her with it once” (M1, p. 2).} \footnote{250}{Mills describes such outcomes as accomplishing a “male-centering [of the story] by the conversion of the female trickster-hero into a classificatory male” (“The Gender of the Trick”, p. 255).}

What are we to make of the wiles of men vis-à-vis women and other men, and what of the feminization of men and masculinization of women? Why do Mekr-i Zenan stories incorporate such instances, and what do they tell us about the genre’s understanding of gender? When we look carefully at the instances in which men use wiles, we notice that these wiles are almost exclusively directed towards opponents who have the upper hand in terms of their standing in the hierarchical structure of society. In “The Reluctant Conjurer”, both the police officer and his wife have greater authority and higher standing than the weaver. In “The Duped Officer”, the judge being tricked by the police officer is of higher rank than the former; he can issue orders that the officer has to follow. The same is true for the judge faced by the husband in “The Adulteress and the Wife”. Finally, even in the weakest example of the group, namely “The Deceitful Wedding”, the old woman has managed to get the male protagonist to marry her, giving her at least a measure of societally sanctioned rights and bargaining power over him. In each case, then, we find men, caught at the weak end of a hierarchical power relationship, using wiles to subvert this hierarchy and gain the upper hand.\footnote{251}{Such instances clearly confirm Mills’s assertion that “guile is a weapon of the weak: the victor is always inferior in power or status to [his or] her opponent” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 263).}

The opposite example is “The Lazy Husband”, in which the woman, theoretically in the weaker hierarchical position vis-à-vis her husband, brings herself into unison with societal norms (her husband should find a job and provide for her) in order to gain the upper hand over her lazy.
and unconforming husband. It is this authority, gained by acting as society’s mouthpiece, that
masculinizes the woman to the extent that she can force her husband to work by beating him
with a cudgel.

The upshot of all these examples is that in *Mekr-i Zenan*, as in so many contexts, gender
relations are often a special case of power relations, and one’s gender is determined as much by
one’s standing vis-à-vis others in the societal power hierarchy as it is by the sex of the body one
is born with. Gender depends on status and power, and gendered guilefulness, in turn, is a
subversion of that status and power. By acting as mouthpieces for society, women can escape
their gender. Conversely, men securely inhabit their own gender only to the extent that they
accept, and represent, societal rules. If they shirk these rules, like the man in “The Lazy
Husband”, or subvert them, like the weaver in “The Reluctant Conjurer”, they run the risk of
feminization. Ultimately, these examples enable us to see that even in the world of *Mekr-i
Zenan*, guilefulness often has nothing to do with being a woman, but to the contrary, being a
woman has everything to do with one’s position in the hierarchy of power. Women are women at
least in part because they seek to even out their status and power disadvantage vis-à-vis men,
proclaimed by the rules and norms of society and religion, by resorting to wiles. It is not gender
that creates guilefulness, but the power hierarchy that creates both gender and guilefulness.

252 The idea that guileful behavior and manliness are incompatible is also encountered in ‘Abd
al-Rahman Jami’s (d. 898 AH / 1492 CE) retelling of the Yusuf story. Analyzing the text, Milani
tells us that “if men have to be portrayed as cunning in its negative sense, the reader is reminded
that this is not a part and parcel of manliness (*mardanagi*). When Jami recounts Yusuf’s
brothers’ plot to kill him […] he is quick to meditate on manliness as mutually exclusive with
fraudulence. Unlike these villains and evil-doers, the manly men (*javanmardan*), he interjects,
‘are free from the bondage of self and guile’” (p. 185).
253 Andrews and Kalpakli make a similar point when discussing the Ottoman relationships
between older, powerful men and the young boys who were their protegés and objects of desire:
“In all respects (but one) the young man subject to being physically/sexually dominated by an

113
2.2.3. A World for Women, a World for Men

The complexities of Mekr-i Zenan are far from exhausted with the assertion that in these stories, gender is ultimately a function of the societal power hierarchy. One issue that further complicates things is that Mekr-i Zenan does not really present its audiences with a unified society and hierarchy, but rather with two societal systems that run parallel to each other: one for men, and one for women.

No object in Mekr-i Zenan renders this bifurcation in society as visible as the trunk. In story after story, across all three categories, trunks are used as instruments in guileful schemes. “The Reluctant Conjurer”, “The Fake Adultery”, and “The Book Within the Book” feature adulterous men using trunks to hide from their lovers’ husbands. In “The Cuckolded Princes”, it is the giant’s wife who is locked away in a trunk by her husband in a misguided and spectacularly unsuccessful attempt at stopping her from cheating on him. Finally, “The Ruler Reminisces” employs the trunk to ends other than adultery. When the female protagonist approaches Al-Ma‘mun with the promise of leading him to the hideout of his enemy, İbrahim, in return for a reward, Al-Ma‘mun sends a servant out with the woman, ordering him to give her the reward if she is telling the truth. The woman tells the servant to get in a trunk; he is then carried to an unknown location. There, he truly sees the sultan’s enemy, but has no way of knowing where he is. The woman takes the reward, gets the servant drunk, puts him back in the trunk and drops him off in the marketplace, with no one any the wiser about the location of İbrahim’s hideout.

It is tempting to think about the outside of the trunk as representing the public sphere, while the inside stands for the private. One might even argue that it is the very difference older, more powerful man is a woman – especially if we ignore physiology for a moment and take woman to represent a position in the sociosexual power structure” (p. 261).
between the public (predictable and reliable) and the private (unknown and unpredictable) that is at the root of guilefulness in the first place. After all, if all were public, wiles would never work. Wiles only work because the private exists, because people can hide things, be it at home, in a trunk, or in their heads. If, then, the outside of the trunk were taken to represent societal rules and norms, its inside could be read as the possible subversion of all these in private.

However, while the employment of the categories of public and private carries a certain degree of persuasiveness, it would be wrong to equate the realm of men in *Mekr-i Zenan* with a public sphere, and the realm of women with a private sphere. Rather, women in *Mekr-i Zenan* share a female public sphere of their own, a sphere that only qualifies as “private” when viewed from the perspective of men. It is a sphere that is hidden from men, but not one that is “private” in the sense that the private is taken to imply the atomized and unshared.\(^{254}\)

One example for this shared female public sphere in *Mekr-i Zenan* is the joke shared by the wife and the judge’s daughter, but unaccessible to the judge himself, in “Coffee, Melons, and Marble”. The same story also tells us that “the daughter of this judge was wanton to the extreme, and the [other] woman knew this to be the case”,\(^ {255}\) thus pointing to women’s personal and intimate knowledge of each other’s lives, a knowledge not shared even by the men who are ostensibly closest to them, in this case, the judge himself.

An even more extreme example is the female sign language employed and understood by both the adulteress and the wife in “The Adulteress and the Wife”. We saw above how here, the

---

\(^{254}\) Here, I find the content of *Mekr-i Zenan* to be supportive of Leslie Peirce’s assertion that “in the Ottoman case, conventional Western notions of public and private are not congruent with gender” (p. 8). To Peirce, we must abandon “modern (post-seventeenth-century) Western notions of a public/private dichotomy, in which the family is seen as occupying private, nonpolitical space” (p. 6) if we hope to understand the powerful role that women played in Ottoman society from within the supposedly private, secluded space of the household.

\(^{255}\) “Bu efendinin kızı ziyade arüfte imiş, avret bu kızın böyle olduğunu bilirdi” (P9, p. 135).
wife acts as an interpreter for her husband, a jeweler, deciphering the signs he receives from his would-be lover. It is worth our while to look at this example in some more detail here. The story starts out with the adulteress visiting the jeweler’s store and asking him for a pair of earrings, but disappearing when he turns to fetch a pair.\textsuperscript{256} The next day, she reappears, this time asking for a necklace, and once again vanishes before the jeweler can hand her one.\textsuperscript{257} The third day, she repeats the whole exercise by asking for an ankle chain.\textsuperscript{258} However, this time, the jeweler finds a little sack in his store after she has left. “He opened it and saw it contained some wheat, beans, lentils, chick peas, horse shit, cow shit, and camel shit, all tied into one pouch. The jeweler said to himself, ‘who knows who lost this here?’, tied the pouch back up, and threw it outside”.\textsuperscript{259}

Finally, the jeweler cannot take it any longer and reports the whole chain of events to his wife. First, she interprets the other woman’s requests and disappearances: “my dear, today is the third day she came and went; first she let you behold her ears, secondly her neck, and thirdly her heels, thereby fully ensnaring your heart”.\textsuperscript{260} Then, she goes on to ask, “did you not notice a sign

\textsuperscript{256} “In an instant, she exposed both her ears, saying, ‘master jeweler, do you have some charming earrings worthy of these my ears?’ The jeweler replied, ‘I do indeed, my lady,’ turned around, opened the trunk, and took out a becoming pair of earrings. But by the time he turned to face the woman again, she was gone, not even leaving behind a dream” (P3, pp. 63-64).

\textsuperscript{257} “In an instant, she exposed her neck, saying, ‘master jeweler, do you have some bejeweled golden necklaces worthy of this my neck?’ The jeweler, saying, ‘I do, my sultan,’ turned around and took one out, but what should he see when he looked again but that the woman had vanished once more” (P3, p. 65).

\textsuperscript{258} “[The woman] put her henna-painted heel in front of him, and asked, ‘master jeweler, do you have an ankle chain worthy of these my heels?’ The fellow, saying, ‘I do, my lady,’ took an ankle chain out of the trunk, but when he turned around, he saw the woman had vanished once more.” (P3, p. 67).

\textsuperscript{259} “Açub gördi kim içinde buğday ve arpa ve mercimek ve nohud ve bakla ve at bokı ve şiğır bokı ve deve bokı, bu cümlesin bir yire bağlamışlar. Kuyumcu kendii kendiiye eyitdi, ‘kim bilir kimden düşmişdir?’ diyüb ol bezi bağlıyub yabana atdı” (P3, p. 68).

\textsuperscript{260} “Be canım, bugün üç gündir gelür gidemmiş. Evvel sana kulakların seyr etdirmiş, saniyen boynun seyr etdirmiş, salisen topukların seyr etdirmiş, tamam gönlin almış” (P3, pp. 70-71).
on her part, or some kind of token, perhaps? When he confirms her suspicion and tells her about the little sack, the wife clears up this riddle, as well: “that was a fine clue and token for you, but you weren’t able to read it. [……] O hapless one, that woman gave you a sign, saying, ‘our house is by the grain bazaar.’ [……] [The things] you found tied inside that cloth—all of that only comes together at the grain bazaar, and nowhere else”. She continues, telling her husband what he should do next: “get up early tomorrow, put on your best clothes, stroll over to the grain bazaar, and wait there. Wherever that woman might be, she will be keeping her eye out for you, and surely, she will give you a token or sign. Once she does, come back and tell me all about it. Based on her message, I will contrive a way for you to go and meet up with her”.

Following his wife’s instructions, the jeweler arrives at the grain market the following day. Soon, he notices that “he had been observed from a dais—his eyes went up to that place. Just then, that woman showed herself slightly through a window on the dais. At once, she removed a mirror from her headdress, and first showed the jeweler the face of that mirror. Next, she turned it around, showing him its back. And finally, putting it back in her headdress, she went inside”. The jeweler, not even aware she may have given him a sign, waits around for as long as he can, and, finally giving up, returns home in a gloomy mood. When he tells his wife all

---

261 “Hiç bu üç gün içinde bir dürül işaretin işaretin ve yahud bir remzin duymadın mı?” (P3, p. 71).
262 “Ol sana güzel remz-i işaret, amma sen duymamışsın [……]. Derd-mend, ol avret sana remz idüb dimiş ki, ‘bizim evimiz tahıl bazaraştır’ [……]. Bulduğun bezin içinde bağlı olan buğday,arpa, mercimek, nohud ve bakla ve at boku, deve boku, süğr boku, bu cümlesi tahıl bazaraında cem olur, gayri yirde cem olmaz” (P3, pp. 71-72).
263 “İmdi sabah erkenden kalkub giyin kuşan, seyran iderek tahıl bazarına varub dur. Ol avret her kanda ise seni gözendir ve sana elbetde bir remz ü işaret eyler. Andan sonra gel bana diyüvir, ann remzine göre ben de bir maslahat idem ki varub buluşasin” (P3, p. 72).
264 “Karşusında bir çardakdan kuyumcıyı gözendirler imiş, heman ol canibe gözü düş oldu. Ol mahalde çardığın penceresinden ol avret bir mikdar kendüyi gösterüb, ol avret heman başından bir ayine çıkardi, kuyumçuya ol ayinenin evvel yüzün gösterdi, sonra dönüreb ayinenin ardın gösterdi, ve başına sokub içerü alub yürüyüürdi” (P3, p. 73).
that has happened, she has a surprise for him: “she gave you a fine sign, but you weren’t able to fathom it”, she tells him again. “when that woman took the mirror from her headdress and showed you first its front and then its back, she said to you, ‘it’s daytime now, so you should come back at night.’ And when that woman did not linger and went back inside that instant, she told you that you, too, should not linger there, but leave at once”.265

In the context of such examples, the trunk metaphor, suggesting a division of society into public and private, gives way to a more nuanced understanding of society divided into a male public sphere and a separate female public sphere, with only limited access from one sphere to the other. Men are caught in the dilemma of trying to keep women out of the male public sphere, but, as an unintended result, enabling them to create a public sphere of their own.

It is assumed in Mekr-i Zenan that there should be a women’s world apart from the world of men. The justification appears to be that this kind of seclusion is needed to keep the wiles of women in check. But now it seems that seclusion can actually help to bring the wiles of women about. The realm into which women have been banished by men becomes a shared women’s world that men cannot enter or understand, a world that enables subversion. This world, in fact, is subversion, a locus of alternative power sources outside the male power hierarchy, a world the rules and language of which women can use to overpower men.266 This is why Mekr-i Zenan

---


266 Once again, it is tempting to draw parallels to Peirce’s description of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries: “The governing class of the Ottoman Empire in this period operated not so much on the basis of institutionally or functionally ascribed authority as through a complex of personal bonds and family and household connections” (p. 149). Peirce’s “institutionally or functionally ascribed authority” could be seen to correspond to the ideal, male-centered power hierarchy of Mekr-i Zenan, while her “personal bonds and family and household connections” might roughly correspond to the women’s world of Mekr-i Zenan.
men using wiles risk feminization: they are availing themselves of sources of power outside of their own remit, and monopolized by women.
2.3. Individuals and Society

2.3.1. Are There Any Anti-System Stories?

In the last two sections, we seem to have come across two quite different perspectives on *Mekr-i Zenan*. The former perspective claimed that *Mekr-i Zenan* has an internally consistent worldview, in which the wiles of women are explained by the fact that women are part of the world, not of mankind, that they have been put in the world to test men, and that it is men’s responsibility to learn from this test to prove themselves worthy in the eyes of their creator. The latter perspective, in contrast, pointed to cracks and fissures in that worldview: men use wiles as well, it claimed; in fact, if we look at wiles across stories, it seems that they are always employed by someone with a disadvantage in power or status, that this disadvantage, and the resulting guileful behavior, occurs regardless of gender, and that, as a matter of fact, gender can be ascribed to a person based on social status and guileful behavior, not just the other way round.

Must we, then, conclude that *Mekr-i Zenan* stories intend to give us a certain message but end up saying something else altogether; that while setting out to underline some intrinsic qualities of women and men, they end up undermining this goal by exposing how contingent those qualities are? To render the question more specific, how subversive of its genre’s own assumptions regarding men, women, and society is it possible for a *Mekr-i Zenan* story to be?

*Mekr-i Zenan* contains many story elements that offer instances of such message subversion. The wiles of men examined above are perhaps the most obvious example, but others readily come to mind. For instance, what to make of stories in which wiles are used to publicly defensible ends, such as “The Lazy Husband”, which features a guileful woman reintegrating a male misfit into society, and “The Deceitful Wedding”, in which a man uses wiles to escape a marriage into which he has been tricked under false pretenses? If wiles are wrong by definition,
and adhering to the rules of society is right, how can wiles serve the end of supporting, or rectifying, society?

We also find instances in which societal norms themselves seem to place individuals in danger. A good example is “The Fruit of Rape”. Here, the virgin realizes that she has let a man into her quarters in the mistaken belief that he is a woman—his features are obscured by the veil. He grabs her, but she doesn’t make a sound: “I was scared of crying out lest I bring shame upon myself”. The passage concludes with the girl getting violated. Societal norms take on a very negative connotation here; it almost seems as if they had conspired against the girl: first, her rapist takes advantage of the rule that women ought to obscure their features; second, she herself refrains from self-defense for fear of disclosure and public censure. One might be forgiven for getting the impression that this story takes issue with the way society works.

Finally, “anti-systemic” openings, if not agendas, may be gleaned from the lessons that mistake, complicity, and transgression stories try to teach. In the latter two categories, it is quite clear that men cannot stop women from acting guilefully, but must live with them nonetheless. If so, could it be argued that the system of rules trying to keep women under control might as well be abandoned? As we have seen above, the story that comes closest to raising this question is “The Fake Adultery”, in which the wife states quite clearly that a woman may forswear wiles, not by being forced, but only if she chooses. Finally, in their own way, the mistake stories may appear even more radically anti-systemic than the complicity or transgression stories. After all, the most extreme mistake stories, such as “The Resurrected Wife”, urge men to stay away from women altogether: surely, if taken literally, this advice would cause society as *Mekr-i Zenan* knows it to collapse? All these potentially subversive readings are implicit in *Mekr-i Zenan*; that

---

267 “Korhdum ki feryad eyliyem, rüsva olam” (E7, p. 41).
is, no story proceeds with the explicit aim of undermining, changing, or overthrowing society as it stands. Still, whether it be the wiles of men, wiles useful to society, the dangers of societal norms, or more “macro” issues with the way society works, *Mekr-i Zenan* does not seem to be afraid of raising some strong objections to the way in which it structures and defends society.

Ultimately, however, *Mekr-i Zenan* manages to answer all these questions, and render all objections to its explicit worldview moot. There are no “anti-system” *Mekr-i Zenan* stories. Even in situations where wiles are employed to correct imbalances in society, we do not encounter the idea that society may need to be questioned as a whole. Rather, such situations are always brought about by men or women who act in ways society would deem wrong, thereby causing the imbalance. None of the stories gives us reason to believe that if individuals behaved ideally, society would still be flawed. Women, for one, are taken to be inherently guileful, so society can hardly be faulted for suffering because of their wiles. And the remaining imbalances in society are caused by individual men who do not behave as they ideally should, not by society itself. While there may be some leeway across categories of *Mekr-i Zenan* as to what the ideal society actually looks like, there is never any problem with that society *per se*; the problem is always guileful women or men with moral lapses.

Examples of this abound. The wife in “The Fake Adultery” would not have seen the need to teach her husband a lesson if the latter had not behaved in an overly jealous and possessive manner. The wife in “The Resurrected Wife” would never have found a new lover if her husband had not been excessive in his attachment to her, going as far as asking Jesus to resurrect her. The man in “The Deceitful Wedding” has no inherent need to use wiles as a way to get out of his marriage; he could simply go to court and ask for annullment. And the misfit in “The Lazy Husband” would never have had to endure humiliation at the hands of his wife if he had not
wilfully placed himself outside of society to begin with. Finally, even “The Fruit of Rape”, at first glance an example of societal rules endangering individuals, turns out, upon closer examination, to be the opposite: a warning against individuals undermining societal rules. True, the virgin is compromised due to her acceptance of and adherence to certain norms. But these norms only start working against her after other individuals have already subverted them for their own wicked purposes: the old woman, by proposing a friendship between the girl and her daughter (the old woman’s “daughter” turns out to be the rapist), and the rapist himself, by taking advantage of the veil and the virgin’s probity to violate her. Once societal norms have been undermined in this way, they start working against individuals, but ultimately, Mekr-i Zenan always places the blame at the feet of the individuals who undermined the norms, rather than the norms themselves.

2.3.2. Social Cohesion in Mekr-i Zenan

Often, across Mekr-i Zenan stories, we find that one male or female protagonist might as well be the next; characters are not so individuated that men and other men, as well as women and other women, could not be exchanged easily.\(^\text{268}\) It is tempting to think of this simply in terms of a literary genre and its accepted, ossified types and clichés: Mekr-i Zenan stories clearly draw on a predetermined cast of characters that repeat from one story to the next. However, I would argue that there is more to this similarity of characters across stories, and that it in fact plays a functional role in propping up the precedence that Mekr-i Zenan gives to society over

\(^\text{268}\) This is not the case with all Ottoman stories or genres. In the Tifli Stories, for instance, characters are often very individualized. The heroic protagonist of “Hikâyet” (Sansar Mustafa Hikâyesi), for instance, could not pass for the morally compromised protagonist of Hançerli Hikâye-i Garibesi; if the stories’ protagonists were exchanged, their plots could not remain as they are (see Sayers, Tifli Hikâyeleri, pp. 63-64; 69-71).
individuals. I propose to think of the cast of characters in *Mekr-i Zenan* in terms of social cohesion, in terms of a belonging to the same *cemaat* (community of believers). In effect, Mekr-i Zenan sees this community or society as so absolutely normative that two people one may randomly encounter apart from each other are guaranteed to believe pretty much the same thing and acknowledge the same rules, even if they break them and, in the case of men, regret doing so, or, in the case of women, claim exemption from them.

This normative aspect of society comes out especially well in stories where we see a group, crowd, or mob of people think, talk, and act in unison, as demonstrated by a remarkable passage from “The Adulteress and the Wife”. In this passage, an *imam* recounts to a judge the chain of events by which the adulterous couple was caught in the act by a neighborhood mob, culminating in the couple’s appearance in court:

> O sultan, there is a wanton woman in our neighborhood, and we have been helpless and impotent against her. Many a time, we observed her take strange men inside, but when we arrived at her door with the congregation, forced her to open up, and went inside, we could never determine where she had smuggled or hidden them. Finally, last night, this fellow arrived at her house. We said, “if we go in again without delay, she will only hide him away, we will not be able to find him, and as soon as we are gone, she will get him out and continue her debauchery. Savvy and precaution call for us not to react at once. Later, once they have eaten and drunk and gone to bed, we will climb over the wall, never let them stir as they lie in each other’s arms, wrap them in their sheets, tie them to a stretcher, take them to the dungeon, bring them into the presence of my lord in the morning,
untie them right there, and expose them naked as on the day they were born.” We acted as we had resolved, and here we are, having brought them into your presence.269

Thinking with one mind, like a Greek chorus, this mob consists of people who, in a fundamental sense, are all the same person, interchangeable, not a collection of “I”s as much as an a priori “we”. As in this case, the collective often has a head that manifests its will and voice, in the form of the local imam and/or müezzin. And while it is hard to tell whether actual women are included in this cemaat, it definitely has a male mind, works according to the male logic and worldview outlined above, and thus can be duped by women just as easily as a single man can be, which happens in this case when the adulterer’s wife swaps places with the adulteress in jail, thus rendering the question of adultery moot.

The community of faith acts like a single organism in more ways than one. In many Mekr-i Zenan stories, we encounter men stepping out of line quite easily and willingly when in private, but reining themselves in immediately when their transgression is made public. In “The Buried Fish”, when the wife denies knowledge of the fishes her husband had brought home earlier in the day for her to prepare, the husband flies into a rage,

took up a cudgel and trounced her with it once. Realizing that he was seeing red with hunger, the woman let out a shriek and ran out in front of the guests, blood running from her head, uncovered as she was. She cried, “o neighbors, save me from the clutches of this ogre, he has taken leave of his senses!” and the guests became sorry that they had come at all. The fellow grew ashamed in front of the guests and could not attack the woman again.\textsuperscript{270}

At this moment of public revelation and shame, \textit{cemaat} processes start operating at once:

“while they were clamoring like this, it turns out that the \textit{imam efendi} and the \textit{müezzin çelebi} were on their way from the mosque. Hearing this clamor, they stopped at the door and asked, ‘what is the cause of this ruckus at this time of the day?’\textsuperscript{271} After each side has presented its case, the \textit{imam} wraps up the proceedings by appealing to the \textit{cemaat}: ‘the \textit{imam} said, ‘neighbors, bear witness, how could fishes be in a field?’ They grabbed the man and sent him to the mental asylum, putting him in chains. From time to time, his neighbors would visit and inquire about his health’.\textsuperscript{272}

Individual guilt does not come into play here; public shame, on the other hand, does so quite strongly. Similarly, in our previous example from “The Adulteress and the Wife”, culpability arises from literally naked exposure to the community at large; as long as wrongdoing has not been witnessed and documented publicly, it does not even quite seem to enter the

\textsuperscript{270} “Herif eline bir odun alub avrete bir yol urĎti. Gördi ki herifin açlıkdan gözleri dönmiş, feryad idüb başından kan akarak çiblak taşrada misafirlerin yanna uğradı. ‘Konşular, bu zalimin elinden beni kurtarın, aklı gitmişdir!’ didikde misafirler geldiklerine peşimân ü nâdim oldılar. Herif misafirlerden hicâb idüb hele bir dahi avrete hücum idemedi” (M1, p. 2).

