

The Tale of the Potter: A Potter, a Jinni and the Queen of Sheba

At the point where the Sindh Darya breaks through the last of the mountain ranges, in the land of Yaghestan, in a small gao by a forest, there lived a kuza-gar named Sha'ir. He did not fire pots in the presence of a wife, since he had none, but rather in the good company of his single possession, a goat, whom he had called Shirin. It may seem odd firstly that this animal should be named at all, partly because it was not the custom in those parts, in those days, to bestow names upon beasts, since every name connotes meaning and of this the animal would be unable to grasp, neither concept nor resonance, and also because the goat in question – Shirin – was in fact male.

The Story of the Naming of the Goat (an excerpt from the displaced kitaabain of the Scotichronicon, Volume III 1)

The manner by which Sha'ir's goat came into his possession lies largely beyond the parameters of this impersonal text. To explore it here, would be speculation, supposition, rumour and very probably, an exercise in, a treatise on, a monograph of, at the very least, dissimulation, and, more likely, out-and-out mendacity. So permit me, Sha'ir that I yearn to be, to relate this tale myself. And who better? I have a long and dubious history of patronage by assorted courts, from Kush to Kasperia, via those of various Counts Casimir of the lands of the plains, forests, rivers and hog-houses that cluster around the blue river of Donna the Great. Karlsbad and Astarabad and most points in between have been my versifying grounds, my palimpsests, as it were, and so I deem myself more than capable of telling my own story. Here goes:

Suffice to say that one day while the pottery-maker was out digging in the seam of earth which in those regions at a certain altitude is known to yield the best clay for the cutting, moulding and firing of surahis, jaams and so on, he was accosted by a large, one-toothed djinn. Now, as is known to those who know, djinns commonly take many forms, or, to be more precise, the form of any individual djinn may alter an infinite number of times in any one day. In this manner, through shifting structures, do these beings of fire and light become capable of living for five hundred years or more ². On this morning, the djinn had assumed the appearance of an old woman. Allow me to break into song.

Now let us praise the Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven
The might of the Creator and the thought of her mind!
Listen well, in mountain or dell, for the music of the tolling bell!

The pottery-maker was cutting clay for his pots
When out of the tree came an ancient crone
With tresses heavy with dirt, a body
Short of breath and with sweat beaded across the wrinkles of her brow
She was bent double with a large sack
The potter was a man full of heart
And so he beckoned the woman to sit upon a log nearby
And watch as he cut the earth from itself
She relinquished the sack and sat down
The potter offered her some water and a piece of the flatbread which he had
brought with him

She quickly finished both bread and water
Yet still, her eyes were moist with hunger,
He could see that she had not eaten for weeks
Perhaps she had not drunk anything save the clear waters of mountain streams,
The potter was a kind man, with a soft liver
Indeed, more than once his kindness had drawn him into trouble
It is no lie that those with stone souls pass this life in great ease,
While the Friends, the minstrels of love, for three score years and ten
Dwell in countless agonies

So he offered her more bread and water
And greedily, she drank and ate and drank and ate
Until there was nothing left for the potter
He would go hungry today!
The greedy old woman was not concerned with this
And farted and belched her way through the morning
Paadh, paadh, hey!

Now, as he worked with the spade,
The potter was aware of her gaze upon his back
And his skin began to feel warm
As though with her eyes she was burning him
Down to the bone
And yet he felt unable to leave
Unable, even, to stop working away at the softening earth
It were as though she had him fixed in her stare
As the day was growing hotter
The sun began to burn the air

Without turning around, he spoke to the old woman:
“You are a djinn”, he said, “I think”
She replied: “I am a djinni, good potter”
“Ah, djinni” he said, “I was kind to you.
I gave you water and a chunk of my hard-won flatbread,
Yet now you repay me by burning my back”
The old djinni shrugged her shoulders
“It is the way. We cannot alter the quality of our natures
They are fixed in stone, even though into this world
We are brought forth through fire
And like the lick of a flame,
We cannot shift the quality of our desire

And the potter saw that the djinni’s tresses
Reached to the ground and curled around themselves
As petals, around the flower,
“You have a smooth tongue and a big belly,” said the potter
“It is my smooth tongue that has saved me, many a time,
And my big belly that has sustained me
Through thick and thin, through war and peace and love and hate”

“How do you mean?” asked the potter,
Who by now was feeling quite light-headed
“I have a tale to tell,” began the djinni
“I will sing my tale, and when I have finished,
You will have fashioned a surahi for me,
Or else you will have been consumed by the flame of my tail!”

“But I need to cut more clay!” the potter protested
“You are doing well, already,” she replied.
“But what about my wife?” he pleaded.
“If you fail in this task, I will take up your form
And will lie with your wife,
And she will know no different
Except for one thing”
“What is that?” asked the poor potter.
“Her children will be born with flames coming from their mouths
And tails from their backs”
The potter shuddered, in spite of the heat,
And he quickened the rate of his cutting
As the djinni began to relate her story
Of love, blood, loss and glory

“Once, many years ago,
I was a beautiful maiden
At the court of the Old Kings of Nubia
I was the daughter of the Grand Vizier
And my name was Tahiyah Nawbiyah
My hair was long and black like the waves of the night ocean,
My eyes glistened like new stars being born from the deepest shubb
And my lips were watermelons
I was six feet tall, and when I walked, the breeze followed me,
So that the sand swirled up around my body like robes, like clouds
Many men desired me, and many women, too,
For there was none like me

One day, there arrived at the court, a minstrel named Sol”
“Sol?” the potter broke in.
“Do not interrupt!” the djinni ordered,
And the potter felt the heat at his back grow more intense
“This minstrel had a face whose beauty matched mine,
And a pair of hands that played the ‘ud more skilfully than a farishta
We fell in love at second sight
But I was the daughter of a court minister, and he, a mere travelling musician
There was no possibility of a match,
Not in this world
Yet we loved each other as none had loved before,
Save one, perhaps

We used to meet in a garden of diamonds
Where anguria and moon-lemons grew, and in which four gleaming

Pishon, Gihon, Idigna and Buranun,
 Had their birth and their end
 And Sol would play to me and sing,
 And I would close my eyes
 And his voice and the voice of the oud
 Would dance and twine around each other like the slender stems of vines,
 And then I would rise,
 And I would begin to dance the steps without rules
 The weaving, bending, turning eightfold steps of the spiders”

