Preserving Omani Intangible Heritage: A Study of Folktale Authenticity and Classification

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Abstract:

To prevent Omani folktale heritage from being lost or distorted, especially in the era of globalization and digitization, and since there is no oral documentation of Omani folktales, there is a need to investigate the authenticity of documented Omani folktales published in print and to classify them based on tale-type. This study attempts to document a comprehensive collection of Omani folktales from existing materials published in or translated into English by developing a classification system based on Hasan El-Shamy's established tale-type index. Further, the study aims to assess the authenticity of these folktales by investigating Omani cultural markers found in them and identifying potential distortions or adaptations.

Keywords: Omani folktales, tale-type, cultural markers, authenticity.

ملخص :

الحفاظ على التراث العماني غير المادي: دراسة في أصالة الحكاية الشعبية وتصنيفها

للحفاظ على تراث الحكايات الشعبية العمانية من الضياع أو التشويه، لا سيما في عصر العولمة والرقمنة، ونظرًا لغياب التوثيق الشفهي لها، تبرز الحاجة إلى التحقق من أصالة الحكايات الشعبية العمانية الموثقة والمنشورة في المطبوعات، وتصنيفها حسب نوعها. تسعى الدراسة إلى توثيق مجموعة شاملة من الحكايات الشعبية العمانية من المواد المتاحة المنشورة أو المترجمة إلى الإنجليزية، وذلك من خلال تطوير نظام تصنيف قائم على مؤشر حسن الشامي لأنواع الحكايات. علاوة على ذلك، تهدف الدراسة إلى تقييم أصالة هذه الحكايات الشعبية من خلال دراسة السمات الثقافية العمانية الموجودة فيها، وتحديد أي تحريف أو تعديل محتمل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحكايات الشعبية العمانية، نوع الحكاية، السمات الثقافية، الأصالة..

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1. Introduction:

Folktales reflect the culture's heritage, traditions, diversity, and vitality. They encompass various forms of expression to underline the community's strengths, unity, and values to support people's cultural attitudes and ways of living (Stein & Swedenburg, 2005). Folktales are regarded by UNESCO as a component of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) that must be preserved or safeguarded in the face of growing globalization. Through its 2003 Convention, UNESCO proposes that safeguarding ICH can contribute to sustainable development (UNESCO, n.d.).

Despite Oman's top priority to preserve and promote its cultural heritage as a signatory of the ICH agreement, Omani folktales are not recognized among the listed ICH.[1] This is due to the lack of documented Omani folktales, which has resulted in their exclusion from the Omani school curriculum, while Western folktales— like "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Biff and the Coconut Tree"— are adapted to fit the Omani context (AlHarrasi, 2012, p.52).

Due to their oral tradition, folktales have not enjoyed the needed attention to be documented, authenticated, and promoted (Amali, 2014, p. 89). Many folktales in Oman are endangered and at risk of being lost (Almamari, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, to prevent this heritage from being lost or distorted, and since there is no oral documentation of this heritage, there is a need to classify Omani

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[1] The list can be found here (https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/oman-OM?info=elements-on-the-lists).

folktales documented in print. This paper focuses on Omani folktales published in English, an under-researched area in scholarly literature[1]. Relying on Hasan El-Shamy's tale-type index as a framework, this study attempts to classify the documented Omani folktales found in *Folktales from Oman* (2018), *Folktales from the Arabian Peninsula* (2016), *My Grandmother's Stories: Folk Tales from Dhofar* (2012), *Halimah and the Snake and other Omani Folk Tales* (2008), *Omani Folk Tales* (2006), and *Folktales from the Arabia Gulf* (2003). The classification has been conducted manually by applying the folktales to El-Shamy's index. This study further aims to assess the folktales' authenticity through analyzing recurring cultural markers and identifying potential distortions or adaptations.

2. Research Framework

2.1 Tale-Type Index

Tale-type is an important classificatory concept that offers a structured method to categorize and evaluate common structures and elements shared among different cultures' folktales. El-Shamy was not a pioneer in publishing a folktale-type system; the Finnish scholar, Antti Aarne, created the first significant tale-type index in 1910, which concentrated on European tales. Later, Stith Thompson developed this work by translating Aarne's index and adding stories from a wider variety of sources related to, for example, Turkey, Persia, and Sub-

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[1] It is worth mentioning that this study's first aim was to analyze printed and digitized Omani folktales in English. However, the analysis will be confined to printed texts as thorough research revealed that there are no digitized Omani folktales available.

