Glimpses of Narration 'Tricks' in the Arabic Storytelling Heritage

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Abstract

The Arabs started to have their narrative tradition at an early period of their history. Three of the early pioneers of Arabic storytelling cited by later historians are: al-Nadhr bin al-Hareth, Tamim bin Aus al-Daree, and Ubaid bin Shriyah al-Jurhumee.

In the early Islamic eras, the storytelling class quickly established itself as a fixed feature of the cultural scene. Within this group, several types were recognizable; one was elite storytellers who tried to combine narration and education; another was the popular storyteller group, and this was an important phenomenon of the Islamic community; a subtype of this last was a group of storytellers who almost acted out the roles of their tales.

The present research focuses on the 'tricks' of Arabic narratology, i.e. the principles, methods, and intricacies of the art of Arabic storytelling. It presupposes that ancient Arabic narration had its distinctive ways, and that by investigating those ways we shall broaden and deepen our conception of the unique contribution of that art, and of the Arab-Islamic heritage in general.

The research is an endeavour to bring out those 'tricks' or techniques, through a study of the tales of oracles and the wild fantasies of Bedouins. It focuses on the techniques of the marvelous and eccentric, the principle of providing the line of reporters 'isnad', the principles of framing and barter. It concludes with a look at the role of poetry cited in ancient narrative models.