



GENIE

GENIE (Ar. and Pers. *jenn*; incorrect plural, *ajenna*, used in Persian), name of a category of supernatural beings believed to have been created from smokeless fire (Qur'ān 55:14; El-Shamy, Motif A2905.1, "Jinn created from fire") and to be living invisibly side-by-side the visible creation. They are repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'ān, where chapter 72 (*Sūrat al-jenn*) is named after them. Arab lexicographers derive the term from the root *janna* (to conceal; Lane, pp. 402-03; cf. Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XVI, p. 244), but it possibly has a foreign origin (Nöldeke, pp. 669-70). Early Persian sources use the Persian word *parī* and the Arabic word *jenn* interchangeably (e.g., Bal'amī, ed. Bahār, I, pp. 66-68; *Tafsīr*, pp. 3; 181, 263; Abu'l-Fotūḥ, X, p. 352; Ayyūb Ṭabarī, II, pp. 458, 543).

Although some philosophers questioned the literal existence of the jinn and sought to interpret references to them allegorically (e.g., Rāḡeb, p. 158; Ṭūsī, p. 484; Fozūnī, p. 524), theologians consider their existence beyond doubt because of the explicit references to them in the Qur'ān. The jinn are considered by some theologians to be the children of Eblīs (q.v.), and they are said to have ruled the earth before the creation of Adam (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XI, pp. 304, 321, XII, 366, XIV, p. 169; *Tafsīr*, p. 263). They may be Muslim or pagan, because Moḡammad's mission involved the jinn as well as humans (Ṭabarī, ed. Rowšan, I, pp. 68 ff.; Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XIV, pp. 193, 341, XVII, pp. 278-81); thus they may be rewarded in heaven or be punished in hell for their deeds (*Tafsīr*, p. 181; Abu'l-Fotūḥ, X, pp. 328, XIV, pp. 193, 241, XVII, p. 282; cf. Loeffler, p. 46). Some of the Muslim jinn are considered to be Shi'ites; they are said to come to



the Imams for religious instructions and to render them a variety of services (Kolaynī, I, pp. 395-96, II, p. 167; Solṭān-Moḥammad, pp. 175, 199). These jinn may on occasion help their Shi'ite brethren (Kolaynī, II, p. 167). By contrast, the impious jinn form the hosts of Satan (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XIV, p. 335).

The prophet reportedly divided jinn into three classes: those who have wings and fly in their air, those who resemble snakes and dogs, and those who travel about ceaselessly (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XVII, p. 281; Fozūnī, p. 526). 'Abd-Allāh b. Mas'ūd, who was accompanying the prophet when the jinn came to hear his recitation of the Qur'ān, described them as creatures of different forms; some resembling vultures and snakes, others tall black men in white garbs (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XVII, pp. 279-80; Fozūnī, pp. 525-26). They may even appear as dragons, onagers, or a number of other animals (Kolaynī, I, p. 396; Solṭān-Moḥammad, p. 62). The prophet is said to have told the jinn that they may subsist on bones, which will grow flesh again as soon as they touch them, and that their animals may live on dung, which will revert back to grain or grass for the use of the jinn flocks (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XVII, pp. 280-81).

The jinn are greatly skilled in crafts, and in building amazing objects or structures. They were the first to build baths, invent depilatory ointment, and construct many great edifices. King Solomon is said to have compelled the jinn into his service and given them dominion over 25 parasangs of his realm. In his court, the jinn stood behind the learned humans, who in turn, sat behind the prophets. Solomon's wife, the queen of Sheba (see BELQĪS), was reportedly born of the marriage between a jinni and a human. However, it is not clear whether it was her mother or father who was a jinni. Those authorities who believe that her mother was a jinni further tell us that her name was Rayḥāna. It was this connection of her with the jinn that made people apprehensive about Solomon's marriage to her. They feared that if their master Solomon married a half-jinni, they would be forced to remain in the service of the offspring of that marriage forever. Thus, to make Solomon fall out of love with her, they told him that she was insane, and that her feet were hairy and resembled those of an ass (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, 15, 21-22, 29-32, 40-42, 45, 47-50, XVI, p. 51; Ṭūsī, pp. 486, 495). The jinn remained in the service of Solomon, who had placed them in bondage, and had ordered their king, Zūba'a, to perform a number of tasks throughout his life. Upon Solomon's death, however, Zūba'a went to the places where his subjects were toiling, and called out to them to stop working. They happily obeyed, and one of them carved a message in stone, enumerating what they had built during their servitude.



According to Shi'ite theologians, in spite of their great and varied skills, the jinn lie in claiming that they know the future (Abu'l-Fotūḥ, XV, p. 52, XVI, p. 54).