Saharan Africa. Their combined efforts produced the 'AT number system,' which gives each sort of folktale a distinct title and identification. For example, (510A Cinderella). Aarne and Thompson's system was further developed in 2004 by Hans-Jörg Uther, who produced what is now referred to as the 'ATU tale-type index.' This thorough index, which divides folktales into broad categories, is a typical source used in folklore studies to identify the type and is an invaluable resource for scholars working in the field. Furthermore, Thompson (1966) published *The Motif-Index of Folk Literature* which relies on motif as a key concept to classify folktales based on tale-types.

When categorizing Arab folktales included in the above scholars' index, (AT) and (ATU) indexes primarily pay attention to the narrative components, themes, and motifs of the stories without taking into account various regionally specific cultural, social, and psychological issues. Thompson (1966) addressed a key limitation found in the *Motif-Index*; it excluded specific aspects of folklore like "superstitions, customs, religious beliefs, riddles, or proverbs" unless they are an integral part of a narrative (11). In addition, Thompson expressed some doubts regarding the usefulness of incorporating psychological foundations that might be found in a culture. He noted that

> no attempt has been made to determine the psychological basis of various motifs or their structural narrative art, for though such considerations have value, they are not of much practical help toward the orderly arrangement of stories and myths of a people. (10)

E-Shamy's tale-type classification might be considered a useful index to remedy what (AT) and (ATU) indexes failed to address (El-Shamy 2018, 24). For any classificatory system to be successful, it should be useful, widely accepted, and capable of adequately reflecting a culture's distinct customs, values, and social practices (El-Shamy 2018, X). In this regard, El-Shamy believed that Thompson's *Index* was not sufficient for classifying Arab folktales. He stated that psychological and sociological concepts such as "empathy," "conditioning," "adaptation level," and "fealty (partnership)" are present in Arabic folk expressions and can be significantly useful in classifying folktales (1995, xiii).

Tale-types are made of plots, themes, and sentiment; yet, they are not the same as literary genres. El-Shamy (2004) considers a tale-type as "a full narrative or (a tale's plot) that recurs crossculturally in varying sub-forms and may incorporate a number of episodes" or motifs (x). Tale-type exists independently and does not rely on other tales to generate meaning (Thompson 1946, 415), but it includes a recurring plot or group of motifs that might be shared among other tales. El-Shamy designated tale-types following Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's tale-type system. His book included 1,590 independent entries, each of which depicts a plot typically told among different groups in the Arab World. He developed 496 of these tale-types because they represent Arabic cultural uniqueness (El-Shamy 2004, x). Type 425, *The Search for the Lost Husband* and 425A, *The Monster (Animal) as Bridegroom* are examples of these added tale-types. The structure of any tale-type, within this classification, consists of a number and a type

title (Type 425, *The Search for the Lost Husband)* and may be accompanied by a letter (425A, *The Monster (Animal) as Bridegroom*) or an asterisk "*" (4*, *Fox Pollutes Wolf Who is Carrying Him*) to indicate a variation on another narration or subtype with the same content.

2.2 Folktales' Authenticity

Depending on from where and by whom they originate, folktales may be lost in time, raising a concern about their authenticity. Academic scholars have realized the challenges of authenticating folktales and they have looked for ways to examine them. Folktales' authenticity is important because it gains value and credibility, or, as Bendix (1997) declared, it "legitimated the subject that was declared authentic […] by elevating the authenticated into the category of the noteworthy" (7). This study contributes to such efforts by assessing the authenticity of printed Omani folktales based on the criteria set by folklorists.

