On Validity of the Gharânîq ‘Ḥadîth’:
Examining the Religious Reason of Exegesis Literatures

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Abstract
It is interesting to re-discuss the controversy about something claimed as a prophetic tradition (al-Hadîth), especially when it is related to its explanatory-doctrinal function to al-Qur’ân and to its implication for essential Islamic doctrines. The account of Gharânîq claimed by some experts as a prophetic tradition is one of the models of old cases, but it remains to produce a religious discourse colored with pros and cons. Some experts believe in the existence and validity of the account of Gharânîq, some others reject it partly or with “notes”, and the others reject it totally. This article tries to analyze critically the account of Gharânîq by exploring literatures on exegesis and traditions in order to discuss and treat this topic more proportionally.

Keywords: Gharânîq Story; Satanic Verses; Qur’anic Interpretation; Doctrinal Implication; Purity of Islam

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Kisah Gharânîq; Ayat Setan; Tafsir Al-Qur’an; Implikasi Doktrinal; Kemurnian Islam

Introduction
Al-Hadîth has a very important position as the source of Islamic teachings after al- Qur’ân. Both are believed to be God’s revelations. The difference is that, borrowing the term from Muḥammad ‘Ajjāj al-Khāṭib, al-Qur’ân is considered as al-matluw (recited) revelation, while al-Hadîth is the ghayr al-matluw (uncited) revelation (‘Ajjāj al-Khāṭib, 1989: 34). This important position of al-Hadîth has put the study of ḫadîth as urgent as the study of al-Qur’ân. In the study of ḫadîth, the problems arising are more complex because some hadîths have the zannî al-wurûd status, i.e. strongly presumed that ḫadîth came from the Prophet Muḥammad himself. In addition, the new codification period began in the second century of Hijri with the so long and varied isnâd (the chain
of transmission) unlike al-Qur’ān. In addition, conflicts that have been occurring among schools in Muslim society have led to massive counterfeiting of hadith.

In general, the study of hadith includes the study or criticism on the sanad (the chain of muḥaddiths or transmitters) and the matn (the texts). Both are equally important because although the sanad of a hadith has been acceptable, the matn will not necessarily be acceptable, or vice versa. Thus, a review of the acceptability of hadith by former ulamas (Islamic experts), especially those concerning with basic doctrines, is still deemed necessary. This is because the results of their studies have not finished yet. Therefore, the results of the studies developed by some hadith experts are often criticized by other hadith experts (Mustarhami, quran-journal.com). For instance, the results of study on “hadith” of al-Gharānîq conducted by some experts, like in view of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî, it were considered acceptable.

However, lately hadith Islamic experts, such as Muḥammad al-Ghazālî, Yusūf al-Qarḍâwî, and Quraish Shihab (2012: 369) strongly rejected it. Even, they judged that hadith of al-Gharānîq was a form of a huge lie blown by certain groups to tarnish the purity of Islamic teachings. What feared by them is reasonable enough. Getting inspiration from the story of al-Gharānîq, Salman Rushdie has composed his novel with the title, Satanic Verses, that has insulted the Prophet (Mujiburrahman, 2008: 113-15). He has narrated imaginatively the figure of Prophet Muḥammad as a usual man that has done many great efforts to compromise and accommodate desires of the leaders of Jahiliya, including his praise through a similar utterance said in the story of al-Gharānîq (Rushdie, 2007: 86). Such narration was considered as an obvious act of insulting to the Prophet, so the Spiritual leader of Iran, Āyâtullâh Khomeini, has commended execution of Salman Rushdie.

Concerning surah al-Hājj (22): 52 that has been as a one of bases for the opinion on possibility of the Prophet in conducting a fallible thing, Sa’īd Nashîd stated a very strange conviction. He assumed that the Prophet was not free from any wrong or fallibility as indicated by such Qur’ānic verse (Nashîd, 2016: 45). According to him, the satan could infiltrate into the revealed verses to disturb before correction and abrogation from Allah. Of course, such Rushdie’s and Nashîd’s opinions have obviously fundamental implication to our perception about Islamic teaching and the prophetic duties of Muḥammad.

**The Story of al-Gharānîq: A Brief Description**

The elaboration of al-Gharānîq is generally related to the explanation of the content of sūrah al-Hājj (22): 52- 53,

“And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he spoke [or recited], Satan threw into it [some misunderstanding]. But Allah abolishes that which Satan throws in; then Allah makes precise His verses. And Allah is Knowing and Wise. [That is] so He may make what Satan throws in a trial for those within whose hearts is disease and those hard of heart. And indeed, the wrongdoers are in extreme dissension”.

