Int. Commun. Chin. Cult (2015) 2(3):223–233
DOI 10.1007/s40636-015-0023-0

The Rukh and the influence of Chinese mythology

Ahmed Al-Rawi[1,2]

Received: 28 May 2015 / Revised: 14 September 2015 / Accepted: 14 September 2015 /
Published online: 29 September 2015

Abstract The Rukh bird that was mentioned in the *Arabian Nights* became popular in the West due to the Venetian traveller Marco Polo (1254–1324) who referred to it in his travel account. Though Marco Polo did not claim to see the Rukh himself, he narrated what Arab navigators described as a giant bird that appeared near the island of Madagascar (Polo in The travels of Marco Polo the Venetian, 1914) (McElroy observes that in southern part of Madagascar, 'near Isalo, explorers still found the giant eggs of the roc, the great elephant bird….' (McElroy in Over the lip of the World: among the storytellers of Madagascar, 2001) or Aepyornis, which is believed to be the source of the Rukh's myth). Other travellers like Ibn Baţūţah (c.1304–c.1377) stated that the bird had the reputation of attacking ships whenever it saw them. Previous studies emphasized the link between the Persian Simurgh and the Rukh, but this article argues that the Rukh has been influenced by Chinese mythology especially by the P'eng bird, while the Arabs' oral tradition is indirectly associated with the Rukh through a number of traditional practices and rituals popular in the early twentieth century. Further, the article provides textual evidence that assist in further understanding some *Arabian Nights* tales.

Keywords Rukh bird · Chinese mythology · Arab oral tradition · Arabian Nights · P'eng bird

✉ Ahmed Al-Rawi
ahmed@aalrawi.com

[1] Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, Montreal, QC, Canada

[2] Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Introduction

The debate on the origins of the *Arabian Nights* has been a topic of interest to many scholars. From the eighteenth century, several Western scholars argued the *Arabian Nights* were derived from Indian and Persian sources. These claims were mainly based on examining the Indian elements like the frame-story and Indian and Persian settings of the tales such the '*names of the heroes, the geographical environment, and type of story*' (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004, vol. ii, pp. 603–604 and p. 672). There were older Indian works translated into Arabic like *Kalīla wa Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa'(c. 724–c. 759). In this work, the Indian Gaṛuda bird became the Persian Simurgh when it was translated into Middle Persian. Then, al-Muqaffa' changed the bird into 'Anqā' to make his work suitable for the Arab audience. F. De Blois believed that this was also the procedure followed when a giant bird was translated into Arabic and Persian languages (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 9, p. 615).

As will be explained below, some of the Arabic tales that refer to the Rukh are linked to the moon eclipse and can be seen in older popular practices widely spread in several parts of the Arab world up to the early twentieth century. For example, among the folklore traditions in Iraq was a popular habit of beating drums during moon eclipse. People used to beat copper plates, bang on cooking pots, and even fire shots when there was eclipse thinking that the whale devoured the moon. In order to frighten the imaginary sea animal, they used to sing songs accompanied with drum beats when it becomes dark, and they continue until the moon appears once more (*Lughat al-'Arab* 1913, pp. 387–389; al-'Alwajī 1962, p. 4–7; 'Ayssā 1936, pp. 49–52; al-'Ānī 1985, p. 217). The popular song goes like this:

Yā Ḥuttah Yā Manḥuttah
Hiddī Kkumarrnah al-'Ālī
Hadha Kkumarrnah Anrrīdah
Hūwa 'Alīnah Ghālī
Wa Ann Kān mā Tihhddīnah
Ann Dugglich bil Ṣīnīah
'Thy whale, thy engraved one,[1]
Let go of our high moon.
This is our moon that we want,
and is very dear to us.
If you don't let go,
we'll bang on the tray'

In fact, this cultural habit is found in other Arabic regions such as Oman. For example, some people in Dhofar who speak al-Shaḥrī language strike stones at unbreakable plates when there is eclipse until the moon returns to its normal shape (al-Shaḥrī 2000, p. 316). Hence, the habit of beating drums to frighten whales is

[1] This is a literal translation because the second attribute 'Manḥuttah' is mainly used to rhyme with 'Ḥuttah'.

rooted in some parts of the Arabic culture whether by the common people or seafarers.

