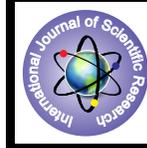


The Form of Society in the *MaqÁmas*



Education

KEYWORDS : maqÁma, social criticism, beggars, anecdotes, social situation, plundering.

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ABSTRACT

Maqamas are an expressive art that evolved in Arab culture in an age that saw an explosion of knowledge and a revival of life at all levels, and that brimmed with all kinds of intellectual and cultural materials, as a result of a mingling of nations, languages and cultures. The maqama served in those times as an important living document, by means of which one can learn much about various aspects of Arab life at a time of intellectual and cultural revival. The maqama played an important role in recording disparate aspects of Arab social and intellectual life. It also provides an accurate account of how people behaved, especially certain unfortunate social habits, in addition to depicting different habits, customs and traditions, both positive and negative, by way of profound semantic and factual descriptive frameworks. In the course of this study we also deal with the ethical and social values adherence to which is considered appropriate.

Introduction

This study has as its objective to describe how the *maqÁma* as a unique genre within the literary oeuvre of the fourth/tenth century was able to reflect the poverty, corruption and oppression, even on the part of clerics and judges, that were rampant in Abbasid society and later. The *maqÁmas* are written in rhymed prose with meter, interspersed with lines of verse, proverbs, and quotes from the QurYÁn and ÍadDth. In each *maqÁma* a well-known literary type is chosen and elaborated. What all *maqÁmas* have in common is the general plot and the two constant protagonists: the narrator and the hero. The *maqÁma* tells the story of a hero who is vagrant and a beggar, but at the same time also an eloquent man of culture. This man appears in various forms in public places such as markets, mosques, cemeteries and public baths, and dupes the people with his eloquence, playing on their emotions and causing them to shower him with money.¹

The concept of the *maqÁma*

In the Arabic language of antiquity the word *maqÁma* meant a gathering; later its meaning evolved and it came to denote what was related as such a gathering.² During the first centuries AH the word was used to refer to advice given by a pious man to the caliph. Ibn Qutayba collected such words of advice in his *YUyUn al-akhbAr* under the heading "*MaqÁmas* by ascetics to caliphs and kings".³

One of most elegant and entertaining of genres was the *MaqÁma*, which is a highly complex and artificial form of Arabic rhymed prose interspersed with poetry⁴. Originally, *maqÁma* or *maqÁm* (plural *maqÁmÁt*) meant "a place", the root of this word (q w m). In arabic usage the word also signified an assembly of people, synonymous to *nÁdD* or *majlis*.⁵

By the third century after the hejra this word came to denote a begger's appeal, which had to be framed in carefully-chosen language.⁶ Al-JÁÁiÚ gives a full account of these beggars and their activities.⁷ A. F. L. Beeston, in his article: "The Genesis of the *MaqÁmÁt* Genre", says that the closest parallel to the poets of the *MaqÁmÁt* were the everyday anecdotes⁸ collected by TanÚkhD (d.384/994) in his book "al-Faraj baYda al-Sidda" (The Relief after the Grif). This, according to Beeston, attests that both the anecdote and the *maqÁma* are based on the common stock of Arab anecdoteage current at that time in the Arab world.⁹ According to ÍuOrD, BadDÝ¹⁰ wrote his *maqÁmÁt* in order to compete with Ibn Durayd (d.321/933) who wrote forty *aldDÓ* "tales".¹¹

"Alien combination add strange expressions from which minds shrink and which the ears do not lift their curtains to hear". As GhnDmD HilÁl states, "the first to have invented the *maqÁmas* and to have given them this name in Arabic was BadDÝ al-

ZamÁn al-HamadhÁnD".¹² Some attempts were made to deny that BadDÝ al-ZamÁn was the architect of this genre. Now it is accepted that he is the father of the *maqÁma* exactly as al-ÍarDrD stated it the introduction to his assemblies:

"In a meeting of the friends of a species of literature the prevalence of which ceased in our time, and the luminaries whereof are well-nigh extinct, mention occurred of the *MaqÁmÁt* of BadDÝ al-zamÁn the learned sage of Hamathan¹³ who invented them, in which he assigned the part of inditing to AbÚ al-FatÍal-ÍskandrD¹⁴ and that of narrating the anecdote to Ibn HishÁm when a personage¹⁵, from whose behests is most advantageous, recommended to me to compose some *MaqÁmÁt*, in which I should endeavour to follow the method of BadDÝ, notwithstanding the inability of one so feeble¹⁶ as myself to attain the superiority of one so mighty in the course".¹⁷

Chenrery, in his introduction to the Assemblies of al-ÍarDrD¹⁸, maintains that the setting of the *maqÁmÁt* is important, the adventures are often trivial¹⁹, but the diction is all-important: a view shared by Nicholson in his book *A Literary History of the Arabs*, which contends that the *MaqÁma* is a melody of prose and fashion the *MaqÁma* was perhaps the most orate working of a tendency found throughout mediaeval Arabic belles-lettres.²⁰

Ibn YÁbd Rabbihi did the same in his *al-YÍqd al-farDd*, in which he quotes a number of such words of counsel under the heading: "*MaqÁmas* by the pious to the caliphs".²¹

In this sense a *maqÁma* is really no different from a sermon, with the exception that the latter is given in public at a mosque at a specified time of public prayer on a Friday or holiday.

When BadDÝ al-ZamÁn al-HamadhÁnD (398/1007 CE) began his writing career he found *maqÁmas* that consisted of numerous exhortations and was influenced by numerous people who specialized in giving sermons and telling stories in mosques and elsewhere, some of whom were pious and others who were cheats. He also noticed that many beggars used tricks and rhetorical skills in order to ply their trade. He came to know their tricks and used his literary gifts to compose *maqÁmas* through which he disseminated his ideas and opinions.

Entertainment generates social criticism

MaqÁmas both ancient and modern contained descriptions of the social classes as perceived by the author, whose views on these groups, whether positive or negative are meant to sway the reader and either change or reinforce his previous opinion, but in any case to make him enjoy the work and admire the author's mental prowess, breadth of culture, profound experience and attentive contemplation of the texts that he reads²². The art of the *maqÁma* is a branch of literature one of whose objec-

tives is to entertain at literary gatherings, whether among the literati or before the caliph. Entertainment in the literary sense is something serious, not only because seriousness and jest are closely related in literature, but also because the consumers of this kind of entertainment belong to the educated classes, such as rulers, ministers and writers, who are mainly entertained by content that involves language and linguistic embellishments, ancient texts, Quranic verses, oral traditions, fables, proverbs and the like. In addition, entertainment also involved the use of jest, leading to laughter in the presence of the ruler or caliph, or among the intellectual participants themselves.²³

A number of Arab literary critics who maintain that the *maqāma* had social criticism as its objective. *Maqāmas* contain a type of humor called “free jest”, which means presenting issues fearlessly, as in the writings of al-Jāhīz and other Arab stories that mock aspects of the lives of the educated classes, including even caliphs, judges and clerics.²⁴ An example of such an entertaining story (likāya)²⁵ can be found in Ibn al-Jawzī’s²⁶ *al-Adhkiyāb*. There he tells of a false man of religion whom the people admired because he fasted for a long time without eating anything, a rather improbable feat. While he fasted thus he was seen in the mosque and other public places, but then he would go to the toilet, where he wife had previously placed various kinds of sweets, which she had kneaded into the shape of stools. However, when he entered he was able to distinguish between the true stools and what his wife had prepared for him.²⁷

This is a funny story that mocks a cleric and reveals his false pretenses. It can be reformulated as a *maqāma*, even though it was composed after al-Īrāḍ. Stories of this kind are also an expression of literary daring whose objective is often to provide literary entertainment. In this case we have a long story, rich in detail and possessed of an evolved plot, in contrast to the very short stories about beggars, which are more like anecdotes.

We may thus say that Ibn al-Jawzī in this story, contrary to what we usually find in his days and earlier, presents the narrator and the protagonist in the same way as al-Hamadhānī, al-Īrāḍ and those who copied their style. It is a *maqāma*-like story in which the element of humor prevails, as well as an element of derision aimed at various classes of people, such as caliphs, princes and ascetics.