El-Shamy argues that for a folktale to be authentic, "anonymity of origin or author was often cited as a prerequisite. However, recurrence seems to have eclipsed 'anonymity' as a requirement" (El-Shamy 2018, 2). Recurrence indicates how frequently a story, cultural expression, and tradition is repeated, transmitted, and acknowledged within a certain community. This frequent repetition, according to El-Shamy, has become more important than anonymity to classify a work as a folktale. Similarly, Venbrux and Meder (2004) posited that "the folklorists did not need whole stories, let alone contextual information about the storytelling. They were satisfied with elements, namely the stories' motifs and plots" to track where stories originated and

how they spread over time (207). Similarly, Bendix contended that what tested folklore's authenticity was "lack of identifiable authorship, multiple existence over time and space, variation of the items, and the social and economic circumstances of the 'bearers of tradition'" (15). In this regard, folklorists relied on a set of criteria to decide on the authenticity of folklore. According to Brunvand (1968), "folklorists generally associate five qualities with true folklore: (1) it is oral; (2) it is traditional; (3) it exists in different versions; (4) it is usually anonymous; (5) it tends to become formalized" (4). These qualities are also applicable when investigating the authenticity of folktales since they can identify elements that remain true to the oral tradition and potentially pinpoint areas where formalization might have altered the stories. In the same manner, Venbrux and Meder's study investigated how Voskuil, the head of the Bureau of Ethnology in Amsterdam in 1965, succeeded with Dam Jaarsma, a Dutch writer, to collect folktales from Friesland for the Bureau of Ethnology. Voskuil asked the collectors to adopt these criteria to authenticate folktales in Friesland:

> It meant the stories a) had to be from an exclusive oral tradition (shown, among other things, by speech relics, characteristic words and turns of phrase), b) be written down out of the mouth of a suitable informant (that is, rural elders), and c) comply with a given list of motifs or themes designed by a folklorist, and later on, in the case of folktales, the internationally recognized plots. Time after time, Voskuil stressed that stories derived from a literary source, 'the books', such as the stories from the Grimm Brothers, were not allowed. (203)

Voskuil followed the qualities adopted by folklorists to authenticate folktales. What is seen as interesting, though, is that he added another quality; stories should not be derived from known literary books like the *Grimm Brothers*. The importance of this quality lies in its aim to preserve the oral tradition, affirm its authenticity, and highlight the specific cultural nuances and references that are present in authentic folktales, which also aligns with Bendix's observation. Folklorists also favor the analytical concept of examining folklore's authenticity. Kingston (1999) stated that "the application of the epithet 'authentic' actually entails an interrogation, rather than an affirmation" (339). In this regard, in order to claim that a folktale is authentic, investigating its origin and transmission, changes and adaptation, and cultural significance are all crucial steps.

3. Findings and Discussion
3.1 Recurring Cultural Markers in Omani Folktales

Based on El-Shamy's observation on the importance of recurring cultural expression to authenticate a nation's folktales, and aligning with Bendix, Voskill and Brunvard's insistence on an exclusive oral tradition that reflects the cultural nuances for authentication, this study explores the authenticity of selected Omani folktales based on cultural traditions and markers.

AlSeyabi and Sultana (2012), in their investigation of two Arabic Omani folktales— "Ja'roof and Ma'roof" and "The Omani Cinderella"— identified some cultural factors found in these stories:

> The significance of the character's name; beliefs and
> thoughts about destiny (unalterable) and luck (can be

changed); the climate conditions and terrains—desert, mountains; customary greetings—using familiar Omani address terminology when meeting strangers; the flora and fauna—like palm trees; the water system— the presence of falaj; architecture—fort; travelling abroad for trade and commerce; simple village life—fetching water from a/the well, cutting wood for cooking; travelling Bedouin—son of a sheikh. (107-108)

Further, Risse (2019) highlighted certain cultural beliefs found in Dhofar, located in southern Oman, such as "oath-taking, *djinn*, and the importance of teaching morality in written, but not oral texts" (320). Expanding upon Al Seyabi & Sultana (2012) and Risse's (2019) ethnographic observations, this study adds the following cultural markers as prominent themes that collectively contribute to a rich and multifaceted understanding of Omani society and culture: polygamy, tribal disputes, superstitions and enchantments, and sacred/haunted places.

   To add to the cultural markers reflected in AlSeyabi and Sultana's (2012) study, Table 1 shows that three animal tales might reflect the Omani culture and the relationship between Omanis and their environment. "The Cunning Fox" is similar to Aesop's fables in which talking animals are the main characters. Furthermore, the above folktale features animals with human-like qualities, human-animal interaction, and a moral lesson. The story is about an Arabian red fox, locally known as "Abu Alhussein-أبو الحصين", that managed to trick people into gaining food and wealth. However, the fox's tricks led to his downfall and imprisonment. The **Red Fox**, a hero in many world

(folk)tales (Uther 2006, Lee 2011, Cardi 2022, Makarova 2018, Burnakova 2020), is part of the fauna of Oman (AlSeyabi and Sultana 2012) and has a prominent place in Omani culture (Alsaid 2019), especially in folklore. "Abu Alhussein" is the specific manifestation of the cunning fox archetype found globally and within Omani culture, making the tale a regional *oikotype* (a local form of a migratory tale), which El-Shamy's system is designed to highlight.