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Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman
Volume 31, Nomor 2, Juli 2020

341
It is narrated that when the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was among the polytheists of the Quraysh, he recited sūrah al-Najm (53): 19-20.

“So have you considered al-Lat and al-‘Uzza? And Manat, the third - the other one?”

Unconsciously, the Satan inserted the line: *Tilka al-Gharānîq al-‘ Ulâ wa Inna Shafâ‘ atahunna Laturjâ* (They are beautiful, high-ranking birds, and their intercession is anticipated). Then there was an impression that the sentence was part of the revelation of God, and many polytheists were full of joy because their Gods were recognized and praised (al-Zuḥailī, 1991, vol. XVII: 247).

Some of the existing exegesis books, especially those circulating among the Sunnis, can be divided into two types, namely exegeses that recognize the validity of the account of Gharānîq, and those that deny it. For example, Wahbah al-Zuḥailī in the book of al-Munīr’s Exegesis states his rejection both in the way of *naqliyyah* (dogmatic argumentation) and *aqliyyah* (logical argumentation). Meanwhile, in the al-Jalālāin Exegesis, the account of Gharānîq is considered valid. In Lubāb al-Nuqūl, al-Suyūṭī addresses various chains of ḥadīth al-Gharānîq. Basically, he tended to stand with the opinion receiving the account. He said, “Ibn Abî Ḥātim, Ibn Jarîr, and Ibn Munzir reported from the chain of Sa‘īd b. Jubair with the *sanad šaḥîh* (a collection of ḥadîths) that when the Prophet Muḥammad was in Mecca, he recited the verses of sūrah al-Najm (53): 19-20. Then the Satan through his utterance inserted the line:

After finished reciting sūrah al-Najm, the Prophet Muḥammad prostrated and was followed by the polytheists because they felt that their Gods have gained recognition and been praised by the verses earlier. Thus, there was sūrah al-Ḥājjî (22): 52-53 (al-Suyūṭī, n.y., vol. II: 3). In addition to this chain, al-Suyūṭī also mentioned the chain of al-Bazzâr and Ibn Mirdawâihi originating from Sa‘īd b. Jubair from Ibn Abbâs. Al-Suyūṭī said that this chain was the only *sanad* that was *muttaṣıl* (continued). In this *sanad* (the chain of transmitters), there was a transmitter named Umayyâh b. Khâlid regarded as a transmitter with *thiqah* (integrity) and who was famous (al-Âṭîr, 1970: 139). Al-Bukhârî with the chain ending in Ibn Abbâs, in which there were transmitters, such as al-Wâqidî and Ibn Mirdawâihi through the chain of al-‘Ufî from Ibn Abbâs, narrated the same thing.

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalâni thought that with a number of chains of the account, it indicated that the account of Gharânîq was reliable, especially with the existence of two acceptable chains although they did not follow (*mursal*) from Ibn Jarîr through the *sanad* of al-Zuhri from Abî Bakar b. Abdurrahmân b. Ḫârîth b. Hishâm, and Dâwûd b. Hind from Abî ʿAlîyâh (al-Suyūṭî, vol. II: 3-4; al-‘Asqalânî, vol. VIII: 439). For that reason, Ibn Ḥajar said to ignore the statement from Ibn al-ʿArabi and Qâdi ʿIyâd that the account of Gharânîq was a groundless “lie”. However, Ibn Ḥajar’s opinion acknowledging the acceptability of the account of Gharânîq does not necessarily mean the recognition of the validity. The acceptability here is related to the accountability and acceptability of the account to be used as *hujjah* (proof or evidence). In fact, validity is not only related to accountability-acceptability but also related to the peak qualification of accountability and acceptability.
On Validity of the Gharânîq ‘Hadîth’, ..., Mahmud Arif, Mohammad Kurjum

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalâni indeed tended to acknowledge the existence of the account of Gharânîq but with a critical note. He proposed a critical assessment of the account. He said that al-Kilbî as one of the transmitters in the sanad of the account of Gharânîq was not a credible transmitter (al-‘Asqalânî, vol.VIII: 439). Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalâni put this opinion in the context of elaborating the pros and cons with their respective argumentation. As most of the attitudes of ḥadîth experts, al-‘Asqalânî strongly appreciated an account supported by the sanad before conducting the reasoning within the framework of that narration.