It would therefore be wrong to attribute to the composers of *maqāmas* just the one objective of social criticism, when in fact these were works of literary entertainment that reflected certain social realities: most *maqāmas* deal mainly with beggary and the tricks used by beggars and sycophants²⁸. Now in order to clarify the social situation reflected in the literary works composed in the fourth century AH and later, we may at this point quote what Adam Metz wrote about the period in question: “Famines became ever more common, security deteriorated, burglary and thievery abounded, and the caliphs and princes collected their taxes through a system of tax farming”.²⁹ It is important not to ignore this conclusion concerning the social meanings of the *maqāma*, and will discuss some of these meanings, based on the materials in al-Hamadhānī, al-Īrāḍ and al-Ābbās, as presented in the *maqāmas* attributed to Ibn Mārī (d.1193/589 CE)³⁰. However, before delving into the works themselves, we should like to present a picture of the social situation in the period during which the *maqāmas* were written, as reported by their contemporaries and others, so that we may understand how these social aspects were reflected in the *maqāmas* and their contents.

The *maqāmas*’ connection to the social situation

In many cases the content of a *maqāma* is a matter of contention among scholars, especially concerning its relation to the social realities they reflect. Some scholars, especially in the West,

are of the opinion that the *maqāmas* as a literary genre are derived from the genres that they contain, such as stories, anecdotes, verses, rhetorical images, clichés and rhymed prose.³¹ Other scholars, including Arabs, tend to view the *maqāmas* more as literature intended to depict an existing social situation.³²

In the following paragraphs we will show the connection between the *maqāmas* and the state of society at the time, in addition to other content that they have, such as cultural and educational elements, riddles, as well as the humorous style that was often used in order to entertain at the gatherings of the caliphs. But before proceeding with a detailed description of these literary types and their social beginnings, we discuss the social situation at the time the *maqāma* arose, that is, between the third and the sixth centuries AH or the First and Second Abbasid periods. One description of the situation in the fourth century AH was that it was “the best of times and the worst of times”,³³ because it was a time of much violence and great political unrest on the one hand, and of much progress in knowledge and science on the other.

The Byzantine push forward began in the year 314 AH, when they occupied the city of Malatiya. Their advance continued to Diyār Bakr and by the year 331 AH they reached the hills around Nisibis.³⁴ This was a period in which the army came to have more and more influence on the central government. The army’s increasing demands for pay emptied the national treasury and as a result traditional farmers were deprived of their land.³⁵ Andre Michael argues that the beginnings of this development can be traced back to the Umayyad period, but that in the fourth century “its speed accelerated, especially in the east, until the golden age of ‘the regime of military occupation’ came with the arrival of the Seljuk Turks and, generally speaking, the ‘nobility of the sword’ triumphed over the ‘nobility of wealth’”.³⁶

At the same time the position of the caliphate deteriorated to such an extent that the caliphs themselves came under attack, were isolated, even tortured and otherwise maltreated. Turkish mercenaries and slaves came to control the state, while the servants and women of the court intervened in matters of policy. To this must be added the internal rebellions, the constant Byzantine provocations, the conflicts between the various religious sects, the *shu‘ūbiyya* movement and the independent policies pursued by the provincial governors.³⁷ Al-Mas‘ūdī describes with regret the dissolution of the state as follows: “The weakness and dwindling of Islam, the emergence of the Byzantines before the Muslims, the corruption of the pilgrimage and lack of holy war, the blocking of the path and the wickedness of the way, with every leader going his own way and imposing himself on his district. Until this time Islam still had the upper hand, but then its foundations were shaken, in the year 332, in the caliphate of Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Muttaqī li-llāh, Commander of the Faithful. God help us in our situation”.³⁸

