The Art of Story in Classical Arabic Literature

Klasik Arap Edebiyatında Hikâye Sanatı

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ABSTRACT

The emergence and development of the art of storytelling in classical Arabic literature progressed in parallel with both the influence of oral traditions and the spread of Islam. The Abbasid period, considered the golden age of Islam, marks one of the brightest periods of Arabic literature and storytelling. In this period, especially "One Thousand and One Nights" and the fable genre hold an important place. The allegorical narratives used in this genre added depth to the story and ensured that social values were reflected. This research aims to examine the art of storytelling that took shape between 500-1200 AD in Arabic literature. The subject will focus on the narrative types, themes and stylistic features in works written between the 6th and 12th centuries AD. The research will reveal the narrative techniques in the works of the classical period by examining the literary aesthetics, linguistic structures, cultural context and effects on society of Arabic storytelling. The importance of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the origins and development of the art of storytelling in the Arab world. The research was conducted using a descriptive method. It addresses the story themes by providing brief and general examples from the important works of this period.

Keywords: Arabic Literature, Classical Period, Story, Qissa, Fable.

KLASİK ARAP EDEBİYATINDA HİKÂYE SANATI

ÖZ

Klasik Arap edebiyatında hikâye sanatının doğuşu ve gelişmesi hem sözlü geleneklerin etkisiyle hem de İslam'ın yayılmasıyla paralel olarak ilerlemiştir. İslam'ın altın çağı olarak kabul edilen Abbasî dönemi, Arap edebiyatı ve hikâye sanatının en parlak dönemlerinden birini işaret etmektedir. Bu dönemde, özellikle "Binbir Gece Masalları" ve fabl türü önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu türde kullanılan alegorik anlatımlar, hikâyeye derinlik katarak toplumsal değerlerin yansıtılmasını sağlamıştır. Bu araştırma, Arap edebiyatında miladi 500-1200 yılları arasında şekillenen hikâye sanatını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Konu, özellikle miladî VI. ve XII. yüzyıllar arasındaki dönemde yazılmış eserlerde yer alan anlatı türlerine, temalara ve stilistik özelliklere odaklanacaktır. Araştırma, Arap hikayeciliğinin edebî estetiklerini, dilsel yapılarını, kültürel bağlamını ve toplum üzerindeki etkilerini inceleyerek, klasik dönem eserlerindeki anlatı tekniklerini ortaya koyacaktır. Bu çalışmanın önemi, Arap dünyasında hikâye sanatının kökenlerini ve gelişimini anlamaya katkı sağlamaktır. Araştırma, betimsel bir yöntemle yapılmıştır. Bu dönemin önemli eserlerinden kısa ve genel örnekler verilerek hikâye temalarını ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Edebiyatı, Klasik Dönem, Hikâye, Kıssa, Fabl.

INTRODUCTION

Classical Arabic literature occupies a pivotal position in the historical evolution of narrative art, distinguished by its rich oral traditions and enduring storytelling heritage. This study aims to investigate the structural and thematic dimensions of storytelling within this literary period, with a particular focus on its aesthetic functions and cultural significance. The central objective is to analyze how storytelling in classical Arabic literature not only operates as a literary expression but also serves as a medium through which the cultural, religious, and social dynamics of the time are articulated.

The scope of the research extends from the 6th to the 12th centuries AD, encompassing both written texts and orally transmitted narratives that exemplify key developments in the art of storytelling. The analysis will address various narrative forms, recurring themes, stylistic and linguistic

features, as well as the broader impact of these stories on individual and collective consciousness. Within this framework, the study will consider a range of narrative genres, including folk tales and religious-ethical narratives that emerged within the Islamic cultural context.

The originality of this research lies in its systematic approach to the multifaceted nature of storytelling in classical Arabic literature, contributing a new perspective to the existing body of scholarship. By examining the interplay between literary tradition and sociocultural structure, this study seeks to demonstrate that classical Arabic storytelling is not merely a historical artifact but a foundational element that continues to influence contemporary literary and cultural paradigms.

This genre, which is considered as a sub-branch of prose, is referred to as Fenn al-Qasas wa'r-Rivayāt in literary history sources . Here the word Qasas refers to the story and Rivayât to the novel. The novel was one of the weakest branches of literature in classical Arabic literature, despite its prominence in Western literature (Zaydān, n.d: II/294). But the art of story is an oral genre that has been known since the Jāhiliyyah period. It has been said in different fields such as Qasas es-Samr, al-Qasas et-Tārihiyye, Qasas al-Ayyām, Qasas al-Hubb, Qasas al-Hayavān, Qasas al-Jin. After Islam, this genre became associated with preaching and guidance (Katt, 2009: 130). During the First Islamic period, the Companion al-Tamīm al-Dārī was the pioneer of this art. He asked the Caliph Umar for permission and the caliph granted him to tell the story. Initially these stories were told in the masjids and were very popular with people. During the reign of the four caliphs, these stories were mostly told at night. The subject of these stories included exhortation and invitation to God (Sālih, 2006: 141).

During the Umayyad period, storytelling continued in the same way as it did during the reign of the four caliphs. However, unlike that period, the scope of the story widened and it started to be told in the palaces of the Umayyad caliphs and the mansions of the governors in the Islamic geography (Sālih, 2006: 141).

During the Abbasid period, the art of storytelling experienced its most brilliant period with many different types. In this period, the genres were divided into fabricated stories, heroic stories, funny stories, love stories, animal stories, jinn stories, religious stories and philosophical stories. These genres were sometimes handled in the form of short stories and sometimes in the form of long novels (Suleymān, 1950: 18).

