

Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib

(Miracles and marvels)

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I. Introduction

1. Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib in Classical literature

This study deals with the subject of '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' in Arabic culture in general and its treatment as a literary genre by classical and modern authors and critics. It also discusses the different versions and views regarding this type of writing from the first century H./seventh century CE till today. The study shows how classical authors dealt with this genre and how modern ones interpreted it.

As an independent literary genre, the term *Ajai'ib wa Ghara'ib* has not gained a special study in Arabic literature yet, especially in its primary religious context as it was used by al-Sha'bi¹ in his work *This is the story of Mdinat al-Nuhas and what it has got of miracles and marvels in perfection and completion*² However, there are some authors who used this term or a similar one to it. Some of them are:

- al-Kisa'i,³ : *Aja'ib al-Malakut* / a manuscript.
- Ibn al-Faqih,⁴: *al-Buldan*, Beirut, 1996.
- Abu Hamid al-Ghirmatti,⁵ *Tuhfat al-al-Bab wa Nukhbat al 'Ijaab*, Beirut, 1993.
- al-Kazwini,⁶ *Aja'ib al-Makhlukat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat*, Beirut, 1973.
- Ibn Battutta⁷, *Tuhfat al-Nuthaar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar*, Cairo, 1938. (Rihlat Ibn Battutta).
- al-Jabarti,⁸ '*Aja'ib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa al-Akhbar*, Cairo, 1998, who is interested in history more than any other subject.
- C.E. Dupler⁹, in modern era.

Most of these works can be classified as geographical ones, but some are related to history, such as *Aja'ib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa al-Akhbar*. It seems that al-Kisa'i in his work *Aja'ib al-Malakut* understood the term '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' as al-Sha'bi did. Therefore, we see that he attributes it in his book '*Aja'ib al-Malakut* (manuscript) to the Creator, where he says: "This is the book of '*Aja'ib al-Malakut*, in which I collected wonders made by God as we have known"¹⁰. Similarly, al-Kazwini in his book '*Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat*, does the same thing, though he does not limit himself to it, as we sense in the title of his work and its content also.

The reader has the feeling that the process of distortion of the term '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' has started in the days of al-Sha'bi, by his contemporary follower, Abu Wa'el¹¹ and continued till the 19th century, with the Egyptian historian, al-Jabarti.

2. Types of '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*'

With reference to the above works, it is possible to classify this genre of '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' into three main types:

- a. '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' in the meaning of 'the miracles of God and His Marvels'.
- b. '*Aja'ib*' with the meaning of supernatural deeds that are beyond the customary ones. These are nearer to the original divine meaning of the first type.
- c. Rare and unusual phenomena, which drew the attention of Arab writers, especially in the secular field.

3 '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' in Modern Studies

C.E. Dupler was the last one to distort this term as it appears in his article *ADJAIB*¹² in *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

This abridged term *ADJAIB* as used by Dupler in *Encyclopedia of Islam* can be considered as a flagrant example of the unaccepted distortion of the term '*Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib*' when compared with the term as it was originally used by al-Sha'bi. Dupler abridged it into *ADJAIB* excluding it from its religious context.

Dupler's article invites some critical notes. Dupler separates the term '*Aja'ib*' from its twin '*Ghara'ib*', which is impossible, because they are inseparably united binomial or, as al-Sha'bi says: "in perfection and completion". They go together as a restricted collocation, and therefore, it is impossible to say '*Ajaib*' without saying '*Ghara'ib*'. Such a title as *ADJAIB* does not exist at all, let alone that it is far from its real and original meaning, and such use empties the term from its content.

Dupler argues that the term '*Aja'ib*' deals with the 'miracles' of antiquity, or the ancient classical world. He speaks about the "Marvels, In The First Instance, The Marvels of Antiquity", meaning "miracles" and this is incorrect, since '*Aja'ib*' (marvels) does not always mean "miracles". He ignored the denotative meaning of the word, especially that the word '*Aja'ib*' is not mentioned in the Koran, though the word *Ajib* is mentioned ¹³ twice only, as an adjective, but not the word '*Ajibah*' as a noun with the meaning of "miracle".

On the other hand, Dupler should have written "In The Last Instance" because if he is referring to the Greeks and the Romans, he is making a grave error by thinking that the 'marvels' of the Greeks and the Romans precede the 'marvels' of the universe¹⁴

"Islam, the continuator of the classical tradition as it was formulated in the East, was interested in exceptional monuments but in a spirit different from that of the Greek".

Depending on this paragraph, one can conclude that “marvels” are derived from the Greek spiritual life, and after that from the world of the Bible. In fact, the opposite is the right thing, whether from the point of view of time sequence or order. It is known that the Biblical source is the most preceding one.

In this context, it is possible to refer to some of the sources of al-Sha’bi: *al-Zaboor – Book of Psalms* and *al-Towrah / the Bible*, which he relies on as a basis for his views in *’Aja’ib wa Ghara’ib*. He says: “He looked at the rabbis of Bani Israel as they were sitting on chairs studying *al-Zaboor / Book of Psalms* and *Tawrah / Bible*”¹⁵.

Dupler introduces The Minaret of Alexandria as an example of the buildings that he considers as one of the “Wonders” of the world saying:

Among the surprising buildings described as marvelous by the Arab authors, the Pharos of Alexandria acquired great notoriety.