Before he could stop himself, the potter again had broken in:
 “This sounds familiar, somehow”
 The djinni held up her right hand,
 Yet the potter did not heed her warning
 “Yes, I recall seeing just such a dance once in the land of the sun,
 The tricorn land that lies in the sea at the centre of the world
 I saw it in my dreams, once”
 The djinni moved the tips of her long fingers
 And the potter saw the robe around his left arm
 Go up in flames
 Panicking, he leapt up and threw sand onto the fire,
 Then he fell to the ground and rolled around in the clay
 At last, the flames were extinguished,
 But only when the djinni’s palm had returned to her lap,
 Leaving imprints of her fingers
 Like silent, burning notes in the clear mountain air

It was now almost noon
 And the sun burned down on the potter’s head
 As he pondered on the pass to which he had come
 Until his pate felt almost as hot over his brain
 As had the fire, against his arm
 What have I done, O God, to deserve this? the potter thought
 As he got himself up again and resumed digging
 “You have done nothing,” the djinni replied,
 As though she had read his thoughts
 As though his mind was a book,
 Each dream, a page smoothed over an oak lectern
 And she resumed her tale of truth and lies

“This minstrel was so skilful, he could cause the very rocks and stones to sing
 And the wheels of chariots to whirl over the ground
 More than once, he had been used by kings and priests
 To help wage their wars
 He had composed verses which the soldiers had carried
 In bone ostrakons
 Deep into battle
 And which they had recited,
 And at the end, when the war had been won,

And the piles of the dead and the dying
Had raised a chorus to the sky,
A deep, Muscovy bass,
A howling cacophony of broken spears
Dead trumpets and punctured drumskins
Told the tale, in hard calligraphies,
Of the sufi who became a swineherd
And fell in love with a Byzantine girl
And of the Madressah Boys who left that place
Cast away their books
And followed the qallash to the place of the chains
Where the rascal danced to the ends of the days
To the rhythm of the melody banged out
By the hooves of magical goats

A hundred years on,
In Murcia, Xanadu and Constantinople
The bones of these lovers of the songs
Were used to build
Temples, mosques and cathedrals
Their faces, caught in mosaic flecks of gold
In the endless chime of the bell
In the inhalations of dead choirs
In the motes of light that streamed through the hot-blown windows
Like spheres caught in the aspic of the heavens
This was the man with whom I ran away
That deep, velvet night when the moon closed both lids
To allow us safe passage to the Sea of Hazrat Musa
To the selfsame place where the ocean, having once parted
Its praying hands, now
Held back its swell,
Even they, red waters, were reluctant to drown two sweet lovers
Or perhaps they, too were bewitched by his song
By the laced maqam of his 'ud

And so we crossed into the land of Suleiman's Queen
Where all at once, we were surrounded
By strange companions:
soldiers without swords
sufis without robes
poets without verses
slaves without masters
whores without takers
jugglers without balls
the living without the dead

They took us on palanquins to the palace of the Sultana
And it was there I discovered that my companion,
my friend, my lover
Was none other than Hazrat Suleiman, himself

And that he had heard of a djinni
Living in the Land of the Habesistan
Whose beauty had no match
And so he had adopted the disguise
Of a minstrel, in order to win my affections and enslave me
For any djinn who is seduced by, and couples with, a human 4
Becomes that person's slave till their dying day
And alone among men, Hazrat Suleiman,
As even you, humble potter, must surely know,
By means of the six points of nothingness
Of the Khatem Sulayman
Commanded vast fleets of djinns
And the forty abdals
And was Lieutenant of the eighteen thousand worlds
And as the Beautiful One had commanded the women of Old Egypt,
So he was the seducer of Bilqis, the Sultana of Saba

I had touched him many times,
Yet had felt nothing of his true substance
And so I had become his concubine
His favoured courtesan
His woman of separations who turned
A single second
Shubb Leila ul-Qadr
Into a thousand-and-one nights
I was the fourth daughter of four daughters
You see, my father was the son of a king
But my mother, she was a djinn
Who was descended from the tribe of Al 'Atik,
Whose lineage goes back to Hazrat Nuh
And whose blood is of the ocean that flows
From azal to abad,
From before to after.”

By the asr prayer of late afternoon, the potter had cut enough
Of the pure clay that smelt of white honey
To bake a surahi, the size of a woman
He turned to the djinni, and said
“Now, Good Djinni, Princess of the honourable land of Habesha,
Great Tree-Dweller who hath touched 'pon the face
O th'Immortal One,
I must fire the clay, or it will remain formless,
A soft clod of earth, merely”
She nodded. “Fire it then!”
“Like niyaz into namaz, make it harden”
Exasperated, he held out his arms
“But I have no kiln, and on this mountainside, there is no oven”
“Then you shall make one, she commanded.”

The potter's heart sank

He felt that he was doomed for sure
He knew that it had been a mistake to cut clay so close to a tree
But he had no alternative, but to obey, and so he began
To gather together sticks and stones
And to fashion a tandoor of sorts
When he had finished, he turned to the djinni,
Who, he saw, was smoking a small water-pipe
“O Djinni, you, who can make fire from a bow
And dance in light across the mountain peaks
Pray help me now”

Smoke rose around her tresses,
Which the potter saw were no longer white, but sable black and curlicued,
And in the gentle breeze,
They moved like the rolling spines of the night ocean
In amongst the smoke, he could hardly make out her face
She shook her head, slowly
And so, with a terrible weariness in his bones, like the first man
The potter set about making fire
He found a translucent stone,
And he used the stone to direct the sun’s rays
Onto the twigs and dry leaves that he had gathered at the base of the kiln
He had done this, many times in the past
For food or warmth
But on this day, as is the way, everything was difficult

At length, the potter grew frustrated
“You are torturing me without reason!” he shouted
“I cannot exceed Khudaa in this,” she replied, and smiled
And the potter saw that all her teeth were of brightest silver
He wagged his finger at her, for at last, his anger had conquered his
fear

“You should remember, O curly-headed djinni,
That come the Day of the Snowfall,
The time of the torn pages of this life
God will judge djinns and men, alike!”
So saying, he raised his arm and threw down the stone
It hit the rock in amongst the twigs
The rock sparked and the twigs burst into flame.
The djinni’s voice came from somewhere within the white cloud
“Fire the clay, potter. I will have my surahi. I will live forever!”
Her voice seemed to have acquired a different quality from before
It was less hoarse, less like the drone of an old crone
And more like the instrument of a Nubian princess.