One of the reasons for the corruption of the state was the fact that the Abbasid caliphs immersed themselves in physical pleasures; this also had the effect of harming the office of the caliphate and giving a blow to the economy.³⁹ The state treasure paid for the rulers’ opulence enjoyed by the Abbasid caliphs, the members of their family, the ministers, the commanders, the men of state and their associates. In fact, it was reported that when the caliph al-Manṣūr died (136 AH) he left behind fourteen million dinar and six-hundred-million dirham.⁴⁰ As a result the number of servants and slave girls rose to hundreds or even to thousands, and the expenses likewise multiplied.⁴¹ Al-Khaḍīb al-Baghdādī described the palace of al-Muqtadir (295-320 AH) in the following words: “Al-Muqtadir possessed eleven thousand servants. Stores were opened and curtains were hung. The number of gold embroidered silk brocade curtains in his palaces was thirty-eight-thousand”.⁴² Money was thus plentiful and pro-

vided much luxury, especially in the public and private palaces of the caliphs and princes, but the common people were mostly very poor.⁴³ This situation upset the lives of the common people, whose rights were violated, while the court's luxury depleted the state treasury, so that the rulers were forced to rob the weak, by expropriating the property of employees and people of means, which they then sold in auctions. This property was bought by people who became rich through war and raids. Here is how the situation is described by the merchant in al-HamadhĀnĪ's *MaĀdriyya maqĀma*: "I bought this mat in a public sale. It was taken from the houses of the family of al-FurĀt⁴⁴ at the time of the expropriations and raids".⁴⁵

As a result the entire financial system became corrupt, following which the people became impoverished, restless and rebellious.⁴⁶ It is perhaps worth quoting the opinion of someone who pondered on this period of pandemonium and evil, namely AbŪ ĪyĀn al-TawĪddĪ's depiction in his *al-ImtĀy wal-muĀnasa* of one of the outbreaks of civil strife in NaysĀbŪr in the year 370 AH: "I was told by a *ŌĪff* shaykh in those days: 'I was in NaysĀbŪr in the year 370 as KhurĀsĀn erupted in sedition. The state of the SĀmĀn dynasty became disturbed by tyranny. In this period ... the roads were filled with fear, there were many false rumors, people had evil thoughts, the public clamored, opinion was confused, prices were high, hope was gone, every dog barked from every corner, every lion roared from every thicket, every wolf clamored from every hill; people snatching each other, a rule of fear and terror; the land was ablaze with questions, disclosure, and the spread of truth and lies ...'.⁴⁷ It was a time of deviants, highway robbers and scoundrels. Mischievous and corruption filled the land, with no government to deter them and no authority to set bounds for them. In fact, some officials worked hand in hand with them and used them as shields in calamity.⁴⁸

Perhaps one of the most reliable witnesses to the political, economic and social deterioration of the times was AbŪ ĪyĀn al-TawĪddĪ, who himself suffered from the ills of the age. He noted that religion had lost its hold on the people, who used it for plundering and subjection, adding that "the situation was transformed into Persian, (as it was under) Chosroe and Caesar", which resulted in "these rebellions, sects, fanaticism and immoderation, which became aggravated, increased, evolved and rose so high that no devices were able to amend them. The ignorant common people found power in the educated class. Therefore blood flowed, women were taken as booty, raids became common, countries were laid waste, conflicts abounded, as did chatter and lies. The seeker of truth became confused and the lover of security was a target on every tongue and tooth. The people were divided into sects and religions".⁴⁹

Al-MasŪdĪ, too, provides us with a picture of the deterioration of society in the fourth century AH, from which we may gain the impression that all values collapsed, social bonds were shattered and virtue had no place any more: "When you see the common people gathering you see them hurrying to a leader who creeps and strikes a drum in the manner of a monkey, or yearning for entertainment and play, or listening to a lying narrator, or gathering around someone who had been beaten, or standing by someone who had been crucified. He bleats at them and they follow, shouts at them and they are not deterred. They do not realize that they do not know what they do not know, and that they know what they do know".⁵⁰