This example is basically wrong, because, *’Aja’ib and Ghara’ib* are made by God, not by man. It is worthwhile mentioning that Islam gave The Tower of Alexandria a Moslem touch when it gave the tower the name “Minaret”¹⁶ as a good omen, so that it will become a purely Islamic landmark, knowing that it was built by Alexander the Great, as it was mentioned in “News of the Minaret of Alexandria that was built by Alexander the Great, peace be upon him [in source]”¹⁷. This is what Moslems did to the Minaret of Alexandria and other buildings, to emphasize their new Islamic characteristic, in an attempt to make signs that refer to the greatness of the new religion and its triumph as a monotheistic religion in its war against paganism and its victory over it. On the other hand, the Moslems intended by this step to limit the effect of these buildings on the souls of the Moslems. This is what happened also to the building of The Dome of the Rock, which was built by Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan in Jerusalem, who became Caliph in it in the year 65 of

Hegira. Amir al-Mu'minin Abdul-Malik became a Caliph in Ilia as he was in it¹⁸, where Christianity was spreading intensively, and it had already had great buildings, such as 'The Holy Sepulcher Church' from whose magnificence Abdul-Malik was worried about the Moslems. Therefore, he decided to divert their admiration from those buildings that Christianity glorifies to Islamic buildings that compete with them in greatness and magnificence. Therefore, he built the Dome of the Rock. "Dear son, al-Walid revealed to him a great matter that he noticed that al-Sham / Syria, the country of Christians, and he saw in it many beautiful villages with attractive ornamentations, and their names have spread widely, like al-Qimama [which is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher], and the village of Lydd and Raha; therefore he built a mosque for the Moslems which occupied them and he made it one of the wonders of the world. Don't you see that when Abdul-Malik saw the greatness of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and its shape, he was worried that it would become great in the hearts of the Moslems, therefore he built upon the Rock the Dome that you see!?"¹⁹

It seems that Dupler does not speak in vacuum. The basis of his opinion was mentioned by al-Maqdisi who says; "People say that the wonders of the world are three: the Minaret of Alexandria, the Arcade of Sanja, and the Church of al-Raha, but when al-Aqsa Mosque was built, it replaced the Church"²⁰.

That was the theory of Caliph Abdul-Malik and his companion al-Sha'bi behind the composition of Madiant al-Nuhas. Al-Sha'bi says: "*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas and what it contains of wonders and marvels in perfection and completion*". By this story, they intended to confirm the greatness of Islam in its confrontation with paganism, and at the same time to confirm the eternity of the Creator against the weakness of man and his transience, "and [Mousa Ibn Nussair] said that there is no power and no

strength save in God, the High and the Great.. God be praised, the eternally living one who does not die”²¹ . It deserves mentioning that this motif of “the eternally living, who does not cease to exist, the everlasting with no motion, no movement, the everlastingly existing, in the name of the only one, perpetual, who was not born or given birth”²² is repeated all through “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas...*”.

Though the term 'Ajai'b wa Ghara'ib, not ADJAIB as Dupler uses it, exists as a literary genre in Arabic literature, he does not mention al-Sha'bi as the first to use this term at all. He only praises Ibn al-Faqih and Abu Hamid al-Gharnatti and their efforts in this field.

Dupler did not pay attention as he should to the great difference between 'Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib in their original religious meaning and 'Aja'ib which apparently indicates an unruly imagination in the journey stories, such as the journeys of merchants overseas, and to other far countries in Africa, the Far East such as China and India. Dupler mentions a familiar example of Ajaib, which is “Adja'ib al-Hind - Buzurg bin Shahriyar”. He says:

“The Adjaib al-Hind by the captain Buzurg b. Shahriyar deserves to be mentioned in the first value place by its early date and by its incontestable documentary for its period.”

There is another error that Dupler makes when he attributes al-Kazwini to the fourteenth century. He says: “The Adjaib thus came into greater favor and reached their full century. The development in the cosmographies of the 8th/14th greatest author of this period was al-Kazwini”. Al-Kazwini was born in 600/1203 and died in 682/ 1283.

His translation of the title of al-Kazwini's book is not perfectly correct. He translates “Ajai'b al-Makhlouqat” as “The Marvels of Creation” instead of “The Marvels of Creatures”. The full title of the book is” ‘*Aja'ib al-Makhlouqat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat*’ (The Miracles of the Creatures and

the Marvels of the Existing Things”. The book was printed in Beirut in 1973. Dupler also mentions another book by al-Kazwini with the title “*Athar al-Buldan, The Monuments*”. The real title of the book is “*Atahr al-Bilad wa Akhbar al-‘Ibad*”, which was also printed in Beirut 1960.

II. MADINAT L-NUHAS / THE CITY OF BRASS

It seems that *Madinat al-Nuhas* still occupies the minds of researchers. Many writers have dealt with this story considering it as one of the stories that resemble the Arabian Nights (*Alf Laila wa Laila*), or those that are similar to them like “*One Hundred Nights / Me’at Laila wa Laila*” and others. Some of the reasons for their interest can be attributed to the atmosphere of fantasy that they include (e.g. description of the council of King Solomn, and the journey of search of *Madinat al-Nuhas*, and the meeting with the afreet or jinni/imps); the legend (e.g. the Qamaqim al-Suleimaniyya (Bottles of Suleiman), and King Solomon’s knowledge of the logic of birds, and the attempt of Mousa Ibn Nussair to enter *Madinat al-Nuhas*); and history (Suleiman the Wise, Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan, Mousa Ibn Nussair).