Based on the description of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî, those who support the existence of the account of Gharânîq can be divided into two groups: the “extremist” and the “moderates”. The extremist faction sees the account of Gharânîq is real and is attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad as he spoke it. Nevertheless, he said it unconsciously or even consciously to assail the polytheists (Javanese: nglulu or a form of sarcasm). On the contrary, the moderate faction acknowledges the existence of the account of Gharânîq but does not attribute it to the Prophet Muḥammad because it was not his speech. It was the voice of the Satan that resembled the voice of the Prophet (Ibid.: 439-40).

It was admitted by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî himself that from the point of view of the sanad, the account of Gharânîq had many weaknesses. There was no continuity of the sanad, some of them are weak, and so on. However, if the various existing chains of the account had been compiled as a whole, it would have been an acceptable account. Here, al-‘Asqalânî as a ḥadîth expert looks like more concerned about the sanad issue and less concerned about the doctrinal implications of the account. For this reason, it seems that Muḥammad al-Ghâzâlî (1996) contrasts the understanding of ḥadîth between ḥadîth experts and fiqh experts.

Some of the sanads (the chains of transmitters) of the account of Gharânîq are based on the Companion of Ibn ‘Abbâs. The rest chains of the account do not have the first transmitter from the generations of the Companions. If there is an attribution to the Prophet it means that there has been a leap. The story of Gharânîq is a story of an event taking place in Mecca, while Ibn Abbâs, who was the first transmitter of the generations of Companions, belonged to the junior Companions (min ṣîhâr al-ṣâhâbah) that was prominent and grown-up in the Medina period. Why, then, was the account of Gharânîq not narrated by the first transmitter of the Companions? From this point of view, the validity of the account of Gharânîq should be questioned by its isnâd (the chain of transmission). Meanwhile, concerning the tamannâ (sûrah al-Ḥâjj (22): 53) Ibn ‘Abbâs, claimed to be the first transmitter, interpreted it as the hope of the heart (the whisper of the heart), not the spoken word. This kind of interpretation clearly does not support the attribution of the account of Gharânîq to the Prophet, which is related to the account where Ibn ‘Abbâs is considered as the first narrator. Is this not a “contradiction” and an “oddity”?

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî’s recognition of the existence of the account of Gharânîq has led him to the interpretative efforts (al-‘Asqalânî, vol.VIII: 34). This is a shift from the literal meaning of the verses that the Prophet consciously uttered the words ‘tilka al-Gharânîq’ while reciting the verses of al-Qur’ân, or unconsciously, which is clearly
 contrary to the principle of monotheism. He mentioned various interpretations. For example, the Prophet uttered these words when he was sleepy and unconscious. Then it was corrected by God. The Prophet pronounced it with the intent of assailing the polytheists. The one who pronounced it was the Satan with a voice that resembled the voice of the Prophet. This last takwil seems to be preferred by al-'Asqalâni.

If the account of Gharânîq is judged ‘internally and cumulatively’ (i.e. combining several similar accounts), the conclusion will generally recognize the acceptability of this account. However, if it is judged ‘externally and holistically’ (i.e. relating this account with other hadîths, al-Qur’ân, and the rationality of Islamic teachings), it will generate a conclusion that rejects the acceptability of the account. The rejection may not only mean that it is weak but is also considered to be false. This assumption must be completely contrary to the assumptions of those who accept it.

There is a “vague” impression in the attitude of those who acknowledge the existence of the account of Gharânîq. This vagueness can be seen from their tendency to leave the literal sense, while usually, the patterns of bi al-riwâyah (based on accounts) are in line with literalism. However, in the case of Gharânîq, the problem seems to be different. They feel as if there are double psychological problems. On the one hand, there will be a psychological burden if they do not accept the account of Gharânîq supported by the sanad (the chain of transmission). On the other hand, if they receive it, there will also be a similar burden because they must leave the literal meaning of the verses.

The Story of Gharânîq in Exegeses and Ḥadîths

The elaboration of the account of Gharânîq can be found both in Ḥadîths and exegeses. The emergence of the diverse perspectives on this account, from those who agree to those who strongly reject it, makes this account full of polemics. In classic bi al-ma’tîhir (based on accounts) exegeses, the existence of this account is generally acknowledged. It refers to the fact that such exegeses are very “appreciative” of every account supported by the sanads and make it a starting point in explaining the content of a verse. The reasoning used to interpret is generally not to criticize the existence of an account but rather to elaborate it.

