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ORAL NARRATING TRADITION OF THE ARAB WORLD: A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR THE MINIATURE PAINTINGS OF HARIRI’S MAQAMAT

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Abstract

This paper argues the relationship between the miniature paintings of the frequently illustrated manuscript of the 13th century Iraq and Syria, “Hariri’s Maqamat”, and the oral narrating tradition of the Arab world. It is intended to form a link with the oral narrating tradition and the miniature paintings in the three existing copies of Hariri’s Maqamat. Puppet theatre and shadow plays of the period, which were derived from the oral narrating tradition, influenced the compositional settings and figure placements seen in those miniature paintings.

Compositional settings and figure placements in the miniature paintings of some of the different copies of Maqamat recalls a kind of theatrical setting. Figures, which are placed on a colourless background with vertical and horizontal separations in an architectural manner, seem to be performing a theatrical play with their gestures and mimicry. Painters of the Maqamat could as well be assumed as one of the audiences in the theatrical plays performed by a narrative. Thus, the settlement of the Maqamat paintings could be inspired from the stage settings and the figure movements of those performances.

Key Words: Oral narrating tradition, Arab world, Maqamat, Miniature painting

ARAP DÜNYASINDA SÖZLÜ ANLATIM GELENEĞİ: HARİRİ’NİN MAKAMAT MİNYATÜRLERİ İÇİN BİR ESİN KAYNAĞI

Öz

Bu çalışmada, 13. yüzyıl Irak ve Suriye’inde sıkça resmedilmiş olan Hariri’nin Makamat adlı yazmasında yer alan minyatürlerin Arap dünyasındaki sözlü anlatım geleneğiyle olan ilgisi araştırılmıştır. Amaç, sözlü anlatım geleneğiyle, Hariri’nin Makamat’ının günümüze ulaşmış üç ayrı kopyasındaki minyatürler arasında bir bağ kurmaktır. Sözlü anlatım geleneğinden doğmuş olan dönemin kukla tiyatrosu ve gölge oyunları da, Makamat minyatürlerinin kompozisyon düzeni ve figür yerleştirmelerinde etkili olmuştur.

Makamat’ın ayrı kopyalarındaki bazı minyatürlerdeki kompozisyon düzeni ve figür yerleştirmeleri, bir tiyatro sahnesini çağrıştırmaktadır. Renksiz bir arka plan üzerinde, dikey ve yatay bölünmelerle mimari bir kurgu içine yerleştirilen figürler, jest ve mimikleriyle bir tiyatro oyunu canlandırıyor gibidirler. Makamat minyatürlerini yapan

sanatçıların da, bir anlatıcı tarafından canlandırılan performanslarda izleyici oldukları varsayılabilir. Böylece, minyatürlerin de bu sahne kurgusu ve figür hareketinden esinle düzenlendiği düşünülebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sözlü anlatım geleneği, Arap dünyası, Makamat, Minyatür

1. Introduction

The Maqamat is known as the most frequently illustrated book in the medieval Arab world of the early 13th century. It displays an elaborate style and its popular content gives reader the opportunity to enjoy the ambiance conveyed by the narrative and the miniatures. The author Hariri, set the story around a cynical urban hero Abu Zayd who makes his living by begging or by swindle, using wit and rhetoric for his purposes. According to Doris Abbousseif, the immense success of the Maqamat is indicative of the artistic disposition of medieval Arab society.¹

As Oleg Grabar notes, dozens of manuscripts of Hariri's Maqamat have been preserved from his own time, including a probable autograph, and hundreds have remained from the 13th and later centuries. Nearly all of them were copied in the core areas of the Arabic-speaking world—Egypt, Syria, Iraq—where there lived and prospered the class of educated Arabs likely to enjoy reading this book and interested in acquiring, perhaps even in sponsoring, a luxury edition of such a work. Even though the text itself and the reasons for its success are hardly topics for illustrations, thirteen of these manuscripts are known to have been provided with images inspired by narrative episodes from individual stories.²

There are three well known Maqamat manuscripts known as; the Leningrad manuscript (1225), the al-Wasiti (the scribe) Paris Bibliotheque Nationale (1237) and the Istanbul manuscript (mid 13th century). These show the most common characteristics that the Maqamat miniatures depict: expression of feeling, gestures, colourless background behind the architecture, setting of scene more significant but rather like a stage backdrop. Those perhaps supply the basic sources for the style and imagery of the formative period of Arab painting which owes to Iran of the pre-Islamic Sasanian period and Byzantium of the Meditarreanean Christian Civilization as they were both conquered by the Arabs in their 7th century expansion.³