Kamil Kilani, who is well-known for his writing on Children’s Literature intended to classify the story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* as a fable or legendary story, after he adapted it to the level of children.

1. *Madinat al-Nuhas*, its Authors and Versions

A. al-Sha’bi, the Companion of Caliph Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan

Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan was a caliph of high significance in politics, science and religion. He was the first to give the Umayyad Caliphate and the whole state an Arab characteristic. He was “a clever, wise, knowledgeable, and powerful king. He had the traits of great dignity, strong diplomacy, and

good management of daily life. During his rule, the official “divan” was changed from Persian into Arabic”²³. al-Sha’bi, as well as other literary sources, acknowledge of his credit in literature and science. He was described as “Abdul-Malik was an intelligent and a virtuous man of letters. al-Sha’bi said: I do not remember discussing anything with anyone without finding out that I have done some merit over him except Abdul-Malik bin Marwan. I have never discussed any Hadith or any poetry with him without adding me something”²⁴. al-Sha’bi repeats this saying: “I have never talked about any Hadith which I thought that it was not heard of without seeing that he had already heard about it”²⁵. In religion also, he had a good knowledge. “Before his caliphate, Abdul-Malik was one of the jurisprudents of al-Madina, and he was called Hamamat al-Masjid (*the Dove of the Mosque*) for his constancy in reciting the Koran”²⁶

One day, Abdul-Malik sent a message to his ruler (wali) of Iraq, al-Hajjaj, saying, “Send me a man with full knowledge. He sent him al-Sha’bi”²⁷. In another version, “and Abdul-Malik wrote to al-Hajjaj saying: send me a man who is good for religion and life so that I can take him as a companion and a friend. He sent him al-Sha’bi”²⁸. A special and unique relationship of companionship developed between Caliph Abdul-Malik and al-Sha’bi which was incomparable in the history of the caliphate. “He did not find anyone that can be good for companionship except al-Sha’bi”²⁹.

al-Sha’bi, Abdul-Malik’s companion, was known to be a well-known ‘narrator’ (rawiya) of the “Tabi’un” (followers). He was said to be a “scholar of the Tab’iin (followers)”³⁰. He was pointed out as a model for his knowledge of the Islamic history and Arabic literature. In Kufa, he was an authority in anything that is connected to fields of knowledge related to Islam. Some people said: “I have never seen anyone who is more knowledgeable than al-Sha’bi.. He was unique in the arts of knowledge”³¹, let alone his knowledge of languages of the Middle East; the Semitic

languages “Hebrew and Syriac,” and the Classical ones, “Greek” and others. “That guiding sheikh knew all the languages, and was able to read all the readings; he read in Greek, Syriac, Amranic, Hebrew, and Arabic”³².

al-Sha’bi used to dictate his “lessons” to his pupils. Such lessons included, as it appears, his most important religious ideas, which he molded through his companionship with Caliph Abdul-Malik. The problem of paganism was in the heart of his teachings. It seems that this problem worried him in a special way.

As for his sources in “*This is the story of Madinat al-Muhas*,” they are the *Holy Koran* and “*al-Zaboor / Pslams and the Towrah/ Bible*”³³. “*This is the story of Madinat-al-Nuhas*” was co-edited by Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan and his companion al-Sha’bi³⁴.

It is worthwhile mentioning what was known about Caliph Abdul-Malik, especially his Arab Islamic awareness. This appears in his Arabization of the divans of the State, and his resistance to paganism which still kept its remnants in some parts of the Umayyad state, especially in the region of al-Sham/ Syria³⁵. The influence of Abdul-Malik by the monotheistic ideology of Suleiman (King Suleiman the Wise) is embodied in his co-editing of “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*” with al-Sha’bi. We read: “In the name of God, the most merciful. It was mentioned, and only God knows what has passed about the history of other nations that one of the kings called Abdul-Malik bin Marwan bin al-Hakam with his ministers and chamberlains and leaders of his state discussed the story of Suleiman Ibn Dawood, peace be upon him, and wondered at his kingdom, and what God has gifted him of his favor. Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan said: This prophet was given a great kingdom, but when he got angry at the imps, he would imprison them in a bottle, and seal them with lead, and throw them in the

sea, and I wish to look at some of them, because that is a lesson to the one who learns and an exhortation to the one who can be restrained. He stood up, and at that moment a prince of his princes, called Prince Talib Ibn Sahl Ibn Abdullah and said: O Amir al-M'uminin! Write to your ruler Mousa Ibn Nussair, your ruler of the Maghreb to go to the place where the bottles are, and he will bring you some of them"³⁶.

