

# MUḤAMMAD’S JUG: ARABIC MOTIFS IN BORGES’S TEXTS

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*“Sentí que Averroes, queriendo imaginar lo que es un drama sin haber sospechado lo que es un teatro, no era más absurdo que yo, queriendo imaginar a Averroes, sin otro material que unos adarmes de Renan, de Lane y de Asín Palacios.”* (Borges, *Obras Completas* I, 588)<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

In this study I discuss twenty-three Arabic motifs in Borges’s texts and trace them back to their most likely sources. Borges did not know Arabic and gained his knowledge of the Orient from secondary sources, books by Burton, Lane, Asín Palacios, and others. In many cases Borges playfully changed these Arabic motifs, or invented new ones. In the rare occasions when he gave his sources, these were as fantastic as the stories themselves: references to non-existing tomes by non-existing scholars, to an odd book of Burton (instead of the correct one by Lane), or to an out-of-context citation from Gibbon. I succeeded in locating the sources of most of these motifs and proved for a few others that they are inventions of Borges. I could not find the source of one poem. For one motif (“Iskander’s mirror”) I could only show that it is well-documented in Oriental literature, but I could not find any likely source where Borges could have learned about it.

**Keywords:** Borges, Burton, Lane, Asín Palacios, *1001 Nights*, narremes, Arabic motifs

## 1 Introduction

These words of Borges (Jorge Luis Borges, b. 1899, Buenos Aires; d. 1986, Geneva), selected as motto for this essay, have been frequently quoted in writings

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<sup>1</sup> “I felt that Averroës, trying to imagine what a play is without ever having suspected what a theater is, was no more absurd than I, trying to imagine Averroës yet with no more material than a few snatches from Renan, Lane, and Asín Palacios.” (Borges, *Busca*; “Averroës’ Search” in Borges 1999a:241.

on the Oriental motifs in Borges's texts: "Borges's intellectual understanding of Islam comes from his own wide reading of Western Orientalists (Burton, Renan, Palacios, Margaret Smith)" (Almond 2004:446), and they usually add the biographical odd bit<sup>2</sup> that his father's library contained translations of the *One Thousand and One Nights* by Lane, Burton and John Payne, and other works on the Orient. Borges himself, in a tape-recorded lecture he gave on Creative Writing, says of his short story "The Two Kings and Their Two Labyrinths" that he wanted it to look like "a page overlooked by Lane and Burton out of the *Arabian Nights*"<sup>3</sup>. Borges – as many others<sup>4</sup> – forgot to mention the influence of Rafael Cansinos Asséns (1883–1964)<sup>5</sup>, his friend and master in his salad years (1919–1921) in Madrid, who introduced him to the Arabic literary tradition<sup>6</sup>, whose style "he was aping"<sup>7</sup>, and of whose new Spanish translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* Borges fondly wrote "*Rafael Cansinos Assens nos da, por fin, el libro esperado*"<sup>8</sup> and "his [Cansino's] book has been published in Mexico; it is perhaps the best of all the versions"<sup>9</sup>.

In the *Busca (Obras Completas I, 582)*, Averroes – the *alter ego* of Borges – who knew neither Greek nor Syriac (to which *Poetics* was first translated), studied Aristotle, "using a translation of a translation" (*Averroes, ignorante del siríaco y del griego, trabajaba sobre la traducción de una traducción*), an already available Arabic version of a Syriac translation of the Greek text<sup>10</sup>. Stavans (1988) argues that Borges could not read Arabic, according to Spikovsky (1968:223) he had a "knowledge of Arabic – however imperfect that might be". Borges admitted his ignorance of Greek and Arabic, "*The fact that I do not know Greek and Arabic helped me to read, say, the Odyssey or the Thousand and One Nights, in many*

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<sup>2</sup> Borges (1970c:209) wrote "if I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library". I could not find a published inventory of Borges's personal library. This library has been fully restored and is now kept in the *Jorge Luis Borges International Library*, in Buenos Aires next to the house where his family lived between 1938–1943 (see *El Nuevo Diario*, Buenos Aires, August 18, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> In 1971, Columbia University, see Borges 1973:109. Emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup> Such as Aizenberg 1980, Schwartz 1989, del Río 2003; Vaccaro 2008. Martínez 2012 discussed the Persian and Jewish motifs in the texts of Borges attributable to Cansinos-Asséns, but his influence on the Arabic motifs has not been studied yet.

<sup>5</sup> Borges, 1970c; Williamson 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Martínez 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Borges, 1970c:152.

<sup>8</sup> "[Cansinos] finally gave us the book we were waiting for".

<sup>9</sup> Borges 1984. In the original: "Ahora, felizmente, tenemos la versión castellana de quien fue mi maestro Rafael Cansinos-Asséns. El libro ha sido publicado en México; es, quizá, la mejor de todas las versiones." (*Obras Completas III*, 240).

<sup>10</sup> Spivakovsky 1968; Dapía 1999; Ackerley 2006.

*different versions*"<sup>11</sup>, he only started in the last months of his life to take Arabic lessons from an Egyptian teacher in Geneva, who traced the Arabic letters with his finger in the palm of the blind writer<sup>12</sup>.

Whatever Borges knew of the Arabic and Islamic world, he learnt from *translations*, though not "*translations of translations*", because his sources (Burton, Lane, Renan<sup>13</sup>, Asín Palacios, Margaret Smith, and probably Cansinos-Asséns) were *bona fide* Orientalists, with first-hand knowledge of the language.

Usually, Borges acknowledged his sources, but his references are not reliable. His short story *La busca de Averroes* starts with a quotation from Renan's (1852) book on the philosopher; his *Zahir* refers to a scholarly book (Julius Barlach: *Urkunden zur Geschichte der Zahir'sage*); he claims the story in *The Mirror of Ink* (*El espejo de tinta*) had been taken from Burton's (1860) book, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*<sup>14</sup>; and in his essay *The Argentine Writer and Tradition*<sup>15</sup> he cites the remark of Gibbon that the Qurān does not contain references to camels. Actually, only the Renan reference is correct, Barlach and his book are non-existent<sup>16</sup>, Burton's book does exist, but does not contain the "mirror of ink" episode, and Gibbon was cited out of context.

As Almond (2004:443) observed, "Rarely does Borges venture a remark upon his Orient without citing an 'expert' of some kind on the subject, fictitious or otherwise". Borges had an inclination for the "perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying things" as he himself admitted in *Borges y Yo*<sup>17</sup>, a "tendency to exaggerate" and "playing literary pranks"<sup>18</sup>.

By a careful reading of Borges's *Obras Completas*, I identified around hundred Arabic motifs and narremes<sup>19</sup> in his work (see Appendix). Out of this, I selected a manageable one-fourth of them (23), which I found most interesting. These twenty-three examples represent the different genres of the Borges oeuvre (fictions, poems, prologues to and essays on books, public lectures) and span his whole

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<sup>11</sup> Sorrentino 1974:71: "*El hecho de desconocer el griego y el árabe me permitía leer, digamos, la Odisea y Las mil y una noches, en muchas versiones distintas*".

<sup>12</sup> Kodama 1986, 2004; D'Amico 1993; Kansoussi 1999; Ormsby 1999; Tornielli 2001; Jullien 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Renan had no access to the Arabic manuscript and used instead a Latin translation of Averroes's Arabic text, see Hulme 1979; and Balderston 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Borges wrote "Equatorial" instead of "Central".

<sup>15</sup> Borges, *Escritor argentino* in *Obras Completas* I, 270.

<sup>16</sup> Another nonexistent book, that Borges cites as source of the "Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv" (*El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, *Obras Completas* I, 324) story is "*Die Vernichtung der Rose*, nach dem arabischen Urtext übertragen von Alexander Schulz, Leipzig, 1927".

<sup>17</sup> "Borges and I" (in Borges, *Hacedor*, *Obras Completas* II, 186).

<sup>18</sup> Ross 2004; Martínez 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Narreme is a bit of legend, the basic unit of narrative structure (Dorfman 1969; Baikadi et al. 2012.)

active life as an author. My aim had been to trace the motifs back to their most likely sources, and to check the accuracy of the references provided by Borges. It had been an enjoyable exercise, and I hope the “very rigorously maintained circles”<sup>20</sup> of Borges scholars and Arabists would forgive me for this intrusion.

I used Borges’s Spanish text (mostly, as in *Obras Completas*<sup>21</sup>) as starting point. In the English editions the translators sometimes corrected Borges’s errors, sometimes introduced new ones. Andrew Hurley, in his translation of *La busca de Averroes*, translated *los muchos volúmenes del Mohkam del ciego Abensida* as “the many volumes of blind ibn-Sina’s Moqqām”, that is he confused the blind lexicographer Ibn Sīda (c. 1007–1066) with Ibn Sīna (c. 980–1037), and his big dictionary, *al-Muḥkam* became “Moqqām” [sic]. In the same story, *Abrió el Quitah ul ain de Jalil* was translated as “He opened Khalil’s *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*”, that is he corrected the misprinted word “*Quitah*” [for *kitāb*] to *Kitāb*. Translations do not always reflect the idiosyncrasies of Borges. In most cases<sup>22</sup> he used the term *Hindustan* for India, even in *Averroës’ Search* where it was anachronistic. The term occurs in his story *El hombre en el umbral* (The Man on the Threshold): *Bioy Casares trajo de Londres un curioso puñal de hoja triangular y empuñadora en forma de H; nuestro amigo Christopher Dewey, del Consejo Británico, dijo que tales armas eran de uso común en el Indostaní*. Hurley translates this as “Bioy Casares brought back a curious knife from London, with a triangular blade and an H shaped hilt; our friend Christopher Dewey, of the British Council, said that sort of weapon was in common use in Hindustan”; but another translator, di Giovanni has “Christopher Dewey of the British Council, told us that such weapons were commonly used in India”<sup>23</sup>.

## 2 Arabic motifs, and narremes, and their sources

The motifs and narremes will be treated in alphabetic order, so we shall proceed in a Borguesque way, visiting the same writing once, and then again.

### 2.1 Arabic poems

The *Obras Completas* contains a few lines from classical Arabic poetry, in Spanish translation, or paraphrased, from al-Mutanabbī (Abū ṭ-Ṭayyib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī, 916–965), from Zuhayr (Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, c. 520 – c. 609), and from the Umayyad ruler ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān I (756–788). The famous al-Mutanabbī lines “*al-ḥaylu wa-l-laylu wa-l-baydā’u ta’rifunī / wa-s-sayfu wa-rumḥu*

<sup>20</sup> Judy 2010:127.

<sup>21</sup> Borges, *Obras*, see the Appendix.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix, items 34, 40; a few times he used “India” (App. # 39).

<sup>23</sup> Borges 1970d: 85; Borges 1999a: 269.

*wa-l-qirtāsu wa-l-qalamū*" (in Spanish *El caballo, la noche y el desierto me conocen / La espada y la lanza; el pergamino y la pluma*; in English "The horsemen [*sic*!] and the night and the desert know me,/and the sword and the lance, the paper and the pen"<sup>24</sup>) were used by Borges to characterize Richard Burton – translator and journeyman – in his essay on the *1001 Nights*' translators: *Hombre de palabras y hazañas, bien pudo Burton asumir el alarde del Diván de Almotanabí: El caballo, el desierto, la noche me conocen, El huésped [*sic*] y la espada, el papel y la pluma. / "A man of words and deeds, Burton could well take up the boast of al-Mutanabbī's Diwan: The horse, the desert, the night know me, / Guest [*sic*] and sword, paper and pen."<sup>25</sup> The same lines were found, in Borges's handwriting, in the margin of the Arabic-language menu of a Lebanese restaurant in Buenos Aires, *La Rosa Blanca*, where Borges dined once with friends in the 1940s. The facsimile of the document was published in the 1964 issue of the yearly *Cahiers de l'Herne* (Paris), with the caption *Vers d'un poète arabe écrits par BORGES sur un menu de ce restaurant de Buenos Aires* (Verse of an Arabic poet, written by Borges on the menu of this restaurant in Buenos Aires)<sup>26</sup>.*

The daily menu contained mouth-watering Lebanese and international delicacies (*kibbeh*, *mešwī*, *kofteh*, *milanesā ma'a baṭāṭā*, etc.) – as well as a philological delicacy: why did Borges use, once again, the meaningless translation *El huésped [*sic*] y la espada* ("Guest [*sic*] and sword") instead of the usual translation "*La espada y la lanza*" ("The sword and the lance") when quoting al-Mutanabbī? It took more than fifty years for Borges-research to discover this error, until Tornielli (in his blog, 2019) pointed it out, and he suggested that it cannot be Borges's fault, because "it could only be committed by [a translator], who knows as much Arabic as to confuse *sayf* (*espada*, sword) with *ḡayf* (*huésped*, guest)". Tornielli could not locate the source of this error, but assumed it comes from "some English translation"<sup>27</sup>. He was right. In Burton's (1855–1856) "*Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah & Meccah*", al-Mutanabbī's lines are quoted twice, in different translations, first as a motto on the first page of vol. 1, and then in the main text, Chapter XXV of vol. 2.