The animals in the other tales, "The Sad Story of the Mother Camel" and "The Lion of Izki," are not talking animals. The former story highlights the maternal bond and loss experienced by animals as a mother camel fights wild dogs to protect her newborn, but tragically loses it. "The Lion of Izki" introduces an encounter between a girl and a lion in Izki, a town in northeastern Oman. While the girl is herding goats in the desert, a lion chases her, but the predatory animal is turned into stone after she desperately prays to God to save her. The story's moral lesson suggests man's reliance on faith when facing moments of peril. The above stories' settings and animals are found in Oman and present a testament to the deep-rooted connection between Omani people and their environment. Furthermore, the tale-types of the stories in question align with El-Shamy's classificatory system, in addition to Bendix, Voskill and Brunvard's examination of folktales' authentication, and the cultural markers identified by AlSeyabi and Sultana (2012).

Table 1

Book	Title	Tale-Type
My Grandmother's Stories: Folk Tales from Dhofar	"The Cunning Fox"	0001* *The Fox Steals the Basket. [Separating owner from goods and then stealing them].*
Folktales from the Arabian Peninsula	"The Sad Story of the Mother Camel"	20C, *The Animals Fleeing Fear of the End of the World.* [They are preyed on by a predator]
Folktales from Oman	"The Lion of Izki"	122Z, *Other Tricks to Escape from Captor*

The concept of polygamy, as a cultural marker, is found in three stories, as presented in table 2. Each story is classified under a different tale-type based on EL-Shamy's tale-type index. "Tale of the Polygamous Man" narrates the story of a man whose first wife could not conceive. He married three other women and divorced them because they did not bear him any children. His first wife decided to teach him a lesson and pointed out the hypocrisy illustrated in the unequal expectations between men and women regarding marriage. "Tale of the Poor Man" is about a poor woodcutter who was advised to marry to increase his income. However, his wife did not provide much assistance. Consequently, he was advised again to marry a second wife, but found that two wives became a burden rather than a help. Again, he was advised to marry a third woman who was resourceful enough to increase their income. "The Good Wife" revolves around a man who had two wives. The first wife treated the second wife poorly. One day, the second wife overheard the first wife plotting with her cousin about a hidden treasure in the

garden and their plan to sell the house to claim the treasure. The second wife informed her husband, who dug up the treasure and sold the house to his first wife's cousin. When the first wife and her cousin couldn't find the treasure, the husband confronted and divorced her, living happily with his second wife.

Polygamy is a legal and religious practice in Oman. The rate of polygynous marriage is 11% (Islam, Dorvlo, and alQasim 2013). These tales offer a complex viewpoint on polygamy. Two narratives draw attention to its possible advantages, while the other underlies gender imbalance. The tale-types concerning polygamy were added by El-Shamy to reflect the Arab-Islamic tradition, a gap not addressed in the (AT) or (ATU) indexes.

Table 2

Book	Title	Tale-Type
Omani Folktales	"Tale of the Polygamous Man"	1379, *Troubles for the Polygynist Man.*
Omani Folktales	"The Good Wife"	1397X, *One More Wife: Husband's Luck Changes for the Better.*
Halimah and the Snake and other Omani folktales	"The Lion of Izki"	910L, *Treasure Hidden in the House; the Faithless Wife Loses*

One story addresses tribal disputes, namely "Strangers on the Road." The latter story is about a man from the Hinawi tribe and another traveller from the Ghafiri tribe who don't know each other but decide to travel together for safety. In the middle of the journey, they realize they are from rival tribes. They quickly part

ways upon reaching Muscat, believing it is better to continue their journeys separately.

The tribal faction between the above two tribes is well known in Oman (Kegiseo, n.d.). However, Sultan Qaboos bin Saeed (give his period of reign) ended this dispute by encouraging the leaders of the tribes to "hand over their traditional powers to the Omani state and to actively cooperate in the building up of the new country" (Kegiseo, n.d.). As it emphasizes the cultural significance of tribal identity and social dynamics found in Oman, which aligns with Viskul and Brunvard's criteria for authenticating folktales, classifying the story based on El-Shamy's tale-type proves its authenticity. The story highlights the importance of identifying the name of the travelling companion to avoid dispute or miscommunication.