It seems that his sources were basically: *al-Zaboor / Pslams* and the *Towrah / Bible*, let alone the atmospheres that surround King Solomon, as al-Sha'bi imagines them. He says, "Because of his lights, the assembly becomes so shining that it nearly takes one's sight. On the right side of the chair, there are ten thousand chairs of gold, crowned with corundum and jewels, and on that chair, there are rabbis of Bani Israel/ Sons of Israel and their scholars / 'ulama recite *the Zaboor* and discuss it and call God in cries, while they are wearing shabby clothes of wool and long hair. Their bodies have slimmed because of over-worshipping. The Praised be He, whose power does not cease or perish. Suleiman, peace be upon him, sat on that bed, and walked above people for seven miles. Praised be He who gifted Suleiman a supreme power that no one deserved after him. He said: When Suleiman, peace be upon him, looked right and left at the lions, and looked opposite him at the hawk, and looked at the Rabbis of Israel while they were sitting on the chairs studying *al-Zaboor wa al-Tawrah*, he increased..."³⁷.

B. Abu Wael, Sheikh of Kufa

Abu Wael, Sheikh of Kufa ³⁸ was one of the listeners to al-Sha'bi's "lessons", and it seems that he wrote down what he heard from al-Sha'bi without understanding the real meaning ³⁹. Here the process of forgery and distortion started by adding things to al-Sha'bi's "*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas...*". Along with this process the operation of distortion of the term 'Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib was started by Abu Wael and during al-

Sha'bi's life himself. It appears also that Abu Wael quoted from al-Sha'bi in "*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*"⁴⁰ without understanding its real meaning.

If the beginning process of forgery and distortion was started by Abu Wael, other writers, who are considered to be authorities in the literatures of Arab geography, such as Ibn al-Faqih and al-Gharnatti, who continued the operation of forgery and distortion, knew, most probably, what Abu Wael registered, which is two thirds of the manuscript, and bears his name. However, they did not know about the first third, which was written by al-Sha'bi himself. Al-Gharnatti exaggerated more than his predecessor Ibn al-Faqih in distorting what Abu Wael had written, especially in giving each chapter a different heading⁴¹

C. al-Kisa'i

al-Kisa'i's⁴² manuscript has not been studied yet, and Dupler did not mention it in his discussion of the term ADJAIB. An exhaustive reading of this manuscript proves that its author followed the meaning that al-Sha'bi intended by the term of 'Aja'ib wa Ghara'ib, which are the "miracles" of God and his marvels.

I got the manuscript written by Abu Wael from Berlin University under the number Berlin. Ms. S.B.B.9183. One third was written by al-Sha'bi himself, while the other two thirds that had undergone a process of forgery or distortion, or changes were written by Abu Wael himself⁴³. Some of the terms that al-Sha'bi used were given a different indication by Abu Wael, especially the words "Madina" and "Nuhas". For Abu Wael, they have the literal meanings of "Madina" and "Nuhas", while for al-Sha'bi they are: "castle" and "smoke"⁴⁴.

Rafi' Yihya referred to that difference in titles, without dealing with the details. He argues that "there is difference in the versions of certain words in

the different texts of *Madinat al-Nuhas*”⁴⁵. However, he did not give any example to illustrate that⁴⁶.

In a later period, what Abu Wael registered in a distorted way became a reliable source for some later Arab authors. Among these are: Ibn al-Faqih, al-Gharnati, and al-Kazwini. However, al-Kazwini (in the 13th century) gave a definition of the terms “’Ajib” and “Gharib” in his book, *’Aja’ib al-Makhlukat wa Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat*, published in Beirut in 1973. He says that “a wonder is a puzzle that exposes the human being to his failure to know the cause of something or to know how it affects him”⁴⁷. But “the gharib/ oddity is any strange and marvelous thing that is improbable to happen differently from the traditional habits and familiar observation either by the effect of astronomical matters or elemental celestial bodies”⁴⁸.

When al-Kazwini mentions *Madinat al-Nuhas*, saying “It has a strange story that is unlike the customary”⁴⁹, we cannot rule out the idea that he might be referring to “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*” by al-Sha’bi⁵⁰. We cannot also rule out the idea that he understood the original divine meaning of the term *’Aja’ib wa Ghara’ib*. Therefore, he tried to keep it according to its previous meaning. However, he quickly goes far away from it to the secular field.

It is worthwhile pointing out that, through “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*,” al-Sha’bi does not define the two terms of *’Aja’ib wa Ghara’ib*, but it is

understood from the context that he means by them “Miracles of God and His Marvels”.

2. The Main Idea of *Madinat al-Nuhas*

The main idea of “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*” can be traced back to the world of the holy books. The story mentions the following

quotation, “As for Moses, he was taking the sheep of Yathron, his father in law, the priest of Median. He drove the sheep to the field, and arrived at the mountain of God, Horib. The angel of God appeared to him through a flame of fire out of a bramble”⁵¹. This is also the story as it is mentioned in the Holy Koran; “When Mousa grew in age, and led his people, he noticed fire from the side of the mountain. He said to his people: stay here, I notice there is a fire”⁵². Al-Kazwini thinks that this mountain is the Mount of Sinai, and he says, “Moses was called when he left Egypt with Bani Israel, and when our lord Moses came to it, fogs would descend onto it, and he would go into that fog and God would talk to him”⁵³. In light of these quotations, it is possible to look at this work as one that has common qualities of the two religions – Judaism and Islam, considering that both are monotheistic religions against paganism.

