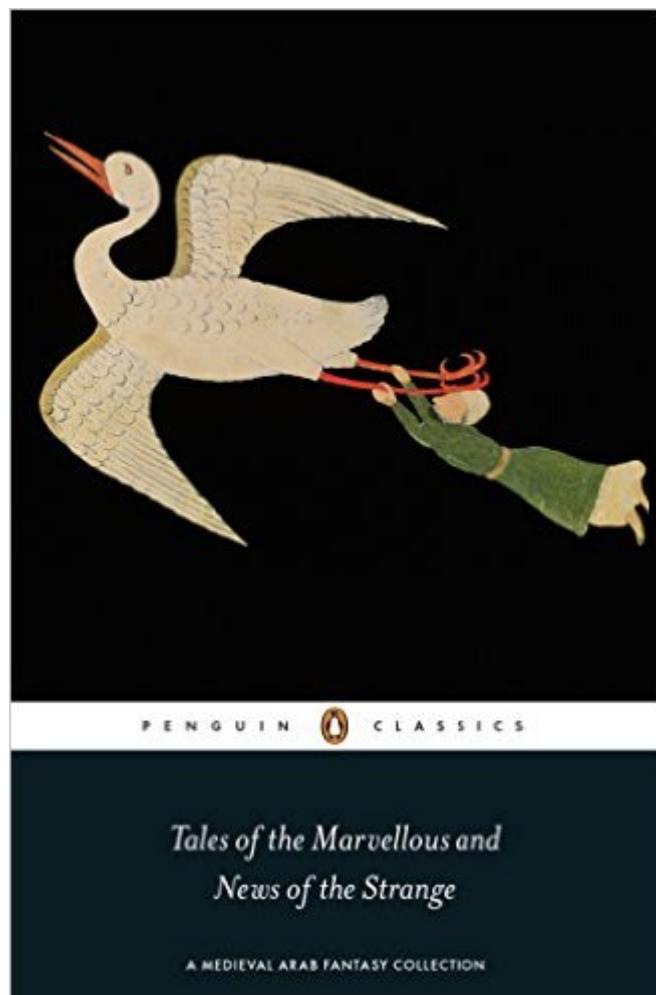


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Tales Of The Marvellous And News



Synopsis

On the shrouded corpse hung a tablet of green topaz with the inscription: 'I am Shaddad the Great. I conquered a thousand cities; a thousand white elephants were collected for me; I lived for a thousand years and my kingdom covered both east and west, but when death came to me nothing of all that I had gathered was of any avail. You who see me take heed: for Time is not to be trusted.' Dating from at least a millennium ago, these are the earliest known Arabic short stories, surviving in a single, ragged manuscript in a library in Istanbul. Some found their way into *The Arabian Nights* but most have never been read in English before. *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange* has monsters, lost princes, jewels beyond price, a princess turned into a gazelle, sword-wielding statues and shocking reversals of fortune.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This manuscript ended up in Istanbul, and it somehow avoided being translated until now. It is a first draft of several stories: some of these are now in '1001 Nights', and some aren't. (I bought it on in February when it was announced, but didn't deliver it until March... so, *that* was annoying. I have waited 'til June to post this review. Also the capsule here is giving top billing to the cover graphic-designer Coralie Bickford-Smith. Her artwork is indeed good - as you can see - but the work of translation was Malcolm Lyons. Lyons deserves credit as primary author, with CBS and Robert Irwin in second place. My bad experience with itself will, in sha llah, not impinge upon this review of the text.) The prose is breathless ("this happened and they saw that and then that happened and ..."); somewhat like that Gospel kata Markon. There is little character-development, and plots are

almost always resolved by *dei ex machina*. The story of "Julnar of the Sea" has the problem that the narrative goes through several main characters - so I start thinking that I'm going to read about Shahriyar and Julnar, and next I'm reading about their son Badr. Have y'all read Aristotle's "Poetics"? Well... few of the authors *here* have read it. So I suspect that what we have here are capsule-summaries of the *real* text, which real text the storytellers would deliver in the souk. Also the manuscript, it seems, has suffered on its way to the translator. I am told that the first story, ""The King of the Two Rivers", is pretty well cut up and broken; so it doesn't now make much sense. Elsewhere every now and again we run across "Lac." for "Lacuna".

Here comes another set of tales originating from the desert sands of the Middle East. Written along the lines of 1001 Arabian Nights, comes a collection of 18 tales found in Istanbul. The stories were written in Arabic and may have been written before the Arabian Nights collection. The stories themselves were incomplete in certain cases. Prior to launching into the tales the author or translator gives a little bit of a painfully long scholarly dissertation that analyzes the stories you will read. The author/ translator notes that women are portrayed in a rather cunning trickster like manner. The Jews and Christians while having their religion as praised as decent are themselves written about in both positive and negative characteristics. Several of the stories feature Harun Hrashid, looking for a tale in Baghdad. He does drink and go about on his river boat in the Tigris and Euphrates River. Some of the tales feature beggars both as victims and con men. Jinn feature largely in this set of tales as do travels by ship to islands on the Indian Ocean. Some of the tales take their travelers all the way to far out places like China and India. The first story talks about two kingdoms owned by the same king. His son travels to the second kingdom and finds himself imprisoned wrongly by the vizier. The vizier gets his just deserts when the prince is free. The second tale is about the son of a quadi who parties away his inheritance and has to sell his beloved slave girl to survive. Later he wants her back and goes through all manner of adventure to retrieve her. The third tale tell the plight of six unfortunate beggars and how the sultan redeems them for telling a tale. The strange stories go on and on.

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