

The Mythical Ghoul in Arabic Culture

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Abstract

For a long time, the idea of the ghoul preoccupied the lives of many people from different cultures and religions. Though the ghoul has origins as old as the Mesopotamian civilization, Arabs were largely responsible for popularizing it. Because Islam incorporated this being in its doctrine, the ghoul remained a source of fear and mystery in the Arab culture.

Peter M. Holt and Ann Katherine argue in The Cambridge History of Islam that Islam came about as a 'revolt' and as a 'protest against' the old Arabs' beliefs, but that it could not change all their existing convictions. Instead, it 'integrated' some old practices like the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca (1997, 17). This study argues that Islam could not change the belief in supernatural beings such as genies and ghouls, because they were an integral part of Arab culture. This essay sheds light on the Arabic origins of the Arabian Nights and suggests possible written sources for some tales as a complement to existing arguments that certain tales were orally transmitted and later written down. In relation to the ghoul, the paper also discusses the fact that some Arabian Nights tales contain Islamic elements and motifs, and feature plots that are clearly similar to older written accounts found in various Arabic books. This work traces its evolution from the past to modern times in an attempt to give an overall understanding of the ghoul, and an idea of how and why its concept changed from one culture to another.

The Pre-Islamic Ghoul

The earliest records of Arabs document their activities in Mesopotamia, providing evidence that the nomads of Arabia were always in direct contact with the more "advanced" people of Mesopotamia, mainly for the purpose of trade. This contact produced cultural exchange between the two peoples, mostly in terms of life style and borrowed words. In ancient Mesopotamia, there was a monster called 'Gallu' that could be regarded as one of the origins of the Arabic ghoul.¹ Gallu was an Akkadian demon of the underworld 'responsible for the abduction of the vegetation-god Damuzi (Tammuz) to the realm of death' (Lindemans). Since Akkad and Sumer were very close to the Arabian deserts, Arab Bedouins in contact with Mesopotamian cultures could have borrowed the belief in the ghoul from the Akkadians.

Before discussing different ideas of the ghoul, however, I will examine the ghoul's general depiction in a pre-Islamic context to show that the Arabic ghoul is older than the religion of Islam. In some old Arabic works written before Islam, ghouls were regarded as devilish creatures. al-Mas'ūdī (c. 896- c. 957) referred in *Murūj al-Dhahab* to the older books written by Ibn 'Ishqq and Wahb Ibn al-Munabbih, who tackled the old Bedouins' myth of creation. Arabs before Islam believed that when God created genies from the gusts of fire, He made from this type of fire their female part, but one of their eggs was split in two. Hence, the Qutrūb,² which looked like a cat, was created. As for the devils, they

came from another egg and settled in the seas. Other evil creatures, such as the *Mârid*,³ inhabited the islands; the ghouls resided in the wilderness; the *si'lwah* dwelt in lavatories and waste areas; and the *hâmah*⁴ lived in the air in the form of a flying snake (1986, 171).

al-Qazwîni (c.1208-c.1283) mentioned a different description taken from an old Arabic source, which says that when the devils wanted to eavesdrop on Heaven, God threw meteors at them,⁵ whereupon some were burnt, fell into the sea and later turned into crocodiles, while others dropped onto the ground and changed into ghouls (1980, 236). Such descriptions cannot be found in Islamic texts. For instance, Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhiz (c. 775- c. 868), who compiled many popular beliefs in his book *al-Haywān (The Animal)*, wrote that commoners thought that the devil's eyes were upright as in images taken from the Bedouins (1969, 214), whose ideas lived on for almost two thousand years.

As for popular tales, several stories dealing with the ghouls circulated before Islam. For instance, 'Umar Bin al-Khaṭṭāb (c. 586-644), the second Muslim Caliph, was known as the man who killed a ghouls in the desert when he was traveling to Syria. After stopping him, the female monster asked the man: 'Bin al-Khaṭṭāb, where are you heading?' The Caliph answered: 'This is not your concern,' and the ghouls turned its head completely around in order to frighten him (Ibn Manzūr vol. xxvii, 269-70). Knowing the evil intentions of the monster, Bin al-Khaṭṭāb raised his sword and killed it by striking it between its shoulder and neck. When he returned to the

same place after few hours, however, he could not find the ghouls there (Ibid.).

In addition, Abū Asīd al-Sa'dī mentioned the story of Arqam Bin Abū al-Arqam in which a ghouls appeared and kidnapped al-Arqam's, son who was on a desert journey. The ghouls, disguised in the form of a woman, carried the boy on its back. When they saw al-Arqam's friend, the woman pretended to be the boy's attendant (al-Wāqidī 1984, 104). This story emphasizes the well-known deceitful and wicked character of the ghouls. In folktales, motif (G443.2) 'Ogre abducts woman's children...' (El-Shamy 1995, 149) is similar to the account given above. In general, the Pre-Islamic ghouls is known as a devilish female creature that intends to inflict harm on travelers and is able to change its form. In most cases, the ghouls is defeated by striking it with a sword.⁶ The following section discusses how the ghouls has been associated with Islamic practices.

The Islamic Ghouls

When Islam firstly spread in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, it succeeded in changing many old customs, such as ending the habit of burying recently born baby girls and preventing women from marrying more than one man at a time. It could not, however, change other ideas such as the belief in the ghouls or the *si'lwah* (*si'lah*).⁷ Prophet Muhammed mentioned the ghouls in several of his sayings, but later Muslim scholars had conflicting views about the authenticity of these sayings, as some negated the ghouls's existence and others confirmed it. Despite the rational voices that rejected the existence of this mon-

ster, many Arabs (especially Bedouins) narrated tales and recited poetry that featured or mentioned the ghoul. Since this creature originated in the desert, it was particularly popular there from the pre-Islamic period until present time. However, the legend spread to the Arabs' urban areas and became part of the culture there, which suggests that the Bedouins' beliefs were very influential, and in some cases formed the very fabric of the Arab society. As mentioned earlier, Holt and Katherine's argument that Islam could not change all the old beliefs of Arabia is valid in the case of belief in the ghoul.

Prophet Muhammed himself was said, in many instances, to comment on or confirm the existence of ghouls. For example, Ismâ'îl bin 'Umar Abū al-Fidâ' (?- c. 1372) mentioned in *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr* that ghouls were the 'demons of genies', and cited the following famous incident: When the Prophet met his companion Abū Dharr in a mosque, the Prophet advised Abū Dharr to pray in order to be saved from the mischief of the devils of humans and genies. Abū Dharr was surprised to hear the Prophet confirmed the existence of creatures such as these, which the Prophet identified as ghouls (1980, 306-8).

In another anecdote, Abū Ayūb al-Anṣārī asked the Prophet's advice because some ghouls used to eat from his dates store at night. The Prophet told him to say the following: 'In the Name of God, answer the Prophet of God'. al-Anṣārī followed the advice and the ghouls promised not to return. The next day, the Prophet informed the man that the ghouls might come back because

they lied. His prediction was accurate. The Prophet then advised al-Anṣārī to recite the 'Âyat al-Kursī' (Throne verse) from the Holy Quran, which proved to be useful in getting rid of the ghouls (Abū al-Fidâ' 1980, 306-8; al-Tirmidhī n.d., 158; al-Kūfī 1988, 94; al-'Asqalânī 1959, 159; al-Naysâbūrī n.d., 519). Abu Asīd al-Sa'dī, another of Prophet Muhammed's companions, had a similar experience (al-'Asqalânī 1959, 489) though in this version the ghouls themselves gave advice on how to rid humans of their harm.

