

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

VISUAL FIXATION:  
ART HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP  
ON MAQĀMĀT AL-HARĪRĪ

by  
KAREN MRAD MRAD

A thesis  
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for the degree of Master of Arts  
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# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Karen Mrad Mrad

for

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## Visual Fixation: Art Historical Scholarship on Maqamat al-Hariri

This study examines and questions scholarship in art history focused on the relationship between illustrations and texts in medieval Islamic manuscripts. While scholars approach many such manuscripts for these purposes, the present study will primarily focus on Yahyā al-Wāsitī's illustrated version of *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, which dates to 1236 CE and is currently held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (arabe5847). Illustrations from this manuscript have been widely discussed by Islamic art historians since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. However, few scholars have studied the manuscript as a whole. My research will address this gap in art historical scholarship on *Maqamat al-Hariri* by considering the historiography of illustrated manuscripts, and questioning the fixation on illustrations that is prevalent in this literature. In particular, my thesis will raise concerns about ideology, the relevance of illustrations to varied historical contexts, and what the scholarly interest in illustrations says about the shifting aspects of the field of Islamic art at present. The thesis will also shed light on the broader impact of art historical interpretations and readings of such manuscripts.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Abū Muhammad al-Qāsim ibn Alī ibn Muhammad ibn Uthmān al-Harīrī, commonly known as al-Hariri of Basra (1054-1122), was an Arab poet, linguist, court official, and author of one of the most renowned collections of stories in the Arab world. His *Maqamat al-Hariri* is regarded as one of the greatest works of Arabic literature after the Quran.<sup>1</sup> The stories follow the escapades of the protagonist, Abu Zayd of Saruji, a rogue wayfarer who throughout the course of the series manages to live, learn, and travel by relying mostly on his wits and sharp tongue.<sup>2</sup> The author's surname - al Hariri - is most likely to have come from the area in Basra where he was born and raised. During the Middle Ages, Basra achieved fame and prosperity for its position as a major production and trade centre in silk production.<sup>3</sup> And much like those of his neighbours, he wove rich, illustrious stories that represent enduring accounts of the very fabric of medieval Islamic society and wealth. His stories were so popular and well-written amongst scholars and literary enthusiasts across Arab speaking countries, that people would travel from across the region to attend the author's personal

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<sup>1</sup> Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Book, Whole (New York;London; Routledge, 2011), 329.

<sup>2</sup> Wadād Qāḍī, Maurice A. Pomerantz, and Aram A. Shahin, *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi*, vol. 122., Book, Whole (Leiden;Boston; Brill, 2016), 470,

<sup>3</sup> Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim bin ‘Alī Ḥarīrī and Amina Shah, *The Assemblies of Al-Hariri: Fifty Encounters with the Shaykh Abu Zayd of Seruj*, Book, Whole (London: Octagon Press, 1980), 7.

recitations.<sup>4</sup> The Maqamat – or ‘The Assemblies’ – were therefore named due to the tradition of their being recited in gatherings of assembled audiences.

Al-Hariri was a poet and prose writer, who managed to generate significant popularity (and no doubt influence) over scholars and literature lovers across caliphates<sup>5</sup> (some of whom had subjected all fifty Maqamat to memory, as examples of literary and grammatical prowess). And writing incisive, masterful and moving street-level accounts of the plights, perils and shrewdness of the protagonist, Abu Zayd, one can only wonder the linguistic skills that were sought at court as a result. Unfortunately, owing to the lack of scholarly discussion, analysis and clear historical accounts, wonder is all that can be done. Instead, modern scholarly interest has seemed more squarely focused on the works as showcasing the achievements of the illustrator of a subsequent edition of the collection.

More than a century after their composition, in around 1237, painter and illuminator, Yaḥyā ibn Maḥmūd al-Wasiti of the Baghdad School of illustration developed a series of ninety-nine illustrations to accompany the Maqamat.<sup>6</sup> The exceptional quality of these illustrations, their balanced composition, expressive realism and vivid colouring proved a worthy companion to the masterfully depicted and articulated scenes described in the Maqamat. Indeed, it seems that while little detail remains intact about his personal life or earlier works, his illuminations seem to have outshone those of the literary genius and social acuity of al-Hariri – at least in the eyes

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Anthony Sells, *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, Book, Whole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 194,

<sup>5</sup> Husam Almuḥajalli, “The Function of Poetry in the Maqamat Al-Hariri” (Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2020), v.

<sup>6</sup> Oleg Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, Visual Library Text-Fiche Series: Studies in Medieval Manuscript Illumination 45 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 10–11.

of contemporary historical scholarship. This is evident even in the referencing of the works as the “al-Wasiti Maqamat” by some scholars.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from twentieth century scholarship, little is known of the whereabouts of the Maqamat al-Hariri before the late eighteenth century. No documentation is available; the owners and traders are unknown except for the most famous, and well-preserved, illustrated Maqamat al-Hariri by Yahya al-Wasiti, also known as the Schefer manuscript. This is currently held in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (Arabe 5847), named after its former owner, Charles Schefer, a French diplomat and dragoman who was based in the Middle East (1843-1882).<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is precisely the literary, intertextual and cultural richness that the Maqamat are interspersed with that has made knowledge of linguistic nuance, religious scripture, and cultural dynamics of the age and the region less accessible to discussions by Western scholars.<sup>9</sup> The illustrations, on the contrary, have been much more accessible to authoritative accounts from Western scholars, who have spared little time in retracing the influences and origins of the stylistic elements of the illustrations.

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard O’Kane, “Text and Paintings in the Al-Wasiti ‘Maqamat’,” *Ars Orientalis* 42 (2012): 41–55.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Hillenbrand, “The Schefer Ḥarīrī: A Study in Islamic Frontispiece Design,” in *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, ed. Anna Contadini, vol. 90, 2010, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Classical Arabic Stories: An Anthology*, Book, Whole (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

## 1.2. Problem Statement

Two clear issues become apparent when assessing academic discussions of the Maqamat. The majority of discussions appear to be fixated on the illustrations. They evaluate the text only superficially, and to the extent that it provides immediate meaning for the accompanying illustrations. The scenes and contexts inspiring the illustrations, however, are much richer and more nuanced than appear in these discussions. Indeed, the central premise of this thesis suggests that in order to understand fully and evaluate the images, one needs not only to examine the texts (requiring an intimate familiarity with the language and culture it is borne forth from) but also the contexts and the impact that capturing such scenes would likely have had on audiences. In fact, as the illustrations were produced more than a century after the Maqamat were written, it would also be central to understanding the motives and meanings driving the artist himself to understand the evolving importance, meaning and memory of the illustrator with the original stories. With the destruction and loss of important literary works following the Mongol invasions,<sup>10</sup> it is likely that returning to such seminal texts and illuminating them would have different meaning for an illustrator compared to at the time of their composition. Similarly, investigations into whether such illustrations were commissioned or not could also be revealing in understanding the broader social significance and societal acceptance of such dexterous social commentaries.

The absence of studies on the manuscripts as a whole is also a result of the dispersal, displacement, and mutilation of these manuscripts by private and public

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<sup>10</sup> According to Starkey, after the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258, the literary Arabic traditions that were passed on from generation to another had been permanently disrupted.

Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature, Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, Book, Whole (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 16.

collectors and dealers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, Islamic art history remains interlocked with methodologies that stem from approaches common to Western art. As such, the state of the field vis-à-vis discussions of Islamic manuscripts and illustrations leads to a skewed, if not altogether misleading, understanding of the texts, of the illustrations and, more importantly, the relevance of illustrations to historical context.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Engaging with the work of Maqamat al-Hariri leaves the researcher in a humbled state. In contrast to Western art history, Islamic art such as the works on the *Maqamat al-Hariri* illustrations have not covered the entire picture, which means the manuscript has not been fully assessed by art historians. There is little or no attempts to compare them to non-illustrated manuscripts of the same script. The purpose behind iconographic, aesthetic and formalist methodological studies of the illustrated Maqamat are also still inadequately grasped. Hence, the core challenge to engage with is why previous methodologies have not truly contributed to the works by Al-Hariri?

This is the outset of how the research questions have guided this study. It seeks to evaluate the texts in their entirety in order to provide a more useful approach to understand the context in which the Maqamat were written. This brings the study to the first research question that will engage with critical historiography to understand the Maqamat. Critical historiography is an approach to the philosophy of history based on Marxist schools of thought, namely the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory that seeks to engage with dialectical methods to interrogate society's contradictions. While art history has long lived a life in the fringes of historical studies, it also was considered to be merely focused on three basic concepts: the history of style, artistic biography, and the tradition of imagery (or iconography). Yet such methodological approaches leave out the more interesting aspects of art, which is to understand the wider social meaning of the art work and the potentially contradicting factors it was influenced by during the time of production. In order to conduct such analyses, critical historiography has found increasing popularity by art historians in recent decades.

The study will follow these critical minds by posing the research questions as:

1. How can a critical historiographic approach to the existing scholarship of the illustrated manuscripts of Maqamat al-Hariri explain why al-Wasiti's works have only recently been better understood?
2. What is the role of a critical historiography in relation to understanding and interpreting the work on Maqamat al-Hariri and to explain the methodological shift that took place in the twenty-first century?

By posing these questions, the thesis does not intend to undermine the extensive research that art historians have contributed to studies of such manuscripts. In highlighting the gaps and in suggesting an alternative approach, this brief study is an attempt to expand the field and contribute to its evolution of methodological studies of Arab-Islamic manuscripts. This is only to underscore the fact that the field of Islamic art history, particularly that dealing with Arab manuscripts, remains in its infancy and under the sway of very few scholars. Yet, it has a significant impact on our understanding of Arabo-Islamic culture.

Reflecting on the methodologies of art historians studying Yahya al-Wasiti's Maqamat, several outcomes are apparent. First, the repetition of formal, figurative, descriptive and biographic methods that pamper to the aesthetic intrigue of these manuscripts but do not treat the illustrations as a part of the manuscript as a whole. Thus, art history has not revealed anything about their underlying message or meaning, or how or why they came about. Surely, there must be clues in the text as a whole and Book Studies offer a bigger toolbox than aesthetics. The intention behind the introduction of Book Studies is to integrate the tools of the art historian with those of other disciplines such as literary and historical studies and bibliography.

Chapter III briefly introduces the interdisciplinary nature of Book Studies and its amalgamation of several disciplines that revolve around cultural history and transmission, literature and materiality. As Roger Chartier puts it, the triangle of departure is the relationship between the text, the book, and the reader.<sup>11</sup> The history of the book itself came into being as a discipline only in the 1950s but, in just a few decades, a substantial mass of scholarship has accrued; beginning with an interdisciplinary relationship between bibliography, literature and history, Book Studies has developed to integrate theories and methods from communication studies, sociology, philosophy and digital humanities. Here, discussions revolve around the relationship of the text to the book, oral and written tradition, the relationship between author and reader, the relationship between illustrations and the text as well as the book as a whole and, so, to the concepts of reading and reception, of materiality and production as well as of culture and society.

Chapter III specifically considers illustrations in relation to the manuscript. Why is it important to consider the text when examining the illustrations? What are the impacts on art history of applying the methodology used to date in the studies of the Maqamat al-Hariri illustrations? Why is it important to highlight these issues—what is at stake? And how could Book Studies as an interdisciplinary approach contribute to betterment of manuscript studies within the field of art history? This section draws on the work of George Saliba and Linda Komaroff, which treats the text and image as equals, as a case in point on how the integration of Book Studies when dealing with

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<sup>11</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Book, Whole (Sausalito CA: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 10.



manuscript illustrations could bring forth greater understanding of illustrations as a part of the manuscript as a whole.

#### **1.4. Methodology**

In order to fulfil the research objectives posed by this study and in order to answer the research questions, the study will employ critical historiography as the method of choice. Historiography is concerned with historical representations. It is the writing of history as opposed to history itself. Although it has become a disciplinary method introduced by modern historians, its origins can be traced back to ancient Greek writers, who reflected on the writing of history of other scholars. There are several traditions of historiography. For example, the historical method uses induction over deduction, and thus the specific over the general. It is important to note that each historical period and context has its own account with specific reasons why history occurred as it occurred.

History is unique with every period being specific. Amongst the most famous and widely applied uses of historiography is the Annales tradition, which postulates that history must be understood through analytical-empirical means to draw some generalizations from past events.<sup>12</sup> The impossibility of understanding the past directly, without the interruption of interpretation based on the perspectives and the consciousness of the present.

In art history, the tradition of critical historiography has gained significant traction since the nineteenth century. It goes beyond the theory and history of historical writing by critically addressing how historians have been influenced by their own groups and loyalties. Critical historiography suggests that the past should not be viewed with the bias of past greatness but rather criticize or even condemn the past to reveal the

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<sup>12</sup> Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (MIT Press, 2001), 65.

effects of repression and past mistakes such as missed opportunities.<sup>13</sup> This holds a particular truth for the study of Islamic art history, which often remained a field for European and North American colonial or post-colonial scholars, who interpreted the art of the Arabo-Islamic other through a colonial lens.<sup>14</sup>

More specifically, the thesis study will be looking firstly into historiography. By tracing the emergent interest in illustrated manuscript within the scholarship, and its connection to the shifting nature of the field. In focusing on Maqamat al-Hariri, I am able to show that there is a preference for Medieval Islamic art as a result of an inherited discourse of nineteenth century modernity. Gülru Necipoğlu in her work, *The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches*, discusses a shift in the field during the 1970s from a dominant focus on the early period of Islamic art to studies broadening their chronological and geographical premise from the centre zone of the Fertile Crescent. Necipoğlu also notes that the “medievalisation”<sup>15</sup> of Islamic art is rooted in a self-defining title of the field itself from the very beginning. Thus, bringing us back to an Orientalist model.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, the thesis will present a methodological alternative, or rather a vessel that could offer broader, more multidisciplinary methods to art historical scholarship dealing with Maqamat illustrations. This will be presented through a mapping of the key scholars, theories and methodologies of Book Studies. In doing so this chapter will

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<sup>13</sup> Bregman Dalgliesh, *Critique as Critical History*, Book, Whole (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 110.

<sup>14</sup> Onur Öztürk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker, *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, Book, Whole (Milton: Routledge, 2022), 8–9.

<sup>15</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, “The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 6 (2012): 4.

<sup>16</sup> Necipoğlu, 8.

draw on notions of textuality, the communication circuit in relation to book making, reception and reading practices, and foremost meaning. Lastly, it will present the work of George Saliba and Linda Komaroff as a case in point of the implementation of Book Studies on several illustrated medieval Arabic manuscripts. This will allow this study to demonstrate the methodologies it is suggesting.

Through this methodology, my thesis will be able to critically approach the art historical methods that seem to be more concerned with aestheticism at the expense of historical materialism, to get to understand the relevance of illustrations to varied historical contexts. Considering how scholarship has failed to consider the broader impact of these skewed readings on manuscripts, as well as heritage. As aforementioned, only a few scholars, such as Saliba and Komaroff, raise questions about art historians' preferential treatment of illustrations in medieval manuscripts. The thesis will also raise the question on why these modes are marked problematic. What is the significance of this outcome? Furthermore, in knowing that there is this fixation and in recognizing the limitations of the methodologies utilized in the study of the Maqamat, art historical scholarship is framing the Maqamat manuscripts with an ahistorical approach, one perpetuating an orientalist application.