During the Abbāsid period, because of the interaction with different cultures and nations, a few such works were translated from Indian and Persian culture by such figures as Abdullah Ibn al-Muḳaffā and Jabla b. Sālim. These authors transmitted works such as Kalililah wa Dimne, Rustam and Isfendiyār, al-Ādāb al-Kabīr, Hezār Legend, Shahrāzāt, Behrām and Nursī from Persian; Sindbād, Būdāsef from Hindi. However, many of these stories have been lost and some of them have been altered from the original. In addition to these, the Arabs read stories that had reached their hands, such as Qıssatu Antara, Elf Leyl wa Layla, Abū Zayd al-Hilālī, Firuzshāh. Most of these stories were composed after the 3rd century AD (Zaydān, n.d: II/294).

The limited studies on the art of story in classical Arabic literature highlight the need for broader literary examination and discussion in this field. The storytelling tradition of this period has mostly been summarized in works focused on modern Arabic narrative, often briefly discussed with references to stories like Kalīla wa Dimna and One Thousand and One Nights. Therefore, it can be said that the role of storytelling in classical Arabic literature, both on an individual and societal level, should be addressed in greater detail to fill this gap.

The stories that emerged during the Abbasid period are analyzed in several different genres in terms of their subject matter (Teymūr, 1948: 36). These are original stories based on the tales of the Jāhiliyyah period and dealing with historical facts; translated stories translated from the languages of other nations; al-Qasas al-Hezliyya written for the purpose of making people laugh, and al-Qasas al-Fuqāhiyya written for the purpose of entertaining the public; Qasas al-Hubb, which deals with the concept of love and affection; Qasas al-Hayavân, which is written for educational purposes about animals or with animals as protagonists;'Qasas al-Jinn, which is written about the jinn and Qasas al-Âlem al-Ulwî, which deals with the otherworldly realm.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive inquiry into the formation and typology of narrative art in classical Arabic literature. The research questions focus on how narrative genres were classified within the classical period, around which themes these genres evolved, and how their features resonate in the modern Arabic short story and narrative tradition. The chronological framework of the study extends roughly from the 6th to the 12th centuries

AD, encompassing the formative and mature phases of Arabic literary production. The sources examined include both literary histories recognized by scholars as representative of the classical Arabic canon and modern academic works on Arabic literature. The analysis employs a descriptive method, aiming to outline the principal themes of classical narratives without delving into stylistic or linguistic minutiae. Through this approach, the study seeks to reveal the essential narrative patterns that shaped the early aesthetics of Arabic storytelling.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in several theoretical approaches in order to examine the art of storytelling in classical Arabic literature through a systematic lens. Primarily, the Parry–Lord theory of oral tradition provides a foundation for understanding how oral transmission shaped the narrative structures of classical Arabic storytelling. This framework serves as a key reference point for explaining the continuity and transformation of narrative forms during the transition from oral to written culture. In addition, theories of allegory and fable are employed to uncover the symbolic dimensions and conceptual features of moral and didactic narratives. Together, these approaches enable a holistic analysis of the thematic and aesthetic functions of original, translated, and fable-type stories within the classical period of Arabic literature.

CONTRIBUTION AND ORIGINALITY

This study distinguishes itself from previous research by examining the art of storytelling in classical Arabic literature not only in terms of literary content but also through a descriptive analysis of its generic diversity and narrative structures. While existing studies have typically addressed genres such as qissa, epic, or maqāma in isolation, this research approaches them within a comprehensive framework that includes original, translated, fable, love, jinn, and entertaining narratives. In doing so, the study aims to fill a thematic and systematic gap in the literature by jointly exploring the historical development and internal taxonomy of narrative forms in classical Arabic literature.

ORIGINAL STORIES

These stories are the tales of the Arabs, usually dating back to the

Jāhiliyyah period, and deal with themes such as social life, heroism, generosity, tribalism, and the feeling of revenge. These stories are also historical documents representing the pre-Islamic Arabian tradition and have survived to the present day after Islam. Even after they became Muslims, Arabs recited these tales before a battle to encourage their soldiers. When they became civilized and established various states, they began to pay closer attention to these stories, which have historical value. Before compiling a story, they would expand and magnify it with a number of oral traditions. Of course, in the meantime, since the main purpose of the story was to mobilize the emotions of the people, the narrator would make exaggerations in the story and make additions to the story according to the situation. Thus, the story was expanded in terms of subject and purpose, and with the changes made, it became popular and eventually compiled in this way. This is how the Arabs incorporated all stories into Arabic literature. In addition, in order not to cast a shadow on the truth of an event while narrating it, they based the narrators of the stories on famous narrators such as al-Asma'i and Abū Ubaydah (Zaydān, n.d: II/295). This has caused the original authors of many ancient stories to be forgotten.

Highlights of the original stories that tell the true stories of the Arabs include the following:

The Story of Antara

It is one of the most comprehensive stories in Arabic literature and consists of a series of intertwined stories. It is a heroism and love genre that deals with the customs, traditions, social life and wars of the Jāhiliyya period. Although most of the names mentioned in the story are real, it is also true that they are sometimes exaggerated. It was written many times during and after the Islamic period. The most famous of these is the story written by Yusuf b. Ismaili in the late Xth century AD during the reign of Azizbillah, the Fatimid caliph of Egypt (975-996 AD). This work, written in stages, is the best and most useful of the Arabic stories. Western scholars have also translated it into their own languages in its entirety (Zaydān, n.d: II/295).

In terms of style, it has a weak style in that the expressions are not strong, the relations between the sections are insufficient, the prose is weak and there are many repetitions (al-Fakhoury, 1986: 601).

