

6 The Turandot Tale in Europe: Origins of the Name ‘Turandot’

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1 The Name ‘Turandot’

The name *Turandot* is attested for the first time, in the form *Tourandocte*, in the tale “Histoire du prince Calaf, et de la Princesse de la Chine” (other editions have: “Histoire du prince Calaf et de la Princesse Tourandocte”) in François Pétis de la Croix’s tale collection *Les Mille et un Jour(s)* (Paris, 1710-12, 5 vols.).¹¹⁰

In Europe, after the publication of Pétis de la Croix’s collection of tales, the character of Turandot appears in many other re-elaborations of the tale, from the drama plays by Carlo Gozzi (*Turandot. Fiaba cinese teatrale tragicomica*, first performed in Venice on 22 January 1762) and Friedrich von Schiller (*Turandot, Prinzessin von China. Ein tragikomisches Märchen nach Gozzi*, first performed in Weimar in 1802), to Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni’s libretto for Puccini’s *Turandot*, which premiered in Milan, at La Scala theatre, on 25 April 1926 – these only being some of the main stages in the fortune of the Turandot tale in Europe.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ In the different editions the title is given either as *Les Mille et un Jour*, or as *Les Mille et un Jours*. In the edition I consulted (*Les Mille et un Jour. Contes persans*. Amsterdam and Paris, 1785, 2 vols.), this tale is in vol. 1: 227-42 and 296-392, days 45-8 and 60-82. I was not able to consult the critical edition of the work by Paul Sebag (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1980; 2nd rev. ed. Paris: Phébus, 2003).

¹¹¹ Among the studies specifically devoted to the fortune of the Turandot tale in Europe see Di Francia, *La leggenda di Turandot*.

The question of Pétis de la Croix's sources has been much debated.¹¹² Scholars consider a manuscript of a Turkish tale collection entitled *Ferec ba'd eš-sidde* as the direct source of Pétis de la Croix's *Les Mille et un Jour(s)*.¹¹³ Pétis de la Croix re-worked the Turkish Turandot tale introducing a number of innovations:¹¹⁴ the most relevant from the point of view of the present study is that he gave a name to all the personages of the tale, who - with the exception of the hero, Khalaf - were nameless in the Persian and Turkish redactions.¹¹⁵

On the origins of the character of Turandot and her name there is, as far as I know, no research. Letterio Di Francia, and Ettore Rossi after him, merely noticed that in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697) two historical figures bear the name *Tourandokht*: a queen, daughter of Khusraw II Parvīz, and the daughter of Ḥasan b. Sahl, wife of caliph al-Ma'mūn.¹¹⁶ Likewise Angelo M. Piemontese, without referring to Di Francia and Rossi's remark, quotes d'Herbelot on the two historical personages bearing the alleged name of *Tūrān-dukht*.¹¹⁷ Recently Youssef Mogtader and Gregor Schoeler have hypothesized that Pétis de la Croix took the name from the short section dedicated to Queen Būrān in the *Shāhnāma*, where the queen's name is erroneously given in the form *Tūrān* or *Tūrān-dukht* due to a change in the diacritical points.¹¹⁸ Neither Mogtader and Schoeler, nor the scholars referring (without the due historical checks) to the two *Tourandokhts* in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, deal with the narrative features linking these historical personages with the literary character of Turandot. However Piemontese is probably right when he states that: "The name Turandot, by which the Princess is known in European modern literary developments, originates in d'Herbelot's posthumous *Bibliothèque orientale*" (see § 3 below).¹¹⁹

112 The story related by Pétis de la Croix, and accepted - among others - by Meier, about a certain Moclès (i.e. Mukhliš) from Isfahan, who gave Pétis a manuscript containing a collection of tales from Indian sources, that he translated into French, has been recognized as a mere literary cliché (see, among others, Di Francia, *La leggenda di Turandot*, 14-15). Mukhliš, however, was a historical figure, that Pétis did actually meet in Isfahan (see Marzolph, *Relief After Hardship*, 7-8).