## **1.5. Summary of Chapters**

Chapter II provides a critical historiography of scholarship on the Maqamat. It seeks to establish what might be learned from the illustrations and, indeed, the Maqamat as a whole. The thesis hypothesis is that historians have, so far, not dealt with the manuscript as a whole but rather studied the illustrations as separate objects of art. This begs the two questions of why this is the case and why this may be of significance? This thesis seeks to contribute new knowledge to this gap by highlighting what is missing. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first part, all the art-historical scholarship on the Maqamat al-Hariri illustrations is mapped out chronologically, which involves a list of the key scholars and their works on the Maqamat. Secondly, their methodologies are examined to identify the key factors that have arisen in their art-historical studies. This section also attempts to answer the questions of why art historians have studied the illustrations separately from the text; what the art-historians have viewed to be the original purpose of the illustrations themselves; and why these scholars came to their varied conclusions.

Chapter III is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the history as well as the methodology of Book Studies as a discipline. This involves a representation of the key methodological approaches of this multidisciplinary study that initially integrates history, literary studies, and bibliographical studies.

Chapter IV will discuss the integration of Book Studies to the Maqamat illustrated manuscript. It will not however implement these methods but rather discuss the broader understanding that could arise in relation to textuality, reception, and reading practices as well as meaning.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CRITICAL RESTROSPECTIVE

#### 2.1. Yahya al-Wasiti's Illustrations of Maqamat al-Hariri

The purpose of the first chapter is to position Maqamat al-Hariri المقامات الحريريّة in the context of al-Hariri's time by using critical historiography to interrogate his work. However, firstly, a brief overview of al-Hariri's work is required to set the argument in train. The Assemblies of al-Hariri is a book written by Abū Muhammad al-Qāsim ibn Alī ibn Muhammad ibn Uthmān al-Harīrī, better known as al-Hariri of Basra (1054-1122). Maqamat al-Hariri is considered one of the most eminent and sophisticated works of Arabic literature of the Abbasid period of modern-day Iraq.<sup>17</sup> His work is understood to be essential in the foundation of novel stories in Islamic and Arabic literature. A traditional form of Arabic prose, the Maqama form (plu. *Maqamat*) or 'assembly' originated between the ninth and eleventh century and proceeded to be a favoured form of linguistic prowess, and included but was not restricted to poetry, up until the nineteenth<sup>18</sup> and twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> This genre of fictional narrative was considered an innovation to implement saj', bayan, badi' as well as verses of poetry, figures of speech, clichés, and ready-made rhymed prose for the sake of expressing societal and secular narratives. An approach considered by Roger Allen (2000) as

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<sup>17</sup> H. A. R. (Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen) Gibb, *Arabic Literature: An Introduction*, 2nd Rev., Book, Whole (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 89.

<sup>18</sup> Husam Al mujalli, "The Function of Poetry in the Maqamat Al-Hariri" (Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2020), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Allen, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, Book, Whole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 162.

“oratorical and homiletic dimensions by placing them into societal context [...] that both exploited the potential of the Arabic language and evoked numerous intertextual linkages.”<sup>20</sup> Al-Hariri wrote an assemblage of fifty tales on the adventures of the protagonist or rather anti-hero Abu Zayd. Each *maqama* is made up of two to ten pages, and includes “practically everything, from literary models to particular themes, motifs, situations, verses of poetry, figures of speech, clichés, and ready-made rhymed prose formulas.”<sup>21</sup> As a genre of Arabic poetry<sup>22</sup>, the maqamat was developed by Abu al-Fadl Ahmad Bin Yahya Bin Saïd, better known as Badi’ al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (969-1008). Al-Hariri built upon al-Hamadhani’s model of *saj’* through combining rhythmic prose with poetic language.<sup>23</sup> A combination of oratorical speech (*khutba*)<sup>24</sup>—similar to the speech given by the Sheikh during Friday prayers, and of rhyming and tropes (*badi’*),<sup>25</sup> and rhymed and rhythmic prose (*saj’*).<sup>26</sup> Al-Hariri also established a unique verse of poetic gestures and uses humour and satire to convey social and cultural critique.<sup>27</sup> The author places the hero in all fifty assemblies. Abu Zayd al-Sarujî, an elderly conman who travels throughout the Middle East as an orator using his wits on

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<sup>20</sup> Allen, 162.

<sup>21</sup> Rina Drory, “The Maqama,” in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, ed. Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 190.

<sup>22</sup> Caroline D. Eckhardt, “The Medieval Prosimetrum Genre (from Boethius to Boece),” *Genre (Norman, Okla.)* 16, no. 1 (1983): 23.

<sup>23</sup> Almujaïli, “The Function of Poetry in the Maqamat Al-Hariri,” 1.

<sup>24</sup> David J. Roxburgh, “In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri’s Maqamat,” *Muqarnas* 30 (2013): 179.

<sup>25</sup> Roxburgh, 179.

<sup>26</sup> Roxburgh, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Roxburgh, 179.

people as a way of gaining money and goods. Al-Hariri also includes a narrator, al-Harith ibn Hammam.

Maqamat al-Hariri gained great popularity and success at his time and thereafter, and his style of maqamat became the key guide to this genre of writing.<sup>28</sup> It became particularly known for its lexical complexity and its popularity. As a result, the stories of Abu Zayd have been portrayed in many forms. Most commonly the stories were narrated orally in group settings, with a common interest in the complexity of the text more so than the image, however, an interest in illustrated manuscripts and shadow plays also appeared afterwards.

Thirteen illustrated manuscripts have been noted to date.<sup>29</sup> The most popular being the illustrated version by Yahya Bin Mahmud Bin Yahya Bin Abi'l Hassan Kuwarriha al-Wasiti, commonly known as Yahya al-Wasiti. Al-Wasiti is considered a prominent thirteenth century medieval Islamic painter.<sup>30</sup> Islamic art historian Oleg Grabar notes three main reasons why al-Wasiti's Maqamat gained more popularity than the other illustrated Maqamat manuscripts. First and foremost, the wide variety of images that are considered more complex and aesthetically distinguished considering the technique and style presented by thirteenth century illustrated works.<sup>31</sup> Additionally al-Wasiti uses a double-page layout (*figure 2*)<sup>32</sup> that is noted highly uncommon at the

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<sup>28</sup> Almujaalli, "The Function of Poetry in the Maqamat Al-Hariri," 2.

<sup>29</sup> Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*.

<sup>30</sup> April Fast, *Iraq: The Culture* (Crabtree Publishing, 2010), 19.

<sup>31</sup> Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, Visual Library Text-Fiche Series: Studies in Medieval Manuscript Illumination 45 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>32</sup> Yahya al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. Arabe 5847, Folio 2r-1v*, 1237, 37 x 28 cm, 1237, Bibliothèque nationale de France.



time. Lastly, Grabar notes that rarely is the date and name of the scribe and artist noted in the colophon, yet in the Yahya al-Wasiti manuscript it is noted that al-Wasiti was responsible for both the calligraphic writing and illustrated material,<sup>33</sup> dated May 3, 1237 “end of the day Saturday sixth day of Ramadan month year thirty-four and six hundred”.<sup>34</sup>

The illustrations of al-Wasiti manuscript gained global recognition amongst contemporary scholars and aesthetes from around Europe, the United States and throughout the Arab region. Iraqi culture in particular takes pride in the works of al-Wasiti and an annual festival known as al-Wasiti Festival in Iraq is even held since 1972.<sup>35</sup> This festival was meant to bring together artists from all over the Arab region, which unfortunately has been negatively impacted by the perpetual conflict in the country. Al-Wasiti also became the name of Iraq’s first major art gallery in 1965.<sup>36</sup> Al-Wasiti’s name was utilized as the greatest example in associating contemporary artistic projects and collectives.<sup>37</sup> According to Saleem al-Bahloly, modern Arab art groups also had a re-encounter with these manuscripts, similar to that of European nineteenth century intrigue in these manuscripts. Local interest throughout the Middle East was re-initiated as a result of early nineteenth century European publications. Al-Bahloly

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<sup>33</sup> O’Kane, “Text and Paintings In the Al-Wasiti ‘Maqamat’”, 41.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Qasim Bin Ali Bin Muhammad Bin Othman Abu Muhammad Al-Hariri, *Maqamat Al-Hariri* (Beirut: Dar Beirut, 1978), 344.

<sup>35</sup> Jordi Tejel, *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, Book, Whole (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2012), 478.

<sup>36</sup> Saleem Al-Bahloly, “History Regained: A Modern Artist in Baghdad Encounters a Lost Tradition of Painting,” *Muqarnas Online* 35, no. 1 (2018): 268.

<sup>37</sup> Oleg Grabar, “What Does ‘Arab Painting’ Mean?” in *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, ed. Anna Contadini, vol. 90, 2010, 18.

mentions how this re-encounter of al-Wasiti illustrations of the Maqamat provided a historiographic premise for the practices of modern art within Baghdad.<sup>38</sup> Al-Bahloly

notes:

“It was not only that Selim had discovered a lost history of art [al-Wasiti illustrated Maqamat], then, in the form of the reproductions on the pages of a French picture magazine [*L'Illustration*]; rather, that history had already been discursively reconstructed in terms of the European pictorial tradition and its crisis of illusionism.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Al-Bahloly, “History Regained: A Modern Artist in Baghdad Encounters a Lost Tradition of Painting,” 242.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Bahloly, 241.

## 2.2. The Premises Behind the Scholarship

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European travellers, collectors, and diplomats visiting and residing in what at the time was the colonised Bilad al Sham region of Greater Syria<sup>40</sup> collected fragments of the local “oriental” culture: mostly carpets, jewellery, paintings, and illustrations. Maqamat al-Hariri manuscripts were amongst these items that attracted the interest of European institutions, auctions, and publications.<sup>41</sup> This appropriation of Islamic art was part of what orientalism in practice or the grabbing of art in a stretch of land labelled the “Middle East” by the British Foreign Office in the nineteenth century (the term got later popularised by the US military strategist Alfred Mahan during the First World War).<sup>42</sup> The “Middle East” was an apt description of the mindset of European colonisers to describe the Arab region as the middle route to the “brightest jewel in the British crown”: India.<sup>43</sup> While Orientalism was aptly described by Edward Said as a form of racism,<sup>44</sup> the grabbing of art displayed a form of active imperialism by European powers to bring home art of the “Muslim other” to European capitals such as the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, the British Museum in London, or the Louvre in Paris. Amongst those oriental art of interest of the European colonisers has been the Maqamat al-Hariri.

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<sup>40</sup> Spanning the modern countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine as well as the districts of Hatay, Gaziantep and Diyarbakir in modern Turkey.

<sup>41</sup> Necipoglu, “The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches,” 21.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*, *Reading Orientalism*, vol. no. 18., Book, Whole (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 68.

<sup>43</sup> Harold Raugh, *The Victorians at War, 1815-1914: An Encyclopedia of British Military History* (ABC-CLIO, 2004), 175.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1978), 8.

General interest and written scholarship on the numerous illustrations of the Maqamat al-Hariri manuscripts began in the early 1900s and continues to the present day. The information and analyses at hand, particularly in art history, is predominantly a European and American field of study. Great effort has been expended in acquiring these illustrations, gathering the remaining fragments of the manuscripts, and applying in depth studies mostly those of descriptive and formal analysis of the works. Aside from a few scholars, most of the illustrations have been studied as stand-alone works of art, separate from their literary counterpart. Considering the scarcity of historical documents and archival material present on the Maqamat, art historical scholarship resorts to hypothesizing and interpreting the meaning and purpose behind understanding the illustrations and the broader social context.

The earliest text to discuss the Maqamat al-Hariri illustrations was published in 1907. In the following decade several publications captured the attention of the public and art historians alike. Thus, it was not until the early twentieth century that these illustrated Maqamat were introduced to the modern European audience; and proper codicological studies did not appear till the 1950s when scholars such as Oleg Grabar and Richard Ettinghausen began examining dispersed folios and fragments of these illustrated editions. It must be noted that both Grabar and Ettinghausen were born in Europe, where they began their academic careers. Both scholars however continued their careers after the Second World War in the United States reflecting the rise of the US as a world hegemonic power in both economic and cultural terms. Scholars then began discussing and discerning the contents and meanings behind these images. However, dismissing the literary body that accompanies these works. Grabar notes that the decision to organizing the illustrations “story by story rather than manuscript by

manuscript” is based on a certainty that the Maqamat al-Hariri “are not as widely known as biblical stories or Persian epics.”<sup>45</sup> Others have suggested that the text contributes very little to the illustrator, and as such, the art historian.<sup>46</sup>

The absence of studies on the manuscripts is also a result of the dispersal, displacement, and mutilation of these manuscripts by private and public collectors and dealers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> As well as the natural deterioration that exhausted the manuscripts with the passage of time. Aside from what is presented by twentieth century scholarship, little is known of the whereabouts of the Maqamat al-Hariri before their acquisition in the late nineteenth century. No documentation is available; the owners and traders are unknown in exception of very few manuscripts such as al-Wasiti Maqamat. Currently owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris as Arabe 5847, the manuscript was donated to the library as a part of the Edgar Blochet collection of *Oriental, Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts* (1900).<sup>48</sup> Which Blochet would later include in several of his publications. Again, the very ownership of the manuscripts by European museums and the residence of the scholars studying the works of the Maqamat highlights the aforementioned cultural appropriation of the Islamic artworks by Western colonialism and post-colonialism.

In examining the sudden interest that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth century, it is noticeable that discussions on medieval Islamic manuscripts fixate on the

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<sup>45</sup> Grabar, viii

<sup>46</sup> Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva: Skira, 1962), 104

<sup>47</sup> Anna Contadini, “The Manuscript as a Whole,” in *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, ed. Anna Contadini, vol. 90, 2010, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Information published by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in the “Archive et Manuscrits” of the Department des Manuscrits. [Arabe 4666-6753 (E. Blochet)].

illustrations themselves, as works of art, rather than the role of illustrations in relation to the manuscript as a whole and its context. Aside from a few scholars such as George Saliba (who is notably from the Arab region) and Linda Komaroff (2008), hardly any studies consider the relationship between the text and the image in relation to the broader social context. In the last two decades, there has been a shift in the treatment of these manuscripts, but only in studies of Persian masterpieces such as the *Shahnama*.<sup>49</sup> However, the illustrations in the *Maqamat* received particular attention despite the separation from the text. They were perceived as notable early works of Islamic art. They were also an archive or documentation of the social and cultural structure of medieval Islamic society in the Arab lands. The main scholarship noted in this chapter reveals the analyses, points of interest and methodologies developed by art historians in the last two centuries. The chapter develops a framework to further examine the role art historical scholarship play towards an understanding of the *Maqamat al-Hariri*.

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<sup>49</sup> Contadini, "The Manuscript as a Whole," 10.

## 2.3. References and Previous Scholarship

### 2.3.1 *Early Studies*

Alongside the rising Orientalist interests of European audiences in artefacts from the so-called East during the nineteenth and twentieth century, early publications on the Maqamat al-Hariri appeared in several journals and survey books. The publications presented Eastern aesthetic objects, including miniature paintings from several illustrated Maqamat manuscripts. The earliest publication this study was able to identify was that of *Le Décoration Arabe* published in 1885. The book included various photographs of murals, mosaics, carpets, floor tiles and ornaments from all over Bilad al Sham and the Arabian Peninsula. It included one frontispiece illumination from a thirteenth century Maqamat manuscript.<sup>50</sup> The photobook does not have any written text and does not mention to which particular manuscript the frontispiece belongs.<sup>51</sup> So far, no studies have discussed it, neither was this research able to identify it due to limited access to some of the manuscripts.

However, what is interesting about this frontispiece is the presence of angels. The representation of angels in another frontispiece belonging to the Vienna manuscript (d. 1334/ A.F. 9) has intrigued early scholars such as Edgar Blochet as well as later publications by Richard Ettinghausen and Robert Hillenbrand (*figure 1*).<sup>52</sup> So, it is of interest why this frontispiece has never since been discussed or affiliated with the Maqamat. Interestingly, early publications mostly discuss the relationship between Arab

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<sup>50</sup> Prisse d'Avennes, *La Décoration Arabe* (Savoy et Cie., 1885), 4.