The story of Antara is rooted in the significant events and figures of the Pre-Islamic period, aiming to reflect the brave and noble spirit of the Arab world. The narrative begins with the tale of Antara's mother, Zabība, who

is later revealed to be the daughter of a Sudanese king. She is captured during a battle by her father, Shaddad, and eventually marries him. From there, the story shifts to Antara's birth and growth. According to the narrative, even as an infant, Antara exhibited extraordinary strength and energy, tearing through the strongest swaddling cloths. By the age of two, he had demolished a tent; at four, he killed a dog; by nine, he had slain a wolf, and as a young shepherd, he defeated a lion. The narrative then shifts to recount how Antara, born to a slave woman, was initially regarded as a slave himself. His struggle for freedom, his love for his cousin Abla, and the perilous quests he embarks on to win her heart are highlighted. As the story unfolds, Antere's relationships with prominent Arab warriors and poets are explored, alongside his notable prowess in poetry. Furthermore, according to the tale, Antara, the hero who vanquished the Jews of Khaybar, extends his travels beyond the Arabian Peninsula, meeting rulers and leaders across Iraq, Syria, Iran, North Africa, and Spain. Always by the side of his allies, he engages in battle with their enemies. As the narrative progresses, it also touches on certain tales related to the figures of Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Muhammad, and Imam Ali. Positioned at the cusp of the transition from the Pre-Islamic era to the rise of Islam, Antara's virtuous life is depicted, painting him as a hero who paved the way for the coming of Islam. In this light, he is symbolically linked to the early Islamic conquests, particularly in the regions mentioned above. The story of Antara's adventures in Iran also provides rich insights into the wars of the era, the traditions in royal courts, and aspects of Iranian life. This inclusion suggests the possibility of the work being enriched by a strong Persian author's additions. Moreover, Antara's encounters in the courts of Byzantium, France, and Rome lead him as far as Egypt, Sudan, and India. The story offers detailed accounts of the Christian communities and Crusaders in Syria and Byzantium, their customs, the lifestyle and attire of the clergy, and the distinct features of their religion. The narrative also addresses the misconceptions held by Christians about Muslims during the time the work was written (Muhtār, 1991: 238).

The Story of Baqr and Taghlip

As the title suggests, it is a story about the two sons of Vâil, Baqr and Taghlip, and their tribes, and is closer to the present day in terms of history. The author added odes and some imaginary elements to the story. Although it is not known for certain, it is rumored that these narrations, which are intended to reinforce the heroic feelings of the Arabs, belong to Muhammad b. Ishāq, or it is possible that the author of the story added some

narrations and complementary information from Ibn Ishāq. The story was published in Basra in 1305 AD in a book of 120 large pages (Zaydān, n.d: II/296).

The story recounts the War of al-Basūs, a long and bloody conflict between two powerful Arab tribes: Banū Bakr and Banū Taghlib. This war, which took place between the tribes of Bakr ibn Wāʾil and Taghlib ibn Bakr, was sparked by a seemingly trivial incident—the wounding of a she-camel belonging to an elderly woman named Basūs by a chieftain from Taghlib. What began as a personal affront quickly escalated into a relentless feud, marked by cycles of vengeance and bloodshed, lasting intermittently for forty years. The conflict finally came to an end through the intervention of al-Mundhir III, the King of al-Ḥīrah (Kapar, 1995: 15).

Poetry and oratory are integral parts of this narrative. Through their poets, both sides express the valor of their tribes and the treachery of their enemies. The story delves deeply into concepts such as Arab codes of war, courage, loyalty, betrayal, sacrifice, and revenge. It also contains accounts of how women played an influential role in these struggles. This tale is not merely a historical account of conflict but also a representation of the epic storytelling tradition in Arabic literature. These poetry-laden tales continued to evolve and shape narratives in the Islamic period as well. Notably, the works of poets like Antara ibn Shaddad, Amr ibn Kulthum, and Tarafa ibn al-Abd frequently echo the themes and battles of such conflicts.

The Story of Shaybān and Kisrā Anūshirvān

It is a story consisting of seventy printed pages and based on historical events, with mostly imaginary elements. Because the Iranian ruler Anûshirvan wanted Numan's daughter Harka bint Mutajarride, a war broke out and the story revolves around this war. The story contains a number of additions and verse odes. The story was collected from Ibn Nafi al-Tamīmī on the narration of Bishr b. Marwan al-Asadi. The historical events up to the point of narration are not the inventions of the Arabs themselves, but the expansions made by the generations who told and listened to the story before it was compiled. Because stories come through transmission, they become different with the changes in narration style arising from each person's own nature. Thus, with the change of generation, events turn into stories. In fact, many narrations of ancient societies are in this style (Zaydān, n.d: II/297).

Shayban is one of the foremost heroes of the Arabs, a distinguished warrior and leader. Kisra Anushirvan, the ruler of the Sassanid Empire in Persia, is

renowned for his sense of justice and strong leadership. According to the story, Shayban is summoned to the presence of Kisra Anushirvan. Anushirvan admires Shayban's exceptional skills and bravery, and he assigns him a task. Kisra holds great respect for Shayban's courage, warrior spirit, and honor. The interactions between these two figures revolve around a struggle for honor in warfare and strategies concerning governance. While Shayban shows respect to Anushirvan, the story also tells of the challenges he faces in his own efforts to defend the honor and freedom of the Arabs. This tale is a significant reflection of the cultural interaction between Arabic literature and Persian mythology. It also draws attention as a representation of the Arab-Persian wars and the complex relationships between the two. The connection between Shayban and Kisra Anushirvan symbolizes a heroic understanding and leadership style that transcends cultural boundaries. In summary, this story is not merely a historical narrative but also sheds light on the deep ties and heroic values shared between Arab and Persian cultures.

TRANSLATED STORIES

Within the rich corpus of classical Arabic literature, translated narratives occupy a significant place in the transmission and transformation of story-telling traditions. These tales, rendered into Arabic from various foreign languages, particularly Persian and Sanskrit, not only expanded the thematic and stylistic horizons of Arabic literature but also served as conduits for cross-cultural literary exchange. Far beyond simple linguistic transfers, such translations introduced new narrative structures, ethical paradigms, and literary aesthetics, offering valuable insights into the intellectual and moral worlds of the source cultures.