To sum up, according to the Prophet Muhammed, ghouls are the demons or enchantresses of genies that hurt human beings by eating or spoiling their food or by frightening travelers when they are in the wilderness. In order to avoid their harm, one can recite a verse from the Holy Quran or call for prayer since they hate any reference to God.

Other Muslim scholars like Abī al-Sheikh al-Aṣbahânī (c.887-c.979) described the ghoul or si'lwah as a kind of a female demon that was able to change its shape and appear to travelers in the wilderness to delude and harm them. He narrated the story of Aḥmed al-Dabbâgh's father, who went once on a trip and took a risky road that was known to be frequented by ghouls. After walking for few hours, Aḥmed al-Dabbâgh's father saw a woman wearing a ragged dress lying on a bed above hung lanterns used to illuminate the place. When she saw him approaching, the woman started calling on the man to attract him; however, he realized that she was a ghoul, so he recited the Sūrat Yâsīn from the Holy Quran. As a result, the woman

put out her lantern lights and said: 'Oh man, what did you do to me?' Hence, he was saved from her harm (1987, vol. v, 1652) (Motif F491.10) en-Naddâhah 'the she-Caller' was described as a 'female spirit who calls people by name and then leads them astray' (El-Shamy 1995, 130).⁸

On the other hand, an authenticated saying attributed to Prophet Muhammad by Abdullah Bin Jâbir stated that ghouls did not exist: 'No ghouls, no *'adwâ'*⁹, and no *ṭayrrah'*¹⁰ (Ma'rûf et al. 1993, vol. iv, 251; al-Shawkânî 1973, 373; al-Jawharî 1990, 381). In addition to the ghouls, the Prophet negated other fallacies or old customs like the *'hâma'*¹¹ (al-Ṭahâwî 1994, 308), *'banî'*¹² (al-Qushayrî n.d., 1745; al-Tamîmî 1967, 498), *'ṣifr'*¹³ (Ma'rûf et al. 1996, vol. vi, 23) and *'naw'*¹⁴ (al-Qushayrî n.d., 1742).

Though the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad seem to contradict one another,¹⁵ many Muslim scholars believe that ghouls used to exist before Islam. For instance, Abū Asīd al-Sa'dī (cited above) commented after narrating a story involving a ghouls that 'ghouls lived at that time [before and at the beginning of Islam], but they perished later' (al-Wâqidî 1984, 104). Yūsuf al-anafī shared the same view, stating that 'God could have created this creature, but later He removed its harm from human beings' (n.d., 268). According to the writings of these scholars, the Prophet Muhammad states ghouls no longer exist because God has rid humans of their mischief.

In brief, Islam tried to direct the people's way of thinking to the one omnipresent God as the creator and mover of

all things and did not acknowledge that there were other forces involved in controlling the universe. Conflicting views about the existence of ghouls, however, imply that Muslim scholars were still struggling to balance the widespread popular beliefs taken from *Jahiliyya* era (before Islam) with the new ideas of the Islamic doctrine. In order to understand the further influence of the ghouls on the Arab culture, this essay will analyze the popular beliefs expressed in different books written after the emergence of Islam.

Arabic Culture

Medieval Arabic culture is mainly reflected in literary works, especially poetry. However, there were other outlets by which writers expressed their views of their culture such as books of history, science, and philosophy. For instance, the Arab encyclopedic writer al-Jâhiz wrote about the types of animals and other creatures in *al-Haywân*. He said the ghouls were believed to attract travelers by setting fire at night; subsequently, the travelers would lose their direction. (Motif G0412.3 'Ogre's (ogress's) fire lures person) (El-Shamy 2004, 1073). al-Jâhiz elaborated by saying that people viewed the ghouls as a type of genie, and the *si'lwah* was the female genie if she did not change (*tataghawwal*) or become a ghouls by deluding travelers. If a genie changed its shape and harassed travelers, it would become a she-devil or ghouls (1969, 195). In fact, al-Jâhiz confirmed the continuous belief in the ghouls and added a strange conviction popular among Arabs: the *si'lwah* would die only by one mighty blow from the sword because if

two strikes were directed to it, it would not expire until one thousand blows follow (1969, 233 and 235). On the other hand, Yūsuf Ibn 'Abdulbâr al-Qurṭubî (c.978- c.1071) considered the abovementioned view one of the Arab Bedouins' legends, and the author harshly criticized al-Jâhiz for citing such a popular belief and accused him of being 'foolish' (1982, 177). Nevertheless, this belief was widespread. The best example is probably the *Arabian Nights*, which contains many other popular convictions dating back to the medieval times (Perho 2004; Shosha 2004). Also, Silvestre de Sacy stresses that there are Islamic elements in the composition of the *Arabian Nights* (Sadan 2004, 44). When Antoine Galland (1646-1715) first translated the *Arabian Nights* into a European language, he mentioned in the preface that the stories 'must be pleasing, because of the account they give of the Customs and Manners of the Eastern Nations' (1718, 'Preface'). Furthermore, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) compared the strange scenes and items found in Turkey with what she read in the '*Arabian Tales*'. Montagu reminded her sister by saying: 'You forget... those very tales were written by an author of this country, and (excepting the enchantments) are a real representation of the manners here' (1992, 157). Despite the fact that the *Arabian Nights* was only a fictitious work, Galland and Montagu considered it an accurate representation of the Arabic and Islamic culture instead of viewing it as a receptacle of some popular old beliefs.

Indeed, *The Arabian Nights* abounds with references to the ghoul and some of the ideas cited above. For instance,

in Richard Burton's translation of the 'Story of Prince Sayf Al-Muluk and the Princess Badi'a Al-Jamal' in *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, a man and his fellows were taken by a ghoul to its cave, but they managed to blind its eyes with hot rod and smite it with 'the sword a single stroke across his waist'. The ghoul cried out: 'O man, an thou desire to slay me, strike me a second stroke'. As this man was about to hit it again, his fellowman said: 'Smite him not a second time, for then he will not die, but will live and destroy us' (1886-8, vol. 7, 361). This tale corresponds with al-Jâhiz's account of how to kill a ghoul by striking it once; apparently such a belief had not faded away from Arabic culture despite the fact that many centuries elapsed between al-Jâhiz's time and that of the *Arabian Nights* composition. Muhsin Mahdî confirms that certain storytellers of the *Arabian Nights* transformed some anecdotes found in the books of history into fiction. For instance, al-Mas'ûdî recorded an account similar to the tale of 'The Hunchback and the King of China' in the *Arabian Nights* (1995, 165-6). The following tale further suggests the link between factual written accounts and fictional tales.