In this regard, there has been some speculation that the Rukh bird is Persian due to its seeming resemblance to the Simurgh (Mot. B31.5) as the Rukh itself was never referred to in Persian mythology. On the other hand, some Arab lexicographers mentioned the Simurgh in their works and often mixed it with the Arabic 'Anqā' bird. al-Jāḥiż, al-Tha'ālibī (c.961–c.1037) and al-Baghdādī attempted to explain its etymology, stating that the Simurgh or Simurg was formed by two words (Si Murgh) which means 'thirty birds' (al-Jāḥiż 1965, vol. vii, pp. 120–121; al-Tha'ālibī 1985, p. 450; al-Baghdādī 1996, vol. vii, pp. 132–133). The three authors believed that the Simurgh and the other mythical bird the 'Anqā' (Mot. B0032) were the same. This alleged similarity supports F. De Blois' claim cited above in which the 'Anqā' turned into Simurgh when translated into Persian and vice versa. Yet this article argues that there is evidence that Chinese elements or influences shaped the perception and concept of the Rukh as will be discussed below.

The origins of the Rukh

In Chinese mythology and the early philosophy of Taoism, the old folk stories of Chuang Tzu (399–295 B.C.) are relevant here as they contain a reference to the P'eng mythical bird. In the story of the 'Transcendental Bliss' (1-11), the following account is given: '*In the northern ocean there is a fish, called the Leviathan, many thousand li in size. This leviathan changes into a bird, called the Rukh, whose back is many thousand li in breadth. With a might effort it rises, and its wings obscure the sky like clouds'* (Giles 1889, p. 1). Here, the giant fish that is called K'un was metamorphisized into a great bird (Birrell 1993, p. 191). In this context, Herbert Giles, Chuang Tzu's translator, preferred to call the bird Rukh instead of P'eng probably to make the meaning closer to the understanding of his Western readers. Further, a Chinese traveller called Chou Ch'ű-fei went to Madagascar and wrote down the details of his travel in the year 1178, and he referred to a similar bird in his writing, stating: '*When they fly they obscure the sun for a short time. There are wild camels, and if the p'éng birds meet them, they swallow them up. If one finds a feather of the p'éng bird, by cutting the quill, one can make a water jar of it'* (Duyvendak 1949, p. 22). By examining the above account, Joshua Potter believes that the P'eng bird mentioned here '*is most likely the* rukh' (1974, p. 121). One of the main qualities of this mythical bird is 'immortality and longevity' as it was believed that '"*it received the gift of eternal life" from God*' (Birrell 1993, p. 187). Indeed, the descriptions given above are identical with the accounts mentioned in the *Arabian Nights* and repeatedly stated by Arab travellers on the Rukh, as will be stated below.

In order to understand how the Rukh was generally perceived, it is necessary to trace its origins in medieval Arabic sources. Here, we need to discuss the Rukh's accounts given by different Arab travelers and navigators. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the Rukh was first mentioned by the Persian traveler Buzrug Bin Shahriyār al-Rāmahirmizī (lived in the tenth century) in *'Ajā'ib al-Hind* (The Wonders of India) (vol. 8, 595). However, al-Rāmahirmizī never mentioned

the bird by its name, and there is new convincing evidence that the Persian traveler, Abī 'Umrān Mūsā al-Sīrāfī, who lived in the tenth century and died around 1009 was the original author of the aforementioned work. al-Sīrāfī wrote a book entitled *al-Ṣaḥīḥ min Akhbār al-Biḥār wa 'Ajā'ibihā* (The Right Accounts of the Seas and their Wonders) from which *'Ajā'ib al-Hind* took its content, and it appears now that parts of the book were wrongly attributed to al-Rāmahirmizī.[2] Originally, the Rukh was likened to a huge eagle whose wings measured about 18,900 meters[3] and was able to carry an elephant or rhinoceros with its strong talons; it was believed that the bird resided in remote and faraway islands near China (al-Brūsaūī 1913, vol. xiv, p. 64) that was also referred to in the *Arabian Nights* (Burton 1885, vol. vi, pp. 16–17). Marco Polo revealed that the Rukh used to appear in a certain time of the year, and it looked like the 'eagle'; however, '*it is incomparably greater in size; being so large and strong as to seize an elephant with its talons, and to lift it into the air, from whence it lets it fall to the ground, in order that when dead it may prey upon the carcass'* (Polo 1914, p. 393). Hence, the eagle and Rukh seem to look identical as they seem to share the same qualities.