Jinn in epic literature: The jinn are rarely mentioned in the secular epic. Solomon and Jamšēd were the first to rule over the jinn and demons (Ebn Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 370). In the *Šāh-nāma* the word *jennī* is used only once, in the letter of Sa'd b. Waqqāṣ to the Sasanian general Rostam Farroḳzādān, in which the Arab commander tells his Persian counterpart "about the jinn and humans, and about the Hashemite prophet" (IX, p. 324, l. 178). Although the *Šāh-nāma* does not mention the name of the sorceress who bewitched Bahrām Čōbīn (q.v.) and persuaded him to rebel against the king (Moscow, VIII, p. 405), this woman is described as a female jinni, by the name of *Maḏhaba* in another source (*Tajāreb*, p. 330), which information must be based on some lost epic material. In the *Farāmarz-nāma* (p. 27), the king of the *parīs* informs the amazon Bānū Gošasp that a certain onager is in reality the demon Sorḳāb, the king of the jinn, who has assumed animal form.

The jinn have a more pronounced presence in religious epic narratives. In one episode, the prophet appoints Imam 'Alī to help a faithful jinni against his pagan foes. Two fires, one larger than the other, appear facing one another. Armed, the Imam enters the smaller flame, which moves forward to smash into the larger one amid great sounds of thunder. After a while, the Imam walks out of the flames, carrying his bloodied sword and a hideous head which he identifies as that of the king of the pagan jinn (Solṭān-Moḥammad, pp. 62-64, cf. pp. 45-46). Shortly after the start of the epic battle at Karbalā, Safar, the king of the jinn (whose name must be a corruption of Za'far, cf. Mīhandūst, p. 49), went to offer his services to Imam Ḥosayn, who refused him on the grounds that the invisibility of the jinn would be an unfair advantage against the opposing army. Safar suggested that his forces assume human form, but the Imam continued to refuse. Za'far returned home and told his mother of the Imam's refusal; the pious lady bared her breast and threatened her son with cursing the very milk on which she had nursed him, unless he helped the Imam. Safar returned and fought with the Imam's forces, until he was martyred (Loeffler, p. 41, cf. p. 143).

Jinn in the secular literature. The secular view of the jinn is more colorful than the religious one. There is a considerable variety in the forms attributed to the jinn in the Iranian lore. They may be beautiful or hideous, black or white, and large or small (Ṭūsī, pp. 497, 501, 506, 511; Fozūnī, pp. 525, 527). Generally, the



Muslim jinn are described as beautiful, while the pagan ones are portrayed as hideous monsters with a long head, a single eye in the middle of the forehead, and big protruding fangs (Loeffler, p. 141, cf. Solṭān-Moḥammad, pp. 45-46, 62-64; cf. Rīāḥī, p. 24). Some of the jinn are described as composite beings that may have a human body, a lion's head, and limbs which resemble those of various animals (Ṭūsī, p. 486); others have an elephant's head, breath fire, and emit a foul smell. They are capable of assuming virtually any form that they desire (Ṭūsī, pp. 489, 497-98, cf. motif G307.21, cf. El-Shamy, motif G307.22). The most common animal forms assumed by the jinn are those of the snake, goat, cat, pigeon, wild sheep, or dog (Fozūnī, p. 525; Loeffler, p. 142). When the jinn assume the form of game animals, they are referred to as the game of Abū Jahl in contrast to the real game animals which are called the game of Abraham (Loeffler, p. 142). They may live on land or in water, inhabit bath-houses, graveyards, ruins, bodies of water, and even trees (Massé, pp. 294, 360-61, 363; Fozūnī, p. 525; Mīhandūst, p. 48; A'zamī, p. 52). There is a variety of water-dwelling jinn in India, which resembles humans from head to its waist, and has the lower body of beasts. The land-dwelling jinn are scattered far and wide, with greater concentrations in Syria, India, and Vabār (Ṭūsī, pp. 507, 509-510). The Nasnās, who have only one eye and one leg, and who cause trouble by setting fires to people's homes, along with the Šeqq, are counted among the jinn in some sources. Another variety of jinn, called Ġaddār, is devotedly attached to sex and attempts intercourse with whomever he gets hold of, male or female (Fozūnī, p. 528).

The jinn who fall in love with humans steal their beloved, and offspring may result from their love affair. Some Arab tribes were therefore thought to have descended from the jinn (Ṭūsī, pp. 493, 509; Fozūnī p. 525). The love affairs between humans and the jinn may be the stuff of literature. Ebn al-Nadīm lists a number of these interspecies love-affairs and several famous books that were written about them (ed. Tajaddod, p. 367).