The potter did as he was commanded
And at last, as the sun was about to dip
Below the jagged blade of the mountain-tops,
The surahi was ready.
It was unglazed, yet in the clarity of the moonlight

It shone like the skin of a pool
In Tashkent or Taxila or Dimashq
Yet it was white-hot:
To have touched it would have been to have burned to death
To have broken the rule

Slowly, gathering up her long tresses,
The djinni rose to her feet
“The Night is the science of disclosure,” she said, “study it well,”
She was wearing a long, green robe that touched the ground
And her face, now revealed to the potter,
Was like the face of the night
And her name was Leila, Lilith
“Before he died, Hazrat Suleiman imprisoned me in a jar
He could not bear the thought of another man
Touching me, or playing the music of my soul
The djinni had stopped smoking the water-pipe
And now walked towards the potter
She was seven feet tall and behind her head,
Her hair billowed like the flames of a black sun
Trembling, he stepped backwards
And tripped over his own kiln
He landed heavily, on his left arm
He heard a crack, and felt a searing pain in his wrist

She smiled, reached into the fire
And picked up the surahi.
She lowered her hand into its opening
And bit-by-bit,
She pulled out its insides,
Until it was a jaam of opposites
Then she began to grow slimmer and slimmer, until
She was as thin as a scroll of Chinese paper
So that through her robe, the potter could see, in the stars,
The elegant, perfect form of her spirit
And her body trembled like a date-palm in the breeze
And as the breeze blew hot, quite suddenly
She leapt, head-first, into the surahi

The potter lay where he had tumbled
Until darkness had fallen
Over the trees, the sky, the sides of the mountain
Then, slowly, he arose,
And touched the sides of the jar
The porcelain had grown cool, and felt smooth beneath his fingers
He was surprised that his wrist was no longer painful
It was as though the whole thing had been a dream
Or a tune which had ended
In mid-song
And yet, here, in his palm, was the surahi

As solid as earth, stone, jeem, seen, sheen.

He held it up, examined it closely and saw
Across its glazed surface, there hovered an ornament of music
A ruba'i
Four lines of writing
Penned in a language
The potter did not know
Then he noticed that there were neither stars
Nor moon
Nor even fireflies
There was no light at all
And he was no longer breathing.”

So what had happened? asked the goat.
Who are you? asked the Sha'ir.
I am the listener, the reader, the thinker, replied the goat.
Well, the Sha'ir resumed his tale, perhaps what had happened was this:

The djinni had turned the world inside-out, so now the world of the potter was inside the jar, while the djinni had escaped and was free to roam around the universe. Either that, or the world of the mountain ridges and rivers and skies and smiling goats - the world that we think we know - is and always has been merely the world of the jar. It is we, and not the Queen of the Djinnns, who are forever imprisoned. Our lives, our loves, are merely the virtuoso performances of intelligent mosquitoes. Our travails, the scrambling of clever lizards on their way to the earthen clod.

Such a thought is fantastical, even for a poet, said the goat.
Perhaps, then, the Poet replied, I should conclude the story with these words:

At the fall of night, a letter fell from the heavens...

Or else:

Ah, but as the thin djinn had slipped into the jar,
She had left behind a single finger
And on the finger, was an emerald ring
And from the ring, there came music, a song

Or else:

At the end that was beyond the end,
There came naught but the Destroyer of delights and the Severer of societies

You see, the way the tale goes, depends upon which court I am in, and in which company.

And the goat riposted:

But what really happened, you see, was this. The djinni was free, with that I agree, and she wandered around the world in the form of the potter, who had been imprisoned in the surahi. She had learned many things from her Master, the Old Man of the Tacht, the

Son of Daoud. She had learned the languages of men and animals, and the quite different tongues of women, musicians and dreamers. And she had learned how to play the 'ud. The djinni was able to bewitch, to destroy, to spin magical interludes, simply by picking up her feather plectrum and her Aleppan oud and striking one against the other, as, so often, she had struck the flint of one world against the bone of the next. And through the 'ud, this Queen of Djinnis had learned to sing most beautifully.

Like Lata Mangeshkar? the Sha'ir asked.

No, more beautifully than that. Better, even, than Zohrabai Ambalawali.

More powerful even than Gauhar Jaan, the muscle dancer of Calcutta, the Sha'ir concurred.

How do you know about her? asked the goat. The Indians are very precious about their heroines and heroes, you know, even the ones who remain invisible, hidden in silver diskoi. They treat even the villains, as deities, since like most people they are intensely protective of their concepts of evil even to the point of such concepts coming to define their very selves. They resent the opinions of outsiders. It is as though their singers are flags, or pennants, or smoking, religious symbols.

Aie-haie! the Sha'ir explained, I was a beautiful, long-legged assistant to the whiskered Deutsche engineer who spun the first disc of vinyl around the globe. On those long voyages, we would sip warm Glu-wein and would make love beneath the awnings of the ship to the tune of twinkling stars and a labial moon.

Ah! The romantic awnings! the goat sighed.

S: In Bombay, in Calcutta, we watched the twisting bellies of the whore-swingers.

G: The kunjerees.

S: The conjurors.

G: The soldiers

S: The sufis.

G: The poets.

S: In our search for beauty.

G: For truth.

S: It is far easier to overcome one's desires, than to be abased by succumbing to them.

G: Hah! Now you are quoting, my friend, from the works of Omm 'Ali.

S: Om shanty om.

G: Book XII, Vol. 6, I believe.

S: *We sealed jars with the secrets of the worlds and we cast them into the cold Sea of Hiber.*

G: Magical numbers. Along with the Pharaoh's daughter and the Gaedil.

S: Or that of the Grand Vizier.

G: Scota, Egyptian Mother of the Irish, or the Scots, or the Scots-Irish or the
Irish-Scots

S: Aye. Mata Scotia, with her faces, eight-and-one.

G: Hazrat Yahya, into infinity.

S: Into the baptismal loch.

G: The cold, northern mirror, into which all myths ultimately vanish and in which their heroes find repose.

S: Repose is all we seek.

G: Tell me about your travels, O Sha'ir.

Very well, said the Sha'ir, but first you must know that I am not a sha'ir, but a sha'iri, that I was born, and remain, a woman and that what you see now is merely an assumed form, drawn from the seas of your own mind and those dancing jugglers of

legerdemain which they call, eyes. The goat reacted with surprise, but not displeasure, at this revelation. In truth, he was pleased that other creatures beside himself underwent both the appearance and the reality of gross morphological change during the span of a single life. And the sha'iri began to tell her tale.