In this paper, I will begin by analysing the cultural context into which the Maqamat was born as a literary genre, carrying features of oral narrating tradition of the medieval Arab world, from which it probably gained its content. The point I am interested here is to link the oral narrating tradition with the paintings. First, I

¹ Doris Abouseif; *Beauty in Arabic Culture*, Markus Wiener Pub., Princeton, 1999, p. 95.

² Oleg Grabar; *Maqamat al-Hariri, Illustrated Arabic Manuscript from the 13th Century*, Facsimile published by Touchart, London 2003, p.38.

³ Robert Hillenbrand; *Islamic Art and Architecture*, Thames&Hudson Inc., London, 1999, p. 129-131.

will specifically look at oral narrating tradition and then I will examine the urban context which seems to be in connection with the reasons of great popularity of literary manuscripts that are illustrated. Then, I will move on to discuss the relationship of Maqamat miniatures with the other manuscripts of the period in terms of their link with the influence of oral narrating.

From Hasan El-Shamy's view, it could be said that the maqama may have been plays written for theatrical performance, composed as "dramatic literature" in didactic purposes.⁴ This point of view supports the suggestion that miniatures from the Maqamat indicate the scenes of theatrical performance such as shadow plays. In the course of this essay I hope to provide evidence that will back up my suggestion that the miniatures transmit a sense of oral narration, in which the audience is the reader himself, by means of moral and didactic messages sent throughout the written text. This idea will be expanded in the conclusion.

2. Oral Narrating Tradition and Its Relation to Maqamat

This section will briefly discuss the probable involvement of oral narrating tradition of the Arab world in Hariri's work Maqamat. It is scholarly a common apprehension that the composition settings of the Maqamat are presumably derived from the theatrical performances such as shadow plays of the period. Thus, those composition settings evoke a relevancy to the tradition of oral narrating as an act of performance.

The oral tradition in the Arab world is one of a collective imaginary and a reflection of the consciousness. Tales and stories have had twofold purposes: On the one hand, they provide entertainment to an audience so long accustomed to orality that they have developed a particular taste for, and an appreciation of verbal imagery. On the other hand, tales respond to a variety of needs – cultural, social, religious, etc – that emerge constantly from the individual's interaction with the surrounding, as well as from the influence of the society on the individual. Local oral narrating and performing traditions were clearly institutions in Middle East and North African Maghrebian societies. These traditions existed alongside the more conventional performance modes such as song, dance, ritual and ceremonies. Oral narrator was a performer articulating a social collective identity in the context of the region. The performance functions traditionally associated with the oral narrator and oral tradition in which the fundamental components make up an orally-founded tradition: an orally narrated "text", the human narrator (body and voice, or gesture and word), the transmission of the "text" through the human medium in dialogue with the audience. Traditionally, the oral narrator used voice to narrate a series or sequence of events, whether factual, legendary or fictitious. Theatrical quality was added to the narration by imitation, mimicry, impersonation in order to create verbal imagery. Through this imagery and theatrical play, the oral

⁴ Hasan El-Shamy; *Folk Traditions of the Arab World*, Bloomington, Indiana Uni. Press, 1995, p.14.

narrator created a “place”, a fictional or theatrical space in which the audience was invited to interact. In terms of language of cultural and symbolic codes, manifest in gestures and words, and drawn from a common pool of sources like social customs, political or religious practices, both oral narrator and audience engage in dialogue as if they are all part of a theatrical performance. Within the Arabic-Islamic oral tradition, the spectator has characteristically been an active one, as the audience has been accustomed to playing a participatory role in the reception of the poem or narration.⁵

A characteristic miniature of the Leningrad manuscript showing that Abu Zayd appealing to the generosity of the Governor of Merv (**See Image 1**), gives us helpful hints to animate a chimerical (imaginery) oral narrating scene in our minds. First of all, to be able to speak of such a scene, we have to describe the figural placements throughout the composition. Four figures at the right form part of the assembly, all of them attentively witnessing the proceedings. According to Richard Ettinghausen, “...among them is al-Harith, the narrator, probably the figure behind the Governor...”⁶. On the left, there are two figures which looked irrelevant to the theme of the scene, seem to be in disregard for the proceedings and talk to each other. Without making descriptions of the architectural setting, which quite resembles the stage for a shadow play with flatness, this scene could become a good example to make a reasonable attribution to our suggestion that some of the miniatures of Maqamat transmit a sense of an oral narrating act is taking place.