\textsuperscript{271} “Bunlar bu feryad üzure iken imam efendi ve müezzin çelebi camiden gelirler imiş. Bu feryadı işidüb kapuda durdular. ‘Bu vaktide bu feryadın âşlı nedir?’ didiklerinde” (M1, p. 2).

\textsuperscript{272} “İmam dimiş, ‘konşular, şahid oln, hiç tarlada balk olur mı?’ didi. Herifi tutub dîmarhâneye gönderdiler, zencire urdılar. Gâhiçe konşuları varub hatırını sorarlar idi” (M1, p. 2).
category of wrongdoing. Conscience, then, seems not to be internalized, but externalized in the form of a “collective conscience” that manifests itself as shame whenever the collective actually physically shows up. In the previous section, I had suggested that rather than postulating a public and private sphere, it might make more sense to think of Mekr-i Zenan as containing two public spheres, one for women and one for men, both freely accessible to all members of the same sphere, and at least penetrable by members of the other. The present discussion of individual versus community leads one to wonder whether Mekr-i Zenan leaves room for the idea of an individual private sphere at all.

At times, Mekr-i Zenan underlines its emphasis on community by unfavorably contrasting the results of individual choices with the results of processes approved by the community. “The Resurrected Wife” starts out with the male protagonist catching a glimpse of his uncle’s daughter: “One day, that young man’s eyes fell upon the girl’s beauty by accident. When he saw her beauty, he lost hold of the reins of discernment, was bewitched, went out of his wits with her love, and became her forlorn nightingale”. In contrast, we hear nothing of her feelings for him; conceivably, she might even be unaware of his existence at this point. What follows is a highly traditional courtship, structured around societal norms and expectations: “Going through envoys, he asked his uncle for the girl’s hand, paid in full whatever price his uncle demanded, and took the girl as his wife”. This “proper” way of conducting a marriage is contrasted with what happens when a person (a woman, in this case) is left to her own devices. After her death, the same woman is

---

274 “Ara yere elçiler nısb idüb emmisinden zevceliğe ol kızı taleb eyledi, emmisi ne şeyler baha istedi ise tamamen virüb kızın aldı” (P6, pp. 116-17).
resurrected by Jesus, and while her husband rushes off to get her some clothes (she is naked), she espies a handsome young man. In contrast to her feelings for her husband, which had not been of relevance to her traditional marriage, we are informed that the feelings in this new pairing are mutual: “As soon as the young man saw this treasure, he became her forlorn admirer with the love of a thousand hearts and souls. For a while, he was dumbfounded and simply gaped at her from where he stood. But from yonder, that woman also gaped at the youth from where she stood.” 275 She does not shy away from physically expressing her feelings, either: “At once, that woman showed the youth her inclination”. 276 In other words, the woman is alone, recently reborn, starting a new life, like a baby, literally naked, but naked also in the sense that she has shed all male and societal “protection”. And in this state, she makes a choice to be with a man of her own free will. Of course, even the setting of this new union—a graveyard—heralds disaster. The husband returns with her clothes, finds her with the other man, and notwithstanding her argument that she has died and been reborn, and therefore her former vows are no longer binding, induces Jesus to extinguish her life once again.

Another example of the relationship between individual choices and the rules set out by the community is “The Fruit of Rape”. Here, as we have seen, the woman takes her rapist’s life. Once the matter becomes known, Ali, the religious authority, is asked how he will rule in the case. His response is thus: “No blood money is required in this case, and this woman needs not be punished, for he was not her husband”. 277 Clearly, the woman’s murder of her rapist is acceptable solely because the intercourse has taken place out of wedlock. The implication seems to be that if the two had been married, and the man had forced himself upon the woman in a

---

275 “Ol yiğit bu mahbubu görince bin dil ü can birle aşk-i efgendesi oldı, bir zaman dembeste hayran olub bakub kaldı. Amma beriden ol hatun da ol yiğide bakub kaldı” (P6, p. 121).
277 “Onun diyesi yohdur, ve bu avrete had lazım değil, ondan ötiri ki eğer ehlin olub” (E7, p. 42).
similar fashion, the woman would have had no similar right to physically defend herself.

Consensuality in sex then, is not individually but institutionally defined. A woman can consent, of course, both to adultery and to lawful sex with her husband, and she can and ought to refuse adultery or rape, but she cannot refuse sex within marriage. Sex within marriage is sanctioned by society, and the woman’s consent is implicit. The message of both the examples above is loud and clear: persons live their lives properly only to the extent to which they bring their actions into harmony with given societal rules. As soon as they allow individual choices to make their actions diverge from these rules, they have stepped into error. Individuals ought to be submerged, even effaced, in society.

This kind of effacement might be compared to the lack of individuation in facial features found in Islamic miniature painting. Characters in such paintings may be facially undifferentiated, but they are definitely not nameless: we always know who this or that person is, gleaning this information both from the context of the painting and from the text accompanying it. The point is not that these figures could be just anybody; it is that they could be anybody from the perspective of the deity. In the context of miniatures, it can be argued that since the deity is the one deciding the laws of society, it is to him that all humans must look the same; he, not humans, is the one who needs to be able to see their underlying sameness in order to be able to decree just and impartial laws.

I have argued above that Mekr-i Zenan also postulates, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, a society with rules handed down by the deity, a society in which imperfection is due not to flaws in the rules, but to deliberate trials by the deity on the one hand, and human imperfection in responding to these trials on the other. Now, the rules in and of themselves cannot be flawless if the beings to which they are supposed to apply have not been
perfectly understood, and they cannot apply to all if all are not essentially the same (albeit within distinct categories). In line with these conditions, we do not find any indication in *Mekr-i Zenan* that nurture, for instance in the form of education, might make any difference whatsoever as to how men and women behave towards each other. Essence reigns supreme; contingent factors like education or circumstance are discounted. This perfect divine fathoming of essentially defined categories of subjects forms the metaphysical ground without which a perfect earthly system of rules cannot exist.

A good example for this interdependence between earthly rules and the essence of those who are governed by these rules is found in “The Fruit of Rape”. Here, one might ask oneself why the female protagonist, once she has been raped, does not turn to the authorities (the ruler of the Islamic Caliphate, no less) for help and redress. A plausible reason is that, having witnessed the corruption of societal rules by both the old woman and the rapist, she is afraid of encountering more corruption if she speaks out. Once again, human misbehavior has stopped societal rules from functioning ideally.

In order to compensate for this state of affairs, the system itself, once its wheels have been set in motion, must be just in an absolute fashion; once the proper justice mechanism gets involved, everything must work itself out like a puzzle and all stones fall into place. But the justice mechanism by itself is insufficient to effect this falling into place. In this case, it needs to work hand in hand with the essence of the woman who has borne the child of her rapist. If the woman detested the child because of the way it was conceived, or saw it as a burden, perfect justice could not be served: no matter what happened to the rapist himself, the child would remain as a constant reminder to the mother of the injustice she had to endure. *Mekr-i Zenan* solves this problem by appealing to the essence of the woman as mother: even though the woman
has abandoned the child, because she is a mother, she has an unbreakable bond of love with her child. She recognizes her child, just a baby, from afar in a crowded marketplace. Twice, she takes the risk of exposure just to be near her child. And finally, the story ends happily with Ali reuniting mother and child. The essence of a mother’s supposedly intrinsic inclination towards her child, even if it is the child of a rapist, complements the laws applied by Ali to punish the transgressors (the woman who had facilitated the rape is stoned to death), and thus, perfect justice is attained.

Ultimately, then, there is no inconsistency between Mekr-i Zenan’s overall vision of an order decreed by the deity—with society based on divine rules implemented and followed by men, and women seen as part of the trial of the world rather than as part of mankind—and supposed cracks in this vision, such as the wiles of men and the social construction of gender. The stories bridge the gap between the deity’s plan and men’s imperfection by positing society as the mediator between the two: society is the arena in which men negotiate their imperfection and try to bring themselves into closer harmony with the divine will. The more closely they can

---

278 "A woman called out from among the women, saying, ‘o nanny, I implore you, stop, in Muhammad’s name!’ The nanny stopped, that woman came up, and […] took the child” (E7, p. 39).

279 “After that, he sent the woman home with her child, and later on, that child was martyred during the campaign of Siffin in the service of his excellency. May God have mercy upon him” (E7, p. 42). This little coda recounts how the boy, once he grows up, dies a martyr to the faith, serving Ali, by then the fourth caliph, in his campaigns against Mu’aviya ibn Abi Sufyan. Thus, ultimately, even the rapist and his actions are redeemed by the character of his son.

280 The subtle way in which this story achieves its balance between heavenly and earthly justice without openly branding the mother as guileful for trying to evade this justice can be contrasted with a similar story found in Ibn al-Batatuni, which concludes with a moral explicitly condemning the mother for not immediately contacting the authorities (Malti-Douglas, pp. 62-65). Once again, the question is to what extent a heterogeneous mistake story has been made to conform to Mekr-i Zenan standards. While in “The Fruit of Rape”, the lack of focus on the mother’s wiles suggests that this story is about the justice of Ali rather than the wiles of women, the Batatunian story, through the intervention of the narrator in the form of a concluding moral, has been sharply refocused on the wiles of women.
follow the ideal rules and norms of society, the closer they come to the deity.\textsuperscript{281} And adhering to the societal power hierarchy is part of this deal: any way of obtaining power that does not ground its legitimacy in the hierarchy—in other words, any form of subversion—may be viewed as guilefulness from this perspective. The legitimately powerful are not supposed to be guileful, and indeed, in none of these stories do we find characters who are both powerful and guileful.\textsuperscript{282}

In this world, thinking that is intended to secure a personal advantage outside of society’s norms automatically seems inferior and imperfect. The rules and laws of society are perceived as so just that such thinking is not required at all; this kind of thinking is always perversity, guilefulness. Everybody is always already at the maximum advantage in the ideal society governed by the laws of the deity. There is no advantage to be gained from extra, self-serving thinking. The complicity stories, and some of the transgression stories, have their bit of fun with this idea by allowing that straightforward thinking all the time would be a pretty dull affair and that it is the vexatious, perverse kind of thinking that makes life interesting. But ultimately, even in these stories, this kind of thinking can only be a distraction, and one must, or at least ought to, return to the norm in the end. Both women and men, in their subversion of societal norms, are ultimately frivolous because they have no alternative to offer. In fact, it does not seem imaginable within the parameters of Mekr-i Zenan that there could be an alternative order.

\textsuperscript{281} In \textit{The Imperial Harem}, Leslie Peirce approaches this idea of the perfect society from the perspective of statecraft: “In the traditional Muslim understanding of statecraft and kingship, to which the Ottomans were heir, the well-being of society depended ultimately on the vigilance of the ruler, whose duty it was to ensure that the different elements or classes in society remained in their fixed places and performed their fixed functions. It was this, the maintenance of social harmony and order, that was the highest expression of the ruler’s justice (\textit{adl})” (p. 177).

\textsuperscript{282} Over time, this worldview comes under serious attack in other genres of Ottoman prose fiction. Thus, in some late-nineteenth-century Tıflı stories, legitimately powerful people start acting guilefully as well. This development, in all its ramifications for society, truly signifies a world out of joint. (See, for instance, “İki Biraderler Hikâyesi”, in Sayers, \textit{Tıflı Hikâyeleri}, pp. 72-74.)
It appears that for Mekr-i Zenan, ascribing intrinsic guilefulness to women and regarding them as beings inferior to men was not simply a way to arbitrarily discriminate against a segment of society. Rather, the dehumanization of women was an integral part of a societal vision, with much more at stake than the relations between men and women. The worldview of Mekr-i Zenan implies that the perfect society is theoretically attainable, even here on earth. But this theoretical perfection comes at a heavy price: it is to be had only in a heavily circumscribed, highly exclusive area, and all those excluded from this area have to pay for this perfection. It is no wonder that the women in Mekr-i Zenan perceive no injustice in their situation, and openly and cheerfully confess to their guileful nature. By branding themselves as intrinsically guileful, and thus excluding themselves from society, they fulfill a function vital to it: they enable the dream of a perfect (male) society to survive.
Conclusion: Us and Them

Today, in the twenty-first century CE, we can easily imagine contexts in which the depictions of women in at least some *Mekr-i Zenan* stories would be perceived as more positive, or at least value-neutral. For instance, we may think of the anti-hero, who wins his very charm through subversive and perhaps even openly guileful attitudes and actions. Women in stories such as “The Duped Officer” could be cast as perfect anti-heroes in contemporary reimaginings of these stories. But the anti-hero only has relevance in a narrative that does not proceed from the assumption that its societal model is perfect. In fact, she acts as a critique of this very assumption, as someone we sympathize with precisely because she does not fit in with the ostensibly perfect or utopian world of the fiction in question.

There is no such critical distance in *Mekr-i Zenan*. The genre is based on the *a priori* assumption that the society it presents is made not by men and for men, but by the deity, and for the perfection of men, with women serving an instrumental function in the fostering of that perfection. It seems unlikely that men in the *Mekr-i Zenan* world could ever reach a stage at which earthly society might be called perfect. After all, there are “outside” factors like women, introduced precisely to make things difficult and challenging for men, and men themselves are imperfect creatures. Still, the onus is on men to bring themselves into greater and greater conformity with the ideal society, which stands unassailed as a pinnacle of divinely decreed perfection.

The imperfection of humans, as encountered in *Mekr-i Zenan*, is an idea that has lost none of its weight, even today. However, through fiction and reality, many of us today have become exposed to the idea—if we do not in fact actively subscribe to it—that laws and society cannot
be perfect, either. While in the system described by *Mekr-i Zenan*, humans are forever trying to catch up with the laws, in many modern systems the law must try to accommodate the imperfect human being, and there is always room for improvement since humans are always imperfect. In the world of *Mekr-i Zenan*, perfection of the law is a given, while we are familiar with worldviews that exclude this possibility.

If perfection of the law (or, if you will, the existence of a divine legislator) is a given, thinking geared towards securing questionable personal advantage is irrational. It may have a logic, but that logic is a nonsense logic that applies in some topsy-turvy parallel world of reality or fiction, a world that does not play by the same rules. In that parallel world, where law is not perfect, and where structural injustices—as opposed to mere individual shortcomings—are assumed to exist, subversion may not necessarily be a bad thing. In such a society, looking out for one’s self-interest in ways that society may not endorse is equally likely to be viewed as clever or resourceful as it is to be condemned as “guileful”. Further, if laws and rules are not set in stone, it makes sense to question everything because, at least theoretically, questioning can lead to better laws and rules.

It is almost as if women in *Mekr-i Zenan* were already living in such a topsy-turvy world—an idea of the world intimately familiar to many of us today—while *Mekr-i Zenan* men were still living in a world of divine justice. These women have an intelligence more suitable to an inherently unjust world, which *Mekr-i Zenan* cannot believe in, while these men have an intelligence more suitable to an inherently just world, which may be harder to believe in—or defend in fiction while keeping a straight face—today. This is why it is easy for readers today to sympathize with the women in *Mekr-i Zenan*: though existing in the past, they seem to embody a very contemporary mode of thought and action.
If we proceed from the assumptions of this “topsy-turvy” world, it is easy, or perhaps even inevitable, to condemn *Mekr-i Zenan* for singling out a particular segment of society, namely women, in a discriminatory and sexist way for the kind of self-serving behavior that, after all, everybody practices, regardless of gender. Still, it might be instructive to consider how writers of *Mekr-i Zenan* may have reacted to the idea of the topsy-turvy world, an inherently unjust world, a world in which imperfect laws follow imperfect humans and all try to look out for their self-interest in the best way they can. It is likely that they would have regarded this idea as a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, as an abandonment of everything because one cannot have it all. At least, they may have argued, their vision of society, by excluding half of humankind and imbuing it with all our negative attributes that simply cannot be helped, allowed for the possible salvation of the other half. The topsy-turvy vision, they might have said, may render all of us equal, but only at the cost of rendering us all equally irredeemable.

Still, it is hard to imagine that the ambiguity we may feel today when reading *Mekr-i Zenan* was never felt at readings in the original contexts of the stories, even among male audiences. In fact, the reader’s comment we encountered above demonstrates that, while it did not occur to the critic to question the underlying forces that made *Mekr-i Zenan* men and women act the way they did, the question did occur whether men and women really could be described as simply as they are here. Male audiences rooting for the women in these stories would have had to mean that men could empathize with them, so that even if the stories present a certain worldview of a perfect society, the flawed realities of life may have made men more ready to view the world through women’s eyes.\(^{283}\) Perhaps, then just as now, the most enjoyable *Mekr-i Zenan*...
*Zenan* stories were the ones exploiting the ambiguity between cunning and cleverness, probity and stupidity, and leaving the reader in a state of doubt about where the line should be drawn.

Ultimately, the line is always shifting, and in constant need of redrawing. *Mekr-i Zenan* as a genre is a chronicle of attempts at answering perennial, interlaced questions about our understanding of women and men, institutions and their subversion, the individual and society, religion and the world, the hidden and the revealed. And while the genre is clearly historical in its social, geographic, and temporal boundaries; it is also universal in the way that it leaves us with a set of riddles, negotiations, failures, half-measures, and ambiguities in response to these issues. The questions it asks are as relevant today as they ever were, and the answers it provides should take their place as part of the human catalogue of local and temporary attempts to deal with timeless and universal questions.

Qur’an. Further, I think it quite likely that non-elite males take the occasion to identify with and celebrate successful underdogs, even (or especially) when the elite oppressor is being bested by an underdog woman” (“Whose Best Tricks?”, p. 270).
Bibliography

Primary Sources
Registro de Varías Materias y Apuntaciones (turco) [manuscrito]. Biblioteca Nacional de España. Sede de Recoletos. MSS/12097.

Secondary Sources

Appendix A: Transliterations

Transliterations: Madrid


“Avretler nakîs-ül-akîldir, âktî kâmil olanlar nice mekr idebîlûrler ve nice galib gelebîlûrler?” didi. Gayrî avret bunun üzerine sürmedi, amma buna mekr itmeğe karar kıldı, azm ü niyet eyledi.


Transliterations: Paris


Bir mikdar devr idüb kaba kuşlık oldı instrumentation yine ıscakdan bunalub gelüb ol mahud sofaya çıkub oturdu. Dahi meşhur meseldir, kurd bir kere karını toyurub ed yeri [?] tokuz toluşur [?]. Hele bir mikdar teneffüs idüb yine gaflet alıkdıda bu kez uyumiyub, amma uyura urub, mızganur


[The text continues on the next page in a different handwriting.]


145


bize gazab eyliye, arada zahmet çekkeyüz. Ve yahud bir emin itimad olmun eve emanet koyayuz, bu gice anda yatub sabah kalkub evine gide” dedi.


Bes sabah oldî, gün nuriyle alemi münevver kıldı. Asesbaşı heman yerinden durub ve sürüb subaşının evine vardı, gördü kim kadî efendi gelmiş, geçüb subaşının yanına karar eylemiş. Heman kadî, asesbaşıyı görçek, subaşïa eyitdi, “benim hasmım gelsün, görelim malî ne eyledi,


Bes subaşı, naib ve anda ne kadar adem hazır bulundu ise bile alub geldiler, kadinın evinin içerüşüne girüb başdan başa aradılar. Asla ne avretden ve ne eşyasından bir nişan ve bir


Derd-mend kadı neye uğradığın bilmeyüb, dembeste ve hayran olub, ağaç gibi dikilüb kaldı, halk içinde rüsvey hecel oldı, bilen bilûr, bilmeyen gerçek kryas ider. Ol arada subaşı dönüb eyitdi, “Bu ne şekil işdir böyle? Hîç kimse görmüş ve işmiş değildir” diyüb vafir serzenişler eyliyüb, naib ve halk taşra çıkub [32] her biri bir dürüﬂ söz söyylediler. Heman kadı-i biçare subaşıya ve asesişyaya vafir tazarrular ve niyazlar idüb özürler diledi ve hayli mal virdi ve


Ol ölicek karı eyitdi, “gel imdi, getür sanduğü, gidelim. Seninle yeni ana oğl oldık, ve hatunun da küçikden benim elimde büyüdü. Her daim bu derdi tutdıkça ben varub ilaç iderim. Ve


Avret oynasıyla âlem etmek istediğinde, hemandem çulha derd-mendi bir yirinden dahi, “var, fülan şeyi getür” diyü gönderirler idi. Heman çulha kapuyu kilidliyüb giderdi, avret yine oynasın çıkurub âlem iderler idi, ta çulha kapuya gelince. Çulha kapuya gelince tiz herifi sanduğa

158
koyarlardı. Elhasil, bunun üzerine bir hafta geçti. Bir haftadan sonra, avret dibdiri olub, bunlar
dahi tamam murad üzere zevk ü alem etdiler. Bir haftadan sonra avret iyüce oldı. Karı eyitdi,
“oğıl, bir haftadır ben de evime varmadım. Belki emanet sahibi gelmişdir, beni arar, bulamaz.
İmdı lutf ü kerem eyle, bu sanduğu yine benimle evime iletüvir” didi. Çulha dahi, “anaciğım,
başim üstine” diyüb, heman sandüğü yine arkasına urub, kapusun kildiyyüb, karı önince, çulhanın
sanduk arkasında ärınca, yab yab [44] gittiler.

Meğer ahşam yakın idi. Çulha, sırtında sanduk ağır olmak ile yab yab girerdi. Ahir
yorılub, sandüğü arkasından bir yüksecek yere koyub biraz dinlendi. Karının ise çulhanın
dinlendiğinden haberi yok, önince bek bek giderdi. Çulha katlan[…], “kaçan ise ben evi bilir, ko
gitsün” diyüb mukayyed olmadı. Bir lahza dinlendiğinden sonra, yine sandüğü arkasına alub
giderken, ahşam olmağile yolu şaşırub, bir gayrı yola girüb, bakub gördü kim yolu şaşırmış,
dönme başladı. Ahşam dahi geçüb göz gibi gormez oldı. Dönüb evine dahi gitme yolub bulmaya
heman tevekkülü giderken, nagah yolu aberların konağı sentine varub bir bölük
aseslerin üzerine uğradı.

Asepler gördüler, bir herif, arkasında bir sanduk,нтında iki kat olmış büyüküb gider,
heman asepler bunu göreck birbirlerine eyitdiler, “hiç değil, bu herifin dahi yoldaşları vardır,
Bunun elbette bir yatak yirleri olmak gerekdir. Bu herifin yoldaşları ve yatak yirleri aceb kanda
ola? Besbellü, bunun yoldaşları bu sanduğu buna yükledüb ol yatak olan yire getürirler, her biri
bir tarafдан ol mahud oldukları yire varırlar. Acaba ne şekil kimsenin evin açmışlardır? Büyük
seray olmak gerekdir!” diyüb heman asepler çulhanın önün alub, “dur a bre herif! Bu gice
vaktinde, sırtında bu sanduk, nereye getürirsin, ve ne şekil kimsenin evini açdınız, ve yoldaşların

159
kandadır, ve mahud olduğunuz ev kandadır? Tiz söyle!” diyüb derd-mend çulhanın yakasından yapışub dur avzdîlar [?].


Subhan olıcak yine varub odana gidesin” diyüb, heman yirinden durub, çulhayı önüne katub doğru evine geldi, kapu kakdı.


162
Andan ötürü, “ben hokkabaz istemem” diyü asesbaşıya yalvardı ve “bir dahi tövbeler olsun, ben hokkabaz istemem!” diyü yalvardı.


Beriden çulha gördü anlar halâs oldılar, kendü kendüsine eyitdi, “anlar hile ile halâs etmek hüner değil. [60] Hüner oldı ki kendünü dahi halâs eyle, yohsa anların yiyeceği boztağını sen yirsın” diyüb, amma asesbaşı çulhanın itdürü işe hayran olub kendü kendüye
eyitdi, “çok hokkabaz gördim, amma bu hokkabazın eylediği sanatı hiç ömrimde görmedim!
Kendünün sanduğundan bir âdem çıkara ve benim küpümden bir âdem çıkara! Bu hünner çok
hünerdir ve bu sanat çok sanatdır, ve kimse dahi görmüş değildir!” ve bundan bir şey
anlayamıyub gerçekden hayatât kıyas eyledi ve azim fıkre vardı.