In a story cited by al-Aṣbahânî and narrated by Zaid Bin A'slam, two men from Ashjja' tribe wanted to provide a bride with her wedding outfits, so they went on a trip to an area where they saw a lonely woman. Upon seeing them, the woman said: 'What is your need?'; the men replied, 'We want to provide a bride with her needs'. The woman said she could assist in this business if the two men promised to come back to her.

So they made their promise. When they finished their business, the two men returned to the lady. She said: 'I will follow you in your journey'. They made her ride on one of their camels until they reached a sand mound where the woman stopped and said: 'I have some business here', suggesting that she wanted to relieve herself. Unexpectedly, the woman remained behind the mound for an hour; thus, one of the two men went to check, yet he was delayed, too. When the other man climbed the mound and looked, he was shocked to see that the woman was lying on the man's belly and eating his liver. As a result, the man ran as fast as possible to escape from this woman, but she glimpsed him and followed his trace. After stopping him, she said: 'What is wrong with you?'; he replied: 'There is an iniquitous devil among us'. Despite the harm she inflicted on the other man, the woman gave advice on how to avoid her mischief by supplicating and mentioning God. The moment the man did what he was advised, a fire fell from the sky and ripped the woman in two, so he thanked God for killing the *si'lwah* (1987, vol. v, 1671-2). This tale is somehow similar to the tales of the 'King's Son and the Ogress' and 'The Tale of the King's Son & the She-Ghoul' (Haddawy 1992, 42-55) in the *Arabian Nights*, which further suggests that some tales in the *Arabian Nights* are more or less derived from written texts. The idea that ghouls could be driven away by reciting verses from the Holy Quran persisted for a long time because it was recommended by the Prophet himself, as previously explained. In fact, such an idea is bor-

rowed from Abū Asīd al-Sa'dī's account and other anecdotes involving the Prophet. For instance, Gharib, the character in Richard Burton's translation of the story of 'The History of Gharib and His Brother Ajib' in *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, was caught by a ghoul. He started crying God's name and supplicating. As a result, Gharib was able to release himself from the ghoul's grip and finally killed it (1886-8, vol. vi, 257-295). The motifs in this tale are similar to those in the one narrated by Aḥmed al-Dabbāgh's father cited above, which gives an idea of the possible source of this *Arabian Nights* tale. In general, the moral of such tales is to show God's supremacy, which is far beyond the power of this naïve monster. In addition, there is a recurrent notion that ghouls show up along desolate roads asking for help. They usually ask for a ride on a camel or horse with other passengers until they reach a proper place to stop and carry out their hideous plans.

Another popular aspect of the ghoul is the belief that it can change its shape; for instance, Antoine Galland translated a tale from the *Arabian Nights* entitled 'The Story of the Vizier that was Punished' (1798, 77-79), in which an ogre, the Western equivalent of the *si'lwah*, explains: 'The Lady was a Hogres, wife to one of those Savage Demons, called Hogres, who stay in remote places, and make use of a thousand wiles to surprise and devour passengers...' (1798, 78). The portrayal of the ogre in this story is the typical Arabic cultural concept of the ghoul that changes its shape and usually becomes an attractive woman in order to kill human beings. Again, al-Jāhiz

referred to this trait in the ghouls in his book *al-Haywân*, as mentioned earlier.

Other fallacies about the ghouls include the belief that it has 'cloven feet similar to that of a goat', according to al-Mas'ûdî (1986, 170) or closer to that of an 'ass' (al-Manâwî 1945, 318). There was also the cultural practice of hanging a paw of a rabbit around one's neck for the protection from the offenses of genies and the evil fires of the *si'lwah* (al-Isfahânî 2004, 316-7). Furthermore, Arabs believed that ghouls resided in islands, for instance, al-A'drîsî (c.1100 – c.1166) mentioned that there was an island called 'the *si'âlî*' (she-ghouls) where certain creatures that looked like women lived, having long fangs and bright eyes like lightning. There was no difference between the males and females except for their genitals and their dress, which was made of tree leaves (1866, 53). Furthermore, Ibn Sa'îd al-Maghribî (c.1213–c.1286) said that there were almost 100 small islands called 'the ghouls' wherein black naked people lived and spoke an indistinct language (1970, 130). In the *Arabian Nights*, many references to the ghouls correspond with the above description. For instance, Lane and Burton narrated the 'Story of Fourth Voyage of the Es-Sindibad of the Sea' (Lane 1865, 35-49; Burton 1886-8, vol. vi, 34-48) in which Sindibad traveled from Basrah and saw many islands, but nearly drowned when he was shipwrecked. Sindibad managed to swim with some of his comrades to an island by using a plank from the ship. On the shore, they saw a high building and walked toward it. Standing near the gate, a group of naked savage men ran toward them and

took them all to the King. Those naked men were the 'Magian people' and their king was a 'Ghul' (1886-8, 36). Whoever came to their island were required to eat a certain kind of food, but unlike his fellows, whose minds were 'stupefied' and 'state became changed,' Sindibad could not eat. Then Sindibad's fellows were given cocoa-nut oil until they became very fat and stupid after which they were roasted and presented to the King. However, Sindibad succeeded in escaping especially after learning that the Magians eat raw human flesh.

Finally, the ghouls were thought to have magical powers by possessing human bodies. Some Western travelers to Arabia in the nineteenth century documented such a popular conviction;¹⁶ for example, in *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1893), Sir Richard Burton pointed out that Arab Bedouins followed traditional medical practices based on superstitions because they interpreted rabies as: 'a bit of meat [that] falls from the sky, and that a dog eating it becomes mad'. If a man was bitten by such a dog, his fellows must 'shut him up with food, in a solitary chamber, for four days'; however, if he continued barking like a dog, they would 'expel the Ghûl (demon) from him, by pouring over him boiling water mixed with ashes' (1893, 389). In other words, the Bedouins believed that the ghouls could possess a man's body and make him mad. Until this day, many Arabs believe that genies can take over a man's body if he does not practice his religion in a proper way; hence, violent means are used by the cleric to exorcise the evil spirit. In her study of popular Islam (unorthodox reli-

gious practices), Gerda Sengers mentions the *zar* as an exorcising ritual well known in Egypt in modern times. The *jinn* (genies) and *Asyad* (demons) are believed to be responsible for 'clothing' (possessing) one's body, and the main method of driving these supernatural beings away from the body is by reciting certain verses from the Holy Quran (2003, 23-4). On the other hand, in Burton's account, Arab Bedouins think of the ghouls as a kind of genie that possesses one's body instead of being an animal-like creature, denoting that this monster has retained its old ethereal character mentioned in Islamic texts.

Apart from the abovementioned tales, many comparisons were made in Arabic poetry between ghouls and human beings in order to describe an ugly woman, a forceful man, or an evil trait. For instance, 'Âṣim Bin Kharwa'ah al-Nahshalī disparaged his wife saying:

She is the ghou! and the devil put
together...