Table 3

Book	Title	Tale-type
Folktales from the Arabian Peninsula	"Strangers on the Road"	0910B1, *Knowing the Name of a Travel Companion Proves Valuable*

The following three folktales found in Table 4 are included in one book collection entitled *Folktales from Oman*. The narratives reflect the supernatural or sacred aura of certain places found in Oman and the local stories of those places. "Baby Maryam" narrates how a wealthy man, who has a beautiful daughter called Maryam, refuses all suitors because he doesn't want his daughter to leave him. One day, an earthquake strikes the town, killing many people, including Maryam. The father

tries to drown himself in the sea; yet, he is transformed into a rock, which is hit by the waves. The townspeople create a beautiful tomb for Maryam, calling it Bibi Maryam's tomb. The grave, which has a slit in the middle, is believed to bring death to anyone who passes through it. This tomb is located in the historic city of Qalhat *and is one of Oman's tourist attractions.* The tale of "AlBustan" recounts the story of one of the village's old mosques that the people considered sacred, especially during the AlNahda period. In the story, the government intends to demolish the mosque to construct a larger one to accommodate the growing population, but the trucks malfunction whenever they attempt to start the project. Believing the mosque to be protected by jinn, the villagers decide to renovate it instead. Finally, "Jarnan Cave" is about a golden calf that people used to worship in the pre-Islamic era. After people converted to Islam, they hid the calf in the cave. It is believed that the cave is guarded by jinn to prevent humans from reaching or stealing the calf. Janran Cave is a tourist attraction in Izki in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

This study posits that the above stories are constructed narratives, centering on people's experience with a place they might think of as spiritual or sacred. Cultural identity, beliefs, and values are imbued in these stories, revealing a complex relationship between Omanis and these places. Furthermore, these stories attempt to promote the historical significance of the places in question. However, this study found that a definitive classification of these stories based on El-Shamy's tale-type was not established, revealing a significant gap in El-Shamy's classificatory system. El-Shamy noted how folklorists, sometimes, are unable to classify certain narratives, clarifying

that some narratives were "left un-indexed, leaving the reader with no means of verifying a motif or an idea in the tales" (2004, xiii).

Table 4

Book	Title	Tale-type
Folktales from Oman	"Baby Mariam"	Unclassified
Folktales from Oman	"Al Bustan"	Unclassified
Folktales from Oman	"Jarnan Cave"	Unclassified

The cultural markers of the explored Omani folktales and their alignment with folklorists' authentication criteria reflect the essence of the tradition of Omani tales, suggesting their unique national specificity. This calls for the need to introduce a tale-type classificatory system tailored for Oman that would be a valuable addition to El-Shamy's index and would reflect the shared and/or unique cultural traits found in Omani intangible heritage.

3.2 Recurring Plot

As outlined in the research framework, El-Shamy illustrates the significance of recurrence to authenticate a country's folktales. Similarly, the third quality stated by Bunvard, the presence of **multiple versions of a story, also underscores** Voskuil's attempt to authenticate Friesland's folktales.

A recognized plot suggests a shared understanding of the core narrative within a cultural context and can identify the folktale type. Based on that, this study argues that the following Omani folktales, presented in this section, fit within this quality.

Table 5 shows two stories that this study classified under El-Shamy's tale-type 1646, *The Lucky Blow*. " The Jinny and the Bride" revolves around a greedy man who uses perfumes to impress a passing prince, claiming the scent comes from his nonexistent daughter. In response, the prince offers a large dowry to marry the man's daughter. The greedy man tricks the prince by making a doll and then takes the dowry. However, a genie, amused by the deception, replaces the doll with his ugly daughter after turning her into a beautiful woman. Oblivious to the trickery, the prince marries this woman and thereafter lives happily. The "Fake Bride" follows the same plot, and no added or omitted versions were found.

