

Old Age and the Transmission of Knowledge in the
1334 Mamluk Illustrated Manuscript of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*

by

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B.A., Queen's University, 1977
M.Pl., Queen's University, 1980
B.A., University of Victoria, 1999

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Abstract

This thesis examines ideas about old age in four anecdotes and their illustrations from the 1334 illustrated Mamluk volume of al-Hariri's (1054-1122) *Maqamat* in the context of early (1250-1382) Mamluk society. The *Maqamat* contains fifty short anecdotes with a common plot format and two main characters. In each anecdote, the narrator al-Harith relates an adventure of the hero Abu Zayd, an elderly beggar who travels throughout the medieval Islamic Middle East. Using his talent as an orator, Abu Zayd draws people together in a public place, performs an eloquent speech, and is rewarded with money and goods. Ideas about the status of old age in Muslim society originate in the *Qur'an* and *hadith*. Attitudes about the elderly are expressed in other selected texts and in painting (frescoes and manuscript illustration). In the 1334 Mamluk volume, *Maqamat* illustrations either enhance the text or function independently of the text. Images portray old age as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and authority in the social roles of literary scholar, judge, religious leader, and teacher.

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Introduction

The representation of old age in medieval Islamic painting is a subject that has not been the principal focus of any previous study. What did it mean to be old in the Islamic Middle East during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? How were Islamic ideas about old age represented in contemporary visual culture? The eleven extant illustrated versions of al-Hariri's (1054-1122) *Maqamat* produced between ca. 1220 and ca. 1375 are a rich source of visual interpretations of old age.¹ (Refer to the Appendix for detailed information about each manuscript.) The *Maqamat* text consists of fifty short anecdotes. Its portrayal of the elderly protagonist named Abu Zayd and his interactions with other characters are instructive. The manuscripts' miniature paintings provide an opportunity to learn about the pictorial interpretation of societal attitudes toward old age and the meanings associated with old age.

I consider only old men in detail in my thesis. Few old women are mentioned in al-Hariri's anecdotes, and only a small number can be identified with confidence in the illustrations. More importantly, the portrayal of elderly women in Islamic painting deserves a dedicated study.

The objective of my thesis is to investigate how old age is depicted in illustrations of the al-Hariri manuscripts. Specifically, I will study the illustrated *Maqamat* manuscript

¹ The eleven extant manuscripts are: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 3929, *arabe* 6094 and *arabe* 5847; St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. 23; Istanbul, Süleymaniye, *Esad Efendi* 2961; London, British Library, *or.* 1200, *or.* 9718, *or. add.* 22114 and *or. add.* 7293; Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Marsh* 458. The focus of my study is the Vienna 1334 Mamluk manuscript. For the other ten *Maqamat* volumes discussed in the thesis, after the first complete reference to a particular manuscript, I refer to it by the city where the manuscript is located plus its accession number.

(Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9) completed in 1334 during the Mamluk (1250-1517) period. The place of origin of the manuscript is not known. It has been assumed that it was produced in Cairo. Most recently, Damascus, Syria is thought to be a likelier location. In 1375, Ahmad ibn Jullab al-Mawsili, the inspector of alms in Damascus, obtained a 1323 copy (London, British Library, *or. add.* 7293) of the *Maqamat*.² Damascus was also the place of production for another volume of the *Maqamat* (London, British Library, *or.* 9718), which was copied and illustrated by the calligrapher Ghazi ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman (d. 1310), probably in the second half of the thirteenth century.³

I will study old age by concentrating on one manuscript rather than through a broad comparative survey of several manuscripts. The aim is to analyze one set of images in a comprehensive fashion. I will explore a selection of miniature paintings within the context of the anecdote being illustrated. In addition, I will discuss the paintings in light of Mamluk society in Egypt during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Although I may mention the issue of painting style, the focus of my research is not stylistic analysis. Instead, I will discuss the illustrations within the historical framework of the early (Bahri) Mamluk period (1250-1382) and consider political, economic, religious, social and intellectual factors.