Whoever accompanies the ghou! and
the devil is depressed,

Even genies seek God's protection
upon seeing her. (Hāshim 2001, 813)

The ghou! was used in many Arab proverbs to denote different meanings; for instance, it referred to a repulsive human being with a horrible looking face: 'Uglier than a monkey, uglier than a pig, uglier than a ghou!' (al-Naysabūrī, 129) or 'uglier than the devil', which referred sometimes to the ghou!'s repulsiveness (al-Jawzī 1983, 63). al-Qazwīnī pointed out that Arabs stressed the ghou!'s ugly

features. However, even if they did not see a ghou!, mentioning its name in poetry and tales brought fear to listeners (1980, 387).

In brief, the Arabs understood the ghou! to be an ugly female demon that intends to harm travelers and even to kill them in some cases. It has the ability to change its form and become a beautiful woman to attract men or even to mate with them. The ghou!'s description is close to that of a predatory animal that has fangs and cloven feet, and combines features of the snake, goat, and ass.

Since Islam clearly dictated that its followers use their rational judgments in assessing matters, there were many Arab writers, particularly those belonging to *al-Mu'tazilah* (Recluses) school, who negated the very existence of the ghou! because they relied on reason in analyzing different cultural and religious issues. For instance, al-Jāhiz, who was one of the *al-Mu'tazilah* members, offered a logical explanation for the myth of the ghou!. He said that if a man sought solitude in the desert, he would be confused, distracted, unfocused, and would start seeing the small thing as huge. He might also perceive the invisible, hear the inaudible, and view minute matter as utterly magnificent and big (1969, 150). In other words, the desert heat and fear caused by darkness and loneliness could make any man hallucinate and see illusions. A young person, for instance, who grew up with ghoulish stories that were part of his culture, might go alone to the wilderness at the dead of night and become delusional at the sound of the first owl cries and voice echoes. Sir Richard Burton's interpretation of the ghou! fell

along similar lines. In his translation of the 'Story of Fourth voyage of the Es-Sindibad of the Sea' (1886-8, vol. vi, 34-48) in *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, Burton explained the word 'Ghul' as 'an ogre, a cannibal' and said: 'I cannot but regard the "Ghul of the waste" as an embodiment of the natural fear and horror which a man feels when he faces a really dangerous desert' (1886-8, 36). Finally, Hasan El-Shamy suggests that one's 'life space' contains an amalgam of 'real' and 'imaginary' worlds. 'If a child is told that wolves swallow "kids" whole and live in old tombs, then as association is established between wolves and these acts and objects; for the child, this is what wolves "really" do' (1999, 7).

al-Jâhiz further elaborates by saying that after remembering the hallucination, a man would possibly write poetry or narrate tales about seeing this monster, thus making other people believe in its reality more than before. If that man was a natural liar and habitually exaggerated and overstated matters, he would claim to have seen the ghoul or talked to the *si'lwah* (1969, 150). Others might pretend that they killed the *si'lwah* or accompanied it or even married it. al-Jâhiz stressed that some of those liars would be tempted to continue misleading others if they encountered naïve commoners who did not question or doubt such tales and who could not distinguish between reality and fantasy (1969, 151). Carl von Sydow classifies such accounts as memorates because they deal with a belief in superstition like stories of ghosts (Green 1997, 92-3), and El-Shamy mentions similar motifs (A2909) 'Origin of jinn [genie]: generated by hallucina-

tion caused by sensory deprivation' and motif (F1043.1) 'Hallucinatory experiences from sensory deprivation' (1995, 58 & 143). In brief, the accounts mentioned above suggest that human beings imagine fearful creatures such as genies and ghouls because of the old fanciful stories they have heard. These supernatural creatures will become more real and will 'materialize' when people with feeble minds are frightened or in a state of exhaustion.

Furthermore, the Arab philosopher Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (c.973-c.1057) stated in *Risâlat al-Ghufrrân* that some Arabs 'lied about the ghoul' (1988, 244); he stressed that 'whatever was contrary to reason must be a myth' (1988, 223) such as the story Ta'abbaṭah Sharran. Another Arab writer who objected to the popular beliefs in ghoul was al-Jawzī (c.1116-1196). In his book *al-A'dhkiyâ* (The Bright Ones) al-Jawzī tells the story of a brave and strong man called al-A'drra' in the city of Kūfah. al-A'drra' heard once that there was a ghoul near one of the remains on the outskirts of the city and decided to investigate the matter because he believed that 'the devil and the ghoul were only illusions'. After riding on his horse at night, he suddenly saw a fiery creature decreasing and increasing in its size. As the horse panicked, the man was forced to walk, and he followed the trace of fire to a cellar located under the remains. The man felt his way along the narrow corridors because it was very dark, and when he reached its end, he caught a person. Astonished, al-A'drra' found out that the fiery shape was only a black woman, so he swore to kill her if she would not speak the truth. Instead,

the woman asked a question: 'Are you a genie or a human being? I have never seen anyone else braver than you!' The man discovered that the lady was a slave serving a family in Kūfah who ran away and stayed in the remains. In order to survive, the woman had the idea of terrifying travelers by using a stick, a candle, and a piece of cloth. She used to hold the candle in one hand and the stick in another and place the piece of cloth over the stick. By moving them all, she managed to create an illusion of a glittering indistinct creature. Then she would do the same without the stick to fool the people by showing that the creature changed its size. For two decades the woman was able to use this same trick to frighten travelers, who would throw their luggage and run away. After learning her story, the man took the woman to her owners, and travelers were no more harmed by the alleged ghoul (2001, 107).

Finally, 'Abdul Qādir al-Baġhdādī (c.1620-c.1682) cited the Arab poet Kāmil, who wrote: 'After viewing the fellows of my age, I found no true friend who could stand by you at times of need/ I have known then that the impossible matters are three: the ghoul, the phoenix, and a faithful friend' (1979, 136). These lines of poetry have become proverbial in Arabic language, which suggests that many Arabs believe that the existence of the ghoul is a mere illusion. In brief, rational interpretations of the fallacy of the ghoul verify that many Arabs wanted to uncover the nature of this monster to enlighten the people in order that they not be deceived by popular tales.

In addition to the classical descrip-

tion of the ghoul in Arabic culture, there is another type of ghoul called shiqq. In the following section, I will present an analytical discussion of this devilish beast because of its importance in understanding the 'other side' of the ghoul.

shiqq

Several Arabic sources referred to the shiqq or nasnās which literally meant 'half' and 'only one half is visible' (Marzolph & Leeuwen 2004, 535). In folktales, the 'person with half a body' and the 'one-sided man' are well-known motifs (F525) and (F525.1) (Thompson 2002; El-Shamy 2004, 163). In pre-Islamic Arabic accounts, there was the famous story of 'Allqumah Bin Ṣafwān Bin Umayyah al-Kinānī who once rode a donkey and went during a clear night to Mecca. He reached a place called Yaḥūman¹⁷ where he met the shiqq carrying a sword; however, they both fell dead at the end of the fight (al-Qazwīnī 1980, 237; al-Dimīrī 1978, 601-2; al-Jāhiz 1969, 206-7; al-Zamakhsharī 1976, 379-80). After Islam, the shiqq remained alive in the minds of the people who believed in its existence. For instance, al-Jāhiz said that this creature was known to be 'a kind of genie appearing to travelers to kill them either by frightening them or by beating them' (1969, 206). However, the shape of the shiqq was peculiar because it had only 'one eye, one hand, and one leg'. al-Qazwīnī further clarified that the shiqq was 'a devilish creature which looked like a half human' (1980, 237). In the *Arabian Nights*, 'The Story of the Sage and the Scholar' referred to nasnās, denoting that this was a common belief held by Arab people.