Among the most influential of these translated works are Alf Layla wa-Layla (One Thousand and One Nights) and Kalila wa-Dimna. Both texts have endured for centuries, becoming integral to the Arabic literary canon. One Thousand and One Nights, with its complex, nested narrative structure and incorporation of motifs from Indian, Persian, and Arab traditions, exemplifies the syncretic nature of Arabic storytelling. Meanwhile, Kalila wa-Dimna, originally a Sanskrit collection of animal fables with didactic aims, became a cornerstone of Arabic moral literature through its eloquent use of allegory and symbolism.

These translated narratives did not merely enrich Arabic literature with new content; they catalyzed the development of indigenous narrative

forms and laid the groundwork for a literary tradition that valued both entertainment and ethical instruction. As such, the translation of stories from other cultural and linguistic spheres played a formative role in shaping the narrative imagination of classical Arabic writers and readers alike.

Alf Layla wa Layla

One Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa Layla) is not merely a compilation of folk tales; it stands as a significant masterpiece in classical Arabic literature, distinguished by its literary values, narrative techniques, use of language, and symbolism. This work transcends the boundaries between popular and aristocratic literature, blending the worlds of individuals from different social strata.

The language of One Thousand and One Nights possesses a rich and multilayered structure. The strong phonetic and rhythmic qualities of Arabic play a crucial role in the storytelling. Particularly, the narratives, where the boundaries between night and day, reality and fantasy become blurred, create a profound mystical atmosphere, facilitated by the fluid and flexible nature of the language. Each story reflects the influence of various folk tales and literary traditions, thereby enhancing the linguistic diversity of the work. Beyond the well-known folktales, One Thousand and One Nights offers deep metaphors and allegorical narratives. These tales, which can offer profound insights into the human condition, often critique individual and societal values. For example, in many of the stories, universal themes such as love, betrayal, ambition, and justice are articulated through metaphors. The animal figures in the stories, particularly in works like Kalila wa Dimna, serve as metaphors for human nature. As characters, animals become tools for criticizing human society and conveying educational messages. These metaphorical narratives not only provide individual moral lessons but also offer instructive teachings on social justice.

One of the strongest aspects of One Thousand and One Nights is its use of symbolism. Ancient Eastern literature has long been adept at employing symbolism, and One Thousand and One Nights continues this tradition with remarkable strength. The symbols in the stories direct the reader to reflect on particular themes or moral lessons. For instance, the continuous transition between night and day symbolizes the transient nature of time and the inevitable changes within the human lifespan. The class differences between palaces and slaves symbolize hierarchical societal structures, and sometimes the stories also depict the collapse or transformation of these structures. These symbols reinforce the multi-layered nature of

the text, offering the reader not only surface-level entertainment but also a social and cultural analysis. The theme of dreams also frequently appears as a symbol. Dreams question the boundaries between reality and imagination, aligning with the fantastical nature of the work. Dreams also carry deep symbolic meanings, such as rebirth, escape from reality, or personal and societal transformation.

While One Thousand and One Nights presents a delightful and captivating narrative, it simultaneously carries a strong element of social critique. Many of the stories address themes such as ambition, injustice, social class disparities, and selfishness. These themes are deepened through symbolism and metaphor, emerging as both individual and societal critiques. Particularly notable is the portrayal of female characters in the stories. At times, these women appear as figures who resist societal norms, offering a significant discourse on the place of women in Arab society. Furthermore, many of the tales present an allegorical narrative about how a strong and intelligent woman can have a profound impact on society.

Many researchers have disagreed about the origin of this story, which consists of a series of stories, each part of which is read in one night. The widespread opinion is that this story was translated into Arabic before the Xth century AD based on the Persian story book called Hezâr Efsane (A Thousand Legend) (al-Fakhoury, 1986: 603). Indeed, the famous historian al-Masūdī gives the following information about this issue in his work Murūj al-Zahab:

"Many people have said that this work is a collection of ahbar (superstitions) that some of the people around the court told to gain favor with the kings by telling various stories. Its method is also almost identical to that of other stories translated from Persian, Hindi and Greek. People called it "Elf Laila and Laila" and it tells about the king, the vizier, the king's concubine Shahrazad and the rest of the court circle (al-Mas'ûdî, 1973, II/86)."

On the other hand, about the story called Hezâr Efsane, which is said to be the source of the Thousand and One Nights, Ibn Nedîm says that a king married a woman, had sex with her for one night, and then killed her the next day and married a beautiful and powerful concubine named Shahrazad, and the events unfolded in this way (Ibn Nadīm, 1973: 78).

The Arabs translated the "Thousand and One Nights" from Persian before the IVth century Hijri and expanded it by adding to it and making some changes (al-Fakhoury, 1986: 603). When the story is read, these changes

in terms of wording and style are easily recognized. In particular, the mention of coffee drinking in the story and even the mention of kings living in the last periods clearly show this. According to a preferred view, the surviving version of the story was completed after the XVIth century AD. Because when the present form of the story is compared with Hezâr Efsane in various aspects, it is seen that although the original of the story is in Persian, it has taken a form that can be completely attributed to Arabic literature. Moreover, the elements of the story, the time and place, the events and the people in the story provide information about the social structure of the Arab society of the period in which the story was adapted, not about ancient Iranian society. The orgies of pleasure and entertainment described in the story are also the habits of this period (al-Fakhoury, 1986: 612).