Jinn were often thought to act as a variety of muse, transmitting verse to poets (e.g., verses by Rūdakī and Jamāl-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Razzāq in Dabīrsīāqī, pp. 47, 234-35). The jinn who followed a person around, whether they inspired verse or not, were called *tābe'* or *tābe'a* (lit: follower), depending on whether they were male or female jinn; others are known by the names of *hātef*, *šeqq*, *nasnās*, or *ġaddār* (Lane, p. 296; Ṭūsī, pp. 496, 501; Homā'ī, p. 434; cf. 'Oṭmān Moḳtārī, pp. 229-331, n. 5). In addition to communication with poets, the jinn typically communicate with soothsayers and seers. Like the religious



writings on the subject, the secular literature about the jinn portrays them as skillful builders and artisans. Thus, many great buildings, such as Persepolis or the pyramids, were thought to have been built by them (Abu'l-Mo'ayyad Balkī, pp. 396, 404, 414; Ṭūsī, p. 498; cf. El-Shamy, Motif F272, sec. "Jinn as Builders of Great Structures").

The social organization of the jinn resembles that of the humans (Ṭūsī, p. 484; Fozūnī, p. 527). They have kings, court of law, weddings, and mourning. If a Muslim jinni is killed when it has assumed a form other than its original form, its killer is not held responsible (Fozūnī, p. 524; A'zamī, p. 52; Mīhandūst, pp. 47-49). The king of the Muslim jinn was called Za'far, the same jinni who offered to help Imam Ḥosayn in Karbalā. According to one version of his biography, Za'far died in the 1930s and was succeeded by his son Shah Kāẓem (Mīhandūst, p. 49). In addition to their animal forms, the jinn occasionally assume human form to mislead and destroy their human victims. One such jinni who had assumed the form of a beautiful woman was identified because of her beastly feet by her human victim, who killed her by throwing a rope around her neck and dragging her behind his camel (Fozūnī, p. 527). Such a jinn is called *mardāzmā*, (tester of men) among the Baluch (Mīhandūst, p. 44). If the person is not frightened by it, the *mardāzmā* becomes his friend and helps him in life, otherwise it will drive him mad with fear (Nāṣerī, p. 225). Some believe that the *mardāzmā* is a male jinn, who offers sexual intercourse to his victims (Massé, p. 360).

Jinn in folklore. Jinn hold an impressive command over the popular imagination. Special precautions are taken against harming or summoning them. Thus, they are often referred to by antiphrasis like *az mā behtarān* (those better than we) or *'azīzān*, (the dear ones) and special care is taken not to summon them inadvertently by mentioning their name, whistling or otherwise, provoking their wrath by throwing stones, pouring out hot water or ashes without reciting the necessary formula, or by burning eggs and onion skins together, or even by such innocent acts as sweeping at night (Massé, p. 357-58; cf. Loeffler, p. 142). An old hunter who wounded a jinni, which was running around in the form of a greyhound, came upon the jinn encampment, was scolded by them, and died three days after the incident (Loeffler, p. 142). The jinn also disapprove of a hunter killing too many animals. They punished one such old hunter by turning him into a buck that he had once wounded and forced him to experience the trials of a hunted animal from being chased through being killed, beheaded, skinned, and roasted (Loeffler, p. 143).



In order to avoid inflicting unintentional harm on the jinn, or generally to make them leave, one needs only to recite the koranic formula *bessmellāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* (in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful; Hedāyat, p. 94; Katirā'ī, pp. 76, 216; Massé, p. 358; Šakūrzāda, p. 308; see [BESMELLĀH](#)).

The jinn are more menacing during certain times of the week, notably Saturday and Tuesday evenings (Šakūrzāda, pp. 276-77, 310), when they can menace or harm people by sending misfortune, causing accidents, diseases, or replacing one child with a changeling (Loeffler, p. 143). They may also take over one's house and steal his belongings (Massé, p. 358). There is a dangerous jinni by the name of *dīv-e yāholo* among the Baluch, which appears in the form of a bull at nights, and attacks its victims. Another Baluch jinni by the name of *jenn-e sang jabūk* torments its victims by throwing stones at them. The victim looks around to see the culprit, but can find no one (Nāšeri, p. 226).

The most damaging harm inflicted upon men by the jinn however, is neurological disorder, especially epilepsy, which is caused when the jinn enters a human's body (El-Shamy, Motif D2065.1.1, sec "Epilepsy from Possession by Jinn"). The jinni who enters a victim's body feels the physical sensations experienced by that body. This is why those who were possessed by the jinn were not only treated by prayer, but also often tied up and savagely beaten in order to drive the jinni out of their bodies (Nāšeri, pp. 220, 224-25; Rīāhī, pp. 23-24). The type of insanity inflicted by the jinn is rare according to one *do'ānevīs*, who claims that medicines to cure these patients exist and are listed in a book authored by Solomon, "to whom the jinn told exactly how to recognize diseases caused by them and what to use as medicine" (Loeffler, pp. 124-125).