It is important here to refer to one of the first Arabic accounts that made an indirect reference to this mythical bird. In his discussion of Gargizia near Mongolia, al-Beirūnī (c.973–c.1048) talked about a giant bird that the locals called Khatū. He narrates a story told by a fellow traveler who accompanied some men in the wilderness of China, saying that once the sun darkened all of a sudden, so all the travelers descended from their animals and knelt imitating the posture of worshipping. Upon observing the incident, the fellow man mimicked the other travelers until the sun light appeared again. When he asked them about the event, the travelers ignorantly referred to a giant bird that dwelt in uninhabited wildernesses overseas that lied beyond China and Africa, and that it fed on wild elephants. The travelers revealed that the Rukh used to eat its food like a rooster picking wheat seeds. They called it Khatū which is a name given to a person with high esteem like the title bestowed upon their Khan or leader (2007, vol. i, p. 89) in China.

In relation to al-Sīrāfī, he mentioned several tales that are cited below involving a bird that looked like the Rukh. For instance, a group of men whose boat was shipwrecked and most of them died except for seven of them found refuge in an island near India and stayed there. In this island, there was a giant bird that used to fly off in the afternoon. Because they were desperate, they decided that one of them would hold on to its claws, an act that would either make them land in a nearby country, which was what they wished, or make them stay and die, which was what they expected. The first man hid himself among the trees and tied himself to the bird's claws by using tree bark. The man descended over a mountain and stayed there until the second morning when a shepherd saw him (Helpful roc. Type: 449/1511; B455.6). He realized that he was in an Indian village. All the other men did the same and landed in the same spot (al-Sīrāfī 2006, pp. 54–56; al-Rāmahirmizī

[2] The editor, Yūsif al-Hādī, mentions that al-Sīrāfī's work is included in *Masālik al-Abṣṣār* by Ibn Faḍilallah al-'Amrī.

[3] The wings were measured by using the baa' measurements. One baa' is thought to be equal to 1.89 meters.

1883–1886, pp. 12–14). Another similar tale deals with a man from Basrah who was left stranded in a remote island inhabited with savages. The man used tree bark and tied himself to the claw of a giant bird which took him to another region. However, the man was not fortunate because he was imprisoned again by another group of barbarians (al-Sīrāfī 2006, p. 200; al-Rāmahirmizī 1883–1886, pp. 180–190). In this regard, 'The Second Voyage' tale in 'Sindbad the Seaman and Sindbad the Landsman' in the *Arabian Nights* (Burton 1885, vol. vi, pp. 14–22) carries similar plot lines with the above tales.

It was only in the twelfth century that we find a reference to the name of this bird. In fact, the first mention of the word 'Rukh' to mean giant bird came from Abī Ḥāmid al-Andulusī (c.1169 d.). He narrated the story of 'Abdul Raḥīm al-Ṣīnnī whose surname reveals that he is originally from China. al-Andulusī's account coincided with that cited above by the Chinese traveller, Chou Ch'ŭ-fei. It is claimed that al-Ṣīnnī brought with him the quill of a Rukh's feather which was used as a water container. This description is identical with the account given above on the P'eng's quill which provides clear evidence on the Rukh's Chinese origins. (Duyvendak 1949, p. 22). al-Ṣīnnī said that he sailed with other travelers in the China Sea where the winds blew so strong that they were driven to a huge island. When they woke up in the morning, they saw in its end something that looked like a dome glittering and shining; they approached it. They saw it was a huge egg (Mot. B31.1.1) and started swinging at it with their axes until they broke it. Realizing it was an egg that contained a huge chick, they clenched to its feathers which were not yet fully grown and dragged the chick out of its shell. Later, they set the cooking pots and went to bring wood to cook the chick. After eating it, the white-haired travelers' beards turned black, a sign that they returned to their youth (Mot. D0550). al-Andulusī reports that the reason was that the twigs used in stirring the cooking pot were taken from the Tree of Youth. But when they woke up in the morning, the Rukh bird came back to its nest and found what happened to its chick. The bird fetched a big rock and followed the men as they were on board their ship. 'The Rukh threw the rock at the men's ship, but Allah, the Merciful, saved them from its mischief' (Mot. B 31.1.2). The men kept the bases of the chick's feathers which they later used to bring water because they were as large as buckets (2002, p. 77).