Heman çulha fêhm ü idrak eyledi ki asesbaşı kendünün eylediği hile-yâbına ve sanatına
akıl iðridirmeyüb hayrete vardı, heman ol mahaðde çulha eyitdi, “ağa efendi, kûpden ve
sandukdan âdem çıkarmak hüner değildir, ve bu sanat bir hüner değildir! Hüner oldur kim şimdi
varam, taṣradan birini maymun ve birini şebek idib getürüb [61] karṣunuzda oynamad! İşte seyir
bu seyirdir. Bu ideceğim sanata dahi hayran kaldınız!” dedikde heman asesbaşı, “ha göreyim seni,
usta hokkabaz! Heman iş gör, sana bu etdigin sanatlar mukabelesinde bahşiş dahi virürüm!”
diyince avreti eyleti, “vallah efendi, bu hokkabaz, üstad ve dahi sanatında mahir ve kâmil
hokkabaz imiş! Görülmedik seyranlar gösterdi! Eğer bu didiği sanati da gösterir ise çok hünerdir
ve azim ihsana müstahakdır” dedi. Avretin bu sözlerden muradı, asesbaşı heveslendirüb, bir
yol çulha taṣra çıkub ve taban kaldırub gide, kendü sırrı fâş olımıya.

Heman asesbaşı eyleti, “ha göreyim seni, heman iş gör!” dedi. Çulha gönlünden eyitdi,
“hele bir kere taṣra çıkabilsem, ol zaman siz de görîrsiz seyri” diyüb bir kere bacakların şîgayub,
dönüb asesbaşıya eyitdi, “ağa efendi, acaba ol iki âdemden birin maymun, birin dahi [62] şebek
mi etsem, yohsa eşek mi etsem?” dedi. Asesbaşı eyleti, “eşekin maymun ile münasebeti yokdür.
Şebek eyle” dedi. Çulha eyleti, “imdi siz seyr eylen, görin ne fasıl idib hüner göstersem gerekdir,
ki siz dahi acebe kalub bana pesend idesiz” dedi. Heman asesbaşı eyleti, “di imdi, göreyim seni!”
dedi. Heman çulha, elinde tebsi, suçrayarak ve çalarak kapudan taṣra olub, hiç eğlenmiyüb, nerd-
bandan aşağı inüb andan kapudan taṣra olub, anda dahi eyleşmiyüb, taban kaldırub bir baş soluğu
evinde alub, kapusîn açub, içeri girüb, ol saat avretine talak virüb kendü işine meşgul oldı. Bu
tarafından asesbaşı bekledi, gördü kim gelür gider yok. Avreti duydu çulhanın firar eyledüğünü,
amma hiç tunmayub açmaz kodı ve çulhaya Gonzlinden dualar ve aferinler eyledi. Asesbaşı gayrı
bilüb anladı kim [63] herif kaçdı, yine bir şey anlamadı, bu işlerden asla bir şey feth idemedi.

Benim canım, kısadan murad olan hissedir. Avretin üzerine gayet pek mukayyed olma
ve pek de boş koma. Zira eğri kökden hasıl olmuşdur, pek doğruldayım dirsên kirlur. Heman
Hakk-i sübhane ve teala yaramazlarının haklarından gele, ve yohsa yaramaz ile başa çıkmaz.
Ve yaramazları da Hakk-i teala ıslah eyliye, kıs salari meşhurdur.
Hikâyet-i 3 [P3]


yukarı arayub yine bir nam ü nişanın bulmuyub, heman yine dükkanına gelüb, işe güce [66] eli varmuyub, tiz yine dükkanın kapayub seyrana gitub, ahşama dek gezüb teferrüc eyledi.

Çün ahşam öldü, seyrandan dönüb evine geldi, yine melül mahzun, yüzü asla gülmeyeş. Avreti gördü yine erinin yüzü gülmeyeş, melül, eyitdi, “bre kişi, iki gicedir kim eve melül gelürsin! Nedir bu senin derdin? Yoksa bir kimseyi mi seversin, ve yahud iki gündür bazar etmedin mi? Melaletin her ne ise bana söyle, ben de bile melül olayın! Eğer bir kimmeye aşk oldınsa ana göre bir çare ideyim, eğer borcun var ise virmelü midir yohsa katlandırmalı mıdır, ana göre iş idelim, eğer bazar olmadiysa ana ne melül olursun, bugün olmadiysa yarın olur!” dedikde, kuyumcî yine avetine hiç cevab virmeyleş heman soynuyub döşeğe girüb yattı, gözleri sabahı gözledi.


Çün sabah oldı, herif heman yerinden durugelüb, kaftanın giyüb, ála yolundan dolabından sarıнуb, gözlerine sürmeler çeküb, kendüyi çeküb çevrüb düşüb kuşadı, netekim âdet-i zenpâredir. Andan sonra evinden çıkub, yab yab tahıl bazarına varıb [73] bir küşede durub etrafına bakınurken, nagâh, karşıında bir cardakdan kuyumcuyu gözederler imiş, heman ol canibe gözi düş oldı. Ol mahalde cardağın penceresinden ol avret bir mikdar kendüyi gösterüb, ol
avret heman başından bir ayine çıkardı, kuyumciya ol ayinenin evvel yüzün gösterdi, sonra dönüp ayinenin ardın gösterdi, ve başına sokub içeri alub yüriyüvirdi. Kuyumci katlama görür kim ol avret çıkub kendüye bir remz eyliye, bu dahi ol remzi tughb gelüb avretine diye, çok zaman muntazır oldı, hiç artuk çıkmadı.


pencereden içeri bıraksun” diyüp yâd ile kapuya dek bile çıkdı, erini gönderüb avret kapuyu kapayub, içeri girub içine meşgul oldı.

Kuyumcî cân kapudan taşra çıkub taban kaldırub

[The text breaks off here, resuming on the next page at a different point of the story.]


altın vireyim, anları çın taşra çıkarmazsın, bari beni aşağı sarkıt, ineyim, ikisi bir yirde [78] iken yüzlerine tüküreyim, dahi varub eve gideyim” dedi. Zindancı, altını alub, avretin beline bir ip bağlıyub, kuyuya sarkıtı.


efendinin huzurına iletüb, ol arada çözüb ikisin dahi anadan tohma çıkarayuz’ diyüb tedbir etdik, vakta didüğümüz gibi idüb üş huzurınıza getirdik’ dediler.


Avretlerde böyle hileler çok olur. Kissadan murad ancak hissedirdi, akıl sahblernine hoş malumdır, pek fehm eyle.
gönli olub bunlara, [85] “siz elem çekmen, ben anı bağhiyub size haber vireyim, ne hâliniz var ise görin” dedi, bunlar da dönüb gidiler.


İmdi benim canım, avretler gör ne mertebe merhametsiz ve şefkatsız olur imiş. Yetmiş yıl ol abid ü zahid ile bir yirde ömür sürümsüz de ve bu kadar nan ü nimet in yemesi iken gene tuz eteği basub kocasını ne hâle giriftar idüb, asla merhamet etmiyüb, ahir pâre pâre etdirince çalışub, kendü dahi etdüğünü buldı. Malum oldı ki avret kısmında vefa yokdur, vefa olmak dahi mutasavver değildir. Ve dahi cihanda üç şeyde vefa yokdur, biri avret, biri kılıç, biri at. Pek fehm eyle, bu da bunda tamam oldu.


Badehu atlarına binüb iki muazzam padişahlara at baş beraber otağa doğrıldılar, andan saniyen cümle vüzer ve erkân-i devlet selama durub, bunlar dahe iki tarafı selamliyub, gelüb otağa inüb, iki karışinski bir tahtın üzerine çıkub karar idüb tekrar hâl ü hatır soruşturub. Ve andan nüzul-i nimet gelüb, yenüb ve şükri dinüb, âlâ buhurlar tuttüreb, andan şerbetler icildikden sonra atlara binüb sehre, seraya gelüb nüzul eyeledi, karar eyelediler.


Meğer bu Zenan Şah’aın oturduğu odanın bir penceresi var idi, bağçeye bakar idi. Zenan Şah’dır pencere bağçeye bakub seyr ider iken anı görübü kim bağçe kapusından içeri yiğırmi kadar Arab cariyeler, anların ardına yiğırmi kadar beyaz cariyeler, ve andan saniyen Cabbar Şah’ın hatını ortalarında, gelüb bir havzin kenarında soynub, andan sultandır geçüb TAHT-i


Amma benim canım, Mülk-Cabbar günlerde bir gün Mülk Zenan’a sual idüb eyitdi, “be canım, sen evvel böyle değil idin, gam olur idin. Benim karındaşım, şimdi görürüm, ferah bulub benzin yerine [106] geldi ve asla gammin ve kasavetin yok. Ve benim karındaşım, beni elbetde bu ahvalden haberdar eyle.” Ve “canım karındaşım” diyüb çok niyaz eyledi. Ahir Mülk-Zenan,
Cabbar Şah’ın ilhâh ve ibramına dayanamıyub başladı, kendü avreti olan emmisi kızı ile açtı oğlanı mabeyninde olan macerayı, ve andan saniyen sabra idemiyüb ahir ikinin dahi katl idüb, andan sonra Hindistan’a gelüb dahil olduğun cümle bir bir nakl etdi, ve andan eyitdi, “benim canım karındaşım, gerçi sizinle görüşüb aṣı işret ve zevk-i sohbet iderdim, amma ol melun avretimin ettiği hıyanet asla hatırlanmadan gitmeyüb daima elem ve kasavet üzere olduğum ol idi. Amma o gün kim, benim canımdan azizim, karındaşım, siz saadetle ava gidüb ben serayda kalmış idim, pencereden bağçeye bakub seyr iderken anı gördim ki kapudan bir yiğimi kadar [107] Arab cariyeler geldi bağçeye. Anların arınca yiğimi be yaz cariyeler dahi gelüb,” ve bunların netice arada olan ef’al-i kabihlerin ve ahvallerini, cümlesini bir bir nakl ü beyan eyledi. “İmdi, benim karındaşım, eğer ki bana inanmaz isen yarın gel, yin ava gidüb yalnız gel, tebdil-i suret eyle, andan sonra bu pencereden seyr ü temaşa eyle, bak gör ki sana olan şeyi, ve rüsvaylık bana olandan bin beterdir” diyüb hamuş oldu.


Anı gördü kim ol kapudan içeri mutad-i kadim üzere yiğımı kadar Arab cariyeler feraceliyle girüb, anların arınca yiğımı kadar beyaz cariyeler, ol cariyelerin orta yirlerinde sultan varub havzin kenarında feracelerin âlâ çıkardılar. Sultan dahi gelüb, bin naz ve istiğna ile ol nazenin, sofaya çıkub karar eylediler. Andan emr eyledi, meclis müşheyya olınıb ol nazenin


Andan sonra karşısında Mülk-Zenan ile bir mikdar musahabed idüb, esna-i musahabetede Mülk-Cabbar karşısında Zenan Şah’a eyitdi, “gel, birader, seninle tebdil-i came [111] idüb bir zaman şu âlemi geçt ü güzel idelim, bakalım ayine-i devran ne suret gösterir, ve bu dünyada dahi bizim musibetimizden ziyade bir musibet bir kimsede dahi var mıdır!” diyüb iki biraderler tebdil-i came ithiyar idüb andan bir yolu tutub gidtilder. Bu minval üzere yiğirmi otuz gün kadar


Hikâyet-i 6 [P6]


Hele benim canım, çün bunların mabeynlerinde [118] mah-i visur mürur eyledi, bir gün kız Allah emrine vasîl olub merhum oldı, çün ol yiğid sağ kaldı. Hele mevtauğu gusl idüb


olmuşum diyan ahd eyledim, ve yine ahdına durdum. Ve lakin ben hâlâ ölüb yine dirildim. 


Hikâyet-i 7 [P7]

Hikayet-i 8 [P8]  

Hikâyet-i 9 [P9]


[197]


Yaşına varınca kemikdir, otuz yaşından altmış yaşına varınca sükkerdir, altmış yaşından sonra etdir!” didi.

[28] **İza Der Mekr-i Zenan Est [E1]**


O civân, o avretün sözlerine amel idüb, eyle ki o gulam sandukı o kişinin ivine getürdi, avret bu håli görüb yiridi ireli, erine didi, “bu nedür? Mebâdâ sabah sahibi diye ki, ‘fülan ve fülan zâd bu sanduka idi.’” Eyitdi, “yahşısı budur, sandukı açısan, göresin ne var.” Ve gulam bu işden haberdar değildir, sanduki açub, nagâh o civan başın sandukdan hariç idüb göz o kişiye düşdi, az kalub akıl başından çığha, ve o kişinin nazarı o civana düşüb durdi ayaka, ki ona sadme
Der Beyan-i Mekr ü Hileh-i Zenan [E2]


mekri de kitabunda yazıbsan?” Didi, “ne.” Didi, “bunı da kitabun hasıyesinde yaz ve tövbe eyle ki bundan sora bir de avret mekri yazmıyasan.”


avret o kişinin saklinen tuglerini bir bir elielenceküb sora emirilen bahem erinin cenazesin
getirub cekdiler dara.

Bir muddet emir o avretun ivinde kalub, bir gün emir nahoş oldü. Avret şuru eyledi ağlamaka. Emir hemsayelerin cem eyledi, didi, “ey kavm ü kabilem ve hemsayelerim, menim bu avretden bir iltimasim var ki men ölenden sora meni kabirden çıhartmasun, ve sakalımı yolmasun, ve meni öz hâlime koysun.”
İza Der Mekr-i Zenan [E4]


Me’mun didi ki, “Haceb’i getürdiler minim yanıma, ve suret-i hâli evvelden ahire kimi nakl eyledi, ve hiç vech ile bulmadı ki İbrahim hansi kûçede ve mahallededür, ve o avretün bir eseri peyda olmadı, ta vakti ki İbrahim menim yanıma geldi. Ahvalati ondan haber aldım. Didi ki, ‘bizim harcımız tamam olmuşdu, bu hile ilen niçe dinar ele getürdüh ve güzeran eyledüh.’”


Avret bir çomak alub eline, niçe çomak ona virüb, labûd durub ayaka avretlen geldi bazara.

Der Mekr ü Hile-i Zenan [E7]


213
English Translations: Madrid

The Buried Fish (M1)

[1] A Story on the Wiles of Women

In times past, there lived a person who would pray thus whenever he worshiped and prayed in his house: “Lord, protect and shelter against misfortune and accident and the wickedness of the devil.” Now, this man had a guileful wife, and she would always ask, “o fellow, why do you not say, ‘o Lord, protect the Muslims against the wiles of women’?” Once, when she said this, the man turned around and replied, “o woman, what are these words you utter? What are the wiles of women that I should pray on account of them?” And he added, “women are deficient of mind. How could they possibly beguile those whose minds are whole, and how could they possibly come out on top?” The woman did not press the issue, but resolved and determined to play a trick on him.

One day, she went out, bought some fresh fishes, and buried them one by one in the soil of the field that the fellow would be ploughing. Then, she went back home. When morning came, the fellow went out to plough, and no sooner had he begun ploughing than he saw a fish emerge from the soil. He took it in his hand, saw that it was indeed a fish, kept on ploughing, and again and again—let us not drag out the story, he uncovered ten fishes in all. In the evening, he took them and came home. His wife came out to greet him and saw that he was holding the fishes. The fellow said, “take these and cook them by the time I return from the prayer, for I am hungry.
I found these in the field.” As the woman was taking them from him, she turned and said, “there is a mystery behind this; how could fishes ever be found in a field?”

The fellow went to the mosque, and the woman cooked the fishes and enjoyed them herself. When the fellow had gathered a few men from the mosque and come home, he saw that the woman was unwell. He turned to her and asked, “o woman, I brought guests! Where are the fishes, did you cook them?” The woman said, “o fellow, you brought no fishes here! I have been sick all day, and haven’t even prepared any soup. How can you say you brought fish? [2] If you had at least let me know in advance that guest would come, I could have prepared something!”

The fellow, putting aside his hunger, grew embarrassed on account of his guests, and asked, “o woman, where are the fishes that I gathered from the field and brought here?” Hearing this, the woman cried out, “this man has eaten henbane!” When she made this ruckus, the fellow took up a cudgel and trounced her with it once. Realizing that he was seeing red with hunger, the woman let out a shriek and ran out in front of the guests, blood running from her head, uncovered as she was. She cried, “o neighbors, save me from the clutches of this ogre, he has taken leave of his senses!”, and the guests became sorry that they had come at all. The fellow grew ashamed in front of the guests and could not attack the woman again.

Now, while they were clamoring like this, it turns out that the imam efendi and the müezzin çelebi were on their way from the mosque. Hearing this clamor, they stopped at the door and asked, “what is the cause of this ruckus at this time of the day?” The fellow said, “all day, I worked hungrily in the field, eating nothing at all. Then I came home, bringing fish, and said, ‘cook it, for I will bring guests.’ Now I am here, and she won’t serve us, saying instead, ‘you didn’t bring any fish, and I was sick.’ When I went to the mosque, she was healthy as an ox!”
As he was relating this, the woman cried out again, saying, “o imam efendi, bear witness, my husband has gone mad! How could fishes ever grow out of the soil in a field?” The imam asked, “o neighbor, did you catch the fishes in the field?” The fellow responded, “o efendi, I was driving the plough through the soil when a fish came out. As I went on ploughing, I gathered more. I brought them, and she took them from me, saying ‘let me cook them!’” When he replied thus, the imam said, “neighbors, bear witness, how could fishes be in a field?” They grabbed the man and sent him to the mental asylum, putting him in chains.

From time to time, his neighbors would visit and inquire about his health, asking the fellow, “brother neighbor, where did you find the fishes?” [3] And again, the fellow would answer, “in the field.” And again, the neighbors would say, “he has not come to his senses yet.”

Finally, one day, the woman took pity, laughingly came to her husband, and asked, “where did you find the fishes?” When he answered, “in the field,” the woman said, “o husband, did you see what shape the wiles of women can take?” Laughing, she continued, “I kept telling you each time, but you would just make fun of me. Do you see now?” That was when the fellow grasped what had befallen him. The woman said, “swear that you will not hurt or desert me, and I will get you out of here.” The man cried out, “mercy, woman, you have made me the laughing-stock of the world! Mercy, woman, mercy!” The woman said, “if you hurt me, I will put you in a worse state than this until the day you die!” Then, she instructed him, saying, “I will go now and send the neighbors to you. When they come and ask you about the fishes, you answer, ‘have you gone mad? I haven’t seen any fishes.’ Say only this, and no other word, and then ask them how they have been.”

The woman departed, went to her house, and informed the imam and müezzin that “my husband has finally come to his senses.” The imam assembled and sent a couple of men, then
arrived himself and inquired about the fellow’s health. The fellow, saying, “welcome,” paid his respects to the imam and the neighbors. Then the imam asked, “brother neighbor, where did you find the fishes?” The fellow replied, “what kind of fishes, efendi?” The imam said, “You beat up your wife because of the fishes; have you forgotten what you did with the cudgel?” The fellow said, “I know nothing of this, o efendi, you are slandering me! How could fishes be in a field? Fishes are found in the water!”

They conversed for a while longer, and then the neighborhood imam and the fellow’s neighbors released him from the mental asylum. He went to the bathhouse, came home, and showed deference [4] to his wife. From that day onwards, whenever he prayed, he would pray thus: “o Lord, shelter the ümmet of Muhammad from the wiles of women!” And thus, my dear, it is related that they became hand in glove with that woman, and lived a long life together. And may any offense we might have given be excused.
The relaters of news, transmitters of works, and chroniclers of the age narrate that in the city of Cairo, there once lived a famous captain of the guard who, having been captain for quite a while, had gathered much experience regarding the wiles of women. One day, by coincidence, while he was patrolling the city of Cairo, he grew fatigued by the heat, and, looking for some shade in which to rest, saw that they had put up an object, resembling a sofa made out of stone, in a shady spot. He got onto that stone sofa and rested for a while, and carelessness overcame him as he was sitting. While he had thus fallen asleep, suddenly an object fell onto him. At once, he awoke from his slumber, and saw that it was a pouch, firmly tied shut. The captain of the guard opened the pouch right away—there was gold inside—and, counting it, [6] saw that it came to a hundred gold coins. He quickly looked all around him to see who might have left it, but could not see anyone at all. Bewildered, he got up and left.

After resting that night, he went out to patrol the city as usual early in the morning, and walked around quite a bit. Once again, with the heat starting to bear down, he rested on that stone sofa and, being very tired, fell asleep as he had before. While he was asleep, once more, an object fell on him. Again, he woke up and saw that, as before, it was a hundred gold coins. He looked around and established that no one could be seen, was filled with bewilderment, and, getting up at once, went home. That evening, he went to sleep, thinking, “I wonder who it might be that is dropping this gold on me, and what his aim might be.” And, thinking this, he said,
“when I arrive there again, I shall not sleep but keep watch, so that, if they drop it once more, I might see who they are and find out what their purpose is.”

[7] In the morning, he got up as usual, left his house, and went to patrol the city of Cairo. He walked around for a while, and, around late morning, once again became distressed by the heat, got on the abovementioned sofa, and sat down. It is a well-known fable that the wolf, once he has sated his stomach, *ed yeri tokuz toluşur* [?]. So, as before, he rested for a while, and this time, when he started to drift off, he did not go to sleep but just pretended he was nodding off, and started observing through squinted eyelids.

Suddenly, he saw a delicate hand appear from somewhere. The person produced another pouch, dropped it on the captain, and was just about to withdraw the hand when the captain grabbed it by the wrist, intercepting it. But it was as if his hand had sunk into cotton, and he saw diamond rings on her fingers and bejeweled bracelets on her arm. And when the captain looked up from there at the woman’s [8] face, he saw that this was a beauty, a beloved of the age, with a face that looked as if God almighty had created it by pouring and shaping it in the mold of facial allure itself. Her stature was that of a fragrant cypress, her eyebrows were arched like two bows, and, as if this beauty had not been enough, she had adorned herself, decking herself out in fine silks and ornaments. Anyone, whether genie or human, would have been tongue-tied and enchanted had they seen this woman in such attire.

Had only the captain not seen this flirtatious woman in such a condition—he had been captain of the guard in the city of Cairo for such a long time, and had seen and talked to so many women; but, by God, he had never seen a woman of such beauty and grace. Finally, he gathered his wits, and said to the woman, “o soul of my soul, of which yard are you the rose, of which orchard [9] the hyacinth, of which garden the nightingale? What kind of person are you, and
where do you hail from? Even though you and I have no prior acquaintance, you have repeatedly shown me largesse. I do not know you in any capacity, so what is your object and aim in giving me this gold? Let me strive as much as I can, as much as possible, to attain it.”

At once, the woman turned to him and said, “I am but a feeble woman. One day, I chanced upon the daughter of the judge efendi in a bathhouse and became addicted to her love, turned into her forlorn adorer, my heart falling for her with the love of a thousand hearts and souls. That girl’s inclination and love for me also exceeding bounds, we made many a vow and oath among ourselves. Alas, I have not seen this coquette for quite a while now, and [10] it is not possible to visit and enter the judge’s house without a pretext. My love and affection for that girl are driving me out of my mind. If only I could get into her home by some means, see that coy one, and converse with her for a while, so that my heart may find some closeness to her and my love be soothed a bit!”

The captain of the guard listened to the woman’s words and asked, “o my soul, what is your aim and purpose in this matter, and what kinds of precautions need to be taken so that your heart’s desire may be fulfilled?” The woman replied, “what I desire of you is that you assist me in this matter, and convey me into the judge’s house.” The captain asked, “but how would I ever be able to get you into the judge’s house?” The woman turned around and replied, “I know that you can’t just let me in. But would you be able [11] to get me in by a trick?” The captain of the guard replied, “whatever trick you may employ, I will convey you there by means of it, and be of assistance to you.”