⁵ Deborah Folaron; “Oral Narrating and Performing Traditions in The History of Modern Middle Eastern and Maghrebian Theatre and Drama”, Nitle Arab World Project 2002, <http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts>, pp 1-11.

⁶ Richard Ettinghausen; Arab Painting, Rizzoli Int. Pub., Washington, 1977, p. 105.



Image 1. Maqamat Hariri: Abu Zayd before the Governor of Mevr (Thirty-eighth Maqama). Baghdad (Iraq), 1225-1235, ms. S.23, Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences, Leningrad.

We could trace this transmission here in this scene with a close look to the placement of the figures as the narrator al-Harith is on the right fitted into a niche that somewhat separates him from the act of proceeding, and the three figures sitting on the right bottom are likely to be assumed as the audience ready to participate in this happening. Therefore, we could speak of an oral narrating action in which the oral narrator creating a theatrical space and the audience is invited to interact. If we are to make a clearer definition, this could be described rather by “transferring the image of an oral narrating to the surface of miniature painting as a visual depiction of the act”.

As audience is the “producer” of interactive transaction, it is important to entertain audience properly to get the necessary attention in order to provide interaction which eventually creates the theatrical performance itself. This depends on the ability and skills of the narrator to entertain and receive attention, which he probably achieves by all the physical gestures as we can relate this effort of the narrator to the scenes from the Maqamat exhibiting clear gestures and a kind of body language.⁷ In the “Forty-third Maqama” of the Paris Maqamat (Arabe 5847), we can easily recognize the gestures of each figure, though this composition is not fitted into a static ready-made architectural setting, and no longer transmits the

⁷ Deborah Folaron; Ibid., p. 3.

sense of a shadow play (**See Image 2**). Yet, we could suggest that al-Wasiti, the painter and the calligrapher of the Paris manuscript (Arabe 5847), while illustrating the text, in this particular painting he might have intended to walk in the same path together with an oral narrator as both of them would be endeavouring to create a theatrical performance – oral narrator, live with the act of performance, and the painter, visually on a two dimensional paper.

Because the oral narration is negotiated socially (through narrator-audience-performance dynamics), the orally narrated “text” becomes linked to the concept of social-collective identity and representation. The orally narrated text, within oral tradition, has the capacity to act either as a stabilizing force or as a force of disruption, capable of change in order to deal with strange or foreign elements encountered by the community. In confronting foreign elements, oral narration generates alternative solutions that reveal coping mechanisms by means of personal performance techniques, creating a dialogue that is both psychological and physical with the participating public – that is to be called “the audience”. It functions as a tool of survival and organization, or adaptation of social values, norms and practices; as such, it defines the socio-cultural values of community.⁸

⁸ Deborah Folaron; Ibid., pp. 5-6.