The position of old age in a society and the roles that an elderly person performs within it are dynamic, changing with time, place, and circumstances. The performance of

² Jonathan M. Bloom, "Mamluk Art and Architectural History: A Review Article," *Mamluk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 47.

³ Ibid; Oleg Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13; L. A. Mayer, "A Hitherto Unknown Damascene Artist," *Ars Islamica* 9 (1942): 168.

old age occurs within “spaces of old age.” In each picture that I analyze, the main character Abu Zayd performs the duties of or aligns himself with a leadership position that can be affiliated with maturity and knowledge. In addition, from another perspective, each social role that he takes on requires some element of theatrical performance to be successful. I developed the phrase “spaces of old age” based on Henri Lefebvre’s propositions about the production of social space.⁴ Lefebvre’s fundamental tenet is that social space is a social product. Each society (re)produces space and maintains it as a basis and a support for the symbols of the power structure. This concept can be related to the performance of old age in *Maqamat* illustrations.

I argue that the illustrations in the 1334 Mamluk manuscript associate old age with the transmission of knowledge and authority. Although al-Hariri’s assemblies were written in ca. 1111, the illustrations were produced over 200 years later. The illustrator interpreted the anecdotes within the context of early fourteenth-century society.⁵ In the past, art historians have misunderstood the main protagonist. They have automatically accepted and perpetuated the idea that Abu Zayd is a sinister character. On the contrary, I will show that the 1334 manuscript illustrations confirm Abu Zayd is a *shaykh* whose

⁴ Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Lefebvre's concepts have been applied to the study of architecture in Howayda al-Harithy, "The Concept of Space in Mamluk Architecture," *Muqarnas* 18 (2001): 73-93.

⁵ An example of the potential incongruence between text and illustrations is seen in Robert Hillenbrand, "Images of Muhammad in al-Biruni's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*," in *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars: Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (London: I.B. Taurus in association with the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, 2000), 129-146. Hillenbrand argues that the set of five images (of a total twenty-five) of Muhammad in the 1307-8 copy of al-Biruni's *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* changes the emphasis of the text, making it relevant for contemporary issues in Ilkhanid Iran.

high stature in the Muslim community is facilitated by his old age.⁶ He is a leader and a teacher in Mamluk society who inhabits and performs multiple roles in a range of social environments, spaces of old age such as literary scholar, administrative judge (*qadi*), religious leader (*khatib*) in the mosque, and teacher in a *madrasa*.

On the surface, the anecdotes focus on the idea of subverting figures and positions of authority. As a classical Arabic text studied for almost 900 years, however, al-Hariri's *Maqamat* is complex and welcomes alternative interpretations. *Maqamat* in general were written for an appreciation of the Arabic language. "The *maqama* with its prodigious store of sophisticated rhetoric and eloquent phrases overshadowed all other oral and written genres in medieval Arabic literature. It is a written genre intended for silent reading or for recitation before an audience."⁷ In his biographical dictionary (*Bughyat al-talab fi ta'rikh Halab*) of people related to Aleppo, Syria, the teacher, diplomat, and historian Ibn al-'Adim (1193-1262) reinforces how Muslims valued the spoken over the written word. The entry for Hammad al-Bawaziji (d. 1211) states he recited the following lines more than once:

You should con by rote without [the aid of] books which you gather; books
possess a fragility of material things that scatter them:
Water drowns them; fire burns them; thieves steal them; and rats chew
Them up.⁸

⁶ For a discussion of the many meanings of the term, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "shaykh."

⁷ Shmuel Moreh, "Hikaya and Literary Genres: *Maqama* and *Risala*," in *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arab World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 117.

⁸ David Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and His World: Ibn al-'Adim and Aleppo as Portrayed in His Biographical Dictionary of People Associated with the City* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 84-86.