Kalila and Dimna

Kalila and Dimna, one of the first and most important works of the fable genre, was written in Sanskrit by a wise philosopher named "Beydeba" during the reign of an Indian ruler named Depshelim. Later, when the Iranian ruler Anushirvân learned that such a work was in the treasury of the Indian ruler, he commissioned Berzaweyhî, a learned philosopher who knew Persian and Hindi well, to buy this work written by "Beydeba". Thereupon, Berzawayhī established close ties with the official who held the key to the treasury where the book was hidden and quickly translated it. When he returned to his country, he read it in the presence of the ruler. Later, Ibn al-Muqaffa translated this work into Arabic and introduced it into Arabic literatüre (Chalabi, 1941: I/1507; Karaismailoğlu, 2002: 210).

The language of the work skillfully employs the phonetic and rhythmic qualities of Arabic, adding depth to the narrative. The narrators, especially Kalīla and Dimna, serve as both the storytellers and characters, taking on dual roles that enrich the text. This multi-layered narration enhances the complexity of the work, offering readers various perspectives. "Kalīla and Dimna" features an allegorical structure, presenting animals endowed with human traits to critique the moral and social structures of human society. For instance, the lion Bankala symbolizes tyranny and injustice, while the stories of Kalīla and Dimna metaphorically depict the dangers of the struggle for power and authority. This allegorical framework reinforces the work's educational and thought-provoking aspects. The symbols employed in the work carry profound meanings. For example, the figure of the lion Bankala represents sovereignty and power, while Dimna's greed and schemes illustrate how individual interests can threaten the social

structure. These symbols strengthen the multi-layered nature and deeper meanings of the work, offering the reader not only superficial entertainment but also a social and cultural analysis.

Kalila and Dimna is a collection of moral tales. Its heroes are chosen by animals representing people of various characters. Translated into Arabic from Pahlavi, the work consists of an introduction and five parts called tantra (the state in which one uses one's intellect). Ibn al-Muḳaffa, however, did not content himself with a mere translation, but added an introduction and some chapters. The work was originally intended for the intellectual class, but the attractiveness of its content soon made it a popular book for the public. Therefore, it has undergone some changes as it passed from author to author. As a matter of fact, the information in Ibn Kutayba's Uyūn al-Akhbār does not correspond to the present copy (Furat, 1996: II/222).

AL-QASAS AL-HAZALIYAH (ENTERTAINING STORIES)

These stories are stories based on entertainment and laughter. Such stories are sometimes short and sometimes long. Since the style used in such stories, which are based on imagination in terms of subject matter, is simple and easy, there is no monopoly in their language, that is, a style based on excessive art (Sālih, 2006: 142).

The most famous person known in this field is Abū Hayyah al-Namīrī, a muhadram poet who lived during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods (Ibn Nadīm, 1973: 177, 185). One such story of al-Namīrī is as follows:

"One day I came across a deer and I shot an arrow at it. It ran away from my arrow and it did not hit it. But the arrow deceived him and after a while it hit him and knocked him down."

As can be seen, this story, which is quite short and based on elements of imagination and exaggeration, is a good example of the kind of stories mentioned above. Another story of this kind by al-Namīrī is as follows:

"I shot an arrow at a deer and when the arrow came out of the bow, I felt a love for the deer, so I ran after it and caught it by the tail before it reached the deer."

Abu Sa'īd b. al-Durrāj al-Tufaylī is also known for this kind of stories. One of the stories he wrote in this genre is as follows:

"I was walking with my son when a funeral passed in front of us. There was

a woman crying at the head of the body and she was saying: They are taking you to a house without a bed, without a sheet, without a quilt, and without bread and water. Hearing this, my son said to me: "My father! By Allah, they are taking this body to our house. I asked him, -How? "Because these attributes that she mentioned are the attributes of our house."

AL-QASAS AL-FUKÂHIYAH (FUNNY STORIES)

It is one of the short story types written for entertainment and laughter. They are more mature stories in terms of artistic aspect. The protagonist (rāvi) in such stories is mostly the author of the story and resembles modern stories. The best example of this type of story is the story of Nāhiḍ b. Sawma. This character is a Bedouin poet whose language is fluent. He is one of the poets of the Abbasid state. When he came to Basra, the narrators learned poetry and language from him. He told them his stories (Sālih, 2006: 147). Part of one such story as follows (al-Isfehānī, n.d: XII/35):

"I decided to go to a friend of mine in Aleppo, who was said to be from Khâlid b. Yazîd b. Mu'âwiya. I stopped in a village called the village of Baqr b. 'Abdillah al-Khilâlî. There I saw many different houses made of red, interlocked together. Suddenly I noticed many people with their faces and backs turned. They were wearing clothes that looked like flowers. I said to myself: Today must be one of the Eids of Sacrifice or Ramadan. Suddenly I remembered what I had forgotten and said: I set out from the deserts of Basra in the month of Safar, and these two Eids have already passed. So what is this that I am seeing!

While I was standing there in a daze, a man came up to me, took me by the hand and led me to a large house. A bed was spread on the floor and a young man was on it. People were gathered around him and he was reciting poems for them. I said to myself, "This must be the emir I was told about, sitting on his bed and people sitting in his presence." I said to him: Peace be upon you! A man pulled me by the arm and said, "He is not the Prince..."

QASAS AL-HUBB (LOVE STORIES)

Such stories have been in existence since the Jāhiliyyah period. During the Abbasid period, they became quite widespread and many such stories were written.

One of these stories is Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Dāwūd b. ʿAlī al-Isfahānī's

(b. 917) story al-Zuhra, which consists of one hundred chapters, each chapter containing one hundred couplets of poetry. Abū 'Umar Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Faraj al-Jabbānī (b. 942) also wrote a book of this kind and named it "al-Hadāiḳ". This book consists of two hundred chapters with two hundred couplets in each chapter. However, there is no mention of anything other than Andalusians in this book (Sālih, 2006: 151).