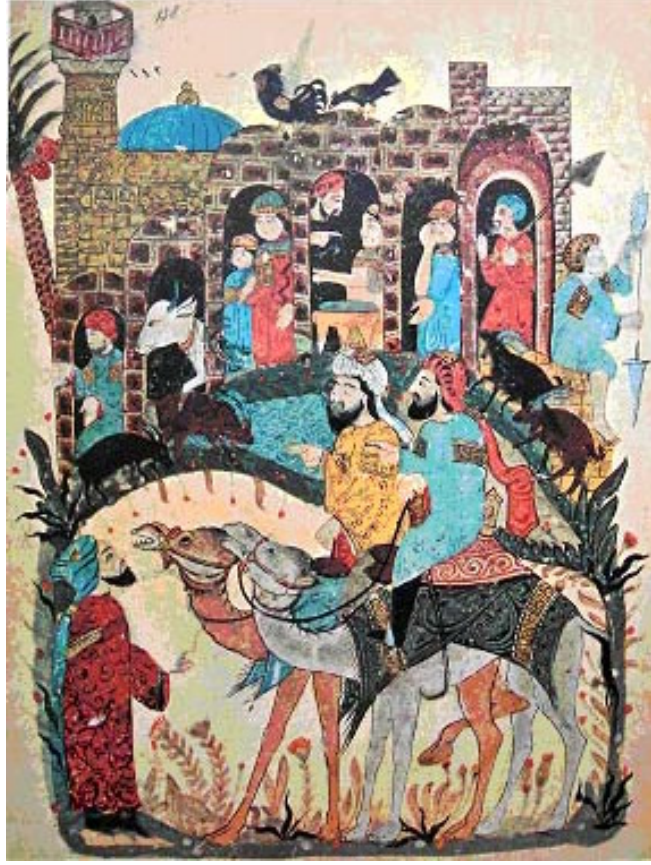


Image 2. Maqamat Hariri: Discussion near a Village (Forty-third Maqama). Baghdad (Iraq),1237, Painted by al-Wasiti, ms. Arabe 5847, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

The genres of narration that emerged in the Arabic prose tradition began to overlap as early as the 7th century during the Islamization of many diverse regions. Of these genres, the sira, qissa and maqama would acquire a distinctive performance personality in popular storytelling, as their oral transmission was often accompanied by imitation, music and impersonation. Maqama was picaresque in tone, composed in dialogue, and dependent on impersonations. It featured marginalized characters and the social underworld mostly through inverse implication. The genre itself came to fulfil a number of different objectives, ranging from debates on specific issues to advice; often employed by educated and literary elite poets. The “maqama” undoubtedly has been considered the most perfect form of literary presentation in Arabic literature since it came into being in the eleventh century.⁹

⁹ Hasan El-Shamy; Folk Traditions of the Arab World, Bloomington, Indiana Uni. Press, 1995, p. 17.

As Folaron notes in her study, "...John Renard, in his study on the heroic image as narrated in the Islamic world, notes that these very kinds of psychological strategies for dealing with local situations and the world at large are specifically revealed in the particular depictions of heroes and other characters in the texts...".¹⁰ On the contrary, in Hariri's *Maqamat*, we see that Abu Zayd displays completely an unheroic character; indeed, Shirley Guthrie asserts that Hariri was insistent that his work had an underlying moral purpose as Abu Zayd, the unprincipled and disreputable rogue, dies as a good Muslim after having repented. In fact, Hariri still gives the moral and didactic messages over the inverse implication of a "hero" that is the anti-heroic image and nature of Abu Zayd.¹¹

3. The Urban Context of 12th and 13th Centuries of The Arab World

In this section, to be able to explain the urban context and social attitude of the period within a limited frame, in the first place, it is preferred to speak shortly of the understanding and position of arts within the society of 12th and 13th century Arab world.

As an indicator of social and economical aspects of a community, artistic production of early Arab tradition is important in referring to the popularity of *Maqamat*. The 9th and 13th centuries were a time of intellectual awakening for the Islamic world, throughout in which the translations from Persian, Sanskrit, Syriac and Greek into Arabic were made. Besides, the major appearance of Islamic art in the production of luxury objects for the rulers and the bourgeoisie were common. Luxury in the courtly context meant power; for the urban bourgeoisie it served pleasure and represented social prestige. Whereas the main requirement of being a good Muslim depended on proper practice of religion which was possible only in the city, urbanity is thus rooted in the religion of Islam, which also views the human being as a member of a community. Also, the ruling class had to reside in the city in order to gain the approbation of the religious authorities and to maintain an income from trade and industry.¹² So, this may draw a general picture of how the Arab social life had its urban context from religious and political circumstances, that there was a relation between the purpose of producing arts and the reasons it had to refer to "urban" in character.

During the period of 12th – 13th centuries, urban culture was important with the rise of the wealthy merchant classes; outside the courts, the wealthy merchants must have been the buyers of artistic products. In her book "Beauty in Arabic Culture", Doris Abouseif mentions about the *Arabian Nights*, as a literary document of the early Arab world, including stories about wealthy cosmopolitan merchants who dealt with goods from all over the world to satisfy a sophisticated

¹⁰ Deborah Folaron; *Ibid.*, pp. 7.