In the motto Burton translates the verse (archaically, but correctly) as "Dark and the Desert and Destriers me ken, / And the Glaive and the Joust, and Paper and Pen." In the main text, however, we find the story of al-Mutanabbī's last night:

<sup>24</sup> Ormsby 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Borges, *Traductores*. In Borges, *Obras Completas* I: 403; in English: Borges 1999b, transl. by Esther Allen.

<sup>26</sup> de Roux and de Milleret 1964; Ormsby 1999; D'Amico 1993; Spivakovsky 1968.

<sup>27</sup> Tornielli, on May 5, 2019, in an already unavailable blog. He verified this quote in a more recent personal email: *El inexistente huésped sale de la confusión entre "sayf" (سيف), espada, y "ḡayf" (ضيف), huésped. En el entrevero se ha perdido la lanza, mientras que "saif" se ha desdoblado en espada y huésped. No encontré el texto original donde está este error que Borges no pudo haber inventado, ¿quizá en alguna traducción inglesa?*

“When Al-Mutanabbi, the poet, prophet, and warrior of Hams (A.H. 354) started together with his son on their last journey, the father proposed to seek a place of safety for the night. “Art thou the Mutanabbi,” exclaimed his slave, “who wrote these lines, ‘I am known to the night, the wild, and the steed, / To the guest, and the sword, to the paper and reed’? The poet, in reply, lay down to sleep on Tigris’ bank, in a place haunted by thieves, and, disdaining flight, lost his life during the hours of darkness.”

In Borges’s *La busca de Averroes* we encounter three times paraphrases of the famous line-from Zuhayr’s *Mu’allaqa*:

*ra’aytu l-manāyā ḥabṭa ‘ašwā’a man tuṣīb*

*tumithu wa-man tuḥṭi’ yu’ammiru fa-yahramī*

which is usually translated as “I see death is like the blundering of a blind camel / him who he meets he kills and he whom he misses, lives and will become old”<sup>28</sup>. In the *Busca*, however “Zuhair comparó al destino con un camello ciego”, “Zuhair, en su mohalaca, dice que en el decurso de ochenta años de dolor y de gloria, ha visto muchas veces al destino atropellar de golpe a los hombres, como un camello ciego”, “dos imágenes, la del viejo camello y la del destino” (in English: “Zuhayr compared fate to a blind camel”, “In his *mu’allaqa*, Zuhayr says that in the course of his eighty years of pain and glory many is the time he has seen destiny trample men, like and old blind camel”, “two images – that of the old camel and that of destiny”, transl. by Hurley). While it was *destino* (fate) that Borges compared to the blind camel, in most translations – as in Johnson’s cited above – it is *death* which is associated with it. Both interpretations are right, because *manāyā* (broken plural of *maniyya* = fate, destiny) means fates or decrees [of God]”<sup>29</sup>, or can be a euphemism for “death”. But where had Borges come across the “*manāyā* = destiny” interpretation? This phrase occurred in the translation of Sir Charles James Lyall (1885), who wrote “I have seen the Dooms trample men as a blind beast at random treads/whom they smote, he died; whom they missed, he lived on”. Lane’s, or Burton’s writings do not contain this verse, so I suggest the source of the Zuhayr paraphrase in the *Busca* is the 1888 or 1930 edition of Lyall’s *Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry*.

The *Busca* also contains a strophe from ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān: *Así, atormentado hace años en Marrakesh por memorias de Córdoba, me complacía en repetir el apóstrofe que Abdurrahmán dirigió en los jardines de Ruzafa a una palma africana: Tú también eres, ¡oh palma! / En este suelo extranjera...* (“Thus it was that many years ago, in Marrakesh, tortured by memories of Córdoba, I soothed myself by repeating the apostrophe which ‘Abd-al-Rahman spoke in the gardens of

<sup>28</sup> English transl. in Johnson 1893: p. 84 (line 48).

<sup>29</sup> Lane 1863: 3025.

al-Rusayfah to an African palm: Thou too art, oh palm!, On this foreign soil..."). This is not a direct quote but only a paraphrase of the Arabic original<sup>30</sup>:

*tabaddat lanā waṣṭa r-ruṣāfati naḥlatun*  
*tanā 'at bi-ardī l-garbi 'an baladī n-naḥlī*  
*fa-qultu ṣabīhī fī t-taḡarrubi wa-n-nawā*  
*wa-ṭūlī t-ṭtanā 'ī 'an baniyya wa-'an ahlī*  
*naṣa 'ti bi-ardīn anti fīhā ḡarībatun*  
*fa-miṭluka fī l-iqṣā 'i wa-l-munta 'ā miṭlī*

I do not know where Borges could have found this poem, and why did not he quote it in full?

## 2.2 Averroes's name

Borges's short story *La busca de Averroes* (*Obras Completas* I, 582) starts with Averroes's full name, and we are told how "Ibn Ruṣd" had changed to "Averroes":

*Abulgualid Muhámmad Ibn-Ahmad ibn-Muhámmad ibn-Rushd (un siglo tardaría ese largo nombre en llegar a Averroes, pasando por Benraist y por Avenryz, y aun por Aben-Rassad y Filius Rosadis) redactaba el undécimo capítulo de la obra Tahafut-ul-Tahafut (Destrucción de la Destrucción), en el que se mantiene, contra el asceta persa Ghazali, autor del Tahafut-ul-falasifa (Destrucción de filósofos), que la divinidad sólo conoce las leyes generales del universo, lo concerniente a las especies, no al individuo. ("Abu-al Walid Muhammad ibn-Ahmad ibn-Rushd (it would take that long name, passing through "Benraist" and "Avenris" and even "Aben Rassad" and "Filius Rosadis," a hundred years to become "Averroës") was at work on the eleventh chapter of his work Taháfut al-Taháfut ("Destruction of the Destruction"), which maintains, contrary to the Persian ascetic al-Ghazzālī, author of the Taháfut al-Falásifah ("Destruction of Philosophers"), that the deity knows only the general laws of the universe, those that apply not to the individual but to the species" – transl. by Hurley).*

The careful reader would discover the difference in the *nasab* (series of *patronymics*) between the two versions: In the English text one "ibn Muḥammad" was left out. Borges copied the name from Renan<sup>31</sup> where there is *Le kadhi Aboulwalid Mohammed Ibn-Ahmed Ibn-Mohammed Ibn-Roschd naquit à Cordoue l'an 1126 ....* Renan used for his book three biographies of Averroes, of Ibn al-Abbār (1199–1260), of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (1203–1270), and of aḍ-Ḍahabī (1274–1348), all three were appended to Renan's book. Both Ibn al-Abbār and aḍ-Ḍahabī gave the *nasab* as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Ruṣd (Renan 1852:435, 456). Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a had Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad b.

<sup>30</sup> *Obras Completas* I, 587. Arabic text in Nykl 1946:18.

<sup>31</sup> Renan 1852: 10.

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Rušd (*ibid.* 448). Renan accepted the version of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, and this is how it was used by Borges.

As for the change of “Ibn Rušd” to “Averroes”, Renan (1852:7 fn.1) mentions several Latin transcriptions of Ibn Rušd: “*Ibin-Rosdin, Filius Rosadis, Ibn-Rusid, Ben-Raxid, Ibn-Ruschod, Ben-Resched, Aban-Rassad, Aben-Rois, Aben-Rasd, Aben-Rust, Avenrosd, Avenryz, Adveroy, Benroist, Avenroyth, Averroysta, etc.*”, of which Borges selected four at random.

### 2.3 Bahamut, Falak, Kujata

In his *El Libro de los Seres Imaginarios* (“Book of Imaginary Beings”) Borges discusses *Bahamut*, or *Behemoṭ* (from Ar. *bahāmūt*, Heb. *behēmōṭ*) the gigantic fish, which – deep below – supports a hierarchic structure that holds up the Earth, according to the cosmogony of Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī (1203–1283).<sup>32</sup> Borges (*Obras en Colaboración* 590) refers to Lane (1883) and to the 496th night<sup>33</sup> of Burton’s *1001 Nights*<sup>34</sup> as his sources. The reference to Lane is missing in di Giovanni’s English translation: *Leemos en una tradición recogida por Lane: Dios creó la tierra, pero la tierra no tenía sostén y así bajo la tierra creó un angel* became in his English version: “A Moslem tradition runs: God made the earth, but the earth had no base and so under the earth he made an angel” (Borges and Guerrero 1974:25), but it is duly included in Hurley’s (Borges and Guerrero 2006): “Here is the story of this creature in Lane’s translation: The earth was, it was said, originally unstable, and therefore God created an angel of immense size and of the utmost strength, and ordered him to go beneath it and place it on his shoulders ...”. The rest of Borges’s text consists of four narremes (translations are by di Giovanni: Borges and Guerrero 1974:25–26):

(i) *Pero el ángel no tenía sostén y así bajo los pies del ángel creó un peñasco hecho de rubí. ....bajo el toro creó un pez llamado Bahamut, y bajo el pez puso agua, y bajo el agua puso oscuridad, y la ciencia humana no ve más allá de ese punto ...Otros declaran que la tierra tiene su fundamento en el agua; el agua, en el peñasco .... Tan inmenso y tan resplandeciente es Bahamut que los ojos humanos no pueden sufrir su visión. Todos los mares de la Tierra, puestos en una de sus fosas nasales, serían como un grano de mostaza en mitad del desierto* (“But the angel had no base and so under the angel’s feet he made a crag of ruby... and so under the bull he made a fish named Bahamut, and under the fish he put water,

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<sup>32</sup> Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Aḡā’ib wa ḡarā’ib*. In the cosmogony of al-Qazwīnī the sky is held by Allah so that it does not fall on earth (Q 22:65), the earth is flat and surrounded by mountains of *Qāf*, which is supported by an ox, the ox stands on a fish (Bahamut) swimming in an ocean inside a bowl on top of an angel.

<sup>33</sup> This tale from the *Adventures of Buklukiyya* cycle is not contained in Lane 1840.

<sup>34</sup> Burton 1900–1901: V, 324–325.



and under the water he put darkness, and beyond this men's knowledge does not reach ... Others have it that the earth has its foundation on the water; the water, on the crag ... So immense and dazzling is Bahamut that the eyes of man cannot bear its sight. All the seas of the world, placed in one of the fish's nostrils, would be like a mustard seed laid in the desert".) This narreme was taken from Lane, the three others from Burton:

(ii) *En la noche 496 del Libro de las Mil y una Noches, se refiere que a Isa (Jesús) le fue concedido ver a Bahamut y que, lograda esa merced, rodó por el suelo y tardó tres días en recobrar el conocimiento* ("In the 496th night of the *Arabian Nights* we are told that it was given to Isa (Jesus) to behold Bahamut and that, this mercy granted, Isa fell to the ground in a faint, and three days and their nights passed before he recovered his senses");

(iii) *Se añade que bajo el desafortado pez hay un mar, y bajo el mar un abismo de aire, y bajo el aire, fuego, y bajo el fuego, una serpiente que se llama Falak, en cuya boca están los infiernos* ("... beneath the measureless fish is a sea; and beneath the sea, a chasm of air; and beneath the air, fire; and beneath the fire, a serpent named Falak in whose mouth are the six hells."). In Burton's *1001 Nights*: "Under the sea the Lord created a vast abyss of air, under the air fire, and under the fire a mighty, serpent, by name Falak; and were it not for fear of the Most High, this serpent would assuredly swallow up all that is above it, air and fire and the Angel and his burden, without sensing it."<sup>35</sup>

(iv) *La ficción del peñasco sobre el toro y del toro sobre Bahamut y de Bahamut sobre cualquier otra cosa parece ilustrar la prueba cosmológica que hay Dios, en la que se argumenta que toda causa requiere una causa anterior y se proclama la necesidad de afirmar una causa primera, para no proceder en infinito* ("The idea of the crag resting on the bull, and the bull on Bahamut, and Bahamut on anything else, seems to be an illustration of the cosmological proof of the existence of God. This proof argues that every cause requires a prior cause, and so, in order to avoid proceeding into infinity, a first cause is necessary").

Infinity is a recurring theme in Borges's works<sup>36</sup> and he possibly found the connection to the cosmological proof in Burton's odd footnote to the *496th night*: "'The cosmogony of the world' etc., as we see in the *Vicar of Wakefield*." Burton's tongue-in-cheek hint does not refer to some learned discussion of the cosmologic argument by the vicar, Dr. Charles Primrose, as it would seem, but to an episode in Oliver Goldsmith's Victorian novel<sup>37</sup>, where a swindler (Ephraim Jenkinson, "the greatest rascal under the canopy of heaven") started a conversation with the vicar, delivered "a long string of learning about Greek and cosmogony, and the world", and then cheated him out of his money.

<sup>35</sup> Burton 1900–1901: V, 325.

<sup>36</sup> Martínez 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Goldsmith 1766: Ch. XIV.