Thus, it is possible to consider “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*” by al-Sha’bi as a kind of an allegory that the author uses to represent what seems to be a “castle” for the worshipping of the Creator. It is covered by the spirit of God. It sounds as if we were standing in front of “Madinatu-Allah”. al-Sha’bi seems to have intended to “build the city of God” in respect and glorification of the position of the Caliph Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan, who himself stands at its, but what stands at the head of his priorities is ‘worshipping of God’. In respect to this, he is like King Solomon, who was known to be a man of religion and a statesman at the same time.

Al-Sha’bi achieves what he intended in this work, which is to reveal a miracle, or a marvel of God’s marvels. He imagines a castle of smoke at the moment of God’s revelation and epiphany at Mont Sinai “Toor Sina’,” which is “Jannat al-Dunya/ The Paradise of Earth”, because it is “one of the mountains of the Garden of Heaven”⁵⁴. Therefore, Madinat al-Nuhas, according to al-Sha’bi, is nothing but “Paradise and Garden of Happiness”⁵⁵.

It is possible to say that “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*” reflects the ideology of Caliph Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan regarding religion and state, in an attempt to compare himself to King Solomon the Wise, who was also a man of religion and a statesman.

It worthwhile pointing out that this is not the first work by al-Sha’bi that follows this writing style. He had written the work called “*This is the story of Garden of Shaddad bin ‘Ad*” “*Hathihi Qissat Jannat Shaddad bin ‘Ad*”⁵⁶. Basically, it depends on the story as it is mentioned in the Holy Koran. God says: “Didn’t you see what your God has done to ‘Ad, Iram the city of columns, like which none has been created in the world?”⁵⁷. The story of al-Sha’bi, whether it is an explanation or an interpretation of the Koranic verse (Sura) emphasizes the triumph of Islam over paganism in the East.

Thus, we see that al-Sha’bi is the author of two stories:

- 1) “*This is the story of Shaddad bin ‘Ad*,” in the Arab Peninsula in the East.
- 2) “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*,” in al-Andalus in the West.

It seems that al-Sha’bi had two purposes in writing these stories:

- to praise the efforts of Abdul-Malik in his establishing the political bases of the Umayyad State besides the religious spiritual bases.
- To emphasize the triumph of Islam and its establishment in the two wings of the Islamic Umayyad Empire in the East by “*This is the story of Shaddad bin ‘Ad*”, and in the West by “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*”. Both are equally important in facing paganism.

Some critics had doubt regarding the existence of this city, because of its remoteness from the ordinary. He said, “It is said to be called as *Madinat al-Suffr* (Yellow/Brass), and it has a long story, which is far from truth because of its remoteness from the customary. I am innocent of its guarantee, but I

write that I found it in the famous books that were written down by the wise ones, and yet, it is a well-known city, and therefore I mentioned it⁵⁸. This is another proof of the

author's misunderstanding of the real meaning of this work.

It deserves mentioning that the story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* was mentioned in some copies or editions of the *Arabian Nights*⁵⁹, while we find other copies that do not include it⁶⁰. This hints at the possibility that the story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* may not belong to the *Arabian Nights*.

3. *Madinat al-Nuhas* and Modern Critics

A. Pinault

Some modern critics have dealt with the story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* from the literary point of view. One of them is Pinault, who focused on its literary aspects such as: narrative techniques, and manipulation of events of characterization. He concludes that the story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* is not so different from the stories of *The Arabian Nights* and similar works like *Me'at Laila wa Laila*⁶¹.

B. Kamil Kilani

The Egyptian author, Kamil Kilani,⁶² remolded the story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* in an abridged version within the frame of Children's Literature in a way that suits children's level. What draws the attention is that the manuscripts that Pinault came across and discussed seem to be relatively modern ones, because he did not mention the name of al-Sha'bi at all. Besides, there are many differences between the various versions, which indicate the extent of the change that has happened to the original work of *This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas* throughout the years.

In this context, one can notice that all those that referred to *Madinat al-Nuhas*, or mentioned it did not think at all that the real author of the story al-Sha'bi was talking about a real city. All of them looked at it as a legendary imaginary and fantasy story; a tale or a fable similar to the fables of *The Arabian Nights*. The exceptional one is Shmu'el Tamari, who is the first to discover the manuscript of Berlin Ms. S. B. B. 9183. In his review of Chapter Four of Pinault's book, which has the title *Madinat al-Nuhas*.

C. Ibrahim Jiryas

Ibrahim Jiryas considers this book as a "historical legendary tale"⁶³. He expresses his admiration of Pinault's study of the aspects of "Form and Content" in the tale of *Madinat al-Nuhas* saying, "Pinault finishes his chapter by a study of the form and content in the tale of *Madinat al-Nuhas* and tries to classify the tale among the Arabic literary genres, which is an exciting profound study of the meanings that this tale includes"⁶⁴. However, the reviewer does not bring reasons to justify his judgments.