No one knows why illustrations were first integrated into volumes of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* in the early thirteenth century. At the very least, the images were an unsuccessful experiment in the illustration of a text composed for the admiration of language. Perhaps the volumes were made as an unusual gift or for a personal book collection. They may have been for wealthy Mamluk patrons who did not read Arabic or read it with difficulty. Scholars can only speculate. The largely superfluous and short-lived addition of the illustrations, however, presents an opportunity to investigate the contribution of images to the genre. Like the text, the illustrations may have several purposes and be read in multiple ways. The illustrations can function to explain or improve the anecdotes, or they may function independently of the anecdotes, in a visual relationship with each other.⁹ In this thesis, I show that the illustrations of a Mamluk *Maqamat* manuscript, along with the text, associate old age with the transmission of knowledge and authority.

Methodology

I analyze four *Maqamat* anecdotes and their associated images in the 1334 Mamluk manuscript. I discuss the image both in the context of its accompanying text and in relation to its wider cultural background. I am particularly interested in ways that the text and image reinforce or contradict each other in how they portray old age. In the discussion of each anecdote, I include samples of illustrations from other *Maqamat* volumes to give the reader a sense of the scope of pictorial interpretations.

⁹ Oya Pancaroğlu investigates the purpose of illustrations in two copies of *Kitab al-diryaq*. See Oya Pancaroğlu, "Socializing Medicine: Illustrations of the *Kitab al-Diryaq*," *Muqarnas* 18 (2001).

I will use the most recent English translations of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* for my analysis of illustrations.¹⁰ The translations do not relate directly to the illustrations, but to the original Arabic text. Theodore Preston (1850) published a translation of twenty selected anecdotes, each accompanied by detailed notes. Thomas Chenery (1867) followed with his translation of the first twenty-six assemblies. Chenery included a 100-page introduction, which relates al-Hariri's biography and places al-Hariri's writing in historical context. In a later companion volume, Steingass (1898) completed the project initiated by Chenery when he translated the remaining twenty-four assemblies. For each anecdote, Chenery and Steingass wrote an abstract, the translation, and extensive annotations, which are much longer than the anecdote itself. The translations of Preston, Chenery, and Steingass represent a nineteenth-century perspective that is awkward and difficult to understand today. I would have welcomed a more accessible version. A twenty-first-century scholarly English annotated translation of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* would benefit anyone interested in classical Arabic literature.

For my discussion of Islam and beliefs about old age, I use Arthur J. Arberry's English translation of the *Qur'an*.¹¹ I also refer to English translations of *hadith* (reports

¹⁰ The English translations of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* I use are Thomas Chenery, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1867); Theodore Preston, *Makamat or Rhetorical Anecdotes of al-Hariri of Basra*, trans. Theodore Preston (London: Darf, 1850, 1986); F. Steingass, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1898).

¹¹ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

on the life and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) from the website, "USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts," maintained at the University of Southern California.¹²

The transliteration of Arabic names and terms is based on a simplified form of the system used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Macrons are not used for long vowels, and none of the letters are dotted.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One presents a critical review of the leading modern art-historical literature that has contributed to knowledge about al-Hariri's illustrated manuscripts. I demonstrate that, for most of the twentieth century, scholars were occupied with issues of place of origin, dating, attribution, painting style, and iconography and treated illustrations in isolation of the text. I also introduce recent new opinions about how to look at and write about Islamic manuscript painting.

Chapter Two centres on Islamic ideas and perceptions about old age. I discuss passages in the *Qur'an* and *hadith*, which together direct Muslim behaviour and constitute the core of Islam. The chapter also considers different ways old age is represented and interpreted in other texts and in images.

Chapter Three examines the depiction of old age in the 1334 Mamluk manuscript of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*. I analyze a selection of miniature paintings within the context of the anecdote being illustrated and Mamluk society during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

¹² University of Southern California, "USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts," <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA>> (14 November 2003). The site includes a powerful searchable database for the *Qur'an* and selected volumes of *hadith*.

*The Maqama and Classical Arabic Literature*¹³

The *maqama* (plural, *maqamat*) is a celebrated genre of classical Arabic literature.¹⁴ The word *maqama* means a “standing,” and in a broader context, a place for public assemblies.¹⁵ The *Maqamat*’s title is often translated as “Sessions,” although more accurately it means “Standings,” because its main characters stand to address one another.