Borges found the name of the giant bull in Lane's book, who wrote: "But there was no support for the rock: wherefore God created a huge bull, with four thousand eyes and the same number of ears, noses, mouths, tongues, and feet; between every two of which was a distance of five hundred years' journey; and God, whose name be exalted, ordered this bull to go beneath the rock; and he bore it on his back and his horns. The name of this bull is Kuyootà.<sup>38</sup> But there was no support for the bull, therefore God, whose name be exalted, created an enormous fish ... to be a support to the feet of the bull. The name of this fish is Bahamoot [Behemoth]<sup>39</sup>." Borges did not tell the name of the bull in the entry *Bahamut* of the *Seres Imaginarios* but devoted a separate entry *Kuyata* to it (*Obras en Colaboración* 654): "*Según un mito islámico, Kuyata es un gran toro dotado de cuatro mil orejas, de cuatro mil narices, de cuatro mil bocas, de cuatro mil lenguas y de cuatro mil pies. ... A Kuyata lo sostiene el pez Bahamut ...*" ("In Moslem cosmology, Kujata is a huge bull endowed with four thousand eyes, ears, nostrils, mouths, and feet. .... Kujata stands on the back of the fish Bahamut ...", transl. by di Giovanni, Borges and Guerrero 1974:89).

#### 2.4 Bull and buffalo

In the concluding lines of the *La busca de Averroes* (*Obras Completas* I, 587–588; "Averroës's Search"), Borges complains: *sentí lo que hubo de sentir aquel dios mencionado por Burton que se propuso crear un toro y creó un búfalo* ("I felt what that god mentioned by Burton must have felt – the god who set himself the task of creating a bull but turned out a buffalo."). Borges refers here to a narreme in Burton's *Terminal Essay*<sup>40</sup>: "Thus, when Hormuzd created the planets, the dog, and all useful animals and plants, Ahriman produced the comets, the wolf, noxious beasts and poisonous growths. The Hindus represent the same metaphysical idea by Bramha the Creator and Visva karma, the Anti-creator, miscalled by Europeans Vulcan: the former fashions a horse and a bull and the latter caricatures them with an ass and a buffalo, evolution turned topsy turvy."

Borges ingeniously paraphrases Burton's convoluted argument changing it to the frustration felt by the Creator god who "set himself to the task of creating a bull that turned out a buffalo". The second part of Burton's narreme, concerning the

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<sup>38</sup> In different editions of al-Qazwīnī's *Cosmography* we find the bull's name as *Kīyūbān*, *Kibūṭān*, *Kuyūtā*.

<sup>39</sup> Lane 1883:107. Burton did not name the bull, in a footnote (Burton 1900 – 1901 vol. 5: 324 fn.2) he called it "Gaw-i-Zamun = Bull of the Earth", in *The Terminal Essay* (Burton 1900–1901: X, 131) he wrote "[the Earth is] supported by the *Gav-i-Zamin*, the energy, symbolized by a bull, implanted by the creator".

<sup>40</sup> Burton 1900–1901: X, 130–131.

rivalry between Brahmā and Viśvakarman is not supported by any classical texts<sup>41</sup>, because Hinduism is not a dualistic religion as the Persian used to be, with positive and negative Creators. Until I found the source of this narreme, I was sure that it is an invention of Borges, now we see it had been made up by Burton!

## 2.5 *al-Burāq*

The *Burāq* (a grammatically both masc. and fem. diminutive<sup>42</sup>, from Ar. برق = “lightning”, or “bright”) is a horse-like creature in Islamic tradition that was said to be a transport for certain prophets<sup>43</sup>. *Ḥadīṭ*, *tafsīr*, *sīra* books recount in their chapters on Muḥammad’s *mi’rāğ* that al-Burāq carried the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem, then up in the heavens and back in one night. Its name is not mentioned in the Qurān.<sup>44</sup>

Borges devoted a long section to al-Burāq in *Seres Imaginarios* (*Obras en Colaboración* 599) and repeated it in the *Historia de la eternidad* (*Obras Completas* I, 361, footnote). It consists of a chain of seven narremes (see Table 1):

Discussion of the seven narremes in *al-Burāq*:

### 2.5.(i) Q. 17:1

Borges’s Spanish text does not mention the source of the translation of Q. 17:1 *subḥāna l-laḏī asrā bi-‘abdihi laylan mina l-masğidi l-ḥarāmi ilā l-masğidi l-aqṣā l-laḏī bāraknā ḥawlahu li-nuriyahu min āyātīnā innahu huwa s-samī‘u l-baṣīru*. It is close to Cansinos-Assén’s (1973) translation, which starts as *La loanza a Aquel que hizo viajar a su siervo de noche, desde la mezquita la vedada hasta la mezquita la remota ...*, and to that of Julio Cortés (1979) that reads: *¡Gloria a Quien hizo viajar a Su Siervo de noche, desde la Mezquita Sagrada a la Mezquita Lejana ...!* In the *El Sagrado Coran* (1953) by Ahmed Abboud and Rafael Castellanos, Q. 17:1 reads *Glorificado sea Dios, quien, durante la noche, transportó a tu siervo, el Apóstol desde la sagrada mezquita de la Meca hasta la mezquita lejana*

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Doniger O’Flaherty 1975: 358; Dowson 1879:323–324 and 363–364; Wilkins 1882:75–77. (I acknowledge the useful advice on this point from my Indologist friend, Professor Gyula Wojtilla.)

<sup>42</sup> This was the opinion of Horowitz, 1919, who adopted the view of classic Muslim commentators, that *Burāq* is a *nomen deminutivum*, formed by applying the rare *fu’āl* pattern (indicating the *small portion of something*, see Wehr 1981 “Grammar” I, §.287(b)) to the root *b-r-q* (instead of making it *Burayq*), thus, its meaning is “a flash of lightning”. See Horowitz 1919, Gruber 2012; Dankoff 1971.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Hišām 1858–1860: I, 263.

<sup>44</sup> Schimmel 1985:159–175 and endnotes 297–301; Heath 1992; Colby 2002, 2008; Vuckovic 2005; Gruber 2012.

*de Jerusalén*, almost as in di Giovanni's English translation, which is a modernized version of Sale's archaic Q. 17:1 (Praise be unto him who transported his servant by night, from the sacred temple of *Mecca* to the further temple of *Jerusalem* ...). Borges's rendering omits the place names.<sup>45</sup>

I propose that the Spanish Q. 17:1 in Borges's text, "*Alabado sea El que hizo viajar, durante la noche, a su siervo desde el templo sagrado hasta el templo que está más lejos ...*" is Borges's *own translation*. In his studies for the "Burāq" entry he had certainly come across with Sale's translation, "The Glory of Him who transported His servant by night from the Sacred temple (of Mecca) to the Remote Temple (of Jerusalem), whose precincts we have blessed, that we might show him of our signs" in one of the notes to a *1001 Nights* story<sup>46</sup>, and with the *abridged version* (explanatory place names omitted) of Marracci's<sup>47</sup> classic Latin translation of Q. 17:1, *Laus illi qui transtulit servum suum ab oratorio Haram ad oratorium remotissimum* ..., in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (1776–88: Note 98 to Ch. 50<sup>48</sup>). The lack of placenames in Borges's rendering of Q. 17:1 suggests his source was Gibbon.

At this point it should be mentioned that Borges did not refrain from modifying even Qurānic texts. In his essay *Las Kenningar* (*Obras Completas* I, 380) he refers to Q 22:5 in the form "[*el hombre sea generado*] por "*unas gotas de vil*"<sup>49</sup> (in Arabic *min nutfatin*). No other translator, or commentator, of the Qurān have ever termed *nutfā* ('sperm-drop') as a drop of vile (i.e., base, wicked) water!

## 2.5.(ii) The Prophet's Night Journey

Borges's text is correct. In the English text, the words "that the sacred temple is that of Mecca, that the distant temple is that of Jerusalem" are superfluous, because this explanation was already included in Sale's translation.

## 2.5.(iii) al-Burāq's description by Burton

Borges's source was Burton's 1900–1901: fn. 435 to the *457th Night*: "When Abu Bakr was hiding with Mohammed in a cave on the Hill Al-Saur (Thaur or Thūr<sup>50</sup>) South of Mecca ... the fugitives were protected by a bird which built her nest at the

<sup>45</sup> The Qurān translations quoted are: Cansinos-Asséns 1954, 1973; Cortés 1979; Abboud and Castellanos 1953; Sale 1734.

<sup>46</sup> Kirby 1901a: note 1 to the *Tale of the Warlock and the Young Cook of Baghdad*.

<sup>47</sup> Marracci 1698: II, 407.

<sup>48</sup> "Yet the Koran without naming either heaven, or Jerusalem, or Mecca, has only dropped a mysterious hint: *Laus illi qui transtulit servum suum ab oratorio Haram ad oratorium remotissimum* (Q. 17:1 [Marracci 1698: II, 407])".

<sup>49</sup> See App. # 81, Borge, *Obras Completas* I, 380.

<sup>50</sup> See Burton 1855–1856: II, 131.

entrance (according to another legend it was curtained by a spider's web), while another bird (the crow of whom I shall presently speak) tried to betray them. The first bird is popularly supposed to have been a pigeon, and is referred to by Hudibras<sup>51</sup>: 'Th' apostles of this fierce religion / Like Mahomet's, were ass and pigeon'. The ass I presume alludes to the marvellous beast Al-Burāk ... which Indian Muslims picture with human face, ass's ears, equine body and peacock's wings and tail."

#### 2.5.(iv) al-Burāq tipped a jug of water and 2.5.(v) No drop spilled from the jug

As Annemarie Schimmel noted "the heavenly journey [of Muḥammad] became a model of the ecstatic state in which man can live in a single moment through years"<sup>52</sup>. The Prophet's still-warm bedclothes, or the tipped-over jug that had not spilled out fully, or these two tropes mentioned together, had become in the *mi'rāğ* accounts and commentaries symbols of this ecstatic moment.

Only a few classical Muslim accounts of the *Night Journey* specified the duration of this event, because if too short, this would imply the journey was spiritual, or just a dream, not corporeal, thus losing its miraculous nature and religious significance. Ibn Sīnā (980–1037) narrated the episode<sup>53</sup> as "He [Muḥammad] said: When I did all this I returned to the house. Because of the swiftness of the journey the bedclothes were still warm", then commented: "that is the journey was intellectual [*fikrī*]. He went by thought [*ḥāṭir*]"'. The narration of Ibn 'Abbās (c. 619 – 687) is more cautious: "I woke up in Makkah the next morning"<sup>54</sup>. Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (1150–1210), in his *Tafsīr*, used physical-geographical arguments to prove that the *Night Journey* could have been done physically "in one third of a night" or

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<sup>51</sup> *Hudibras* is a mock-heroic narrative poem by Samuel Butler (1612–1680). Zachary Grey (1688–1766) notes on lines 231–232 of Part 1, Canto 1 that "Mahomet had a tame dove, that used to pick seeds out of his ear that it might be thought to whisper and inspire him. His ass was so intimate with him, that the Mahometans believed it carried him to heaven, and stays there with him to bring him back again." (Butler 1805: I, 26).

<sup>52</sup> Schimmel 1985a:161. The possibly earliest occurrence of this motif is the "charming story of Kaṇḍu the Penitent" in the *Viṣṇu purāṇa* I, 15, composed in early 1st millennium), "who spends many hundred years in erotic dallies and, at last, waking up from the ecstasy of his love [finds that] only a few hours of a single day have passed by"; see Winternitz 1981: I, 511.

<sup>53</sup> Heath 1992.

<sup>54</sup> Asín Palacios (1919) calls Ibn 'Abbās's narration *Redacción C del ciclo 2º*. In the translation of Colby (2008:208): "Praise be to God for that [journey]! It was all in a single night, with God's permission and power." See also the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kaṭīr on Q. 17:1: "Imam Ahmad also recorded that Ibn 'Abbās said: The Messenger of Allah said: *lammā kāna laylata usriya bī fa-aṣbaḥtu bi-Makkata faẓi'tu wa-'araftu anna n-nāsa mukaḍḍibī* ("On the night when I was taken on the Night Journey, I woke up in Makkah the next morning having anxiety because I knew the people would not believe me.")".

– more likely – “over the course of a full evening”<sup>55</sup>. Those accounts that do speak of the swiftness of the journey base this on (a) only the warmth of the bedclothes; (b) or they tell the bed was still warm and the tipped-over jug was still not empty; or (c) they refer only to the jug. In this last case, it is mentioned that (c1) (somehow) it was tipped; or (c2) it was tipped by al-Burāq (as Borges does); (c3) or it was tipped over by the angel Gabriel; or (c4) by the Prophet’s feet or clothes<sup>56</sup>.

From among Borges’s usual sources, Gibbon<sup>57</sup> does not mention bedclothes or jug, he only writes “[the Prophet] performed in the tenth part of a night the journey of many thousand years”. Asín Palacios quoted Ibn ‘Abbās, according to whom “*y la leyenda termina haciendo constar Mahoma que el maravilloso viaje se realize en el breve espacio de una sola noche*” (“and the legend ends with the statement of Mohammed, that the miraculous journey had taken place in a single night”)<sup>58</sup>. Burton’s<sup>59</sup> *1001 Nights* provided Borges with both tropes “[Muḥammad] found his bed still warm, and the water had not fully run out of an ewer which had been upset beside him”.