D. Rafi' Yihya

The same attitude is adopted by Rafi' Yihya, who avoid going deep into the reality of *Madinat al-Nuhas*. He is satisfied with references to manuscripts mentioned by Pinault⁶⁵, which he did not see, as it appears, not even one. He was satisfied by exposing what Pinault mentions⁶⁶. Yihya is not fully accurate in his translation from Pinault. For example, he says, "In this manuscript, (the Tunisian), two characters appear: King of al-Maghreb and his son the Prince"⁶⁷. The original text says "malik al-Gharb, which is the King of the West" and not the King of al-Maghreb. In another instance, he says: "It was found in the geographical sources that all the texts are similar, which means that it was believed that *Madinat al-Nuhas* is in al-Maghreb"⁶⁸. This is incorrect. The correct translation should be "in the

West” and not in the “Maghreb”. It is clear that the critic is confused between “al-Maghreb” and “al-Gharb”, i.e. Morocco and the West. Finally, his reference: “al-Ghirnatti, Abu Hamid Abdul-Rahim bin Suleiman al-Qaisi 1993. *Tuhfat al-Albab fi TuhfaT AL-‘Ijab*”⁶⁹. The correct title is *Tuhfat al-Albab wa Nukhbat al-I’jab*.

III. Conclusion

A. This study shows that the term ‘Aja’ib wa Ghara’ib appeared for the first time in a religious context and it was coined by al-Sha’bi during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan. The distortion that occurred to the term started during the days of al-Sha’bi himself by his pupil Abu Wael and the process of distortion continued through out the Middle Ages by Ibn al-Faqih, al-Ghirnatti, and al-Kazwini till the present period by al-Jabarti and Dupler. The manuscript of Ms. S. B. B. 9183, Berlin, which was discovered by Shmuel Tamari shows the distortion that has taken place to this term. This argument is supported by the manuscript written by al-Kisa’i *‘Aja’ib al-Malakut*.

B. Most of the researchers that have dealt with “*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*” have considered it as a legendary tale that deals with marvels, or imaginary events that follow the well-known Arabian Nights. It appears that they did not recognize the reality of the story and its allegorical significance. The reason for this misunderstanding can be attributed to their full dependence on distorted unoriginal manuscripts that are full of shortcomings and inaccuracies. Such dependence lies behind their misinterpretations of the real meanings and representations of the story. They had no opportunity to read the original Berlin manuscript, since they did not have any reference to it at all.

C. Some of these modern critics and researchers include Kamil Kilani and Pinault. Besides, those who reviewed Pinault’s work, such as Ibrahim

Jiryas and Rafi' Yihya, consequently made the same mistake that Pinault made. They did not search for the original manuscript, probably of ignorance of its existence and availability, or for their full reliance on Pinault and his study. Academic scrutiny requires more, and entails checking original sources. The result is that they committed the same mistake and what is built upon a mistake results in mistakes.

NOTES

¹ He is 'Amir bin Shurahbil bin Abd Dhi Kibar al-Sha'bi al-Himyari, and his nickname is Abu Amr al-Sha'bi; a Hadith relator, narrator, jurispudent, and poet. He was born in Kufa (19 H. -103 H). His origin is from Sha'b, a mountain in Yemen. See: Yaqut al-Hamawi, *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, 2nd Edition, Vol. 3, P. 347, Dar Sader, Beirut, 1995. It is not Sh'ib as it was explained by Mohammad bin Zakariyya al-Kazwini in *Athar al-Bilad wa Akhbar al-'Ibad*, P. 48, Beirut, 1960, nor al-Shu'ibi, as explained by Gabriel Ferrand, *Le Tuhfat al-Albab de Abu Hamid al-Andalusi al-Garnati*, P. 64, Paris, 1925, from manuscript D, N0. 2170. For more details about al-Sha'bi, see : Ibn Manzur, and *Mukhtasar fi Tarikh Dimashq*, by Ibn 'Asaker, Vol. 11, P. 249-263. Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1988.

² Selected parts of this manuscript have been published by Professor Shmu'el Tamari from Bar Ilan University as they appeared in origin, and not as they were given with distortion by Abu Wael, al-Sha'bi's pupil and his contemporary. See Tamari's book, *Iconotextual Studies in the Muslim Ideology of Umayyad Architecture and Urbanism*, Introduction, pp. X-XV, D, Da, De, & pp. 80-146, Wiesbaden, Ramat Gan, 1996.

³ He is Abu Ja'far Mohammad bin Abdullah al-Kisa'i, writer of the book "Qissass al-Anbia'" at the beginning of the fifth century of Hegra. He is not the same al-Kisa'i, the well-known grammarian and linguist. Ms. Ar. 63, al-Maktaba al-Wataniya, al-Quds.

⁴ He is Ahmad bin Mohammad bin Ishaq bin Ibrahim al-Hamadhani. No one gives a determined year of his date of birth or death, but he lived in Granada / Ghirnata, in the third century of Hegira. It is most probable that he died in this century, or during the first decade of the fourth century.

⁵ He is Mohammad bin Abdul-Rahim Abu Hamid al-Andalusi al-Ghirnatti, whose origin is from al-Qairawan. Born in 473 H. and died in Damsacus in 565 H.

⁶ He is Zakariyya bin Mohammad al-Kazwini, born in Kazwin in 600 H./ 1203 AD. He lived in Damascus since 630 H. / 1232 AD, where he met Ibn Arabi. During the reign of al-M'utasseem, the last of Abbasid Caliphs, he became a judge in Waset and al-Hilla. He died in 682 H. / 1283 AD.

⁷ He is Mohammad bin Abdullah bin Batuta (1303-1377 AD). He was born in Tanja; a traveler who traveled all over the world then, and his travels lasted for 29 years.

