



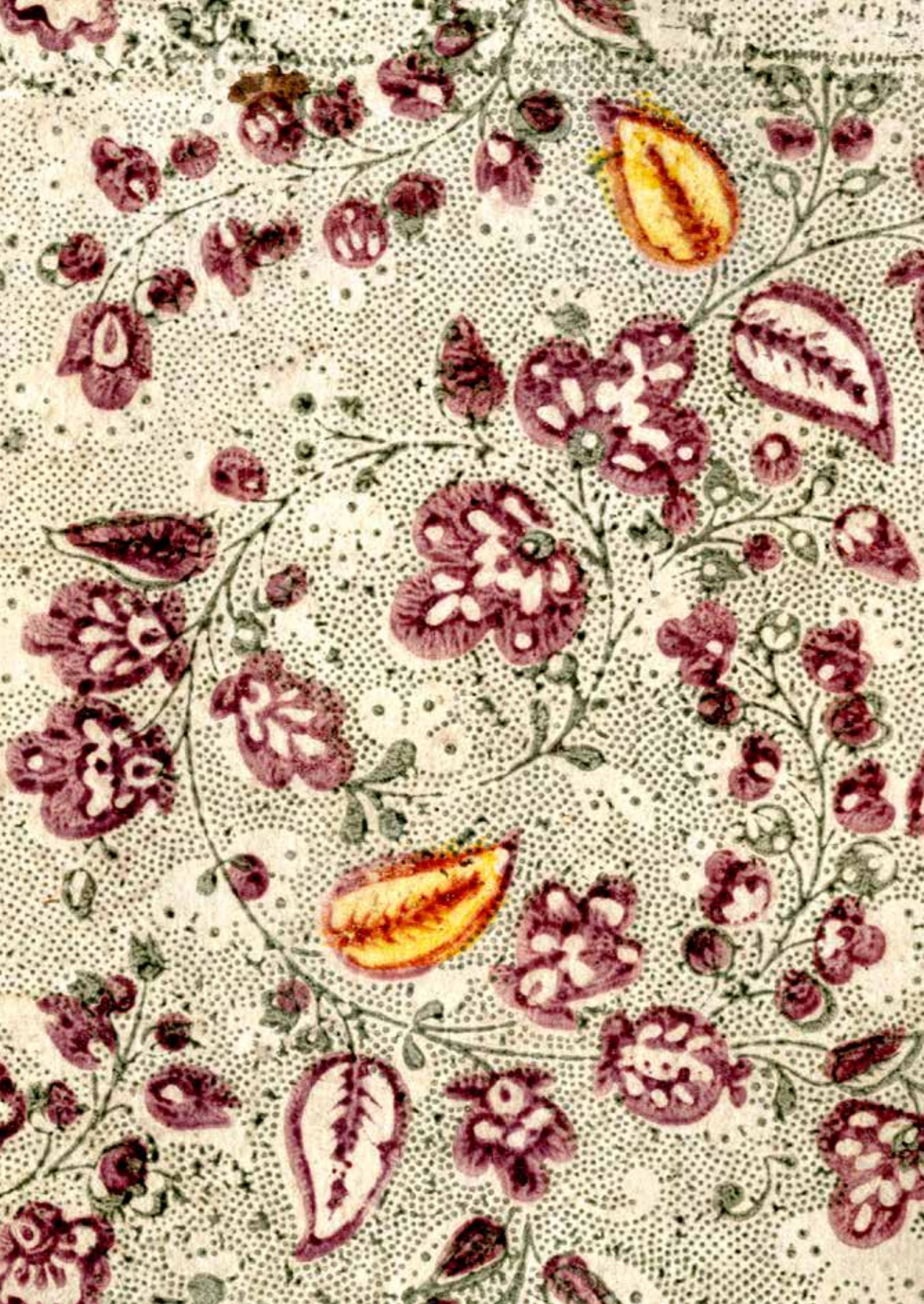
Richard van Leeuwen and Arnoud Vrolijk

*The Thousand and
One Nights* and
Orientalism in the
Dutch Republic,
1700-1800

Amsterdam
University
Press

Antoine Galland, Ghisbert Cuper
and Gilbert de Flines

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DUYSENT EN EEN
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1709.