Table 5

Book	Title	Tale-type
My Grandmother's Stories: Folk Tales from Dhofar	"The Jinny and the Bride"	1646, *The Lucky Blow*
Folktales from the Arabian Peninsula	"The Fake Bride"	

"Tale of the Woman and the Vow," "The Talking Tree," and "Mariam and the Palm Trunk" (see Table 6) share a similar plot but with different characters' names and endings. A barren woman vows that if she gives birth to a baby girl, she will marry her off to a tree trunk. When her wish is granted and her baby girl grows up, the mother has to fulfill the promise and thus leaves her girl by a palm tree. A jinni, living in the tree trunk, takes her

as his wife, and they live happily. However, when she visits her parents, she breaks her husband's request not to reveal his name, and the husband never shows up to take her home. The version of this story entitled "Mariam and the Palm Trunk" does not have the same ending. As the girl wants to live with her husband, she has to go through a journey and sacrifice a piece of her flesh on the seventh sea she passes by. On the other hand, "The Woman and the Vow" resembles the other two stories in the vow and the disappearance of the girl. However, in this version the girl returns with her human husband and newborn baby. Afterwards, the mother shares the story with the village sheikh, who revealed that superstitions about the palm tree are meant to keep people away from the well.

These three folktales share a similar foundational plot (the vow, marriage to a supernatural tree-dwelling being, the husband's disappearance after the wife breaks a taboo), and they only differ in character names, specific incidents, and endings. Based on that, these narratives follow Brunvard, Voskuil, and El-Shamy's observation of a recurring plot with narrative variances across a tradition. The presence of these various, but structurally connected, versions among three book collections about Omani folktales indicates how Omani tradition enhances the narratives' common identification and transmission across time. This not only validates their authenticity as folktales but also identifies valuable cultural markers and adaptations within a shared tale type.

Table 6

Book	Title	Tale-type
Omani Folktales	"Tale of the Woman and the Vow"	0425, *The Search for the Lost Husband.* [Supernatural husband (lover) vanishes and is found: (various reasons)].
Halimah and the Snake and other Omani Folk Tales	"The Talking Tree"	
Folktales from Oman	"Mariam and the Palm Trunk"	

The two stories presented in Table 7 share El-Shamy's tale-type classification. *"The Girl Who Was Dead"* recounts the story of a ten-year-old girl who lives at the time of Ya'rubia Imamate in Nizwa in a village called Sual. The girl is beautiful and vivacious, but an evil man enchants her. Afterwards, as the girl is believed to be dead, the people in her village prepare her for burial. A religious old man who recognizes the enchantment advises the girl's mother to put mercury in the girl's hands. After the burial, the enchanter comes to take the girl but notices the mercury and leaves. Eventually, the girl is reunited with her family. *"The Girl and the Miracle"* follows the same plot with the same incidents but there is no mention of the location and the girl's family tribe.

These two folktales have a remarkable theme and structural consistency that follows folkloristic classification criteria. Specifically, they strongly promote **Brunvard's third criterion for folktale authenticity. Their shared narrative heritage, although encompassing minor variations or omissions, asserts their position as authentic Omani folktales. They also** mirror the cultural belief in superstitions and enchantment.

Table 7

Book	Title	Tale-type
Halimah and the Snake and other Omani Folk Tales	"The Girl Who Was Dead"	0779 J, *Intercession by Religious Personage Saves Victim-to-be*
Folktales from Oman	"The Girl and the Miracle"	

It is remarkable how the plot in the following narratives, "Tale of the Friend Who Gouged out his Friend's Eyes" and "Asif's Betrayal," is similar but with different characters' names. They narrate the story of two best friends who set out on a journey to find work. One of them gouges out the other's eyes after asking for food and abandons him under a tree in the middle of nowhere. The blind friend follows the advice of three crows who tell him how to restore his sight and find a hidden treasure. Following their advice, he regains his sight and transforms some abandoned land into a rich farm. Years later, the treacherous friend passes through the area on his way home, wanting to know what had happened to his blind friend. When he discovers what happened to his friend, he begs him to blind him and leave him under the same tree. The good friend refuses, but he instructs a servant to blind the man. The treacherous friend waits under the tree for the crows, but his impatience scares them away. He remains blind and is cared for by his good friend until his death.

The above two tales demonstrate a recurring plot pattern that aligns precisely with El-Shamy's recognized tale-type and Viskuil's understanding of a recognized plot. The consistency of

the plot in these narratives, found in two different books, indicates their communal recognition and transmission, ensures their cultural presence, and illustrates the authenticity of these tales as part of the Omani folktale heritage.

