

NAXOS
AudioBooks

TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and other stories

Read by **Toby Stephens**

JUNIOR
CLASSICS



NA232712D

1	Tales from the Arabian Nights	3:20
2	One day, when the grand-vizir was talking to his eldest daughter,	4:09
3	When the usual hour arrived	3:07
4	Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp	4:28
5	Aladdin found everything as the magician had said,	3:13
6	One day Aladdin heard an order from the Sultan	3:11
7	Aladdin waited patiently for nearly three months,	2:46
8	When the three months were over,	3:22
9	The palace was finished by the next day,	2:40
10	But far away in Africa the magician remembered Aladdin,	3:04
11	Next morning the Sultan looked out of the window	2:57
12	That morning the Princess rose earlier	3:46
13	The Sultan, who was sitting in his closet,	4:38
14	Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves	3:05
15	Knowing Ali Baba's poverty,	3:19
16	As night drew on Cassim's wife grew very uneasy,	2:34
17	The forty thieves, on their return to the cave,	3:06
18	The Captain now resolved to go himself,	4:09
19	At daybreak Ali Baba arose,	2:57
20	She sent up the supper by Abdallah,	3:27

21	The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor	3:53
22	My rescuer introduced me to his friends	3:06
23	The second voyage. The following day,	4:16
24	The third voyage. Sinbad the bearer of burdens	4:04
25	It was not a peaceful night, however.	3:38
26	The fourth voyage. Next morning,	3:31
27	As time went by, my reputation grew,	3:03
28	The days passed.	2:32
29	The fifth voyage. At the first light of dawn next day,	3:34
30	A few days after this,	3:58
31	The sixth voyage. Next morning, he returned,	3:57
32	When I awoke, I was back in the open air,	2:25
33	The seventh voyage. Back he came at sunrise next day,	3:07
34	By that time I was half dead from hunger and terror.	3:45
35	The story of Blind Baba-Abdalla	3:52
36	After walking some time,	3:08
37	I was a quick runner,	3:19
38	Oh, if he had only refused my request!	3:40
39	“Miserable dervish!” I shrieked,	2:37
40	After one thousand nights	1:21

Total time: 2:14:28

TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

The **Tales from the Arabian Nights** are about the magic and the mystery of far-flung places – or at least they were far-flung when Aladdin and the Lamp, Sinbad the Sailor and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves first became popular in the West in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Here was a land of camels, of silks, of fabulously wealthy palaces, guards with turbans and gleaming, polished scimitars; the women were scented, had kohl under their eyes and lounged on cushions or danced.

And most importantly there was magic. There were flying carpets, angry Djinns and helpful genies stuck in bottles or in rings, who would do the will of their masters. There were palaces that could appear and disappear in a trice, or be transported across vast deserts to another country, leaving just an empty space where they once were.

And there was the beautiful Sheherezade who, with her sister Dinazarde, kept the Sultan Shariah amused, aghast and on tenterhooks with each of her tales for 1001 nights – until he finally acknowledged that his Sheherezade was

too special to behead like her predecessors.

But where do these stories come from? They talk about Baghdad (capital of modern-day Iraq) or sometimes Damascus (capital of modern-day Syria). This places them in the heart of the Middle East where, in the early centuries, it was the country of Persia that was a dominant influence, not only in power and government but also in the arts – including storytelling.

The first mention we have, in very old records, of two women, Sheherezade and Dinarzarde, dates from the 9th century CE, on papyrus – some 1100 years ago. We don't know any more about them but gradually stories developed around them – a story of two sisters and a powerful ruler – and the telling of many tales. Some of the tales may originally have come from India. Some from Arabia. Some from Persia or neighbouring countries.

The Book of One Thousand Nights and a Night that we know opens by referring to the Persian kingdom of the Sassanidae, and this really did exist – it was a powerful dynasty for 400 years from 220CE-620CE. And someone very much like King Shariar probably did exist also. The Sassanid Empire

ruled over a broad area from India to the edges of China and it was from these lands that the main tales of The Thousand and One Nights emerged.