One of the best stories written in this field is Abu Muhammad Ali b. Ahmad b. Saīd b. Hazm's (d. 1076) Ṭawḳu'l-Hamāma fi'l-Ulfati wa'l-Ullāf. This book, which stands out for the beauty and simplicity of its style, gave Ibn Hazm an opportunity to observe the situation of women and their dispositions. Because he spent his childhood and youth around them (Sālih, 2006: 151).

Abū Muhammad Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad al-Sarrāj also wrote a book entitled Meṣāri al-Ushshāḳ. This book consists of twenty-two chapters. In this book, the stories, ahbār and poems of the lovers are included. Here, the concept of a lover is not limited to two people who love each other, but also includes the love of God. Lovers of jinn, animals, birds and trees are also discussed here. The loves that stand out in the book is characterized by their chastity. The stories end with a request for repentance and forgiveness (Sālih, 2006: 151). Some of the works that should be mentioned in this field are Dāwūd al-Anṭāqī's "Tezyīn al-Aswāḳ fī Ahbāri al-Ushshāḳ" and Shahab al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Abī Ḥajjah al-Talmisānī's Divān al-Ṣabāba.

QASAS AL-HAYAWĀN (FABLES)

Tales and stories written in the language of animals are a very common literary genre in world literature. In these tales, words and deeds are attributed to animals under a mask or a pseudonym. These stories contain moral aims, social and pedagogical lessons, as well as critical political issues.

Some literary researchers state that the emergence of this genre is related to politics. They say that this genre emerged during periods of oppression and tyranny. In fact, they point to the fact that the people who wrote in this genre were slaves or mawali as evidence (Hamīde, n.d: 38). Ahmad Amīn says in this regard: "In times of oppression, when kings and rulers oppressed people, there was a dire need for this genre. At that time, no critic could criticize their actions, and no preacher could give them good advice to dissuade them from their actions. Therefore, stories of this kind

emerged to advise rulers to be just (Amīn, 1933: I/222).”

Some of the animal stories were translated into Arabic from other languages. The most important of these is Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation of “Kalila wa Dimna” from Pahlavi, as mentioned above (Karaismailoğlu, 2002: 210).

The authors who wrote stories in this field enriched their animal stories with political and social concepts. Some of these authors had caliphs, emirs and governors represented in such stories in the hope that they would realize some maxims. One of the stories written for this purpose and told about the caliph al-Ma'mūn is as follows:

“On a sleepless night, the caliph called a night companion to him and he said to the caliph: O Amir of the believers! There was an owl in Mosul and an owl in Basra. The owl of Mosul married his son to the daughter of the owl of Basra. Then the owl of Basra said: I do not accept your son's marriage unless you give my daughter a hundred villages as mahr. The owl of Mosul replied: I cannot afford it, but if our governor, may Allah bless him, give us a year's respite, I will do it.

Thereupon, Caliph al-Ma'mūn took note of this situation and sat on the divān al-mazalim. He was fair to the people and carefully examined the affairs of the governors, workers and the people (al-Ibshihi, 1953: I/108).”

Sahl b. Harūn (d. 830) is one of the authors who wrote works in this field. His books containing animal stories are “Kitāb al-Ghazāleyn”, “Kitāb Seāla wa Afrā” and “Kitāb al-Namr wa's-Sa'leb” (Ibn Nadīm, 1973: 192). The summary of the story of al-Namr wa's-Sa'leb is as follows:

“A fox named Merzouk, whose name was Abu's-Sabbâh, lived in a valley with his wife. There was no one in this valley except the two of them. They both lived in abundance and prosperity. One day a fox (Abu'l-Mughelles Tarıq), a friend of Merzouk, came to him and advised him to leave this valley because it was a floodplain. He discussed this with his wife, but she objected to leaving the valley on the grounds that the fox was jealous of them. After a while, the valley was suddenly flooded and Merzouk grabbed hold of a piece of driftwood, which carried him to the sea and threw him on one of the islands in the sea. Merzouk was astonished at this situation. He did not hear a sound or see anyone on the island. He spent the night here hungry. In the morning, a hungry wolf named Muqabir came to him. After they met each other, he asked the wolf why he was hungry on this island where there were so many gazelles and cows. He replied that it was the property

of the Tiger King (Mansoor b. Muzaffar), who was a tyrant and did not show kindness to anyone. The fox named Merzouk asked this wolf to go to the tiger and pay his respect and obedience to him. After thinking for a while, the wolf agreed.

The wolf went to the tiger and presented the situation. The tiger accepted the situation and appointed the wolf governor of one of the regions on the island.

The wolf went to his fox friend, whom he had made his vizier and scribe, and after a while they were both well off and comfortable. Soon the wolf broke the agreement and took possession of the things the tiger had allocated to him. So the tiger wrote to the wolf and threatened him, telling him to keep his word. The wolf consulted with his vizier, the fox, who repeatedly told him to obey the tiger and be kind to him. However, the wolf continued to ignore his offense and the correspondence between him and the tiger went on and on. Eventually a fierce battle took place between them, which ended with the wolf being killed and the fox being taken prisoner. As each of them was killed one by one, it was the fox's turn. The fox shouted, "I have some advice for the king." But he asked to be left alive in exchange for giving this advice. Then the fox talked to the tiger on the one hand and his viziers on the other about the state of man, his shortcomings, his maturity, his intellect, his share of wisdom, his place in knowledge, his influence on human behavior, his good morals, and all kinds of situations that would carry man to the highest heights and bring him to maturity. The tiger saw the superiority of the fox's intellect, his logic, the quality of his words, the influence of his opinions, the soundness of the evidence he brought, and ordered him to be rewarded. He gave him a position near him and consulted with him and acted on his views until his death."