¹¹ Shirley Guthrie; *Arab Social Life in The Middle Ages*, Saqi Books, London, 1995, p. 20

¹² Doris Abouseif; *Ibid.*, pp. 159-164.

clientele.¹³ Parallel to this, a growth of popular culture became significant and there had been a tendency towards combining sophisticated eloquence with an older tradition of oral narration. Other popular and common artistic expressions were Shi'ite passion plays, shadow plays as most of the Maqamat miniatures show resemblances of those plays.¹⁴ According to Khalid Amine, the Shi'ites' ritual passion play called *Taziye* (condolence) is one example among many and it is perhaps the most tragic form in the Islamic performing traditions. It is a formulaic space commemorating the historical martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammed, and his family.*

Besides *Taziye*, the shadow play was also performed during the medieval period in the Arab world. Shadow plays were performed with figures held by sticks against a back-lit canvas screen. The audience sitting in front of the screen saw only the shadows of the figures. The man who moved the figures spoke or sang the text just as though the moving figures were speaking or singing. The performance takes place in a fully arranged theatrical space in which a screen separates stage and auditorium. In addition, the shadow play remains the only performing tradition in the medieval Arab world that relies on a written script.¹⁵

Another point is that, taking a brief look at the term "adab" that relates to Arab literature may designate the link between the modality of literature and the social context of the 12th – 13th century Arab world. The word adab means literature in modern Arabic, but originally it meant a specific type of culture or life-style. The development of adab culture in the Abbasid period was an expression of the aesthetic needs of a sophisticated urban society. Originally, the term adab meant habit or tradition; with it came to designate "high quality of soul, good upbringing, urbanity and courtesy". Adab had also bearing on culture and entertaining erudition, including poetry, rhetoric and Arab tradition which could be defined as the non-religious culture. The literature of adab was light, pleasing, humorous, rational, cosmopolitan and enlightened. It consisted of a variety of subjects and had to be interesting and witty, but not too scholarly. Excessive aestheticism and the prevailing elitism of the Abbasid period may explain the growth of an interest in the vernacular and even in the underworldly as a reaction. The taste for the underworld found its expression in the genre whose heroes were

¹³ Doris Abouseif; *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴ David Talbot Rice; *Islamic Painting, A Survey*, Edinburgh Uni. Pres, Edinburgh, 1971, pp. 58-62.

* In the year of 680, Hussein led his family and followers from Medina to Kufa at the request of the Muslims there. Outside the city on the plains of Kerbela, Yazid, the governor of the region and the son of the first Umayyad Caliph, intercepted him. Yazid's army slaughtered Hussein and his followers after a siege that lasted for ten days. Abandoned by the Muslims of Kufa, Hussein died for his ideals in the face of tyranny. Since then Hussein has become for the Shi'ites the greatest martyr of human history. (Khalid Amine; Khalid Amine; "Theatre in the Arab World: A Difficult Birth", *Theatre Research International*, Vol.31, No:2, pp. 148.)

¹⁵ Khalid Amine; "Theatre in the Arab World: A Difficult Birth", *Theatre Research International*, Vol.31, No:2, pp. 148-150.

eloquent vagabonds and beggars. The Maqamat of Hariri belongs to this category. And the genre maqama rose in an ambience which displayed a decline of sophistication.¹⁶

The credibility of an anti-hero at this period in the mould of Abu Zayd seems to be reasonable and exemplifies a change of spirit. Hariri frequently used these tales as a subtle and indirect way of satirizing the prevailing social order and drawing a moral, and it is likely that they in some way gave a sophisticated voice to the urban bourgeoisie; in this may lie one reason for their considerable appeal throughout the Arab world.¹⁷ As this clearly explains the great popularity of the Maqamat's text, since it sends moral messages through an anti-hero to the urban bourgeoisie which definitely conveys a contrast; also the reason for this great popularity of the miniatures of Maqamat could be emerged from the sudden surge of the popular dramatic arts of the period – Shi'ite passion plays, puppet theatre, and shadow plays. The performance taking place in those plays immediately evokes the action shown in those miniatures. Such a relationship between the shadow plays and the miniatures seems more significant when it is realised that the shadow plays held against a white screen with multicoloured motives.¹⁸

4. Relation of Maqamat Miniatures with the Specific Manuscripts of The Period

In this section, it is intended to display the relation of Maqamat miniatures with the specific manuscripts of the period in terms of their relevancy to the effect of oral narration on literary texts as well as on composition settings and stylistic features.

