



## HERBELOT DE MOLAINVILLE, BARTHÉLEMY D'

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**HERBELOT de MOLAINVILLE, BARTHÉLEMY D'** (1625-95), French orientalist whose monumental four-volume encyclopedia, the *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697), was published posthumously by Antoine Galland (1646-1715), himself a noted orientalist and the first European translator of *The Thousand and One Nights* (see [ALF LAYLA WA LAYLA](#)). Writing at a time when Europeans regarded “the Orient” as an exotic but undifferentiated locale, d’Herbélot was one of the first orientalists to produce a systematic survey and alphabetized account of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literature with dictionaries for each language.

*The Cambridge History of Islam* regards the *Bibliothèque* as “highly important” because it disseminated information about Islam to a wider, “less academic readership” (Holt, p. xvi). D’Herbélot’s entries introduced the words “minaret” and “muezzin,” and explained the differences between “calenders,” “faquirs,” and “derviches.” Readers whose ideas of the Fall had been formed by Genesis (and by Milton and Dante) were charmed by d’Herbélot’s account of the parallel fall of the peris and by the hierarchy of genii, afrits, and dives ruled by Eblis, who had rebelled, refusing to serve mere “creatures of clay.”

D’Herbélot’s entries on Persian poetry and mythology gained wide currency largely through William Beckford’s highly influential novel, *Vathek* (1786). Through voluminous footnotes which conveyed the flavor of d’Herbélot’s



scholarship, Beckford transmitted the story of “Megnoun and Leilah,” along with descriptions of the fabulous “Simurgh,” the ruby cup of “Giamschid,” the mountain Kaf, the fortress of Ahriman, and the angels “Monkir and Nekir.” Beckford’s footnotes were in turn mined by a number of poets, such as Byron, Southey, Landor, and Moore in “*Lalla Rookh*” (1817), as well as for novels such as Disraeli’s *Alroy* (1833) and Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* (1850), among others (see William Beckford, *Vathek*). Lonsdale’s helpful annotations cite the relevant entries in d’Herbélot. (For a comparison of Beckford’s text with sources in d’Herbélot and for an exhaustive list of examples of *Vathek* as source and influence, see André Parreaux, pp. 553-63.)

Although it remained a standard reference work well into the nineteenth century, the *Bibliothèque* is not so much an encyclopedia as it is a romance (Heseltine, pp. 375-77). However, it has been argued that d’Herbélot’s approach—the orient from A to Z, as it were—helped create the Eurocentric discourse of orientalism, fostering illusions of “expertise” in, and “mastery” over, “the Orient,” and thereby lending the weight and authority of scholarship to later European imperialism (Said, pp. 63-67).

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