

The phoenix after Zakariya' al-Qazwini

Anqa: the greatest of the birds in form and the largest in body. It captures the elephant just as the kestrel captures the mouse. In ancient times, it would make captures from the houses of people and they suffered damage from his crimes until one day it carried off a bride adorned. The prophet Anzala (whom Allah bless and deliver) prayed against it. So Allah removed it to certain islands of the Ocean beyond the Equator, and there is (there) an island that no man has reached. In it are numerous wild animals, such as the elephant, the rhinoceros, the water-buffalo, the leopard the lion and birds of prey, Yet the Anqa does not hunt any of them because they are under his dominion. If it obtains any quarry, it eats some of it and the rest is eaten by the animals under his dominion. It only hunts the elephant or the great fish, or the sea-serpent and when it has finished, it leaves the rest to the animals. Then it goes up to its perch and looks with pleasure at their eating of it. And when it flies, there is heard of its feathers a sound like the approach of a flood, or the noise of trees in a tempest of wind.

Moreover the following is related on the authority of certain traders:

We strayed from our course in the Encircling Ocean and we were in perplexity. And lo! We were overshadowed by a great darkness like a vast cloud: Then the sailors said 'that is the Anqa'. And we followed it until we had entered under that darkness. Then our tongues were loosed in prayer. And it did not cease from travelling with us until we regained our course; then it vanished from us. They relate the life-span of the Anqa is one thousand and seven hundred years, and it mates when it has reached the age of five hundred years.

When the time comes for the female (anqa) to lay the egg, she becomes very sick and the male brings sea water in his beak and injects it into her, and the egg comes out easily. Then the male brood over the egg and the female walks about and flies off. The egg hatches in 125 years and the offspring is full grown. If it is female, then the (older) female anqa gathers a great deal of firewood, and the male rubs his beak on the beak of the female until the fire is thereby ignited and the fire is set ablaze. Then the female enters the fire and is consumed. The offspring remains as the spouse of the male. And if the offspring is a male, then the (older) male anqa does as the female would and the offspring remains as the spouse of the female. Even stranger things are told of the anqa but as they were not founded a trustworthy source, we shall stop here.

The wonders of Creation. Zakariya' ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini Ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen 1848) vol. p. 420; ed Faruq Sa'ad Beirut 1977, p. 456F.; Tunis u.d., p.281