I have another, very enticing, hypothesis which – of course – would be very hard to prove: Borges might have also learned about the narremes from Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*<sup>60</sup> (part 3, chapter V, section 5) where Kirillov describes to Shatov his ‘seconds of eternal harmony’, and Shatov replies: “Take care, Kirillov, I’ve heard that’s how epilepsy begins... Remember Muhammad’s jug that didn’t have time to spill while he flew round paradise on his horse ... It’s too much like your harmony, and Muhammad was an epileptic. Take care, Kirillov—it’s epilepsy!”. Dostoevsky was one of Borges’s favourite writers, Borges included the *Idiot* among the most important books in anyone’s personal library<sup>61</sup>. In his short story *El Otro* (*Obras Completas* III, 13; “The Other”) the old Borges asks the young Borges what he was reading. *Los poseídos o, según creo, Los demonios de Fyodor Dostoievski – me replicó no sin vanidad*. (“The Possessed—or, as I think would be better, The Devils, by Fyodor Dostoevsky,” he answered without vanity”, transl. by Hurley). Dostoevsky’s sources were also traced back<sup>62</sup> to Orientalist sources, namely to

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<sup>55</sup> Vuckovic 2005:80–81.

<sup>56</sup> Narrations according to this typology are: (a) Ibn Sīnā (quoted in Heath 1992); (b) Schimmel 1985a; Kazimirski 1840; Burton 1900–1901; Gibbs 1886; (c1) Dostoevsky 1974; see Freemon 1976, Futrell 1979; (c2) Borges and Guerrero, *Seres Imaginarios*, Ch. “Burāq”; (c3) Irving 1849; (c4) Frederick Colby, *Pers. comm. by email* 19 April 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Gibbon 1776–88: II, Ch. 50, 98.

<sup>58</sup> Asín Palacios 1919: 30.

<sup>59</sup> “The Tale of the Warlock and the Young Cook of Baghdad” and its fn. 1. in Burton 1900–1901 (*Suppl. Nights*): VI, 505–537.

<sup>60</sup> Freemon 1976; Dostoevsky 1974; Futrell 1979.

<sup>61</sup> Crow 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Futrell 1979.

Kazimirski's Qurān translation<sup>63</sup> (of which Dostoevsky obtained a personal copy in 1859) and to Washington Irving's *Mahomet and his Successors* (1849) that appeared in Russian translation in 1857. Kazimirski's commentary on Q. 17:1 contained both the warm bed and spilled jug motifs; *le prophète trouva son lit qu'il avait quitté, tout chaud, et que, le pot où il chauffait de l'eau étant près de se renverser à son départ, il revint assez à temps pour le relever sans qu'il y eut une goutte d'eau de répandue*. In Irving (1849:95) the anecdote lacks the "warm bed" motif: "on his return, he was able to prevent the complete overturn of a vase of water which the angel Gabriel had struck with his wing on his departure". I suggest Borges learned of the jug episode from Burton's *1001 Nights*, or from Washington Irving, or Kazimirski. He might also have found the motif from Dostoevsky. Of course, it was Borges's own playful idea to make *al-Burāq* responsible for the accident.

## 2.5.(vi) Cold hand of God

The narreme "[*el Profeta*] sintió un frío que le heló el corazón cuando la mano del Señor le dio una palmada en el hombro" ("[the Prophet] felt a coldness that chilled his heart when the Lord laid a hand on his shoulder") was common in the early narrations of Muḥammad's *Night Journey*, told in the name of Ibn 'Abbās<sup>64</sup>. In the "primitive version"<sup>65</sup> of Ibn 'Abbās's narration the relevant part reads as "He placed one of his hands between my shoulder blades, and I felt the coldness of his fingers upon my heart for some time"<sup>66</sup>. aṭ-Ṭabarī (839–923) includes the trope, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, in his *Tafsīr*<sup>67</sup>: "So he placed his hand between my shoulder blades and I felt the coldness between my nipples."

From among the sources used by Borges, Asín Palacios 1919 contains only an abbreviated version of Ibn 'Abbās's narration, which refers to God's hands touching the Prophet, without mentioning their coldness, "*Al posarse las divinas manos sobre los hombros de Mahoma ...*"<sup>68</sup>. Burton's and Lane's<sup>69</sup> books do not contain the episode, but Gibbon's does: "Beyond the seventh heaven, Mahomet

<sup>63</sup> Kazimirski 1840.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed discussion of this trope see Colby 2002 and 2008.

<sup>65</sup> So called by Colby 2008. Asín Palacios 1919 called it *Redacción C del ciclo 2º*.

<sup>66</sup> Transl. in Colby 2008:186.

<sup>67</sup> aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* XI, 510 (commentary on Q. 53:11).

<sup>68</sup> Asín Palacios 1919:28.

<sup>69</sup> Lane 1883 (note 21 to Ch. 3) contains a wonderful *al-Burāq* legend, that somehow escaped Borges's attention: "When I was taken up into heaven," said the Prophet, "some of my sweat fell upon the earth, and from it sprang the rose; and whoever would smell my scent, let him smell the rose." In another tradition it is said, "The white rose was created from my sweat on the night of the Meṛāj; and the red rose, from the sweat of Jebrāel; and the yellow rose, from the sweat of El-Burāk."

alone was permitted to proceed; he passed the veil of unity, approached within two bowshots of the throne, and felt a cold that pierced him to the heart, when his shoulder was touched by the hand of God.”<sup>70</sup>

Borges’s text had been taken, almost *verbatim*, from this last source.

## 2.5.(vii) The mystic from Murcia

The *místico murciano* is Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240); Borges learned of him from Asín Palacios’s two books<sup>71</sup>. He took both Ibn ‘Arabī quotes, *verbatim*, from him (Asín Palacios, 1919:62, main text and fn.1), where we find “*Para este místico viaje, la veloz cabalgadura que los transporta es el amor divino, simbolizado por Borac*” (“for this mystic journey, the fast mount that carried him is the divine love, symbolized by Burāq”); and “*el Borac de la pureza de intención*” (“al-Burāq, the purity of intention”). The first quote is from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Isrā*, the second from his *Šaqq al-ġayb*.

## 2.6 Camels in the Qurān

In his 1932 essay *El escritor argentino y la tradición* (*Obras Completas* I, 267–274; “The Argentine Writer and Tradition”) Borges criticized his compatriots who thought that “gauchesque literature is the only truly Argentine mode of aesthetic expression”<sup>72</sup>, and he claimed, using a quote from Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that the Qurān, “the Arab book par excellence”, contains no references to camels, the typical symbol of the Arabs’ everyday life:

“Gibbon observa que en el libro árabe por excelencia, en el Alcorán, no hay camellos; yo creo que si hubiera alguna duda sobre la autenticidad del Alcorán, bastaría esta ausencia de camellos para probar que es árabe. Fue escrito por Mahoma... Mahoma, como árabe ... sabía que podía ser árabe sin camellos. Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local.” (*Obras Completas* I, 270) (“Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book par excellence, in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, this absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed ... Mohammed, as an Arab ... knew he could be an Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local color,” transl. by Esther Allen).

<sup>70</sup> Gibbon 1776–88: II, Ch. 50.

<sup>71</sup> Asín Palacios, 1919, 1931.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted and discussed in Zivin 2011.



The quote, indeed, occurs in Gibbon<sup>73</sup>, where the passage runs as follows: "Alive or dead, almost every part of the camel is serviceable to man: her milk is plentiful and nutritious: the young and tender flesh has the taste of veal [fn. 13] a valuable salt is extracted from the urine: the dung supplies the deficiency of fuel; and the long hair, which falls each year and is renewed, is coarsely manufactured into the garments, the furniture, and the tents of the Bedoweens. In the rainy seasons, they consume the rare and insufficient herbage of the desert". It is explained by footnote 13: "*Qui carnibus camelorum vesci solent odii tenaces sunt*, [Those who are accustomed to eating camel meat are tenacious in their hatred] was the opinion of an Arabian physician, (Pocock, Specimen, p. 88.) Mahomet himself, who was fond of milk, prefers the cow, and does not even mention the camel" – that is, it was *camel-milk* (and not camels) what Muḥammad (rather than the Qurān) "[did] not even mention"<sup>74</sup>. Borges-criticism, of course, discovered the falsity of the quote: "Borges cites Gibbon's (erroneous) remark"<sup>75</sup>; "while humorous, this false reference (a favorite literary ploy of Borges) does not prove the inexistence of camels in the Koran (there are, in fact, camels in Islam's holiest text)"<sup>76</sup>. One wonders how come Borges had not read the Qurān translation of his old friend Rafael Cansinos Asséns where the index of the book has five references to camels, and there are nineteen verses (incl. Q. 6:145 and Q. 91: 13–14) that contain the word "camel".

Borges certainly realized this, but he was stubborn. In 1954 he participated at a conference in Buenos Aires celebrating the publication of Cansinos's *new translation of the Qurān*<sup>77</sup>, and at this occasion republished<sup>78</sup> his old essay with some modifications (but keeping the notorious "no camels in Koran" part intact).

In Borges's essay the *fue escrito por Mahoma* ("it [the Qurān] was written by Mohammed") phrase is also strange, because Borges had certainly read, in the same chapter in Gibbon's book, the refutation of the claims that the Prophet could read and write. Gibbon (1776–1788: III, 69, Ch. 50) wrote: "With these powers of eloquence, Mahomet was an illiterate Barbarian: his youth had never been instructed in the arts of reading and writing", and elaborated in fn. 70: "Those who

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<sup>73</sup> Gibbon 1776–88: V, Ch. L: Description of Arabia and Its Inhabitants. Part I.

<sup>74</sup> As a matter of fact, camel milk was also mentioned by the Prophet: "Narrated Abū Qilaba: "Anas said, "Some people of 'Ukl or 'Uraina tribe came to Medina and its climate did not suit them. So the Prophet ordered them to go to the herd of (Milch) camels and to drink their milk and urine (as a medicine)." (Bukhari n.d., Ablutions (*Wuḍū'*), I, Book 4, Number 234). Also, there is a *ḥadīth* on camel meat: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 3, Ch 25 "Performing wudu' after eating camel meat", *Ḥadīth* Number 700.

<sup>75</sup> Almond 2004:441 and fn. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Zivin 2011:135–136.

<sup>77</sup> Cansinos-Asséns 1954.

<sup>78</sup> See Lastra 1998. Hernaiz 2019 compares the different published versions of the essay.

believe that Mahomet could read or write are incapable of reading what is written with another pen, in the Suras, or chapters of the Koran, vii. xxix. xcvi. These texts, and the tradition of the Sonna, are admitted, without doubt, by Abulfeda, (in Vit. vii.,) Gagnier, (Not. ad Abulfed. p. 15,) Pocock, (Specimen, p. 151,) Reland, (de Religione Mohammedica, p. 236,) and Sale, (Preliminary Discourse, p. 42.)”.

The phrase occurs once more, in Borges’s short story *Un doble de Mahoma* (*Obras Completas* I, 346; “A Double for Mohammed”): *El verdadero Mahoma, que redactó el Qurán, ya no es visible a sus adeptos.* (“The real Mahomed, who wrote the Koran, is not at this day to be seen among them”, transl. by Hurley). In his many other writings Borges treats the Holy Book with due respect, in a theologically correct way, as e.g. in *La busca de Averroes* (*Obras Completas* I, 584):

*“Farach expuso largamente la doctrina ortodoxa. El Qurán (dijo) es uno de los atributos de Dios, como Su piedad; se copia en un libro, se pronuncia con la lengua, se recuerda en el corazón, y el idioma y los signos y la escritura son obra de los hombres, pero el Qurán es irrevocable y eterno. Averroes, que había comentado la República, pudo haber dicho que la madre del Libro es algo así como su modelo platónico.”* (“Faraj discoursed long on orthodox doctrine. The Qur’an, he said, is one of the attributes of Allah, even as His Mercy is; it may be copied in a book, pronounced with the tongue, or remembered in the heart, but while language and signs and writing are the work of men, the Qur’an itself is irrevocable and eternal. Averroës, who had written his commentary on the Republic, might have said that the mother of the Book is similar, in a way, to the Platonic Idea”, transl. by Hurley)<sup>79</sup>.

## 2.7 Copyist’s error, or is the *Thousand and One Nights* infinite?

“Games with time and infinity” (*juegos con el tiempo y con lo infinito*)<sup>80</sup> are recurring motifs in Borges’s works<sup>81</sup>. As a writer, and librarian, he was especially concerned with the possibility of *infinite books*. As Nada Elia, and Ian Almond, observed<sup>82</sup>, Borges equated infinity with *The Thousand and One Nights*. In his essay *Las mil y una noches* (“The Thousand and One Nights”) he wrote *La idea de infinito es consustancial con Las mil y una noches* (“The idea of infinity is con-

<sup>79</sup> Other similar places are listed in App. # 45; see also Scott 2001; González 1992.

<sup>80</sup> The phrase is from his 1960 story, *Borges y Yo* (*Obras Completas* II, 186; “Borges and I”).

<sup>81</sup> Reviewed in Barrenechea 1956.