Born in Hamadhan, a city in Western Iran, Badi‘ al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (968-1008) is credited as the inventor of the *maqama*. Al-Hamadhani’s collection *Maqamat* comprises fifty-two fictional narrative vignettes written in rhymed prose and interspersed with verse. Each episode is between 200 and 2,000 words in length. Al-Hamadhani’s anecdotes were improvised oral narratives presented for public entertainment at the end of scholarly belles lettres (*adab*) meetings. The author gathered them into a volume as an afterthought.

¹³ My thesis centres on art-historical issues about miniature paintings created to illustrate a text of fifty anecdotes, not literary issues. Consequently, I give only a brief introduction to the *maqama* genre. For references to Arabic literary studies, see the following note.

¹⁴ There is extensive literature about the origins, history and development of the *maqama*. I suggest the following selection of texts for further reading. For general reference, see Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002); Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, eds., *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). More specific topics are examined in Daniel Beaumont, "The Trickster and Rhetoric in the *Maqamat*," *Edebiyat* 5 (1994): 1-14; A. F. L. Beeston, "Al-Hamadhani, al-Hariri and the *Maqamat* Genre," in *Abbasid Belles Lettres*, ed. Julie Ashtiany, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 124-135; Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); J. N. Mattock, "The Early History of the *Maqama*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 15 (1984): 1-18; D. S. Richards, "The *Maqamat* of al-Hamadhani: General Remarks and a Consideration of the Manuscript," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1991): 89-99.

¹⁵ The terms *maqama* and assembly are used interchangeably in the thesis.

About one hundred years later, the literary form became popular and was integrated into the literary canon when al-Hariri composed his *Maqamat*. Abu Muhammad al-Qasim ibn ‘Ali al-Hariri was a civil servant, grammarian, and scholar who lived in Basra. Using al-Hamadani’s work as a model, al-Hariri wrote his picaresque narratives under different conditions from those of his predecessor. He composed his anecdotes privately, in writing, and deliberately published them as a coherent collection. Over 200 twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts of the collected *maqamat* are known, and the text was translated into other Semitic languages.¹⁶

Al-Hariri’s collection of fifty anecdotes is famous and valued for its eloquent use of Arabic. Through protagonist Abu Zayd, al-Hariri displays his skill for wordplay including alliteration, assonance, rhyme, punning, and allusion.¹⁷ His speeches contain complex syntax and obscure vocabulary, which sometimes require annotations placed between lines of text or in the margins.

Written for a sophisticated and literate bourgeois audience, al-Hariri’s short independent anecdotes have a common plot format and two recurring protagonists, the hero and the narrator. The episodes relate the adventures of hero Abu Zayd al-Saruji as told by the narrator, merchant al-Harith ibn Hamman. Al-Hariri was strategic when he chose names for the main characters. Zayd is a common name, and means “any man

¹⁶ Oleg Grabar, "Pictures or Commentaries: The Illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri," in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (Salt Lake City: Middle East Center and New York University Press, 1974), 87.

¹⁷ Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context: Art, Architecture, and the Literary World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 186.

whatever.” The *imam* (leader at the ritual prayer) Sharishi (d.1223) suggests that Abu Zayd is an honorific name (*kunya*) for either an old man in general or for time or fate (*dahr*).¹⁸ To explain the name of the narrator, Sharishi refers to a *hadith* in which the Prophet Muhammad states, “the most truthful of names are al-Harith and Hamman.”¹⁹ Al-Harith means “one who acquires gain by trade or other means,” trade being seen as an intrinsically worthwhile activity for a Muslim man.²⁰ Hamman is “one who is subject to cares and anxieties.” The characters, therefore, represent two groups of people. Abu Zayd is the ordinary man living in any Arab community; al-Harith is the middle class merchant dealing with personal and business concerns.