In the book of Jâmi’ al-Bayân fî Ta’wil al-Qur’ân, commonly referred to as the “mother” of bi al-ma’tîhir exegeses when interpreting sûrah al-Hâjj (22): 52-53, al-Ṭabarî said that the Prophet in his meeting with the polytheists of the Quraysh had once wished not to have a revelation which is uncomfortable for them (al-Ṭabarî, 1992, vol. IX: 174-75). Then there was sûrah al-Najm which is inserted by the “verse” of Gharânîq that seemed to be an expression of a compromised tendency of the Prophet against his people. In the other part, al-Ṭabarî mentioned the background of sûrah al-Hâjj (22): 52-53. That was when the Prophet recited the revelation, the Satan inserted the Gharânîq through his speech. This incident greatly struck the heart of the Prophet so that he was very sad. To comfort his heart, Allah sent down sûrah al-Isrâ`(17): 73,

“And indeed, they were about to tempt you away from that which We revealed to you in order to [make] you invent about Us something else; and then they would have taken you as a friend”.

Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman
Volume 31, Nomor 2, Juli 2020
344
This verse implies that the event was normal as a manifestation of humanity. If al-Ṭabarî’s explanations are examined, it appears that he did not deny the existence of the account of Gharânîq although he did not explicitly attribute it to the Prophet.

Meanwhile, al-Suyūṭî in his exegesis book entitled al-Durr al-Manthûrī fi al-Tafsîr bi al-Ma’îthûr provided an exposition indicating his approval of the existence of the account of Gharânîq (al-Suyūṭî, 1990, vol. II: 661-64). The same issue can be found in Fath al-Qadîr by al-Syaукârî’s exegesis book (al-Syaукârî, vol.III: 463-464) and also in al-Nukat wa al-‘Uyûn by al-Mâwardî’s exegesis book. Thus, it is clear that the existence of the account of Gharânîq has been supported by some exegesis experts. In contrast, Ṣîddîq Hasan Khan in exegesis book, Fath al-Bayân fi Maqāṣîd al-Qur’ân, emphasized the invalidity of the account of Gharânîq. According to him, the story of Gharânîq was totally wrong (Ḥassan Khan, vol.VI: 245). Similarly, Muḥammad Ali al-Ṣâbûnî also rejected the validity of the account of Gharânîq. He argued that the account widely elaborated by exegesis experts was a “fictitious” story created by the Zindiq (the Atheits). In addition to counteracting those who acknowledge the validity of the account, al-Ṣâbûnî’s critical commentary is also intended to make people aware of many “strange” thoughts that have sneaked in and tied to the source of Islamic teachings. In line with this, in Ṣafwat al-Tafâṣîr, he didn’t relate at all the interpretation of sūrah al-Ḥâjj (22): 53 to the account of Gharânîq (al-Ṣâbûnî, 2001, vol. II: 269-70).

The different opinions among the exegesis experts have led to the polarization of understandings in addressing the existence of the story of Gharânîq. Regardless of whether the account is valid or not, the polarization of understandings has varied conceptual implications. At the same time, it is also an indicator of the diversity of perspectives and the paradigms of interpretation used. While the opinions that acknowledge the validity of the account of Gharânîq have been much blown up by the Orientalists and have been made as a weapon to insult Islam, those rejecting the validity gain more sympathy and support. This shows that the change in the cultural atmosphere is very influential in shifting the perspectives of the experts. When the recognition of the validity of the account of Gharânîq has not raised the fundamental excess and has not been made by the “outsiders” to strike Islam, the opinions acknowledging the validity are dominant. Nevertheless, after the situation changes new perspectives arise, the opinions rejecting the validity of the account of Gharânîq are strengthening.

The term ghurnuq (the singular form of the word gharânîq) has existed in the Arabic vocabularies since the Jahiliyyah era (the age of ignorance) meaning white birds flying high into the sky. Ghurnuq was the name for idols worshiped by the unbelievers of the Jahili. They called their idols ghurnuq because there was a belief that the idols worshipped would be able to give shafâ’ah (intercession to get reward and forgiveness and to ward them off from harm) like birds (al-Zamakhshyari, 1972, vol.III: 65; al-Jauzî, 1985, vol. II: 155). This means that the word ghurnuq has been attached much to their collective memory and theological concept.