In spite of the pre-Islamic origins of shiqq, Arab Bedouins held this creature as part of their popular beliefs for many centuries since Charles Montagu Doughty (1843-1926) referred in *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888) to it. Doughty's traveling desert companion mentioned that there was a genie type with 'horrible' looks; 'certain of them have but one eye in the midst of their faces' (1964, 17). Doughty met an Arab Bedouin who swore that he saw a 'ghrôl' or 'ghrûl' in the desert and provided the following description:

[It had] 'a cyclops' eye set in the midst of her human-like head, long beak of jaws, in the ends one or two great sharp tusks, long neck; her arms like chicken' fledgling wings, the fingers of her hands not divided; the body big as a camel's, but in shape as the ostrich;¹⁸ the sex is only feminine, she has a foot as the ass' hoof, and a foot as an ostrich. She entices passengers, calling to them over the waste by their names, so that they think it is their own mother's or their sister's voice.... (1933, 53)

Doughty considered these tales ridiculous, saying that 'no man, but Philemon, lived a day fewer for laughing' (1933, 53) at such stories. Nevertheless, Hasan El-Shamy classified tens of Arab folktales that belong to 327B (The Dwarf and the Giant) in which Nuşş-nuşaiş (Half) and Ḥdaydûn were the main characters (2004, 1001). Also, motif (G415.1) 'Ogress poses as man's sister and invites him to live in her house' (El-Shamy 2004, 1073) is similar to the account mentioned above. Again, the legend of the half person has not faded away in the popular

imagination, though the one mentioned in folktales is rather friendly and carries human features unlike the devilish shiqq or nasnâs.¹⁹

To sum up, the ghoul is very popular in the oral tales of Arab Bedouins. As a proof, Western travelers who visited the Arab region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries referred to this monster mainly when they encountered the Bedouins. However, when Antoine Galland translated the *Arabian Nights* in the eighteenth century, he claimed that the ghoul mentioned was of Arabic origin (Al-Rawi 2009). The following section discusses the way Galland changed perceptions of the ghoul in the West by attributing it to the Arabic culture.

Galland's Contribution

In his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Galland tried to give an authentic rendition of the Arabic work, but he deviated several times by deleting and adding many details. Among the details he introduced about the ghoul, one can be found in volume 11 in 'The Story of Sidi Nouman' (1798, 78-9). Galland mentioned that ghouls were male monsters that in 'want of prey, will sometimes go in the night into burying grounds, and feed upon dead bodies that have been buried there' (1798, 81). In addition, he introduced the morbid character of Amina. Though she was newly wed, Amina preferred to accompany the ghouls in the graveyard at night. In the Arabic culture of the time, no such character existed, which indicates the liberty this French translator took in his translation (Al-Rawi 2009). According to the Ox-

ford *English Dictionary*, the word 'ghoul' nowadays means an 'evil spirit supposed (in Muslim countries) to rob graves and prey on human corpses' (1989). This inaccuracy is clearly an effect of Galland's translation, which was not a faithful rendition of the Arabic original word (Al-Rawi 2009). Unfortunately, other works followed Galland's new description of the ghoul without further inquiry. For instance, the famous orientalist William Lane (1801-1876) suggested the ghoul 'applied to any cannibal', as a creature that 'appear[ed] in the forms of various animals, and in many monstrous shapes' so as to 'haunt burial-grounds and other sequestered spots; [and]... feed upon dead human bodies' (1987, 42; 1860, 227). This description corresponded with Galland's account. Lane did not cite any Arabic reference to support his claim; instead, he referred to Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights* rather than original Arabic sources. Lane also contradicted his own work because he never described the ghoul in such a manner in his book *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, in which numerous Arabic references were used (1980, 2311).²⁰

Furthermore, in his classification of Arab folktales, Hasan El-Shamy mentioned motif G20 'Ghouls. Persons eat corpses' and its subtypes by referring to Victor Chauvin (1995, vol. i, 144). However, the latter only cited Galland's 'Sidi Nouman' tale as evidence of his claim (1902, vol. vi, 198). As in Lane's case, Chauvin and subsequently El-Shamy depended on Galland's ghoul. Ultimately, Galland embellished the ghoul with a new feature that became a standard description of this creature in the West.

In an attempt to investigate the origins of Galland's idea of the ghoul that digs graves and eats corpses in Arabic sources, it is necessary to compare his description with some Arabic references to a certain animal that has similar characteristics. In old Arabic writings, the only account similar to Galland's ghoul is found in the popular description of the hyena. al-Dimīrī (c. 1341-c.1404) mentions that hyenas 'are fond of digging graves due to their great appetite for eating human flesh'²¹ (1978, vol. i, 641). Also, al-'Aīṣāmī (? -c. 1699) cited anecdotal evidence of an event that occurred in Mecca in 1667, in which a hyena-like animal came close to an ass, so some men traced it. The animal ran to a nearby house and injured the woman living there. As a result, the men killed the animal and called it 'ghoul' because they did not know what it was (2007, vol. iii, 51). This tale suggests the proximity with which people viewed the two creatures. Furthermore, J. E. Hanauer documented several stories about the superstitious beliefs in animals among Jews, Christians, and Muslims during his journey to Palestine in the late 19th century. According to the Arab belief, if the hyena is 'not content with digging up and devouring dead bodies', it would 'often bewitch... the living and lures them to [its] den', and it is believed to appear to 'the solitary wayfarer, rub against him endearingly and then run on ahead'. According to Hanauer, this person becomes, 'instantly bewitched' and would follow the hyena 'as fast as he can till he gets into the beast's den and is devoured' (1907, 271). In folktales, Muhawi and Kanaana believe that the hyena is 'traditionally

linked with supernatural forces, its effect on human beings being considered similar to that of possession by the jinn' (1989, 43). Also, El-Shamy classifies motif (B14.5) 'Ghoul (ogre) as hybrid of jinniyah and hyena' (1995, 104) which corresponds with the idea cited above. As the hyena is well known to eat carcasses and produce some semi-human sounds like crying and laughter, it can be easily confused with the ghoul. The above mentioned accounts are almost identical with the description of Galland's ghoul since he could have heard a similar account from Arab friend, Ḥannâ Dhiyâb who inspired the orphan tales in the *Arabian Nights*, or read somewhere about the belief in hyenas in the Arab world and applied such a description to the ghoul. In Arabic culture, the ghoul is still alive, making its appearance in its different spectrums and retaining its old features, as discussed below.