As soon as he said this, the woman replied, “tonight, I will adorn myself with garments covered in gold and pearls. Then, I will arrive and sit down in front of the judge’s house. When you and the superintendent reach that spot and find me there, I will say, ‘I came down from the
fortress to the city on some personal errand today, but by the time I’d run my errand, I saw that I was late, and when I arrived at the fortress, the gates were already shut. I returned to the city, but there is no one here that I am familiar with, no one that I know and regularly meet, to whose house I might go to spend the night. I inquired with some people, and they told me that this neighborhood is that of the judge efendi,

[The text continues on the next page in a different handwriting.]

[12] that it is safe and protected, and a decent place. This is why I came here and sought refuge in this corner, so that I might get up in the morning [...] and go home; and that is when you arrived. These are my circumstances.”

“[...] And when you see the garments on me, say to the superintendent, ‘it will not do to leave this woman on the street like this, in all her beauty and bedecked with so many jewels and pearls; for it is possible that some rascals and thieves will show up and rob this woman, and it is further possible that they will kill her for her possessions. If that happens, we will get an earful from the sultan and suffer punishment. We should either leave a guard with this woman to stand watch over her until morning, or we should place her in the home of a reliable person of your choice, so that she will make the morning safe and sound. However, we cannot place this woman in any old house, and since this is the judge’s neighborhood, and the judge’s house is protected in every way, there can be no more appropriate location. You should deposit this woman at the judge’s house for safekeeping at once.’ If you […] the superintendent in this way, [13] [...] and see the judge efendi’s daughter, […] and my desire will be fulfilled. However, […] this is all I ask
of you.” When the captain of the guard heard these words from the woman, he said, “o my soul, this matter is easy,” and they both agreed upon these words and left.

Evening came, dinner was eaten, and the time of the evening prayer went by. The superintendent and the captain of the guard set out on patrol together, and while they were walking about the city of Cairo, they arrived at the judge’s neighborhood. As they drew near the spot where the woman was, a fragrance of musk and ambergris perfumed their palates. They looked around, asking themselves where this beautiful smell might be coming from, when an object—like a mirage—caught their eye from afar. The superintendent said, “go and check what that darkness over there might be.” At once, the captain of the guard went forward and said, “I saw it, it is a beautiful woman, arrayed in gold and pearls and fine silks and ornaments, crouched in a corner and waiting.”

The captain, feigning ignorance, asked the woman, “o lady, why are you, woman that you are, standing here at this time of the night in all your beauty and with all these pearls and jewels?” As soon as he asked this, the woman recounted her predicament in the way she had announced to the captain earlier that day. The captain turned to the superintendent and said, “o brother, this is a beautiful woman bedecked in gold and jewels and precious clothes. She says that her house is in the fortress and that she came into town on an errand today. However, by the time she had run her errand, she was late, and when she got back to the fortress, the gates were closed.”

After the black-bearded captain had told the entire story to the grey-bearded superintendent, he added, “o venerable father, now this woman has been left outside, and she says she has no friend with whom she socializes, to whose house she might go. She says that she came to this place and stood in this corner because she thought the judge’s neighborhood would
be safe. [15] We should leave a guardsman with her to watch over her until morning, since it is possible that some rascal will assault and rob her, or kill her for the sake of her belongings. If that were to happen, the sultan of Egypt would turn his wrath upon us, and we would suffer punishment. Or we could place her in a protected, reliable house for safekeeping, so that she could spend the night there, and leave for her own house in the morning.”

The superintendent said to the captain, “since you are the one who brought it up, why don’t you take this woman to your house? She will be safe at yours for the night, and can go home in the morning.” The captain of the guard replied, “God forbid, I cannot keep a deposit like this at my own house. What would be better—the only place to leave this woman for safekeeping is the judge’s house, since the judge is reliable by all standards, and she will not come to harm there by any means. Also, she was found in front of the judge’s house. Further, in this way, if anything were to happen to her precious clothes and jewelry, we would be above reproach.” The superintendent, in turn, [16] found the captain’s suggestion suitable, and they knocked at the judge’s gate at once. The judge’s servant came and opened the gate, and they entrusted that woman to the servant. The servant, in turn, took the woman inside and closed the gate. From there, the superintendent and captain completed their rounds, returned to their homes, and went to bed.

That night passed like the life of an enemy, morning came, and the sun rose, illuminating the world with its light. At once, the captain of the guard got up and went over to the superintendent’s house. He saw that the judge efendi had arrived, screaming and clamoring, at the superintendent’s house, saying, “by some ruse, you put a rascally woman in my house for safekeeping. Last night, in my trunk, there were goods left in my care, worth about six thousand. That woman opened the trunk, took the lot of it, and made off. Verily, you must find her, or I
will go and report you to the sultan!” The superintendent ushered the judge into his best seat, and the judge stared in the captain’s face, saying, “verily, you must find this woman; the goods in my care must be recovered.”

[17] At this, the captain of the guard found himself short of breath. Unable to utter a single word, he plunged into a sea of sorrow and grief, and did not know what to do. Right then, the judge repeated his words, saying to the captain, “this matter is nobody’s responsibility but yours. Make haste, you must find that woman at once!” The captain could muster no retort to the judge’s words, and said, “o efendi, now that such a matter has arisen, surely one is granted a grace period of some days. If the robber is caught, it is on her; and if not, then one takes her place. You, too, should grant us three days’ grace to find her; if we cannot find her, we should take her place.” And so, the judge granted the captain three days’ grace.

At once, the captain of the guard left the superintendent and went home, lost in thought. From there, he set out and started searching the entire city of Cairo for that woman, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood, door by door. His grief caused the city of Cairo to darken around his head, and the expanse of the world became but a dungeon to him. [18] For two entire days, he roamed the city step by step, but could not find any trace or sign of her—as the matter stood, he would not have recognized the women even if he had seen her, and he could obtain no information about what kind of woman she was.

Finally, the third day arrived. As the captain of the guard was roaming the city yet one more time, he reproached himself, saying, “there can be no man more stupid and foolish than me. I need a person but cannot find her; even if I found and saw her, I would not recognize her; and whoever I ask knows nothing. What a baffling predicament! And that I, who I fancied myself a man of the world, should have been deceived by the wiles and trickeries of such a woman, and
should have dug such a hole for myself!” As he spoke like this, his endurance reached its limit, but still he wandered on.

Noontime had drawn near, and as the captain, utterly defeated in his grief and sorrow, was pacing down yet another street, his path led him up to the house of the very rascal he had been seeking out for these three days. And as that woman, by coincidence, was sitting at her window and looking down at the street, she espied him from her window. Seeing that the hapless one was quickly passing by, lost in thought and without looking over his shoulder, she knew at once that he was searching for her. The woman said to herself, “true skill and cunning would lie in making myself known to the captain, and, if he has come to grief on account of me, releasing him from his predicament, setting him free.” While she was saying this, the captain had reached the window behind which the woman was sitting. As he was passing by, the woman let out a guffaw. The captain of the guard, hearing the woman laugh, raised his head, and while he was looking up at the window, trying to see who had laughed, his eyes fell on the woman. The woman gestured at the captain to come upstairs. The captain said to himself, “I wonder who this woman might be and what her purpose is in calling me upstairs. Surely, there is some secret and mystery to this; let us see what the mirror of fate will reveal.”

At once, he walked up to the door and stepped inside. He saw a big, high pavilion and a coquettish woman standing at the top of the staircase, looking down at him. That woman motioned to the captain to come upstairs, and the captain stepped onto the staircase, ascending the pavillion that instant. Then, the woman took the captain’s hand in her own, ushered him into her best seat, and inquired about his well-being. The captain of the guard, however, never once recognizing her, turned to her and asked, “o soul of my soul, forgive me, but I could not recall you; who are you?” The woman turned to him and replied, “I am the
woman whom you left for safekeeping at the judge’s house.” The captain said, “o lady, you have done a fine thing, sticking my head into noose after noose and rendering me worthy of execution!” The woman turned and said, “you are the captain of such a city as Cairo, renowned for your bravery, respected among the valiant. For two days, I have watched you pass through here lost in thought, and never paid attention. But today I learned that the judge has granted you three days’ grace, and that you will be punished in my stead if you do not find me. I pitied you, and further, my heart fell for you, and I felt an inclination and affection towards you. This matter is straightforward; I called you here so that we may resolve this affair and you may be free.”

He asked, “how could this matter be resolved? Tomorrow, the three days’ grace will expire, and they will take me from the superintendent’s house, show no mercy, and punish me in your stead. Now, you have brought this business about, so you find a solution, and deliver me from the hands of the judge! How can we resolve this issue?” The woman replied, “the precautions in this matter are straightforward, so do not sink into gloom.” Getting up from her seat at once, the woman went on, “do not open your heart to anguish, the judge cannot kill you. But you can kill the judge.”

She took the captain’s hand in her own and entered a room where there were a couple of trunks full of rubies and jewels, in addition to other trinkets. She showed them to the captain, who looked on in amazement. Then, the woman opened yet another trunk, picked up a sack full of gold from inside it, and put it in front of the captain. The captain asked, “what is this?” The woman replied, “I am not in love with the judge’s daughter; I am in love with this gold. This sack contains the six thousand gold coins that I took from the judge’s trunk. Take it if you want; or if you’d rather, leave it with me. I have plenty of riches, and no matter how much I spend and...
consume, they do not run out. My desire is to take you as my husband, and for you, in turn, to take me as your wife. And if I didn’t truly want you as my husband, how would you have ever found me? Even if your life had lasted a thousand years, you would not have found me. It was because I wanted you that I called out to you while you were passing by, brought you here, and, even though you did not recognize me, showed you the sack of gold, making you privy to this secret.”

The captain of the guard replied, “o lady, I have no desire for these rubies and jewels. May God grant you your riches. However, if you know a way to release me from this calamity which you have brought upon me, [23] do it!” The woman said, “I’ve already solved your problem.” The captain retorted, “o lady, what do you mean, you already solved it? Tomorrow, the three days will be up and I will be done for! And I have no idea what the solution to that might be!”

The woman turned to the captain and said, “this is an easy matter. When morning arrives, let the judge come to the superintendent’s house and take issue with you; do not reply at all. No matter how much he rants at you, never once answer him. And when the superintendent finally says to you, ‘surely you must talk; why do you not talk or answer?’, reply, ‘how could I answer? That judge is an exalted personage, all will stand by him, and death will pass him by. I, in turn, am a feeble person; I will talk only if I am given assistance and a fair opportunity. And if the judge makes a statement, how could my word count as equal to his?’”

“If you talk like this, the judge and the superintendent will say to you, ‘speak, what is your answer?’ At that point, say, ‘only if the judge asserts that my word will be counted as equal to his.’ And when he says, ‘may he speak,’ you say, ‘listen, then, and let me tell you. The other night, I left a woman for safekeeping at the judge’s house. She was wearing ornaments worth
more than a thousand gold coins. That woman never left the judge’s house. No clue or trace of her was found, she disappeared, and no one has heard any news of her since. Now, the judge efendi comes and makes claims, saying that goods entrusted to him and worth six thousand gold coins are gone. This is a staggering affair. Perhaps that woman became the victim of some perfidy in his house. If the judge’s house were to be searched, it is possible that a trace of the woman would be found. Then, the truthfulness of my words would be established.’’

“When the judge hears these words of yours, he will vow to release you [?], and say, ‘of course, you must come and search my house.’ You reply, ‘I won’t go alone; the deputy and the superintendent should accompany us; then, I will come, as well.’ Thoroughly search [25] the inside of that house, and, when nothing is found, break out in lamentation and beseech him, begging for forgiveness. After that—just when you are about to leave the house, there is a dark spot behind the gate. That is where the water jugs are buried. Look at that spot attentively; you will see a piece of cloth with its end sticking out of the ground. Call the superintendent and the deputy and the people who are around, saying, ‘wait, I see something there!’ In front of them all, quickly dig up that place. Some clothes and a bundle will emerge, covered in blood—my skirt, my veil, and my clothes are all in there. At that point, you will be able to do to the judge whatever you want. Your word will trump his, you will be victorious over him, and you will escape his clutches with ease.”

Hearing the woman’s words, the captain of the guard grew amazed at her precautions, found them adequate, and was filled with admiration by this ruse. He got up to leave, but the woman said, “since you are leaving, take this sack of gold with you.” [26] At once, the captain replied, “since you are inclined to be my wife, let these riches remain with you. Once I have settled our matter with the judge, if fate allows, I will return, take them, marry you, and
consummate our marriage.” And thus, the captain of the guard displayed enormous foolishness. The woman said, “well, from now on, you are mine and I am yours, and so are all my riches.” And this was how she stole the captain’s heart. The woman, amazed at this degree of idiocy, felt pity for him in spite of herself, and said, “since you are leaving, at least don’t leave me empty-handed.” She brought two hundred gold coins and put them in front of him, saying, “maybe you will need them; keep them on you. And if you need more money, come here to me and I will give you as much as you need.” The captain put the gold in his pocket at once, became happy and cheerful, said goodbye to the woman, and headed back home. And when night fell, [27] he lay down and slept, wholly at ease.

Morning came, and the sun illuminated the world with its light. The captain of the guard got up at once and arrived at the superintendent’s house. He saw that the judge efendi had come and taken a seat next to the superintendent. As soon as the judge saw the captain, he said to the superintendent, “let my adversary come up; let him tell us what he did about the goods,” and he addressed the captain of the guard right away. The captain, in turn, following the advice of that guileful woman, gave no answer at all. The judge became enraged that the captain was not answering him, and said, “look at this mule now, he will not even answer! I speak, but he won’t reply at all! Let me go to the sultan, then, and petition him with may case, so that the sultan himself may see what atrocities I have suffered!""

When he said this, the superintendent asked the captain of the guard, “why won’t you answer? The judge efendi is waiting for an answer.” At once, the captain started talking and said, “my reason [28] for not answering is that my word and the word of the judge efendi are not equal. Grief and sorrow have frustrated me, and my endurance has reached its limit. He is the judge of the sultan, while I am a lowly, humble person. Anyone will help out a judge; but if my
word were to be heeded, the truth would reveal itself.” At this, the judge became enraged again, and said, “o man of inauspicious birth, what do you mean, truth would reveal itself in this matter?” The captain of the guard replied, “it has been three days since the night I placed a woman in the judge’s house for safekeeping. On her, she had ornaments worth more than a thousand gold coins. For three days, there has been no hint or sign of that woman. By some perfidy, they killed that woman for the sake of her belongings. If the judge efendi’s house were to be searched, perhaps a trace of that woman would be found.”

As soon as the judge heard these words from the captain, it was as if they had poured a cauldron of boiling water down his head. He became enraged, swore to release him [?], displayed much sophistry, and said, “if you are not lying, [29] may it all be upon me.” I said, “God forbid that I should be lying; let them search his house at once. If no sign of that woman is found, I will be proven wrong, and will suffer in her stead. But otherwise, I will be proven true to my word.” The judge said, “come, then, and search my house.” The captain of the guard replied, “I shan’t come and search on my own. The superintendent, and the deputy, and a few people from the community should come along, and I will go with them and search, as well.” The instant he said this, the judge ordered the superintendent to search his house.

And so, the superintendent, the deputy, and whoever else happened to be around at that time went to the judge’s house, searched it from end to end, but could not find a single trace or clue of either the woman or her belongings. Right away, the captain of the guard grew terribly ashamed, begged the judge for forgiveness, and showered him with pleas. The judge efendi, in turn, seizing his opportunity, said to the captain, “o inauspicious one, do you see, your lies have led to nothing!” and went on to add many [30] insulting things, swearing and cursing. The deputy, the superintendent, and the other members of the community wanted to go outside, and
made to leave through the gate. Right then, while the captain was attentively staring at the dark spot the woman had mentioned to him, a corner of it revealed itself to his eye. At once, he called out to the superintendent and the congregation, saying, “come, something is visible here, let us see what it is!” The superintendent and the congregation came up, and the judge efendi said, “the water jugs are here.” The captain of the guard quickly dug up the spot where that piece of cloth could be seen, and, apart from the jugs, a bundle emerged from the ground. The captain opened the bundle in front of everyone, and they saw that inside it there were women’s clothes, all smeared with blood. And the woman’s veil and her kerchief, her overcoat and her undergarments, her shoes and her headscarf, as well as some other things of hers, were all there in the bundle.

The captain of the guard immediately seized his opportunity and said, shouting and clamoring, [31] “o master of ours! Finally, by the grace of God, the exalted, it has become clear, in front of the congregation and the deputy, whether my word is false or true! I entrusted a hapless woman to you with all her belongings, thinking that since you are the sultan’s judge, authorized to pass judgment, you would be dependable. But you betrayed that trust, killed that woman for her belongings, and gobbled up all her riches! This is a grave scandal; I must report this business to the sultan. Verily, this matter cannot remain unheard; this lance will not fit in the haircloth sack! Otherwise, once this affair reaches the sultan’s ears, I’ll be the one to lose my head.” In this manner, he ranted on for a while, sounding off as much as he liked.

The hapless judge, not grasping what had befallen him, tongue-tied and bewildered, stood rooted to the spot like a tree, and was shamed and humiliated in front of the people—those who knew, knew, but those who did not know would assume this to be the truth. The superintendent turned around and said, “what kind of a matter is this? No one has ever seen or heard of such an
affair,” speaking full of reproach. The deputy and the people went outside, [32] heatedly discussing the matter. At once, the wretched judge started begging and imploring the superintendent and the captain in the most acute manner, apologized repeatedly, granted them many riches, and said, “do me this favor, and do not expose this secret to anyone.” Speaking thus, the hapless judge once again started apologizing profusely. The superintendent and the captain took the bribe [?], whereupon they finally left the house. Thus, thanks to the trickery of that woman, the captain of the guard escaped the hands of the judge. The hapless judge, in turn, not only lost all those riches, but was also humiliated in front of everyone.

The superintendent and the captain of the guard returned to their homes. Three days later, the captain rose with the intention of going and marrying that woman, and departed for her house. When he arrived at the door of the woman’s house, he saw that it was locked. He asked the neighbors who were around, “where did the woman go who owns this house?” [33] But those around informed him, “there was no one in that house; it was empty. A couple of days ago, a woman had brought a load of cloth and gone inside. She stayed there for some days, but it has been three days since she left again. We do not know what kind of woman she was.” At once, the captain of the guard realized his own folly, was filled with regret, and knew that the woman had taken him for a fool. He became determined and pursued and investigated that woman for a long time, but was not able to find a single clue or trace of her. In the end, he returned home, gloomy and morose, amazed at the tricks the woman had played on him, astounded by his own idiocy. And this story has remained as a memento of theirs.
Now, listen to yet another peculiar story. The relaters of news, transmitters of works, and chroniclers of the succession of cycles of the age narrate that in times past, in the city of Nishapur, there was a woman who had two lovers. That woman would tell both her lovers, “when my husband dies, I will marry you instead.” Some time passed like this, until finally, one of her lovers said, “when will this husband of hers die? I might as well leave this town for a while, explore the surroundings, and then come back.” And, saying this, he left the city. Now, the lover who had stayed behind in the city was a young weaver. And before long, while the other lover was abroad, the woman’s husband died, and she got married to that weaver. The weaver was so jealously protective of this woman that whenever he went somewhere, he would lock the door on her; and whenever she went to the bathhouse, he would accompany her and wait at the door until she had bathed and come out; and then, he would once again set out in front of her and take her home.

One day, after some time had passed, the lover who had gone abroad returned. But even though he went out of his way to meet up with that woman or at least see her once, it proved completely impossible. [35] One day, while he was walking around outside that woman’s house—there also happened to be an old crone’s house in the vicinity—the crone, who had observed the young man roaming the area for days, said, “o son, I have been watching you wander around here for two days now. I wonder if a woman you love lives somewhere around here! Don’t hide it from me.” The fellow replied, “o mother, I used to love the wife of such-and-such person. Then, some time ago, I left this city. Now I have returned, but haven’t been able to catch a glimpse of her.” Hearing this, the crone said, “son, that woman’s husband died. Now, she
is married to a weaver. She is with him.” The fellow replied, “dear mother, what is to become of me now? If only I could meet with her once! My heartache for her is killing me!” As he spoke like this and wept, the woman’s heart got seared with compassion. So the crone turned to him and said, “son, don’t you weep, I will devise a convenient way for you to meet up with her. [36] You just come back here after some time.” And, saying this, she saw him off.

Pounding the ground with her walking stick, the crone went to the weaver’s house and knocked on the door. The weaver opened up, and, extending her greetings, the crone swept in right away. The weaver returned her greetings and went back behind his loom. The crone, in turn, sat down in front of him and asked, “son, is it you who lives in this house now?” The weaver replied, “it is we.” The crone went on, “a friend of mine used to live here before. I would visit her from time to time; we were close companions.” The weaver said, “dear mother, if that is the case, you should come again and become a companion to us, as well.” The crone replied, “so, is your wife at home right now? From her very childhood, I raised her with my own hands.” And, saying this, she forced her way in, leaving the weaver outside.

As soon as the crone had reached the woman, she said to her, “child, it seems there is a young man who loves you. He told me that he had left this city for a while, but that he has returned now, and that he has been driven into a frenzy by the pain of his love for you. The tears flow from his eyes like rivers. You are young; making him cry like this does not bode well for you. Wouldn’t it be possible for him to see you, at least once?” When the crone had spoken, the woman replied, “dear mother, right now it is impossible for me to meet up with him. My husband, the weaver, does not leave my side for an instant, and even when he does, he locks the door on me, leaves, and returns. What can I do? There is no contrivance by which I could meet up with him.”
At once, the crone replied, “if you have a heart to meet him, I can easily set up a rendezvous for you two!” Upon hearing this, the weaver’s wife said, “mercy, dear mother! No one can find a way but you!” The old hag turned to her and said, “here is how you will meet up with that young man: an hour after I leave, start crying out, ‘o mercy, my waist! O mercy, my sides! O mercy, my chest!’ And when your husband comes in and asks, ‘o wife, what has happened to you?’, say right away, ‘mercy, I have become like this again! [38] This used to happen to me from time to time. Whenever I got like this—that lady who came here earlier is my foster mother, and she is a good woman with sleek, plumpy hands—she would rush over, make me a remedy, and I would get better again, overcoming this malady. If you don’t go and bring that lady to me, I cannot be rid of this sickness.’” After giving these instructions, the crone went out to the weaver, said, “son, I entrust you to God,” and left.

Before three or four hours had passed, the weaver’s wife started shrieking “o mercy!” and broke out in screams, her eyes quailing, and foaming at the mouth. The weaver took leave of his senses, his hands and feet going cold. After a while, the woman opened her eyes, and the hapless weaver exclaimed, “o, what will become of me?” He went on, “my cypress-statured, my lady, is there no remedy for this?” The woman replied, “o my lord, this sickness overpowers me once or twice a year. If that crone from before were to come, I could be saved,” [39] and broke out in screams again. As soon as the hapless weaver saw his wife in this state, he locked his door, scampered over to the crone’s abode, and knocked on her door. At once, the crone approached from inside, saying, “who might be knocking on my door?”, opened up, and saw the weaver standing outside. “Welcome, my son,” she said, “what news do you bring?” The wretched weaver replied, “o dear mother, have mercy and come at once! My wife is in a terrible state; if
you don’t come to the rescue, she will die!” The crone replied, “so help me God, son, I cannot come or do anything in this matter.”

By that time, the old hag had already put the woman’s lover into a trunk and locked it; he was in her house and ready to go. The weaver said, “o dear mother, grant me this favor and grace! For if you do not come at once, that woman will surely die!” And saying this, he started weeping. The hag replied, “o son, how can I come? I have a foster son [40] who left today, entrusting me with a trunk. I do not know what is inside, and my house is but a ruin; if I were to leave the trunk and go, it is possible that a rascal would break in and make off with the trunk. What would I say to the young man if that happened?” When the crone said these words, the weaver immediately went up to the trunk, lifted it up, and saw that he could carry it. He said, “o mercy, dear mother, let me bring this trunk to the house along with you! Just show me the kindness and grace of coming with me. For my wife is in dire straits, and her demise is quite near!”