<sup>82</sup> Elia 1998:142 “Borges says he owns Burton’s translation of the Islamic anthology, a collection he equates with infinity”; Almond 2004:436 “[Borges makes] repeated references to the *Thousand and One Nights* almost as a standard metaphor for infinity”.

substantial with *The Thousand and One Nights*”, transl. by Weinberger)<sup>83</sup>. In *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (*Obras Completas* I, 477; “The garden of forking paths”) he tells how he found a model for the infinite book in the *1001 Nights*:

“yo me había preguntado de qué manera un libro puede ser infinito ... Recordé también esa noche que está en el centro de las 1001 Noches, cuando la reina Shahrazad (por una mágica distracción del copista) se pone a referir textualmente la historia de las 1001 Noches, con riesgo de llegar otra vez a la noche en que la refiere, y así hasta lo infinito.” (“I had wondered how a book could be infinite ... I also recalled that night at the centre of the 1001 Nights, when the queen Scheherazade (through some magical distractedness on the part of the copyist) begins to retell, verbatim, the story of the 1001 Nights, with the risk of returning once again to the night on which she is telling it—and so on, ad infinitum.” Transl. by Hurley).

Borges refers here to a tale which resembles an episode in the frame story, “King Shahryar and his Brother encountering the woman kept in a chest by the Genie”.<sup>84</sup> In his essay *Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción* (“When Fiction Lives In Fiction”)<sup>85</sup> Borges points out the “vast possibilities, the curious danger” of this repetition:

“[el rey] oye de boca de la reina su propia historia. Oye el principio de la historia, que abarca a todas las demás, y también – de monstruoso modo –, a sí mismo? Intuye claramente el lector la vasta posibilidad de esa interpolación, el curioso peligro? Que la reina persista y el inmóvil rey oirá para siempre la trunca historia de Las Mil y Una Noches, ahora infinita y circular ...” (“The King hears his own story from the Queen’s mouth. He hears the beginning of the story, which embraces all the others as well as – monstrously – itself. Does the reader really understand the vast possibilities of that interpolation, the curious danger – that the Queen may persist and the Sultan, immobile, will hear forever the truncated story of A Thousand and One Nights, now infinite and circular?”), transl. by Esther Allen).

Borges-researchers denied such “unlimited possibilities of interpolated repetitions”<sup>86</sup>. According to Kilito (1992) the infinity of the *1001 Nights* should be understood only symbolically<sup>87</sup>. Concerning Borges’s claim (*Obras Completas* I, 477) that this episode was included in the *1001 Nights* “through some magical distractedness on the part of the copyist” (*por una mágica distracción del copista*),

<sup>83</sup> *Obras Completas* III, 234.

<sup>84</sup> Burton, “King’s Son and the Ifrit’s Mistress”, *Burton* 1900–1901: VI, 199, Night 602.

<sup>85</sup> Borges, *Obras Completas* IV, 434.

<sup>86</sup> Fishburn and Psiche 1990:139–140, entry “Night of Nights (*Noche de las Noches*)”.

<sup>87</sup> In the axiomatic theory of narrative structures (Baikadi et al. 2012:45) it is proved that “there are no self-loops ... there cannot exist a link between a narreme and itself”.

Kilito says, “only the naïve reader will go from version to version of the *Nights* trying to verify the fact”<sup>88</sup>. Table 2 (based on Kirby 1901b) summarizes the tale’s redaction history. Let us indeed go “from version to version”.

The story occurs in three printed Arabic texts of the *1001 Nights*, including the Calcutta text (ed. by MacNaghten<sup>89</sup>) which was the basis for Burton’s translation, and the Būlāq text (1835) used by Lane. Burton gives the story in full (Burton 1900–1901: VI, 199–202); Lane only gives an “Abstract “of the whole cycle “*Story of the King and his son and the Damsel and the Seven Wezeers*” (Lane 1840: III, 145–167, Chap. 21) where he refers to the story (on p. 148) only with its title, “On the third day (for on each day one Wezeer tries his influence), the Damsel relates *The Story of the Envious Wezeer and the Prince and the Ghooleh*”. Both Burton and Lane observed that the narreme repeats the episode found at the beginning of the frame story: Burton noted (p. 199, fn. 3), “This is a mere abstract of the tale told in the introduction (I, 10–12). Here, however, the rings are about eighty; there the number varies from ninety to five hundred and seventy”; Lane is shorter (p. 148, fn 15), “Nearly as told in Chapter ii. in this work”. Borges was the first to realize the possibility of an *infinite cycle*. His claim that this was due to a “magical slip of the copyist” is reasonable. The episode existed as a separate anecdote in the *Seven Wezeers* story-cycle<sup>90</sup> and became incorporated the second time in the *1001 Nights* through careless edition when fusing the two cycles.

## 2.8. *Iskander Dū l-Qarnayn*

The legendary *Iskander Dū l-Qarnayn* appears in two stories of Borges: (1). In *La busca de Averroes* (*Obras Completas* I, 585) he writes: “*Farach preguntó si la ciudad quedaba a muchas leguas de la muralla que Iskandar Zul Qarnain (Alejandro Bicornes de Macedonia) levantó para detener a Gog y a Magog*” (Faraj asked whether the city lays many leagues from that wall erected by Iskandar dhual-Quarnayn (Alexander of Macedonia) to halt the advance of Gog and Magog. Hurley’s transl.). (2) It also appears in *El Aleph* (“The Aleph”, *Obras Completas* I, 627): “*Doy mis razones. Hacia 1867 el capitán Burton ejerció en el Brasil el cargo de cónsul británico; en julio de 1942 Pedro Henríquez Ureña descubrió en una biblioteca de Santos un manuscrito suyo que versaba sobre el espejo que atribuye el Oriente a Iskandar Zú alKarnayn, o Alejandro Bicornes de Macedonia. En su cristal se reflejaba el universo entero. Burton menciona otros artificios congéneres...*” (Around 1867, Captain Burton held the post of British Consul in

<sup>88</sup> Cited in Ross 2004. (Italics mine).

<sup>89</sup> MacNaghten 1839–1842.

<sup>90</sup> Lane 1840: III, 145, fn. 51: “The next story in my original is that of the *King and his Son and the Damsel and the Seven Wezeers* which ends with part of the six hundred and sixth night. It is similar in its framework to the *Bakhtyár Námeh ...*”. The *Seven Wezeers* story-cycle was published by Clouston 1884.

Brazil. In July, 1942, Pedro Henríquez Ureña came across a manuscript of Burton's, in a library at Santos, dealing with the mirror which the Oriental world attributes to Iskander Zu al-Karnayn, or Alexander Bicornis of Macedonia. In its crystal the whole world was reflected. Burton mentions other similar devices .... Transl. by di Giovanni)."

In Burton's *1001 Nights* (V, 464th night) a brief story<sup>91</sup> *Iskandar Zu al-Karnayn and a Certain Tribe of Poor Folk* and two footnotes are devoted to Iskandar. Note No. 460 instructs to pronounce the name as "Zool Karnayn", an advice Borges followed. Note No. 461 refers to Iskander's Qurānic fame<sup>92</sup>: "At the end of Persia ... he came upon two huge mountains on the same line, behind which dwelt a host of abominable pygmies, two spans high [1 span = 0.2286 m], with curious eyes, ears which served as mattresses and coverlets, huge, fanged mouths, lions' claws and hairy hind quarters. They ate men, destroyed everything, copulated in public and had swarms of children. These were Yájúj and Májúj (Gog and Magog) descendants of Japhet. Sikander built against them a famous wall with stones cemented and riveted by iron and copper"<sup>93</sup>.

The main motif of the *1001 Night* story, Dū l-Qarnayn's visit to the "tribe of poor folk" and his discussion with the sage, is not mentioned in the Qurān, though it is included in the *Tafsīr* of aṭ-Tabarī. Yamanaka convincingly<sup>94</sup> proved that the story had been adopted to the *1001 Nights* from al-Ġazālī's (1058–1111) *Counsel for Kings* (*Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*)<sup>95</sup>.

The story *El Aleph* (*Obras Completas* I, 627) also mentions the motif "*el espejo que atribuye el Oriente a Iskandar Zú alKarnayn*" (the mirror which the Oriental world attributes to Iskander Dū l-Qarnayn) in which "the whole world was reflected". The mirror motif is very common in Burton's *1001 Nights*<sup>96</sup>, but there is no reference there, nor in Lane, or Asín Palacios, to "Iskander's Mirror". Iskander's mirror is mentioned, among others, in the *Romance of Alexander the Great* (Persian: *Eskandar-nāmeḥ*) by Niẓāmī Ganjavī (1141–1209), and in the *matnawī*

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<sup>91</sup> Yamanaka 2006:93 notes "Lane compresses most of these shorter stories into the notes to the chapters in small print and omits to mention even the title of minor tales such as that of Alexander."

<sup>92</sup> Q. 18:83–101.

<sup>93</sup> Q 18:93–96. Asín Palacios 1919 (English transl. Asín Palacios 1926:367), a book known to Borges, also contained this legend. "Finally, the region of darkness recurs in all the versions of the tale of Dulfarnain, who in Arabic legend is identified with Alexander the Great; and the monument appears as a wall built, according to the Koran, by Dulfarnain as a protection against the peoples of Gog and Magog, who, according to a version of the Islamic legend—like the pygmies of the Christian legend, whose stature was only an ell [about 1.14 meters]—measured but a hand and a half in height".

<sup>94</sup> Yamanaka 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Ghazali 1971.

<sup>96</sup> See the section "Burton's Mirrors" in Ling 2012.

“*Ā’īna-yi Sikandarī*” of Amīr Ḥusrau Dihlavī<sup>97</sup> (1253–1325), a heroic poem narrating the deeds of Alexander the Great<sup>98</sup>. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, keeps a page of an illuminated manuscript of Dihlavī’s *Ā’īna-yi Sikandarī*, where the miniature illustration shows how “Alexander the Great (Iskandar) invents a mirror that, when mounted on a tower, shows everything within a radius of sixty farhangs and thus enables Alexander’s men to attack marauding pirates”<sup>99</sup>.

## 2.9 *The Mirror of Ink*

Borges narrates the strange tale of *el más cruel de los gobernadores del Sudán, Yakub el Doliente* (“the crudest of the governors of the Sudan, Yakub the Afflicted”) with *el hechicero Abderrahmen El Masmudí* (“the sorcerer Abderramen al Masmudī”) in *El espejo de tinta (Obras Completas I, 342; “The Mirror of Ink”,* transl. by Hurley). In the first paragraph (*Obras Completas I, 343*) he attributes the story to Burton, *Sin embargo, el capitán Richard Francis Burton conversó con ese hechicero el año 1853 y cuenta que le refirió lo que copio* (“Capt. Richard Francis Burton spoke with this sorcerer in 1853, and he reported that the sorcerer told him this story that I shall reproduce here”), and at the end (*Obras Completas I, 345*), refers to Burton’s book as his source: “From Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Equatorial Africa*”<sup>100</sup>. Di Giovanni (2011:202) claims that the story is “pure, original Borges ... [it had] nothing whatever to do with Burton”. According to Almond (2004: note 1), “this is one of his [Borges’s] fictitious references”. According to Di Giovanni (2011:202) “The mirror of ink, the device itself, comes from Edward William Lane’s *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, one of Borges’s favourite books. What is seen in the pool of ink, however, is Borges’s invention, not Lane’s.” Ling (2012) agrees with di Giovanni, that one of Borges’s sources was Lane (1860) but tries to find motifs of the story in Burton’s *1001 Nights* and even in the very book cited by Borges<sup>101</sup>. I want to point out two more

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<sup>97</sup> See Schimmel 1985b.

<sup>98</sup> Fishburn and Psiche 1990: entry *Iskander*; Nizāmī: Canto XXIII Sikandar’s mirror making.

<sup>99</sup> See <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/18740/alexander-the-great-invents-a-mirror-2/>. Illustrated in the Walters manuscript W. 623. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.

<sup>100</sup> The correct title is: Burton, Richard F. 1860. *The Lake Regions of Central Africa: A Picture of Exploration*. New York: Harper and Brothers. This was not a deliberate hoax to mislead the reader. Borges also referred to the book under the same name in another writing: Borges, *Traductores (Obras Completas I, 401)*.

<sup>101</sup> Burton 1860.

books<sup>102</sup> by Burton where the sorcery is described similarly as in Lane (and in Borges). Compare the following four descriptions:

(a) Borges *El espejo de tinta* (*Obras Completas* I, 343): *Recorté la hoja en seis tiras, escribí talismanes e invocaciones en las cinco primeras, y en la restante las siguientes palabras que están en el glorioso Qurán: 'Hemos retirado tu velo, y la visión de tus ojos es penetrante'. Luego dibujé un cuadro mágico en la mano derecha de Yakub y le pedí que la ahuecara y vertí un círculo de tinta en el medio.* ("I cut the paper into six strips and wrote charms and invocations upon the first five; on the last I inscribed the following words from the glorious Qur'an: 'We have removed from thee thy veil, and thy sight is piercing.' Then I drew a magic square in Yakub's right palm and asked him to hold it out to me; into it, I poured a circle of ink", transl. by Hurley).

(b) Lane (1860: 274) "In the palm of this boy's right hand, the magician drew, with a pen, a certain diagram<sup>103</sup>, in the centre of which he poured a little ink. Into this ink, he desired the boy steadfastly to look. He then burned some incense, and several bits of paper inscribed with charms; and at the same time called for various objects to appear in the ink. The boy declared that he saw all these objects ....".