<sup>51</sup> The only written text available is in Chapter I of the Table of Contents noting "Pl. 4-Séances de Hariry. Encadrement du frontispiece. XIII siècle." Plate 4-Assemblies of Hariry. Frame of frontispiece. XIII century.

<sup>52</sup> *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. A.F. 9, Folio 1 Frontispiece*, 1334, 27.5 x 25.5, 1334, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Vienna.

illustration and that of Greek and Byzantine work, with a particular interest in the presence of angels and halos. Edgar Blochet (1907) claims that the angels depicted in the corners of the frontispiece are copies of Byzantine artwork. Even though Blochet does not reference any particular Byzantine artwork, he claims the artist copied the characters with no effort to amend the details. For instance, in the folios (*figure 2*)<sup>53</sup> where in a halo is shown around the head of the main figures is as would Blochet claim it an explicit imitation of Byzantine saints.<sup>54</sup> Blochet discusses three illustrated Maqamat folios found at the Bibliothèque nationale de France—arabe5847 and arabe6094 (d. 619/1222) and arabe3929 (d. 13<sup>th</sup> century). Blochet presumes that the paintings of arabe6094 are derived from Byzantine originals. The characters and the painting techniques are clichés of the Byzantine school, with the Hellenistic influence diminishing with the progression of the Ayyubid dynasty (1169-1334). He also notes a striking similarity in the workmanship of the paintings between arabe5847 and the art of the Hellenic Middle Ages. Similarly, Hugo Buchthal (1940), in his study on Maqamat 6094, considers Muslim manuscripts to have been influenced by Christian style and taste which Buchthal considers it still in the manner of the Greek empire. Buchthal cross compares the compositions, layouts and characteristics between Maqamat folios and Greek biblical illustrations and mosaics as a way of claiming that the Maqamat manuscript is an offshoot of Hellenistic aesthetic traditions in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>55</sup> This again reveals the nature of the Eurocentricity taken by previous

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<sup>53</sup> al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Wasiti*, 1237.

<sup>54</sup> Edgar Blochet, “Peintures de Manuscrits Arabes a Types Byzantins,” *Revue Archéologique - Presses Universitaires de France* 4 (1907): 207–8.

<sup>55</sup> Hugo Buchthal, “‘Hellenistic’ Miniatures in Early Islamic Manuscripts,” *Ars Islamica* 7, no. 2 (1940): 130–33.



researchers. They sought to interpret Islamic art in a way conceivable by European scholars.

In Chapter XI of his book, *The miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century* (1912), the Swedish art collector Frederik Richard Martin argues against Blochet and Buchthal's views by suggesting that to a stranger's gaze, these miniatures might seem a facsimile of Greek Byzantine art, however, if anyone has visited the East they would come to see how the Maqamat illustrations are a faithful representation of their environment.<sup>56</sup> This is seen in the depiction of the crowds of people around the small shops at the bazaar. Or the somewhat caricatured or exaggerated figures, that might seem to some strange but are rather a true representation of Arabs to date (1912). In a notable deflection from previous scholarship, Martin explains that such manuscripts are more representative of Chinese influences as seen in the depiction of the drapes and colours of Maqamat A.H.733 (d. 1333) than that of Greek. Similarly, Hugo Buchthal (1940-1942) presents a departure between Arabe illustrations and that of the Hellenistic traditions.<sup>57</sup> Buchthal compares styles between two illustrated editions of the Maqamat (arabe 6094;3929;5847) as well as a copy of *Kalilah w Dumna* (arabe3465). Martin adds that these works deserve much appreciation. Especially for the facial characteristics, the motion of the hands, the style of drawing, and the wealth of the colour palette utilized in their making, noting them as "colourists by the grace of God."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Martin goes

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<sup>56</sup> Frederik Robert Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from 8th to the 18th Century*, vol. 1 (B. Quaritch, London, 1912), 13.

<sup>57</sup> Hugo Buchthal, "'Hellenistic' Miniatures in Early Islamic Manuscripts," *Ars Islamica* 7, no. 2 (1940): 124–27.

<sup>58</sup> Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from 8th to the 18th Century*, 1:13.

to add that in his view the Mesopotamian and Syrian artists are very lightly influenced by Byzantine aesthetic, but rather are purely Oriental.

In his book Martin claims to have acquired the largest collection of decorated first pages from illustrated Qur'anic manuscripts and other works throughout his journey in the East. Despite Martin's apparent racism as well as vagueness in revealing how his collection was obtained, Martin devotes a part of his study to examining a brief history of al-Wasiti manuscript and the artist. Firstly, by mentioning that the al-Wasiti manuscript was acquired by the French national library after the death of Mr. Charles Schefer. That it contains 96 miniatures and is copied and illuminated by Yahya al-Wasiti.<sup>59</sup> Alongside other manuscripts such as arabe6094, arabe3929 (d. 1270)<sup>60</sup>, and the Vienna manuscript A.F. 9. Martin marks the al-Wasiti manuscript as the most important one amongst them, due to its preserved condition as well as unique style and representation. Martin also identifies that two of the Maqamat manuscripts used paper of silk refuse from Samarqand and India, however it is not very clear which manuscripts in particular are being referenced.<sup>61</sup> Following in Martin's footsteps, Thomas W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann published the joint work *Islamic book: a contribution to its Art & History from VII-XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century* (1929). The book was divided into two parts. The early Islamic period from the seventh-twelfth century and works from the thirteenth-eighteenth century. Sections 43 to 47 are publications of the Vienna manuscript A.F.9

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<sup>59</sup> Martin, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Arabe 3929 is not dated, F.R. Martin resorts to Edgard Blochet who presumed the manuscripts was produced in Syria in 1270.

<sup>61</sup> Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from 8th to the 18th Century*, 1:105.

comprising of eight illustrated folios and the frontispiece, and no text or information.<sup>62</sup> Similar to Martin, Arnold and Grohmann discuss al-Wasiti maqamat noting the same hand did the text and illustration. However, Arnold and Grohmann delve a little more into the making of books rather than the materiality and the painters as did Frederik Richard Martin. They note the specialty behind the Maqamat for it does not represent the typical operational process of manuscript making that appeared at a later period. That which includes, besides the painter (*musawwir*), the leaf cutter (*qati'*) the gilder (*mudhakhhib*) the draughtman (*tarrah*), the binder (*mujallid*) the preparer of the gold-sprinkled paper, the designer of the lined borders, the restorer of old manuscripts, and the master who put together the albums called *muraqqa'at*, as separate craftsmen.

Early studies on the illustrated Maqamat published brief descriptive analytical studies, which mostly crossed compared between Arab, Byzantine, Hellenistic and Persian painting and style. Some bibliographical and authorship studies did appear in the works of Martin, Arnold and Grohmann. These early studies did not so much lay the groundwork for later scholarship on the Maqamat but were rather including them as a part of early survey texts on decorative Islamic artefacts. The Maqamat became a separate focus in later studies after some publications such as that of Martin attracted the public.<sup>63</sup> Aside from the upsurge in publishing photographs of these folios, many European exhibitions introduced the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts as a way of presenting Arab-Islamic artwork. One such exhibition was held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 1938, showcasing leaves of the illustrated Maqamat exhibited

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann, *The Islamic Book: A Contribution to Its Art & History from the VII-XVIIIth Century* (Germany: The Pegasus Press, 1929), 331–44.

<sup>63</sup> Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, 1984, 1.

separately.<sup>64</sup> In exception of the extended studies of Buchthal<sup>65</sup> and Holter, there is an overall scarcity in scholarship on the Maqamat illustrations between the early 1940s and late 1950s, probably due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

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<sup>64</sup> Buchthal, “‘Hellenistic’ Miniatures in Early Islamic Manuscripts,” 125.

<sup>65</sup> Hugo Buchthal, “Early Islamic Miniatures from Baghdād,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 5 (1942): 18–39.



Figure 1. Ms. A.F. 9, fol. 1, Maqamat, Nationalbibliothek, Vienna 27.5x25.5 cm, Frontispiece, Rajab 734/1334 ce. Courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.



Figure 2. Ms. arabe 5847, fol. 2r-1v, Maqamat, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département des Manuscrits orientaux, 37x28 cm, copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, ah 634/1237 ce. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

### ***2.3.2 Mid-20th century Studies***

In the 1950's D.S. Rice published two studies that lightly examine the characters in the Maqamat illustrations. In his attempt to understand the social construct behind the making of these illustrations, Rice's work highlights the significance of the illustrated Maqamat within the broader context of early Islamic painting. In his first article Rice discusses al-Wasiti manuscript, arabe3929 and the Vienna manuscript A.F.9, noting close pictorial representations of the text, however with a main focus on the characters

and architectural resemblance of the tavern scene<sup>66</sup> (*figure 3*)<sup>67</sup> similar to that of a caliph palace Dar al-Khilafa (Samarra). However, his article “The Oldest Illustrated Arabic Manuscript” focuses on the Maqamat illustrations individually, and not as a supporting study. Rice was the first to include a chronological list of the eleven illustrated manuscripts of the Maqamat that had been discovered by 1959.<sup>68</sup> It also included a stylistic analysis of each manuscript from which Rice focused on particular objects, such as the different pictorial representations of tombs, to identify the various burial customs in the Islamic region.<sup>69</sup> Rice used his analysis of these objects as a method of identifying the origins of these works. Despite the one-dimensionality found in Rice’s methodology as a result of unsupported interpretations, it none the less brought attention to the significance of the Maqamat in the artistic developments in Islamic and Arab regions. Shortly after the Second World War during his tenure at Princeton University, Richard Ettinghausen (1962) publishes a survey book on Arab painting. In agreement with Rice’s methodology, Ettinghausen utilised the formal aspects and stylistic characteristics to provide social and cultural interpretations of the Islamic Middle Eastern region. Ettinghausen also cross compares between various editions of the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts. Despite his work focusing primarily on the Leningrad manuscript (ms. S23) and al-Wasiti manuscripts, Ettinghausen’s survey is

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<sup>66</sup> D. S. Rice, “Deacon or Drink: Some Paintings from Samarra Re-Examined,” *Arabica* 5, no. 1 (1958): 30.

<sup>67</sup> Yahya al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. Arabe 5847, Folio 33, 1237, 37 x 28 cm, 1237, 33*, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>68</sup> D.S. Rice, “The Oldest Illustrated Arabic Manuscript,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22, no. 2 (1959): 215.

<sup>69</sup> Rice, 215–19.

considered more significant than that of Rice. In that he included previously unpublished illustration, insight on the typologies present in various versions, and a more detailed context to not just the objects but the facial expressions and bodily poses of the characters. For instance, in comparing the differences in composition of similar scenes, including the postures and facial expressions of the figures present (ex. Abu Zayd, the Governor and Al-Harith the narrator), Ettinghausen identified a difference in the dates of origination and cultural context of these works.<sup>70</sup> In 1960, Ettinghausen discovered a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Maqamat* (Esad Efendi 2916) with an extensive amount of illustrated material, which 42 illustrated folios were then published by Oleg Grabar in 1963.<sup>71</sup>

Similar to both Rice and Ettinghausen, Grabar differentiates facial expression, attire and characters. Grabar divides these attributes between Arab looking and non-Arab looking representations of miniatures. He does so by claiming that these works differ from Persian painting.<sup>72</sup> While Ettinghausen and Grabar were at the time both involved in other domains of study within the field of Islamic art history, Grabar continued his work on Islamic history by publishing several articles between 1963 and 1976. The articles varied however were a build up to his later extensive study published in 1984. The earlier work focuses on what Grabar considers the six cycles of

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<sup>70</sup> Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 104–7.

<sup>71</sup> Oleg Grabar, “A Newly Discovered Illustrated Manuscript of the ‘Maqāmāt’ of Ḥarīri,” *Ars Orientalis* 5, no. Journal Article (1963): 107.

<sup>72</sup> Grabar, 108–9.



Islamic artistic production<sup>73</sup>, locating the illustrated thirteenth century Maqamat at the end of the ‘princely’ cycle.<sup>74</sup>

Even though Grabar (1970) announces his wish to study the Maqamat al-Hariri “beyond technical problems of stylistic and iconographic analyses or of relationship between manuscripts,”<sup>75</sup> Grabar proceeds with an iconographic approach, noting that one factor is the limitation that the text in relation to the linguistic complexity the Maqamat.<sup>76</sup> In 1974, Grabar did however attempt to discuss issues of urban patronage which he detects through examining the illustrated miniatures of the Maqamat. It is clear that his aim is to elaborate his studies beyond formal aesthetics and stylistic studies by studying a particular illustration from al-Wasiti (*figure 4*)<sup>77</sup> as a way of questioning the relationship between image and text. Whether the function of these visual representation is a translation of the text into a pictorial medium, or just an aesthetic addition. Through this method Grabar identifies five different attitudes of how the images were added to the original text. The first as essentially *literal*<sup>78</sup>, as found in arabe3929 suggesting that the images resembling the text so closely that they are nearly inconceivable without the text. Grabar suggests that the illustrations of arabe3929,

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<sup>73</sup> Oleg Grabar, “Les arts mineurs de l’Orient musulman à partir du milieu du XIIe siècle,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 11, no. 42 (1968): 185–88.

<sup>74</sup> Grabar, 187.

<sup>75</sup> Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Visual Culture, 1100-1800*, vol. 2 (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate/Variorum, 2006), 167.

<sup>76</sup> Grabar, 2:173.

<sup>77</sup> Yahya al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. Arabe 5847, Folio 101*, 1237, 37 x 28 cm, 1237, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>78</sup> Grabar, 2:195.

literal as they seem, are recognized as “a random commentary on a most elementary reading of the text rather than as a coherent visual interpretation.”<sup>79</sup> For the reasons that it is a manuscript providing images and not a text, while also being an adaptation from other illustration of Maqamat.<sup>80</sup> Grabar describes LeningradS.23 and Esad Efendi2961 and arabe5847 as *descriptive*, yet arabe5847 as also *interpretive*. This marks a major shift suggesting that he viewed Islamic art such as the Maqamat in more complex terms than a mere depicting nature. According to Grabar, al-Wasiti portrayed the narrative beyond the literal meaning of the text as well. Grabar concludes his study by claiming:

“To imagine and to reconstruct what may have been in the minds and attitudes of those who ordered, bought, made and appreciated these images requires the combination of still incomplete art historical and other research. Once this is achieved, we may have more than an explanation [...] possibly means to delineate the position of the visual world in medieval Islamic culture in general.”<sup>81</sup>

In 1974, David James like Grabar diverted from the traditional bibliographic and descriptive methodologies. James studies the technical developments in artistic production between the 1300s and 1400s. Especially the expansion of the composition and of the frame (space) of al-Wasiti illustrations, what he notes as ‘the development of the “high horizon” composition<sup>82</sup>—ground is seen from above, creating more space. James, similar to Grabar, notes how the new spatial demonstrations found within the Maqamat are an early and unique example of the origination of these compositions. “It

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<sup>79</sup> Grabar, 2:196.

<sup>80</sup> Grabar, 2:19

<sup>81</sup> Grabar, 2:205.

<sup>82</sup> David James, “Space-Forms in the Work of the Baghdād Maqāmāt Illustrators, 1225–58,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37, no. 2 (1974): 305.