⁸ He is Mohammad bin al-Hassan bin al-Jabarti (1754 – 1822 AD). He was born in Cairo, and taught at al-Azhar. In the introduction of the book , we read: “And then, the poor Abdul-Rahman bin Hassan al-Jabarti al-Hanafi says: I had made a draft of some papers about the events of the end of the 12th century and what followed it, and the beginning of the 13th century, in which we are living, where I collected a summary of the events, and I mentioned others in detail, most of which are plights which we reached, and matters which we witnessed...They are strange events in their classification, but various in their marvels.”

⁹ Dupler, C. E, I², I, P. 203. ADJAIB.

¹⁰ Al-Kisa'i: *'Aja'ib al-Malakut*, P.1, Manuscript N0. Ms. Ar. 63, al-Maktaba al-Wataniyya, al-Quds.Also: Manuscript of Dar al-Kutub al-Missriyyah, N0. 3869 C.

¹¹ He is Shaiq bin Salamah al-Asadi, Abu Wael al-Kufi. Assem bin Bahdala said about him: I lived seven years of my life in al-Djahiliya. Khalifa bin Khayat said: He did after al-Jamajim in 82 H. See: Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Tahthib al-Tahthib*, Vol. 4, P. 329-330. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1994.

¹² Dupler, E. I², I. P. 203.

¹³ God says: “She said! O upon me! How can I give birth as I am old and my husband is an old man. This is a miraculous thing. Surat Hud, Verse 72. He also says: “They were surprised that they were sent a herald from them. The kafirs said: this is a miraculous thing”. Sura Q, Verse, 2

¹⁴ al-Kisa'i, *'Aja'ib al-Malakut*, Manuscript.

¹⁵ Tamari, S.: Iconotextual. II. P. 99.

¹⁶ See this in *Lisan al-'Arab*, Ibn Manzur, 3rd. Edition. Vol. 5, PP. 240-241. Dar Sader, Beirut, 1994.

¹⁷ Al-Ghirmatti, *Tuhfat al-Albab wa Nukhbat al-I'jab*, 2nd Edition, P. 99. Edited by Ismael al-Arabi, Dar al-Jil, Beirut, and Dar al-Afaq – al-Maghreb, 1993. See: al-

Abshihi, *al-Mustaraf min Kulli Fannin Mustathraf*, P. 413, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1993. See also: al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*. 5th Edition, Vol. 1, P. 375, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut. 1973.

¹⁸ Khalifa bin Khayat, *Tarikh*, P. 200. Beirut, 1993.

¹⁹ Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-Taqasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim*. P. 139. Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1987.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 130.

²¹ Tamari, Chaper III, P. 123.

²² *Ibid.*, P. 116-117.

²³ Ibn al-Taqtaqi Mohammad bin Ali, *al-Fakhri fi al-Adab al-Sultaniyya wa al-Duwal al-Islamiyya*, P. 122, Dar Sader, Beirut, See also al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'* P. 250, Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, Cairo, 1975.

²⁴ Ibn al-Taqtaqi, *al-Fakhri fi al-Adab al-Sultaniyya wa al-Duwal al-Islamiyya*, P. 124; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Vol. 1, P. 166, Leiden, 1904.; al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, P. 247.

²⁵ Al-Balathuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, Vol. 1, P. 1163. Manuscript: NO. 598-597. (The University of Jordan).

²⁶ Ibn al-Taqtaqi, P. 122. It is worthwhile mentioning that this caliph (685-705 AD), and despite his importance, did not gain the care of the Arab or non-Arab historians, neither in ancient nor in modern times. No one has ever written about him in a methodological and detailed way, despite his witnessed efforts for the sake of Arabization of the Umayyad State, and expanding its area, which raises more than a question mark!

²⁷ Al-Balathuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, Vol. 1, P. 1168, (Manuscript).

²⁸ Al-Sharishi, *Sharh Maqamat al-Hariri*, Vol. 4, al-Maktaba al-Thaqafiyya, Beirut, 1952.

²⁹ Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*, 3rd Edition, Vol. 3, P. 100. Beirut, 1973. About al-Nadim's literature, see the same source. Also, Yuseph Sadan, *al-Adab al-Arabi al-Hazel wa Nawader al-Thoqala'*, *Nathariyat al-Nadim al-Muta'adib*, P. 54-56. Tel Aviv University, and Maktabat wa Matba'at al-Suruji, Akka, 1983.