Travels with a Donkey: The Journeys of the Sha'ir

I was born in the city of Nishapur, in the Year ... well it's so long ago that I have forgotten exactly when I came into this world, or perhaps it is Time who has forgotten me! No matter. Our house was next door to a khanqah which was run by one Mama 'Esmat. It was there I developed an interest in the ways of the Friends. Even aged eight years old, I was listening to the words of Omm Mohammad, Mother of Shaikh Abu 'Abdo'llah Ebn Khatif as she related her mokashafat, her tales of the visions she'd experienced in those wavering, elliptical lands that lie between the twin rivers of Assyria. When I was eleven, I conversed with Bibiak of Marv (a city which likes also to go by a number of other names: Mary, Margu, Meru, Mulu and Antiochia in Margiana) while she was on her thirty-year quest outside of her body. That is an intriguing tale. While back home in the Turkestani city, she was growing old in the normal manner, yet her self, her nafs malhama, her soul if you like, was busy, journeying around the various caravanserais and cities of the known world at an alarming rate – alarming, that is, if one were a Frank or a mullah with little knowledge of such things – and for thirty years, this itinerant soul remained unchanged. Not young, exactly, since by the time she had attained this level of Sufistic power, she was already beyond age itself. In fact, it was she, Madame Bibiak, who first instilled in me the hunger for both poetry and travel. It was she who took me on my first night journey. We sailed along the dark river, the Amu Darya, also known in some places as, the Oxus, for seven days and seven nights and then we alighted and climbed up an unimaginably steep cliff - we were like cats, creeping up that cliff, our limbs were possessed of an unnatural agility and our bones felt as light as Kashgari paper - until we came to the mouth of a cave. The cave had been stoppered, like a surahi, with a large, round boulder. It was dark, yet the blackness possessed a strange quality which was quite unlike the darkness of night. It were as though a veil had been removed from the surface of the earth, so that each star shone with an almost painful brilliance. And as for the moon, well, it was as bright as a daytime sun!

We rolled the boulder aside as though it was made of cotton, and we entered the cave. Now that we were fully upright, I noticed that my eyes were on the same level as those of Bibi Bibiak. I was only twelve years old, yet in this other existence, I was outside of time. It turned out that this cave was merely the portico, the natural verandah, of a huge underground city. We entered the dalaan of one of the havelis, and we began to live in that house, as sisters. My name in that place was Tohfah, and I was an accomplished minstrel and singer. I played the 'ud and I would give performances at weddings, court events and in the transient khanqahs of visiting 'arefs. I became known as the Mistress of the Dervishes. I was very fastidious, though. Not for me, the ecstatic cries of the qalandars. Once, I fasted until my bones turned black. At least, such was the legend. The truth is, deep in the night I used to consume vast quantities of black olives and then I would bathe, for hours, in their oil. And with the clarity which I attained as a result of my metaphorical and physical immersion in the substance of these fruits, I found myself impelled to write poetry. Reams and reams, scroll-upon-scroll, reed-after-reed. I used up the city's entire supply of ink and quills. So much so, that various civil servants would slip notes beneath my door, asking if I might be a little more sparing with my verse. They would creep up, adaab'ing along the corridor, and then, eyes lowered, they would ask me: Bibi Tohfah, you are a great sha'iri, of that there is no question,

most esteemed, to be sure, but could you possibly memorise your verses like the bards of old? I would throw them a burning look, a caustic aphorism, a spinning fable, which, since they were gazing at the floor, they would not see but would rather feel as a burning letter on their foreheads:

‘The bards of old are dust, their words eddy among the rocks in the wind. Most of what I write will be lost. If I am fortunate, a locket’s portion, a cut taaviz, perhaps, will survive, and even that will not be read. I need to write a million words, that one letter may sing. We, the sha’irs of the world, roll up our words and secrete them in jars and tombs and boxes and we set them off, down mountain rivers, to float, by degrees, into the future.’

‘Yes, yes, you are most wise, Bibi Tohfah,’ they replied, and again they would adaab in reverse, all the way out again, till they almost tripped over the surahi by the door.

The ruler of this city was a woman called Zobayda. Once, she had been the daughter of one of the Qajar shahs, but now she was a poet and mystic, and a disciple of the great Hamadani. She left behind a diwan of verses in her name, but actually, that was my diwan. I penned those poems and gave them to her as a gift, because she had inspired them. She was my muse, and I was her Hafiz. Indeed, once I saw a curtain of light descend from the rock that formed the roof of this city’s world, and then I saw that in reality the luminescence was rising from her scalp. She was my lover, in both the physical, and the spiritual, senses. You see, this was a city of women. It was where all the women who were concubines, wives, daughters, slaves, whores, dancers, ud-zan, lute players, queens, priestesses, ceremonial virgins, camp followers, victims of the white wolf, grandmothers and sawn-off magicians’ assistants came during the night. And because it was out-of-time, because the night was eternal, even as they existed in the physical world which we think we know, they also lived there, unchanging and free, forever. During my sojourn in that miraculous place, I penned the lyrics of their existence. It was a great honour. And that was only my first journey. My first diwan.

My second was as a recluse of the way. By now, I was a woman of twenty-three. I did not marry, though, and this set me apart from most other women of my age and station. I spent much of my time in the khanqah, but this did not mean that I neglected the physical world. Indeed, my abilities had developed to the extent that I was able to pick out the seeds of pomegranates without once touching the red skins of their fruits. I do not say this with any kind of pride, it was simply that I had joined somehow with that river which flows through most things. In fact, one of the reasons for my second withdrawal from the husk lay in the fact that my powers resulted in my being beset by a constant stream of appellants seeking help for their problems. I had no wish to become a moharvi or a parish priest. I had no desire to spend my days and nights, wringing sweat from hands and squeezing tears from handkerchiefs. I did not want to drown in the salt and darkness of other people’s oceans. And so, one morning, just before sunrise on Itvar, I took the donkey which I had bought from the Jumma bazaar and left through the western gate of the city. It was winter, and I was heading towards a sky, heavy with stars.

