

The Poetics of *Kalileh and Demneh*: An Analysis of the Mechanisms Governing Its Introductions and Text

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Abstract

Intending to teach wisdom and relying on the concepts of wisdom, speech and immortality, *Kalileh and Demneh* seems to have evolved from previous texts. *Kalileh and Demneh* has so far been translated into different languages, with each translator writing his own introduction to the book. While reproducing the main themes of *Kalileh and Demneh*, each introduction has encompassed references common in the discourse and language registers of each period to the main text. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, “mythological symbolism”, and “intertextuality”, the present paper aims to analyze the traces of meaning in *Kalileh and Demneh* and show how they are reproduced and transferred to the translators’ introductions. To this end, the author describes, analyzes and reviews the introduction sections of various translations of this book in relation to the main text of *Kalileh and Demneh*. The analysis reveals that, in addition or contrary to the main text, the introductions have tried to find a structural connection with the main text by repeating the traces of meaning of *Kalileh and Demneh*, and to contribute to its ever-lasting “wisdom”, so that each translation and its introduction has a different interpretation based on the discourse and the language conventions of each period. As a result, each introduction creates a new chain of signifiers, making the introductions an inseparable part of *Kalileh and Demneh*.

Keywords: *Kalileh and Demneh*, Introduction, Immortality, Mythical Symbolism, Intertextuality

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Kalileh and Demneh has been translated from one language to another and with each translation an introduction has been written for it, bringing about a

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feeling of eternity. The writers of these introductions and the translators of this book can be viewed as readers who have added something to the text or changed something in it in accordance with the discourses dominating their period. Therefore, the main text, the introductions and the translations can be regarded as a chain of signifiers, forming a kind of fluidity. Thus, a kind of intertextuality can be seen here: the absence of a beginning for the text links it to Indian and Sanskrit mythology and the endlessness of the introductions connects it with the different references and readings of it in Pahlavi, Syriac, Arabic and Persian languages.

2. Theoretical Framework

Based on Eliade's definition of symbolic thinking in mythology, a connection between the realm of mythology and intertextuality can be identified, which is, in a way, similar to the idea of Kristeva in this regard.

3. Methodology

The present paper adopts the descriptive-analytical method for the purpose of the study. It also draws on mythological symbolism and intertextuality.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Nasrollah Monshi tries to decentralize *Kalileh and Demneh* and attributes immortality to the text itself and points to the contrast between the text and his introduction. The identification of "plant and words" has been referred to in Monshi's introduction. Humans and their conversations fill up the beginning and end of *The Panchatantra* and *Kalileh and Demneh* and animal talk with each other mostly in the middle sections of the book. This structural pattern is exactly followed in *The Panchatantra*, but in *Kalileh and Demneh* small variations can sometimes be seen. At the beginning of the main text, humans have a substantial presence and it seems that because of their lack of wisdom they suffer a symbolic death and metamorphose into animals. At the end of the text, after gaining wisdom, they regain their human form and become immortal. The introductions to *Kalileh and Demneh* mainly point to wise words and immortality.

5. Conclusion

The fundamental opposition in this book as well as in the introductions to it is between mortality and immortality. Immortality is symbolically associated with the immortalizing plant. At a different level, the plant of immortality symbolizes wisdom, as opposed to ignorance, which in Indian thinking saves humans from the 'samsara' cycle and makes them immortal. *Kalileh and*

Demneh is the story of a journey starting with a human conversation about wisdom. There is struggle between the main text and the introductions, in which the introductions try to connect to the main texts so that they are no longer marginalized.

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