Table 8

Book	Title	Tale-type
Omani Folk Tales	"Tale of the Friend who Gouged out his Friend's Eyes"	613, *The Two Travellers (Truth and Falsehood).* [Evil person blinds and mutilates his good-hearted companion (brother)].
Halimah and the Snake and other Omani Folk Tales	"Asif's Betrayal"	

Table 9 includes three tales found in three different book collections about Omani folktales. "Tale of a Woman Who Married Her Daughter to a Serpent" and "Halimah and the Snake" share an identical plot and character dynamics. The tales reveal how a girl, living with her father, stepmother, and stepsister, is ill-treated. One day, the stepmother sends the girl to collect crooked wood sticks for fire, but the girl couldn't find any. The stepmother convinces her husband to punish her. Crying by the "falaj"[1], the girl encounters a fish who directs her to a helpful snake. The snake promises to give the girl the requested sticks if she convinces her parents to allow him to marry the girl. In the snake's cave, the snake turns into a handsome man and

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[1] Falaj is a traditional irrigation system used in Oman and other Gulf countries. This system was recognized by UNESCO World Heritage in 2006.

dresses the girl in gold. Meanwhile, the stepmother thinks that the girl has been bitten by the snake after hearing her yelling. Instead, she found her stepdaughter living in luxury. Envious, she sends her daughter to marry a snake, but the daughter meets a tragic end. "The Orphaned Girl" is another Omani folktale that follows the same premise but with some differences. In this story, the stepmother convinces her husband to abandon his daughter by the beach. There, the girl meets an old man who advises her to watch the waves and to follow his instructions. As she does, he transforms her appearance with riches and jewelry. Jealous of the girl's newfound wealth, the stepmother sends her daughter to the same place. However, the daughter does not follow the old man's instructions, leading to her transformation into a venomous serpent.

The fundamental plot found in these stories, even when the precise details and transformational forces vary, strongly echoes Brunvard's third criterion for folktale authenticity: the presence of multiple versions of a story. Furthermore, the clear cultural markers, manifested in the fauna and flora found in Oman, along with the belief in supernatural beings, align with El-Shamy, Bendix, Bunvard, and Voskiul's declaration of examining recurring cultural nuances for authenticating a nation's folktales. These findings underscore the narratives' transmission and their authenticity as Omani folktales. One might argue, however, that the tale-type variance found in "The Orphaned Girl," which clearly presents a localized adaptation of "Cinderella," suggests a departure from its authentic Omani narrative heritage. The story is commonly known among Omanis, locally recognized as the Omani Cinderella" (AlSiyabi and Sultana 2012). Furthermore,

the story's plot convergence (heroine persecuted by her stepmother, the intervention of a supernatural helper, and the heroine's transformation), along with shared cultural markers with the other two stories, supports its authenticity as an Omani folktale.

Table 9

Book	Title	Tale-type
Omani Folk Tales	"Tale of a Woman who Married her Daughter to a Serpent"	552 *The Girls Who Married Animals*
Halimah and the Snake and other Omani Folk Tales	"Halimah and the Snake"	
My Grandmother's Stories: Folk Tales from Dhofar	"The Orphaned Girl"	510A, *Cinderella* [Girl persecuted by stepmother and stepsisters is aided by fairy].

Guided by El-Shamy's Tale-type index and Brunvard and Voskuil's observations on authenticating folktales, the investigation and discussion of the above-mentioned folktales reveal a rich narrative heritage in the Omani culture and provide evidence for their authenticity. Moreover, the Omani cultural markers — manifested in superstitions, enchantments, supernatural creatures, the ecosystem, and sacred places— indicate the complex interplay between human experience and traditional beliefs, which shape and reflect the Omani identity.

3.3 Inauthentic Tales

This study has encountered some challenges related to authenticating certain Omani folktales in the book collections, particularly as many appeared in other famous classical books. For instance, "Abdullah of the Land and Abdullah from the Sea" is included as part of the Omani folktales in *Folktales from the Arabian Gulf*. The tale, however, was recounted by Scheherazade between the 940th to 946th nights in *The Arabian Nights* under the title "Abdullah the Fisherman and Abdullah the Merman." This study questions the authenticity of this story because it does not follow the criteria established by Voskuil, which proves the inauthenticity of a folktale if it appears in a well-known collection. Although fishing is part of the Omani cultural craft and way of living, the tale fails to reflect authentic Omani fishing customs and/or geographical locations along with reliable authorship.