As it is mentioned in the former section, the emergence of intellectual taste and the demand among the urban society towards literature, theatrical performances and illustrated manuscripts took place between 9th and 13th centuries. There are two types of manuscripts revealing different influences; one is the Greek medical and scientific texts translated into Arabic and the other is the literary texts such as novels, prose (history and poetry) which means that as they have different subjects, they may both express a different way of illustrating. Scientific texts, such as "Kitab al-Baitara" was the Arabic version of Greek "Hippiatrica" which is the earliest manuscript identified with the Baghdad school dated 1209, an early further example Dioscorides "Materia Medica", or al-Jazari's "Book of The Knowledge of Mechanical Devices" (Automata), all had to be descriptive and virtual in their pictorial language which the illustrator could achieve this over the explanatory text. For instance, a miniature painting of an "Elephant Clock" from the al-Jazari's

¹⁶ Doris Abouseif; Ibid., pp. 89-94.

¹⁷ Shirley Guthrie; Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹⁸ Richard Ettinghausen; Ibid., p. 81.

Automata (1315) in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, shows clearly how the device works conveying definitely an Oriental style (**See Image 3**).

On the other hand, literary texts such as the Maqamat with its ingenuity of eloquence, offers little to the illustrator to create a virtually relative scene to the text. Since the illustrator is not aware of what these verbal deceptions suggest, the illustrations of the Maqamat give an insight into the Arab social life, mostly informative about Iraq as they were executed there. The lively and colourful illustrations produced in 13th century Baghdad depict a variety of scenes from urban life in a style that conveys the jesting and caricatured character of the sketches. In their realism these miniatures reveal many features of medieval Arab life as this could be accepted as the expression of the sophisticated taste for art and literature among the Arab urban bourgeoisie.

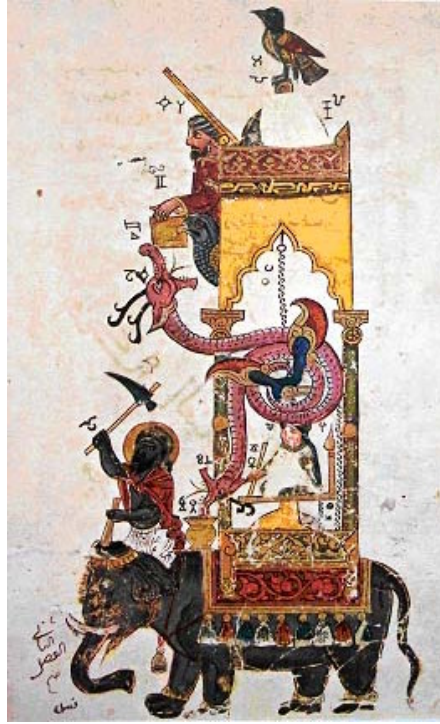


Image 3. Book of the Knowledge of Mechanical Devices (Kitab fi Ma'rifat al-Hiyal al-Handasiya) of al-Jazari: The Elephant Clock. Probably Syria, 1315, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

There are two couples of miniatures from different manuscripts that may fit into my suggestion which looks at those miniatures as if they were influenced from the oral narrating tradition as an act of performance. The first one is the scene called "Pharmacy" from Materia Medica dated 1224, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and this scene generally depicts how to produce medicinal

concoctions (**See Image 4**). If we turn to the compositional setting of the scene, it is apparent that the flatness, the architectural framework and the character of the figures recalls the stage setting of a shadow play as in the Leningrad manuscript of the Maqamat, in the scene of Abu Zayd before the Cadi of Sa'da in Yemen (Thirty-seventh Maqama), dated 1225-1235 (**See Image 5**).