[*space-form*] provides technical information, which if interpreted correctly, could constitute the framework for understanding the organization of Maqamat illustration, about which we know almost nothing.”<sup>83</sup> He proceeds to discuss several examples from various illustrated Maqamat editions that embody these spatial compositions, in comparison to earlier medieval Arab paintings—compositions defined within the columns of the texts rather than an enclosing frame/background.<sup>84</sup> As such identifying a shift in artistic technique, and a development in the visual arts of the Middle East in the thirteenth century. Grabar (1984) later elaborates on James’ study, however not directly, by a descriptive material analysis of illustrated manuscripts. Yet, he only does this for the illustrated material. Unlike any scholar beforehand, Grabar provides a full bibliographical study of all thirteen illustrated Maqamat manuscripts (dimensions, illustrated folios, courtesy notes, etc.). Grabar’s developed method engaged with a typological as well as formal examination of the manuscript as a form of identifying different social classes in the Maqamat. Therefore, by the late twentieth century, a shift becomes evident from the visual details and attributes of figures, edifices and attire, to an interest in the artist, aesthetic and technical development as well as discussions of cultural significance that are, unlike early studies, divorced from comparison with Persian and Byzantine works.

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<sup>83</sup> James, 320.

<sup>84</sup> James, 307–8.



Figure 3. Ms. arabe 5847, fol. 33, Maqamat, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département des Manuscrits orientaux, 37x28 cm, copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, ah 634/1237 ce. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Figure 4. Ms. arabe 5847, fol. 101, Maqamat, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département des Manuscrits orientaux, 37x28 cm, copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, ah 634/1237 ce. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

### 2.3.3 Late Studies

In the wake of the twenty-first century there is a build-up on the groundwork put forth by previous scholars, particularly Grabar. The interest in composition, layout and other means of aesthetic representation are still present in the late studies as will be demonstrated by Robert Hillenbrand (2007) and Bernard O’Kane (2012). However, the approach is seen to have embodied a more holistic picture of the Maqamat illustrations. Studies on book production and materiality, and material analysis of the Maqamat

illustrations became more synthesized in relation to textuality, book making, and the cultural agents at play. In other words, scholars began examining the Maqamat illustrations outside an autonomous frame, and within the context of book production and the socio-political frame of reference. As aforementioned, this approach was proposed by Grabar in the 1970s but did not come to core until the twenty-first century. However, it reveals the simplistic approach taken by Eurocentric researchers taken for decades to interpret Islamic art such as the Maqamat. In many ways, this reveals a broader problem of how Western art historians were incapable of understanding the “Islamic other” despite having gained strong reputations for their work at crucial intellectual powerhouses also known as Ivy League institutions.

It took until the twenty-first century for Western scholarship to further refine its approach. Jonathan Bloom’s article is one of the earliest publications to demonstrate this methodological shift. Bloom (2000) identifies the shift from parchment to paper as a leading factor in the development of illustrated manuscripts. Scholars agree that there was an ‘explosion’ of illustrated manuscripts in the thirteenth century around the Arab and Islamic world, but most, as will be discussed at a later stage, have associated this development to the dispersal or disappearance of any evidential remains of earlier illustrated manuscripts. Illustrated manuscripts (particularly works on poetry and literary writings or *belle-lettres*) existed long before the thirteenth century yet the historical and temporal apparatus have led to the disappearance of these works.<sup>85</sup> Another understanding of this phenomenon in book explosion has been traced to external cultural influences that initiated this common practice, such as copying Middle

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<sup>85</sup> Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Introduction of Paper to the Islamic Lands and the Development of the Illustrated Manuscript,” *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 17.

Byzantine painting. While others trace it to more internal influences, particularly, as noted by Grabar, the emerging interest of the upper-class in illustrated works, and the interest in commissioning these new forms of artistic practices.<sup>86</sup> Bloom however somehow counter-argues these associations by firstly, noting that the smooth surface of paper enabled artists to expand their practices and as such new forms of script and illustrations developed further, particularly illustrated and illuminated manuscripts. More importantly, Bloom traces the introduction of paper to the Islamic world from Central Asia to the eighth century. Adding that illustrated manuscripts only became an active practice after the early eleventh century. Bloom argues that in paper gaining favour throughout the following centuries, the production of book and the practice of reading replaced oral traditions.<sup>87</sup>

Through his work, Bloom takes interest in the broader social context when attempting to understand the relationship between oral and visual traditions in Islamic art. In approaching the broader social context, the studies of the Maqamat illustrated manuscripts developed throughout the following two decades to embody an interest in materiality, and literary studies as such. This also developed a further interest in theatre, oral traditions and textual studies. Such a study is put forth by Toprak (2008) who draws a link between the bodily postures and gestures of the theatre and that of the illustrated manuscripts.<sup>88</sup> Suggesting that there is a direct transcription of shadow plays unto illustrated folios. Toprak identifies architectural settings found in several

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<sup>86</sup> Bloom traces the introduction of paper to the Islamic world from Central Asia to the eighth century. Adding that throughout the ninth and tenth century the usage of paper gained favour as a result of textual tradition becoming more common than oral ones. Bloom notes that despite the use of paper since the eighth century, illustrated manuscript only became an active practice after the early eleventh century.

<sup>87</sup> Bloom, 18–20.

<sup>88</sup> Maqamat S.23, arabe5847, arabe6094, and ms.250.

illustrated Maqamat manuscripts resemble that of theatrical shadow plays. For instance, the distribution of the figures and characters from a folio representing Abu Zayd before the Governor of Mevr (*figure 5*).<sup>89</sup> On the right-hand side noted as the narrator, somehow separate from the rest, and on the bottom right, what Toprak suggests, is the audience.<sup>90</sup> In a folio (*figure 3*)<sup>91</sup> Alain George refers to the physical posture of al-Harith (face in profile, arm extended out of the body) as an identical resemblance to that of shadow puppets.<sup>92</sup> While also noting that the architectural structure of the tavern itself is an imitation of prop theatrical settings. Toprak focuses on the pictorial details and composition to conclude that if these illustrations were inspired by the shadow plays and theatrical performance then both the theatre and the illustration were driven by oral narration. Alain George (2011) in agreement with Toprak suggests that theatrical plays and illustrated manuscripts of the Maqamat were favoured over reading.<sup>93</sup> And as Toprak notes even though oral, theatrical and painting traditions developed simultaneously between the ninth and tenth century, oral narration and performance were more common and favoured by the public.<sup>94</sup> However, the demand for illustrated manuscripts had risen to accommodate a larger audience of the urban society, craftsmen indulged in the pictorial arts more excessively and acquired visual

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<sup>89</sup> *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. S.23, Folio 256*, n.d., 25 x 19 cm, n.d., The Academy of Science, St. Petersburg.

<sup>90</sup> Filiz Toprak, "Oral Narrating Tradition of The Arab World: A Source of Inspiration for The Miniature Paintings of Hariri's Maqamat," ed. Salih Yalın, *Erciyes Akademi*, no. 24 (2008): 109.

<sup>91</sup> al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Wasiti*, 1237.

<sup>92</sup> George, 7–10. Also noted by Grabar, *Illustrations of the Maqamat* on Oxford Marsh 458 5F12, Or. Add. 22114, and A.F. 9 7D12.

<sup>93</sup> George, "The Illustrations of the 'Maqamat' and the Shadow Play," 1.

<sup>94</sup> Filiz Toprak, "Oral Narrating Tradition of The Arab World: A Source of Inspiration for the Miniature Paintings of Hariri's Maqamat," ed. Salih Yalın, *Erciyes Akademi*, no. 24 (2008): 112.



references from the shadow plays.<sup>95</sup> Toprak even detects an “intellectual awakening” witnessed in medieval Islamic culture between the ninth and the thirteenth century that led to a high demand of illustrated manuscripts amongst the upper-crust of society.<sup>96</sup> Thus, it could be derived from these works that firstly all three art forms developed favourability yet amongst different social classes. Secondly, acknowledging that the text is the main influence of these art forms. The interest in these stories is the leading force behind all representations of the Maqamat al-Hariri. This could be potentially observed one of the reasons several recent scholars took interest in re-visiting the concept of the text as a written document and as a communicator of knowledge, narrative and pleasure. Alain George (2012) notes that the illustrated Maqamat are unique beyond their aesthetic value. They are a by-product of a text that embodies several dimensions of expression. The Maqamat al-Hariri text is unique in its usage of prose and verse. This has made the Maqamat popular beyond the common literary and aesthetic components, since it encompasses the art of oral narration and therefore the text.

This multi-dimensionality of the Maqamat text in relation to orality before the common practice of modern print, were made to be read aloud.<sup>97</sup> George suggests that the oral testimony even surpasses the written, similar to that of the memorization of the Qur’an. Thus, claiming that the oral and textual are inseparable spheres in examining the origins of the Maqamat. However, scholars such as George and Bernard O’Kane

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<sup>95</sup> Filiz Toprak, “The Influence of Oral Narrating Traditions on a Frequently Illustrated Thirteenth-Century Manuscript,” in *Islamic Art, Architecture and Material Culture* (Achaepress, 2012), 140.

<sup>96</sup> Toprak, “Oral Narrating Tradition of The Arab World: A Source of Inspiration for The Miniature Paintings of Hariri’s Maqamat,” 112.

<sup>97</sup> Alain George, “Orality, Writing and the Image in the Maqamat: Arabic Illustrated Books in Context,” *Art History* 35, no. 1 (2012): 12.

(2012) revert to examining the written form, layout and composition between text and image of the Maqamat illustrated manuscripts. George for instance draws parallels between the Qur'an and the Maqamat. As aforementioned they share a similar literary complexity as well as an affinity towards oral traditions, and yet the Qur'an was never illustrated. However, George also mentions a similarity in material representation. For instance, the titles and headlines represented with ornamentations, cursive writing, and calligraphic aestheticism. Together with the presence of golden roundels as verse separators, illustrated frontispieces and illuminations<sup>98</sup>, and so on (*figure 6*).<sup>99</sup> Similarly, O'Kane examines the layout, composition and colophons of al-Wasiti manuscript<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> Alain George, "Orality, Writing and the Image in the Maqamat: Arabic Illustrated Books in Context," *Art History* 35, no. 1 (2012): 19–20.

<sup>99</sup> *Maqamat Al-Hariri, Or. Add. 7293, Folio 14v-15r*, 1323, 43 x 30 cm, 1323, British Library, London.

<sup>100</sup> O'Kane, "Text and Paintings in the Al-Wasiti 'Maqamat'," 42.



Figure 5. Ms. S.23, folio 256, Maqamat Hariri, Russian Academy of Science, St. Petersburg, Oriental Institute., 25.x19 cm. Thirteenth century. Courtesy of the Academy of Science, St. Petersburg



Figure 6. Or. Add. 7293, fol. 14v-15r, Maqamat al-Hariri, British Library, London, 43x30 cm, unknown scribe and illustrator, ah Rabi' II 723/1323 ce. Courtesy of the British Library.

On discussions of textuality, David Roxburgh (2013), similar to Alain George, suggests that the Maqamat al-Hariri is a book that is not only meant to be read, but seen and heard,<sup>101</sup> and a reason behind illustrating such material. Roxburgh attempts to raise the question of what influenced these artists, such as al-Wasiti, to illustrate such complicated literature in the first place. Unlike Grabar, Rice, James and Ettinghausen, who believe the complexity of the text limits the illustrative potential. Roxburgh notes that this complexity itself, such as the use of palindrome, is what kept the illustrations from representing a literal visual contribution. On the contrary, that complexity itself is

<sup>101</sup> David J. Roxburgh, "In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's Maqamat," *Muqarnas* 30 (2013): 206.

what makes the illustrations so unique and creative, while also preserving the integrity of the text. Roxburgh explains the development of the literary style al-Hariri uses in writing the Maqamat through a unique integration of oratical speech (*khutba*), rhyming and tropes such as *badi'*, and rhythmical prose (*saj'*), amongst others. According to Zahra Pakzad and Mahboube Panahi (2016) al-Wasiti for instance presented an authentic visual manifestation of the text, and was able to portray meaning from the text that is not easily comprehensible by the reader, or word alone. However, it is not clear whether the intention behind al-Wasiti's work is a commentary, an explanation, or purely entertaining. Similar to Roxburgh, Pakzad and Panahi note that the Maqamat al-Hariri includes words that were considered unfamiliar and obsolete to the general Arabic reader. As well as, difficult lexical compositions. It could be perceived that the purpose of Hariri, and Hamadhani before him, was to demonstrate exceptional literary skills associated with higher education, as a means of utilizing linguistic prowess to gain a position at the Diwan al-Rasa'il, the office of the Caliph. In al-Wasiti's case, the illustrations are a similar contribution to the textual intent from that perspective.

Artists deciphered and derived meaning from the written text, digging into the theological substance of the book in order to create the illustrated material. This could be seen in the manner in which al-Wasiti for instance represents the everyday engagements and customs around the Islamic Mecca pilgrimage (*figure 7*).<sup>102</sup> Therefore, the study suggests that through analysing particular illustrations, a more concrete understanding of the medieval Islamic society and Arab traditions is formed. Pakzad and Panahi were able to derive that the illustrations portray and guide meaning to the reader. More importantly, the article demonstrates the interlinked relationship between

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<sup>102</sup> Yahya al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. Arabe 5847, Folio 143v*, 1237, 37 x 28 cm, 1237, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

text, image and artist. In doing so, the challenges of the artist are presented, as well as the ability to portray the underlying social criticism hidden behind the complex and humorous literary work of al-Hariri. The authors include an example that demonstrates al-Wasiti's painting skills and his ability to capture the satire of the stories in his pictorial representations. Particularly ones that display the reality behind significant social settings such as the annual *hajj* pilgrimage. Hariri and al-Wasiti instead of depicting the spiritual ceremony and journey, both present the chaotic social surrounding at the parameters of the pilgrimage itself.<sup>103</sup> For instance, al-Wasiti portrayed women haggling salesmen, other people spinning thread, and men baking bread, to mention a few (*figure 7*).<sup>104</sup>

This interest in understanding the modes of operations behind al-Maqamat, particularly that of the artist is presented more thoroughly by Robert Hillenbrand (2010), wherein the author discusses the frontispiece of al-Wasiti manuscript. Hillenbrand notes that out of the eight thirteenth century illustrated Maqamat editions, only one, apart from the al-Wasiti edition, includes a frontispiece.<sup>105</sup> Thus, Hillenbrand firstly suggests that the inclusion of a frontispiece is uncommon to thirteenth century illustrated manuscripts. Hillenbrand puts into question the causes behind this unique frontispiece phenomenon. Hillenbrand applies a descriptive analysis on the frontispiece as a method of not only attempting to understand the intention of the artist, but as a demonstration of al-Wasiti's skill as well. For instance, Hillenbrand suggests that al-

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<sup>103</sup> Zahra Pakzad and Mahboube Panahi, "Social Criticism in Hariri's Maqamat with a Focus on Al-Wasiti's Miniature Paintings," the source is *Asian social science* vol 12, 2016, published by the *Canadian Center of Science and Education* 12, no. 12 (2016): 88.

<sup>104</sup> al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Wasiti*, 1237.

<sup>105</sup> Hillenbrand, "The Schefer Ḥarīrī: A Study in Islamic Frontispiece Design," 119.