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- ³⁰ Al-Dhahabi, *Tathkirat al-Huffath*, Vol. 6, P. 79, Beirut, 1374 H.
- ³¹ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Tahthib al-Tahthib*, Vol. 5, P. 63.
- ³² Tamari, Shmuel, Iconotextual Studies... Scene C. P. 116. The Caliph Abdul-Malik had sent him to the King of the Rum. See: al-Mubarrid, *al-Kamil*, 3rd Edition, Vol. 2, P. 638, edited by al-Dali, Mu'asasat al-Risala, Beirut, 1997, al-Sha'bi used the two words "qyanus" and "al-Phaylasophiya" in Arabic exactly as they are mentioned in their Greek source. See: Tamari, Shmuel, Iconotextual Studies... P. 105 (17), 122, (15),
- ³³ See: Tamari, Iconotextual. P. 99. and Manuscript A. 9183.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. III, PP. 80-140
- ³⁵ See: al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-Taqaqim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim*, P. 139.
- ³⁶ Tamari, P. 144.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, Ch. III, P. 99.
- ³⁸ See: al-Thahabi, *Tathkirat al-Huffath*, Vol. 1, P. 60. Also, al-Asqalani, *Tahthib al-Tahthib*, Vol. 4, PP. 329-330.
- ³⁹ See: Manuscript Berlin, S. B. B. 9183
- ⁴⁰ See: Tamari, PP. 80-86
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, PP. 94-97, Footnote, 37.
- ⁴² Al-Kisa'i, *'Aja'ib al-Malakut*, Manuscript : Ms. Ar. 63.
- ⁴³ See: Tamari, Introduction, PP. XI-XV.
- ⁴⁴ Tamari, PP. 80-85, and *Lisan al-Arab*, 3rd Ed. Vol. 13, P. 402, Entry of "Mudun" (Cities): "The city is a castle that is built in the center of the land". For the meaning of "Nuhas" (Brass), See Holy Koran, Surat al-Rahman: Verse 35, [Yursilu alaikuma shawath min nar wa nuhas fala tantasiran"]; also: Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, Ed. 3, Vol. 6, P. 227. He said: and 'Nuhas' with dammah: smoke that has no flame"
- ⁴⁵ Yihya, Rafi' : *Ta'thir Alf Laila wa Laila 'ala Adab al-Atfal al-Arabi*, P. 105. M.A. thesis, Haifa University. Published by the Academic Arab College for Education. Center of Children's Literature, P. 105. Haifa, 2001.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 105.

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- ⁴⁷ Al-Kazwini, Zakariyya, *'Aja'ib al'-Makhluqat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat*, P. 31.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., P. 38.
- ⁴⁹ Al-Kazwini, Zakariyya, *Athar al-Bilad wa Akhbar al-'Ibad*, P. 558, Dar Sader and Dar Beirut, Beirut, 1960.
- ⁵⁰ See: Tamari, PP. 88-89.
- ⁵¹ *Al-Kitab al-Muqaddas* (The Bible): Exodus, Ch. 3: 1-3.
- ⁵² *Holy Koran*: Surat al-Qissass, Verse 29; See also, Surat Taha, Verse 10, and Surat al-'Araf. Verse 143.
- ⁵³ Al-Kazwini, Zakariyya, P. 214.
- ⁵⁴ Al-Qurtubi, Shams al-Din, *al-Tathkira fi Ahwal al-Mawta wa 'Umoor al-Akhira*, P. 523, al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya.
- ⁵⁵ See: Tamari, P. 123.
- ⁵⁶ Tamari, Shmuel, *Iconotextual Studies in Mid-Eastern Islamic Religious Architecture and Urbanization in the Early Middle Ages*. Naples, 1992. Chapter III, PP. 123-139.
- ⁵⁷ *Holy Koran*, Surat al-Fajr. Verse 6-8. Though al-Sha'bi does not refer directly to Caliph Abdul-Malik in this story, it seems that it is a result of their companionship, and that is clear because of the common element of the two stories is their fight against paganism. While the first story "*This is the story of Shaddad bin Ad*" talks about Arab paganism in Djahiliyya, the second story "*This is the story of Madinat al-Nuhas*" talks about the same issue but in more detail in all parts of the Umayyad Empire, especially in facing the religions that preceded the appearance of Islam (Roman and Greek paganism). It appears that Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan and his companion al-Sha'bi dealt with that problem: How can Islam face it? At the same time, how can they keep Islam as a new religion, and a new empire?
- ⁵⁸ Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-'Udaba'*, Vol. 5, P. 80. See also: Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, P. 48. Dar al-Fikr. Lebanon, 1981.. Also: Gaudefroy, Demombyne, *Les centes et une nuits, traduite del Arabe*, Paris, 1910.
- ⁵⁹ Bulaq Printing, Cairo, 1252 H. Also: al-Maktaba al-Thaqafiyya, 2nd Edition, P. 215, Beirut, 1981.
- ⁶⁰ See Brill, Leiden Edition. Edited by Mohsen Mahdi, 1984.
- ⁶¹ Pinault, David, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*, Leiden. New York, Koln. 1992. P. 157, 191.. The writer gives common elements between the

story of *Madinat al-Nuhas* and those stories. For example, concentration on characters, inclusion of verse lines in the text, and narration by Shahriyar.

⁶² Kamil Kilani: *Madinat al-Nuhas*, 11th Edition. Dar al-Ma'arif. Cairo, 1987.

⁶³ Jiryas, Ibrahim. Review of David Pinault's book *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1992. PP. 262. in *al-Karmil*. Issue 13, p. 201. 'Abhath fi al-lugha wa al-adab'. University of Haifa. Haifa.

⁶⁴ Ibid., P. 201.

⁶⁵ Yihya, Rafi', *Ta'thir Alf Laila wa Laial ala Adab al-Atfal al-Arabi*. P. 105.

⁶⁶ Ibid., P. 105.

⁶⁷ Ibid. See also Pinault, P. 155, where he says "King of the West" where he should say "King of the Maghreb, or Morocco". Similarly, regarding the second example, he refers to page number as 156, while it is 155.

⁶⁸ Yihya, Rafi', P. 105.

⁶⁹ Ibid., P. 194.