113 See Marzolph, *Relief After Hardship*, especially 9-11, and Di Francia, *La leggenda di Turandot*, 14-15.

114 On which see Mogtader, Schoeler, *Turandot*, 34-7.

115 In the long Persian prose redaction of the tale (see above, ch. 1, § 2) only one other character has a name: Āzād, a king who helps the hero during his journey in search of his fortune; cf. Mogtader, Schoeler, *Turandot*, 14 and 27 (Persian text).

116 See Di Francia, *La leggenda di Turandot*, 42; Rossi, "La leggenda di Turandot", 471 fn. 1.

117 Piemontese, "The Enigma of Turandot in Nizāmi's Pentad", 133.

118 Mogtader, Schoeler, *Turandot*, 14 and fn. 7.

119 Piemontese, "The Enigma of Turandot", 133.

2 From Būrān-dukht to Tūrān-dukht

It is well-known that the name of the character in Pétis de la Croix's tale, and hence in Gozzi, Schiller and Puccini's plays, Turandot, corresponds to Persian *Tūrān-dukht*. This name, however, is only attested in Islamic sources as a misreading of the form *Būrān-dukht*,¹²⁰ a name attested – as already stated – for two historical figures: the daughter of Khusraw Parvīz, and the daughter of Ḥasan b. Sahl, wife of caliph al-Ma'mūn. The original Persian name of the character known in European sources as Turandot, then, must have been *Būrān-dukht* (*Burān-dokht* according to later pronunciation), the form *Tūrān(-dukht)* only being attested in a number of manuscripts of different works as a misreading of the original form.¹²¹

Bōrān is considered an ancient patronymic formed from *Bōr* < **Baur*, an abridged form from **Baurāspa*- 'having bay horses', followed by the suffix for patronymics *-āna*-; and means 'daughter of the possessor of bay horses'.¹²² The occasional and later addition of *-dukht* to this name may have been dictated by analogy with the many Middle Persian female proper names ending in *-duxt* (daughter, girl).¹²³ It is interesting to notice that, according to some sources, *Būrān-dukht* (or *Pūrān-dukht*) became a sort of nickname for a clever and wise woman, as strong as a man (see above, ch. 3, § 2).

'*Tūrān-dukht*', then, probably arose from a trivial misreading of the name of the two *Būrān-dukhts*, the daughter of Khusraw Parvīz and the wife of caliph al-Ma'mūn. This kind of mistake, called *taṣḥīf*, is well-known to philologists: it consists in changing the diacritical points of a letter. Indeed, *Būrān/Būrān-dukht* does not seem to have been a widespread name, as only two historical personages bore it. The reading with initial <t>, instead of , allowed, with a simple displacement of the diacritical points in the initial letter, a more comprehensible etymology for the name: *Tūrān-dukht*, the girl from *Tūrān* – this region being variously identified with the central-Asiatic Turkish lands, and with China. As we have already seen, the corrupted form of the name was even accepted into European sources, such as d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*.

As to the form *Purān* or *Purān-dukht* given in later Persian sources, Theodor Nöldeke demonstrated – comparing the Middle Persian

¹²⁰ Cf. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, 329, s.v. "Tūrānduxt ('dot)".

¹²¹ For the name of the Sasanid queen, see *Shāhnāma*, 8: 394 (apparatus for l. 8); Ba'al'amī, *Tārikh*, 2: 1198 (apparatus); *Mujmal al-tavārikh*, 37 and 82 (apparatus).

¹²² Cf. Gignoux, *Noms propres sassanides en moyen-perse épigraphique*, 58, nos. 208-9. See also Moḥammad Ḥasandust, *Farhang-i rīsha-shinākhtī-yi zabān-i fārsī*, 1: 527-8, s.v. "būr, bōr".