The Ghoul Today

The belief in the mythical ghoul is still widely spread in the Arab world up to this day, particularly among elderly people. In almost all Arab countries, the ghoul is viewed as a monster that eats human beings and is used as a means of instilling fear inside children's hearts. Many modern stories rewritten and adapted from old Arabic folktales deal with this monster, whose description resembles the one mentioned in this work. For example, the Palestinian writer, Amīl abībī, published a story called *Sarâyâ Bint al-Ghoul* dealing with a girl called *Sarâyâ* who was kidnapped by a ghoul and was imprisoned in his palace. Later, her cousin searched for her and man-

aged to rescue her (Motif G0440.1 'ogre abducts woman (maiden)' and motif G0500 'Ogre defeated') (El-Shamy 2004, 1073 & 1074). Another Palestinian, Jamīl al-Salhūt, published a story for children called *al-Ghoul* portraying a small girl called Khadījah who dreamt of the ghoul after hearing its horrible description from her grandmother, so she urinated while asleep due to her excessive fear. When she narrated the dream to her teacher at school, the grandmother was criticized for narrating such old legends. Furthermore, the famous Egyptian film actor 'Ādil Imām starred in *al-Ghoul* (1981) in which he appeared as a journalist trying to discover the truth about a fearful and cruel tycoon who harmed people and exploited them. The ghoul in this film referred to a hideous person due to his ugly behavior, as is the case in old Arabic proverbs. In the following section, a more empirical discussion of the ghoul is made in an attempt to understand how this creature came to exist in Arab people's lives.

Alternate Account

In view of the details given earlier, ghouls can merely be real human beings carrying birth defects. The mouth of the ghoul is believed to have the shape of a cat's, or what is now medically called a 'cleft lip' and 'cleft palate'. In addition, a ghoul is thought to have deformed legs or hands that look like that of an ass which is medically called 'ankyrodactylia', and it has hair covering a great deal of its body. In fact, many children around the world are born with such defects every year due to environmental factors and genetic flaws (Carinci et al. 2007, 2). If one

takes into account the fact that pregnant women in the desert lack basic nutritious food and that Arabs, until this very day, commonly practice intermarriage within their tribes over many generations, one can conclude that the ghouls are children with serious birth defects. After giving birth, the mother might be forced to part with her child due to his/her congenital birth deformities. As a result, the child would be ostracized from his/her tribe and would seek the desert as a refuge because superstitions played an important role in the lives of Arabs before Islam.²² Hence, the Arabic stories that mentioned a marriage taking place between a human being and a *si'awah* can be true in view of the above mentioned assumption. In brief, the ghouls could be real human beings born with severe birth defects, compelling them/her to reside in the wilderness to avoid other humans who would naturally loathe and fear horrendous and ugly creatures.

Conclusion

The mythical ghouls of Arabia have preoccupied the Arabs for several centuries and will certainly remain a source of inspiration for some writers and a cause of fear for many children. One of the main reasons behind their fearful character is their mysterious nature since there is no unified agreement about their features; the ghouls are thought to be a kind of devil, genie, enchantress of genies, devilish genie, and spirit. However, most accounts mention this monster as an ugly and harmful female creature. In all cases, the belief in such a supernatural being is still solid mainly among uneducated people who are plagued by ghoulish tales from

their early childhood until their death. What is striking is that the ghouls refuse to fade away from the imagination of some people regardless of the great passage of time and the various cultures and religions it has encountered.

Notes

1. There are plenty of Arabic words whose origins are derived from the old languages of Mesopotamia. For instance, the Arabic word 'harem' that is associated with women stems from the Akkadian word 'Harimtu' which means 'sacred prostitute dedicated to the godhead'. The ending 'u' is usual in such an old language that was deleted in Arabic. As for Ghouls, the Arabic root of the word is 'ghâl' which means 'kill'; hence, the Akkadian word 'Gallu' explains the etymological connection.
2. According to Ibn Durayd (838-933), the *Qutrub* is the male ghouls (1987, 1121).
3. The *Mârid* is a type of a devil whose name means 'rebel' because it has rebelled against God (al-Zubaydî 1998, 165).
4. For the detailed meaning of *hâmah*, see note (11).
5. The Holy Quran contains a verse that describes the devils eavesdropping on Heaven in order to overhear God's angels; thus, meteors are thrown at them (al-Şâfât (7-10) 446).
6. The most famous story was that of the Arab poet Thâbit Bin Jâbir Bin Sufyân or Ta'abbatah Sharran who saw a ghouls in the shape of a ram (al-Işfahânî 1983, 144). For more details, see Ahmed K. Al-Râwî's 'The Arabic Ghouls and its Western Transformation', *Folklore*, Vol. 120, Issue 3 (December 2009): 291 – 306.
7. The two words are used interchangeably to refer to the same creature; however, the *si'awah* or *si'lah* is always feminine.
8. The Western beliefs in the spirits of the

wilderness, Joan the Wad, Jack o' the lantern, and will-o'-the-wisp are similar to the description of this ghoul.

9. *'adwâ* or infection here means transmission of diseases. Before Islam, Arabs thought that the mythical animal *ṣifr* could be transmitted like a disease from one person to another (al-Nawawī 1971, vol. xiv, 215; 'Abdulwahâb n.d., 373). The other interpretation, according to al-Nawawī, was that the Prophet stressed that diseases could not be transmitted to other people without God's will (1971, vol. vi, 325).

10. Arabs before Islam used to believe in *taṭayur* or portents. If any traveler attempts to leave somewhere, he/she has to check the signs by letting a bird fly before the journey takes place. If it goes to the right side, it is a good herald, whereas the left side is a bad omen, so the traveler must postpone the whole trip.

11. Before Islam, Arabs believed that the predatory bird *hâmah* or the owl had a very bad omen. If such a bird dies near someone's house, the house's owner should expect that one of the residents will die. In addition, Arabs believed that the bones of the deceased or their souls would turn later into predatory birds as one way of incarnation; as a result, the Prophet emphasized the falsity of the mythical basis of such a belief (al-Nawawī 1971, vol. xiv, 215; al-Mâlikī 1994, 342; 'Abdulwahâb n.d., 378; al-Dimīrī 1978, vol. i, 226). Until this day, the owl is viewed as a bad omen by many Arabs. In addition, the *hâmah* was believed to be a worm leaving a man's skull if he was killed without being avenged. It would circle around the man's tomb saying: 'water me', asking for vengeance. Jews in Arabia used to think that the *hâmah* would circle round a man's tomb for seven days before departing ('Abdulwahâb n.d., 379). Hasan El-Shamy assigns for the *hâmah* motif (E0451.9.1) '*hâmah* ceases to appear when revenge is accomplished' and motif (E0473.2) 'ghost of murdered person in owl-form that

cries for revenge' (2008, 114), but he classifies the *hâmah* as part of the 'Soul' or 'Self' section instead of being a subheading of 'Zoological Supernatural Beings' since the *hâmah* was believed to be an animal-like creature.

12. *banū* meant pain in the stomach that could infect other people (al-Tamīmī 1967, 199; al-Sajistānī n.d., 520), and sometimes it would infect livestock cattle ('Abdulwahâb n.d., 379). Furthermore, it was believed to be the other name of *ṣifr*, which was one of the months in the Islamic calendar. Though Arabs believed that there were sacred months during which fighting was prohibited, some used to change the rules of war each year. They would sanction the war once but might allow it the next year according to their interests. The Prophet banned this practice (al-Tamīmī, 197-8). In addition, al-Sajistānī mentioned a third explanation of the word '*banū*' saying that Arabs used to regard *ṣifr* as an ill-omened month and the Prophet corrected that view (n.d., 18).