Furthermore, a group of corrupt people known as "the scoundrels" (*al-shuŌĀr*), who terrorized many people into stealing other people's money and property, which caused great confusion in those days. AbŪ JarĪr al-ŌabarĪ described the pandemonium that the Islamic state suffered at the time: "the 'scoundrels' who were in Baghdad and al-Karkh did severe harm to the people. They lived a dissolute life, engaged in highway robbery

and kidnapped women and youths on the roads. They would gather, come to a man, take his son and go away with him, and no one could stop them. If they asked a person to lend or give them anything that person could not refuse. They would gather and go to villages whose inhabitants they outnumbered, take whatever property they could and no sultan was able to stop them. In fact, the sultan himself used them and made them a part of his retinue. He was unable to prevent them from committing any act of debauchery; they imposed a levy on travelers on the roads and on boats, took money for protecting homes, and openly robbed people on the highways. No one was able to stop them, and the people were sorely tried by them".⁵¹

Among these criminals one group was called the "beggars" (*mukdŪna, ahl al-kudya*), whose specialty was to cheat the people of their money. The strange thing was, as pointed out by Victor Elcack, "that this group of people was considered quite reputable by the lower classes and the educated alike. In fact, some of them belonged to the entourage of the rulers, the sultans and their boon companions, whose stories and adventures they related to the people. The rulers enjoyed these stories".⁵² The relevant story about al-NĀĪb b. YĀbbĀd is very well known and can be found in books of *adab*.⁵³

Al-HamadhĀnĪ in his *maqĀmas* describes how these "beggars" were organized under the command of their leaders and how they would go about in processions and troops, as can be seen in the *SĀsĀniyya maqĀma*.⁵⁴

Literature and the depiction of social life

The literary works composed during the first and second Abbasid periods, both poetry and prose, described the wealth and opulence of social life at the time on the one hand, and its poverty and misery on the other, as well as the social and political unrest, the life of pleasure and of seriousness, the deterioration of morality, among writers as well, and other phenomena.⁵⁵

The fact is that Islamic Arab society, especially in Baghdad, proceeded along two parallel paths in its life, which therefore suffered from a duality in every aspect.⁵⁶ This in turn reflected on literature, as we shall see below. To use the words of AĪmad AmĪn, it was "Paradise and Hell, great comfort and ease along great misery, excessive affluence together with lack of food".⁵⁷

Social corruption together with excessive wealth and pursuit of pleasure contrasted with the wretched poverty of intellectuals and common people who did not have connections to the caliphs and governors. The poverty from which scholars and writers suffered was reflected in their writings. They described the existing state of corruption and poverty, that forced them to sell their honor and play the hypocrite in order to make a living. Thus, for example, ĪyĀn al-TawĪddĪ, despite his broad knowledge, his philosophy and his connections to viziers and scholars, writes about himself as follows: "I was among those who despite associations and knowledge often were forced to eat vegetation in the desert, to beg abjectly from both the rich and the common people, to sell one's religion and honor, to act with great hypocrisy, and to do things that no free man should put in writing, because of the pain it would cost his friend to read".⁵⁸ Thus AbŪ SulaymĀn al-ManŌiqĪ, a contemporary philosopher, admitted that he did not have enough money to pay for rent or for food,⁵⁹ and AbŪ YĀĪ al-QĀĪ also reported being in dire straits⁶⁰ before he moved to Muslim Spain, so much so that he was forced to sell some of his book in order to have money to buy food. Some people were even driven to commit suicide.⁶¹

Some of the most prominent writers of the period belonged to the upper classes, for example Ibn al-YĀmĪd, Ibn YĀbbĀd, al-WazĪr al-MuhallabĪ and al-NĀĪbĪ. Thanks to their rank, power and affluence they were able to produce literary texts of great

artistic elegance. The literature of that age made considerable progress in the composition of rhymed prose, linguistic embellishment and rhetorical exaggeration through the frequent use of simile and metaphor. These linguistic ornaments constitute an echo of the ornaments of social life,⁶² whose forms are reflected in literature. In fact, one can hardly find a single poet who does not have at least one poem about slaves. Abbasid society's love of young male slaves finds an echo in literature from which we learn that, strangely enough, even the highest ranking people in the land, including viziers and judges, are not ashamed of speaking of this practice. This shows that public opinion no longer condemned it, but rather considered it as an act of impudence. Thus AbŪ Īyān al-Tawīdī mentions that AbŪ Ībdullāh al-Ba'arī was delighted to hear a young slave boy sing about his connection with another slave youth.⁶³

This form of literature depicts the elegant aspects of social life,⁶⁴ its entertainments and its insolent aspects, as well as the other side of the coin, the poverty, the misery, and the wiles needed to make a living.