Other travelers and navigators narrated the same story such as al-Wardī (c.1290–c.1348) who only changed the name of the traveler, making him 'Abdul Raḥmān al-Maghribī, being the name used in the *Arabian Nights* (al-Wardī 1922, pp. 76–77; Burton 1885, vol. v, pp. 122–124 & 'The Fifth Voyage of Sindbad the Seaman', vol. vi, pp. 48–49; Chauvin 1902, vol. 6, pp. 92–93).[4] However, some details in al-Andulusī's tale were changed. For instance, the *Arabian Nights* mentioned that the reason why the grey hair of the old men turned black was either because the cooking pot was heated with '*arrow-wood*'[5] or because the men ate the Rukh's meat (Burton 1885, vol. v, p. 124).

[4] al-Wardī cites al-Jawzī's *Kitāb al-Ḥaywān*, saying that there was an island called Rukh because it contained this bird. al-Wardī's has possibly made a mistake because it is al-Jāḥiż who has a book called *al-Ḥaywān*. Also, al-Jawzī's only work on zoology is *Iqāđ al-Wasnān bi Aḥwāl al-Nabāt wa al-Ḥaywān*, but al-Wardī's claim cannot be verified because al-Jawzī's work is missing now.

[5] Arrow wood is a type of straight tree commonly found in north eastern China used for making arrows.

Further, a similar tale was cited in another work, but this time the bird was not named and was presented to be as large as a bull. When the men killed the bird and ate its flesh, all their hair fell in the beginning, but it grew black after five days and its colour never changed again, indicating that they regained their youth (al-Sīrāfī 2006, pp. 128–129; al-Rāmahirmizī 1883–1886, pp. 99–100). Again, this is another clear indication that the Rukh is the P'eng Chinese bird which is associated with 'immortality and longevity' (Birrell 1993, p. 187). However, when al-Anşārī (c.1256–c.1327), al-Damīrī (c.1341–c.1405) and al-Brūsaūī (c.1653–c.1724) quoted al-Andulusī, they did not mention the Tree of Youth which is, in fact, the core element of the tale; instead, they focused on the Rukh and the attack that occurred in the sea (al-Anşārī 1923, pp. 161–162; al-Brūsaūī 1913, vol. xiv, p. 64). al-Damīrī changed al-Andulusī's reference to the Tree of Youth into arrow-tree despite the fact that he claimed that he took the story from its original source (1978, vol. i, p. 524).

Also, al-Abshīhī (c.1388–c.1446) changed the Tree of Youth into the wood of youth which makes no sense (al-Abshīhī 1965, vol. ii, p. 113). This transformation is due to the fact that Muslim scribes and writers used to delete any non-Islamic elements from manuscripts. In fact, the old belief in the Tree of Youth that exists on earth dates back to the Sumerian times, and Islam rejected such ideas. In brief, the scribes who collected the tales borrowed al-Wardī's and al-Damīrī's versions, which means that the tale was not introduced into the *Arabian Nights* earlier than the late fourteenth century.

Other stories that involved a Rukh-like bird are numerous in some medieval Arabic travel accounts. For example, one account describes a certain bird that was caught in Africa after hunting an elephant and eating almost quarter of its body. The monarch ruling the region took some parts of the bird like its feathers, claws, and beak. One of its feathers was as large as two goat's skin containers (al-Sīrāfī 2006, p. 97; al-Rāmahirmizī 1883–1886, p. 178). One of the feathers was two arms long, and the other one was enough to be filled with water equal to 25 containers (al-Rāmahirmizī 1883–1886, p. 62, 99). Also, al-Ābī mentioned that a traveler saw on board of his ship a sea bird having one elephant in its beak, another on its neck, and in each claw an elephant, and under its wing a rhinoceros, carrying all of them to its chicks to feed them (2004, vol. vi, p. 340). Furthermore, *Şūar al-Aqālīm* or *Haft Kishūr* which was written around 1347 agrees to the above accounts and add other details to the Rukh: *'It is a giant creature and is enemy to the elephant and the rhinoceros. When it finds a chance, it clasps its claws into their bodies to carry them to a very high point in the sky so that the sun heat blinds them and makes their fat melt*' (Mot. J 1813.12.2). Afterward, the Rukh descends and feeds these animals to its chicks' (Cited in al-Sīrāfī 2006, p. 97).