That execrable crone said, “come, then, take the trunk, and let us go. You and I have only just become mother and son, and I raised your wife with my own hands when she was a child. Whenever she is overcome by this malady, I go to her side and relieve her. However, from what you have told me, this time seems to be particularly bad. Whenever it stirs,” she went on, “she cannot close her eyes and rest at night, [41] cannot sit down, cannot stand up.” The weaver said, “o dear mother, it is exactly as you describe,” tied the trunk to his waist with a rope, and hoisted it onto his back. When they reached the house, the crone in front and the hapless weaver in tow, he lowered the trunk onto the ground, unlocked his door, and took the trunk into the house, putting it down right next to his wife.
As soon as the wife had heard her husband and the crone approach—prior to their arrival, she had readied a bed by the hearth—she had undressed, gotten into the bed, and prepared herself; now, she was awaiting her lover’s arrival. Right away, she started clamoring again, saying, “dear me, my chest! Mercy, my back! Help, my sides are killing me! Woe is me, I am done for! Quick,” she exclaimed, “bring me that old hag!” The crone, in turn, quickly rolled up her sleeves, put her hands on the woman’s chest, and said, “o daughter of mine, has this sickness struck you again? But this time, it is much worse than before! My son, in order to cure this, you must bring me water from a graveyard’s well, [42] and also some soil from an old Jewish grave.”

The hapless weaver quickly put on his robe [?], locked the door on them, and left. At once, his wife sprang up from the bed, full of life, with no trace of her pain. She firmly closed the door and got her lover out of the trunk. They embraced each other and started enjoying themselves until the weaver returned. As soon as he arrived at the door, she put the fellow back in the trunk, closed its lid, and resumed her crying and clamoring. The weaver brought the water and soil, putting it all down before them. That old hag, in turn, got up, mixed the water and soil together, rubbed it onto the woman’s waist and stomach—it was all a fraud—laid some blankets on top of her, and said to the weaver, “go to work now, so that this woman may rest and recover.” And so, the weaver returned [43] to his loom and started weaving again, occupying himself for a while.

Whenever the woman wanted to enjoy herself with her lover, they would send the poor weaver away, saying, “go and get such-and-such thing from some place.” Then, the weaver would lock the door and go, the woman would get her lover out, and they would have a good time until the weaver appeared at the door again. When the weaver returned, they would quickly put the fellow back in the trunk. To cut a long story short, a week went by in this manner, and at
the end of the week, the woman became healthy and hale, and they had had their fill of
debauchery. With the woman feeling much better, the crone said, “son, I haven’t been to my
house for a week. Perhaps the owner of the trunk has returned, is looking for me, and can’t find
me. Now, show me the kindness and grace of coming along with me and returning this trunk to
my house.” The weaver said, “as you command, dear mother,” swung the trunk onto his back,
and locked his door. Then, they went on their way, the crone in front and the weaver in tow, with
the trunk on his back.

[44] Evening had drawn near. The weaver, carrying the heavy trunk, was pressing ahead.
In the end, he grew exhausted, lowered the trunk off his back onto an elevated spot, and rested
for a while. The crone, unaware that the weaver was resting, kept up her pace in front of him.
The weaver bore […], and paid no mind to her, saying, “I know the house anyway; let her go
ahead.” After resting a little longer, he took the trunk on his back again and moved on. But
evening had come, and so he lost his way, setting out on a different path. He looked around,
noticed that he was lost, and made to return. But evening had already passed, and it had gotten so
dark that one could not see the hand before one’s eyes. Not even able to find his way back home,
the weaver was about to lose faith when suddenly, his path took him to the neighborhood where
the captain of the guard had his office, and he came across a division of guards.

When the guards saw the fellow shuffling along, buckled over from the weight of the
trunk on his back, they immediately said to each other, “surely, this fellow must have some
accomplices, they [45] must have broken and entered into a house, and this trunk must be filled
with fabrics. And surely, they must have a lair somewhere. Where might this fellow’s
accomplices be, and their lair? It is clear as day that his accomplices gave him this trunk to carry
to their lair, and that they are all making their way to that place by different routes right now.
What kind of person’s house might they have broken into? Surely, it must be some grand palace.” At once, the guards blocked the weaver’s path, saying, “stop, o wretch, where are you taking that trunk on your back at this time of the night? What kind of person’s house did you break into, and where are your accomplices, and where is the house at which you arranged to meet? Speak up, quick!” And saying this, they grabbed the hapless weaver by the collar and stopped him [?].

The wretched weaver’s heart jumped into his throat. Dumbstruck, he did not know what to say. But he quickly gathered his wits back about him, saying to himself, “if I am to save my neck, I must give these people some kind of answer.” So he turned to them and said, “I am a conjurer, and today, I was putting on a show beneath the fortress walls. In this trunk are my conjurer’s appliances and equipment.” When he said this, they asked, “so, why were you out until this time, and where are you going, alone as you are?” He replied, “after the show, I sent my apprentice to our store, and waited for him with some equipment, since he was to return and take the trunk as well. But he didn’t come, evening fell, and finally, when I saw that no one was coming or going anymore, I was forced to take the trunk onto my own back. While I was on my way like this—I am a stranger to this area—I lost my way and could not find the neighborhood of my house. Then, as I was walking along, having entrusted myself to fate, I came across you.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” they said, “you are a brigand! You don’t look like an honorable fellow to us. You must have some accomplices, and you must have broken into a house and stolen this trunk.” One of them said, “let’s take him to the captain right away; surely the captain will make him talk!” And at once, [47] they grabbed the weaver and took him before the captain of the guard. The captain roared, “who is this fellow?” The guards replied, “we don’t know. We came across him in such-and-such place, as he was walking along, this trunk on his back. We
asked him what it was, and he said, ‘I am a conjurer; today, I put on a show beneath the fortress walls, ended up running late, got on the way, and could not find the way to my dwelling.’ We don’t know if it is the truth or a lie.”

Now, it turns out that the captain of the guard had a beloved wife whom he cherished very much. And she always said to the captain, “you may have become captain of the guard, but have you ever brought a juggler or conjurer home for me to enjoy?” Since she would always nag him like this, when the guards had finished their tale, the captain turned to the weaver and asked, “are you really a conjurer?” The weaver replied, “indeed, I am a master conjurer; so much so that no conjurer like me has come to this city in recent times!” – “Well now,” the captain said, “I’ve netted you just fine! Take your trunk and follow me to my house; then perform your tricks with us as your audience. When morning comes, you can go to your own house again.” The captain stood up at once, and, taking the weaver along, went straight to his house and knocked on the door.

It so happened, though, that the captain’s wife had a lover who would come over every night and indulge himself with that woman. The captain of the guard would only sleep at his own house on Fridays, spending all other nights at his office, and this woman and her lover would have fun and carouse until morning. And so, once again, they were lying naked and tangled up on the bed when suddenly, there was a knock on the door. The handmaidens rushed to the door, opened it, and saw that it was their master, the captain. Right away, one of the handmaidens rushed back inside and informed the lady, saying, “mercy, my lady, the master has come!” When she heard the news, the woman quickly stripped her lover naked, and—there was a stately urn nearby—put him inside.
Meanwhile, as the captain stepped through the door, it is related that the weaver entered as well, the trunk on his back. And it turns out that from the door, one could see a window revealing the room with the woman in it. So while the weaver was entering with the trunk on his back, his eye fell upon the window, and he saw the woman strip her lover and put him inside the urn. He did not let on, however, saying, “let us see what the mirror of fate will reveal.”

The captain of the guard stepped inside and went up to his wife. The woman cried, “o master, you never come home around this time. What wind brought you here tonight?” The captain replied, “my dearly beloved, you always used to nag me, saying, ‘you may have become captain of the guard, but have you ever brought me an entertainer or a conjurer?’ Well, now I’ve gotten my hands on a master conjurer, and I brought him so that he may put on a show for you as his audience.” And the captain said to the weaver, “now perform, master conjurer, but make sure that you put on a good show for us.” When he said this, the weaver replied, “o master, my apprentice is not with me tonight, and my tambourine and some other appliances are missing as well. Also, the trunk is locked, and my apprentice has the key. Let this trunk with my equipment remain here with you, and let me go to my house. In the morning, I will get my apprentice and some equipment I need, come here, and put on a fine show with you as my audience.”

At once, the captain was gripped by fury. He jumped up from his seat, grabbed an ax, and cried, “verily, either you open this trunk, put on a show, and let us watch, or I will break the trunk open with this ax and it will be smashed to bits!” At this, the fellow inside the trunk said to himself, “o mercy, what a confounding state I find myself in! If this fellow strikes the trunk with the ax and breaks it apart right now, it will collapse onto me, I will be revealed stark naked, and my throat will be forfeit. And if the captain of the guard were to ask me, ‘wretch, what are you doing in this trunk?’, what could I possibly answer?” And, saying this, he was filled with
repentance and began praying for forgiveness, his heart starting to beat, boom, boom, like a drum.

Meanwhile, the weaver said, “my lord, show grace and leniency! Do not shatter this trunk; I am a person of modest means, and cannot afford another!” But the captain of the guard became obstinate, insisting, “no, verily, either you open this trunk and perform, or I will break it!” Seeing that there was no way of denying the captain, the weaver turned around and said, “master, if you shatter my trunk, I will have no choice but to break yonder urn in return!” As soon as the captain’s wife heard this talk from the weaver, she knew that he had seen her put her lover in the urn, and that, if her husband shattered the trunk, and this fellow went on to break the urn, her lover would appear and her secret would be revealed. At once, she turned to her husband and [52] said, “have mercy and do not injure this hapless one by shattering his trunk! I do not need to behold a conjurer right now. Release this wretched one, so he may go back to his house, fetch his apprentice and whatever he needs, and, in the morning, put on a proper show for us to behold.”

But no matter how much she begged the captain, it was all in vain. Ax in hand, the captain said, “verily, either you open your trunk and perform, or I will shatter your trunk with this ax! Surely,” he turned to his wife, “he must perform! Else, you will start nagging me again, saying, ‘you brought a conjurer all the way here but were incapable of making him perform!’” The woman, on the other hand, would not have minded a show, but since her secret would have been revealed if the fellow in the urn had come to light, she begged the captain again, saying, “I do not want a conjurer! I repent,” she went on, “and will never ask you for a conjurer again!”

While they were engaged in this struggle, the weaver snuck up to [53] the trunk and gave the lock a knock with his hand. Now, it turns out that the bottom of the lock, upon closer
inspection, was quite rusty and crumbling, and the rest of it fell apart in his hand right away.

Seeing this, the weaver said, “let’s have a look at what is in this trunk.” Lifting the lid of the trunk ever so slightly, he saw that a naked fellow, rolled up in a ball, was lying inside. At once, he gingerly shut the lid, saying to himself, “so what they say is true; there is no faithfulness with women! And the saying that an over-protected eye gets the speck was true, as well! I tried so hard to seclude my wife, jealously guarding her even against my own eyes. I locked the door on her, and even escorted her to the bathhouse. But in the end, I delivered her lover into my house with my own hands, openly acting the pimp! And the very thing that befell me has befallen the captain, as well. O woe is me! Without even knowing,” he added, “I brought this upon myself!”

And he determined to find a ruse that would deliver him from that place.

Thus, the weaver turned to the captain and said, “o lord, don’t be wrathful and enraged; it seems the boy did not lock the trunk after all. See, the lock is open. Now, you take your seats, and I will put on for you such a mystery, and such an outlandish show, as has never been put on or performed by any conjurer before, and a show such as I myself have never performed in front of anyone my entire life, and such an outlandish mystery that no one has ever seen its like before.” The captain of the guard replied, “that is what I desire,” and put down his ax. Then, he and his wife sat down, wondering what kind of mystery and outlandish thing the weaver would show them, and even the captain’s wife recovered somewhat from her shock.

The weaver continued, “since I don’t have a tambourine, at least bring me a tray so I can bang on that.” The captain gave the order, and the handmaidens brought a tray. Taking the tray, the weaver said, “now, behold as I make a man appear from this trunk, and another from yonder urn, and as they line up in front of [55] each other to perform a dance for you. Let me sound my tray!” The weaver took the tray in his hand and started to chant, “it will emerge now, the
mysterious mystery of mysteries—it will emerge now, the enigmatic enigma of enigmas!”

Sounding the tray, he approached the trunk and clapped his hands. Then, he bent over and furtively said to the fellow, “listen, you fucking pimp, who put you inside this trunk? Well, if you hope to escape, there is another guy in the urn. I will get him out as well and sound the tray. You start dancing in front of each other, and then, still dancing, make your way to the door. Once there, get out right away, run without looking behind you, and escape. Else, so help me God, the captain will smite you so hard with his mace that your skins won’t be worth half a coin.” He concluded by adding, “come out as soon as I say.”

Then, sounding the tray in his hand, the weaver made his way to the urn. Again, he clapped his hands, and furtively said to the fellow inside, “listen, you fucking pimp, I saw you earlier as you got in the urn. If you want to escape, come out as soon as I say, ‘the one in the urn, come out,’ start dancing face to face with the man who’ll get out of the trunk, quickly make your way to the door, flee, and be free. There is no other way for you to escape the captain’s clutches; if you don’t do it, you will get a taste of his mace.” And he added, “don’t hesitate or be afraid; get out as soon as I tell you to,” admonishing him thus.

The captain’s wife started shrinking in her seat, her skin turning pale. When he saw his wife unwell like this, the captain asked, “o soul of my soul, why do you shrink like this?” The woman replied, “I’m afraid; what sorts of men are to come out of this trunk and urn?” The captain said, “don’t be scared, o soul of my soul. This conjurer is an illusionist; he will not produce real men from that trunk and urn; [57] he will just show us apparitions. So don’t be reluctant or scared, and behold: it looks like he will put on a good show.” When he said this, the woman calmed down a little; she had been wondering what to say in case the captain noticed the fellow in the urn, and had not been able to think of anything. So she smiled and sat down, saying
to herself, “alright, let us see how things go.” The captain of the guard, on the other hand, believed the conjurer was putting a spell on the trunk and the urn.

Finally, the weaver returned from the urn, sounded the tray, and stood in the center of the room. Then, he turned to the captain and said, “master, please command the handmaidens to open the door of the house. I may have finished my incantations for the trunk and the urn, but the art I am about to display is a mighty art, and the doors need to be open for my work to come out well. I do not wish to find myself shamed in front of you, [58] and I need my work to neatly unfold and not get all tangled up; for the performance I am about to put on has not been attempted by any conjurer before.” Thereupon, the captain gave the order, and the handmaidens opened all doors.

Sounding the tray in his hand, the weaver started chanting, “it will emerge now, the mystery, o the enigma, the mystery—it will emerge now, the enigma!” And as soon as he opened the lid of the trunk, a man, naked as a baby, came out and started contorting himself in a dance. The captain of the guard turned to his wife and said, “he truly is a good conjurer; I wonder if he will make one appear from the urn as well, and have them dance face to face.” The woman replied, “he made one appear from the trunk, so now he must make one appear from the urn as well. If he manages that, he will have put on a truly stupendous show.”

The weaver, tray in hand, came back to the center of the room, went from there to the urn, and chanted, “it will emerge now, the mystery—from the urn as well, the enigma! O mysterious enigma, now emerge from the urn as well, o mystery!” [59] As soon as he said this, the young butcher—for that is what the lover of the captain’s wife turned out to be—emerged from the urn, naked as a baby. Both of them started dancing, face to face, in fanciful contortions. And the captain said to his wife, “don’t you be scared now, my soul, these are not real, but mere
apparitions.” When the young butcher had come out of the urn as well, and the two had started
dancing, the weaver signalled to them to move towards the door. And as soon as the two
women’s lovers, dancing in the middle of the room, saw the weaver’s signal, they seized the
opportunity and made for the door, bouncing and jumping all the way. From there, they went out,
and, the doors being open, made themselves scarce at once, not stopping to catch their breath
until they had arrived at their own dwellings.

When the weaver saw that they had thus been saved, he said to himself, “true skill does
not lie in using trickery to save them; true skill would lie in saving yourself as well. Else,
you will be the one to taste the mace that they escaped.” But the captain of the guard had been
dumbfounded by the performance the weaver put on, and was saying to himself, “I’ve seen a lot
of conjurers, but never in my life did I see the artfulness displayed by this particular one. That he
should have brought out a man from his own trunk, and another one from my urn! This skill is a
mighty skill, and this art a mighty art, the likes of which have never been witnessed before!” And
thus, grasping nothing of what he had seen, he truly considered them apparitions, and fell into
deep thought.

As soon as the weaver realized that the captain could make neither head nor tail of the
ruse and and artfulness he had put on, he said, “o master, it is no skill to make men appear from
an urn and a trunk. That art truly requires no skill. True skill would be for me to go outside, turn
one of them into a monkey and the other into an ape, bring them back, [61] and have them dance
in front of you. Now, that would be a true show, and I hope to astound you with this art, as
well!” When he said this, the captain replied at once, “go all out, master conjurer, and do it right
away! I will reward you handsomely for these tricks you are performing!” And his wife chimed
in, saying, “so help me God, my lord, this conjurer is a master, and truly adept and accomplished
at his art! He has granted us an unparalleled performance. If he displays the art he just talked
about as well, it will truly be a mighty exhibit of skill, and he will deserve great munificence!”
The woman’s goal with these words was to fan the captain’s ardor so that the weaver could find
a way to get outside and beat a hasty retreat so that her own secret would not be revealed, either.

The captain quickly exclaimed, “give it your all; do it at once!” , and the weaver said to
himself, “if only I can make it outside; then you’ll see the real show.” Rolling up the legs of his
trousers, he turned to the captain and asked, “o master, I wonder if I should turn one of those
men into a monkey and the other one into an [62] ape, or rather into a donkey?” The captain of
the guard replied, “donkeys and monkeys are unrelated. Turn him into an ape!” The weaver said,
“now, you just sit back and watch the performance and skill I will display, so that I may earn
your astonishment and applause.” The captain replied, “do your best!” , and the weaver, tray in
hand, jumpingly and playingly exited through the door, cut and run without delay, breathlessly
arrived at his own house, opened the door and went inside, divorced his wife that instant, and
went about his own business.

The captain of the guard, for his part, waited and waited until he saw that no one was
coming or going anymore. His wife understood that the weaver had fled, but never let on and did
not utter a word, sending the weaver silent prayers and praise. And when the captain finally
understood that [63] the fellow had escaped, he still did not grasp a thing and could not fathom
any part of what had transpired.

The purpose in telling stories, my dear, is to impart a moral. So do not tie down your wife
too tightly, and neither leave her too free. For she has sprouted from a crooked root, and if you
try to straighten it out too much, it will break. May God, the exalted and sublime, deal with the
wicked among them, for there is no one else who can; and may God, the exalted, reform the wicked ones, for their tales are widely retold.
The Adulteress and the Wife (P3)

[63 cont.] Third Story

Story: In days of yore, in the city of Basra, there lived a master jeweler, wholly adept at his art and fully adroit at his craft. One day, while he was sitting in his store, going about his work, he suddenly noticed a flirtatious woman—a raider’s sword aimed at hearts—appear from across the street, walk right up to his store, and stop in front of it. In an instant, she exposed both her ears, saying, “master jeweler, do you have some charming earrings worthy of these [64] my ears?” The jeweler replied, “I do indeed, my lady,” turned around, opened the trunk, and took out a becoming pair of earrings. But by the time he turned to face the woman again, she was gone, not even leaving behind a dream. The jeweler, taking leave of his senses, quickly came down from his store and started searching up and down, saying, “I wonder if she went this way or that?” But he was not able to find her. Finally, he returned to his store, but his heart was no longer in his work, and his soul was filled with unease. And so, he cleared his counter, closed his store, and went to the park, where he spent quite a while strolling around and taking the air.

When evening came, he went home from the park, all dejected and sad. His wife, who was quite perceptive, caught on to his depression, and said, “o master, you are sad again!” But the jeweler gave her no answer, went to bed right away, and lay down. Peering out of the window, he found himself unable to [65] sleep, saying, “I wonder when morning will finally come.”

When morning arrived and the sun raised its head above the peak of Mount Kaf, illuminating the world with its light, the jeweler left his home at once, hurried to his store, opened up, and busied himself with his work. His eyes, however, were always on the street. As he was looking around, saying, “I wonder if that coquette will show up today as well,” he
suddenly saw the same solace of hearts appear from across the street, saunter over to him, and once again come to a halt in front of his store. In an instant, she exposed her neck, saying, “master jeweler, do you have some bejeweled golden necklaces worthy of this my neck?” The jeweler, saying, “I do, my sultan,” turned around and took one out, but what should he see when he looked again but that the woman had vanished once more. Quickly, he came down from his store and searched up and down, saying, “I wonder if she went this way or that?” But as before, he could find no trace or clue of her anywhere, and so, once again, he returned to his store. However, his hands [66] would not touch his work, so he quickly closed his store and went to the park again, strolling around and taking the air until the evening came.

Once evening had fallen, he returned from the park and went home, dejected and sad as before, nary a smile crossing his face. When his wife saw her husband frowning and sad again, she said, “fellow, this is the second night in a row that you come home like this. What is this trouble of yours? Are you in love with someone, or have you not sold anything for two days? Whatever the reason, share it with me, so that I may be sad with you. If you have fallen in love with someone, let me find a solution for that. If you have debts, let us determine whether to pay or delay, and act accordingly. If your goods have not been selling, don’t despair; if they did not sell today, they will tomorrow!” But once again, the jeweler gave his wife no answer, got undressed without delay, went to bed, and started awaiting the morning.

When morning came, the jeweler got up, went [67] to his store, opened up, and sat down to his work. But as before, his heart was not in it, and his eyes were roaming the street. Then, while he was saying, “that beauty of the age—I wonder if she will come and render the ruins of my heart prosperous once again?”, suddenly she appeared from across the street, came right up to the jeweler’s store, put her henna-painted heel in front of him, and asked, “master jeweler, do
you have an ankle chain worthy of these my heels?” The fellow, saying, “I do, my lady,” took an ankle chain out of the trunk, but when he turned around, he saw the woman had vanished once more. At once, he came down from his store and started rushing up and down, saying, “I wonder if she went this way or that.” But he could not find a single trace of that woman. He returned, but since his heart was not in it and his soul was out of sorts, he started closing up his store again.

While doing this, he noticed a tied-up piece of cloth lying where he had been sitting. Looking at it and wondering what it was, he took it in his hand—there was something inside. He opened it and saw it contained some wheat, beans, lentils, chick peas, horse shit, cow shit, and camel shit, all tied into one pouch. The jeweler said to himself, “who knows who lost this here?”, tied the pouch back up, and threw it outside. Then, he closed up his store, went to the park, strolled around till evening, and, when evening had come, once more went home, dejected and sad, down in the mouth and tired.

As soon as the wife saw her husband despondent yet again, she cried, “o husband, what is this state of yours? For three nights now, the food I cook has remained uneaten and gone to the dogs! Quick, either tell me what is the matter, or divorce me this instant!” Now, the jeweler loved his wife very much and had plenty of affection for her. So finally, he was forced to confess, “o wife, for three days now, a woman has been visiting my store. The first day she came, she exposed both her ears and said, ‘master, do you have some good earrings worthy of these my ears? I said, ‘I do,’ but when I had gotten the earrings from the trunk, I saw she had left. I got up and made after her, but could not determine which path she had taken. So I returned to my store, but my heart was not in my work anymore, and I closed the store and went to the park. I strolled around and took the air until evening, and then I came home.”
“The next day—which was yesterday—I got up in the morning and went to the store again, sitting down behind the counter. Again, she appeared from across the street, came all the way up to the store, uncovered her neck this time, and said, ‘master, do you have a gold necklace worthy of this my neck?’ I said, ‘I do, my lady,’ took it out of the trunk, and turned around, only to see that she had vanished again. At once, I got down to pursue her; but again, I could not find her, so I returned to the store and sat down to work. However, as before, my heart was no longer in it, so I closed the store right away and went to the park again, taking the air until evening. But in the evening, at home and lying down, sleep [70] eluded me once again.”

“When morning came, I got up and went to the store—that was today. I sat down to work, my eyes on the street, wondering if she would come again, when just as before, she suddenly appeared from across the street. Again, she came right up to the store, raising her henna-painted heels this time. Putting them up into the store, she said, ‘master, do you have any ankle chains worthy of these my heels?’ I said, ‘I do, my lady.’ But by the time I had turned and taken an ankle chain out of the trunk, I saw that she had dropped off the face of the earth once again. At once, I jumped and searched up and down, but could not find any sign or trace. So I returned to the store, but since once again, my hand would not touch my work anymore, I became restive and jittery, quickly closed the store, and went to the park. Just now, evening fell, so I returned home.” And the unfortunate jeweler wept, “I don’t know what is to become of me at this rate.”