Another group of writers described the lives of the rich, the merchants, the writers and the scholars as wretched and distressful, for the rich had their property expropriated, the merchants were overburdened with taxes, and the writers and scholars had nothing to eat unless they attached themselves to a ruler or used beggary as a means to make an occasional living through folk literature or fraud. A large group of such people was called the *Sāsāniyans* or the "beggars" (*ahl al-kudya*).⁶⁵ The members of this group traveled around the country and committed acts of fraud and trickery. Some of them had literary talents which they used to dupe the people. An echo of this group can be found in a new type of literature that emerged at this time, the *maqāmas* of Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī,⁶⁶ then those of al-Īrādrī,⁶⁷ and later those of al-Ībbās, attributed to Ibn Mā'arī. The *Sāsāniyans* are mentioned in Badī' al-Zamān's *maqāmas*, while al-Īrādrī, in his *Sāsāniyya maqāma*, describes many of the factors⁶⁸ that drove them to engage in fraud.

This great increase in the number of beggars due to the economic situation and the lack of social equilibrium, the great increase in misery beside the great increase in luxury, was reflected in literature, through *maqāmas* and other types of "beggar" literature, as well as poetry in which the sad state of affairs is bemoaned, as in the following lines by Ibn Lankak al-Ba'arī:⁶⁹

Woe to the times that have dressed free men in disgrace and contempt

How can we hope for good from you when high rank with you is base

This was the situation for all composers of *maqāmas* such as al-Hamadhānī, al-Īrādrī and al-Ībbās. Beggary became very widespread in the days of Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, as social life declined and poverty increased, so that even AbŪ Īyān al-Tawīdī described the situation thus: "There is no way to obtain food except through the mores of valor, drinking grief, suffering agony and the sting of deprivation, and patience for various kinds of degradation".⁷⁰

Corruption and deviation came to be considered respectable by the caliphs. Thus al-Tawīdī, in his description of the corruption of his age reveals the situation of the times in the following words: "In this age, which is empty of judges who reform themselves and others through their own piety, which is bereft of the kind of honorable people who even if they strayed they would bestow of what they possessed and give thanks for what they received. It was in their character to pardon and forgive, for which their reward was salvation and honor in this and the

next world. Whenever they met they supported the good and rejected the evil. But all this has gone, its roots have strayed. The clothes of religion have become worn out, its customs have become abandoned, its traditions have been uprooted. What was unacceptable became acceptable, and what was a good deed became unacceptable. Everything became opaque, curdled, corrupt and wrong. Things went so far that it was said: 'So-and-so is of light spirit, so-and-so is of good face, so-and-so is wholly elegant, sweet of character, pure of intelligence, a good chess player, good at backgammon, good at computation, good at managing money, makes an effort, investigates things minutely, and the like, whose increase the knowledgeable scorns and the writer refuses to note'.⁷¹