Introduction

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Orientalism was in vogue in various forms in Western Europe. This trend of cultural exoticism had been triggered by Europe's increased interaction with Oriental societies – from the unfamiliar empires of China, Japan and Mughal India to the more conversant Muslim realms of Persia and the Ottomans. Following in the tracks of explorers and traders, European scholars and diplomats sought to solidify relationships with these foreign regions and to enhance their knowledge of non-European languages and cultures. The Portuguese, Dutch and English trading companies were not only instruments for exploiting new economic opportunities in the East; they were also carriers of commodities and ideas that changed fashions, tastes and intellectual debates in Europe. In the course of two centuries, Europe's encounter with the Orient decisively transformed the direction of European intellectual and cultural history, providing new visions of the world and of Europe's place in human civilisation.¹

This new taste for the Orient can also be perceived in the field of literature. Although Orientalism had been an important element in European literature from the Middle Ages onwards, it was in the eighteenth century in particular that references to the Orient became more prominent and structurally incorporated. This was the century of the so-called Oriental tale, the type of short story set in the Arab world or the more distant East and usually marked by a distinct, exotic ambience. The taste for Orientalism was, of course, partly aroused by the growing communication between Europe and the Orient and by Europe's keen interest in travel accounts and information concerning Eastern societies. It was also stimulated, however, by what is commonly considered to be one of the greatest literary events of the period: the appearance of the first European translation of the *Thousand and one nights*. The French Orientalist Antoine Galland's version of the Arabic collection of tales was published in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717. The work, entitled *Mille et une nuit*, became an instant success; it gained a wide readership in France and was soon re-translated into all the main European languages. It is no exaggeration to say that Galland's version of the *Thousand and one nights* not only established a European 'tradition' of the *Nights* but also significantly contributed to the shaping of the literary landscape in Europe in the eighteenth century.²

1 There are many studies about the cultural impact of the European expansion towards the East. Here we will only mention two: Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol. 2, *A century of wonder*, book 2-3, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, München: Beck, 2013.

2 For Galland, see Mohamed Abdel-Halim, *Antoine Galland: sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1964; Jean-Paul Sermain, *Les Mille et une nuits entre Orient et Occident*, Paris: Desjonquères, 2009. For literary

The first European version of the *Thousand and one nights* was particularly popular in France, England and Germany, where it inspired a vogue of literary Orientalism that continued throughout the eighteenth century and that could still be perceived in the literary trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In other countries such as the Dutch Republic, similar tastes emerged, although perhaps less prominently. The Orientalist traditions and their literary components in France and Britain have received ample attention from scholars, but Orientalism in the Netherlands has hardly been touched upon. There has also been limited interest in the reception of the *Thousand and one nights* in the Netherlands and the impact of the work on Dutch literature and culture.³ This book aims to fill, at least partly, this apparent lacuna and to present some new findings concerning the reception of the *Nights* in the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century and, more specifically, the first translation of Galland's *Mille et une nuit* into Dutch.

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was economically and intellectually at the centre of Europe. As we will see, developments in literature and culture in the Low Countries during this period cannot be dissociated from the wider European context. The country's prominence within Europe was particularly reflected in the field of printing and publishing. Amsterdam, The Hague and Leiden were the centres of European publishing, not only because their printing techniques were advanced and refined but also because the relative degree of freedom of expression in the Netherlands allowed foreign authors to publish works that would have been banned in their own countries. Moreover, communities of religious refugees from France and England had settled in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, forming links between the Netherlands and European intellectual networks. Although the economic role of the Netherlands declined in the eighteenth century, its prominent position in the field of publishing and the international dimension of its cultural and intellectual life persisted at least until 1750, when French censorship was relaxed. The international orientation of Dutch literary and intellectual networks can also be perceived in the way in which the *Thousand and one nights* was received in the Netherlands. In this book we will show that also in the domain of Orientalism, the Dutch Republic was integrated into European networks and dynamics.⁴

Orientalism, see, among others: Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: resisting the rise of the novel*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

3 The only study of Dutch literary Orientalism in the eighteenth century is: Christien Dohmen, *In de schaduw van Scheherazade: oosterse vertellingen in achttiende-eeuws Nederland*, Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2000; see also Richard van Leeuwen, *De wereld van Sjahrazaad*, Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 1999.

4 Inger Leemans & Gert-Jan Johannes, *Worm en donder: geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, 1700-1800: de Republiek*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013.

Although the starting point of this study is the publication history of the *Thousand and one nights* in the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century, we will also sketch a broader picture of Dutch Orientalism and Oriental studies and their international connections in the field of literature. But before we turn our attention to the Dutch Republic, we feel it is incumbent on us to give a brief introduction to the *Thousand and one nights*, and a summary of the circumstances of the appearance of the Galland translation and its significance for European Orientalism.