At first, my donkey was stubborn, but after I had whispered a few of the words of the wise in her ear, she consented to everything I bade her do, she would clamber without demur up even the steepest of slopes and would carry nearly twice the burden any normal donkey would have been capable of bearing. We travelled for forty days and thirty-nine nights, and on the fortieth night, just after sunset, in the midst of a lonely, dust-filled plain which up until then I had thought to be uninhabited, we came to a caravanserai. This place was ringed by an earth-coloured wall, set out in the shape of a square, which, I discovered as I drew near, had actually been constructed of dried mud - a custom not uncommon in such barren parts - and

through the murk, I was able to make out the roofs of several buildings which had been constructed in various sizes within the enclosure thereby formed. I searched for a gate, since normally, such would be set opposite each other, so that travellers might enter through one and leave through the other. But search as I might, I was unable to find a point of entry. I thought that perhaps the place was deserted, a victim, perhaps, of one or other of the Mongol terrors, the last of which (to date) had swept like a terrible toofan across all of these lands, some fifty years earlier. Yet I could make out the sounds of human habitation, the cries of cameleers, the belching of grazing asses and the shifting, uncertain humming noise not unlike that of cicadas into which human speech is transformed when heard from a certain distance. These people and their animals had got in somehow, I thought, they must have found a gate or door somewhere. So why couldn't I?

At length, I grew exasperated, and began to call out to the sentries to let me in. Eventually, a head poked out above the top of the wall. He seemed to beckon down to me, but by now it was well beyond twilight and I was unable to make out his signal. Then I heard a clatter that sounded like an iron centipede, but which in fact was the running of metal-shod feet. Some rattling sounds followed, and a section of the wall seemed to fold inwards. Tentatively, I crept forwards, tightly clutching the rope that connected me to my donkey and to all my possessions, which though far from luxurious, yet remained necessary for my continued existence in this world. Through the opening, I saw a light shining across the dust and scrub of the wasteland. Then, all at once, a group of men came rushing out through the gap. They seemed to be covered from head-to-toe in iron. They ran towards me and as they ran, tiny glimmers of light came from their right hands. Only at that stage did I realise that this was a phalanx of soldiers and that the sticks which they were carrying in their right hands were swords, glinting in the light cast from the fires that burned within the caravanserai.

The men encircled us, my poor beast and I. The donkey was covered in sweat and was quivering with fear. In a tongue with which I was barely familiar, they demanded the reason for my presence there, outside the walls of the caravanserai. I stated, in all the words of all the languages that I could muster, that I was merely a traveller from the easternmost satrapy of the Empire and that I had been seeking a place in which to spend the night, for repose and sustenance for both my beast and myself. They did not seem convinced by my explanation. They laid their heavy, chain-mailed hands upon my shoulders and with metal fingers, they tore the rope from my grasp and led us separately into the enclosure. Fortunately, they did not lift my veil. I glanced behind me and saw that quite silently the gap in the wall had sealed up with recourse to neither key nor hinge nor bolt.

My donkey was led towards a dark corner of the caravanserai, and I was taken to the largest of the buildings. The leader of the group swung open a heavy wooden door and I was almost thrown into a room. The door slammed shut.

At first, I dared not move, for the place seemed pitch dark, and I was afraid that I might bump into something or that I might trip and fall. The noises beyond the room seemed as distant yet all-pervasive as had been the case when I had been standing outside the walls. Gradually, my eyes grew somewhat accustomed to the darkness, and I began to make out items of furniture - shelves, cupboards and the like. It was then that I noticed, sitting at a broad wooden desk, a man whose presence had been so silent, he could hardly have been breathing at all. He was poring over a pile of manuscripts and was wearing eyeglasses of a type which on occasion I had seen brought by merchants across the green mountains from Chiin. With glass lenses, framed by jade stone, they were shaped like half-moons and they rested two-thirds of the way

down his nose, which was itself long and tapered at its end. Wrinkles swarmed around his eyes. He seemed not to have noticed my presence. At first sight, he looked about seventy years old, but in retrospect I think that he may well have been very much older; at that point, I had no way of judging such things, and anyway, so disoriented had I become by my dramatic entrance to this place, I placed little trust in my judgement. I marvelled at him as he worked in such dim conditions and at the strange tableau before me and the manner in which he seemed able, not only to read perfectly well, but also trace ink across paper in literate patterns. I realised with a start that I, too was now capable of seeing what he was writing. Thinking to arouse his attention, I cleared my throat, yet still he did not shift or look up. I began to feel some degree of discomfiture, standing in one position, my neck craned to the left as I watched this man trace strange letters and numbers and other symbols which I did not understand across the white, Chiini paper. So I stamped my feet, hard, on the floor. Finally, and it seemed, wearily, he glanced up from his work. He gestured to me to sit down. I obeyed, startled as much by his apparent lack of surprise in seeing me as in the strange situation in which I had found myself. I had simply wanted a bed for the night, and some food and water. Now I was in a darkened room with this wrinkled, bespectacled old man who seemed to puzzle rather than threaten.

He resumed his work, while I sat with my hands folded over my lap. Now it was his continued silence that disconcerted me. I had expected him to address me, to say something. I attempted a few sentences in the broken language of my captors, but they came out all wrong, and I suspect that I had said something which I did not mean. His brow wrinkled even more than before (if that were possible) and he threw down his quill, folded his hands across the desk as though in a subtle mimicry of the position which I had adopted, and stared at me. When I say, stared, I do not mean that he leered or widened his eyes like a madman, or that he was in any way unpleasant in manner or expression and anyway, poets go on far too much about eyes, when after all they are merely transparent globes of jelly. Yet I cannot avoid it, it must be said: his eyes seemed to penetrate the ribs and bars of my veil, so that it was as though I was wearing nothing over my face, as though my skin were displayed, naked, before him. I glanced down at my feet, and shifted in my chair.

I know why you have come, he said.

He spoke in my language, yet it did not seem like mine. His voice was like rock, deep and hard, and there was a coldness like that in winter when the ice runs slow and heavy through veins of river and stone.

I know that you are a sha'iri, and that you have come here to tell your second tale.

I looked back up again. So he knew.

You are my acolyte?

He nodded, slowly.

I sighed, so that the muslin of my veil billowed like a tiny sail over my nose and lips. I felt as though I might sneeze, but instead of that happening, I felt as though I were being lifted out of my body, as though I were no longer, I, but were simply an observer of that room in that caravanserai in that desert in Western Khurasan.

Is it you with whom I have been conversing, these forty years or more? the sha'iri asked.

I have lived among these pious brigands. Thieves who steal only to seek the truth.

He swung his arm around in a wide arc.

And now you have come looking for a map.

Have I?

I had no idea of a map. I was simply heading west, towards the lands of old Rum.

He began to sort through his numerous papers. The desk was so chaotic, I found it startling that he could ever hope to find anything in all of those piles.

You know, sha'iri, I have been trying to decipher the meanings of these manuscripts, these disparate pieces of paper.