The other reference to the Rukh was made by the famous Arab traveller, Ibn Baţūţah. On his travel with others from China to Jawa Island, he mentioned that they lost their way in the sea after sailing for forty two days, so some of the sailors wanted to return to China. But on the forty third day, they saw a big mountain in the midst of the sea. Only twenty miles separated their ship from the mountain while the wind was still blowing and pushing the ship toward it. The other sailors felt surprised and beseeched God to save them from the danger. In the morning, Ibn

Baṭūṭah and his men saw the mountain getting higher into the sky and the sunlight appeared between the sea and the object. The sailors started crying and bade farewell to each other because they knew that what appeared to be the mountain was, in fact, the Rukh which would normally destroy ships in the sea. Fortunately, the bird did not see the men and their approaching ship; thus, they were glad to stay alive (Ibn Baṭūṭah 1904, vol. ii, p. 209).

In relation to the Rukh's feather, it was known that the bird had huge precious quills that were sold in different markets. In his description of Qamar Island (Moon) which is also called Malay Island that is located in the Bay of Bengal, al-Anṣārī said that the Rukh was often seen hovering there especially in its eastern side. *'The residents regularly find its black feathers which they used like a goat's skin container. The length of the feather, which was as thick as a finger, was about the size of a human being and the width of its shaft was about 15 cm*'. The author revealed that some tradesmen used to take such feathers to Aden in Yemen to sell them and were called Rukh's feathers (al-Anṣārī 1923, p. 161). Also, Polo narrated how some men who went to an expedition returned to China and presented to Kublai Khan a feather of the Rukh which '*measured ninety spans, and the quill part to have been two palms in circumference*' (Polo 1914, p. 393).

In brief, almost all the above tales on the Rukh were linked to China and to the P'eng mythical bird. al-Brūsaūī, Ibn Baṭūṭah, al-Anṣārī's assertions that the bird was firstly found in regions or islands near China, and the *Arabian Nights*' reference to its presence in China are just a few examples cited above. Besides, al-Beirūnī's account of the Chinese Khatū bird, al-Andulusī's first reference of the Rukh that was taken from a Chinese Muslim traveller, Chou Ch'ű-fei's account of the same bird, and the fact that several basic features related to the Rukh all suggest that the name of the Rukh and some of its features were derived from China. Most importantly, the Rukh's qualities that are associated with immortality, longevity, and large quills provide clear evidence that the P'eng mythical bird is the Rukh's origin. In the following section, a discussion of the Arabs' oral tradition is provided and some oral accounts that are associated with the Rukh are explained in order to trace the other associations attached to the Rukh.

Oral tradition

Dwight Reynolds asserts in his work on Arabic folklore that the oral tradition plays an integral part in the lives of the Arabs, saying that 'Arab culture…is permeated and held together in many different ways by its folklore' (2007, p. 26). Indeed, by studying the oral heritage of the Arab cultures, one can understand the nature of the society and the people. Even the *Arabian Nights* is believed to be a collection of oral tales (El-Shamy 1990, pp. 77–79). It was later written down by different scribes throughout the previous centuries. It is important to note here that a few other tales that deal with the Rukh contain references to some popular practices and rituals which were practiced until recently in some parts of the Arab world, as will be stated below.

In one of the tales cited by al-Qazwīnī who quoted the author of *'Ajā'ib al-Baḥar* (The Wonders of the Sea) (1980),[6] a man from Isfahan was in debt and could not earn the living of his family, so he decided to leave his city and travel by sea with some merchants. But the strong sea waves in the Persian Gulf pushed them to a dangerous narrow strait called Dardūr.[7] The other merchants gathered around the captain of the ship and asked: '*Is there any chance we can survive?*' To which the captain replied: '*It is only with Allah's will that we will be able to get through this Dardūr, but if someone would step down the ship, I would do my best to save you*'. The Isfahani man said: '*Thou fellows, we are all in peril, and I'm a man tired of toiling; I had wished to die long time ago*'. Turning to some travellers from Isfahan, he said: '*If you swear you'll pay my debts and be benevolent toward my children, I'll sacrifice myself for your sake*'. The people from Isfahan agreed, so the man asked for instructions. The captain pointed to a nearby island that was located within three nights distance from the ship, saying: '*You must stand on that island and keep on beating this drum (Dohol)*'[8] (al-Wardī 1922, p. 147). He agreed and was given food and water which would last him few days. He headed toward the island and started beating the drum. After a while, he saw the water moving and the ship gradually disappearing from his view. Feeling lonely, the man wandered in the island and observed the largest tree he ever saw in his life over which was a thick layer. By the end of afternoon, the man heard a loud bang and saw the largest bird he ever saw in his life landing on its nest above the great tree. On the first day, the man hid himself lest the bird should harm him. By early morning, the bird took wings. When the second night approached, the man came closer to the bird because he felt he had nothing to lose with his feeling of helplessness and despair; again, the bird did not harm him. On the third day, the bird was about to fly at dawn, so the man clenched to its claw (Mot. B 31.1, Type 936A; Mot. B 0542.1.1 & B 0455.6). When he looked down, he only saw the turbulent sea and the earth becoming small (Mot. F 1021.2.3); he was about to let go due to fatigue but decided to be more patient. Finally, the bird approached the ground and left the man on a small mound of hay in one of the villages while some farmers were watching him. The bird disappeared in the air and the villagers gathered and took him to their leader who understood his language. Everyone was surprised to hear his story, and the man was given plenty of money. After a few days, when he was walking near the beach, he saw his fellows on their ship approaching and were united again (1980, pp. 88–89). In fact,