(c) Burton (1851:180 and note) "The most curious and complicated charms are those used in recovery of stolen property, and the detection of thieves. Strange to say, the Egyptian practice of seeing figures shifting over the ink poured into a boy's hand is, with certain small differences, known in Sindh. The *Vinyane-waró*, or finder of lost goods, rubs some dark substance upon the thumb-nail of a youth not arrived at the age of puberty, or directs him to look at a black spot painted on the bottom of a bright brass pot. ... The branch of magic set apart for the recovery of stolen goods, is called *Vinyano* or *Gahno*."

(d) Burton (1855–1856:95) "The modern Sindians<sup>104</sup> know the art by the name of *Gahno* or *Vinyano*; there, as in southern Persia, ink is rubbed upon the seer's thumbnail. The people of northern Africa are considered skilful in this science, and I have a Maghrebi magic formula for inking the hand of a "boy, a black slave girl, a virgin, or a pregnant woman," which differs materially from those generally known. The modern Egyptians call it *Zarb el Mandal*, and there is scarcely a man in Cairo who does not know something about it. In selecting subjects to hold the

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<sup>102</sup> A third place, Burton's 1876 letter to *The Times* (London) was very likely not known to Borges.

<sup>103</sup> I thank Tamás Iványi and Dóra Zsom for kindly discussing with me this magic square.

<sup>104</sup> Sharīf (1972: Ch. 28 (Magical Methods)) describes this divination among Indian Muslims, and refers to both Lane and Burton among his sources: "On *Lekanomancy*, or magic by staring into a vessel filled with some fluid, see Halliday Greek Divination, 145ff; Lane M.E. [*Modern Egyptians*: 1860] i. 337ff.; Burton *Pilgrimage* (1873) i. 387f.; ERE [*Enc. of Religion and Ethics* (Ed. by J. Hastings) 10 vols. Edinburgh 1908–1918], iv. 351 ff., 807, 817."

ink, they observe the right hand, and reject all who have not what is called in palmistry the *linea media naturalis* straight and deeply cut.”<sup>105</sup>

By Lane’s request, the wizard wrote down on a piece of paper<sup>106</sup> the spoken part of the spell which contained a call for the help of Jinns, and the Quranic invocation (Q. 50:22): *fa-kašafnā ‘anka ġiṭā’aka fa-bašaruka l-yawma ḥadīdun*. Borges repeats the same supplication in his story<sup>107</sup>, which proves that his source had been Lane.

## 2.10 *The Rose of Hindustan (Indostán)*

The “rose of Hindustan” is mentioned in *La busca de Averroes (Obras Completas I, 583)*: *Farach no se dejó sobornar; observó que el docto Ibn Qutaiba describe una excelente variedad de la rosa perpetua, que se da en los jardines del Indostán y cuyos pétalos, de un rojo encarnado, presentan caracteres que dicen: No hay otro dios que el Dios, Muhámmad es el Apóstol de Dios* (“Faraj was not to be suborned by flattery; he observed that the learned ibn Qutaybah had a superb variety of the perpetual rose which grows in the gardens of Hindustan, and whose petals, of a deep crimson red, exhibit characters reading ‘There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet’”, transl. by Hurley).

Here we are only concerned with the source of this motif, and the anachronistic use by Averroes of the word *Indostán* (Hindustan) for India.<sup>108</sup>

Borges came across Ibn Qutayba’s mysterious rose in Lane<sup>109</sup>, who wrote “The rose is even a subject of miracles. It is related by Ibn-Ḳuteybeh, that there grows in India a kind of rose upon the leaves of which is inscribed, ‘There is no deity but God’”. Note that Lane used the word “India”, same way as in the original text of Ibn Qutayba (828–889) and in its translation, where we find *ra’aytu bi-bilād al-hindī šaḡaran lahu wardun aḥmaru maktūbun fīhi bi-bayāḍin Muḥammadun rasūlu Allāhi* (“I saw in India trees with red leaves on which was written in white: ‘Muhammad is the Prophet of God’, etc.”)<sup>110</sup>.

<sup>105</sup> On the same page (Burton 1855–1856:95) Burton acknowledges the priority of Lane: “In the first account of the magician, by Mr. Lane, we have a fair and dispassionate recital of certain magical, mystical, or mesmeric phenomena”.

<sup>106</sup> Reproduced in Lane 1860: 276.

<sup>107</sup> “escribí ... las siguientes palabras que están en el glorioso Qurán: ‘Hemos retirado tu velo, y la visión de tus ojos es penetrante’ (“I inscribed ... the following words from the glorious Qur’an: ‘We have removed from thee thy veil, and thy sight is piercing.’”).

<sup>108</sup> The symbolic meaning of the “perpetual rose” and the role of rose in Borges’s oeuvre are discussed in Balderston 1996; Abadi 1999; López-Baralt 2011–2013.

<sup>109</sup> Lane 1860:188, note 21 to ch. 3. Lane’s sources were “*Halbet el-Kumeyt*, [of an-Nawāḡī, 1386–1455] ch. xvii.; and [his personal copy of a MS of] Es-Suyootē’s [as-Suyūṭī, c. 1445–1505], account of the flowers of Egypt, in his history of that country.”

<sup>110</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-aḥbār* 121 (transl. Ḥuseini 1950:36).



The *Hobson-Jobson* of Yule and Burnell defines *Hindustan* (from Pers. *Hindūstān* = Persian word *Hindū* cognate with Skrt. *Sindhu* + the suffix “-stān”) as “the country of the Hindūs, India”<sup>111</sup>. In the age of Ibn Qutayba the word *Hindūstān* was not used in Arabic. Lane (1863) documents only *hind* and *hindī* from the large Arabic dictionaries: al-Ġawharī’s (d. 1002 or 1008) *Šiḥāḥ*, Ibn Sīda’s *Muḥkam*, Ibn Manẓūr’s (1233–1311) *Lisān al-‘arab* and al-Firūzābādī’s (1329–1414) *al-Qāmus al-muḥīt*.

In al-Bīrūnī’s (973–1050) *India*<sup>112</sup>, the country is always called Hind. The five apocalyptic *ḥadīṭs* on *ġazwat al- hind* in Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād’s (d. 843) *Fitan* also refer to India as Hind.<sup>113</sup>

The real Averroes never used the word Hindustan. It is one of Borges’s idiosyncrasies, who consistently referred to India with this word, as in *El acercamiento a Almotásim* (*Obras Completas* I, 415; “The approach to Al-Mu’tasim”): *la peregrinación que comprende la vasta geografía del Indostán* (“a pilgrimage that covers the vast geography of India”, di Giovanni’s transl.); in *El hombre en el umbral* (*Obras Completas* I: 612; “The man on the threshold”): *Bioy Casares trajo de Londres un curioso puñal de hoja triangular y empuñadora en forma de H; nuestro amigo Christopher Dewey, del Consejo Británico, dijo que tales armas eran de uso común en el Indostaní* (“Bioy Casares brought back a curious knife from London, with a triangular blade and an H-shaped hilt; our friend Christopher Dewey, of the British Council, said that sort of weapon was in common use in Hindustan.” Hurley’s transl.). There are further examples in Borges’s essay *Formas de una leyenda*<sup>114</sup>: “todas las religiones del Indostán y en particular el budismo, enseñan que el mundo es ilusorio”; “peregrinó a los reinos del Indostán en busca de libros sagrados”; “la cronología del Indostán es incierta”.

### 2.11 The two faces of the Qurān

Al-Ġāḥiẓ (776–868) is mentioned in two works of Borges, in the chapter *El Zaratán* (*Obras en Colaboración* 711; “The Zaratan”) of the *Seres Imaginarios*, and the *Busca* (*Obras Completas* I, 584). Zaratan (from Ar. *saraṭān* = crab<sup>115</sup>) was the giant fish (or crab, or turtle) in the legends of ancient mariners, that looked like an island. Borges found the name and description of this giant animal and references to the *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-ḥayawān*) by al-Ġāḥiẓ, in one of his frequent sources, Asín Palacios<sup>116</sup>.

<sup>111</sup> Yule and Burnell 1903: entry *Hindustan*; Wink 1991.

<sup>112</sup> al-Bīrūnī 1910.

<sup>113</sup> As e.g. the second one, *ḥadīṭ* No. 1236, Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan* I, 409.

<sup>114</sup> In: *En Otras inquisiciones*, Borges, *Obras Completas* II, 118–121; see further examples in App. #40. On Borges’s India image see Betancourt Santos 2010.

<sup>115</sup> See Lane 1863:1348.

<sup>116</sup> Asín Palacios 1919, 1926, 1930.

*“Hay un cuento que ha recorrido la geografía y las épocas: el de los navegantes que desembarcan en una isla sin nombre, que luego se abisma y los pierde, porque está viva. Figura esta invención en el primer viaje de Simbad ... Paradójicamente, una de las primeras redacciones de la leyenda la refiere para negarla. Consta en el Libro de los Animales de Al-Yahiz, zoólogo musulmán de principios del siglo IX. Miguel Asín Palacios la ha vertido al español con estas palabras: en cuanto al zaratán, jamás vi a nadie que asegurase haberlo visto con sus ojos. “(There is one story that has ranged the whole of geography and all epochs - the tale of mariners who land on an unknown island which then sinks into the sea and drowns them because it is a living creature. This invention is found in the first voyage of Sindbad ... Paradoxically, one of the first versions of the legend tells the story to show that it is not true. This is the Book of Animals by Al-Yahiz, a nineteenth-century Muslim zoologist. Miguel Asín Palacios translated it into Spanish with these words: “As for Zaratan, I have never met anyone who says he saw it with his eyes.”)*<sup>117</sup>.

Lane and Burton both included *Sindbad's First Voyage* in their respective translations of the *1001 Nights* but Lane does not mention the name of the animal, and Burton<sup>118</sup> refers to al-Qazwīnī, rather than to al-Ġāhiz: “Al-Kazwīnī’s famous treatise on the ‘Wonders of the World’ (*Ajāib al-Makhlūkāt*) tells the same tale of the ‘*Sulahfah*’ tortoise, the *colossochelys*, for which see *Night [note] dl*.”

Borges’s other reference to al-Ġāhiz is found in the *Busca (Obras Completas I, 584)*, where we read “*Otro habló de Chāhiz de Basra, que dijo que el Qurán es una sustancia que puede tomar la forma de un hombre o la de un animal, opinión que parece convenir con la de quienes le atribuyen dos caras.*” (Another spoke of Al-Jahiz of Basra, who had stated that the Qur’an is a substance that can take the form of man or animal – an opinion which appears to agree with that of the people who attribute to the Qur’an two faces).

The “two faces of the Qurān” are the *Qurān* and the *Muṣḥaf*, its oral and written versions<sup>119</sup>, and al-Ġāhiz was possibly the first who discussed this in his *Kitāb ḥuḡaḡ an-nubuwwa*<sup>120</sup>. The “human and animal faces of the Qurān” motif stems from Wherry’s<sup>121</sup> popular *Comprehensive Commentary on The Quran*<sup>122</sup> where we find: “*Opinion of al Jahidh*, chief of a sect bearing his name, [regarding] touching the Quran, is too remarkable to be omitted. ... he used to say it was a body, which might sometimes be turned into a man, and sometimes into a beast, which seems to

<sup>117</sup> Borges, *Obras Completas I*, 584.

<sup>118</sup> Burton 1900–1901: VI, fn. 8.

<sup>119</sup> Stroumsa 1985; Neuwirth 2010.

<sup>120</sup> al-Ġāhiz, *Rasā’il* III, 221–281.

<sup>121</sup> Rev. Elwood Morris Wherry (1843–1927), an American Presbyterian missionary to India between 1868–1923.

<sup>122</sup> Wherry 1882: I, Section 3, fn. 1 to pp. 112–113.

agree with the notion of those who assert the Quran to have two faces, one of a man, the other of a beast, thereby, I conceive, intimating the double interpretation it will admit of, according to the letter or the spirit.”

### 3 Discussion and concluding remarks

“*Su infelicidad, su infelicidad creadora y feliz, es lo que nos debe importar.*”<sup>123</sup> Paraphrasing a well-known literary anecdote<sup>124</sup>, we can say that Borges had a ‘love affair’ with the Arabic language. An unsatisfied love, Borges could not read Arabic, he only started in the last months of his life to take Arabic lessons from an Egyptian teacher in Geneva<sup>125</sup>. While sometimes he admitted his ignorance, “The fact that I do not know Greek and Arabic helped me to read, say, the *Odyssey* or the *Thousand and One Nights*, in many different versions”<sup>126</sup>, other times he played the role of the expert Arabist, derived etymologies, clarified the meaning of words and personal names, and even compared translations with the Arabic *Urtext* and criticized their fidelity. Some of his observations are surprisingly sharp, as e.g. when he discovers that, in Islamic culture, the *qutbs* (pl. *aqṭāb*) are analogous to the *Lamed Wufniks* (*Tzadikim*, Righteous Ones) of the Jewish tradition<sup>127</sup>. He invented an “Arabic” saying “nobody can read the *1001 Nights* to the end”<sup>128</sup>, explained that “*Zahir, en árabe, quiere decir notorio, visible*”<sup>129</sup>, and “*Almotásim ... etimológicamente quiere decir El buscador de Amparo*”<sup>130</sup>, and (in his *Foreword* to Paul Valéry’s book) referred to the Arabic name of the rooster, “*nombre árabe de gallo es padre del alba*”<sup>131</sup>. In *Las Kenningar* (*Obras Completas* I, 380) he gave

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<sup>123</sup> “It is his infidelity, his happy and creative infidelity, that must matter to us”. *Traductores* (Borges, *Obras Completas* I, 410; transl. by Esther Allen).