And he held up an ancient, worm-eaten piece of Egyptian reed-paper. It quivered between his thumb and index finger. It was so fragile, it was almost transparent.

What is the meaning of this, I wonder? he asked, as though asking the question of no-one but himself.

And then he half-answered himself.

The meanings change as time goes on. Every time I read these manuscripts, everything that was emptied out of the box, I find that I have to begin again to attempt to undertake a deeper analysis of the esoteric meanings of the words. But I discover that the actual words have changed their form, so that where once there was an aleph, now there is a nûn ghunah and where once was inscribed, in very fine nastaliq lettering, a cursive lam, there is now a big black kufic kaf. Consequently, my work is never-ending.

He adjusted the spectacle rims so that they sat a little farther up his nose.

However, I will find you your map.

The spectacles promptly slid back down again as he resumed his search.

After a little while, the sha'iri asked,

Why do you do this work?

And the old reader shrugged and replied,

Because it is the only way I might find my own path through this life. Even if that track takes me through a thousand labyrinths formed by the spines of words, by the nuqtas of nûns and the nûn ghunas of hains, I will find my way. He shrugged. Or I may not, I may get lost and never reach the end, assuming that there is an end.

The sha'iri sighed, as she thought of her own journey. The dim light that filtered beneath the lower edge of the door was changing. Surely, it could not yet be morning, she thought. Perhaps the moon had emerged from behind a cloud, or perhaps the soldiers had lit a fire. Yet the sounds which at first had been issuing from the courtyard of the caravanserai now had faded, and there was just the sifting of a breeze through the sand and from somewhere far off, the flapping of a lone wooden shutter.

The sha'iri almost leaped off her seat when the old man suddenly swept his right hand up into the air and announced:

I have it!

He was waving a bit of paper about. The shock of his cry brought me out of my strange reverie and I was back in my body, my being. I was I once again.

He must have seen the puzzlement on her - I mean, my - face.

Your map.

He leaned across the piles of manuscripts and the stack of quills, and handed the paper to me.

The paper felt rough to the touch. It was either of very poor quality, or else was extremely old. She laid it down on the table and straightened it out. Filling the centre of the map, was a large land-mass, surrounded by water.

We're here, the old man pointed towards a point in the centre of the centre.

And you need to travel to...

He lifted his hand high above the paper, circled his index finger several times through the air and then brought it down, somewhere beyond the far left-hand edge of the map.

Here!

I looked at him, thinking that perhaps he was playing a joke on me, that he thought I was stupid, some peasant-come-lately or else an illegitimate daughter of a travelling musician, a jadugaar woman whose speciality it was to toss balls up into the air in variegated manner and catch them again as they returned to earth. But now I think that perhaps he had done this to illustrate that I am a poet and that the world is my ball.

But there – where you are pointing – that is off the map.

Precisely so, he said, lifting his hand away, his half-moon spectacles not slipping one nano-farsang.

I thought for a moment.

Are you saying that I must travel beyond the bounds of this world that we think we know?

Who knows? It is a sense merely, a glimpse of something. Truth does not come to me, fully-formed like a goat from a mountainside, no, it arrives in riddles, paradoxes, strange conjunctions of tongues. It may be that you will have to travel to the far west and north and then it may be that the map is simply a symbol indicating that you should not move from this spot. Truthfully, there is no way of knowing.

He shrugged, and began to turn away.

Perhaps, it is only through the act of wandering that you will come to know the correct path.

But I am already wandering, I retorted. That is how I came here.

He spun back round and looked me in the eye.

Precisely, he said. You've hit the nail on the head.

He paused.

Which nail, and which head, is another matter. As I said, the meanings change with time and light. This map you have in your hands may well change again and become something quite different. There are forces in this universe of which we know nothing.

I thought you knew, I called after him, but he was already ensconced in his papers and did not look up or turn around.

I thought you knew everything!

But it was no use. The old man would not give her any more information or instruction about what she was to do next, where she was supposed to go. The sha'iri turned on her heel and stormed out of the room. She made her way to her own chamber, where sleep remained elusive almost until the break of dawn. The pious brigands did not seem to have awoken either and as she made good her escape, the khanqah seemed to have been left unguarded. Only the singing of the morning birds disturbed the silence. Feeling somewhat despondent, the sha'iri rose from her slumber, readied her donkey and set off, westwards.

And so began my third, and longest, journey. I travelled for seven years and I encountered many strange beings and listened to much beautiful music and I sat at the feet of a number of Masters in their Abodes of Learning and their Assemblies of Wisdom. In the middle of the blue ocean, amidst the fins of whales and the tentacles of giant squid, I met with Siddhapati, the Lord of Sages, who like the universe had been created through voice and who was now as real as you or I. I saw, incarnate, the old helpers, Seth, Shem and Simon and heard the booming voice of the Lord of the Truth who dressed always in green robes and who spoke, not in words but in quarter-tones on the barbat.

At length, in that region where the land rises and tapers away into the sky in great tongues of snow, I came to a pyramidal-shaped mountain around whose summit, clouds gathered as

though they were the Seraphiel circling the great Takht of God. The foot of the mountain was surrounded by a high wall, along which, set at intervals, were octagonal towers guarded by fierce-looking soldiers dressed identically in white tunics but with caps, girdles and boots of red. I noticed that there was a winding path which led from the main entrance up the side of the mountain. When challenged by the guards, who seemed to have known that I had been approaching even before they had been able to see me, I adaab'd and undertook to perform, then and there, before the enormous, spiked iron gates, a mathnawi based on the tale of a Yunani knight named Milinda, who originally was called Menander (an inheritor of the great plunderer, Iskander) who, in times long past, had wandered through the mountains bordering Hindustan, Thibbet and Chiin and who had come upon a seat of learning, secreted deep in a cave. This same Yavana, become a general and dharmikasa, a master of the dharma and saviour of Buddhism, went on to converse with high pirs of the Buddha and also to conquer all the lands as far east as the metropolis of Pataliputra and as far south as the coast of Surat. Along with most of his people, he had become a Buddhist and was keen to crush the power of the Sungas, those rampagers who had destroyed the Mauryan Empire of Asoka's descendents. And he stopped there, only because of treachery from his cousins in Bactria. He was a friend of the Ionian Buddhist monk, Mahadhammarakkita of Alasandra, the Great Protector of the Dharma, whom he sent southwards to Serendip, to lay there the foundation stone of the Mah Thupa. Halfway through an abridged form of this mathnawi (the full version goes on for three nights and two days), the guards assented to open the gates and, no doubt keen to ensure my silence, warmly welcomed me into their citadel.