In this story, Sahl b. Hārūn represented the political life of his time and the situation of the governors with the language of animals.

al-Jāḥiz's "Kitāb al-Hayāwān" can also be considered one of the works written in this field, even though the author dealt with the life, characteristics, nature and attributes of animals in this work.

One of the works that can be considered of this type is Ikhwān al-Safā's treatise "Tudā'i'l-Hayāwānāt alâ al-Insan". The content of this treatise is as follows (Ikhwan al-Safā, n.d: II/204):

"A group of merchants, artisans and scholars were caught in a storm at sea

and their ship was washed away to an island with good weather and abundant crops. Within days of landing on the island, they got used to island life and began to live a good life. After a while they decide to stay on this island permanently. During their stay, they resist the animals on the island to take advantage of them. But the animals do not accept this and refuse to obey the humans.

The animals seek refuge with the island's ruler, a jinn known for his justice, and reject the way humans treat them. The lord of the island sets up a court to resolve the problem and says: "Does man have the right to lord it over the animals or not?" Both sides argue the case in the presence of the judge. After several sessions, the verdict is given in favor of man. This is because man is a saint of Allah. He has praised qualities and the knowledge of certainty. So the ruler orders the animals to submit to the yoke of man."

This story also reflects the thoughts and philosophy of the Ikhwān al-Safā group.

Abu'l-Alâ al-Ma'arrī also wrote stories in this field. Some of them are "Kitāb al-Ḳāif, Kitāb al-Tayr, Kitāb al-Usfurīn, Risālat al-Ṣāḥil wa'l-Shāḥij". There are also some animal stories in "al-Fusūl wa-al-Ghayāt" (al-Ma'arrī, 1977: 184-187).

QASAS AL-JINN (JINN STORIES)

These are stories in which jinns and demons play the role of the main characters. This role serves an idea that the storyteller wants to convey to people (Sālih, 2006: 159).

One of such stories is the story of Di'bel and the Jinn Ẓebeyān. In this story, Di'bel b. Ali al-Khuzāʿī (d. 866) encounters a man in the form of a jinn in Nishapur (al-Mulī, n.d: IV/407).

One of these stories is Iblis fî Ḍiyāfeti Ibrahim al-Mawsılî, which is about a conversation between Ibrahim al-Mawsılî and the devil (al-Mulī, n.d: IV/403).

QASAS AL-ÂLEM AL-ULWI (ESCHATOLOGICAL STORIES)

These stories are based on the events of Isra'a and Mi'râj, which are mentioned in the Qur'an, hadith and narrations of muhaddiths. Some scribes were inspired by such events and used them as a source for their artistic

stories (Sālih, 2006: 162).

Abu'l-A'lā al-Ma'arrī has two stories in this field. These are Risālat al-Malāike and Risālat al-Ghufrān. Risālat al-Malāʾike contains the answers to some of the questions Maʿarri was asked about sarf. The reason for this name is that the names of angels such as Azrael, Munkir, and Nekir are among these questions and he begins his answer with these questions. Risālat al-Ghufrān is the answer to a long letter written to Ma'arrī by a poet named Ibn Karīh. In this work, Ma'arrī takes Ibn Karīh on a journey through the afterlife, taking him through Paradise and Hell (Karaaslan, 1999: 416).

As can be seen, the art of storytelling in Arabic literature of the classical period has become a genre that has developed significantly and its field has expanded. Stories were written in almost every field and these stories were written in a fluent and comprehensible style far from art. These stories sometimes shed light on the historical and social events of the period and sometimes on the political situation of the period.

CONCLUSION

In classical Arabic literature, the art of storytelling emerges as a rich domain encompassing a wide range of genres and themes. From folk tales and religious parables to heroic epics and fables, this vast spectrum not only reflects a literary heritage but also provides profound insights into the social structure, cultural values, philosophical viewpoints, and worldview of the time. For instance, works such as One Thousand and One Nights, Arabic fables, Islamic parables, and the heroic tales of the Jahiliyyah period bear the traces of the multifaceted social structures, beliefs, lifestyles, and philosophical thoughts of Arab society's past. These stories are not merely a source of entertainment but also significant milestones in the intellectual evolution of individuals and societies.

The period spanning from the Jahiliyyah era to the end of the Abbāsid caliphate marks a crucial turning point in the development of Arabic storytelling. The Jahiliyyah period shaped its narratives with stories of inter-tribal conflicts, heroism, moral values, and social order. The tales of this era are rich with themes of wars, heroics, and individual courage. During the Umayyad and Abbāsid periods, however, storytelling underwent a transformation. Influenced by courtly literature, stories became more sophisticated, multi-layered, and diversified. During this period, a balance

was struck between simple narratives, influenced by folk culture, and the complex tales shaped under the influence of aristocratic court literature.

The evolution of Arabic storytelling also reflects the cultural fluidity and interaction between the common folk and the elite. While stories in the popular realm served as a tool to meet the emotional and cultural needs of society, courtly narratives adopted a more intellectual and sophisticated language. The interaction between these two levels of storytelling played a significant role in the later development of modern storytelling in Arabic literature. As a result, the art of storytelling in Arabic literature created a ground where different social classes and cultural layers intersected, gaining widespread popularity both among the masses and in the courts.