<sup>124</sup> In the afterword to his book “*Lolita*”, Nabokov wrote “After Olympia Press, in Paris, published the book, an American critic suggested that *Lolita* was the record of my love affair with the romantic novel. The substitution “English language” for “romantic novel” would make this elegant formula more correct.” (Nabokov 1991).

<sup>125</sup> Kodama 1986, 2004; D’Amico 1993; Kansoussi 1999; Ormsby 1999; Tornielli 2001; Jullien 2007.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Sorrentino 1974:71: “*El hecho de desconocer el griego y el árabe me permitía leer, digamos, la Odisea y Las mil y una noches, en muchas versiones distintas*”.

<sup>127</sup> *Los Lamed Wufniks*, in Borges, *Obras en Colaboración*: 655; Cowan 1976: 773.

<sup>128</sup> See App. #8. “*Los árabes dicen que nadie puede leer Las 1001 Noches hasta el fin*”: *Metáforas de las Mil y Una Noches* (poema), *Obras Completas* III, 170; *Las Mil y Una Noches*, *Obras Completas* III, 237.

<sup>129</sup> See App. #96, *El Zahir*, Borges, *Obras Completas* I, 593.

<sup>130</sup> See App. # 55, *El acarcamiento a Almotásim*, Borges, *Obras Completas* I, 417.

<sup>131</sup> See App. # 72. Paul Valéry: *El cementerio marino* (prólogo), Borges, *Obras Completas* IV, 151, footnote.

further examples, taken from the Bohemian Philosopher Fritz Mauthner<sup>132</sup>, for such “*figuras padre-hijas*” in Arabic (“*Mauthner observa que los árabes suelen derivar sus figuras de la relación padre-hijo*”), such as *padre del merodeo* = *el lobo*, *hijo del arco* = *la flecha*, *padre de los pasos* = *una montaña*. In an analysis of the French translation by Mardrus of the *1001 Nights* (*Obras Completas* I, 406–410), he blames the translator for his Gallicisms, noting that “*charming meanderings* is not Arabic, it is very distinctly French” (*desvíos encantadores no es árabe, es notoriamente francés*), and compared “three German versions by Weil, Henning, and Littmann, and the two English versions by Lane and Sir Richard Burton” with that of Mardrus (without studying the original Arabic!) to conclude that Mardrus’s text is not faithful to the “Arabic editions” (*las ediciones árabes*). His final conclusion, “It is his [Mardrus’s] infidelity, his happy and creative infidelity, that must matter to us” (*Su infelididad, su infelididad creadora y feliz, es lo que nos debe importar*<sup>133</sup>) reads as an apology for his own relation to Arabic culture.

As Ian Almond wrote in his seminal paper, “His [Borges’s] East is, to a large extent, the East of a host of European travellers and scholars—Sykes, Müller, Burton, and Renan—a mixture of the exotic and the esoteric, the scholarly and the fantastic, the orthodox and the arcane” (Almond 2004:438). However, I claim, his Orientalism is the “contemporary alternative to Orientalism” what Edward Said dreamt of when he asserted: “Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power” (Said 1994:24).

Borges’s wife, María Kodama, who took the blind writer to visit the Egyptian pyramids, recalls how happy Borges had been picking up fistfuls of sand and then sifting the grains through his fingers a few steps away. When asked what he is doing, Borges replied, “I am rearranging the Sahara.”<sup>134</sup>

I collected around hundred grains of sand, one hundred and one Arabic motifs that Borges picked up from the infinite *Book of Sand* (*El Libro del Arena*) of Arabic culture<sup>135</sup>, and then, for our enjoyment, he generously scattered them across the four volumes of his *Obras Completas*. In this study I selected and discussed twenty-three representative examples from these motifs and tried to find their most

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<sup>132</sup> On Borges’s reception of Mauthner’s *Sprachkritik* see Dapía 1993; and its review by Patricia Hart 1997.

<sup>133</sup> See also App. ## 24 and 50; *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, Borges, *Obras Completas* I, 406–410. (Transl. by Esther Allen).

<sup>134</sup> “*A unos trescientos o cuatrocientos metros de la Pirámide me incliné, tomé un puñado de arena, lo dejé caer silenciosamente un poco más lejos y dije en voz baja: Estoy modificando el Sahara...*” (Borges, *Obras Completas* III, 443; Borges and Kodama 1986).

<sup>135</sup> See their list in the Appendix. “*El Libro del Arena*” (Borges, *Obras Completas* III, 68–71) is his short story (1975).

likely sources (Chapter 2, summarized in Table 3). For most motifs, I succeeded. I do hope other *aficionados* of Borges and Arabic would continue this work and trace back the remaining motifs to their origin.

This study confirmed the conclusions of Borges research that, “Borges’s intellectual understanding of Islam had come from his own wide reading of Western Orientalists (Burton, Renan, Palacios, Margaret Smith)”<sup>136</sup>, “su propia experiencia de entrar en el orientalismo es a través de textos de Renan, Palacios y Lane.”<sup>137</sup> I found no example for the direct influence of Borges’s friend and master, the Arabist Rafael Cansinos Asséns, on Borges’s Arabic motifs. This question also calls for further studies.

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<sup>136</sup> Almond 2004:446. Margaret Smith provided Borges with Persian motifs, see Martí-nez 2012.

<sup>137</sup> See the section “La influencia de Oriente en Borges” in Ackerley 2006.

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### APPENDIX: List of Arabic Motifs in Borges's Texts<sup>138</sup>

1. A Bao A Ku: *A Bao A Ku*, OCCol: 571(1967)
2. Abubeker Abentofail, novella de: *Historia de la eternidad*, OCI: 356(1936)
3. Abdurrahmán poema de: *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 587(1949)
4. Abenjacán el Bojari: *Abenjacán el Bojari, muerto en su laberinto*, OCI: 600(1949)
5. Abensida, Mohkam de: *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 583(1949)
6. Abulcásim el Hadramí, diván de: *El poeta declara su nombradía* (poema), OCII: 228(1960)
7. La aniquilación de la rosa: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 324(1935)
8. Los árabes dicen que nadie puede leer Las 1001 Noches hasta el fin: *Metáforas de las Mil y Una Noches* (poema), CIII: 170(1977); *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 237(1980)
9. El ave Roc: *El ave Roc*, OCCol: 589(1967)
10. Averroes (su nombre): *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 582(1949)
11. Bahamut: *Bahamut*, OCCol: 590(1967)
12. Barlach: *Urkunden zur Geschichte der Zahirsage: El Zahir*, OCI: 592(1949)
13. El barquero cobre: *Talos*, OCCol: 699(1967)
14. El Burak: *Historia de la eternidad*, OCI: 361 nota (1936); *El Burak*, OC Col: 599(1967)
15. Burak de la pureza de la intención: *El Burak*, OC Col: 599(1967)
16. El Burak, según Burton: *El Burak*, OC Col: 599(1967)
17. Burak volcó una jarra de agua: *El Burak*, OC Col: 599(1967)
18. El Caballo del Mar: *El Caballo del Mar*, OCCol: 600(1967)
19. Camellos en el Elcorán: *El escritor argentino y la tradición*, OCI: 270(1932)
20. Cháhiz de Basra (Al-Yahiz): *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 584(1949); *El Zaratán*, OCCol: 711(1967)
21. Las claras monedas del hechicero: *El Zahir*, OCI: 591(1949)

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<sup>138</sup> References mentioned in the Appendix: Borges, *Obras Completas* ("OC"); Borges, *Obras en Colaboración* ("OCCol"); Borges and Giovanni, *Autobiografía*; Borges, *Craft*.

22. Confabuladores nocturni: *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 236(1980)
23. Doble de Mahoma: *De doble de Mahoma*, OCI: 345(1935)
24. Las ediciones árabes [de 1001 Noches]: *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 408(1936)
25. Elefante de Harun al-Raschid: *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 233(1980)
26. Espéjo de Solimán: *La cámara de las estatuas*, OCI: 339(1935)
27. Espejo de Tárik Benzeyad: *El Aleph*, OCI: 627(1949)
28. El espejo de tinta: *El espejo de tinta*, OCI: 342(1935)
29. Falak: *Bahamut*, OCCol: 590(1967)
30. Fastitocalon: *Fastitocalon*, OCCol: 628(1967)
31. El gato del rabino: *El Golem* (poema), OCII: 264(1958)
32. La gente del libro: *El libro*, OCIV: 168(1978),
33. Hákim de Merv: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 324(1935); *Los traductores de Las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 402 nota 1(1936)
34. Hindú: *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 236, 238(1980); *El Budismo*, OCIII: 244, 245(1980); *La poesía*, OCIII: 266(1980)
35. Historia de los jalifas por Baladhuri: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 24(1935)
36. El historiador arábigo El Isaqui: *Historia de las dos que soñaron*, OCI: 340(1935)
37. Los historiadores sarracenos: *El arte narrativo y la magia*, OCI: 231(1932)
38. El ídolo de oro de Mahoma: *Parábola de Cervantes y de Quijote* (poema), OCII: 177(1955); *No siquiera soy polvo* (poema), OCIII: 176(1977)
39. India: *Formas de una leyenda*, OCII: 119(1952); *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 234, 236, 237(1980); *El Budismo*, OCIII: 244(1980)
40. Indostán: *La supersticiosa ética del lector*, OCI: 204(1932); *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 412(1936); *El acarcamiento a Almotásim*, OCI: 415 n.1(1936); *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 583(1949); *El hombre en el umbral*, OCI: 612(1949); *De alguien a nadie*, OCII: 116(1950); *Formas de una leyenda*, OCII: 118, 119, 120, 121(1952); *Ariosto y los árabes* (poema), OCII: 215(1960); *El libro de arena*, OCIII: 69(1975); *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 237(1980); *El Simurgh y el águila*, OCIII: 365(1982); *El Tiempo*, OCIV: 204(1978); *Los Nagas*, OCCol: 671(1967); *Los Pigmeos*, OCCol: 671(1967); *Los tigres de Annam*, OCCol: 701(1967); *El Unicornio*, OCCol: 703(1967)
41. Infinidad de Las 1001 Noches: *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 412(1936); *Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción*, OCIV: 434(1939); *El 885jardin de senderos que se bifurcan*, OCI: 477(1944); *Magias parciales del Quijote*, OCII: 46-47(1952); *Metáforas de las Mil y Una Noches* (poema), OCIII: 170(1977); *Las Mil y Una Noches*, OCIII: 234, 237(1980); *A poet's creed*, Craft: 101-102(1967-68)
42. Karkadán (rinoceronte): *El Unicornio*, OCCol: 703(1967)
43. Los Kutb (quṭb): *Los Lamed Wufniks*, OCCol: 655(1967)

44. Kuyata: *Kuyata*, OCCol: 654(1967)
45. La madre del Libro: *Una vindicación e la Cábala*, OCI: 209, 211(1932); *El escritor argentino y la tradición*, OCI: 270(1932); *La Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 584(1949); *Del culto de los libros*, OCII: 92, 93(1951); *La cabala*, OCIII: 268(1980); *La larga busca* (poema), OCIII:486(1985); *El libro*, OCIV: 167(1978); *H.G. Wells contra Mahoma*, OCIV: 409(1938); *The riddle of poetry*, Craft: 9(1967-1968)
46. La mano del Señor: *El Burak*, OCCol: 599(1967)
47. La mano derecha del proféta Hákim: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 328(1935)
48. Manual del gigante o Libro de la precisión y la revision: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 324(1935)
49. El manuscrito [de la *Rosa oscura*] encontrado en 1899: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 324(1935)
50. Mardrus, el original de las diez lineas de: *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 408(1936)
51. Un místico murciano: *El Burak*, OCCol: 599(1967)
52. Al-Moqanna (El Velado): *El Zahir*, OCI: 594 nota (1949)
53. Almotanabí, poema de: *Los traductores de Las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 403(1935)
54. Almotásim, divan de: *Cuarteta* (poema), OCII: 226(1960)
55. Almotásim, etimológicamente: *El acarcamiento a Almotásim*, QCI: 417 nota 1(1936)
56. Las 1001 noches: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 325(1935); *Historia de la eternidad*, OCI: 358 nota (1936); *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, OCI: 439(1941); *El Sur*, OCI: 524, 526,528(1944); *Ariosto y los árabes* (poema), OCII: 216(1960); *Otro poema de los dones* (poema), OCII: 314(1964); *El informe de Brodie*, OCII: 449(1970); *On his blindness* (poema), OCII: 475(1972); *El libro de arena*, OCIII: 70(1975); *Metáforas de las Mil y Una Noches* (poema), OCIII: 169(1977); *La Divina Commedia*, OCIII: 211, 218(1980); *Las mil y una noches*, OCIII: 232- 241(1980); *Nueve ensayos Dantescos* (Prólogo), OCIII: 341(1982); *Las hojas del ciprés* (poema), OCIII: 481(1985); *Miguel de Cervantes: Novelas ejemplares*, OCIV: 45(1946); *Lewis Carroll: Obras Completas*, OCIV: 102(1976); *A Bao A Ku*, OCCol: 571(1967); *El caballo del mar*; OCCol: 600 (1967); *El unicornio*, OCCol: 703(1967); *Autobiografía*, Autobiografía: 57, 9(1970); *The Telling of the Tale*, Craft: 46, 51(1967-68); *Thought and Poetry*, Craft: 82(1967-68); *A poet's creed*, Craft: 98, 101(1967-68)
57. 1001, noche 3: *Miguel de Cervantes Novelas Ejemplares*, OCIV: 45(1946)
58. 1001, noche 146: *Arte de injuriar*, OCI: 419(1936)
59. 1001, noche 172: *La cámara de las estatuas*, OCI: 339(1935)
60. 1001, noche 272: *El Aleph*, OCI: 627(1949)
61. 1001, noche 351: *Historia de las dos que soñaron*, OCI: 340(1935)