13. Abū Sâdât al-Jazrī (c.1149 –c.1209) mentioned that *ṣifr* was a kind of a serpent that inhabited the stomach and used to sting a man when he felt hungry (1979, 35). In this way, Arabs explained hunger pangs as *ṣifr* stinging them. In folktales, El-Shamy classifies a similar motif (G328.1) as a 'serpent inside man's body eats all his food' (1995, 148). In fact, *ṣifr* can be simply a tapeworm, a kind of helminthiasis, that usually infects, due to contaminated water or food, the digestive tracts of human beings, wherein it grows rapidly and reaches sometimes several meters in size.

14. *naw'* was the old belief that meteors or 'falling stars' would certainly bring rain. The Prophet emphasized that the falling stars had no effect, but it was God's will that could bring rain and generate the wind (al-Ṭabarī 1984, 208).

15. Other Muslim scholars believed that prophet Muhammed did not negate the existence of ghouls; instead, he only said that

they had no power to change their shapes (al-Kūfī 1988, 311; al-Nawawī 1971, vol. xiv, 217; al-Sūfī 1996, 239; al-'Asqalānī 1959, 159; al-'Abbādī 1994, 292). al-Burrūsī (?- c.1918) elaborated by saying that ghouls could not delude people or change their visages, but the enchantresses of genies, the *sī'lwah*, could if it encountered genies (1911, vol. iv, 450).

16. In *Myths of Babylonia and Assyria*, Donald A. Mackenzie described the widespread belief in Babylonia that some sick people were thought to be possessed by a devilish creature. 'It had therefore to be expelled by performing a magical ceremony and repeating a magical formula. The demon was either driven or enticed away' (1910, 234).

17. al-Jāhiz said that the place was called *azmān* wall instead of *Yahūmān*.

18. al-Qazwīnī referred to another devilish creature called *Dilhāb* that appeared in the shape of a human riding on an ostrich. It lived in sea islands and ate outcasts who were driven by the sea after being shipwrecked. Also, it was reputed to have a shrill cry that would make any person faint upon hearing it (1980, 237).

19. Surprisingly, the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung (1875-1961) reported during the summer of 1920 that while he was staying in an old farmhouse in Buckinghamshire that he saw a weird creature appearing, particularly at night. Aside from the other descriptions given, Jung stated: '[I] opened my eyes. There, beside me on the pillow, I saw the head of an old woman, and the right eye, wide open, glared at me. The left half of the face was missing below the eye. The sight of it was so sudden and unexpected that I leapt out of bed with one bound, lit the candle, and spent the rest of the night in an armchair' (1977, 323-4). Similar to al-Jāhiz and Burton's explanations of the ghouls' existence, Jung interpreted this apparition as a hallucinatory experience due to exhaustion, fear, and recalling memories of a particular lady. Jung com-

mented on the sounds he heard in the room saying that they were 'probably not objective noises, but noises in the ear which seemed to me occurring objectively in the room. In my peculiar hypnoid state, they appeared exaggeratedly loud... My torpor was associated with an inner excitation probably corresponding to fear' (1977, 325).

20. Lane referred in *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians and Arabian Society in the Middle Ages to the Arabs'* superstitious belief in 'Ghools', 'Sealāh', or 'Saalāh' and said that there was no foundation in their belief. In a chapter called 'Demonology' in *Arabian Society*, Lane said at the end: 'I must beg the reader to remark that the superstitious fancies which it describes are prevalent among all classes of the Arabs, and the Muslims in general, learned as well as vulgar' (1987, 46). Lane's observation could be partly right because he wrote his works at a time when the majority of the people were uneducated, and the Bedouins' tribal customs and beliefs were widely spread in the society due to many centuries of regression.

21. al-Dimīrī further says that Arabs make comparisons between humans and hyenas to refer to 'an ugly looking woman from debased origins or an old witch' (1978, 644).

22. In medieval Europe, a child born with mental or physical disorder was mainly 'viewed as evil'. For instance, when Martin Luther heard about such a child, he recommended that he 'be disposed of by drowning' (Eberly 1991, 228 & 231). In a recent medical study conducted on Nigerian women giving birth to children suffering from cleft lips and palate, seven out of sixteen women interviewed from the Yoruba ethnic group believed that 'evil spirits' were behind their children birth defects. Eight of those women considered spiritual healing the only method of treatment (Olasoji et al. 2007, 304).

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Responses

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This article will contribute significantly to the study of the Arab culture and will be of immeasurable value to scholars in the fields of folklore, sociology and anthropology. It is an overall understanding of the ghoul and traces its evolution from the past to modern times in an attempt to give an idea of how and why its concept changed from one culture to another. The article adeptly deals with mythical figure of the ghoul in Arab cultural and literary life since the *Jahiliyya* until the modern period. The author correctly maintains that this mythical figure will certainly remain a source of inspiration for some writers and a cause of fear for many children (and adults). I would like to stress here that even modernist and avant-garde Arab writers utilized (and indeed, still utilize) the ghoul in their literary and poetic works in order to convey their political and social message in a hidden and sophisticated manner.

This is brilliantly evident in the writings of the prominent Palestinian novelist, Emil Habibi (1922-1996), in which the collective Palestinian culture is inscribed as much in the naturalistic account of mundane events as in the flight into fantasy and imagination. In his *Sarâyâ bint al-Ghoul* (*Sarâyâ the Ghoul's Daughter*, 1992), an impressionistic semi-autobiography, Habibi evokes the image of the Palestinian fairy-tale heroine Saraya, a mystical figure which

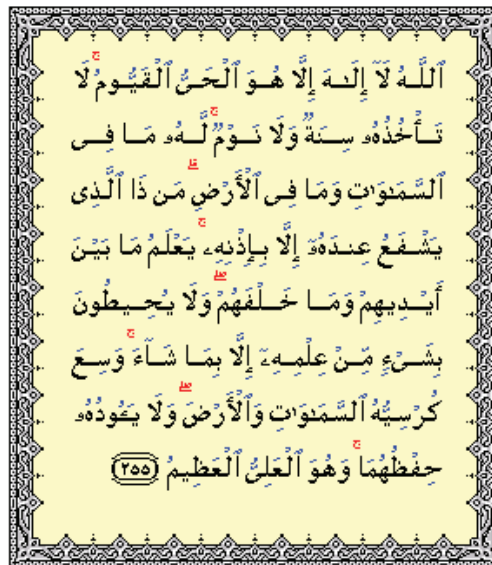
captivates the narrator imagination. His quest takes him into Arab myth, his own personal past and the collective psyche of the Palestinians. By using a network of inter-textual references to the image of the Ghoul in Arabic culture, *Sarâyâ* becomes an allegory to the lost Palestinian identity and the author's yearning to his childhood.