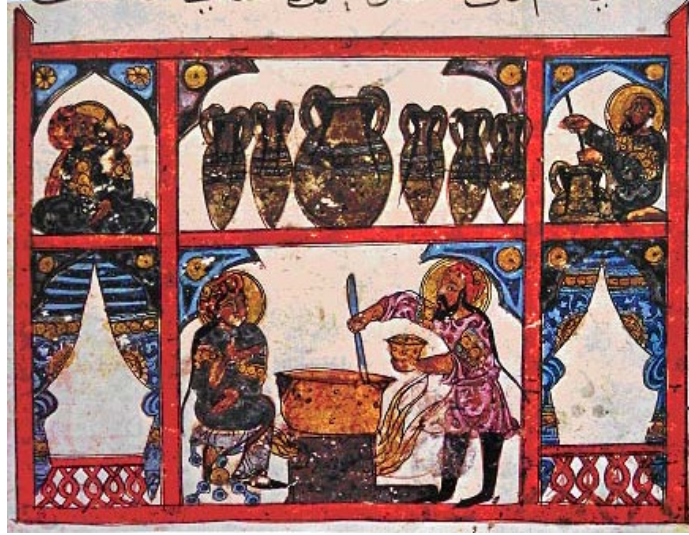


Image 4. De Materia Medica of Dioscorides: The Pharmacy, Baghdad .8Iraq), 1224. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Image 5. Maqamat Hariri: Abu Zayd before the Cadi of Sada in Yemen (Thirty-seventh Maqama). Baghdad (Iraq), 1225-1235, ms. S.250, Oriental Institute, Leningrad.

From the aspect of the settings of these two compositions, they show similarity as the picture surface is divided vertically creating niches on both sides, some of the figures are fitted into those niches, the action takes place in the centre of the picture, the figures make gestures; and decorative tools such as the knotted curtains are similar to each other. Thus, both scenes recall an act of oral narrating as we assume that the illustrator might have been influenced from those performances, since he was the audience, and probably created a rather close depiction of what had left in his mind from the oral narrating performance.

The second couple of miniatures that may again help us to make a connection with the oral narrating influence are the “Story of Bayad and Riyad” in the Vatican Library dated 13th century, and the Paris Maqamat (Forty-second Maqama) dated 1222. In many ways the setting of this scene “Bayad singing and playing the ud before the lady and her handmaidens” (**See Image 6**) is parallel to the Forty-second Maqama “Abu Zayd addresses an assembly in Najran” (**See Image 7**), through the juxtaposition of figures on a horizontal line on the same stage, the simple vertical lines intended to give the expression of a frame and again the gestures of the figures. According to these two different couples of miniatures, it could be said that there is a visible tie to the way oral narrating performed as in this sense it is possible to think that maqama was written for theatrical performance such as shadow plays, which were also driven from the oral narrating tradition.

5. Conclusion

The oral narrating tradition of the medieval Arab world is important for its socio-cultural content and its intention to give moral and didactic messages through an orally narrated text. As it is mentioned in the essay, oral narrating is likely to form the style and content of one of the literary genres maqama.

From the view that maqama may have been written for theatrical performance such as shadow plays or puppet theatre which seems to be very relevant; as an act of performance, oral narrating could be the source of inspiration for both the literary maqama and the miniatures of the Maqamat. Some of the composition settings and the figural representation with gestures evoke this relevancy to the tradition of oral narrating.

The main point searched to explore in this essay is the suggestion that some of the miniatures of Maqamat transmit a sense as if an oral narrating act is taking place. We can trace this transmission in certain scenes where there is totally depiction of a theatrical performance; it is the oral narrating action in which the oral narrator creating a theatrical space and the audience is invited to interact. This



Image 6. Story of Bayad and Riyad (Hadith Bayad u Riyad): Bayad singing and playing the ud before the lady and her handmaidens. Maghrib (Spain or Morocco), 13th century. Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican.



Image 7. Maqamat Hariri: Abu Zayd addresses an assembly in Najran (Forty-second Maqama). Probably Syria, 1220, ms. Arabe 6094, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

could be described as “transferring the image of an oral narrating to the surface of miniature painting as a visual depiction of the act”. Besides, there are also other scenes resembling an act of oral narrating that may drive us to assume that the illustrator might have been influenced from those performances, since he was the audience, and probably in the effort to create a close depiction of what he had seen in reality as the oral narrator performs his story.

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LIST OF IMAGES*

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- Maqamat Hariri: Discussion near a Village (Forty-third Maqama). Baghdad (Iraq), 1237, Painted by al-Wasiti, ms. Arabe 5847, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.
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* The photographs of Maqamat Hariri miniature paintings used in this essay are taken from the book "Arab Painting" by R. Ettinghausen.

Story of Bayad and Riyad (Hadith Bayad u Riyad): Bayad singing and playing the ud before the lady and her handmaidens. Maghrib (Spain or Morocco), 13th century. Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican.

Maqamat Hariri: Abu Zayd addresses an assembly in Najran (Forty-second Maqama). Probably Syria, 1220, ms. Arabe 6094, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

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