Wasiti places an exaggerated figure of a ruler in the centre of the page, thus presenting a hierarchal position in comparison to the rest of the subjects. According to Hillenbrand this is representation of royal iconography yet it could also be a symbolic gesture of the relationship between the authority and the divine (*figure 2*).<sup>106</sup> Hillenbrand proceeds to identify similar details that elaborate on the uniqueness of al-Wasiti's frontispiece, and elaborates on how this form of iconography is ahead of its time, especially in its combination of figures, that has not been seen before in Islamic or Byzantine works. Hillenbrand suggests that it hints to the absence of a patron, meaning al-Wasiti functioned independently.<sup>107</sup> Al-Wasiti included this unconventional double-page as a frontispiece and filled it with rich effect, ornaments and design. However, Hillenbrand also notes that this lavish frontispiece carries hints of al-Wasiti aiming to capture the attention of a potential patron or buyer. More importantly, Hillenbrand through his thorough analysis, notes how for the first time the role of the artist is somehow seen equal to the role of authority. Not only in being both scribe and illustrator or working independent of a patron or group of illustrators, but in the manner in which he utilized this advantage and created an unused form of visual frontispiece in relation to its textual counterpart.

As seen in the historiography, it seems that a renewed interest in Islamic culture and studies occurred after the 9/11 attacks in New York but perhaps more importantly a greater influx of migrants from the Islamic world into Western societies. It appears that the twenty-first century has so far seen as new engagement with Islamic art by Western

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<sup>106</sup> Hillenbrand, 123.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Hillenbrand, "The Schefer Ḥarīrī: A Study in Islamic Frontispiece Design," in *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, ed. Anna Contadini, vol. 90, 2010, 118.

scholars notably diverting from simplistic interpretations of Islamic and Arab culture to a more serious engagement with the “the other”. The debates shifted towards notions on multiculturalism and socio-political issues. Discussions that did not interest scholars until Arab-Islamic culture became a topic of renewed interest from the survey texts that placed in the medieval golden era. As a result, this reminded Islamic art historians of the broader social context. Several Islamic art historians such as Wendy Shaw (2012) delve into the discussions of ‘What is Islamic art?’ and became interested in the social and political meaning behind the artefacts deemed Islamic or Arab. A few scholars utilise the Maqamat illustrations as a means of commenting on contemporary cultural misconceptions of Arab and Islamic communities. For instance, R.D. Geoffrey (2007) in his study of medieval Islamic tombs and burial traditions presented in the Vienna manuscript (A.F. 9) claims that despite more studies are needed to draw the links between the illustrated tombs and that of al-Wuqayba Jewish cemetery in Suhār, it nonetheless represents a time when Muslims, Jews and Christians shared a peaceful life.<sup>108</sup> Another study on architectural formations and facades of mosques written in Arabic by Hassan Kasim and Sura Mohammad Khaleel (2019) highlights another form of misconception of Islamic culture. The quantitative study put forth by this article calls attention to the misrepresentation that contemporary literature provides on the significance of minarets and domes during the Islamic golden era.<sup>109</sup> Kasim and Khaleel examine the illustrations of al-Maqamat that portray architectural entities (arcs, columns, roofs, domes, minarets, maharib, balconies, and quarries) and note that

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<sup>108</sup> R. D. Geoffrey, “The Earliest Islamic Illustrated Manuscript, the Maqāmāt and a Graveyard at Suhār at Suhār, Oman,” in *Arab Painting*, vol. 90, 2007, 101.

<sup>109</sup> Adil Khaleel and Kasim, 89.



minarets and domes appear in small numbers. Thus, Kasim and Khaleel's study firstly presented a methodology more indulgent with the text. More importantly, the conclusion put forth demands that scholarship revisit the iconized representation of these architectural forms that have been utilized as symbolic characteristics of Islamic culture.<sup>110</sup>

Even though, most al-Maqamat scholars did not undertake this 'cause', social and literary criticism is seen to have developed towards studies on textuality, meaning and authorship. Primarily studies expanding on the discussion of oral and theatrical traditions, however to embody a keener interest in the literary content as the main vessel of influence. Thus, a development is witnessed towards three main notions through this socio-political lens—that of visual descriptive analysis, image-text relationship, as well as author-reception cultural modes.

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<sup>110</sup> Adil Khaleel and Kasim, 89.

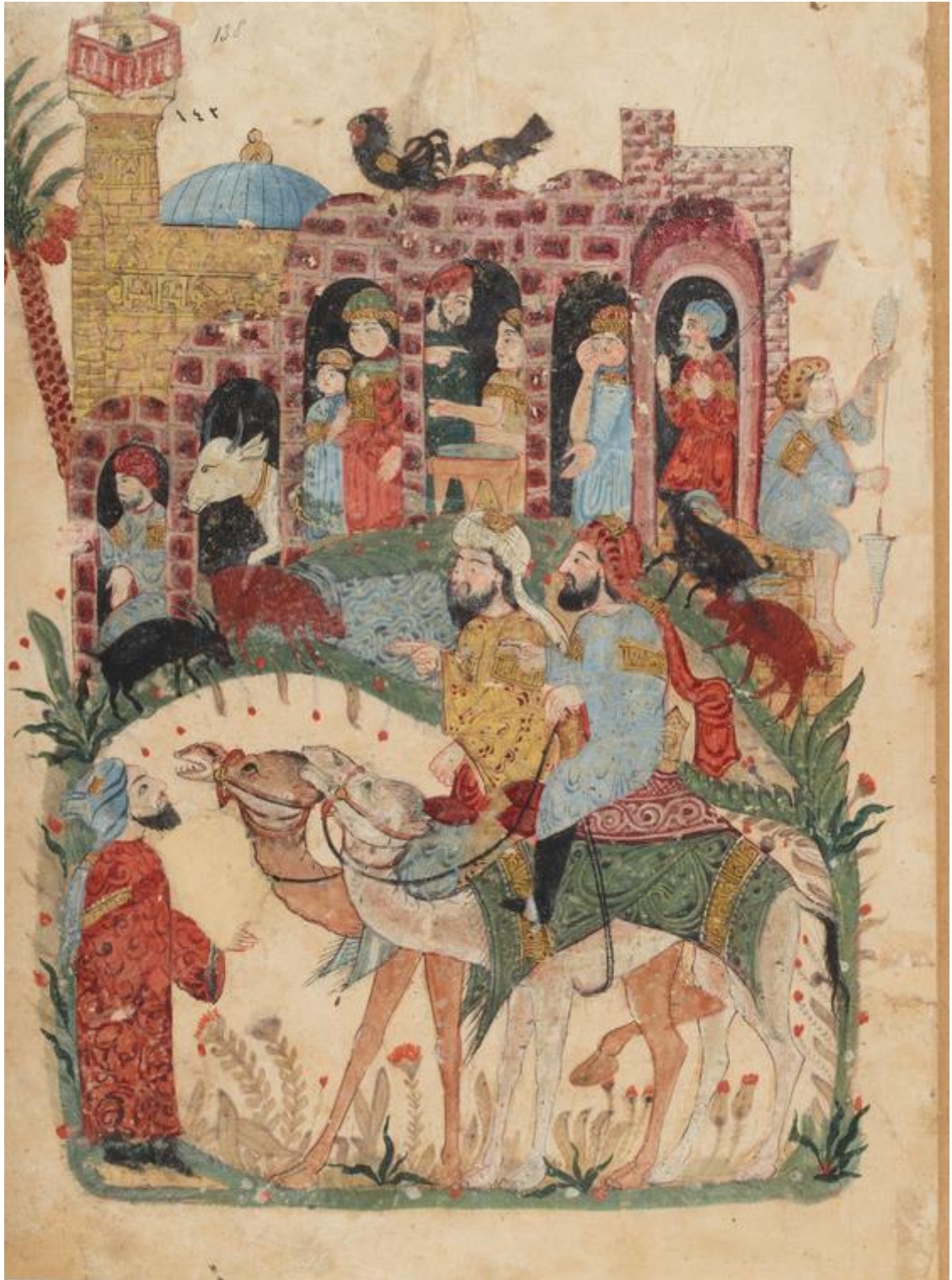


Figure 7. Ms. arabe 5847, fol. 143v, Maqamat al-Hariri, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département des Manuscrits orientaux, 37x28 cm, copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, ah 634/1237 ce. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

## 2.4. The Prominent Methodologies

Reflecting on the scholarship published on the illustrated Maqamat, one can observe a development in the field, from formal analysis applied by studies of the early 1900s to the integration of social and literary criticism applied by recent scholars of the twenty-first century. Early studies mostly examine historical or technical documentation of artistic merit in Islamic art. The same illustrated folios from three illustrated Maqamat manuscripts (arabe5847, arabe3929, A.F. 9) are studied repeatedly. Additionally, illustrated folios were published in several survey texts discussing Arab and Islamic art, and the Maqamat were placed in relation to Byzantine and Hellenistic artworks and iconography. Such survey texts maintained a taxonomy that categorizes medieval Islamic art as fundamentally Byzantine. Placing works such as Maqamat al-Hariri under a reflection of nineteenth century categorization of Islamic and Arab art as subsidiary component of the arts of late antiquity, or rather influenced by western traditions that infuses Byzantine and Sasanian components to create a unique culture of its own.<sup>111</sup> Such a perspective of Islamic works was not wavered until Said's *Orientalism* (1978). By mid-century Grabar and Ettinghausen, scholars considered pioneers in the field of Islamic art history in the United States, demonstrate a break from this narrative by forging studies that consider social context. In an attempt to consider meaning and cultural narrative, Grabar and Ettinghausen advance descriptive examination and preface bibliographic and iconographic analyses. Yet up until the mid-1980s no methodical comprehensive analyses had been presented on the Maqamat that go beyond formal and descriptive methodological applications. Grabar, James, Rice and Ettinghausen demonstrate the early stages of research on the Maqamat. However, it

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<sup>111</sup> Gülru Necipoglu, "The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 6 (2012): 1-2.

was not until the scholars of the twenty-first century that studies became more involved in materiality, textuality and cultural studies of the Maqamat. This development is a path paved in parallel with the canon of Islamic art history, one as Wendy Shaw expresses “has had limited success as a good ambassador for Islam.”<sup>112</sup> Pointing towards a revisitation of the historiographical issues, mainly the limiting conceptual boundaries set by Islamic art history that creates the disability to engage with a comprehensive apprehension of Islamic culture. Despite the slight ruptures seen in the methodological approaches throughout the last two decades, the issue of the visual fixation is still the leading component to the studies put forth in an attempt to understand the broader cultural context of the medieval Islamic world.

Why have art historians not engaged closely with the Maqamat text? And could the constrained parameter of study, i.e., language, conventional art historical methods, or a visual interest alone, within the field Islamic art history be a main cause? If so, then in what ways could this parameter be widened in order for Islamic art history to become a better ambassador towards Arab-Islamic culture?

Most scholarship refer to the text as a means of deriving cultural and social context, identifying dates, scribes and patrons, and as identifying missing pages. Scholars give reason to the dismissal or disinterest in the text. Grabar notes that the text create a limitation to its own reception through the complex language al-Hariri uses. When discussing the Maqamat arabe3929 Grabar admits that the illustrations are confined to the text but it is uncertain in what ways the text contributes to the illustrations. Grabar also notes that the written text adheres to a highly literate Arab milieu, and that the illustrations present “material setting of the thirteenth century world

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<sup>112</sup> Wendy Shaw, “The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6, no. Journal Article (2012): 2.

as seen by the Arab bourgeoisie, it is dangerous to go too far in utilizing them as historical documents [...]”<sup>113</sup> Despite the fact that the notion of bourgeoisie had not been yet developed in the thirteenth century, George builds on Grabar’s theory by claiming that the literary form of Maqamat is so complex that a strong linguistic background and education is necessary in reading the Maqamat.<sup>114</sup>

George and Toprak also suggest that the illustrations are a by-product of the text. Claiming that the text is independent from the illustration as a result of its valuable composition. George, Toprak and O’Kane also demonstrate that oral traditions were preferred over reading practices, and therefore the public engaged more with oral and theatrical traditions and as a result influenced the components found in the illustrations. The notion that the three main art forms (orality, theatre and illustration) are independent of the text in that they are manifestations of the narrative rather than in direct correlation could be considered a reductionist dismissal of the integral role the text plays in informing these artforms. Al-Wasiti is noted to be both the calligrapher and the painter and the narratives inspired artists to illustrate manuscripts of the Maqamat al-Hariri. Materially and conceptually artists engaged closely with the text and the art forms are an attestation of the experience of the Maqamat as a book. Despite the extensive studies done on the literature of al-Maqamat, the same cannot be said about art historical scholarship.<sup>115</sup> Roxburgh notes that “art historians attended to the full range of ways in which the text—along with the manuscript as a complete object—is affected by narrative paintings. The absence is easy to explain because general

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<sup>113</sup> Grabar, 2:173.

<sup>114</sup> George, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Roxburgh, “In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri’s Maqamat,” 179.

assessments of al-Hariri's text—adopted by art historians from the field of literary study—curtailed the variety of possible approaches to interrelations between word and image.”<sup>116</sup>

Thus, the lack of scholarships indulgent with the text and the critical bibliography put forth discerns the studies of the key scholars on al-Wasiti, and identifies the following issues: First, we see a repetition or some form of trend in the methodological approach taken by art historians when studying the Maqamat manuscripts. The methodologies identified are mostly informed by a formal and descriptive analyses that engages with iconology, iconography, and bibliography as tools of study, as shown by Ettinghausen, Grabar, Rice, and others. Through such methodologies scholars formulate cultural context through an examination of the formal and aesthetic components of the illustrated Maqamat.

Secondly, the critical historiography exemplifies that these methodologies only pander to the aesthetic intrigue in the illustrations of the Maqamat but do not really bring forth any substantial information on the existence of these manuscripts. The over-analyses of visual content highlight the desire of art historical scholarship in wanting to understand the broader cultural context of the Maqamat. Yet considering the lack of information available, as well as the limitation of methodological applications, art historians do not step into deep waters in answering fundamental questions about the manuscripts. For example, in trying to understand the meaning and purpose behind the Maqamat al-Hariri illustrations is analysing the visual components enough? Why was Maqamat al-Hariri illustrated after decades of unillustrated copies? What is the purpose

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<sup>116</sup> Roxburgh, “In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri's Maqamat,” 180.

behind the addition of illustrated material? Why did al-Wasiti depict the text through these particular elements and what do they represent? Does the text not contribute information about the cultural and social settings and traditions of medieval Arab culture? Do the elements represented visually fairly represent the objects and subjects and traditions represented in the book? Could the book-making process, the contributing agencies, the reception of the book and the traditions of reading not improve our understanding and thus our interpretation of 13<sup>th</sup> century Arabo-Islamic culture?

The lack of deep engagement demonstrated by art historians towards the Maqamat al-Hariri beyond the illustrated material puts into question whether such scholarship impacts the perception of Islamic works? Is it ahistorical? Is it informed by ideas of orientalism and Arab nationalism? Or rather do these methods perpetuate an orientalist application? While this chapter has provided the historiography of how art history engaged the Maqamat, the next chapter seeks to answer these questions to further shedding light on the methodological shift of the scholarship.

## CHAPTER 3

### WIDENING THE LENS

#### 3.1. An Alternative Methodology

Contadini states that art historical scholarship is responsible in thoroughly analysing illustrated manuscripts in their entirety, and to regard the progression of Islamic illustrations as a parallel phenomenon—independent, aesthetic—that validates the formalist approach in studying these paintings. Contadini argues:

“Miniature paintings may certainly be enjoyed and appreciated independently of the texts to which they relate, but the point of art-historical study is to deepen the appreciation through arriving at a better understanding of their cultural context, of their production, function and, where possible, reception; and in pursuing this goal, the relationship of image to text cannot be ignored.”<sup>117</sup>

The gap that Contadini identifies responds to the problematics identified through the critical bibliography put forth by this study. In particular the relationship between image and text. Mainly in Contadini acknowledging the indivisible link between both the literary components and the visual, in which both forms contribute to founding a coherent and just understanding of Arabo-Islamic medieval traditions. However, in order for art historical scholarship to study the text as well as the book as a whole a methodological shift is required. One that not only responds to the limitation of visual studies, but that considers the illustrated Maqamat in its entirety as a book and not as a work of art. Such a methodology is that of Book Studies. Book Studies does not dismiss the methodologies applied so far by Islamic art historians but rather introduces a further engagement with the materiality and textuality of the Maqamat, along with the

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<sup>117</sup> Contadini, *The Manuscript as a whole*, 8



involvement of neighbouring disciplines that share an interest in these texts. In other words, literary, historical and bibliographic studies offer tools that could potentially assist in the studies of the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts.