Abu Zayd is an elderly homeless mendicant and skilled orator living by his wits as he travels throughout the medieval Arab world. The old man is a proud member of the Banu Sasan, a wandering group of beggars who prey on gullible people.²¹ Each assembly relates a discrete incident in which the hero appears in a public place such as a market, mosque, cemetery, bath, or travelling caravan, under different pretenses. Abu Zayd usually gathers an attentive audience around himself, influences people’s emotions and

¹⁸ Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre*, 154-155.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁰ For a discussion of ideas about Islam, trade, and wealth, see S. D. Goitein, “The Rise of the Middle Eastern Bourgeoisie in Early Islamic Times,” in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966); Leah Kinberg, “Compromise of Commerce: A Study of Early Traditions Concerning Poverty and Wealth,” *Der Islam* 66 (1989).

²¹ Bosworth has written a history of the Banu Sasan in Arabic society. See C. E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banu Sasan in Arabic Society and Literature. Part One* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976).

ideas through his persuasive oratory, and collects money and goods in the process. Al-Harith witnesses, describes, and sometimes participates in Abu Zayd's adventures. An episode ends with the narrator revealing the hero's identity, the hero rationalizing his behaviour, and the narrator and hero leaving the scene. Abu Zayd is a chameleon, changing his persona and demeanor to suit his needs and goals.

What was al-Hariri's reason for writing the *maqamat*? Most often, critics have argued that al-Hariri wrote the anecdotes to satirize indirectly society and to comment upon contemporary morality. In his preface, al-Hariri defends a didactic purpose by asking "What fault is there in one who composes stories for instruction not for display, and whose purpose in them is the education and not the fabling?"²² Hämeen-Anttila insists that al-Hariri had no choice. If al-Hariri had written the narratives solely for entertainment, he would have been criticized.

Hämeen-Anttila also differs from other literary scholars in his opinion of Abu Zayd's integrity. He insists that the old man is a "superhuman hero" who shows no signs of weakness.²³ Foremost to Hämeen-Anttila, Abu Zayd is a wanderer who has voluntarily chosen his peripatetic life. He does not deliberately try to harm others. Although most of the scholarly literature labels Abu Zayd a rogue, scoundrel, or trickster, his behaviour is benign in the majority of anecdotes. Usually, the hero is simply rewarded with food, goods, or money for his mesmerizing eloquence.

²² Preston, *Makamat or Rhetorical Anecdotes of al-Hariri of Basra*, 107.

²³ Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre*, 164-173.

Al-Hariri's narratives take the reader or listening audience on a journey throughout the Arab world. The voyage culminates with Abu Zayd's spiritual transformation as he adopts a pious existence. In the final (fiftieth) episode, Abu Zayd renounces his previous life and dedicates himself to Sufism, prayer, and meditation.

There was substantial scholarly interest in al-Hariri's anecdotes when they were written. In "Certificates of Transmission on a Manuscript of the *Maqamat* of Hariri (ms. Cairo, Adab 105)," Pierre McKay writes with enthusiasm that "an extraordinary galaxy of literary and legal talent was assembled for the first great public reading" of the *Maqamat*.²⁴ Excluding al-Hariri, thirty-eight scholars attended. The reading was held in Baghdad and took more than one month to complete, ending on Saturday, 18 February 1111. McKay analyzed the thirty certificates of transmission (*ijzas*) that were included with the earliest known manuscript of the *Maqamat*. A certificate associated with a reading of the full text validates the transmission of authority (*isnad*) of the manuscript. Attendance at a reading as an auditor, in the presence of the author or a respected observer, gave the auditor permission to teach about the text. Certificate A, the primary certificate of transmission, identifies author al-Hariri as well as the reader of the text, the recorder who is also the copyist and owner of the manuscript, and the auditors. The certificate and marginal notes indicate the dates when specific *maqamat* were read and who attended each session. McKay declares that Certificate A alone confirms the importance of this copy, because it is unlikely that "so large and distinguished an

²⁴ Pierre A. MacKay, "Certificates of Transmission on a Manuscript of the *Maqamat* of Hariri (Ms. Cairo, Adab 105)," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* n.s., 61, part 4 (1971): 9.

assembly of scholars [the literary world of Baghdad] could be brought together for so long...for anything less."²⁵