I was guided through aureate fields of wheat and maize, orchards of almond and cherry trees and gardens of rose and mulberry bushes and on entering the citadel was taken immediately to meet a man named, Sydney who, I was told, also went by by the titles of 'Senex de Monte' and 'Father of Trust' and who, it became evident, was a Master, not merely of the esoteric sciences, but also of the barbat. When he heard that I claimed descent from the tribe of Baniyamin, or Yamin, brother of Dunya, son of Rakhila and Yaqub, scion of Ismail and Ibrahim, he smiled warmly and declared that he, too was said to be a scion of the Bani Israel, in other words, a son of the Sons of Israel. Sydney was nearly seven feet tall and wore his black beard, short and trimmed to a fine point. All this time, I was enclosed in my burqa, so that as I viewed the world through a thick, cotton grille even my face was invisible. Sydney declared that such things were ridiculous, the spawn of lesser men, and ordered me to remove my burqa. Then he bade me sit on a divan opposite him and commanded his servant bring refreshments.

Neither I nor the Senex ate heavily, since we both knew that after the meal would come a performance. I noticed, then, that the hall had filled with people dressed in the same manner as the soldiers. Once we had begun to sip the slightly sweet red wine which, Sydney claimed, was produced from grapes harvested from his own vineyards, and which he told me was exported west even to the cities of Rum, al Andalus and Sikelia and north to the Court of the Amir of Kiev (such was the fame of its vintage), another servant carried in a barbat and respectfully placed it before the Mountain Sage. Sydney told me that this instrument was thousands of years old and that its wood had been cut from a tree that was sacred to both the black and red kafirs and which had grown in the mountains far to the east, while its strings, which could never snap, had been fashioned from the innards of a singing goat. I told him that I recently had come from the east, but he said that those mountains lay close to the borders of Yarkand and Chiin and that only the most powerful spirits, pirs and djinns lived there. During the meal, we had settled on the piece that we would be performing and it was one which I had composed, myself, only a few months earlier. My fame was such, that news

of the piece had spread, far and wide, and barbat players from all over had busied themselves, learning the accompaniment. It was entitled, *Dastgah from the Valley of Demons* and it would last all through the night. The notes had come to me in a series of dreams brought by that same white-robed Milinda of whom I had sung to the guards and on this night as I sang and as the Senex de Monte struck his eagle-feather quill upon the strings of his barbat, I realised that the people here were clad in almost the same garb as the ancient Greek philosopher-general and that Sydney was playing the music almost as though it was a dastgah which he had known all his life.

At certain points during the performance, I closed my eyes and then it was as though I was flying high above the mountain peaks, flying through seven circles, to the far north and west, to the archipelago of Old Vilayeti, Prettaniké, Britannia. I was lying in a bed and could hardly get the breath from my lungs through the veil of my throat so that the notes came out, high and pitched almost like a scream. And then I was forging great iron ships and then the ships lifted into the sky and poured fire from their mouths and their bellies. And my face was pressed, upside-down, into the gold leaf on a wall, high in a drafty house of worship and it seemed that I, the Poet had become Bibi Thenew, of the northern waters, she who had been martyred like Hazrat Yasu and I, too felt the iron agony of the nails as they were driven into the bones of my feet and hands and again, I was unable to breathe and my woman's song turned into a long howl of despair at the merciless nature of humankind – and in particular, of man-kind - who dwell in this world which is known to some as the Valley of Demons. Where have all the angels gone? I wailed. The saints? The prophets? Why have they deserted us? Why has hope betrayed us? Why do we continue to repeat the same mistakes, down through history? These are things which the Yavana knew and the Yehudi, too. All the prophets, saints and martyrs knew this, going back to before Al Tawafaan. It is as though we are trapped in a coffin which moves faster than a galloping horse, we cannot breathe, see or move and we are, each of us, quite alone, hurtling through the darkness that suffuses through this world and until we break open the box of our imprisonment, we will not come to understand the first thing about ourselves. And therefore, unless we travel along the path, we will not be able to change the law. The song that had come to me in seven dreams had never been played to its end, because the ghostly Milinda had never revealed the end to me. This was why I was travelling with my wise donkey across lands and rivers, seas and mountains. This was why I had come to this place, as revealed to me in the map, because I knew that the Senex, the Pir, the Master of the barbat possessed certain knowledge which had been lost since the Fall of the Ark, knowledge that might have changed the disastrous end upon which humankind had set its course.

*The scent of Joseph's coat, swooping from the sky above
Penetrated the wood, stone, iron, mansion of his love*

*By David iron is made as soft as a piece of wax, or the heart of a lion
In thy dead hand, wax is as hard as a rod of iron*

After a time, I realised that the entire crowd in the hall had also started to have visions and I saw that they had begun to sway and turn upon their axes. It was as though I was witnessing a new mode of travel. Then I realised that ever since I had passed through the outer gates of the city, there had been a peculiar scent which as I sang, I was surprised that I had not noted before. Perhaps it had been because, as I had recited the Mathnawi of Milinda before the Great Iron Gate, the aroma had already gripped my consciousness and thereby had become indiscernible. It is a scent for which I continue to long, even after all these years.

As dawn broke across the marble floor of the palace, my song ended and the Senex's barbat fell silent. His eyes reddening, he walked over to my diwan and handed me the instrument.

It is yours, he said. My time with it is over. Now you must take it on your journey to the west and always remember that it will lead you.

I am very grateful to you for your bounteous hospitality and your most generous gift, my Lord Senex, but you know that I cannot play, I protested. I can only sing.

Your song arises from the body of the tree and the flesh of the magical beast that lies within you. Therefore, even when not touching the strings, they will oscillate to the sound of your voice. Just as the wind, when it blows across the land, causes both leaf and water to rise and dance, so do the strings recognise your common origin. Besides, he added, a mischievous gleam in his eye and the tiredness which he had appeared to exhibit earlier seeming now suddenly to dissipate, you must seek out the makers and the players, the sonna'eh al a'ehwaad and the aazefee al oud among the Alhamla Alsilibiy'ya, the Christians of Siqilliya, among the Servants of the Three-fold Kiss 5.