This chapter briefly introduces the interdisciplinary nature of Book Studies and its amalgamation of several disciplines that revolve around cultural history and transmission, literature and materiality. The triangle of departure that is the relationship between the text, the book and the reader.<sup>118</sup> The history of the book itself came into being as a discipline only in the 1950s but, in just a few decades, it has accrued a substantial mass of scholarship. Beginning with an interdisciplinary relationship between bibliography, literature and history, Book Studies has developed to integrate theories and methods from communication studies, sociology, philosophy and digital humanities. This integrates several branches of studies that coordinates alongside one another. For instance, notions on materiality and textuality, relationship between image-text and book; oral and written traditions; author-reception relationship; book making and operational agencies, so on. Even though the following chapter will discuss origins and methodologies of Book Studies the intention is to relate it back to the Maqamat al-Hariri within the framework of art historical scholarship as means of broadening our understanding of the Maqamat as a book. A manuscript that interacts with the reader on several dimensions.

Book Studies or the history of books concerns itself with the nature of books in a material and conceptual sense. In origin it engages several disciplines of study— bibliography, literature, history, socio-economic history, critical theory, communication

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<sup>118</sup> Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 10.

studies, and others.<sup>119</sup> The book in the material sense has taken many forms—published literary compositions, manuscripts, printed books bound and sewn together, scripts and theatrical pieces, magazines, digital books and websites. The quest to understand the book as an object brought together disciplines that shared a common set of issues revolving around the practices and processes of communication.<sup>120</sup> Book Studies is mainly cantered between bibliography, literary studies and history as neighbouring disciplines in a conversation with one another, in particular to examine modes of communication and cultural transmission.<sup>121</sup> In the simplest sense, history and its primary focus on agency, power and experience; literature on texts and literary criticism; and bibliography on documents and objects or material artefacts; defined within this framework, *the book* is the simultaneous interplay between written text, materiality and cultural transaction.<sup>122</sup> Each of these disciplines contributes equally to the discussion of the book. More importantly, each discipline is organically drawn to overlap or rather interact with the others. For instance, the practice of history in academic platforms uses the history of the book as a methodological approach towards cultural history; in doing so, history refers to literary studies in its engagement with literary analysis. Literature refers to bibliography when examining the study of authorship.<sup>123</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova notes that the author is unable to control or

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<sup>119</sup> David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, Book, Whole (Taylor and Francis, 2012), 80–81.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65.

<sup>121</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture*, Book, Whole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 18–19.

<sup>122</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture*, Book, Whole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>123</sup> Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture*, 11–17.

determine the reception or interpretation of their work.<sup>124</sup> As such, cultural agency is found in its reception.

That is to say that meaning, history and bibliography interplay in the discussion of the author and reception within literary studies. History and literature are bound by cultural history, literary history, print culture studies, cultural studies, reception theory, etc. Both history and literary studies rely on bibliography for material analysis: from documentation to archival material, scroll to codex, and manuscript to print. The same goes for studies of modes of production: parchment to paper, writing and printing, lithography and etching, printing tools, and so on. In turn, bibliography, in its attempt to understand materiality and textuality of the objects and artefacts at hand, delves into the literary and historical context of such objects. History and bibliography share the history of books, history of publishing, book-trade, imprint bibliography, and so on. Whereas literature and bibliography interplay with sociology of texts, composition studies, readership/authorship studies and author bibliography. However, as the following section will demonstrate, other disciplines amongst the humanities have indulged in Book Studies and, therefore history, literature and bibliography are the hosts yet not the only contributing fields of study.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, Book, Whole (London: Arnold, 2000), 85.

<sup>125</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 136.

### 3.2. Book Studies: An Integrative Scholarship Approach

In the second half of the twentieth century, scholars became more involved in understanding the book as a transporter of human knowledge and experience. Early scholars were initially interested in distinguishing between corrupt and original material (particularly that of Shakespearean scripts) and the classification of materials, as well as print and book-making culture, authorship, and text linguistics. In pursuit of authenticity, materiality and meaning, Book Studies came to be established as its own discipline of study. Robert Darnton announced a new disciplinary field that could be defined as the cultural and social history of communication,<sup>126</sup> with an aim to comprehend the transmission of ideas into books. Particularly the relationship between texts and words, and their impact on the thoughts and behaviour of individuals and communities. Darnton notes that such a field of study is ‘likely to win a place alongside fields like the history of science and the history of art in the canon of scholarly discipline.’<sup>127</sup> Darnton places the rise of such scholarship at least as far back as the Renaissance, but dedicated studies did not appear till the nineteenth century, when books were still examined as material objects.<sup>128</sup> That established the school of Analytical Bibliography in England, and the *École Nationale des Chartes* in France. The main objective behind analytical bibliography is to explicate the relationship between book production and transmission of texts, with a main focus on production processes, a methodological approach aiming at identifying original texts as well as tracing books

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<sup>126</sup> Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture*, 28–29.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” *What Is the History of Books?* 111, no. 3 (1982): 64–65.

<sup>128</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 65.

through the stages of its production.<sup>129</sup> By the early twentieth century analytical bibliography developed towards reconstructing texts and the study of printing practices through textual criticism and bibliographic studies. New Bibliography thus emerged pioneered by scholars such as Ronald McKerrow, Fredson Bowers and W.W. Greg.<sup>130</sup>

New bibliography suggested a scientific examination and analysis of books and texts as material objects—identifying type, fonts, paper/parchment, ink and paint, printing processes, etc. By the 1950s, new bibliography had developed criteria for ‘how to recognize formats, collate signatures, detect cancels, distinguish typeface, trace watermarks, analyse artwork, and identify bindings.’<sup>131</sup> Manuscripts were utilized as references to check for falsities and copies, printing processes were examined, and eventually the discussion of author and agency came into question. Bowers proposes a more critical study of the textual transmission in relation to the operational agencies involved in the process of bookmaking. The operations behind the materiality and textuality such as the editing and proofreading, the book making process, editorial concepts and such like. According to Bowers, a rigorous investigation of these agencies and the book making process represents a genuine and trustworthy analysis of the book under study. New bibliography and analytical bibliography both focus on the ‘automatic and impersonal operation of a system of signs.’ Either on the system that establishes the language of texts or that of form and print. However, according to Chartier, this does not take into account the manner in which a book is read, heard,

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<sup>129</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 66.

<sup>130</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 7.

<sup>131</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 8.

received and analysed and, so, does not concern itself with establishing *meaning*—in short, what Barthes would call ‘the death of the author’.<sup>132</sup>

By the 1960s, Book Studies embraced the rise of critical theory as it began to question the reality of the book beyond its physical attributes. Scholars such as the Annales School in France led by Lucien Febvre, Henri-Jean Martin, Robert Escarpit<sup>133</sup>, and the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes began to examine the book through the lens of socioeconomic history.<sup>134</sup> Which even though essentially dealt with printed books, was also applied to one-copy manuscripts as much as post-Gutenberg books. Instead of focusing on bibliography, such scholars observed book production and consumption criteria throughout the span of time. They were analysing content of libraries, mapping out ideological currents such as that of the *bibliothèque bleue*. The main focus was on the study of ordinary books and the manner in which the common reader experiences books. These schools applied quantitative socio-historical methods to study the processes of bookmaking, transmission and treatment of texts:<sup>135</sup> Moreover, they studied the phenomenon of Counter Reformation and the Enlightenment period as a way of demonstrating the influence of traditional and cultural literature on societies. Even though no resolutions towards this topic were concluded, the methods the annales school revealed the significance behind “asking new questions, using new methods and tapping new sources.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Book, Whole (Sausalito CA: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 27.

<sup>133</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 25.

<sup>134</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 66.

<sup>135</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 10.

<sup>136</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 66.

At this stage, Book Studies became concerned not just with materiality, but context and the intangible *forms* of the book: that of the reader, the narrator, words, text, meaning and more importantly the influence books have on individuals and at large, on societies. Then after, these methodologies spread throughout the U.S. and Europe. Book historians by 1970 were holding conferences, launching journals and publications, founding centres and, within two decades, had anchored Book Studies as a recognized discipline.<sup>137</sup> Scholars became critical of the traditional modes of Book Studies, such as analytical bibliography. A main issue raised concerning traditional methodologies is in the manner book production is perceived as an anchored, stable and systematic process. Dismissing that the reality of book making encounters many mishaps, accidents and flaws while passing through the process of production. In other words, the approach of analytical bibliography, despite its thorough investigation into the materiality and processes could never reach the original meaning and intention behind the book, simply because book production is prone to accidents and the process is unpredictable.<sup>138</sup> Thus, there was advancement that occurred in the field between the 1970s and 1980s that took into account these issues and addressed them.

Several movements noted as New Cultural History or New Historiography found interest in the studies of ‘histoire des mentalités,’ and cultural studies. In separating from traditional bibliography and historiography, they shifted towards a wider understanding of a plurality of interpretation, narrative and subjectivity —

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<sup>137</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 66.

<sup>138</sup> D. F. McKenzie, “Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices,” *Studies in Bibliography* (Charlottesville, Va.) 22, no. Journal Article (1969): 45.

dismissing the traditional modes of historical objectivity<sup>139</sup> in favour of post-structuralist theory on representation, mainly that of Foucault and Derrida. However, the most accomplished movement to come out of this phase is that of *Histoire du Livre*, History of Books. Spearheaded by Roger Chartier and Darnton, *Histoire du Livre* prioritises the relationship and value between the study of materiality to history and the experiential impact of readers, reading methods and reception theory. This movement delves into studies of materiality, author and reception, as well as meaning.<sup>140</sup>

One notable methodological development is the communication circuit model developed by Darnton (1982). The communication circuit model is considered a sort of paradigm that is utilized to identify a book from point of origin to creation. This model takes into account the relation of book production to the broader social and cultural setting.<sup>141</sup> Darnton maps out main ‘stations’ that the research must pass through in order to understand the nature and meaning of the book. It moves through each station gradually, beginning with the purpose and intention of the author, the contributions or impacts of the publisher and bookseller. Followed by an examination of printing methods, distribution, bookshops/libraries and lastly, the reception of the reader. The communication circuit integrates other layers of analyses settled within these focal bases. There is an acknowledgment that these stages do not differentiate in level of difficulty and availability, however, Darnton admits that, followed by books, reading is to a great extent the most obscure and difficult stage in the communication circuit.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> J. Adema, “Knowledge Production beyond the Book? Performing the Scholarly Monograph in Contemporary Digital Culture” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015), 61.

<sup>140</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 79.

<sup>141</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>142</sup> Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” 74.



Darnton's model demonstrates that all stages of the book are impacted by the socio-political and intellectual state of its time,<sup>143</sup> and all contribute to the meaning, purpose and the condition of the book as a whole.<sup>144</sup> Darnton's method is considered by some scholars as inapplicable to pre-print manuscripts, claiming Darnton is more involved with the people behind the book than the book itself. Thomas Adam and Nicholas Barker propose a shift towards Bio-bibliographical study of the book, or tracing the text itself as a method of unearthing the systems of communication. Barker and Adam note that even the book itself, as a material composition, has influence on the studies of these objects and as a result on culture.<sup>145</sup>

Similarly, McKenzie (1986) also urged a revisitation of the traditional modes of Book Studies. Having broadened 'Anglo-American' studies of text and meaning,<sup>146</sup> he points out that history dismisses the operational agencies interlinked with the fate of the book (that of editors and booksellers, as well reception and readers/audiences). Literature focuses on the text however not the context, and bibliographical studies disregards the social and cultural context relevant to the production of the text.<sup>147</sup> McKenzie (1984) notes that a book is not a simple object, but a unique entity that embodies the product of human agency and not just that of materiality. Thus, in

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<sup>143</sup> Darnton, 74.

<sup>144</sup> Darnton, 67.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Adams and Nicholas Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society- The Clark Lectures 1986-1987* (The British Library, 1993), 10–12.

<sup>146</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 10.

<sup>147</sup> D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, Book, Whole (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10–11.

considering human agency to be complex and uncertain, context must be sought out by the scholar. That is if scholarship wishes to recover a better understanding of communication, and the meaning “as the defining characteristic of human societies.”<sup>148</sup> All forms of inquiry (manuscripts, films, static images, oral texts, etc.) communicate meaning. Thus, only a new and informative sociology of the text could equally engage with the many agencies, processes and facets that contribute to the meaning of the book, as well as the human agency.<sup>149</sup>

The sociology of text however integrates a wider acknowledgment of the socio-economic and literary meaning of texts than that provided by the communication circuit. It proposes that Book Studies and bibliographic methodologies should consider textual analysis within a socio-economic, literary and aesthetic framework. In other words, suggesting that the materiality impacts the way text is read and, therefore, the reader, experience and meaning. Thus, Book Studies is suggested by McKenzie to encompass cultural and sociological disciplines.<sup>150</sup> That primarily puts in question the mediating agencies that exist in between the author, the creation process, and the communities from which the text originated, that is if Book Studies is to be divorced from a traditional Eurocentric perception of the book.<sup>151</sup> Roger Chartier in his seminal work, *The Order of the Book* (1992)—a clear take on Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1966)—draws on post-structuralist theory, particularly the discussion on

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<sup>148</sup> D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, Book, Whole (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>149</sup> McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 28.

<sup>150</sup> McKenzie, 35.

<sup>151</sup> Finkelstein and McCleery, *Introduction to Book History*, 10.

author-function. Chartier added the reader function more intricately into the framework of the sociology of text.

Chartier emphasizes the relationship between author and reader, since as aforementioned, the approaches of new criticism, structuralism and analytical bibliography utilized in earlier Book Studies announces the ‘death of the author’.<sup>152</sup> Chartier notes that such disciplines perceive the book as an enclosed structure, somehow fixed in its materiality. As a result, deeming it indifferent to the human aspect (author-reader) that are impactful components of the book.<sup>153</sup> Chartier indicates that a text, even if considered ‘fixed’, is unable to execute a homogeneous visualization of a culture and its modes of reception and communication as a consequence of the neglect of the author-reader relationship.<sup>154</sup> Chartier refers to the works of Pierre Bourdieu and his concepts on the sociology of cultural production and Don McKenzie on the sociology of texts to demonstrate the benefits of integrating sociological studies into the system of methods of Book Studies. Chartier notes:

“With the sociology of cultural production [...] analysis shifts to the laws of operation and the hierarchies proper to a given field (literary, artistic, academic, religious, political, and so forth), to the structural relationships situating the various positions defined within a field, to the individual or collective strategies that those positions command, and to transfer into the works themselves of the social conditions of their production.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 24.

<sup>153</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Book, Whole (Sausalito CA: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 24.

<sup>154</sup> Chartier, 25.

<sup>155</sup> Chartier, 27.

Thus, since the school of *Histoire du Livre*, Book Studies evolved from the traditional bibliographic methods to incorporate post-structuralist methodologies such as the consideration of operational agencies as shown by Darnton, the socialization of textual studies as presented by McKenzie and the examination of meaning behind the material and immaterial aspects of the book particularly that of the reader as demonstrated by Chartier.

