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ĠUL

ĠUL, designation of a fantastic, frightening creature in the Perso-Arabic lore. It is a hideous monster with a feline head, forked tongue, hairy skin, and deformed legs that resemble the limp and skinny legs of a prematurely born infant (Nöldeke, p. 670). To the Arabs, *ġul*s (Ar. pl. *ġilān*, *aġwāl*) were the most dangerous and harm-ful variety of jinns who inhabited deserts and thickets and misled and destroyed men.

The term *ġul* is a feminine noun, but it is incorrect to confuse the grammatical gender of the noun with the sex of the demon (e.g., Christensen, p. 72). The form *ġula*, which indicates a female *ġul*, supports the position that this creature has both male and female manifestations (Dozy, II, p. 232). Some consider the word to refer only to female demons or to the sorcerers among the jinn (Foruzānfar, s.v. "*ġul*"); others believe it means either a metamorphosed jinn or a creature classed between fairies and animals (Ṭusi, p. 502).

The word *ġul* is used once in the Qurʾān (37: 47) in the sense of "hangover." There is, however, a myth in some commentaries on the Qurʾān, which details the creation of the *ġul*s. According to this myth, demons (*šayāṭin*) had access to heavens, where they eavesdropped and returned to the earth in order to inform the soothsayers and the magicians (*kahana*, *saḥara*) of future events. When Jesus was born, three of the heavens were declared forbidden to them, and upon the birth of the prophet Moḥammad, they were forbidden entry to all seven heavens. However, some of the more persistent among them continued to rise into the heavens in order to eavesdrop as before, and these

were struck by comets and burned. Some believed that the comets did not burn the demons to death, but merely deformed and drove some of them insane. These insane demons roam the deserts as *ḡul*s (Rāzi, XI, p. 314). According to Zakariyāʾ Qazvini, who corroborates Rāzi's account, if the demons who are struck by the comets fall into deserts, they turn into *ḡul*s, but if they fall into rivers, they transform into crocodiles (*nahang*, p. 383). Mir Maḥmud Fozuni, however, states that all demons who were struck by comets changed to *ḡul*s no matter where they fell (II, p. 528).

In contemporary Persian, the word *ḡul* has two senses. It may signify generally large or even heroic individuals. Thus, such forms as *ḡulāsā*, and the *ḡulpeykar* only mean large without necessarily being pejorative. Similarly, in folk speech, one may refer to another as a "giant in his field," by the use of the word *ḡul*. The second sense of the word is ogre or demon, and in that sense the word is a synonym of the Persian *div* (q.v.), and often, though not always, appears in the construct *ḡul-e biābāni* (desert ḡ*ul*), apparently under the influence of the original Arab perception of this demon. In Persian folklore and classical literature, *ḡul*s are anthropophagous monsters, capable of transformation.

In the works of the early poets, the word *ḡul* invokes images of empty deserts and desolation (ʿOnṣori, p. 134; Aḵsikati, p. 415; Asadi, p. 203; Abu Šakur in Lazard, *Premiers Poètes* II, p. 83). Authors of mirabilia inform us that ḡ*ul*s not only inhabit the deserts, but that they may assume the appearance of animals as small as a sheep (Fozuni, II, p. 528; Balāḡi, II, p. 227), or as large as elephants (Ṭusi, p. 502). They can also transform themselves into men, women, or virtually any other form; but they are unable to change the form of their feet, which resemble the feet of an ass (Balḵi, p. 413; Ṭusi, pp. 501-4; Qazvini, p. 383; Christensen, p. 73; Hedāyat, p. 175; Foruzānfar, s.v.), and this is often the only sign by which they can be identified (e.g., *Šahriār-nāma*, pp. 101-2).

Those who claim to have seen *ḡul*s report contradictory accounts of their form. Some claim that it is a composite being which resembles a man from its head to its abdomen and a horse from its abdomen to its toes (Qazvini, p. 383; cf. centaurs in Greek mythology). Female *ḡul*s are called *seʿlāt* (pl. *saʿāl*) and are said to be very beautiful, while the male of the species is reportedly hideous (Ṭusi, p. 501). However, folk-metaphor such as *ḡul-e bi šāḵ o dom* (a *ḡul* lacking horns and tail), which is used to speak pejoratively of a large or unseemly person, implies that *ḡul*s are believed to have both horns and tails (Dehḵodā, II, p. 1131). This physical characteristic of *ḡul*s is referred to by Abu ʿAli Balʿami (q.v.), according to whom the Arab general Qotayba b. Moslem insulted the

ʿAbd-al-Qays tribe in Khorasan by saying that they run from danger like a *ḡul* escaping with his tail banging against his belly (ed. Rowšan, II, p. 870).