62. 1001, noche 496: *Bahamut*, QCCol: 590(1967)
63. 1001, noches 566- 578: *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 407(1936)
64. 1001, noche 743: *Las kenningar*, QCI: 379(1933)
65. 1001, primer volumen de Lane (1839): *El Nesnás*, OCCol: 672(1967)
66. 1001, versión de Burton: *A Bao A Ku*, QCCol: 571(1967)
67. 1001, el décimo tomo de Burton: *El acarcamiento a Almotásim*, QCI: 418 nota 1(1936)
68. Name of the 1001 book: *The metaphor*, Craft: 36(1967-68); *Word-music and translation*, Craft: 67(1967-68)
69. Narradores de cuentos en El Cairo: *Las Mil y una Noches*, OCIII: 237(1980)
70. El Nesnás: *El Nesnás*, OCCol: 672(1967)
71. La Noche de las Noches: *Los traductores de las 1001 Noches*, OCI: 405(1936); *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, OCI: 439(1944)
72. Nombre árabe de gallo: Paul Valéry: *El cementerio marino* (prólogo), OCIV: 151 nota (1932)
73. No se había derramado una sola gota: *El Burak*, OCCol: 599(1967)
74. Padre-hijo figuras: *Las kenningar*, QCI: 380(1933)
75. El término “perro”: *Arte de injuriar*, OCI: 419(1936)
76. Un poema de Moore: *El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv*, OCI: 324(1935)
77. Qurán 2. 261: *El milagro secreto*, OCI: 508(1944)
78. Qurán 17. 1: *El Burak*, OCCol 599, 1967
79. Qurán 29. 40: *Abenjacán el Bojari, muerto en su laberinto*, OCI: 600(1949)
80. Qurán 71. 23: *El Zahir*, OCI: 594 nota (1949)
81. Qurán [22. 5] “[el hombre sea generado] por unas gotas de agua vil”: *Las kenningar*, OCI: 380(1933)
82. Quran, dos caras de: *La Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 584(1949)
83. Religiones anteislámicas: *El Aleph*, OCI: 627(1949)
84. La rosa perpetua: *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 583(1949)
85. Sale, el discurso preliminar del Alkoran de: *El verdugo piedoso*, OCIII: 357(1982)
86. Simbad , el primer viaje: *El Zaratán*, OCCol: 711(1967)
87. Simbad, el segundo viaje: *El unicornio*, OCCol: 703(1967)
88. Simbad, las etapas de Simbad: *Parabola de Cervantes y de Quijote*, OCII: 177(1960)
89. Templo sagrado de la Meca: *El Burak*, OCCol: 599(1967)
90. Toro y buffalo: *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 588(1949)
91. Tesoros en una pirámide: *La cámara de las estatuas*, OCI: 339(1935); *El suicida* (poema), OCIII: 86(1975)
92. Vendedores [de flores] en El Cairo: *Las kenningar*, QCI: 380(1933)
93. Yaqub Almansur: *Cuarteta* (poema), OCII: 226(1960)
94. Yaúq (idolo en la edad de la Ignorancia): *El Zahir*, OCI: 594 nota (1949)



95. Los Yinn: *Los Yinn*, OCCol: 709(1967)  
 96. Zahir en árabe: *El Zahir*, OCI: 593(1949)  
 97. Zaratán: *El Zaratán*, OCCol: 711(1967)  
 98. Zarathustra según Al-Tabari: *El Asno de Tres patas*, OCCol: 586(1967)  
 99. Zéjel (*zağal*) *El poeta declara su nombradía* (poema), OCII: 228(1960)  
 100. Zuhair, mohalaca de: *Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 586(1949)  
 101. Zul Qarnain :*Busca de Averroes*, OCI: 585(1949); *El Aleph*, OCI: 627(1949)

## TABLES

Table 1. Narremes in the *Burāq*

Narreme	Spanish	English (transl. by de Giovanni)
Q. 17:1	<p><i>El primer versículo del capítulo diecisiete del Alcorán consta de estas palabras:</i></p> <p><i>“Alabado sea El que hizo viajar, durante la noche, a su siervo desde el templo sagrado hasta el templo que está más lejos, cuyo recinto hemos bendecido, para hacerle ver nuestros signos”</i></p>	<p>In George Sale's translation (1734), the opening verse of Chapter XVII of the Koran consists of these words:</p> <p>“Praise be unto him, who transported his servant by night, from the sacred temple of Mecca to his farther temple of Jerusalem, the circuit of which we have blessed, that we might show him some of our signs....”</p>
The Prophet's Night Journey	<p><i>Los comentadores declaran que el alabado es Dios, que el siervo es Mahoma, que el templo sagrado es el de La Meca, que el templo distante es el de Jerusalén y que, desde Jerusalén, el Profeta fue transportado al séptimo cielo.</i></p>	<p>Commentators say that the one praised is God, that his servant is Muḥammad, that the sacred temple is that of Mecca, that the distant temple is that of Jerusalem, and that from Jerusalem the Prophet was transported to the seventh heaven.</p>

al-Burāq's description by Burton	<p><i>En las versiones más antiguas de la leyenda, Mahoma es guiado por un hombre o un ángel; en las de fecha posterior, se recurre a una cabalgadura celeste, mayor que un asno y menor que una mula. Esta cabalgadura es Burak, cuyo nombre quiere decir "resplandeciente".</i></p> <p><i>Según Burton, los musulmanes de la India suelen representarlo con cara de hombre, orejas de asno, cuerpo de caballo y alas y cola de pavo real.</i></p>	<p>In the oldest versions of the legend, Muhammad is guided by a man or an angel; in those of a later date he is furnished with a heavenly steed, larger than an ass and smaller than a mule. This steed is Burak, whose name means "shining."</p> <p>According to Richard Burton, the translator of <i>The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night</i>, Moslems in India usually picture Burak with a man's face, the ears of an ass, a horse's body, and the wings and tail of peacock.</p>
al-Burāq tipped a jug of water	<i>Una de las tradiciones islámicas refiere que, al dejar la tierra, volcó una jarra llena de agua.</i>	One of the Islamic legends tells that Burak, on leaving the ground, tipped a jar of water
Cold hand of God	<i>El Profeta fue arrebatado hasta el séptimo cielo y conversó en cada uno con los patriarcas y ángeles que lo habitaban y atravesó la Unidad y sintió un frío que le heló el corazón cuando la mano del Señor le dio una palmada en el hombro.</i>	The Prophet was taken up to the heavens with the patriarchs and angels living there, and he crossed the Unity and felt a coldness that chilled his heart when the Lord laid a hand on his shoulder.
No drop spilled from the jug	<i>El tiempo de los hombres no es conmensurable con el de Dios; a su regreso, el Profeta levantó la jarra de la que aún no se había derramado una sola gota</i>	Man's time is not commensurate with God's time; on his return the Prophet raised the jar, out of which not a single drop had yet been spilled.
The mystic from Murcia	<i>Miguel Asín Palacios habla de un místico murciano del siglo XIII, que en una alegoría que se titula Libro del nocturno viaje hacia la Majestad del más Generoso ha simbolizado en Burak el amor divino. En otro texto se refiere al BURAK "Burak de la pureza de la intención".</i>	M. Asín Palacios, the twentieth-century Spanish Orientalist, speaks of a mystic from Murcia of the 1200s who, in an allegory entitled the <i>Book of the Night Journey to the Majesty of the All-Generous</i> , has seen in Burak, a symbol of divine love. In another text he speaks of the 'Burak of the pureness of heart'.

Table 2. Inclusion of the Tale "King's Son and the Ifrit's Mistress" in subsequent text editions and translations of the 1001 Nights<sup>139</sup>

Arabic text or Translation	Language	Editor/Publisher/Translator	Year	Contained or not
Text	Arabic	aš-Širwānī (Calcutta)	1814	NOT
Text	Arabic	Habicht (Breslau)	1825–43	YES
Text	Arabic	Būlāq (Cairo)	1835	YES
Text	Arabic	MacNaghten (Calcutta)	1839–42	YES
Translation	French	Galland	1704–17	NOT
Translation	French	Perceval	1806	NOT
Translation	French	Gautier	1842	NOT
Translation	English	Scott	1800–11	YES
Translation	German	Hammer-Purgstall	1825	NOT
Translation	German	Zinserling	1823	NOT
Translation	English	Lamb	1826	NOT
Translation	French	Trébutien	1828	NOT
Translation	English	Lane	1840	Only its title and explanatory note
Translation	German	Habicht	1825–43	YES
Translation	German	Weil	1839–42	NOT
Translation	English	Torrens	1838	NOT
Translation	English	Payne	1882–84	YES
Translation	English	Burton	1900–1	YES

<sup>139</sup> After Kirby 1901b. Contributions to the Bibliography of the Thousand and one Nights, and Their Imitations, with a Table Showing the Contents of the principal editions and Translations of the Nights. Appendix II of Burton, *1001 Nights* X, 465–531.

Table 3. Most likely sources of the discussed Arabic motifs in Borges's works

<b>Motif</b>	<b>Occurrence in Borges</b>	<b>Most likely source(s) used by Borges</b>
Averroes's <i>nasab</i>	<i>Busca</i>	Renan Averroès
Bahamut	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> V, 324–325; Lane <i>Arabian Society</i>
Bull and buffalo	<i>Busca</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> X, 130–131
Burāq's description	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> fn. 435 to the 457th Night
Burāq tipped a jug of water	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Playful addition of Borges
Camels in the Koran	<i>Escritor argentino</i>	Gibbon <i>Decline and Fall</i> V, Ch.: Part I
Cold hand of God	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Gibbon <i>Decline and Fall</i> ; Asín Palacios <i>La escatologia Musulmana</i> 28
Copyist's error	<i>El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> VI, 199, Night 602, "King's Son and the Ifrit's Mistress"; Lane <i>Arabian Nights</i> III, 145 fn. 51
Falak	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> V, 325.
Hindustan (for "India")	<i>Busca</i> ; <i>El acercamiento a Almotásim</i> ; <i>El hombre en el umbral</i> ; <i>Formas de una leyenda</i>	Borges's idiosyncrasy
Iskander <u>Du</u> al-Karnayan	<i>Busca</i> ; <i>El Aleph</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> V, 464th night
Iskander's mirror	<i>El Aleph</i>	Source unknown
al-Ġāhiz of Basra	<i>Busca</i> ; "El Zaratán" ( <i>Seres Imaginarios</i> )	Asín Palacios <i>La escatologia Musulmana</i> ; Asín Palacios, <i>Islam and the Divine Comedy</i> : 406
Kuğata	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Lane <i>Arabian Society</i> 107
Mirror of Ink	<i>El espejo de tinta</i>	Lane, <i>Manners and Customs</i> 274; Burton, <i>Sindh</i> 180 and note; Burton, <i>Pilgrimage</i> 95

Mystic from Murcia	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Asín Palacios <i>La escatologia musulmana</i> 62, main text and fn.1; Asín Palacios <i>Islam cristianizado</i>
No drop spilled from the jug	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Burton <i>1001 Nights</i> , Suppl. Nights VI, 505-537
Perpetual Rose	<i>Busca</i>	Lane <i>Arabian Society</i> (note 21 to Ch. 3)
Poem of 'Abd ar-Raḥmān	<i>Busca</i>	Source unknown
Poem of al-Mutanabbī	<i>Los traductores de las 1001 noches</i>	Burton, <i>Pilgrimage</i> II, Ch. 25
Poem of Zuhayr	<i>Busca</i>	Lyall, <i>Ancient Arabian Poetry</i>
Two faces of the Koran	<i>Busca</i>	Wherry, <i>Commentary on the Quran</i> I, 112–113
Zaratān	<i>Seres Imaginarios</i>	Asín Palacios <i>La escatologia Musulmana</i> ; Asín Palacios, <i>Islam and the Divine Comedy</i> : 406.