The woman replied, “but my dear, today is the third day she came and went; first she let you behold her ears, secondly her neck, and thirdly her heels, thereby fully ensnaring your heart. [71] Did you not notice a sign on her part, or some kind of token, perhaps?” The jeweler replied, “no, I did not. But today, once I had made after her again and returned to the store unable to find
her, I saw a piece of cloth lying in my seat. I took it in my hand, wondering who might have dropped it there, and intending to throw it outside. Then, I noticed a knot on its fringe, and untied it to see what it was. I looked inside and saw that they had put wheat, and beans, and lentils, and chick peas, and kidney beans, and horse shit, and cow shit, and camel shit inside, and tied it all into one pouch. Saying, ‘who knows who dropped this here?’, I threw it out. And I did not see anything else.”

At once, the woman said, “that was a fine clue and token for you, but you weren’t able to read it.” The jeweler wept and fell at his wife’s feet. The woman’s soul was filled with pity at seeing her husband like this, and so she said, “o hapless one, that woman gave you a sign, saying, ‘our house is by the grain bazaar.’” The jeweler asked, “how did you know?” The woman replied, [72] “the wheat, beans, lentils, chick peas, horse shit, cow shit, and camel shit that you found tied inside that cloth—all of that only comes together at the grain bazaar, and nowhere else. Now, get up early tomorrow, put on your best clothes, stroll over to the grain bazaar, and wait there. Wherever that woman might be, she will be keeping her eye out for you, and surely, she will give you a token or sign. Once she does, come back and tell me all about it. Based on her message, I will contrive a way for you to go and meet up with her.” The jeweler agreed to his wife’s words, and his heart became a little more elated and gay. And so, they had dinner; after dinner, the wife made their bed; and they went to sleep.

In the morning, the fellow jumped up at once, put on his robe, bedecked himself finely from his cupboard, put mascara on his eyes, and spruced himself up in any way he could—such, after all, is the habit of the womanizer. Then, he left home, quickly went over to the grain bazaar, and stood still in a corner. While he was looking about him—and he had been observed from a dais—his eyes went up to that place. Just then, that woman showed herself slightly
through a window on the dais. At once, she removed a mirror from her headdress, and first showed the jeweler the face of that mirror. Next, she turned it around, showing him its back. And finally, putting it back in her headdress, she went inside. The jeweler, still holding out hope that the woman would come out and give him a sign that he could recognize and report to his wife, waited for a long time, but she never came out again.

Dejected and sad, the fellow went back home. When the wife saw her husband return in despair, she asked, “why are you dejected? Were you not able to find her?” The jeweler replied, “I found her, but as soon as she saw me, she took a mirror out of her headdress, showed me first its face and then its back, and finally put it back in her headdress [74] and went inside. I waited for a long time, hoping for a sign or token to come and report to you, so you might plan accordingly. Alas, she did not come out and give a sign.” The woman said, “she gave you a fine sign, but you weren’t able to fathom it.” The jeweler asked, “how did she give me a sign?” The woman replied, “when that woman took the mirror from her headdress and showed you first its front and then its back, she said to you, ‘it’s daytime now, so you should come back at night.’ And when that woman did not linger and went back inside that instant, she told you that you, too, should not linger there, but leave at once.” Overjoyed at his wife’s words, the jeweler lost all desire to go to his store, and started awaiting the evening, wondering when it would finally come.

When evening fell, they had dinner, and the woman said, “now go; that woman awaits you now.” Delighted, the jeweler [75] got up and put on his robe. However, at that moment, the woman said, “I have a word for you. It is possible that this woman you covet is among the notorious, and that she has received, conversed with, and dispatched many a man before you. And if she is being watched, you might be apprehended. Now, if such a thing happens to you,
send word of it to me no matter what else you do. I will arrive and set you free. However,” she went on, “tell the man you send not to knock on the door that late at night. Instead, he is to pick up three stones, and throw one of them on the roof, and one at the door. If they have taken you to the dungeon, and lowered you into the pit, he is to throw the third stone in through the window.” Admonishing her husband thus, the woman saw him all the way to the door, closed it, returned inside, and went about her business.

When the jeweler had left out the door and made his way

[The text breaks off here, resuming on the next page at a different point of the story.]

[76] Then everyone went back home. At that point, the jeweler remembered the advice his wife had given him, and called out to the jailkeeper. The jailkeeper arrived and asked, “what do you want, wretch?” The jeweler replied, “I will give you one piece of gold—please do me the favor of going to my house and informing my wife of my predicament. But when you arrive there, don’t knock on the door this late at night. Pick up three stones; first, throw one onto the roof; then, throw one at the door; and finally, drop one in through the window. Don’t say or do anything else; just return.”

The jailkeeper took the gold at once, safely went over and found the house, picked up three stones, and threw the first one up on the roof like the jeweler had said. When the woman heard the stone fall on the roof—she had not gone to sleep, and her ear was on the door—she knew that it was a message from her husband. Immediately, she rose, called out to her handmaiden, and said, “girl, get up at once, [77] your master has been detained!” When the jailkeeper threw the next stone at the door, the woman said, “be quick, girl, your master has been
delivered to the dungeon!” Finally, the jailkeeper threw the last stone in through the window and left without saying a word, prompting the woman to cry to her handmaiden, “girl, they have lowered your master to the bottom of the dungeon’s pit!”

Quickly, she got dressed, put on her overcoat, and set out on her own into the night. Arriving at the dungeon, she asked the jailkeeper, “have they brought a woman here, apprehended along with a man?” The jailkeeper answered, “yes, they have.” The woman said, “that man is my husband. I always told him, ‘don’t you dare talk and meet up with that woman. One day, they will set upon you and seize you!’ But he never paid heed to my words. Now, let me give you a piece of gold. Since you will not let them out, lower me down to where they are, so that I may spit in their faces while they are together [78] like this! That is all I want; afterwards, I will go back home.” The jailkeeper took the gold, tied a rope around the woman’s waist, and lowered her into the pit.

As soon as the wife was at the bottom of the pit, she unfastened the rope from around those two, got the woman out of the quilt, stripped off all her own clothes, made that woman put them on, snuck up to her husband’s bosom, wrapped her arms around him, naked as she was, and lay down in his embrace. Then, the jeweler’s wife said to that wanton woman, “don’t just stand there; quickly tie us up with this rope, put on all my clothes, tie that rope around your waist, and call the jailkeeper so he may pull you out. Don’t say a single word to him, and go home without looking back.” That woman, seizing the opportunity at once, firmly tied the lowered rope around her own waist, rolled up the other two together, tied them up with rope, and finally called for the jailkeeper, giving her rope [79] a good tug. The jailkeeper, ready at the mouth of the pit, pulled the woman out by that rope, lifting her out. Without a word, the woman left and went home. She opened her door, went inside, and was released from her worries. Then, she lay down and rested.
In the morning, once the morning prayer was done, the congregation and the imam proceeded to the jail, filled with righteous zeal. They took the jeweler and his wife out of the dungeon, wrapped up as they were in the quilt and mattress, firmly tied them to a stretcher, and took them into the presence of the judge efendi. At once, the imam came forward and said to the judge, “o sultan, there is a wanton woman in our neighborhood, and we have been helpless and impotent against her. Many a time, we observed her take strange men inside, but when we arrived at her door with the congregation, forced her to open up, and went inside, we could never determine where she had smuggled or hidden them.”

“Finally, last night, this fellow arrived at her house. [80] We said, ‘if we go in again without delay, she will only hide him away, we will not be able to find him, and as soon as we are gone, she will get him out and continue her debauchery. Savvy and precaution call for us not to react at once. Later, once they have eaten and drunk and gone to bed, we will climb over the wall, never let them stir as they lie in each other’s arms, wrap them in their sheets, tie them to a stretcher, take them to the dungeon, bring them into the presence of my lord in the morning, untie them right there, and expose them naked as on the day they were born.’ We acted as we had resolved, and here we are, having brought them into your presence.”

At once, the judge efendi said, “untie them, so we may see them and deal with them as is fit.” Officiously stepping out in front of all, the headman untied the ropes from around the two and took the quilt off them. The jeweler and his wife got up from the mattress. Right away, the woman wrapped herself in the quilt, [81] walked up to the judge, and started screaming and clamoring. Meanwhile, the jeweler exclaimed, “o exalted sultan of mine, has no one the right to pay a visit at an acquaintance’s house anymore? My lawfully wedded wife and I went on a social call last night. We ate and drank until it was evening, and then our hosts would not let us go, so
we stayed over. But yesterday, this congregation arrived—we did not notice them; apparently they leapt over the wall while my wife and I were asleep—we heard them set upon us, and before we had a chance to ask what it was all about, they tied the two of us up in our mattress with a firm rope, took us away, and lowered us to the bottom of the dungeon. We lay there, tied up in ropes, until dawn. And now, they have brought us here into your presence. You are seated on the Messenger’s prayer rug. Demand our rights from them today, and let justice and virtue prevail!” And thus, the jeweler started clamoring along with his wife.

The judge became enraged at the congregation and had the \textit{imam efendi}, then the \textit{müezzin}, and then the headman \textit{flogged}. When the rest of the congregation saw this turn of events, they quickly dispersed even as those three were being \textit{flogged}; when it was the next person’s turn, none could be found. At once, clothes were brought for the jeweler and his wife. Putting them on, they said, “o sultan of ours, may God, the exalted, be pleased and content with you; you meted out justice to these people in our case.” Speaking thus, and praying for the judge, the woman and her husband returned home. Bending down, the jeweler kissed his wife’s hand that very instant, and the two of them passed their lives together in pleasure and affection for many a year to come. There are many such tricks with women. A tale is told with the aim of imparting a moral, so heed it well, even though it should already be clear to the wise.
Story: It is related that in the old days, in the time of the Children of Israel, there lived a devout ascetic, who was so devout that he would fast all day and pray all night. He had spent all his life in prayer, fasting, and worship, and had accumulated a thousand months of service in holy war. This warrior on the path of God would always fight with a camel’s jawbone as his weapon, and whenever he was hungry, he would hold that camel’s jawbone to his mouth, and from that jawbone, all manner of heavenly nourishment would flow into his mouth, and he would be sated. And whenever he was thirsty, he would hold that camel’s jawbone to his mouth in the same way, and waters as if from the fountain of youth would flow from its teeth, and he would drink until his thirst was quenched. In this manner, he fought and slaughtered the infidels for a thousand months, and even though he killed so many infidels each day, not once in these thousand months did the infidels achieve a victory against him; they were rendered impotent and weary, weak and powerless at his hand. And the illustrious name of that blessed, devout ascetic was Şem‘un. This Şem‘un was a beloved slave of God, the exalted and sublime, and his prayers were always answered.

Since the infidels had become feeble at the hands of Şem‘un, and since they could not stand up to him on the battlefield, they decided to turn to subterfuge. They conferred for a few days, saying, “in what way can we achieve victory over him?”, and finally reached agreement on the following: this Şem‘un had a beautiful wife who showed evidence of Zeliha in her comeliness and grace. Şem‘un loved that woman very much, and she never had to ask for anything twice around him. Those infidels affirmed, “let us go and offer Şem‘un’s wife many possessions, so that she may tie her husband up while he is asleep and deliver him to us. Then we
can kill him and finally escape his hands.” Five or ten men from among them went to that
woman and said, “do you know, woman, why we have come to you?” The woman replied, “I do
not know; pray tell me why you came.” They said, “we came to offer you possessions and
jewelry; further, you shall become the padişah’s wife and attain prosperity.” The woman was
willing at once, and said to them, [85] “do not be distressed; I will tie him up and let you know;
then, you can do whatever you want.” Thereupon, they turned around and left.

Şemʿun returned home exhausted from the holy war, went to bed, and slept. That instant,
the accursed woman firmly tied up the ascetic’s hands and feet while he was asleep. After a
while, Şemʿun woke up and saw that his hands and feet were tied, and that there was no one next
to him but the woman. He turned to her and asked, “o woman, who tied me up?” The woman
replied, “it was I who tied you up in order to test you strength.” Şemʿun once said “by God!”,
and broke his bonds with a cracking sound.

A few days later, the ascetic went to battle the infidels again, came home tired and
exhausted, went to bed, and slept. Without delay, that accursed woman tied up the ascetic’s
hands and feet once more, this time with chains. As before, Şemʿun woke up only to find that his
hands and feet [86] had been firmly tied with chains. Again, he asked the woman, “who put me
in chains?” , and that accursed woman replied, “It was I again, in order to test your strength. Let
me see whether you can break these iron chains, as well.” At that point, Şemʿun turned to the
woman and said, “foolish woman, nothing in the world can restrain me—except for the hair on
my own head!” Hearing this, the woman smiled. At once, Şemʿun said, “by God!”, as before,
and broke those iron chains apart with a cracking sound.

A few days had passed, the ascetic went out to fight the infidels once again, came
home exhausted, went to bed, and slept. Right away, that accursed woman cut off a few strands
of that devout ascetic’s hair, and tied up Şem‘un’s hands and feet ever so firmly. That devout Şem‘un woke up from his sleep and saw that his hands and feet were tied. He asked his wife, “woman, who tied me up?” [87] The woman replied, “it was I who tied you up to test your strength. Let me see whether you can break apart this hair, as well.” Şemun said, “breaking this is not in my power,” and saw that no matter how hard he tried, he could not break even a single lock of that hair.

As soon as the woman saw this, she quickly went outside—it turns out that some infidels had been lying in wait somewhere near—and that accursed, unfaithful woman went over and took the news to those infidels. Those infidels, in turn, rushed over, entered the ascetic’s house, and, when they saw Şemun all tied up, dragged him, fighting and struggling, in front of their padişah at once. That accursed one quickly gave the order, and they cut the ascetic’s throat. Following that, they gouged out the saintly eyes of that devout ascetic. Then, they cut off the hands he used to battle and slaughter the infidels and the feet that carried him to holy war, and hacked them to pieces. [88] And that traitor to the bread he had fed her, that accursed woman, watched the spectacle, never once showing any mercy or compassion upon seeing her husband like this.

Finally, a voice came from the beyond, pronouncing, “o my slave, wish of me whatever you will, and I will provide a cure.” At once, that ascetic prayed, “o Lord, I wish of you to give me the strength to destroy these infidels.” That very instant, those organs of the ascetic that had been cut off became healthy and hale as before, returning to their places, and his strength returned, as well. Now, it turns out that the infidels were all inside a house, and that a pole had been erected in the middle of that house. Without delay, that devout ascetic grabbed the pole in the middle of the house, said “by God!”, and tore it from its place. The pole collapsed onto the
infidels who were in the house at that time, and all those infidels [89] perished at once, and that accursed woman also perished along with the infidels and got what she deserved.

Now, my dear, observe just how ruthless and merciless women are. For seventy years, that woman had lived in one place with that devout ascetic, and she had received so much of his bread and blessings. Still, she disdained the salt and bread he had fed her, put her husband in such a state, never showed any mercy, and toiled until she had him hacked to pieces, whereupon she herself got what she deserved. It has become clear that there is no loyalty on the part of womenfolk; indeed, it is unimaginable that there should be any loyalty with them. There are three things in the world that possess no loyalty. One of them is the woman, the next is the sword, and the final one is the horse. Comprehend this well; and hereby, this story is complete.
The Cuckolded Princes (P5)

[89 cont.] Fifth Story

Story: The tellers of tales narrate and recount that in the realm of India and the islands of China and its South, there lived an illustrious padişah and a [...] sovereign, called Şehriyar by name. [90] This Şehriyar ruled over all the realms, and he had two sons, one called Mülk-Cabbar and the other called Mülk-Zenan. Mülk-Cabbar, the older brother, ruled over the districts of India and China, while the younger brother, Mülk-Zenan, ruled over the district of Samarkand. The name and fame of these two princes had spread through the entire world; they exacted taxes and tribute from all other padişahs; and the rulers in the vicinity sent them gifts and offerings each year. These two never wanted for anything in this world, were surrounded by prosperity, and their possessions and treasures were countless.

The storyteller relates that Mülk-Cabbar’s heart was filled with yearning for his younger brother Mülk-Zenan, and with the desire to see him. Once he could no longer bear to be patient, he ordered that a letter of affection be composed to Mülk-Zenan at once. Upon his command, his vezirs wrote the letter of affection and handed it to Mülk-Cabbar. [91] After considering it, he placed his seal on it, gave it to a vezir, and told him, “go from here to Samarkand and deliver this my letter of affection to my precious brother Mülk-Zenan, placing it in his own hands. Further, verbally offer our greetings and warmth to him, and declare our most lofty affection and yearning for him. Following this, he is to appoint a deputy in his place and come to India with as many men as he desires, so that, in this mortal world, we may spend a few days in pleasure and conversation, indulgence and drink. For this age is not abiding, and this life not everlasting.”

Once he had completed his verbal instructions as well, the day arrived when the vezir left India
with forty to fifty men and made his way to Samarkand, resting and picking up again, eating and drinking along the way, and passing through mountains and deserts.

One day, he set foot on the border of Samarkand, entered the city of Samarkand itself, inquired about the palace of the grand vezir, and went right to that palace. There, he conferred with the grand vezir, informing him that he had come from Mülk-Cabbar, the padişah of India. They inquired about each other’s health, and then, the grand vezir reported to the padişah Mülk-Zenan that a special vezir of Mülk-Cabbar, the padişah of India, had arrived. Mülk-Zenan, in turn, ordered the special vezir to be brought before him. At once, the grand vezir set out before the vezir of the padişah of India and brought him to his own padişah’s court. As was the custom, the vezir touched his forehead to the ground at three points. Then, he came up, kissed the rug beneath the throne, stood up, recounted all the words that Mülk-Cabbar had ordered him to orally convey, added, “whatever remains to be said is in the letter,” and fell silent.

At that point, Mülk-Zenan ordered the letter to be handed to the court magistrate, and once it had been read out, the purview of the letter became known not only to the padişah, but also to all the vezirs and notables of the court, and they all learned why it had arrived. Following this, the vezir presented the trinkets and gifts that Mülk-Cabbar had sent to his brother, and they were well received. The vezir was shown a place among the vezirs, and he seated himself. Then, dishes were served to the court one by one, and the announcement was made, “the meal is served, oyez!” The meal was eaten, thanks were given, and the grand vezir took the vezir of Mülk-Cabbar, the padişah of India, retiring with him to his palace.

Zenan Şah, for his part, also became desirous to meet with his brother Mülk-Cabbar, and ordered at once that his tents and moveable household be set up outside the city. Once this was done, he appointed his grand vezir as deputy in his stead, entrusted the affairs of state to him, and
took leave of his wife and family. Then, one day, at a blessed hour, Mülk-Zenan Şah departed
the city of Samarkand, [94] and set out on the journey to India. Once they had completed a day’s
journey, they stopped at an appropriate location and set up camp.

As the sweet-tongued storyteller recounts, while Mülk-Zenan Şah was sitting in his
encampment, he was overcome by ardor, his wife came to his mind, and he wept in spite of
himself, his heart getting seared with the fire of passion. So he contemplated for a while, saying
to himself, “let me at least go back for the night, share my affections with my wife, and see her
face once again. For she is my uncle’s daughter, and the first woman my eyes ever fell upon. I
have raised her at my bosom for fifteen years, and she loves me very dearly. I know that right
now, she is distraught on account of my absence, and cannot sleep out of sorrow over our
separation. I am going all the way to the realm of India, and only God, the exalted, knows when I
will return. So let me go back and behold the rose-like beauty [95] of my wife one more time.”

In the meantime, evening had fallen, and, unable to brook any further delay, he mounted
a steed at once, made for his palace, and entered it under cover of the night. He got off the steed,
and, not notifying anyone, entered his private harem without obstruction, headed straight for the
room where she was, arrived at its door, and saw that candles were lit inside. But when he
hurriedly entered the room, what should he see but that his uncle’s daughter, by love for whom
he was consumed, was lying in the embrace of a cook’s apprentice, buried in the padişah’s own
bed? And, my dear, the story goes that the cook’s apprentice was so ugly that whoever looked at
him would be hounded by bad luck the rest of his life. When Mülk-Zenan Şah saw his wife like
this, he stepped back a little and remained still.

At that point, he contemplated [96] a while, saying, “my word; I am such a beauty in this
world, all men and women in this town are in love with my allure, and God, the exalted and
sublime, has bestowed, in all his power and artfulness, such a degree of comeliness and charm upon me! Further, I am only twenty-five or twenty-six, and in possession of such splendor and sovereignty! That my wife, whom I love with all my heart and soul, should do such a thing even so, at a time when I have only just left the city!” Thinking thus, he remained where he was, showing patience a little while longer.

The woman and boy, on the other hand, had no idea that Zenan Şah was there. That very instant, that ugly boy lifted the woman’s legs and [blotted out]. Then, the boy turned to the woman and asked, “my dear, whom do you love more, me or your husband Zenan Şah?” The woman said to the boy, “o master of mine, I have been loving you for three years. [97] May my life be forfeit, my lord, for your sake. I would not exchange you for a thousand padişahs like Zenan. Could there possibly be another beauty like you in the world? You are my very own master. Whenever you get together with me, you fuck me twelve or fifteen times. The padişah, on the other hand, would only fuck me five or six times, and then go to sleep, not getting up before dawn. Now, my dear, since I’ve been loving you, I have not amicably given the padişah [blotted out] even once, and every time I gave it to him, I would cause him hardship, and you would be the only one on my mind.” Then, the woman went on to say, “o master of mine, if only my husband Mülk-Zenan were not to return in good health from the place to which he has gone! If only, God willing, news of his death were to arrive, so that, my lord, I could marry you. But even if the padişah does not die and returns alive, I will poison him and marry you, my lord. I would sacrifice a thousand padişahs like him for your sake!”

At that point, the boy was moved to fairness, turned to the woman, and said, “look, my dear, [98] the world has not witnessed a beauty like that of your husband Mülk-Zenan. He is a

284 blotted out in the original.
285 blotted out in the original.
veritable second Yusuf! My soul—how could it be—I do not compare to a finger of his. Here I am, a dirty cook’s apprentice, and I know very well just how ugly I am. You, my lady, are worthy of being the padişah’s wife. How could I dare to presume to be worthy of a sultan like you? May God, the exalted and sublime, grant you to our padişah; and may He grant our padişah to you.” After he had spoken thus, they embraced once again and gingerly fell asleep. Mülk-Zenan, in turn, could not take it any longer, was overcome by fervor, pulled his dagger from its splendid sheath at his waist without delay, and killed them both as they lay asleep in the bed. He left the harem the way he had come, under cover of the night, mounted his steed, returned to his procession, and retired to his tent.

Once that night had passed and morning had come, the padişah [99] Mülk-Zenan departed from that halting place and continued his journey to India. Eating and drinking along the way, resting and picking up again, traversing lodgings and passing by milestones, one day, they finally set foot on the borders of India. With only five days between them and the the capital of India, the vezir of Mülk-Cabbar touched his forehead to the ground before Zenan Şah, kissed the ground, and received permission to go in advance.

So the vezir went to take the good tidings to Mülk-Cabbar. He entered the city, made right for Mülk-Cabbar’s palace, got off his horse, arrived in the presence of the padişah, kissed the ground, and gave Mülk-Cabbar Şah the good news that his brotherZenan Şah had arrived and was only three days away. Mülk-Cabbar, in turn, clothed his vezir in a heavy robe of honor and gave him a provincial subdivision as a fief. Then, he gave the order to erect tents at an excursion spot outside the city. [100] Following this, Mülk-Cabbar himself, accompanied by all his vezirs and notables of the state, mounted his steed and rode out to welcome his brother Mülk-Zenan until he was only one day’s journey away. And when Zenan Şah approached Mülk-
Cabbar, he hurled himself off his horse, Mülk-Cabbar dismounted as well, and they embraced each other full of longing, grasped each other, and talked.

Afterwards, they mounted their horses again, and these two splendid padişahs advanced towards the tents side by side. All the vezîrs and notables of the state stood at attention, and the two brothers saluted both sides, dismounted at the tent, got on the throne together, sat down, and inquired about each other’s health once again. Soon, the guests’ banquet was set, the food was eaten, thanks were given, fine incense was burned, and sherbet was drunk. Finally, they mounted their horses again, came to the city and the palace, dismounted, and abided there.

For one or two months, Mülk-Cabbar prepared mighty feasts for his brother Zenan Şah; took him hunting in the open plains, whether in or out of season; and passed the time with indulgence and drink, with pleasure and conversation. Zenan Şah, however, would neither eat nor drink, and was always gloomy and despondent, lost in thought. Mülk-Cabbar, observing his brother in this state, would ask himself, “I wonder what his thoughts and sorrow might be?” He did not ask, however, saying, “after all, he is a guest; he might get distressed.”