The importance behind Chartier's contribution in particular is that he highlights the essential component shared by all modes of Book Studies so far—the construction of meaning. Chartier notes the importance of the way the physical forms that are transmitted through the texts to the reader impact the procedure of the formation of meaning. Therefore, a better understanding is formulated in relation to the causes and effects of the physical form (referring to printed books). Particularly in the context of the format, layout, text division and so on. In other words, Chartier is suggesting that these modes exercise some form of power of the intention, reception and interpretation of a book.<sup>156</sup>

The discussions within the field of Book Studies from this point forward proceeded to discuss Darnton, McKenzie and Chartier's theories however are more indulgent in the specificities of studies related to print culture, communication and media studies, digitalization and digital humanities. Therefore, this section will refrain from discussing these notions, for the sake of relevance, and proceed in discussing notions related to materiality, textuality and reception in relation to the Maqamat art historical scholarship.

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<sup>156</sup> Chartier, 28.

## CHAPTER 4

### DEVELOPING NEW DIMENSIONS

#### **4.1. The Application of Book Studies on the Maqamat**

Why is it important to consider the text when examining the illustrations? And how does Book Studies contribute to the art historical scholarship on the Maqamat?

As presented by the critical historiography the methodologies of art historical scholarship on the Maqamat does not consider the text, nor the book as a whole. Rather there is a fixation on the illustrated visual components that are approached through mainly descriptive, formalist and iconological methods. Even though recent scholars express an interest in literary criticism and social theory, no current publications have implemented a thorough expedition of the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts within a literary and social framework. Moreover, the significance of the text has been noted crucial if scholarship is to frame the Maqamat in relation to the broader social and cultural context. Darnton, McKenzie and Chartier aside from delving into a detailed implication of Book Studies, offer insight on the multi-dimensionality behind the book as object. More importantly, scholars of Book Studies acknowledge the significant role played by each and every agent relevant to the book. Beginning with the author and ending with the reader, or rather beginning in thought and ending in thought. Thus, Book Studies incorporates all disciplines and methods necessary in understanding the meaning behind a book. Furthermore, as concluded earlier through a critical historiography of the scholarship, the text is a crucial element of study since the Maqamat manuscript is essentially a book rather than a work of art, and is an integral component between author, the book making process and reception.

So how could art historical scholarship benefit from integrating and applying Book Studies on the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts? Firstly, the understanding of the Maqamat could embody a broader understanding of the relationship between the text, the images and the book since Book Studies clearly interlinks these three aspects through its engagement with literature, history and bibliography. Secondly, acknowledging that the operational agents are not fixed despite our knowledge of manuscript making in thirteenth century Arab culture. Understanding the meaning behind the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts would require an extensive look on all agents at play as modelled by the communication circuit. The ever-shifting meaning that is determined by human agency is essential in understanding the meaning behind any text, and as McKenzie points out, human agency is individual as well as communal and coincides with reception of the time and place from which it originated and is being read.

That being said, it is important to reconsider the relationship between text and image, rather than dismissing it as many art historical scholars have done. Secondly, an examination of all operational agencies is to be examined when looking at any illustrated Maqamat manuscript. However, the significance lies in reminding scholarship that the meaning behind such manuscripts shifts constantly through the passage of the agencies, especially that of human agency. What is interpreted in the present moment is not necessarily what was meant at the time of origination. Nor is the making process, the reception whether it be oral, theatrical or illustrated. Thus, there are three primary methods that could be potential contributors to the studies of the Maqamat. The communication circuit, the relationship between text and image, as well as traditions of reception. A common point of departure that encompasses all these

notions, is that of meaning. Meaning is used here in all its formations (noun/adjective/verb) of what is meant by a word, a text, an action or concept; what the significance and essence is behind a word, text (read or heard) and a society or culture; what are they trying to communicate and express directly and indirectly? And what are they meant to necessitate or give rise to?

The aim of art historical studies on the al-Wasiti Maqamat illustrations is to attempt to understand the meaning behind the work through for instance identifying iconological and cultural symbols, distinguish materials and mediums (paper, paint, binding, etc.), or examining Yahya al-Wasiti and his artistic technique and skills. Meaning is also derived from a desire to understand the artistic practices of the medieval Arab world, as well the social engagement with the aesthetics. Likewise, Book Studies immersed in their examination of books utilizing a similar approach, with a focus on the book and the text as an object within the scope of its materiality and physical body. For the first few decades the physical form of books dominated over more conceptual studies within the framework of history of the book. As demonstrated in the previous section, Book Studies departed from studies of materiality and textuality to then embody more sociological and philosophical inputs. These methods allowed for the study of typography and language, genres and styles, differentiate signatures and typefaces, analysis of writing, access to content and information, and so forth.

According to Finkelstein and McCleery, aside from being a document in writing that is read, a text has many physical forms. That of print, magazine, newspaper as well as digital document. They claim that the function of texts is to communicate information, narrations, as well as entertainment. The text within the discipline of Book Studies has journeyed through several dimensions, which paved the way to the

discussions on orality and writing, as well as reception. McKenzie argues that texts do not originate from a single source (the author) but rather multiple agents (editors, publishers, printers etc.) impact the creation of a text in what McKenzie calls, a concurrent production of the book. Or the complex and unpredictable system of bookmaking, which is not tidy, fixed and orderly. In examining textuality, research must include the external meaning of texts. In other words, that meaning is not intrinsic or confined to the text itself. Rather the meaning behind a text is in a state of sequential reinterpretation (or shifting in meaning) as it interacts with its modes of production, and particularly its modes of reception. Furthermore, the impact and experience of the text on the recipient—whether it be a reader or an audience—whether it is heard or read, individually or as a group—differentiates in the context of its reception, a cultural specificity from which the meaning is derived. Receptions plays a significant role in the interpretation of text.

As a result, book historians are calling for a study of the ‘sociology of text’ and a departure from ‘romantic hermeneutics’ (McGann) or pure literature and history. In the call for socializing the study of textuality, text becomes a part of a broader social, political, and intellectual structure. Chartier brings back the role of the author as well as the reader to accompany the interpretation and engagement with the text. In referring to the author-reader relationship, scholars similar to Chartier and the *Histoire du Livre* acknowledge that intention as well as meaning are interlaced and in constant exchange with every element of the physical and non-physical body of the book in its entirety.



## 4.2. Critical Contribution to Art Historical Scholarship

In “Illustrated books may be hazardous to your health: a new reading of the Arabic reception and rendition of the ‘Materia Medica’ of Dioscorides”, George Saliba and Linda Komaroff (2008) compare the text to the illustrated materia medica known as AyaSofya 3703. In thoroughly comparing the text to the illustrations of the AyaSofya 3703, Saliba and Komaroff notice that a part of the text from the section devoted to the mandrake plant is missing. Instead an illustration is featured. Upon examining the text that was eliminated in favour of the drawing, Saliba and Komaroff note: “The text of the illustrated manuscript simply ended in the midst of a description of the effects of the Mandrake plant, omitting a full page of text.<sup>157</sup>” It is then noticed that the text extracted is informing the reader of the Mandrake’s side effects, one of which is a crucial warning that marks the parts of the plant that are considered poisonous. The close comparison and the cross-examination between the text and the illustration reveals significant variations with regard to content and illustrations. However, what is also of significance in examining Saliba and Komaroff’s study is the methodological approach pursued by the authors. Their extensive research represents more than just a discovery of a missing text in favour of illustrated material. Saliba and Komaroff demonstrate a thorough and comprehensive scope of research analysis and Book Studies on Arabic manuscripts: they take a formal and material analysis, a bibliographical analysis as well as literary and historical criticism. The multidisciplinary approach put forth by Saliba and Komaroff has proven beneficial and represents an objective and equitable understanding of the Arabic Materia medica manuscripts under study. Although Saliba and Komaroff

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<sup>157</sup> George Saliba and Linda Komaroff, “Illustrated Books May Be Hazardous to Your Health: A New Reading of the Arabic Reception and Rendition of the ‘Materia Medica’ of Dioscorides,” *Ars Orientalis* 35, no. Journal Article (2008): 14.

undertake a descriptive and analytical study of the illustration as well as the text under study including other copies, a material analysis on the manuscripts as a book, the text, the illustrations and the process of making are discerned. Darnton's (1982) communication circuit is implemented by the author, to the translator, the book making process as well as to the reader. Despite the limitations that every historian faces in the attempt to understand cultural and historical context of manuscripts, the use of demonstration of the importance of tracing the illustration under study from thought to thought and author to reception provides new insights discussed further in the text. Saliba and Komaroff therefore also discuss the operational agents that influence the meaning and context of the manuscripts, that of the patron, the copyist, and the consumer.

A brief examination of Saliba and Komaroff will highlight the intricate relationship between not just text and image in the formation of meaning, but text-image and book as a complete entity. In engaging with both the text and the image Saliba and Komaroff were able to identify and interpret the missing text that withholds crucial information on the mandrake plant. Through their pursuit of identifying that the missing text was replaced by the illustration, Saliba and Komaroff raise important questions on why the illustration replaced the text and how could such an informative text be eliminated in favour of the visual? This begs the question why no scholarship has identified this phenomenon despite decades of scholarship examining and observing these works? However, it is of interest from such an outcome that by isolating the illustrations and examining them as objects of art, integral information goes unnoticed. Saliba and Komaroff also note that studies regarding the Arabic *De Materia Medica* are almost exclusively occupied with the illustrated versions, implying that scholars are

dominated by an intrigue for the visual and aesthetic.<sup>158</sup> Meaning the interpretations and analysis that might be formulated are incomplete and limited to their aesthetic and formal constituents. “Manuscripts are scattered throughout the world, and because nearly all of them are illustrated they are generally treated as works of art, making them far less accessible than many other types of scientific manuscripts.”<sup>159</sup> By acknowledging this, Saliba and Komaroff also note that for the sake of painting, a large number of illustrated manuscripts are incomplete, vandalised and dismantled. In pointing out the following there are two vital notions that are of significance: firstly, through the tendency to preserve Islamic illustrations, art collectors and enthusiasts have ironically, damaged the manuscript as a whole. Secondly, the perception that these illustrations are independent objects of art, the illustrations are now in isolation from their textual counterpart, which as shown by Saliba and Komaroff are an integral part of the book as a whole.<sup>160</sup>

The authors continue to discuss that scarce attention is given to the text as well as the language. The reason being that many scholars consider that all the Dioscorides manuscript texts are the same, and therefore appear to conclude that examining the text, and the intertextuality of the text, is unnecessary. By their novel interpretation of the text, the studied authors indicate such views as false and unreasonable. As aforementioned, a cross examination between text and illustration has unveiled previously unseen information on the illustration as well as the text. However, Saliba

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<sup>158</sup> George Saliba and Linda Komaroff, “Illustrated Books May Be Hazardous to Your Health: A New Reading of the Arabic Reception and Rendition of the ‘Materia Medica’ of Dioscorides,” *Ars Orientalis* 35, no. Journal Article (2008): 22.

<sup>159</sup> Saliba and Komaroff, 10.

<sup>160</sup> Saliba and Komaroff, 13.

and Komaroff also cross compare non-illustrated versions of the *Materia medica*, as a way of showing that there are differences between the texts as well. For instance, full sentences vary between one copy and another. Some even identified as misreading of the original copy. They therefore identify that neither was a copy of the other, nor of the original translation.

“Even a cursory investigation of the texts immediately reveals that they represent remarkable variety among themselves, so much so that it would be hard to articulate a comprehensive statement describing which of the many surviving manuscripts represents the original translation of Dioscorides.”<sup>161</sup>

By suggesting the following, the authors are also implying that there is a necessity behind understanding the context behind the language of the text and examining the variations of translation and translators that influence the outcome or meaning behind the text. To reach a comprehensive understanding of the text, it is necessary to also understand the agents that influence the meaning and manifestation of these works (author, translator, etc.). More importantly, through the comparison of similar translators for illustrated and non-illustrated manuscripts of Dioscorides, they question the purpose behind the integration of artistic representations as well as the lack of illustrations in other works. Saliba and Komaroff further inspect copyist notes, information on patrons, translators as well as readers. It is suggested that such manuscripts were regarded in high esteem for their engagement with the many processes of translation, writing, illustration and the expansion on classical knowledge. Islamic scholarship is identified as engaged and esoteric as well as practical in respect to its studies and production of these manuscripts. So much so that the illustrations

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<sup>161</sup> Saliba and Komaroff, 11.

examined in for instance the Maqamat, engaged with contemporary life and depicted popular visual representations. This reveals an adherence for the “democratization of knowledge.”<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, the work of Saliba and Komaroff further questions the production of illustrations at such a later stage, and the motivation behind this integration is yet to be known. Through an analytical study they note that significant variations noted between the illustrated manuscripts in text and imagery. Similarly, all the illustrated Maqamat manuscripts are, presumably, from the thirteenth and fourteenth century and vary significantly in style, technique, skill and representation. In questioning why the Maqamat works were illustrated after years of unillustrated copies, O’Kane responds by suggesting a simple explanation that “it was the best seller of its age.”<sup>163</sup> Thus, hinting to commercial utility and market value enhancement in relation to illustrated manuscripts. O’Kane also notes that with over seven hundred copies were authorized by al-Hariri himself. Suggesting that a calligrapher is to guarantee a market sale in copying such work. Similarly, a painter whether individually or in a workshop also acknowledged that his aesthetic technique could contribute to such a famous manuscript. In return adding even more value to its initial market price, “that would be more than compensated for in profit from the increased selling price<sup>164</sup>.” O’Kane also notes that demand initiates production, and that this demand instigated a sudden surge in illustrated Maqamat manuscripts. Saliba and Komaroff encountered the same

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<sup>162</sup> Saliba and Komaroff, “Illustrated Books May Be Hazardous to Your Health: A New Reading of the Arabic Reception and Rendition of the ‘Materia Medica’ of Dioscorides,” 38.

<sup>163</sup> O’Kane, “Text and Paintings In the Al-Wasiti ‘Maqamat’,” 52.

<sup>164</sup> O’Kane, 52.

questions, however under different circumstances considering the nature of the *De Materia Medica* as a scientific manuscript rather than a literary one. Saliba and Komaroff on the other hand note that “we are far from understanding the steps that were taken at each juncture to transmit the illustrations from generation of the text to the next.<sup>165</sup>” Instead of assuming a reason, as O’Kane notes, Saliba and Komaroff raise important questions that show the limited and humble limitations of the historians in the search for meaning and understanding of such works. “There is much to be done in that regard [work on Arabic manuscript]” Saliba and Komaroff despite their implementation of a quite interdisciplinary and multifaceted approach that encounters the many elements of manuscripts studies, suggest that more comparative studies are needed to further expand on the understanding of such manuscripts.

The two authors map out a methodological evolution that is driven not just by the questions that rise as a result of gaps in the context, but through an essential responsibility to search for information beyond familiar landscapes. In other words, the benefit of indulging beyond the scope of a particular discipline, yet also respecting the limitations of our abilities. The collaboration of Saliba and Komaroff, an integration between history, cultural studies and art history, allowed such research to embody a wider scope of understanding. The linguistic capabilities and skills to read, decipher, understand and translate have proven to be necessary tools when indulging with such manuscripts.

In referring to the multitude scope of Book Studies, Saliba and Komaroff joint work demonstrates an indulgence with the book as a whole from the modes of

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<sup>165</sup> Saliba and Komaroff, “Illustrated Books May Be Hazardous to Your Health: A New Reading of the Arabic Reception and Rendition of the ‘*Materia Medica*’ of Dioscorides,” 40.

materiality and textuality to the concepts of author-reader relationship and meaning. As a result, they go much further by capturing and engaging with the book in its entirety. Additionally, the approach is interesting in the sense that rarely individuals in the field are actually able to read and discern these manuscripts, study them in their entirety. While it also helps to prove my aforementioned claims that the methodological approaches being used so far are limited and speculative to the understanding of medieval Islamic manuscripts.

