



ČEHĚL ṬŪṬĪ

ČEHĚL ṬŪṬĪ (forty parrot [stories]), the designation of collections of entertaining stories about the wife of a merchant and a pair of parrots, several versions of which are current in Persia and which are derived from older collections called *ṭŭṭĭ-nāmas* (book of the parrots).

The stories are inserted in a frame narrative, which is essentially about the young wife of a merchant and a pair of parrots who keep her company while her husband is away on business. She is induced by a sweet-talking but deceitful old woman to meet a young man who has fallen in love with her. The male parrot threatens to tell the merchant, and the wife promptly kills it but soon regrets her action and after all does not go to the rendezvous. The woman returns the next day and again persuades the wife to accompany her. The female parrot, seeing what happened to her mate, warns the wife that she may suffer the fate of so and so in a certain story. The wife asks the parrot for further details, and it spends the entire day telling the story, thus preventing the wife from going to the rendezvous. These events are repeated for a great many days (hence *Čehel ṭŭṭĭ* where “forty” just refers to a high number) until the merchant returns. The merchant discovers what has been going on, gets rid of his wife, and buys the parrot another companion. The morals of the stories are told by various animals, but the main narrator throughout is the parrot.

Because of the excessive length of the story the expression *qeṣṣa-ye čehel ṭŭṭĭ*



also signifies a lengthy and circumstantial account (Dehġodā, s.v. *Çehel tÛtî*). The theme of assigning a parrot to guard the lady of the house is found also elsewhere in Persian literature, for instance in Żahîrî Samarġandî's *Sendbād-nāma* (pp. 50-57).

The origin of these stories is the Sanskrit *Śūka-saptati* (Seventy parrots; Eng. tr. Wortham; Keith, pp. 290-92), two versions of which are known: one short, popular version and one more elaborate, apparently compiled by Cintāmaṇi Bhaṭṭa, who incorporated in it stories from the *Pañcatantra* (the original of *Kalīla wa Demna*, Āl-e Aġmad, p. lii). The *Śūka-saptati* differs from the *TÛtî-nāma* in that the merchant, assured that his wife is still pure, lives with her happily and sets the parrot free to show his gratitude.

The oldest extant Persian version is that of KÛvāja Żîā'-al-Dīn Badā'ūnī Naġşabī (d. 751/1350; Ethé, p. 324, tr. p. 225), who, while still a youth, went to Badā'ūn, where he learned Sanskrit and was commissioned by a nobleman to prepare a shortened and revised version of an already existing translation of the *Śūka-saptati* (comp. 730/1329-30; Goġġin-e Ma'ānī, pp. 132-34; MaġjÛb, p. 754; Eqbāl, p. 528; Eng. tr. Gerrans; many commercial, but unreliable, editions in Persia, India, and Afghanistan, see Goġġin-e Ma'ānī, p. 134). Naġşabī not only simplified the earlier translation, but also embellished it with poetry by himself and others, rewrote a number of stories, and replaced those he did not like with new ones (some of which resemble stories in *A Thousand and One Nights*, see Ethé, p. 324). In this version the merchant returns after 52 nights, kills the wife, and praises the parrot.

Naġşabī's version was in turn revised by the Mughal prince Moġammad Dārā ŞokÛh Qāderī (q.v.; 1024-69/1615-59), whose version contains only 35 stories, all abridged (pub. with Eng. tr., by F. Galdwin, Calcutta, 1800, London, 1801; repr. Tehran, 1967). For translations into Turkish (by Sārī 'Abd-Allāh Efendī, 992-1071/1584-1660) and Indian languages see Ethé, pp. 324-26.

Another Persian translation/adaptation of the *Śūka-saptati* is the *Jawāher al-asmār* by 'Emād b. Moġammad Taġarī(?) (comp. 713-15/1313-15; ed. Š. Āl-e Aġmad, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973 from a unique manuscript in the Majles Library) dedicated to 'Alā'-al-Dīn Moġammad Shah Ķalajī (695-715/1296-1315; Āl-e Aġmad, pp. xxxii-xxxiii, lii). It is based on the *Śūka-saptati*, but the stories have



been freely edited, and stories from the *Pañcatantra* and other Indian books have been added. In this version the roles of the female parrot and male parrots are reversed. It contains 86 stories told in 49 nights. The opening is similar to that in Dārā Šokūh's version, and twenty-seven of their stories are identical.

The introduction and five stories from *Čehel tūtī* are included in the *Mabda' al-lesān*, another collection of miscellaneous stories (Āl-e Aḥmad, pp. xxvii-xxviii).

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