One day, when they were sitting alone and keeping each other company, Mülk-Cabbar turned to his brother Zenan Şah and said, “my dearest brother, I wish to ask you about something, but I have been refraining, saying, ‘it might distress my esteemed brother.’” When he said this, Mülk-Zenan responded, “be my guest, and let us answer whatever your question might be.” Mülk-Cabbar said, “look, o brother of mine, you have been conversing and drinking with us since you came to our city and met up with us. However, my dear, you are never free from sorrow and gloom. What, my esteemed brother, is the reason for this sorrow and gloom? Make me privy, my soul, to this mystery, so that I may suffer along with you. Since I have been seeing you in such gloom, my nights are no longer nights, and my days no longer days. Could it be, my
esteemed brother, that you are suffering sorrow and gloom because you have departed your
dominion and your realm? For I see, my brother, that your skin is turning more yellow and pale
by the day. You are more precious to me than my own life; unburden yourself and let us seek a
remedy to your troubles, to whatever extent we can. For whoever does not speak of his troubles,
hiding them away, cannot be helped.” Without delay, Zenan Şah replied, “no, my brother, it is
but a fleeting sorrow and gloom that has darkened my mood. I have no other troubles.” And
having said this, he did not utter another word on the subject.

A few days passed upon this, and one day Mülk-Cabbar desired to go hunting. He said to
Zenan Şah, “o brother, if you please, let us go hunting together on this day. Your mood and
humor, my brother, will lighten, and we can both contemplate and hunt.” At once, Zenan Şah
replied, “brother, please go ahead; my disposition is particularly weak today.” And so, Mülk-
Zenan did not go that day, but Mülk-Cabbar went nonetheless.

As it happens, the room in which Zenan Şah was seated had a window that looked out
upon the garden, and as Zenan Şah was looking out of the window and beholding the garden, he
saw that around twenty Arab handmaidens entered through the garden gate, followed by
around twenty white handmaidens, the wife of Cabbar Şah in their midst. They disrobed by the
side of a pool, after which the sultan reclined on an elevated throne. Following this, a banquet
was readied, and they started drinking and carousing, romping and frolicking. Afterwards—and
it turns out that all those black Arabs were men—[104] the sultan gave a sign and those black
Arabs took those white maidens by the hand, each retreating into a corner with one handmaiden,
got on top of those white handmaidens, and started having their way with them. And then, my
dear, my precious soul, once the sultan had been left alone by the side of the pool, she called out,

286 i.e., blacks.
“o Mas‘at!”, and immediately, an Arab with a countenance of tar appeared from somewhere and mounted the throne next to the pool. He, too, not needing to be told twice, got on top of the sultan that instant, and started having his way with her. Once the Arab was done, they performed their ablutions in that pool, went back out the gate through which they had entered, and left.

When Mülk-Zenan Şah saw all this, his heart found a measure of consolation, he became a little more cheerful, and he fell into contemplation, saying to himself, “Io and behold, this is the way the wind blows, and no place on earth is free of this condition. It turns out that a calamity even greater than my own has befallen [105] my brother Mülk-Cabbar. And apart from that,” he went on, “it appears that there is no loyalty on the part of womenfolk!” And further, he said, “it appears that women will count prosperity for nothing, and that, by God, if a woman has a cunt, she will offer it, unless she happens not to have the cunt on her!” Later, as evening drew near, Mülk-Cabbar returned from the hunt, and once again sat down to intimate conversation with his brother Mülk-Zenan. However, my dear lord, Mülk-Cabbar saw that Mülk-Zenan’s previous gloom and misery had disappeared, and that he bore the mark of good tidings on his face. After that, Mülk-Cabbar could not detect a trace of gloom or anguish in his brother Zenan Şah ever again.

And so, one day, my soul, Mülk-Cabbar asked Mülk-Zenan, “o my soul, you were not like this before; you used to be sorrowful, my brother. But now I see that you have found relief, your complexion [106] looks healthy again, and you never display any gloom or sorrow. Verily, my brother, you must inform me about this situation.” And, saying, “dear brother,” he entreated him mightily. At long last, Mülk-Zenan could no longer resist the importunity and urgings of Cabbar Şah, and told him one by one about the affair between his uncle’s daughter, who had been his wife, and the cook’s apprentice; and about how he had been unable to bear it, had killed
them both, and had come to India. Then, he said, “my dear brother, it is true that I passed the
time with you in indulgence and drink, in pleasure and conversation. And yet, the treachery that
my accursed wife had committed never left my mind, and that is why I was always full of
suffering and gloom. However, o my brother, more precious to me than my own life, on the day
that you had gone hunting, full of bliss, and I had stayed in the palace, I was looking out on the
garden from the window when I saw around twenty [107] Arab handmaidens come in through
the gate, and, following them, twenty white handmaidens.” In sum, he recounted one by one all
their foul deeds and the state they had been in. “Now, my brother,” he said, “if you do not
believe me, go hunting again tomorrow and return here in disguise. Afterwards, behold from this
window and realize that the thing that has happened to you, and the loss of face you have
endured, are a thousand times worse than what has happened to me.” Then, he spoke no more.

When, my soul, Mülk-Cabbar received this horrid news from his brother, he sank into
thought and contemplation for a while. Then, they went back to drinking and conversing,
pleasure and indulgence. And once that night had passed and morning had come, Mülk-Cabbar
announced at once, “I am going out to hunt.” They made their preparations, gingerly mounted
their horses, and left the city in this fashion. Thereupon, Mülk-Cabbar quickly changed his attire,
and while his vezirs [108] and all his soldiers aimed for the open plains, he returned in disguise
and entered the room with the window, where his brother Mülk-Zenan had been.

He stood still at the window and started looking out on the abovementioned garden.
Before long, he saw around twenty Arab handmaidens, as per their usual habit, enter through that
gate in their overcoats, with around twenty white handmaidens in tow. The sultan arrived in the
midst of those handmaidens, and they all nicely took off their overcoats by the pool. Then came
the sultan, and with endless flirtation and affectation, that coquette ascended the sofa, reclining
there. She gave the order, a banquet was prepared, and those coy handmaidens filled some
of purple-colored wine and gave them to the sultan. The sultan, in turn, took the glasses
with countless airs born out of the flame of her passion, and drank the wine to the dregs. As soon
as tempers had been aroused to the full, she gave those Arabs [109] the sign for those black, foul-
countenanced, filthy Arabs to take the white handmaidens, one to a man, to a quiet spot. And so,
the Arabs held one maiden each by the hand, took them to a corner, got on top of them, and
started having their way with them.

When the sultan found herself alone, she once called out, “o Mas‘at!”, from where she
was on the sofa, and, as Mülk-Cabbar watched on, he saw a single black Arab appear, aproach
and mount that pavillion, and seat himself at the head of the banquet, knee to knee with the
sultan. At once, she poured that Arab some glasses of purple-colored wine with her own hand,
and the Arab proceeded to take them and drink. As soon as the Arab’s temper had been aroused
to the full, he pulled the sultan aside, teased a few coy, juicy kisses out of her, and lifted her feet.
Then, [110] before the eyes of Mülk-Cabbar, he inserted his erect member in her filthy vulva
with some difficulty, and started having his way with her. Once he was finished, he got up,
nicely performed his ablutions in that pool, and went off somewhere. Around the same time, the
sultan and the handmaidens also got up and went off to the harem. When Mülk-Cabbar saw this
situation with his own eyes, he nearly died of his fury. Unable to brook any delay, he went to his
harem right away and killed the lot of those accursed handmaidens, those treacherous Arabs, and
his wife. Then, he went up to his brother and swore, “let this be my vow that I will never take a
wife again!”

Afterwards, he conferred with his brother Mülk-Zenan for a while, and during their
conversation, Mülk-Cabbar said to his brother Zehan Şah, “come, brother, let us disguise
ourselves, you and I, [111] and roam this earth for a while. Let us see what face the mirror of fate will show, and whether a calamity greater than ours has befallen anyone.” And so, the two brothers changed their attire and set out on the road. In this fashion, my dear, they wandered for twenty to thirty days. Then, one day, they came to a seashore, where they sat down in the shadow of a tree and rested for a while. Suddenly, a commotion and a mighty rumbling arose from somewhere. They were gripped by terror, asking each other, “I wonder what this rumbling might be?” and quickly climbed on top of the tree, hiding between the leaves. As they looked on, a majestic giant emerged from the sea, a trunk on his head. He took the trunk down from his head [112] and put it on the ground at the foot of that tree. Then, he opened the lid of the trunk, took out a young girl—a true beloved, sowing sedition among the men of the age—and kissed and embraced that girl for a while. After that, he put his head on that girl’s knees and fell fast asleep.

At that point, the girl eased the giant’s head onto the ground, started looking hither and yon, and—it was a disaster waiting to happen—her eye—o may it be gouged out!—fell upon Cabbar Şah and Zenan Şah as they sat in the tree. At once, she said to them, “be quick and come down, or I will wake up the giant right now and he will finish you off!” When she said this, the hapless padişahs got so scared that all color left their faces, came down to the ground from the treetop, went up to the girl, and stood still next to her. The girl said, “be quick and fuck me.” And so, these two brothers had no choice but to [blotted out] and fuck this girl a couple of times.

Once the girl had gotten her wish, she said to them, “bring me those rings on your fingers [113] and hand them to me.” So these two had no choice but to take off their rings and give them to her. The girl took those exquisite signet rings, put them inside a pouch, turned to the two brothers, and said, “there we are; counting these rings as well, I have ninety-nine rings in total. Whenever this giant takes me out somewhere, I surely find a man and converse with him in this
way. And, my precious souls, I take the gold and diamond rings off the fingers of all the persons I converse with, just as I did with you. And this giant carries me on his head so that I will never converse with anyone, and no man will fuck me; that is why he always carries me around in a trunk in this manner. I, my dear, am a padişah’s daughter; this giant abducted me and has carried me around like this ever since. The fool does not know that one can never contend with women in this world. There is no limit to the wiles of women, and no mind can fathom them.”

And so, the two brothers returned from there [114] and headed back to the city of India which was Mülk-Cabbar’s capital. And the two brothers found a measure of consolation, saying, “the calamity that has befallen this giant is greater even than ours.” Mülk-Zenan conversed with Mülk-Cabbar for a few days longer, and then, one day, he said, “o brother, I came of my own free will; now let me ask permission to leave.” Then, he made all the arrangements for his journey and departed from India. Mülk-Cabbar accompanied Zenan Şah for three days with all his vezirs, seeing him off. They embraced each other, wept for a while, and finally said their goodbyes, after which each of them went his own path. Mülk-Cabbar returned to his capital, while Mülk-Zenan started his journey to Samarkand. In due time, my living soul, he arrived at his capital, made sacrifices and distributed alms in gratitude, and was at peace. And from that time onward, neither Mülk-Cabbar nor Mülk-Zenan ever took a wife again.

[115] Tales, my dear, are told with the hope of imparting a moral to those with a mind to grasp it. There is never, not ever, any loyalty on the pat of womenfolk. Women will not judge by beauty or squalor, and neither will they distinguish rich from poor. As soon as they get a chance, they will converse and fuck with others. And since a woman will not tell handsome from ugly once given a chance, you must give her no licence at all, and never avert your glance. And if, my dear, you proceed in this way, be heedful to the extreme; never fail to keep your eyes on your
woman; and comprehend well; for they say, “do not trust in water, and do not believe in a woman.” And thus, this story concludes.
The Resurrected Wife (P6)

[115 cont.] Sixth Story

The tellers of tales narrate and relate that in the time of the prophet Jesus, the exaltations and peace of God be upon him and his family, there lived a very devout and ascetic young man among the Children of Israel. Day and night, he followed and worshiped God, the exalted; and all his labor in this world was devoted to piety and godliness. This young man had an uncle’s daughter who held to the path of Mary, and was so chaste that she had not once let an unfamiliar person catch even a glimpse of her back. And so, my sultan, my living soul, that girl’s chastity and her devout asceticism had become widely renowned.

One day, that young man’s eyes fell upon the girl’s beauty by accident. When he saw her beauty, he lost hold of the reins of discernment, was bewitched, went out of his wits with her love, and became her forlorn nightingale. He gave away his holdings in patience, his thoughts were all torn to pieces, he lost his self-control and did not know what to do with himself. Going through envoys, he asked his uncle for the girl’s hand, paid in full whatever price his uncle demanded, and took the girl as his wife.

Next, as is well-known, comes the wedding night; however, on that night, the girl did not give herself to him. The young man asked, “o my uncle’s daughter, why will you not give yourself to me? Could it be that you desire something of me? Tell me your wish, my sultan, my lady, dearer to me than my own life, and I will fulfill it.” The girl said, “my desire is that you should exchange a vow with me. If I die before you, you are not to marry another after me, and further, you must vow not to take any other women in my stead. And if, God forbid, something happens to you before me, I will adhere to the same rule.” That graceful youth deemed these
words becoming, and so they drew up their conditions, making a solemn vow. Afterwards, the girl gave herself to him.

Once, my dear, the season of their communion had run its course, the girl received the call of God and passed away, leaving that youth behind. They washed the deceased and buried her in the graveyard. Once the youth had returned, moaning and groaning, from the graveyard, he held to his vow for two years, embracing her headstone, weeping, and lamenting. He banished the world from his thoughts and wept upon that headstone day and night, always repeating, “there is no one in this worthless world as loyal and true as this girl who was my wife!” And even though his relatives came together and gave him many a word of advice, they saw they could not get through to him—he just kept on weeping constantly. His anguish and sorrow increased from day to day, until but a hair’s breadth separated him from death; and still, his tribe could not get him to heed advice.

One day, the path of the exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, came upon that graveyard, and he noticed a clamor. He looked and saw that youth, embracing a recently erected headstone, weeping and singing elegies, his lament reaching all the way up to the heavens. At once, the exalted Jesus went up to that youth, greeted him, and inquired about his health. The youth complained of his fate, wept, and recounted his plight. The exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, said, “come, young man, and renounce this passion, for there is no loyalty with them.” But that youth would not accept his words, and so Jesus, peace be upon him, turned to him and said, “come, then, young man, I shall pray and you say amen, so that it may manifest the power of God, the exalted and sublime, the fullest, and render her alive once again.” The youth accepted this offer at once; the exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, prayed; and that youth, with his wounded heart, said amen. Once the prayer was done, they wiped their faces with their hands,
and the exalted Jesus, [120] peace be upon him, said, “by permission of God, the exalted, arise!”

And at once, by permission of God, the exalted, he restored life to the woman lying in the grave.

The youth rejoiced at this, turned to the woman, and said, “my soul, I cannot take you home naked as you are, so let me go home and fetch some clothes for you.” Saying this, he departed, and the woman remained in the graveyard, naked as she was. The exalted Jesus, for his part, started waiting for that youth to return with the clothes, and busied himself reading the Bible on one of the graves. Now, the storyteller relates that in those days, a youth lived among the tribe of the Children of Israel, a veritable sun among beauties, with a fairness as luminous as that of Hüseyin. This youth’s path took him to the graveyard at just that time, and there he saw a beloved of the world, sitting naked in the graveyard, her head bowed to the ground. [121] And indeed, she was such a marvel of the age that her likes could not have been found anywhere in the whole world. She was worthy of all praise; the exalted Lord of the world, had shaped her as beauty in human form. As soon as the young man saw this treasure, he became her forlorn admirer with the love of a thousand hearts and souls. For a while, he was dumbfounded and simply gaped at her from where he stood. But from yonder, that woman also gaped at the youth from where she stood.

And so, my dear, my living soul, that youth came forward, greeted the woman where she sat, and asked, “look, o slave of God, the exalted; who left you here like this, all by yourself, naked in the graveyard? O my lady, my sultan, how merciless and cruel to leave a huri like you in this state! Had that person no fear of God? Let us go, if you please, to our home—without any obligation—and let me, in God’s name, take you as my wife.” [122] At once, that woman showed the youth her inclination, and when he saw that she was inclined towards him, he pressed her even more, until finally, the woman turned to him and said, “so be it, I will go with you—
you are my lord and sultan, and I am at your command. But where can I go and how can I walk, naked as I am? All my private parts are exposed. Bring me a garment, and then let us go, my dear, so that I may be yours, and you may be mine.” Witnessing these words, this revelation, this demeanor on part of the woman, the young man became cheerful and delighted. In his great joy, he took off his outer robe and dressed her in it. Then he took her to his side and made to walk away with her.

Suddenly, that woman’s old husband appeared from across. Seeing his wife in this state, he went up to her and said, “O my uncle’s daughter, what came over you that, unable to wait for me an instant, you committed yourself to another [123] and took his robe, adding fresh misery to all the sorrow and misery that has been my lot? What, my soul, has become of all our intimacy and affection, and of your vow and contract? Could it be that you, my master, dearer to me than my own life, forgot about me? Or did you perhaps lose your senses in fear of death? Tell me!”

The girl replied, “Look, my uncle’s son, soul of my soul; it is true that I made an agreement and resolution with you, vowing that we would not be parted until death. I have kept that vow. But now, I have come back to life after having died. So now, our agreement is null and void. Now, my eyes have beheld this youth, my soul has loved him, and my heart has become inclined towards him. Now, this is my desire.” The young man said, “Look, my uncle’s daughter, I have been falling on stones and leaning on soil, mourning and grieving for two whole years on account of my love for you. Is it fair for you to [124] cast me away like this?” And, saying this, the wretched youth wept bitterly. But the woman showed no compassion at all, and said to that youth by her side, “My soul, let us go.”

All the while, the exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, had been sitting on a grave, reading the Bible. Now, the youth went up to him, wept, and said, “O child of God, my terrible plight has
become even more burdensome. Behold, my uncle’s daughter no longer gives me her hand, is inclined towards another, and wants to desert me! I beseech you, pray once more, so that God, the exalted, may take back her soul; for I have no need of it!” The exalted Jesus, peace be upon him, raised his hands and prayed. At that point, by the command of God, the prayer of the exalted Jesus was answered, and that woman, having reaffirmed her faith, gave up her ghost.

Without delay, that youth took her back to her old grave and buried her again. And, from that time onwards, he knew there is no sincerity with women and that they have no loyalty. Thus, he became enlightened, withdrew from the struggles of the world, and started leading the life of a hermit. Further, my dear, the youth went and conferred with his relatives, took all their advice and admonitions to heart, and devoted himself to worship and piety in solitude.

Those who have true knowledge of God will learn many a lesson from this tale, and not be inclined towards the world, either. For the world is precisely like that woman. One must not put his trust in womenfolk, for they are deceivers, and many heedless ones have lost their heads and lives on account of their trust in women. To sum up, there is no trusting women, and thus, this story is done.
The relaters of news, transmitters of works, and chroniclers of the succession of ages narrate that in the time of the Children of Israel, there lived a righteous person. One day, my dear, this righteous person heard a voice in his dream, and it said to him, “my slave, I will answer three prayers [126] of yours. Ask of me what you will!” And a couple of times he was commanded thus in his dream. That righteous person, my dear, told his wife about this at home. As soon as the woman heard this news, she beseeched her husband, saying, “soul of my soul, since your wish will be granted, pray, my dear, that your penis may become large.” And so, that man prayed, and his penis became so large that it no longer fit in the woman’s vulva. Then, my soul, the woman begged and beseeched her husband once more, saying, “my dearest husband, pray again, so that it may become just a trifle smaller.” Again, he heeded the woman’s word and prayed, whereupon it became a trifle smaller. But two of the wishes were gone, and the woman, still not satisfied, said once more, “my dearest husband, pray so that it may become big as before.” And so, all three wishes were gone, and none of them was put to good use. Now look, my dear, women are [127] deficient of mind. Behold what kind of penis trouble awaits those who heed a woman’s word. And once you comprehend this, show extreme caution, for one must not go along with a woman’s word. And thus, this curious story has also come to an end.
The Three Wishes: Beauty (P8)

[127 cont.] Eighth Story

The relaters of news, transmitters of works, and chroniclers of the succession of ages narrate that in the time of the Children of the exalted David, upon him prayer and peace, there lived a righteous person. One day, he heard a voice from the beyond proclaim, “o my righteous slave, I will answer and grant three prayers of yours in this world; ask of me what you will!” That person told his wife about this, and she asked, begged, and beseeched him, saying, “my dear, my sultan, my husband; pray that I may become so beautiful that my like cannot be encountered anywhere in this world!” That person prayed, and she turned into [128] a second, latter-day Zulaykha, and no woman more beautiful, comely, and fair than her could be found anywhere in that whole age.

One day, this woman took a mirror in her hand, looked in it, and said, “my word, how could I deign to be with this person when I am so fair and exceptional? I am worthy of the padişah!” After she had seen herself, she turned to her husband, the ascetic, and said, “I do not want you; you are not worthy of me and not my equal!” Then, without delay, she threw her husband out the door. And when the news reached the padişah’s ear, he divorced that woman from her husband and married her himself.

A few days later, that righteous one beheld the situation, and prayed and petitioned again, saying, “o Lord, I ask of you to make that woman so filthy and ugly that no uglier woman can be found in this world.” And so, once again, that righteous one beseeched God, the exalted, [129] in prayer. His prayer was answered at once, and his wife became so ugly that it cannot be described. When the padişah saw the woman in such a repulsive state, he rejected her and threw her out the door. That woman regretted the thing she had done, but what was the use? She perished in the wilderness and the stokeholes of bathhouses, and no benefit accrued from the
prayer he had made. And this, my dear, is how those who heed the word of women get frustrated and confounded, and this story, too, ends herewith.
Coffee, Melons, and Marble (P9)

[129 cont.] Ninth Story

The relaters of news, transmitters of works, and chroniclers of the succession of ages narrate that once upon a time, a woman fancied a man, loved him, and said, “young man, my heart desires you, and, by God’s command, I would be your lawful wife, but only if you accept three conditions of mine.” The young man replied, “tell me the three conditions, so I may see what they are.” The woman [130] said, “my first condition is that you never drink coffee. My second condition is that you not eat watermelons. And my third condition is that you never sit down on marble.” The young man accepted these three conditions and took it upon himself not to contravene them. And so, he married that woman and entered the nuptial chamber with her.

For some years, the woman and he led a delightful life full of pleasure, indulgence, and mutual affection. Then, one day, that youth pondered and said to himself, “let me break these conditions and see whether she will know.” He sat on a stone for about an hour, ate some watermelon, drank a cup of coffee, and then came home. When evening arrived, they went to bed, and he undertook to copulate with her. But he climaxed at once, and that woman gave him a kick and threw him out of bed. Then, the hapless one [131] knew that harlot of the age had caught on to him. He became sorry and remorseful for the thing he had done, but since he could not undo it, what was the use? At his wits’ end, he curled up in a corner and lay down, but in his anxiety, sleep eluded him.

As soon morning came, the woman got up, covered her head with her shawl, put on her overcoat, and dragged that youth into court, not resting until they had arrived before the judge efendi. Then, the woman turned to the judge and said, “o lord, I married this youth by the law of the seriat on three conditions. He, in turn, accepted these three conditions, and adhered to them.
for a couple of years. However, now he has broken those conditions, so henceforth, I shall not be this man’s wife any longer. He is to divorce me in your presence!” When she said this, the judge inquired about the conditions, and the woman listed them one by one, adding, “yesterday, he sat on a stone, and also ate some watermelon, and also drank some coffee.”

[On the next page, the text returns to the handwriting found at the beginning of P1.]

[132] When she said this, the youth recalled what he had done, but still he denied it, saying, “I know nothing of this; I did not do it!” Upon hearing the youth’s denial, the woman said, “o lord, I know very well that he did it all!” The judge asked, “how do you know?”, and the woman reported it all, saying, “such-and-such happens when you smoke a pipe, and such-and-such when you sit on marble, and such-and-such when you drink coffee.” The judge was astonished and said, “honestly, o woman, you are quite the deceiver.” These words offended the woman deeply, but the notables and others who were assembled took pity upon the young man and entreated the woman until she said, “alright, but may he never do this again.” And thus, they reconciled the woman and the youth.