Criticizing judges and preachers

Some judges were wrong-doers, who permitted what should have been forbidden and accepted bribes. The people complained about them to the governors and caliphs and the latter would occasionally dismiss such judges and have them beaten and imprisoned, or have their property confiscated. Some writers of *maqāmas* were also maltreated by such judges, and in their works described the worst of their kind, and the hatred which the people felt for them. Al-Hamadhānī in one of his *maqāmas*, "the Naysāburian", describes an iniquitous judge who was known for his infamous behavior, his good looks and his evil inner self. This is clear from his description by AbŪ al-Faṭī al-Iskandarī, the protagonist of the *maqāmas*. Al-Hamadhānī uses this image well in a story related by the narrator of the *maqāmas*, Īsā b. Hishām, about himself. He says that one Friday he entered the mosque in the city of Naysābur to pray, and when the prayer ended a man of imposing looks passed before him. The author provides a good description of this man, who wore the dress of a judge. Īsā b. Hishām was so impressed that he asked the man praying next to him about him, so that he could make his acquaintance and profit from his knowledge, culture or money. The man beside him knew this judge and was convinced of his dishonesty. His anger at the judge was quite evident from what he said about him. The expressions he used clearly demonstrated his hatred for the judge, whom he compared to a worm, which spoiled any food or crops it fell into. AbŪ al-Faṭī al-Iskandarī adds to the horror of his description and states that these worms only eat the wool of orphans, the people most in need of protection and least able to defend themselves. This judge, he claims, is a coward who oppresses orphans, widows and the poor, and eats their money. Al-Iskandarī then turns to another image and compares him to locusts, which leave the soil bare and are the bane of every peasant. In the same way, he says, this judge eats the rights of others with the utmost greed and is therefore loathed by all the people. He then compares the judge to a thief, one who steals only the money of endowments, that is, money that belongs to God and which should be used to support orphans and the poor. He further compares him to a wolf, a ferocious beast of prey, since he (the judge) specializes in preying on and attacking the pious, while they bow in prayer, unaware of the approaching danger. The judge is thus a repugnant figure, whose heart is devoid of faith and mercy. This kind of depiction by Badī' al-Zamān, of an iniquitous judge, testifies to the unjust judges of his times, as it represents corrupt judges of any place and age. It is a live description which broadens our understanding of humankind, that calls on us not to be taken in by a bright exterior and enjoins us to hate injustice and those who commit it.

Al-Īrādrī in his *Nāyānī maqāma*⁷² describes hypocritical preachers through the protagonist, who is very adept at presenting his sermons convincingly so that the people believe that he really means what he says. Indeed, he attacks sin while not refraining from sin himself, urges doing what is good while not doing so himself, condemns the people for not fearing God and

for fearing men instead, while he is the foremost in fearing his fellow man and in not being ashamed before God. He calls on men to abstain, but does not abstain himself; he has an eye for the people's money and does not shrink from taking what his listeners give him. When the people can no longer see him and he is alone with his disciple, his true morals can be observed and his true religion seen: He has no religion but that of collecting money and indulging his desires. He does not refrain from drinking alcohol, or from eating what is forbidden. When al-Īrith b. Hammām exposed him and reprimanded him for scoffing at the principles of religion, and for his hypocrisy in stealing the people's money, he became very angry and stared at al-Īrith as if he wanted to pounce on him and kill him. This preacher's impudence is clearly reflected in the lines of poetry which he declaimed, in which he explains his way of life and admits that his preaching is merely a means for obtaining what he desires:

I turned my preaching into a snare, with which I defraud my quarry

He accuses fate of having caused this behavior. He claims that fate is unjust, because it raises the imperfect and removes the perfect from its position, or in his words:

Had fate been just in its rule the people with defects would not rule

Conclusion

The way in which composers of *maqāmas* such as al-Ham-

adhĀnĪ, al-ĪarĪrĪ and others describe the class of crooked judges and preachers was not limited to the age of these writers, but can be found in all times and in all places, since such people exist in all religions, not only among Muslims. A text that highlights human nature in general, or the characteristics of a certain group of humans, illuminates our mind and can help us avoid being misled. It can be a living experience from which we can learn much, and which can help us in our journey through life's twisted path, showing us the right way across the thorny road. Other writers of *maqāmas* in modern times have also trod the same path and criticized those classes of society using humor and exaggeration in their descriptions of these people's moral failings so that they may correct them. They criticize politicians, notables, the wealthy, and especially the young sons of the rich, whom some consider corrupt, especially when they travel to Europe. They are accused of being rowdy, of wasting their time and money on girls instead of learning from the Europeans to take work seriously, to respect scientific research and to organize their time. The youth are urged to see how well organized the Europeans have made their countries, the beauty and cleanliness there, and how literature and creativity in various domains of culture are promoted there.

On the basis of the unfortunate social realities described in the *maqāmas* of both early and modern times, some scholars, especially among the Arabs, have come to the conclusion "that the *maqāmas* performed the functions of constructive social criticism, entertainment and education which today are performed by narrative fiction."⁷³

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