On another piece of papyrus, this time in Cairo, Egypt's capital, dating from the 11th century, there is mention of a Jewish bookseller who loaned a book out to a customer – and the book was called The Thousand Nights and a Night.

As the years went by, history mixed with fiction. Entertainment was more important than historical accuracy. These were tales for adults, showing people in all their strengths and their weakness – their love of money and wealth, of jewels and fame; their recklessness and stupidity – and the cunning and wiles of others. Caliphs, sultans, princesses, Grand Viziers, handmaidens, merchants, servants, slaves, sailors and robbers – they are all in the stories.

Some 500 or 600 years ago these tales were brought together as a group to become the *Alf laylah wa laylah* or *The Thousand and One Nights* more or less as we know them today.

Not many people could read, and books were expensive, so the tales would have been told by master storytellers, sitting around a fire at night, or reclining on a

cushion in the heavy heat of the afternoon when the leaves of the palm trees hung heavy and motionless in the heat of the desert.

And, like our storyteller on this recording, the voyages of Sinbad the Sailor and his encounters with the whale or the Roc or snakes would keep his listeners enthralled.

In fact, Sinbad, Ali Baba and the others fascinated painters and musicians and writers in Europe. The first translation of *Alf laylah wa laylah* or *The Thousand and One Nights* appeared in Europe – in French – in 1704 and was immediately popular. From their cities of London or Vienna or Paris they regarded the Tales as exotic and sensuous, and borrowed the stories for their own entertainments.

Some traces of these Arabian tales can be found in stories told by Western writers well before 1704, for stories travelled by word of mouth – perhaps at the time of the Crusades in the middle ages. Some of the stories of Chaucer and Boccaccio seem to have their origins in the Arabian Nights.

In the 18th century there was a big fashion for things Turkish – which meant from the Ottoman Empire which then ruled the Middle East – Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* was an example of this and was

indirectly influenced in part by The 1001 Nights. In the 19th century, poets such as William Wordsworth and Lord Tennyson, as well as other writers and composers, were also fascinated by them.

It is not widely known that Johann Strauss II, the Waltz King who wrote The Blue Danube, based his first opera on The Thousand and One Nights. It was called Indigo and the Forty Thieves. It wasn't a huge success but a waltz is still played from it – called 1001 Nights.

On this recording you can hear the most famous music associated with **Tales from the Arabian Nights** – Sheherezade by the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The French composer Maurice Ravel also wrote a work called Shéhérezade, an overture to an opera that was never written. And Giacomo Puccini's last opera, Turandot, used the story of Prince Calaf and the Chinese Princess which had its origins in the 1001 Nights.

Popular entertainment loved the tales. Cole Porter wrote a musical called Aladdin. There was a famous silent film (1924) called The Thief of Baghdad starring Douglas Fairbanks; it was followed, in 1940, by an early colour film of the same name, The Thief of Baghdad made by Alexander Korda. The Italian Pier Paolo Pasolini made his

tribute to the tales, The Arabian Nights, in 1970.

Some of these works, like the original, were mainly for adults. But they make ideal stories for younger watchers and listeners. For many years, Aladdin has delighted the whole family in Christmas pantomime productions, with the Genie, Widow Twankey and all. In fact, the first stage version of this was given in London's Theatre Royal in 1788.

More than 200 years later, in 1992, Disney produced one of its best cartoons with Aladdin. Lots of characters and stories from other tales of The Arabian Nights appear in this and, with the magic carpets and the magic music, makes it delightful.

It was followed by further cartoons, including Sinbad – Legend of the Seven Seas.

And yet there remains something particularly magical about the original tales themselves – at least as told here in the traditional form by our storyteller, Toby Stephens, weaving the mystery, creating the pictures, building the tension, as storytellers have done down the centuries.

Notes by Nicolas Soames

**The music on this recording was taken
from the NAXOS catalogue**

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV SHEHERAZADE

Philharmonia Orchestra London, Enrique Bátiz

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Music programmed by Sarah Butcher