However, the woman resented the judge for talking to her like that in front of all the people. [133] So she turned to him and said, “o lord, I have a question for you; answer it for me.” The judge said, “go ahead,” and the woman asked, “o lord, is it meat, is it sugar, or is it bone?” The judge, who had never heard such a question before, stroked his beard and started thinking. Finally, he turned to the woman and said, “the answer to this question does not come to mind right now. Let me go home in the evening and consult the books. Come back in the morning, and I will answer you.” The woman said, “so be it,” and went home.
Evening came, and the judge went home, as well. Dinner was served, but the judge was fully preoccupied with the question, and while he was eating, he said to himself, “what to do now? There is no such matter in the books. Is it sugar, is it bone, is it meat?” [134] Now, the judge had a daughter, about sixteen to seventeen years old, and when she saw her father stroking his beard and lost in thought like this, she asked, “dear father, what are you thinking about?” The judge replied, “girl, go away and leave us in peace!” The girl insisted, saying, “dear father, tell me what it is,” and so the judge turned to her and told her about the woman’s question. The girl laughed and said, “o father, is that all there is to it? What need is there to think about this so deeply? It’s like this—at thirty years of age, is it bone? When she asked, ‘is it bone?’, she meant that a man is bone from when he is ten to thirty. From thirty to sixty years of age, he is sugar. And finally, after sixty, he is meat.” And so the judge grasped the matter, cheered up, and said to himself, “if only it was morning so I could tell this to the woman!”

When morning came, the judge got up and went to the court. After a while, the woman arrived, extended her greetings, and asked, “o lord, did you find the answer to my question?” The judge replied, “I did indeed; it turns out that what you meant by ‘is it bone?’ is that he is bone from when he is ten until he reaches the age of thirty, [135] sugar from when he is thirty until he reaches sixty, and meat after sixty.” Now, as it happened, the daughter of this judge was wanton to the extreme, and the woman knew this to be the case. This answer, indeed, had been what the woman intended to hear, and she knew that it had come from the girl. So she turned around and said, “bravo, my lord, I am overawed by the harlot who gave these answers, for there is no place she did not visit in the course of finding out.” And so, the woman shamed the judge in front of all the people, left and went back home, and spent the rest of her life in contentment with Mehmed Şah. This is how it is related, and may any offense we gave be forgiven.
The Fake Adultery (E1)

[28] Admonition on the Wiles of Women

It is written in the book of The Adornment of Gatherings that there once was a highly assiduous person with a wife who had a countenance like the moon. And he would never allow the woman to leave the house on an errand, and when that person went to work, he would lock his door firmly and allow no one passage into the house. The woman said, “why do you confine me so strictly? If a woman has no chastity, a person cannot find a remedy for this. It is well-known that if a woman desires to engage in some impropriety, she will conduct this business even through the hole in her door, [29] while if she is chaste, such stringency is fruitless.” That man did not pay attention to the woman’s word, and confined her very strictly.

The woman wished to edify her husband, and offer proof for her own claim. There was an old woman among her friends; from time to time, she would tell this woman the troubles of her heart through a crack in the wall. One day, she said to the old woman, “tell such-and-such young man that I am in love with him and cannot sit still because of this love.” The old woman conveyed these words to that young man. Since the young man had already heard talk of that woman’s beauty and comeliness, the fire of love ignited his heart as well, and he answered, “this desire will not come to fruition while your husband is alive.” The woman said, “I will contrive a measure so that you may attain your desire. If you would be my suitor, prepare a trunk, and tell my husband, ‘I have a trunk that is full of invaluable things. I wish to set out on a campaign, but there is no one to whom I can entrust it. I wish to leave it in your custody.’ From there, go to
your house, get into that trunk, and tell your own servant that he should lock the trunk and bring
it to our house.”

That young man followed the words of that woman and thus, the servant brought the trunk
to that person’s house. The woman, seeing this, came forward and said to her husband, “what is
this? God forbid that the owner should say in the morning, ‘there was such-and-such thing in this
trunk.’” She said, “it would be better if you opened the trunk to see what is inside.” The servant,
unaware of the whole affair, opened the trunk, and suddenly that young man stuck his head out,
and his eye fell upon that person. His mind nearly departed his head, and that person’s gaze fell
upon the young man, and he rose up in order to strike him. The woman said, “I have devised this
affair; he is not to blame. I wished to make evident to you my claim that if a woman is ill-
intentioned, her husband will not find it possible to suppress her. What is needed is for the
woman to preserve herself.”
The Book Within the Book (E2)

[30] Account of the Wiles and Trickeries of Women

It is written in the book of *The Adornment of Gatherings* that there once lived a man, traveller by vocation, who would always record the wiles of women. He had put together a book on this subject—its name was *The Subterfuge of Women*—and he would constantly study it. At one point, he embarked on a journey, and stayed as guest in a house. The owner of the house was not at home; however, he had a wife who possessed great beauty, and who was unrivalled in wiles and deception. The traveller rested in a corner, and the woman, welcoming him, noticed that he was studying a book. The woman asked, “what is this book that you are studying?” He said, “this book is the book of the wiles of women.” The woman laughed and said, “there is no end to the wiles of women.”

After that, she wished to play a trick on this person. Weaving a fabric of affection and flirtation between them, she used two or three provocative words, coquetries, and twinkles to beguile that hapless one so much that he nearly lost himself. In the meantime, the sound of her husband’s feet approached. That wretched person became distraught, and the woman said, “now he will kill us both!” The hapless one said, “o woman, I implore you, by God, find me a remedy!” She said, “stand up, get in this trunk, and be quiet.”

Thereupon, that person got into the trunk, and the woman tied it up. Then, she led her husband inside, putting her arm around his neck and charming him with much flirtation and coquetry. Suddenly, she said, “o fellow, today, a handsome young man came to our house. He was writing a book on the wiles of women, and I seduced him in while he was at it. But just as we were getting ready to do it, you arrived.” That traveller heard these words from within the trunk and gave up hope for his life. And when her husband heard these words, his ardor was
aroused, he became enraged, and he said, “may God curse you! where is that young man?” She said, “he is in this trunk,” and put the lock in her husband’s hand.

Suddenly, the woman cried, “bear in mind!” The man and his wife had been engaged in a game of philopena, it had been a while, and he had not been able to outsmart his wife. When the man saw this, his face turned red, he threw the lock on the ground, and left the house. Thereupon, the woman opened the lid of the trunk, that hapless traveller came out, and the woman asked, “I wonder whether you will record this deception in your book, as well?” He said, “no.” And she said, “write this in your book as a postscript, and repent, so that from now on, you may never write about the wiles of women again.”

---

287 A version of this game is still played by children in modern Turkey. Once the game begins, neither player is allowed to take anything that the other player offers them by hand. When one player forgets the rule and takes something from the other, the winning player exclaims, “lades!” a colloquial form of the “yâd est!” (“bear in mind!”) found in this story.
There once was a man among the robbers who would waylay people on the roads, and he stole the goods that were being delivered to the padişah. Then, one day, they seized him, strung him up, and assigned one of the emirs to him, lest his companions should make off with his body. And the padişah had said, “if they steal his body, I will string you up in his stead.” As a result, the emir was devoting much effort to guarding him, but nonetheless, the companions of the robber managed to remove his body from the gallows by some manoeuvre, and absconded with it.

Fearing his punishment, the emir fled, and his path came upon a cemetery. He noticed a torch burning on top of a grave, came near, and saw that a very beautiful woman was crying and groaning next to the grave. The emir said, “o coy and beautiful stealer of hearts, why do you cry upon this grave, and what is the reason that you have withdrawn from worldly pleasures?” She said, “o emir, I had a husband who held me very dear. For my peace of mind, he had cast aside his mother, his sisters, and his tribe, banishing them from his house; and all his efforts for this world and the next were devoted to me. Together, we had decided that whichever one of us died first, we would cry upon their grave until our own assigned time came. It so happened that my husband died first; so now I cry upon this grave.” The emir said, [33] “this is not a prudent move; there is no merit to be acquired by you crying here like this. This husband is dead, and perhaps you will end up with another husband who will be even dearer to you.” He said as many of these words as it took to make that woman inclined towards himself, and they had intercourse.

A while went by, and the emir, sinking into thought about the man who had been strung up, became distraught. The woman asked, “perchance you have come to regret this conduct of ours?” – “No,” the emir replied, “however, I have a confession to make.” And he related the
story of that robber. The woman said, “do not be distraught on this account; there is an easy remedy for this situation. My husband died only recently. Take him out of the grave and string him up instead of the robber.” So the emir and the woman dug up the grave and took out that hapless person’s mortal remains. The emir sighed deeply. The woman asked, “why did you sigh?”, and the emir replied, “the robber had no beard.” The woman said, “do not worry, it is possible to fix this,” and right that instant, she started plucking out the hairs of that person’s beard, one by one, with her hand. Then, together with the emir, they carried off her husband’s corpse and strung it up on the gallows.

For a while, the emir stayed at that woman’s house. Then, one day, he became unwell. The woman started crying, and the emir gathered his companions. He said, “o tribe and companions of mine, I have a favor to ask of this woman, namely that, after I have died, she does not take me out of my grave and pull out my beard, and that she leaves me in peace.”
The Ruler Reminiscences (E4)

[33 cont.] Admonition on the Wiles of Women

It is written in the second volume of the book of The Adornment of Gatherings that Me’mun-ür-Reşid once said, “no one had ever hoodwinked me until an old woman tricked me and took a thousand dinar from me.” They asked Me’mun, “what is the story behind that?”, and he said, “it is thus: when I came from Khorasan to Baghdad, my uncle Ibrahim bin Muhammed, who had been serving as Caliph, fled out of fear and disappeared. No matter how much I had my soldiers search, I was not able to find him. One day, a woman came and said, ‘I have a word for the emir, but I need to tell him in private.’ I absolved my court, and that woman said, ‘what would you give me if I showed you your uncle Ibrahim?’ I said, ‘a thousand dinar, which would equal a thousand gold coins.’ She said, ‘give the thousand gold coins to one of your servants, so that when I point Ibrahim out to him, he may give me the thousand dinar.’ So I gave a thousand dinar to Haceb and told him, ‘go with this woman, and when she shows Ibrahim to you, give her these coins.’”

Haceb continued the story, saying, “that woman dragged me through the quarters of Baghdad. When evening came, she took me to a mosque and said, ‘get off your horse and hand it to your servant to take back.’ From there, she took me to a house. There was a trunk in the house, and she said to me, ‘get into this trunk so that no one will see you. I will go, fetch Ibrahim, and deliver him to you. This precaution is necessary since Ibrahim does not go to anyone’s house without first sending a man and having it searched to make sure no one ambushes him inside.’ I hesitated,” Haceb went on, “to get into the trunk. But the woman said, ‘If you don’t get in, I will go to the emir and say, ‘he did not follow your orders.’” So finally, I was forced to get in the trunk.”
“The woman locked the trunk and summoned a porter, who picked it up. I could not determine where he was taking me. After a while, he brought me into a house. I opened the lid of the trunk and saw that it was a nice and festive house where a dinner gathering was assembled, and that Ibrahim was enjoying himself at the head of the banquet. I went forward and paid him my respects. He said, ‘come and enjoy yourself.’ And the woman said, ‘I have been faithful to my oath, so give me the thousand gold coins.’ I gave her those coins, and then they served me glass after glass of wine. As soon as I was drunk, they stuck me in the trunk and put me down in the bazaar of Baghdad. The guardsmen came, [35] noticed the trunk, locked as it was, opened it, and saw me.”

Me’mun said, “they brought Haceb in front of me, and he told me the story from beginning to end, and he could by no means discern in which corner or neighborhood Ibrahim had been, and there was no sign of that woman until the time that Ibrahim himself came to me, and I heard the story from him. He said, ‘our funds had run out, and with this trick we made many a dinar and passed the time.’”
The Deceitful Wedding (E5)

[35 cont.] Admonition on the Wiles of Women

A person relates, “once I went to Shiraz, arriving at an old woman’s house. In the house, I suddenly saw a very beautiful girl. I fell in love with her, and told the old woman. She said, ‘this desire is easily fulfilled; listen and make preparations.’ Then, she took some coins from me and left the house. An hour later, she came back with a congregation of men and women. A mullah came up to me and I appointed him as proxy. He made the legal pronouncement, they left, and I stayed behind. I asked the old woman, ‘where is my bride?’ She said, ‘it is I.’ I looked and saw that her body was like a dried-up tree, many of her teeth were in ruins, and the hair on her head had turned gray. I realized she had deceived me, but consoled myself, saying to her, ‘thank God, my desire has been fulfilled! I wanted you, but was embarrassed, and had mentioned that girl as a pretext!’”

“Then I started thinking about how to deliver myself from the clutches of this she-demon, and remembered that the people of this city are very scared of washing the dead. I went to bed that night and left in the morning to go about my business. I went to the bazaar; bought some cloth, covered my head with it, and bought other washing equipment, as well. Then I came home. The demoness bride asked, ‘what is this stuff?’ I said, ‘I was a washer of the dead in my hometown; [36] I heard that the dead-washer of this city had died, and came here to fill the position. Since I was on my own, I married you so that you would help me.’”

“As soon as the bride heard these words, she let out a shriek and fainted. When she came to, I said, ‘get up, we need to leave! A man has died, and they await me; let us go and wash him. I have reached an agreement with the people of this city that you and I will wash their dead.’ The bride begged me, ‘leave me be, and I will let you divorce me [?], and give you this much money
on top!’ I did not consent. After a thousand struggles, she finally won me over and got her divorce. And I gave thanks that I had been delivered from the hands of this she-demon.”
The Lazy Husband (E6)

[36 cont.] Admonition on the Wiles of Women

There was a highly impertinent young man in Isfahan who would always seek the company of
goons and thieves, and would never do a day’s work. And every woman he took, he would only
keep for three days, and then divorce. Finally, one day, a woman from among the people of
Isfahan said, “if I were to become his wife, I would not allow him to remain unemployed or to
divorce me.” And so, they assembled a congregation and married the woman to that young man.

One day, after the wedding night had passed, the woman said to her husband, “I don’t
approve of you being unemployed; I desire food and clothes.” The young man said, “but I am no
good at any job.” The woman said, “get up, and I will show you a job!” The young man ignored
her, whereupon the woman picked up a cudgel and hit him with this cudgel many a time, until he
got up in spite of himself and followed her to the bazaar. Upon arriving, the woman found the
headman of the porters and asked, “how much do you give these porters per day?” He replied,
“one kirān.” The woman said, “give this young man only fifteen şahi per day.” The headman of
the porters agreed, the porters took him off and placed a load in his arms, and thus it went until
dusk. Once the sun had gone down, he took the fifteen şahi, bought some meat and pies, and
came home, tired [37] and groaning. He said, “woman, may your home fall to ruin, you have
found a fine job for me!”

After they had dinner, the young man wanted to lie down, but the woman said, “get up!”
Fearing the cudgel, he got up, and the woman took him to the police captain of the city. She
asked, “how much do you give these patrolmen to walk around the bazaar at night?” He said,
“for instance, ten şahi.” The woman said, “I offer you this young man; give him nine şahi per
night.” The police captain accepted, and thus, the young man wandered around the bazaar and the quarters until it was dawn.

Once dawn had broken, he took his pay and came home in order to rest. But the woman said, “remaining idle will not do; follow me!” Fearing the cudgel, he got up, and the woman took him to the bathhouse attendant. She asked, “master, what do you pay the cleaner of bathing sludge [?]?” He replied, “five sahi.” The woman said, “give this young man just one abbasi.” The master bathhouse attendant accepted. Once it was daytime, the young man took his pay and came home in the hope of resting, but the woman said, “don’t sit down, the bazaar will open soon, and the headman of the porters is sure to send for you any moment!” So that hapless one, fearing the cudgel, got on his feet and left.

Day after day went by in this fashion, and the young man had no rest at night and no respite during the day. One day, as he was walking with a load in his arms, one of his companions saw him and said, “where have you been, my friend? You never show yourself anymore!” The young man related what had happened, saying, “I have become trapped in the clutches of such a woman. She doesn’t allow me to rest for long enough to even scratch my head. Whenever I let up a little, she beats me with the cudgel!” His friend said, “go, divorce her, and breathe easy!” The young man replied, “o companion, she does not give me a moment off work to find time and divorce her. Unless the Lord of the World sends me death to deliver me from the hands of this merciless one; there is no cure!” And thus, it ends.
The Fruit of Rape (E7)

[37 cont.] On the Wiles and Trickeries of Women

[38] It is related by Ibn Abbas in the *Book of the Witnesses of the Prophets* that during the caliphate of Ömer Ibn-ül-Hattab, he came to the mosque one night, and, at the break of dawn, saw a person lying in his *mihrab*. Ömer said, “wake that person up, so he may perform the prayer.” But when they moved him, he did not budge, and they determined that it was a woman. Then, a woman from among the ensar came forward, beheld her, and saw that it was actually a man with a woman’s appearance, henna on his hands, dressed in women’s clothing, his beard shorn, and his head severed.

Ömer said, “let us place him to a corner until we have performed our prayer.” Once they had performed the prayer, Ömer said, “call the exalted emir, peace be upon him.” When his excellency came and honored them with his presence, Ömer asked, “o Ali, what kind of a matter is this?” His excellency commanded, “bury these remains, be quick about it, and make sure the news gets out. In nine months’ time, baby will be placed in this *mihrab*; the Prophet of God, upon him and his family be prayer and peace, informed me thus.”

When the nine months had passed, Ömer came to the mosque at daybreak, heard the voice of a baby, and said, “it is an alms of the prophet.” Once he had performed the prayer, he requested the presence of the exalted emir, peace be upon him. His excellency obliged, and they brought that child forward. His excellency commanded, “give this child a nanny.” They produced a woman, from among the ensar, whose child had died, gave her that child, and decided to allot her a payment of two *dirhem* per day from the treasury.

That woman took care of him, and when nine months had passed since his birth, the feast of the sacrifice arrived. His excellency summoned that nanny and commanded, “at dawn, dress
the child in these clothes, take him on your shoulder, and go to the place of worship. Whichever woman takes this baby from you, kisses it, and says, ‘o wronged child, and child of a wronged woman, and child of a cruel man!’, grab a hold of that woman and bring her before me.”

The nanny set out to fulfill the decree of the exalted emir, peace be upon him. She took that child on her shoulder and was walking around with him, when suddenly, [39] a woman called out from among the women, saying, “o nanny, I implore you, stop, in Muhammad’s name!” The nanny stopped, that woman came up, and took the niqab from her face. Her beauty as that of the day, she took the child, and said the words that the exalted emir, upon him prayer and peace, had foretold. Then, she returned the child to the nanny and made to depart.

The nanny hung on to that woman’s burqa. The woman said, “what do you want from me?” The nanny replied, “Ali, peace be upon him, wants you.” The woman got scared and said, “o nanny, take your hands off me, and be fearful of God, do not shame me! If you take me to Ali, he will give you nothing for it. Come with me now, and I will give you three sets of Iraqi dress, and two blankets imaki [?], and two garments from Isfahan, and three hundred dirhem, provided that when you go to Ali, peace be upon him, you deny all and say, ‘I did not see such a woman.’ And if you show me this child again before the next feast of the sacrifice, I will give you the same amount again.” That woman consented and went with the other, who gave her that which she had talked about.

Once they had left the congregation assembled at the place of worship, and his excellency had summoned that nanny and asked her, “how did you fare?”, she said, “o Ali, I did not see such a woman.” His excellency glared at that woman wrathfully and said, “I swear by the Owner of this Qur’an that the woman came up to you, acted in this and that manner, gave you a bribe, and you let her go!” The nanny responded, “Ali, peace be upon him, speaks the truth. But if I see
her again, I will not let her go; take my life if I do! And if you command, I will go to her house right away and bring her here.” He retorted, “that woman moved to a different location that very instant. You take care of this child now, and if you see her again on the next feast of the sacrifice, bring her before me.”

When the feast of the sacrifice arrived, the nanny took the child to the festival grounds, and that woman ran into her again, saying, “come, [40] let us go, and I will give you the things I promised.” The nanny said, “I don’t need gifts, and I cannot let you go! I must take you before the exalted Ali!” Then she held on tight to the woman’s burqa and dragged her along. When the woman saw this, she turned her face towards the village and exclaimed, “o Helper of those who seek help, and Protector of those who seek protection!”, whereupon the nanny took her to the mosque.

Ali, peace be upon him, commanded, “o woman, either you tell the story of this child, or I will.” She submitted, “if I tell the story of this child, will you show mercy?” His excellency replied, “I will act in a manner pleasing to God.” The woman submitted, “I am a girl from among the ensar. My father, Amir bin Saad, was martyred during one of the military campaigns in the service of the exalted Messenger of God, upon him and his family be prayer and peace, and my mother passed away during the time of Ebu Bekir. I was left alone, with no family to come to my aid. So I would pass the time with the neighbors’ wives, and had become familiar with them.”

“One day, I was lingering outside my own dwelling with a group of ensar women beside me when an old woman arrived, of venerable age and with a rosary in her hand. Leaning on a walking stick, she greeted us, we returned her greetings, and she learned our names. Then she came up to me and asked, ‘o girl, what is your name?’ I said, ‘Cemile, daughter of Amir.’ She asked, ‘do you have a father and a mother and a husband?’ I said I did not, and she asked, ‘then
how can you live alone like this?’ Afterwards, she showed me much compassion and said, ‘if you are interested, I will send you a woman to keep you company, that she may become your confidant.’ I asked, ‘where would such a woman be found?’ She replied, ‘through this compassionate mother of yours.’ I replied, ‘it would be better if you came yourself.’”

“Afterwards, she came home with me, asked for some water, spread out a cloth, and busied herself while I prepared a meal. Once she had performed her prayer, I brought her food, which consisted of pies and dates. She said, ‘o girl, this is not my food.’ [41] I asked, ‘what do you prefer?’ She replied, ‘pies and bread.’ I prepared it, and she said, ‘I am fasting; let me perform the evening prayer first and then break my fast.’ Once she had performed her prayer, she said, ‘bring me some soil.’ Then, mixing the soil with salt, she ate it with two or three barley pies and salt. After that, she busied herself with prayer again, and performed many a prayer until dawn.”

“Since I had never seen a woman like this before, I kissed her feet and said, ‘how good it would be if you were to always remain by my side!’ She said, ‘due to my occupation, I need to go and work during daytime; what you need is a person who will constantly be around you. However, I have a daughter who is always busy with prayers and is not friends with anyone. If your dwelling were beyond reproach, I would bring her here to you.’ I asked, ‘what is objectionable about it?’ She replied, ‘the neighbors’ wives come here, and my daughter is accustomed to always being alone.’ I said, ‘I will stipulate that when she comes, I will let no one enter my abode!’ Then, that old woman left.”

“Some time later, she returned, and with her came a tall person, a niqab over her head, and a veil before her eyes, so that no part of her could be seen. I let her into my chamber, and the old woman left. She said, ‘lock your door so that no one may come in.’ So I locked the door and sat
down [?] with her. But she would not take off her niqab. When I finally took the niqab off her head, I saw that this was a man, his beard and moustache shorn, his eyebrows tinged with kohl, his face rubbed with white water, and his feet painted with henna, so that he looked like a woman."

“I did not let go of him, and in my bewilderment, I asked, ‘why did you do this, and bring shame upon both yourself and me? If Ömer finds you, he will make you suffer! Get up, put on your burqa, and leave!’ I stepped away from him. He held on to me. I was scared of crying out lest I bring shame upon myself. He put his arm around my neck and flung me to the ground, came close to me, [42] and tore my curtain. Afterwards, even though he wanted to leave, he collapsed on account of his intoxication and was not able to move. There was a knife at his waist; I pulled it out and cut off his head. As soon as night fell, I took him in my arms and left him at the mosque. But I had become pregnant by him, so I hid myself until the child was born. I took him and left him in the mihrab of the mosque. May my life be forfeit for your sake; this is my plight!”

Ömer submitted, “o Ali, I heard the Messenger of God command, ‘I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate.’ Now, what is your verdict?” His excellency commanded, “no blood money is required in this case, and this woman needs not be punished, for he was not her husband.” Then he commanded, “o woman, go and produce that old woman.” She submitted, “may my life be forfeit for your sake; grant me three days’ grace.” Afterwards, the woman went about her business and, by coincidence, saw that old woman, grabbed her by the collar, and no matter how much she pleaded, lent no ear to her, bringing her to the mosque, into the presence of his excellency.
His excellency commanded, “o enemy of God, tell the truth in the matter of that man and this woman!” She submitted, “o Ali, I do not know this woman.” He asked, “will you swear on it?” She replied that she would, and he commanded, “place your forehead on the tomb of the Prophet, and state, ‘I have no knowledge of this matter.’” That old woman swore, and her face went black. His excellency commanded, “throw her out into the wilderness and stone her.” And so they stoned her. After that, he sent the woman home with her child, and later on, that child was martyred during the campaign of Siffin in the service of his excellency. May God have mercy upon him.