The jinn rarely endow a person with success, wealth, or the power to heal some illness (Loeffler, p. 125, 143). A man who had received this healing ability could heal skin rashes by spreading his saliva on them (Loeffler, p. 76-77). He had inherited this ability from a female ancestor who had captured a baby jinn by throwing iron bracelets around his feet. When the jinn's mother pleaded for her son's release, the woman said she would free him only if she received something in return. Thereupon, the jinn woman spat into her mouth, and told her that for seven generations her offspring would have the ability to cure skin rashes by spreading their saliva on the afflicted skin (Loeffler, pp. 138-39).



Women in childbed and their infants are among the most vulnerable victims of the jinn. Therefore, neither a new mother nor her newborn should be left alone for fear of harm from the jinn in the first week or two after labor. Once the woman takes her ritual postpartum bath, however, the danger is significantly decreased (Nāṣerī, p. 226). The infant who has been harmed by the jinn is said to suffer from “those ailments” (*ān dardhā*), under the effects of which he turns blue, goes into convulsion, and dies shortly afterward (Šakūrzāda, p. 156). To avert the danger, which is especially great during the sixth night after the child is born, iron implements are placed in the new mother’s room, gunpowder is burned around her, and great noise is made in and around her room. These activities, which are similar to those carried out in order to drive away the demoness Āl (q.v.), are thought to scare the jinn away. Besides, only those who were present during the actual birth are allowed to visit the mother in the first few days, lest the jinn enter the woman’s room in the form of a friend and harm her or her infant. Usually the activities of the jinn cease at daybreak (Šakūrzāda, pp. 140, 142-144, 146).

The jinn are especially afraid of iron (Šakūrzāda, p. 138, n. 4), and anyone who manages to insert an iron needle in their bodies (Massé, p. 360) or clothes, gains control of them because their great fear of iron prevents them from pulling the needle out of their persons or attire. It is said that a man who every morning found his horse sweaty and tired as though it had been ridden all night long, early one morning spied a beautiful girl riding the animal. He realized that the girl was a jinni and quickly inserted a needle in her dress to take control of her. Thus captured, the girl was taken to the man’s house where she was put to work as maid and cook. She baked such tasty bread the equal of which could not be had in the whole country. The lady of the house, who was curious to discover the jinni’s recipe for bread, found her one morning making dough not by the usual addition of water to flour, but by urinating in it. The jinn, who realized that she might be punished, escaped by tricking a grocer into pulling the needle from her dress (Katīrā’ī, p. 28; cf. Loeffler, pp. 138-39).

For every human child, one thousand children are born among the jinn (Ṭūsī, p. 484); thus every human child, except for the prophet and the twelve Imams, has a jinn twin, who is called *hamzād*. The *hamzād*, who is in certain respects identical with the European “changeling,” begins bothering the child even before its birth, and continues its menacing activities after the child is born. When a baby starts in his sleep, it is believed that his *hamzād* is pinching him;



when he laughs in his sleep, it is believed that his *hamzād* has told him “your mother is dead,” to which the baby responds, laughingly, “don’t be absurd; she just nursed me” (Massé, p. 358; Šakūrzāda, p. 142; Loeffler, p. 139).

The jinn require the services of human midwives, and it is said that every midwife must help deliver a jinn child for every one hundred human children she delivers. The midwife is taken to the jinn mother blindfolded, and after the conclusion of her duties, she is given a handful of onion skins as payment. If she places them under a rug, and keeps her experiences with the jinn a secret, then every morning she will find a gold coin under her rug. If not, her payment will stay onion skins (Massé, p. 356).

In Persian folktales, the jinn are predominantly harmful beings. Although along with the *gūl*, the jinn of the folktales are thought to be of Semitic origin by some authorities (e.g., Christensen, p. 71 ff; Marzolph, p. 46; Massé, p. 352), it is possible that they are genuinely Iranian supernatural demons, recycled back into Persian lore via Arabo-Iranian tradition (Nöldeke, p. 670). They appear in a small number of type tales, attested in Iranian folklore (Marzolph, s.vv. types 425B, “The Disenchanted Husband: The Witch’s Tasks,” and 503 “The Gifts of the Little People”). Of these, the latter type tells of the two hunchbacks who meet the jinn. The first is polite to them and is rewarded by the jinn, who remove the hump off his back. The second hunchback, who behaves unkindly towards the jinn, ends up with the hump of the first hunchback added on top of his own. This story is behind the Persian folk expression of *qūz-e bālā-ye qūz* (the hump atop the hump). In the rare instances when the jinn are presented as donor figures in the folktales, reference may be made to their skill in crafts (Enjavī, p. 170). One such donor jinn is the *sīmorǧ* of the folktales (not be confused with the mythical bird of the epic lore), which is said to belong to the class of the jinn (Enjavī, p. 170).

See also [DĪV](#); [PARĪ](#).



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