The barbat felt warm in my hands, whether from the touch of the Senex, from being played all night or from some quality inherent in the wood itself, I cannot say, beyond making the observation that on all of my subsequent travels, the instrument remained warm to the touch, its strings, taut and seemingly unbreakable. And what the Mountain Pir had said was true, every time I sang with the barbat as accompaniment, the strings would begin to flutter slightly as though wafted by some breeze (even though nonesuch existed) and thus to evince music. Yes, and by these humble means, I, the sha'iri and my companion, the good and faithful donkey, acquired a flock of followers, a herd of acolytes, a school of thought, who would attempt to learn the notes, the hand positions, the screaming, demonic voices which would be required to be conjured up if one were to play such a Mathnawi and though few of them attained the ability to do so, those that did, remained with us on our journeys through the lands that border the Middle White Sea. The old man who had given me the map which thereafter I followed was one such follower of mine. You see, in the midst of the song and music which it regulates, time itself becomes malleable. Just as, at the appropriate moment, I became Not-I, so for my sojourn in the caravanserai of the pious dakoos, did my follower become my pir. In all that time, however, even unto the very ends of my old age, never again did Milinda deign to frequent my dreams, and never did I learn the notes of that final song. Bismillah, no! As with carpets, gardens and the lower levels of paridaeza, it is in the nature of human beings to exist in a state of imperfection. Split, as it were, into two.

And so at last the sha'iri' fell silent and looked around her at a world which had grown dark and cold. She wrapped her chugha more tightly around her wizened frame and began to climb the slope towards her small home. It was only then that she noticed that the Goat had disappeared. Not only that, but that he had run off with her barbat.

I knew it! she exclaimed. All goats are musicians and all musicians are thieves.

Her back bent with age and knowledge, she began to make her way towards the cave in which she had taken up habitation and in which, she believed (though the world and its sister considered her a fool), the sage Menander, Greek Lord of Mathura, Sirkap and Barigaza, king of everything west of the Naga Hills and Arakan, Menander, great Yona arhat and hero of the Yuga Purana, once had sought refuge and to which he had returned after relinquishing his kingdom, his worldly possessions, his wife and son, in order to discourse more fully with the monk, Nagasena. The arhat, Nagasena had been the student of the Yojana, Dharmaraksita who had been sent by the Emperor Asoka to lead the Buddhist mission to Gujarat, while the

Great Antiochos, Mahyantika had journeyed upon the same edicts of Asoka to Kashmir and Gandhara and the third proslyetiser, Maharaksita had travelled to Greece. The sha'iri claimed that after he died, Milinda's ashes were first ground with the dust of three precious jewels, red, white and blue, and then scattered and mingled in the sands of this cave and she claimed that ever since then, the cave had given off a strange and quite unique scent which was so strong, it could transfix the mind and generate change within the physical structures of the body. And that night, in a dream, she found herself on a great, white ship. The next day, she set off on a journey to the west. On this voyage, she came to describe herself as, 'The Servant of Milinda', which in a cyclical way was interesting because several thousand miles away, across a good half-length of the Middle White Sea and somewhat beyond memory's edge, on the Levantine coast of the Magna Graecian island of Siqilliya, the goat had become the servant of another, quite different monk.

1: This extract is taken from a hitherto untouched section of marginalia in a colophon from old Sicily, discovered only recently in a library in Farakhshanit, Switzerland among the collection of Liudprand of Cremona and is part of a greater work concerning the tenth century Arab conquest of the Jabal Munjaws, otherwise known as the Alps.

2: This excludes those djinns whom Hazrat Suleiman had enclosed in dark surahis weighted with lead and flung from the prows of warships into the warm belly of the Arabian Sea. Because the jars were laden in this manner, they sank eventually to the sea-bed, where they became covered with sand, rock and other such elements. And because, during its time in the surahi, a djinn is unable to assume any physical shape whatsoever, it is potentially virtually immortal. Suleiman the Wise knew that these were the most powerful djinns of all, and that they were beholden unto him alone, and he wished for his power, in potential form, to persist long beyond his own, mortal demise, to last even unto Judgement Day and possibly beyond. For it is stated in several sapient texts that one day, these very beings will rise and save the world 3. Or at least, that the secreted existence of each djinn may serve to allow an individual human being to muddle through. The corollary of this theory means that if a djinn were to retain the form of a single being throughout its existence, then it would live only as long a human being, or a goat, or a dog, or a fly, or a loaf of bread (depending upon the form assumed). Bakers, bakers, come to me!

3: footnote of the footnote (for while witches have backwards-facing feet, the goats of hidden scrolls have an infinite number and thus are able to scrawl on several thousand palimpsests at once): These include: al-Noor of Peshawar's isharat; the Maqamat al-gulub of Alcalà; the Tale of the Sad Old Man who Wept; the Story of the Bazaar Huckster, by Sari al-Saqati; the letters written by Hallaj to himself; the songs composed by Hazrat Yahya of Úbeda while in a cell, barely larger than the span of his skin; The Captain of the Dark Sea; the Songs of al-Bahr al-Muzlim and al-Bahr al-Muhit; The Steps of the Blue Dancers of Abyla; The Voyages of the Mugharrirun to the Far West; The Dreams of Sand-baad; the Words of the Old Qamanuriya of Tenerife; the list is endless.

4: Although this applies to the vast majority of the permutations of djinn-human intimacy, it is documented in at least one source that there exists a specific company of djinns to whom this rule does not hold sway. It is thought that this group, who descend from the personal minstrels of Hazrat Suleiman, remain immune to the insidious well of the flesh, and so tend to be found in muddy, wind-blown towns on the fringes of various countries, where, often as not, because of heightened immune systems that allow them to partake of a sip from the goblet of immortality, they have been reduced to servicing a number of professions, such as oil-men, visiting anthropologists, adventurous imperialist authors, senior members of the multifarious Islamist political parties and the like. Take as an example the town of Sarikamiş in what is now north-eastern Turkey. The djinns there dwell among the sandstone ruins of Armenian monasteries, emerging only after sunset to ply their marginal trades and play their howling musics. This process serves as a proof of the wise maxim, emblazoned across the marble portal of the Central Hall of the Society of Djinns, 7777 Swing Jazz Avenue, Grapecount, Queens, in New York City, which runs thus:

'When the music is lost, then must degradation and ruination follow'.

5: *The Three-fold Kiss: Right shoulder, left shoulder and phallus. In fact, the more complete ritual performed by certain pagan groups, involves an eight-fold kiss: the above three parts of the anatomy, plus both feet, both breasts and the lips. A spider kiss, one might say. This description was gleaned from the Seventh Codicil of the Siqilliyyat, the author of which, at various times, has been claimed to be the Pseudo-Ibn Hamdis, but who in fact, remains anonymous.*