[6] I identified six books written before al-Qazwīnī's death which have the same title (Wonders of the Sea), but there are now all lost. The authors are: Hishām Bin Moḥammed al-Sā'ib Ibn al-Kalbī (Ibn al-Nadīm 1978, vol. i, p. 142; al-Ḥamawī 1993b, vol. vi, p. 2781), Şakhar al-Maghribī (Ibn al-Nadīm 1978, vol. i, p. 428), 'Alī Bin Moḥammed Bin Shāh al-Ṭahirī (al-Ḥamawī 1993b, vol. iv, p. 1868), Moḥammed Bin Isḥāq al-Şīmirī (al-Ḥamawī 1993b, vol. vi, p. 2422). 'Abdullah Bin 'Umrū al-Baghdādī, Ibn al-Kawā' (al-Baghdādī 1951, vol. i, p. 438), and Ibn 'Afawynn (al-Zarkalī 2002, vol. vi, p. 55).

[7] This was the name of a strait located between two mountains in the Gulf of Oman; only small ships used to pass it (al-Ḥamawī 1993a, vol. ii, p. 450; al-Zubaīdī 2004, vol. xi, p. 287). Because of its location, winds would blow stronger and would create turmoil (whirl) in the sea water (al-Nūweirī 2004, vol. i, p. 228).

[8] The Dohol has two faces and is usually played by using two drumsticks. This drum and others similar ones were and are still used in many Arab countries during the fasting month of Ramaḍan. The drummers make their usual noise to wake people up in order to eat before dawn prayer.

al-Qazwīnī's giant tree is an indirect reference to the Tree of Life that is usually associated with the Rukh and the idea of immortality that is discussed above.

However, al-Qazwīnī does not explain why the drumming of the man made the ship move since it remains a mystery due to an apparent deletion or distortion of the main tale. Indeed, we can know more about the story above by consulting a tale from the *Arabian Nights* and some popular practices. In the first voyages of 'Sindbad the Seaman and Sindbad the Landsman' (Mot. F 110.3.1) (Burton 1885, vol. vi, pp. 4–14), Sindbad and his fellows were stranded on an island that had trees, but it was in fact a large whale. The giant fish started to move (Mot. B 874) after some sailors set fire while others '*fell to eating and drinking and playing and sporting*'. Due to the heat and noise, the whale felt agitated and dived into the sea. The captain of the ship was aware of the reality and reacted fast by sailing away and leaving the others. Sindbad was about to drown but was saved by hanging to a wooden plank and ended up stranded on another island. We learn from Sindbad that there was an island within King Mihrjan's dominions called Kāsil '*wherein all night is heard the beating of drums and tabrets*'. Also, Sindbad revealed how he saw a '*fish two hundred cubits long*', but '*the fishermen fear it; so they strike together pieces of wood and put it to flights*' (Burton 1885, vol. vi, p. 11). In Sindbad's Second Voyage, he was thrown to another island where he saw the Rukh bird and its huge egg that looked like a dome; Sindbad tied himself to the bird's talons and was carried by air (Mot. B 522; Type 936A) to a mountain full with diamonds (Mot. F0062). The details mentioned in the first and second voyages carry close resemblance to al-Qazwīnī's tale mentioned above (Mot. 0963*).

