



HARTMUT FÄHNDRICH

The Execution of Death

ZAKARIA TAMER IN
GERMAN TRANSLATION¹

When Ulrike Stehli-Werbeck first decided to make Zakaria Tamer's stories known in Germany and adjacent German-speaking countries – since only a slim volume had till then been published² – there was the question of which stories to select.

Our “orientalist” background directed our attention to a very particular kind of story, in the main published in Tamer's collection *Nida'a Nouh* (Noah's Summons), with a few in *Al-Ra'd* (The Thunder) and one in *Al-Hisrim* (Sour Grapes). These were tales about “reviving” characters, both historical and mythical, from Arabic and Islamic history, looking at them, to put it neutrally, from a particular perspective. There are poets (e.g. al-Shanfara) and seafarers (e.g. Sindbad), conquerors (e.g. Genghis Khan) and intellectuals (e.g. Ibn al-Muqaffa'), storytellers (e.g. Scheherazade) and the wise fool Joha. Yet none of these stories in fact lays claim to historicity or to an historical interpretation. They are all satires aimed at the deplorable reality of the power structure and/or of the state of societies in the Arab world at the end of the 20th century. They are stories about individuals caught in a net of oppressive rule and repressive societies or suffering from the absurdity of fate, topics that are pivotal to Zakaria Tamer's writings.

Thus, in “The one who burnt the ships”³, Tariq Ibn Ziyad is taken to account for having burnt the ships (state property!) without the order of his superior. The fact that this destruction of the fleet led to victory, the Arab-Berber conquest of Andalusia, is not taken into