The redaction of Gharânîq can also be found in the book of Nihâyah fi Gharîb al-Hadîth wa al-‘Athâr. Referring to the preface of the author, the redaction of ḥadîth or athar contained in this book are not based on the name of a particular transmitter who generally
On Validity of the Gharânîq ‘Ḥadīth’... , Mahmud Arif; Mohammad Kurjum.

belongs to the ḥadīths of the Prophet (Ibn Athîr, 1979, vol.III: 348-364). Thus, the redaction of Gharânîq (tilka al-gharânîq al-‘ūlā...) is considered to be attributed to the Prophet. For that reason, Ibn al-Athîr can be regarded as an expert who recognizes the existence and validity of the account of Gharânîq attributed to the Prophet, regardless whether this is a conscious or unconscious utterance of the Prophet.

Mentioning the redaction of Gharânîq, Ibn al-Athîr also quotes the āthâr of the Companions using the word ghurmuq. This indicates that the word ghurmuq (the singular form of the word gharânîq) had been popular in the era of al-Risâlah (messages communicated from Allah to the humans) of the Prophet. At least, this fact can indirectly serve as reinforcement for the existence and validity of the account of Gharânîq. Ibn Taimiyah, as quoted by Nurcholish Madjid, also mentioned about the account of Gharânîq. He said that as a human being, the Prophet could have done ‘wrong’ and ‘careless’, but in this case, he was immediately corrected by Allah (Madjid, 1986: 132). This statement was proposed in the context of the explanation of the existence of humanity in the Prophet (Shahab Ahmed, 1988: 67-124). Hence, the act of worshiping him, let alone considering him as God, is wrong. His humanity side has given ‘psychological’ and ‘sociological’ nuances to the sacred text. Thus, the Prophet as the recipient of revelations is not like an empty ‘bottle’, but rather a thinker who at the peak of his reflection with a high level of spirituality is able to receive the whispers of God brought by the al-Rûḥ al-Amîn (the spirit of faith and truth), Jibrîl (Gabriel).

Pros and Cons about the Account of Gharânîq

The polemics on the account of Gharânîq and its relation to sūrah al-Ḥajj (22): 52-53 has emerged among scholars since a long time ago. This is reasonable considering the existence of the account has fundamental implications for the construction of Islamic teachings. Many people deem the validity of the account of Gharânîq can tarnish the ʾismah of the Prophet (that the Prophet was protected), which, in turn, can also tarnish the revelation status of al-Qurʾān as a whole. If the Prophet in conveying the revelations of al-Qurʾān could have mixed them with the whispers of the Satan, would there have been guarantees for other matters? If in carrying out his duties, the Prophet had not been protected from slips, he might have been “careless” in doing other activities. Those who acknowledge the existence of the account of Gharaniq generally make a “compromise” effort related to the content of sūrah al-Ḥajj (22): 53-54. The Prophet pronounced the “verse” of Gharânîq, according al-Bâqilâni, actually to mock (taubîkhî) the polytheists. According to other opinions the “verse” of Gharânîq was pronounced by the Prophet when he was sleepy, which was then immediately corrected by God (al-ʿAsqalânî, vol.VIII: 438).

Wahbah al-Zuḥaili judging the account of Gharânîq as a lie, by citing al-Qurtubi᾿s exegesis, stated that the one who pronounced the “verse” of Gharânîq was the Satan himself using a voice similar to the voice of the Prophet. When the Prophet made a pause (saktah) in reading sūrah al-Najm (53): 19-20, the Satan imitated his voice and recited the “verse” of Gharânîq so that the polytheists of the Quraish assumed that the Prophet recited it as a revelation from Allah (al-Zuḥailî, 1991, vol. XVII: 249). This kind of
opinion on one side acknowledges the existence of the account of Gharâniq. On the other hand, it rejects the account when it is attributed to the Prophet.