There are other classical accounts of the sea that carry similar details. Some merchants were on board of ship that was driven by strong wind to a Dardūr. However, the ship's captain who was an old blind man but experienced in sailing thought of a way out. He instructed his crew to throw bottles tied to the ship and filled with fat into the sea. After seeing that the fish gathered around the food in the bottles, the captain ordered his men to shout, beat the drum, and sticks, which greatly frightened the fish that began to pull the ship out of the dangerous strait. The moment they felt the sea was calm, the captain ordered his crew to cut the ropes and the ship was saved (al-Wardī 1922, p. 82). Also, a very large fish, probably a whale, was fond of destroying ships in the Gulf of Oman (Mot. B 0877.1.1), so sailors used their drums and made great noise by banging pieces of woods together to scare the fish and drive it away from the ship (al-Rāmahirmizī 1883–1886, p. 15). Finally, Sulaīmān al-Tājir and Abī Zaīd al-Sīrāfī (ninth century AD) mentioned that sailors were used to use the Christian Naqus (Church Bell) at night to scare the fish especially the whales (2000, p. 31). In brief, the use of drums is a technique used by Arab sailors to frighten the whale lest they destroy their ships. In al-Qazwīnī's tale, the man who started beating the drum was, in fact, trying to make a whale move that would enable the ship to sail, too. Hence, the first Voyage of Sindbad the sailor and al- al-Qazwīnī's tale are complementary, and they both shed light on the kind of distortion such tales go through when they were copied by the Muslim scribes. As mentioned earlier, the habit of beating drums to frighten whales is rooted in some parts of the Arab popular culture whether by the common people or seafarers.

To sum up, the Rukh was moulded in the imagination of people in medieval times by combining different descriptions taken from Chinese sources. The Rukh has also indirect associations with the Arabs' oral tradition. Further research can be conducted to investigate how the name of the Rukh bird was firstly used. What is interesting is the way the Rukh is still depicted in modern Arabic popular culture and oral tradition especially in children folktales and cartoons that are largely adapted from the *Arabian Nights* tales. The question remains is the kind of association and symbolism this bird is going to carry in the near future.

References

Birrell, A. (1993). *Chinese mythology: An introduction*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Burton, R. (1885). *The book of the thousand nights and a night: A plain and literal translation of the Arabian nights entertainments*. London: The Burton Ethnological Society.

Chauvin, V. (1902). *Bibliographie DES Ouvrages Arabes Ou Relatifs Aux Arabes Publies Dans l'Europe Chretienne De 1810 a 1885* (Vol. 6). Liege: H. Vaillant-Carmanne.

Duyvendak, J. J. L. (1949). *China's discovery of Africa: Lectures given at the University of London on January 22 and 23, 1947*. Probsthain's oriental series. London: Arthur Probsthain.

El-Shamy, H. (1990). Oral traditional tales and the thousand nights and a night: The demographic factor. In M. NØjgaard, et al. (Eds.), *The telling of stories: Approaches to a traditional craft* (pp. 63–117). Odense: Odense University Press.

Encyclopaedia of Islam. (1997a). *The Rukh* (Vol. 8). Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Encyclopaedia of Islam. (1997b). *Simurgh* (Vol. 9). Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Giles, H. (1889). *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, moralist, and social reformer*. London: Bernard Quaritch.

Marzolph, U., & van Leeuwen, R. (2004). *The Arabian nights encyclopedia* (Vol. II). California: ABC CLIO.

McElroy, C. J. (2001). *Over the lip of the world: Among the storytellers of Madagascar*. Washington: University of Washington Press.

Polo, M. (1914). *The travels of Marco Polo the Venetian*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD.

Potter, J. W. (1974). Chinese-East African trade before the 16th century. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 5*(2), 113–134.

Reynolds, D. F. (2007). *Arab folklore: A handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Arabic References

al-Ābī, Manşūr Bin al-Ḥussein. (2004). *Nathar al-Durr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Almīah.

al-Abshīhī, Shihāb al-Dīn. (1965). *al-Mustaṭraf fī fenn Kull Mustaðraf*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Jamhūrīah al-'Arabīah.

al-'Alwajī, 'Abdulḥamīd. 1962. 'Qamar Baghdād Bayn Ashdāq al-Ḥūt'. *al-'Irāq al-Jadīd*, no. 1: 4–7.

al-Andulusī, Abī Ḥāmid. (2002). *Tuḥfat al-Albāb wa Nukhbat al-'Ajāb*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīnīah.

al-'Ānī, 'Abdul 'Azīz. (1985). *al-Madīnah al-Mughraqah: Dirāsah Maīdāniah li Madīnat Ānah*. Baghdad: Dār al-Ḥurriah lil Ţibā'ah.

al-Anşārī, Shamsulldīn al-Dimashqī. (1923). *Nukhbat al-Dahar fī 'Ajjā'ib al-Barr wa al-Baḥar*. Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz.