In conclusion, classical Arabic storytelling was not merely a tool for entertainment but also an important vehicle for passing down the moral values, religious norms, cultural codes, and social structure of society from one generation to the next. These stories have shaped the emotional and intellectual development of individuals at both personal and societal levels, while also exploring deep philosophical and ethical questions by addressing universal themes of the human condition. In this context, the art of storytelling in Arabic literature has served not only as a literary genre but also as a crucial means of transmitting the cultural heritage of society, preserving it for future generations.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As a subgenre of prose literature, the art of storytelling is referred to in literary historical sources as Fann al-qaṣaṣ wa'l-riwāyāt (the art of narratives and stories). Storytelling, a well-established oral tradition, has been known since the pre-Islamic (Jāhiliyyah) period. It manifested in various forms such as Qiṣaṣ al-samar (tales of evening gatherings), Qiṣaṣ al-tārīkhiyyah (historical tales), Qiṣaṣ al-ayyām (tales of days), Qiṣaṣ al-ḥubb (love stories), Qiṣaṣ al-ḥayawān (animal fables), and Qiṣaṣ al-jinn (tales of the jinn). Following the advent of Islam, storytelling became closely associated with religious preaching and guidance. Initially narrated in mosques, these stories attracted considerable attention from the public. During the era of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs, these stories were primarily delivered orally at night and centered on themes of moral exhortation and calling people to God.

In the Umayyad period, storytelling continued in a similar vein but expanded in scope. In addition to being told in mosques, tales began to be recited in the palaces of Umayyad caliphs and in the residences of governors across the Islamic world. Under the Abbasid Caliphate, storytelling reached its zenith and diversified into multiple subgenres. These included fictional tales, heroic epics, humorous stories, romantic narratives, animal fables, tales involving jinn, religious stories, and philosophical narratives.

Due to cultural interaction and integration during the Abbasid era, works from Indian and Persian traditions were translated into Arabic by prominent literary figures such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and Jabalah ibn Sālim. These included Kalīla wa Dimna, Rustam and Isfandiyār, al-Ādāb al-Kabīr, Hezār Afsāne, Shahrāzād, and Bahrām and Nursī from Persian sources, and Sindbād and Būdāsaf from Indian literature. However, many of these works were either lost over time or altered significantly from their original forms. Concurrently, Arabs continued to read stories such as Qiṣṣat ʿAntara, Alf Layla wa Layla (The Thousand and One Nights), Abū Zayd al-Hilālī, and Fīrūzshāh, many of which were compiled after the 3rd century AH.

The stories produced during the Abbasid period can be categorized by theme and structure into several subgenres. These include: "original stories" rooted in pre-Islamic traditions and historical events; "translated stories" adapted from other languages; al-Qiṣaṣ al-Hazliyya (comic tales) meant to amuse; al-Qiṣaṣ al-Fukāhiyya (entertaining tales) for public enjoyment; Qiṣaṣ al-Ḥubb (romantic tales) that explore love and affection;

Qiṣaṣ al-Ḥayawān (animal fables) with moral instruction through anthropomorphic characters; Qiṣaṣ al-Jinn (tales of jinn); and Qiṣaṣ al-ʿĀlam al-ʿUlwī (stories of the celestial realm), inspired by eschatological themes.

Original stories typically recounted legends from the Jāhiliyyah era, reflecting themes such as heroism, generosity, tribal loyalty, and revenge, and thus served as both cultural records and historical documents from pre-Islamic Arab society. Among the most prominent examples are: the Antara cycle—one of the most comprehensive epic stories in Arabic literature, interwoven with multiple sub-narratives; the Bakr and Taghlib tale, centered on the long-standing tribal conflict known as the War of al-Basūs; and The Tale of Shaybān and Kisrā Anūshirwān, a semi-fictitious historical narrative composed of around seventy printed pages.

Translated stories reflect the influence of foreign literatures on Arabic narrative traditions, primarily through translations from Persian and Indian sources. These stories provide valuable insights into the literary cultures from which they originated. Notable among them are Kalīla wa Dimna and Alf Layla wa Layla (The Thousand and One Nights), which remain central to the classical Arabic storytelling tradition.

Entertaining tales, composed for amusement, vary in length and are usually imaginative in content. Their simple and accessible language distinguishes them from more elaborate literary forms. Comic stories, a subset of entertaining tales, are often short narratives characterized by mature artistic form, where the protagonist (often the narrator) resembles the author himself, aligning them with aspects of modern storytelling. A key example is the story of Nāhiḍ ibn Sawmah, a Bedouin Abbasid poet known for his eloquence, who taught poetry and language in Basra.

Love stories have been a persistent narrative form since the Jāhiliyyah period, but they flourished particularly during the Abbasid era. Notable works in this genre include al-Zuhrah by Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī (d. 297/917), comprising one hundred chapters each with one hundred verses; Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah fī al-Ulfa wa al-Ullāf by Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1076); and Maṣāriʿ al-ʿUshshāq by Abū Muḥammad Jaʿfar ibn Aḥmad al-Sarrāj. Additional notable works include Tazyīn al-Aswāq fī Akhbār al-ʿUshshāq by Dāwūd al-Anṭākī and Dīwān al-Ṣabābah by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Abī Ḥajlah al-Tilimsānī.

Tales of jinn focus on supernatural beings such as jinn and devils, often

used as symbolic figures to convey specific messages or moral insights. Examples include the story of Diʿbil and the Jinn of Dhubyān, which recounts the poet Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī's (d. 246/866) encounter with a man in jinn form in Nishapur; and Iblīs fī Ḍiyāfat Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, describing a dialogue between the musician Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and the devil.

Eschatological stories, based on themes of the afterlife, draw inspiration from Qur'anic verses, hadith, and early Islamic narratives, particularly the accounts of the Isrāʾ and Miʿrāj (Night Journey and Ascension). Some scribes incorporated such themes into artistic literary narratives.

From the Jāhiliyyah period to the end of the Abbasid era, the art of storytelling in Arabic literature evolved under the dual influence of popular culture and refined courtly traditions. While shaped by oral and communal practices on one hand, it was also molded by the sophisticated tastes of the elite. This evolution—from its tribal origins to its cultural flourishing under the Umayyads and Abbasids—led to a rich, multilayered narrative tradition that ultimately laid the groundwork for the emergence of modern Arabic fiction.