Indeed, the article's conclusion that the ghoul refuses to fade away from the imagination of some people regardless of the great passage of time finds in Habibi's (and other Arab writers') literary works a striking validation.

According to popular belief in the Middle East, the ghouls approaches men, women and adult children and then kill them. One of the arguments, in this paper is that Islam could not change all the old beliefs of Arabs when one thinks of the ghoul. Although Prophet Muhammad mentioned the ghoul in several of his sayings, but later Muslim scholars had conflicting views about the authenticity of these sayings as some negated the ghoul's existence and others confirmed it. At any case, Arabs are practicing some methods in order to ward off the ghoul: one should say loudly the name of God- Allah, or bism Allah al-Raman al-Rahim. It is worth noting that the Qur'an refers to the attributes of God as God's "most beautiful names" (*al-asmâ' al-ḥusnâ*), they are traditionally enumerated as 99 in number. Some of the folk say phrases from the Holy Quran, mainly *ayat al-Kursi*:

"Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep.

His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) before or after or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory)" (Quran 2:255).



Doctrinal Islam and Folk Islam

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Ahmed al-Rawi argues at the beginning of his article that “Because Islam incorporated this being in its doctrine, the ghoule remained a source of fear and mystery in the Arab culture”. Al-Rawi erects his whole article on the basis of incorrect contention for which he fails to provide any support.

To be “incorporated...in its doctrine” as the author claims, the ghoule should have been mentioned in the official source of Islam, the Qur’an. This is not the case. The *jinn* and two of their sub-species, namely *marid* and *ifrit*, are the only kinds of spiritual entities mentioned in the Qur’an. Thus, although the belief in the concept of the *jinn* is not one of the five tenets of Islam, Islamic doctrine requires belief in their existence. This, however, is not the case for the ghoule.

As for the Hadith (the Prophet’s acts and sayings), those that pertain to the ghoule are problematic and unreliable, which the author acknowledges. Also, the Hadith is not sacred in the same way as the Qur’an. The latter is the Word of God *per se* for Muslims, but the Hadith is not. It remains the words of a human being, even if that human being is a prophet. The only thing that is truly central in the faith of a Muslim is the belief in the words of the Qur’an. Thus, if the ghoule is not mentioned in

the Qur'an and the references in the Hadith are questionable and contradictory, how can it be considered doctrine?

This misapprehension is a result of the author's greater confusion between Arabic folklore and Islamic doctrine. The ghouls belong to Arabic folklore, both Muslim and Christian, and thus is not specific to either doctrinal Islam or Islamic culture in general. A lot of the medieval Arabic sources that the author mentions are simply compendiums of anecdotes, stories, and citations from previous sources. They do not belong to folk Islam *per se*, but neither do they belong to doctrinal Islam.

Furthermore, al-Rawi misinterprets the most important text of Arabic folklore, namely, the *Arabian Nights*. Let me offer the following four points. First, he refers to Silvestre de Sacy to contend that "there are Islamic elements in the composition of the *Arabian Nights*". But since *Nights* was written in the Islamic empire between the ninth and eighteenth centuries, it is a truism to assert that they contain Islamic elements and that they have "elements going back to medieval times," as the author writes.

Second, the author should have used more recent scholarship to confirm the Islamic identity of the *Arabian Nights* rather than depending on the opinions of Europeans, such as Silvestre de Sacy, who wrote centuries ago. Along the same lines, one wonders why he didn't use the more recent translation of the *Nights* by Husain Haddawy (1990) instead of the outdated translation by Richard Burton (1886-1888)?

In fact, al-Rawi's article is filled with references to the Orientalist *corpus* in-

cluding works by Richard Burton, Antoine Galland, and Silvestre de Sacy. Instead of revisiting or questioning the Orientalists' contentions on ghouls, however, he simply takes them for granted, and even follows in their footsteps. As a third point, I would like to closely follow al-Rawi's text to illustrate some of the ways in which it simply re-hashes Orientalist views. To begin the section entitled "Arabic Culture" he writes:

When Antoine Galland (1646-1715) first translated the *Arabian Nights* into a European language, he mentioned in the preface that the stories 'must be pleasing, because of the account they give of the Customs and Manners of the Eastern Nations' (1718, 'Preface').

Here, the author accepts Galland's assertions without probing them. Is it true that the *Nights*' stories give an "account...of the Customs and Manners of the Eastern Nations"? (*ibid*). Shouldn't al-Rawi scrutinize Galland's assumptions? How could these folk tales be representative of the manners and customs of various whole nations? Isn't Galland generalizing about the East? What did Galland know about the customs and manners of the East? He never traveled to any Arab country. It was from his desk in Paris that he wrote about the East. His only contact was an Arab Christian from Aleppo who happened to be in Paris at that time.

Al-Rawi, however, is not satisfied with just one example from the Orientalist *corpus*. After Galland he cites Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, de Sacy and Burton all of whom, he believes, were accurate in their interpretations of Arab superstitions.

He seems to be unaware of the dangers of accepting the opinions of others without scrutinizing them. He seems to completely ignore the groundbreaking work of the late Edward Said, precisely entitled *Orientalism* (1978), which has forcefully demonstrated how the same Orientalist writers that al-Rawi cites in his article created a hegemonic discourse that de-valued rich and fundamental cultures, peoples, and religions into an array of demeaning stereotypes.

His incorporation of these sources is not superficial; it is an outgrowth of his basic methodology. Throughout the article al-Rawi proceeds in a similar manner, first citing a Western source and then compiling anecdotes from Arabic sources in order to prove that the Western source is correct. This lack of a critical stance toward sources is rife throughout the piece. For example, he writes:

Peter M. Holt and Ann Katherine argue in *The Cambridge History of Islam* that Islam came about as a 'revolt' and as a 'protest against' the old Arabs' beliefs, but that it could not change all their existing convictions. Instead, it 'integrated' some old practices like the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca (1997, 17). This study argues that Islam could not change the belief in supernatural beings such as genies and ghouls, because they were an integral part of Arab culture.

But Holt and Katherine's assertion deserves some analysis. Is it true that Islam couldn't change old customs and thus integrate them? Most importantly, why did Islam keep some of these

customs and reject others? What are the arguments used by these two scholars to convince us that Islam integrated the ghoul in its beliefs? What are the sources they used to back up their thesis? In keeping with his flawed methodology, the al-Rawi again merely cites a few stories from the Arabic *corpus* and then quickly concludes that, "As mentioned earlier, Holt and Katherine's argument that Islam could not change all the old beliefs of Arabia is valid in the case of belief in the ghoul".

Fourth, in addition to al-Rawi's uncritical acceptance of Western sources, he also asserts that, "The following tale further suggests the link between factual written accounts and fictional tales". But, this statement shows a misunderstanding of folkloric texts, such as the *Nights*, which went through a lot of variation during their circulation. It is almost impossible to say that a tale "suggests a link between factual written account and fictional tales" because the tales of the *Nights* were written over a period of almost eight centuries and kept changing form and content until printing appeared in the Arab world. The tales of the *Nights* were transformed through time by the narrative oral act and thus could not possibly accurately reflect factual accounts.

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