al-Aţţār, Farīd al-Dīn. (2002). *Menţiq al-Ţayr. Badī' Moḥammed Jum'ah* (Trans.). Beirut: Dār al-Andulus lil Ţibā'ah wa al-Nashir.

al-Azharī, Abū Manşūr. (2001). *Tahdhīb al-Lugha*. Beirut: Dār Aḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.

al-Baghdādī, 'Abdul Qādir Bin 'Omar. (1996). *Khizānat al-Adab wa Lub Libāb Lissān al-'Arab*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī.

al-Baghdādī, Ismā'īl Pāshā. (1951). *Hidayat al-'Ārifīn: Asmā' al-Mu'lifīn wa Āthār al-Muṣanifīn*. Beirut: Dār Aḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
al-Beirūnī, Abū al-Rīḥān Moḥammed. 2007. *al-Jamāhir fī Ma'rifat al-Jawāhir*. E-book. http://www.alwaraq.net
al-Brūsaūī, Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī. (1913). *Tafssīr Rūḥ al-Bayān*. Constantinople: Maţba'ah 'Othmāniah.
al-Damīrī, Kamālulldīn. (1978). *Ḥayāt al-Ḥaywān al-Kubrā*. Cairo: Maţba'at Muşţafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī.
al-Ḥamawī, Yāqūt. (1993a). *Mu'jam al-Buldān*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.
al-Ḥamawī, Yāqūt. (1993b). *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī.
al-Jāḥiż, Abū 'Othmān. (1965). *al-Ḥaywān*. Cairo: Maţba'at Muşţafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī.
al-Qazwīnī, Zakarīā. (1980). *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt*. Cairo: Maţba'at Muşţafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī.
al-Rāmahirmizī, Buzurg Bin Shahriyār. (1883–1886). *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind*: *Barahu wa Baḥrahu wa Jazā'irahu*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
al-Shaḥrī, 'Alī Aḥmed. (2000). *Lughat 'Ād*. Abu Dhabi: al-Mū'sash al-Waṭanīah lil Taghlīf wa al-Ṭibā'ah.
al-Sīrāfī, Abī 'Umrān Mūsā. (2006). *al-Şaḥīḥ min Akhbār al-Biḥār wa 'Ajā'ibihā*. Yūsif al-Hādī (ed.). Damascus: Dār Aqrā' lil Ţibā'ah wa al-Nashir wa al-Ţawzī'.
al-Tājir, Sulaīmān, & al-Sīrāfī, Abī Zaīd. (2000). *Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa al-Hind*. Cairo: al-Dār al-Masrīah al-Lubnānīah.
al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayān. (n.d.). *al-Imtā'wa al-Mu'ānasah*. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt lil Ţibā'ah wa al-Nashir.
al-Tha'labī, Abī Isḥāq. (n.d.). *Quṣaṣ al-Anbīā' al-Musmmā bil 'Arrā'is*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Jamhūrrīah al-Arabīah.
al-Tha'ālibī, Abī Manşūr. (1985). *Thimār al-Qulūb fī al-Muđāf wa al-Manşūb*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif.
al-Wardī, Sirāj al-Dīn. (1922). *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib wa Farīdat al-Gharā'ib*. Cairo: Maţba'at Muşţafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī.
al-Zarkalī, Khaīrulldīn Bin Maḥmūd. (2002). *al-'Allām*. Beirut: Dār al-'Alim lil Malāyīn.
al-Zubaīdī, Moḥammed Murtađā. (2004). *Tāj al-'Arrūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*. Kuwait: al-Majlis al-Waţanī lil Thaqāfah wa al-Finūn wa al-Ādāb.
'Ayssā, Razūq. (1936). 'Aṣil al-'Ādah fī Qar'al-Ţibūl' wa Daq al-Awānī al- Nuḥāsīah fī Khisūff al-Qamar'. *al-Najim*, no. 8: 49–52.
Ibn 'Abād, al-Ṣāḥib. (1994). *al-Muḥīţ fī al-Lugha*. Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub.
Ibn Baţūţah, Abī 'Abdullah Moḥammed. (1904). *Riḥlāt Ibn Baţūţah* Cairo: al-Maţba'ah al-Khaīrīah.
Ibn Manżūr, Abū al-Fađil. (1981). *Lissān al-'Arab*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif.
Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū al-Faraj. (1978). *al-Fahrrast*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rrifah.