*Ḡul*s are believed to like human flesh, whether of a freshly killed human or of corpses they dig up or find (Ṭusi, p. 501; Massé, *Croyances*, p. 354). They usually dispatch their charming females to lure travelers to their lair. According to a story, a prince riding in a desert came across a beautiful woman and offered her a ride. En route, however, he noticed the donkey-like feet of his companion and deduced that she was a *ḡul*. He kicked her off his horse and galloped away, but the *ḡul* chased him on foot and followed him into a tribal encampment which they came upon. The prince ran into a tent and asked for help, but the woman claimed that she was his wife, and he was merely trying to abandon her. The master of the tent, moved by the *ḡul*'s considerable charms, offered to take her off the prince's hands. The prince agreed and left her with the suitor. She stayed the night with the Bedouin; in the morning the host was found with all of his internal organs eaten away and his head missing. According to another story, a *ḡul*, masquerading as a monk, lured his victims into his home where he devoured them (ibid., pp. 503-4). The people of Anbi, a village in Western Azarbaijan, believe that the *ḡul–e biābāni*, whom they call the Rašešabi, having assumed the form of an acquaintance, knocks on doors in the evenings calling the man of the house by name. When the man opens the door, the *ḡul* greets him and begins to retreat, luring the unsuspecting victim into the darkness where the *ḡul* suddenly seizes him and carries him into the wilderness. However, if the victim keeps his wits and pronounces the name of God, or if he grabs the *ḡul*'s testicles and gives them a good squeeze, the beast will panic and release him (Kalāntari and Maʿṣumi, pp. 43-44). This is reminiscent of the Bengali demoness Nisi, who is believed to roam the streets at night disguised as a human being, calling out to the inhabitants of the houses by name in order to entice them out of their homes. Should they heed her call, she will mislead them into the wilderness, where she will either kill them or harm them seriously. Since Nisi is believed not to call a person's name more than thrice, the Hindus of Bengal never opened the door of their houses before they were called four times (Basu, pp. 49-50; cf. Asadi, p. 45).

The nature of the contact between men and *ḡul*s may vary considerably. The male *ḡul* who comes upon a sleeping traveler in the wilderness may lick the soles of his feet until the feet begin to bleed. He then drinks the blood (Hedāyat, p. 175). A *ḡul* may engage in sexual intercourse with his human

victim, who may be male or female. If he does so, he often kills the victim. However, clever humans have been known to trick the *ḡul* and escape harm. Balḵi relates that a girl was approached by a *ḡul* at night, but she tricked it into having intercourse with her goat-skin water-bag. Upon escaping the *ḡul* and returning safely home, she found the water-bag to be filled with scorpions (Balḵi, p. 413; cf. Fozuni, II, p. 529, in which the clever human is a man). Female *ḡul*s, however, are also known to grow amorous of their human victims (Qazvini, p. 383), and even marry them and bear children by them. One of them is said to have resided among the Banu Tamim tribe and to have given birth to a son for a man of that tribe. Later, however, she is said to have flown away one day upon hearing the sound of the thunder and seeing lightening over the land of the *ḡul*s (Ṭusi, p. 501). Such stories are reminiscent of tale of the Amour and Psyche type (type 425A, see Aarne and Thompson; Thompson and Roberts). The variety of *ḡul* that possesses humans or approaches them sexually is called *ḡaddār* (Ṭusi, p. 502).

The *ḡul* may be killed by a single blow, but it revives if it is struck a second time (Ṭusi, p. 288; Massé, *Croyances*, p. 354). Since the ideas of *ḡul* and *div* (demon) in Persian narrative tradition are intertwined, this characteristic of the *ḡul* is attributed to demons in the classical Persian chapbook literature. Thus, the author of *Ḥamza-nāma* tells of a demon who fought the hero Ḥamza, and upon being struck down, asked the hero to strike a second time. When the hero dealt it another blow, it revived and began to fight Ḥamza again. This is repeated several times, until the prophet Ḵeżr appeared to Ḥamza and advised him against striking the demon a second time (Šeʿār, ed., I, pp. 215-16). Among other Muslim saints who have successfully struck *ḡul*s, one may mention the caliph ʿOmar b. al-Ḵaṭṭāb (Fozuni, II, p. 528).

In epic literature, *ḡul* has a variety of manifestations. According to the *Šāh-nāma*, the witch whom Esfandiār (q.v.) met in his fourth trial is called by the same name, *ḡul* (*verā ḡūl ḵānand šāhān ba nām*; V, p. 235, l. 186). Similarly, in the *Farāmarz-nāma*, Farāmarz's third trial involves killing a demon called *div-e ḡūl*, who is described as a tall and fierce beast sporting tusks, dark skin, and red eyes (ed. Tafti, p. 376). In the rest of the heroic literature *ḡul*s are a class of demonic beings who may be fought and killed. In the *Garšāsp-nāma*, Garšāsp's army comes upon a desert infested with flying snakes and *ḡul*s, many of whom they kill (Asadi, p. 354). In the *Sām-nāma*, the desert air is dinning with the frightening cries of *ḡul* (I, p. 45). According to the *Šāhriār-nāma*, Šahriār's sixth trial is facing the army of the *ḡul*s. Their king appears disguised as an old man

complaining that the *ḡul*s have devoured his only son, but his ass-like feet betrays his real identity. The *ḡul*s in this epic are described as tall, hairy, foul-smelling creatures, some of whom die at hearing the name of God, while others are put to flight by it (Moḵtāri, pp. 101-2). In the oral prose versions of the epic tales, Kaykāvus's prison guards during his confinement in Māzandarān are called *ḡul-e biābāni*, so is the demon Olād, whom Rostam captures during his seven trials (Enjavi, 1354, pp. 86-87). Similarly, in the folktales, *ḡul*s occasionally replace demons or other fierce animals such as lions. Thus in tale type *311A, "Escape in Glass Gourd," a number of versions show a *ḡul* instead of a *div*, and in the type 159B "Enmity of Lion and Man," some Persian versions have a *ḡul* in place of the expected lion (Marzolph, s.v. types 159B and *311A).

Ḡuls follow man even beyond the grave. It is believed that during the questioning of the deceased in his grave by Nakir and Monkar, a wicked person is flanked by an ugly *ḡul* while an angel stands next to a good person (Loeffler, p. 177). It, however, may be put to flight by the mere mention of the name of God (Hedāyat, p. 94).

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