Contrary to that opinion, Muḥammad al-Ghazâlî and Yusûf al-Qarḍâwî firmly rejected the existence of the account of Gharâniq. They thought that the recognition of the validity of this account was a chance that could be used by the opponents to strike Islam. In fact, the account of Gharâniq has inspired Salman Rushdie to entitle his novel with “Satanic Verses”. This novel has caused Ayatullâh Khomeini, the Spiritual Leader of Iran, giving order to hunt and kill him. Normally, al-Ghazâlî also regrettated the results of the study conducted by some experts, such as Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî and al-Suyûṭî who acknowledged the validity of the account of Gharâniq. According to al-Qarḍâwî, the Sunnah (Ḥadîth) had to be understood within the framework of al-Qur’ân. Therefore, the account of Gharâniq (claimed as a ḥadîth) had to be rejected because it was clearly contrary to al-Qur’ân. The account of Gharâniq is judged as a fabricated ḥadîth (maudû‘), the lowest qualification of assessment. Ḥadîths considered to be fabricated, are in fact no longer valid to be considered as ḥadîth. The title of Hadîth here is only majâżî (figurative).

Muḥammad al-Ghazâlî’s opinion seems more scientifically and rationally acceptable. This is because if we acknowledge the existence of the account of Gharâniq as the voice of the Satan that resembled the voice of the Prophet, how can we explain it scientifically-rationally? Moreover, if we acknowledge the account (the “verse”) of Gharâniq as the utterance of the Prophet coming from the whisper of the Satan and out of his conscious control, it will be even more impossible. Al-Ghazâlî’s above can be categorized as an opinion that strongly refuses it. For him, there was no tolerance for the recognition of the existence of the account since this would only lead to negative excesses. It seems that in addition to cross-checking with al-Qur’ân and the Sunnah, al-Ghazâlî also conducted rational reasoning (al-naẓâr al-‘aqlî) in assessing the account of Gharâniq. The content in the text of the account of Gharâniq (claimed by some scholars as a ḥadîth) was deemed contrary to the results of commonsense reasoning. This pattern of assessment, as stated by Musfîr Ghurmullâh al-Damînî, is a standard pattern in the criticism of the text of ḥadîths (Ghurmullâh, 1984; al-Idlibî, 1983: 304).

Consonant with that opinion, Aḥmad Ḥasan considered the account of Gharâniq to be a part of artificial stories attributed to the Prophet as a manifestation of his compromised desire for the aspirations of the polytheists in order to succeed in developing the mission of al-Risâlah (conveying messages) (A. Hasan, 1984: 57-58). He is indeed acknowledged to have a strong desire to compromise. However, it is impossible if he sacrificed the basic teachings he carried. On the other hand, if the “verse” of Gharâniq is the realization of his compromise attitude, it means that he compromised on aqidah. Then how could this be done? His “compromise” is merely a strategy for the success of his da‘wah (preaching). Thus, compromise is only an instrument to achieve his goal. It is impossible for him to compromise, if he sacrifices the essence of his teaching. Such a compromise strategy of the Prophet is commonly known as al-hanîfîyyah al-samhâh (the straight and easy monotheism).

Aḥmad Ḥasan judged that the attribution of the account of Gharâniq to the Prophet was a form of his compromise tendency that was “dramatized” by a particular group. It
is similar to the case of *naskh* (abrogation) which is understood as the process of abolishing the rules in a law because of the Prophet’s compromise attitude towards the demands of the environment. In carrying out the mission of *al-Risalah*, the Prophet is neither in a “vacuum” nor a heavenly “robot” that is totally unfamiliar with the demands of his people. The Prophet is like “Hermes” (one of the gods in Greek mythology) whose task is to convey messages from God to be understood by his people without distorting the messages.

The writer’s exploration of some literatures, especially related to hadiths, has found out that many do not contain the account of Gharāniq. Abdurrahmān bin Ali al-Syaibānī (1988) did not mention about the account in his book entitled *Tamyīz al-Thayyib min al-Khabīs Fīmā Yadāru Alsinati Al-Nās min al-Ḥadīth*. This means that the account was not recorded by him, or it was recorded but not included because he judged it not as the hadith of the Prophet (something based on him). The writer has also tracked *Mujam al-Mufahras li Alfāzī al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawî* by Wintsink and Fuād ‘Abd al-Bāqî (1987), but he did not find the account of Gharāniq. Therefore, it can be concluded that this account only exists outside Imām Mālik and Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *al-Kutub al-Sittah, Musnad al-Dārīmi, and Muwaṭṭa*. In fact, these books are considered as a parameter of the books of ḥadīth. That is the books whose contents have been widely recognized to be valid.