### 4.3. The Hour of Birth

This thesis proposes a framework and lays the groundwork for future alternative studies on the Maqamat al-Hariri, the scope of this thesis does not allow for further exploration or implementation of the suggested methodologies. However, a brief indulgence with the Maqamat text in relation to illustrations studied by art historians has shown results. Firstly, by revealing misinterpretations of the visual components of the work, and secondly by undermining or misrepresenting the cultural symbols and social attributes behind illustrations that are of great significance within Arabo-Islamic cultures at the time, and for centuries to follow.

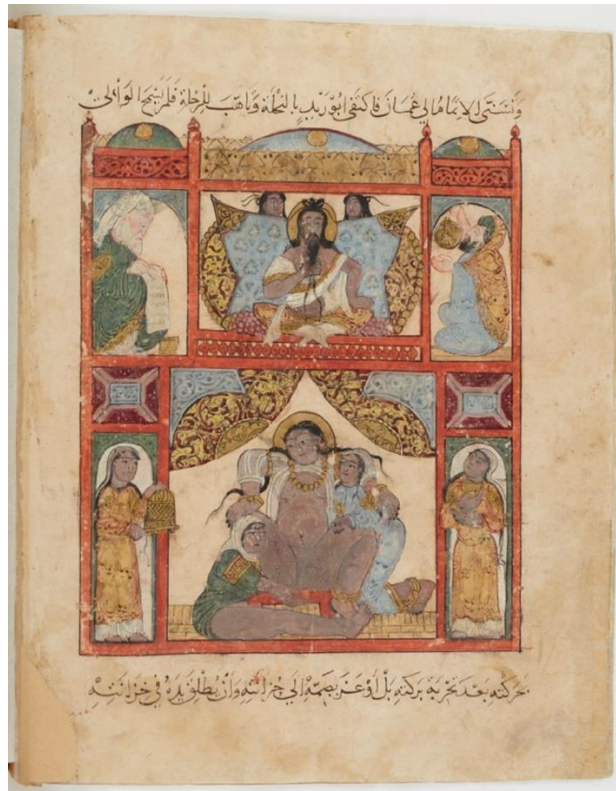


Figure 8. Ms. arabe 5847, fol. 122v, Maqamat al-Hariri, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département des Manuscrits orientaux, 37x28 cm, copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, ah 634/1237 ce. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



For instance, the folio 122v of the 39<sup>th</sup> Maqama (of Oman) from al-Wasiti manuscript, an illustration known amongst scholars as *the hour of birth* or *the woman giving birth* (figure 8),<sup>166</sup> has been described by Ettinghausen in 1962 and Grabar in 1984. The illustration represents a woman giving birth, assisted by a midwife and three other female figures. The centre top figure is a seated man, the husband, who is according to the narrative of the story is the king of an unidentified island. On the top right is a man holding an astrolabe, an instrument used to map the alignment of the stars and planets. This map is traditionally used in medieval Arab cultures to cast a horoscope for the new born child. On the top left is a male figure, presumably Abu Zayd writing on a piece of paper.

According to Ettinghausen, the illustration presents “Abu Zayd writing an amulet to bring about a speedy and successful delivery.”<sup>167</sup> Similarly, Grabar notes “on either side a figure in Arab dress consults an astrolabe and writes a note—certainly Abu Zayd as described in the text.”<sup>168</sup> In referring back to the text, Abu Zayd does write a talisman as noted by Ettinghausen however not on a piece of paper, as seen in the illustration, but on meerschaum. Abu Zayd writes the talisman with saffron mixed in clean rose water on meerschaum. He then folds and encloses the talisman in silk cloth after staining it in fragrance.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, the scene depicted in the illustration could not be Abu Zayd writing the amulet as Ettinghausen suggests. Not only is the talisman not written with the traditional pen and paper as seen in the illustration, but by the time

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<sup>166</sup> Yahya al-Wasiti, *Maqamat Al-Hariri Ms. Arabe 5847, Folio 122v*, 1237, 37 x 28 cm, 1237, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>167</sup> Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, Book, Whole (Geneva: Skira, 1962), 122.

<sup>168</sup> Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, 89.

<sup>169</sup> Abbas Ahmad Al-Baz, *Maqamat al-Hariri [Assemblies of Hariri]* (Dar Beirut, 1978), 319–20.

an astrolabe is being used, the astronomer is in process of preparing the reading of the horoscope in order to map out an accurate chart in time with the birth of the new-born infant.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, it would be more accurate to assume that the top figure on the left is noting the measurements announced by the astronomer, or for instance, preparing a birth certificate. Either way, the interpretation of the illustration, in reference to the text, does not coincide with Ettinghausen's suggestion, and even though Grabar presents a more viable understanding, both Ettinghausen and Grabar simplify the description to such a degree that all cultural symbols and traditions mentioned in the text (i.e., saffron, meerschaum, rose water, the preparation of talisman) are completely dismissed. In other words, to describe the scene as writing a talisman or a simple note based on the illustration alone abandons any cultural references that are present in the text. More importantly, it dismisses any curiosity to research these objects in order to understand the cultural significance behind the whole scene—from preparing the talisman in the manner described in the text to the usages of an astrolabe during the birthing process by medieval Islamic cultures and scientists. For instance, Abu Zayd is not only writing an amulet or orison, all objects mentioned in this verse denote to cultural traditions of writing a *du'ā'* or prayer for the purpose of healing, protection and the aversion of evil. In asking locals about these objects and traditions, a devoted Egyptian Muslim expresses that to this day some Arab communities, including himself, still carry out the tradition of writing a *du'ā'* in the manner described in *Maqamat al-Hariri*. Abu Musa claims that the prayer is inscribed on a clean cloth or plate using saffron as a writing

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<sup>170</sup> Stephen P. Blake, *Astronomy and Astrology in the Islamic World* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 114.

instrument, the writing is then washed off with rose water<sup>171</sup> or purified water to be ingested by the individual in need of the du‘ā’.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, Zibd al Bahr, or meerschaum, is noted to have been traditionally placed on the thigh of women as a means of easing the birthing process.<sup>173</sup> Meerschaum has also been traditionally used by Arab cultures for the treatment and healing of many diseases related to skin, internal organs and teeth.<sup>174</sup>

In demonstrating briefly, the cultural symbolism and traditions these objects hold only comes to show the value of understanding the context of illustrated materials beyond their visual components. Moreover, in proceeding to read the detailed aesthetic components of illustrations of the Maqamat, scholarship tends to not only dismiss an extensive archive of knowledge in relation to medieval Islamic work, but more importantly contribute to constructing a skewed and false understanding of Arabo-Islamic cultures. The small fragments of knowledge presented in this thesis demonstrates what a cursory reading of the text, studying the book and referring to other disciplines for information could benefit the research in relation to understanding Maqamat al-Hariri and the purpose behind the visual components represented in the illustrations. This simple reading is just one of many other ways in which this new framework I am proposing would give us a different understanding of the illustrated Maqamat as a book and their relationship to reading their audiences rather than the

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<sup>171</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn Maghnīyah, *Mujarbat Al-Imamiya Fi Shifa' w al-Du'a'* (1996: Institute Al-A'lami for Publications, n.d.), 17.

<sup>172</sup> Jalal al-Din al-Sayouti, *Al-Rahma Fi al-Tub w al-Hikma* (Beirut: Dar al-Arqam Bin Abi Arqam, 2011), 269.

<sup>173</sup> Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir Ibn Sulaymān, *Azraq* (Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-al-Thaqāfah, 1982), 250.

<sup>174</sup> Abi Ali alHusseinBin Ali Bin Sina, *Al-Qanun Fi al-Tob*, vol. 3 (Dar alKotob al Ilmiya, 2009).

fixation on the visual which creates a different narrative and is not grounded in historical materialism.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Yahya al Wasiti's illustrated version of the Maqamat al-Hariri is the most studied of the thirteen illustrated Maqamat manuscripts. The fame of the Maqamat originated from the text written by al-Hariri of Basra and became one of the most read and narrated books in the Arab world throughout the medieval ages. In mapping out the historiography of art historical studies written on the illustrated Maqamat, this study was able to examine the scope of understanding that is available in the present on Arab-Islamic manuscripts. Thus, making it a suitable case study for looking at the broader cultural understanding of medieval Arabic culture within the canon of Islamic art history.

The historiography of the scholarship focuses on the dominant methodologies that have been implemented in the studies of such works. Since their appropriation by European collectors and traders in the nineteenth century until the present moment. Early scholarship was drawn to visual culture from the Bilad al-Sham region. And similarly, publications and exhibitions admired the illustrated Maqamat of al-Hariri. Many published photographs of the illustrations were presented under the umbrella of Orientalist art. By the mid-twentieth century, scholarship on the Maqamat illustrations had expanded to encompass more intricate studies of the work. Predominantly that of formal and iconological analysis of the illustrations, with particular attention on the figurative representations. Despite the utilization of other methods such as material and technical analysis, most scholarship depended on visual studies and methods in their examinations of the illustrated Maqamat.

As Saliba and Komaroff demonstrated in their study of the illustrated mandrake plant, the illustrations present in medieval Islamic manuscripts were not autonomous objects of art. But rather hold an integral position in the assemblage of the manuscript as a whole, and an intimate connection with the text. Saliba and Komaroff undertake a multidisciplinary approach, in regard to their integration of textual studies. One that integrated historical and art historical studies as well as literary and bibliographic analysis. Some of the methodologies identified within Book Studies.

There appears to be a repetition or trend in the methodological approaches towards the illustrated manuscripts of al-Hariri. For they tend to pander to the aesthetic intrigue of art historians, and audiences alike. As a result, these works are perceived as autonomous objects of art, and are in constant admiration within their visual representation. The restriction or rather the absence of a wider scope of methodology has kept the studies on the Maqamat illustrations confined within the scope of aestheticization.

This so-called fixation has limited the opportunity for scholarship to answer several problematic factors. Firstly, how did these manuscripts impact the audience or influence the culture interacting with these works? Secondly, does scholarship within the current methodological framework impact the perception we have of Islamic works? Thus, could it be identified as ahistorical? Or informed by ideas of orientalism and arab nationalism?

A material analysis of the work highlights that scholarship might have been establishing, since the 1950s, a flawed understanding of these illustrations and manuscripts. This could potentially shed light on the broader impact such scholarship has on the readings of these manuscripts. Lastly, such methodologies create a skewed

understanding of Islamic art works, and a misconception of the culture that created them.

Thus, Book Studies offers broader modes of understanding these works. A sociological study of illustrated manuscripts, and methodological tools that consider the operational agencies (all stages of book making) as well human agency that of author and reception. More significantly is the interest in meaning that has brought about methods that retain a close understanding of books, while acknowledging the ever-changing conditioning of meaning.

Saliba and Komaroff undertake a study on an illustrated manuscript similar in date and culture to that of *Maqamat al Hariri*. Saliba and Komaroff integrate textual and visual studies, and the disciplines of history, art history and literary studies.

*Maqamat* had an impact on particular audiences and reading practices are a multi-pronged practice and experience in medieval Arab culture. As to say that these illustrations are a part of a reading tradition and practices as and are equally engaging with the readers as well as author. Yahya al-Wasiti as the calligrapher and illustrator, was engaging with the book as a whole. So much so that he illustrated the frontispiece of the book, as to decorate the entry of the manuscript. Al-Wasiti was only depicting stories written over a century before, and in doing so, he himself was interpreting meaning and experience within his personal engagement with the text as an artist. al-Wasiti did not derive the content from imagination, he engaged with the textual context and as a result was inspired, whether for profit as O’Kane suggests, or not, to create a visual interpretation of these stories. If we are to even engage with the illustrations as works of art, it would be difficult to go beyond the material attributes in an attempt to understand the context of the work. That is to say that the illustration, text, agents,

author and reception were all a part of the book. And as Saliba and Komaroff come to show, understanding a manuscript's function and how it functions within the realism of its materiality, textuality as well broader socio-political and cultural substance.

The methods presented by Book Studies require extensive research in order for scholarship to examine the book in its entirety. However, no studies so far have engaged in comparing non-illustrated Maqamat manuscripts with illustrated ones, and as result we could never know what got illustrated and what did not, what reappears and what does not. Referring to Saliba and Komaroff it is essential to attempt to be more systematic of the meta/micro- reading of these manuscripts, if scholarship is to understand the reason and purpose behind the appearance of illustrations. Particularly in relation to the Maqamat manuscripts, where in, from our limited knowledge, all seem to originate between the thirteenth and fourteenth century.

Elsewhere, Anna Contadini notes that for a long time these manuscripts were traded by dealers and collectors that were 'on a treasure hunt' resulting in these manuscripts getting mutilated, dispersed and damaged. Illustrations were detached from the manuscripts and sold in the market as works of art. Saliba and Komaroff note that the AyaSofya3703 of the illustrated Arabic De Materia Medica became widely recognized by western scholarship when exhibited in the Islamic art exhibition in Munich in 1910. The illustrated pages were removed from the manuscript to become in the possessions of a Swedish collector. Similarly, many illustrated Islamic manuscripts witnessed a similar fate within the construct of orientalist exhibitions, bazars and auctions. by looking at the "origins of Islamic art" which began in the early 1900s with the Meisterwerk exhibition in Munich, where Islamic carpets and architecture were elevated to category of "high art." The western centric field was interested in



representational art as “high art.” Take the 1897 Art and History Exhibition in Stockholm for example: the collection constituted an abundance of objects, works on papers, textiles, carpets, and other elements that have Islamic or Arabic origins. Yet, these objects were all hung on the wall and placed in cabinets in tight proximity to each other revealing the orientalist mindset that curators had at that time.

Despite accompanying these objects with more informative context, Islamic art works have been traditionally relegated to the realm of artifacts and antiques—decorative and associated with the “minor arts.” Thus, within the art market they were considered as luxury wares as opposed to mechanically produced artifacts. Collectors had a similar outlook on Islamic works. In the late 1700s Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, a Prussian diplomat, gathered from several sources a large number of Islamic illustrations, paintings and calligraphic works which he later assembled into 5 volumes, 3 of which contained only images put together sporadically. Contadini claims that von Diez’s approach was repeated numerous times by others throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

In conclusion, the Maqamat furnish the listener or reader with a street-level account of social interactions, the language, the political and economic dynamics, the public sense of social responsibility and chivalry, all interspersed with rich intertextual references to Quranic verses, canonical precepts and cultural wisdoms du jour. That such scenes were being so widely circulated by an officer of the Seljuk court speaks volumes to the general level of literary and cultural awareness amongst the public. If truly these texts and illustrations were indeed so widely circulated amongst the public. The social importance and space given to critically engage with social challenges and the many conundrums Abu Zayd found himself in. Were more accurate accounts made

of such a text, it would paint a stark contrast to the scenes one would expect to find in medieval European cities at the same time. It comes as little surprise that Western scholars should be preoccupied with the aesthetics of such a work and overlook the culturally rich, literarily laden content within the stories of the Maqamat; evaluating the prowess of the language and being able to authoritatively assess it in comparison to other works of the time or from the region (or indeed afterwards) presents a significant challenge. Yet, it is a challenge worth engaging with. *Book Studies* provides a starting point, a framework for evaluating the piece in its entirety - as an artifact - a material object fused with cultural meanings. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, the value and significance of such a text - and the illustrious illumination that enshrouds it - can be much more holistically explored, understood and valued by methodically examining each of its constituent components and their development.

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