¹²³ These nouns, in their turn, are for the most part patronymics; cf. Gignoux, *Noms propres sassanides*, 9.

form attested on the coins minted in her name with the form attested in the Syriac, Greek and Armenian *Nebenüberlieferung* – that this is only a late, incorrect form of the name of the Sasanid queen (also attested for the other Būrān).¹²⁴

3 Conclusions: the Anecdote of Ma'mūn and Būrān and the Turandot Tale

A number of narrative features link the character of Turandot of European literature with that of Būrān-dukht, as it emerges from the review of texts given above. It is impossible, however, at least in the present stage of research, to trace a direct derivation of the Turandot tale and character from tales and anecdotes focused on the figure of Būrān-dukht (mainly intended as the caliph's wife). The inclusion, side by side, of both kinds of narratives – the Turandot tale and the anecdote about Ma'mūn and Būrān – in 'Awfī's collection of tales seems to show that they developed independently from one another. What is sure is that the Turandot tale, from the one side, and the anecdotes on Ma'mūn and Būrān from the other, pertain to different literary genres: folk-literature, permeated with fabulous motifs and clichés, in the first case; narratives based on historical or semi-historical personages and events, in the second case. Such difference of narrative genres may explain some differences in the physiognomy of the female protagonist. For example, the princess in the Turandot tale possesses a feature (almost) unknown to the character of Būrān-dukht: that of her cruelty.

The cruel princess who sets riddles to her suitors seems to have received a name, *Tourandocte*, for the first time in Pétis de la Croix's *Les Mille et un Jour(s)*. The name of Pétis's princess is so well-chosen that it cannot be due to chance; the hypothesis underlying this article is that it originated from the character of Būrān-dukht described in this study. As to possible ways of transmission of this character's name to Pétis de la Croix, one can only guess. If Būrān-dukht/Tūrān-dukht as the name of the princess is not attested in any of the Eastern redactions of the Turandot tale, and in particular in Pétis's Turkish source, it is possible that the French author took the name either, directly, from one of the anecdotes about Ma'mūn and Būrān in the literatures of the Islamic world, or, indirectly, from the notice on *Tourandokht*, the wife of the caliph, in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*. Indeed under this entry d'Herbelot recounts the episode of the couple's wedding and relates the Kuranic verse uttered by *Touran-*

¹²⁴ See Nöldeke, in Ṭabarī, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, 390 fn. 2.

dokht to prevent the caliph from approaching her when she was in a state of impediment.¹²⁵ In such a case, d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque Orientale* provided Pétis de la Croix with not just a name, but with a name and a set of narrative features pertaining to one of the representatives of the misogynist woman type in Arabic and Persian literatures.

Niẓāmī’s Tuesday tale in the poem *Haft peykar* seems to represent – if our supposition is confirmed by further research – an early text documenting a link between the Turandot tale and the anecdote about Ma’mūn and Būrān. Indeed, one can hypothesize that Niẓāmī’s tale of the princess in the castle is a poetical re-elaboration of an early Turandot tale, perhaps the one in Ibn Khusraw’s collection (see above, ch. 1, § 2), with substitution of the verbal with non-verbal riddles, in the wake of the tradition of riddles by means of objects. It is also possible that, in choosing the pearls as symbolic objects in the context of the couple’s encounter, the poet was influenced by Niẓāmī ‘Arūzī’s beautiful anecdote on Ma’mūn and Būrān’s union.

125 See d’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale*, 895-6. Concerning *Tourandokht*, the caliph’s wife, d’Herbelot says: “Cette princesse étoit fort sçavant & douée d’un très bel esprit. L’Auteur du Nighiaristan rapporte que le Chalife étant entré un jour dans sa chambre & voulant avec precipitation s’acquitter avec elle du devoir de mary, cette Dame, qui avoit pour lors quelque empêchement legitime, luy dit ces paroles de l’Alcoran [...] Il arriva que ce passage cité à propos reprima la convoitise trop ardente de son mary” (896).