Folktales from the Arabian Peninsula presents folktales from several countries in the region, one of which is Oman. The authors claim that thirteen stories belong to the Omani folktale heritage. Although in some cases they mentioned the name of the person who narrated the story, this study argues that the authors have failed to establish the authenticity of these stories, in terms of identifiable authorship, variations, and cultural relevance.

Stories about Abu Nawas the trickster and Jouha appeared in the above collection as Omani folktales. However, Abu Nawas appeared in *One Thousand and One Night* and *Hikayat Abu Nawas*. He was also considered part of the folktale tradition of Malay culture (On 2015, 1). Similarly, Jouha is a recognized Arabic folk character, the first narrative about whom appeared in

AlJahiz's book *Sayings about the Mules* in the ninth century (Jones 2023, 20). He is also considered by Galley& Sinaceur (1994) as a "Maghrebian character of jokes and pranks" (51). Different versions of the story of Jouha and his donkey appear in Helmke's *Humor and Moroccan Culture,* among other published Arabic folktales. Folktales are transnational and adapt to local context over time, which doesn't make them less authentic. Modernization, though, saw "genuine folklore[…]rapidly disappearing" (Jones 207, 209). With the prevalence of a huge amount of printed folktale books along with adapted televised and digitized versions, the authenticity of folktales is overshadowed if not distorted. Further, Jones (2023) noted that "the rarity of the story implied the possibility that authenticity could be attributed to the tale" (209). In this regard, since Abu Nawas and Jouha's stories were shared within the Arabic historical and modern narratives, and as they fail, in Taibah and McDonald's collection, to represent references to, for example, Omani locations, customs, or proverbs, these stories may not be categorized as authentic Omani folktales.

The authenticity of "Love is Blind" (2016-8), which appeared in the above folktale collection as part of the Omani folktale tradition, is questionable. A thorough investigation conducted by the researchers of this study revealed that Badr Al-Khudari, a Kuwaiti journalist, published an article entitled "The Story of Love is Blind" in AlAnbaa Newspaper in 2011. He attributed the story to Rami Al-Shahri, who wrote the tale in 2001 under the title "This is How the Love Story Began" and won the short story award at the university level of the Arabian Gulf. Other similar

online versions of the story in Arabic and English were found,[1] casting significant doubt on the story's status as an authentic Omani folktale.

4. Conclusion

This study critically examined documented Omani folktales published in English. Following El-Shamy's tale-type index, the study provided a comprehensive classification for these narratives to robustly affirm their authenticity and distinctive characteristics as Omani folktales. The findings demonstrated how the country's cultural fabric is integrated in the examined folktales. Building upon AlSeyabi and Sultana's (2012) cultural markers, the study identified other societal activities, such as polygamy and tribal dynamics, reflecting how Omani culture has been (re)shaped by these traditional beliefs for years. These features align with El-Shamy's emphasis on examining reiterated cultural manifestations as a requirement for folktale authenticity. Furthermore, the recognized recurring plot, a criterion established by El-Shamy, Brunvard, and Voskuil for authenticating folktales, was applied. It provided compelling evidence for the authenticity of Omani folktales across different collections. While other narratives, such as "Baby Maryam" or

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[1] Please see, https://www.wattpad.com/691795822-from-the-ghost-of-a-closed-chapter-the-story-of,
https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=57844,
https://www.manhal.net/art/s/14456,
https://artic.nl7za.com/%D8%AD%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%B5/%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%89/

"Al-Bustan," posed difficulties for precise classification under El-Shamy's index, their reference to specific Omani places reinforces their national identity and cultural embeddedness.

In light of these findings, this study fills the gap in the academic discussion related to classifying and authenticating Omani folktales published in English. Preserving and disseminating these folktales can help to safeguard this intangible heritage from distortion and ensure that Omani folktales continue to thrive. This paper further recommends comparing the documenting practice of this study with other practices to safeguard Omani folktales' integrity, distinctive tale-types and motifs, and accessibility. These recommendations will benefit both the preservation of this priceless Omani cultural legacy and our comprehension of the various storytelling customs found around the world.

5. Acknowledgments

6. Conflicts of Interest
All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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