At least, if the authoritative hadīth does not mention the account of Gharāniq, we need to be “suspicious” of the existence of this account. It may be true that the account of Gharāniq exists as recorded in some literatures, but it is not attributed to the Prophet because if it is attributed to the Prophet, why do the standard literatures not mention it? Is the account of Gharāniq not close to the interpretation of the verses of al-Qur’ān, but why is it not quoted in *muṭabarah* (recognized; legitimate) literatures? The proofs of whether the account (story) of Gharāniq exists or not can only be based on written evidences, while *muṭabarah* written documents do not record it. This means that the existence and validity statuses of the account are questionable.

**Critical Analyses: Towards the Common Ground**

Understanding the account of Gharāniq can be allocated in the context of interpretation and understanding of sūrah al-Ḥājj (22): 52. In this verse, the keywords “tamānā” and “ummīyyatihī” do not only mean: reading or reading verbally, but they also mean hoping or the hope from the heart. That means the Prophet had a hope for the success of his preaching, but the Satan hindered the realization of that hope (*alqâ al-shaiṭānu*) (al-Ṭabatāba’ī, 1991, vol.XIV: 393). Furthermore, an expression as found in the account of Gharāniq was the one that were popular among the people of Mecca, and they often recited it while rounding the Ka’ba (Hasan, 1984: 222). It was possible that soon after the Prophet recited sūrah al-Najm (53): 19-20 telling the names of their gods, they recited together the expression/ utterance familiar to them. Such an understanding is based on the opinion saying that what is meant by the word *al-shaiṭān* in sūrah al-Ḥājj (22): 53 is the Satan among humans (a human who behaves badly) (al-‘Asqalānī, vol. VIII: 440; al-Andalūsī, 1993, vol.VI: 352). This kind of understanding is a compromise
On Validity of the Gharâniq Ḥadîth’, Mahmud Arif, Mohammad Kurjum

because it recognizes the existence of the account of Gharâniq as a popular utterance and rejects it as something attributed to the Prophet. Therefore, it can accommodate various opinions, both the pros and cons, proportionally.

As mentioned above, the word ghurnuq had been widely known by the people in the Jahiliyyah Era (the age of ignorance). This word means white storks flying high into the sky. They called their idols ghurnuq (the singular form of gharâniq) because they believed that the idols were the intermediaries/messengers of their worship to God and the ones that could give sha'â’ah (intercession to get reward and forgiveness and to ward them off from harm). Such beliefs are in line with the meaning of ghurnuq from the perspective of language and are synchronous with the meaning of al-‘Uzzâ and al-‘Lâta (al-Isfahânî, n.y.: 466), the names of idols they worship. It indicates that the word ghurnuq had already been well known in the Jahiliyyah era. This word was even included in their (the people in the Jahiliyyah Era) rituals while rounding the Ka’bah which was surrounded by idols.

Conclusion

The acceptance of the account of Gharâniq rests on so many existing sanads (the chain of transmitters). Nevertheless, many experts strongly reject the acceptability of this account. Some experts reject it totally, and some others only reject its attribution to the Prophet Muhammad but recognize the expression: tilka al-gharâniq al-‘ulâ wa inna sha’â’ahatahuma laturjâ as being well known to the people in the Jahiliyyah Era. That is an expression strongly attached to the memory of the Quraish at that time. Based on the opinions of the majority of Hadith experts, if there is a contradiction between the jarḥ (critical assessment) and ta’dîl (positive assessment), the jarḥ should be prioritized. The opinions denouncing the account of Gharâniq are worthy of consideration more than the ones recognizing it. However, the historical evidences suggest that the expression of gharâniq had been widely known to the people in the Jahiliyyah era. Thus, “the compromising” conclusion that can be proposed is that the expression of gharâniq did exist as a popular expression, but the attribution to the Prophet (as his speech) when he recited the verses of the Qur’an is a groundless form of dramatization. Such a dramatization is indeed possible by the literal meaning of the verses.

The attribution of the expression of gharâniq to the Prophet Muhammad Saw has raised a high “risk” of doctrinal implication because it will open the chance for the disagreement on his ismah (being protected). It will lead to a debate on the originality of the revelation in the verses of the Qur’an as a whole. For that reason, it is reasonable that contemporary Muslim thinkers, such as Muhammad al-Ghazâli and Yusâf al-Qardâwi firmly reject the recognition of the existence and validity of the account of Gharâniq. They seem a priori to this account, so it looks like it is easy for them to ignore or neglect the existing historical data.

References


On Validity of the Gharânîq ‘Ḥadîth’ …, Mahmud Arif, Mohammad Kurjum