The 1334 Mamluk Manuscript

The 1334 Mamluk manuscript contains 195 folios (370mm x 255 mm), including a frontispiece (fol. 1r, 192mm x 175 mm) and seventy high-quality miniature illustrations on a gold background. The illuminations are small and of variable size, usually about 155mm x 125 mm. The protective page (fol. 195v) is decorated with a geometric design consisting of two interlocking twelve-point stars and a hexagonal figure. The entire surface is covered by one complete and four one-quarter stars in the corners.²⁶

A colophon (fol. 195r) indicates that the copying of the manuscript was completed on 29 March 1334.²⁷ An additional statement identifies Abu al-Fada'il ibn Abi Ishaq as the scribe, vocalizer, provider of diacritical marks, and corrector (proofreader) (*kataba, dabata, naqata, harrara*).²⁸ The scribe may also be the illustrator. It is possible that the scribe was a descendant of Mamluks (*awlad al-nas*). The latter usually had Muslim names.²⁹ These free-born sons of Mamluks were educated in reading and writing

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kurt Holter, "Die Galen-Handschrift und die Makemen des Hariri der Wiener Nationalbibliothek," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 11 (1937): 16.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, 15.

²⁹ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "mamluk."

to prepare them for professional employment in the Mamluk administration and religious organizations.³⁰

The frontispiece of the Mamluk manuscript depicts an enthroned ruler attended by two crowned angels, and being entertained by dancers, acrobats and musicians (Figure 1). The scene is placed on a gold background and framed with an intricate arabesque border. The frontispiece, however, does not portray a particular leader and is not indicative of the book's subject matter.³¹ It is intended to be a generic court scene that glorifies royalty through enthronement and courtly entertainment.

The miniature paintings are striking compositions. The simple design, solid gold background, and spare setting of most illustrations create a stage for the large theatrical human figures, which are reminiscent of fourteenth-century shadow play figures.³² A few plain objects usually identify the setting. A mosque lamp, candelabra, or curtain tied and draped to one side can signal the inside of a building; a dome, arch, or column indicate its exterior; a camel, horse, or tent denote a caravan; and, a single plant represents the natural landscape. Sometimes there is no scenery at all.

People dominate the paintings. Oversized heads are attached to rectangular bodies draped in cloaks and robes made of complex patterned textiles. Precise dramatic hand

³⁰ Nasser Rabbat, "Representing the Mamluks in Mamluk Historical Writing," in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2001), 60.

³¹ Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, 22, 171 note 6.

³² Amila Buturovic, "The Shadow Play in Mamluk Egypt: The Genre and Its Cultural Implications," *Mamluk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 153. The article discusses how the flat, leather figures were manipulated by the puppeteer to cast shadows onto a white screen during theatrical performances. See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "khayal al-zill" and "Ibn Daniyal."

gestures perform and communicate. The figures fill the image. They are often crowded together, pressing against the picture frame, and may spill outside the border.

Art historians contribute many points of view about the 1334 manuscript, but no one mentions the theme of old age. How is old age represented in the illustrations? How do the illustrations relate to each other? And, how are they connected to the anecdotes in the text? My thesis addresses these issues and establishes a baseline for further investigation of old age in al-Hariri's *Maqamat* illustrations and in early Islamic visual culture in general.

Chapter One: The Art-historical Study of al-Hariri's Illustrated *Maqamat*

The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century illustrated manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* are rare and valuable sources of artistic impressions about Arab life. Of the thirteen extant illustrated manuscripts, eleven were produced between ca. 1220 and ca. 1375. The illustrations add aesthetic appeal, reinforce hero Abu Zayd's adventures throughout the Islamic world, and offer a complex visual reading of medieval Islamic daily life.

One facet of life at the forefront of the illustrations is old age. The theme of old age is central to al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, because the protagonist Abu Zayd is an elderly man. This decision by the author raises interesting questions: Why did al-Hariri choose an old man as the central character? How is Abu Zayd portrayed in the illustrations? How are other elderly characters, and Abu Zayd's relations with them, depicted? How did illustrators differentiate between adulthood and old age? In Chapter Three, these are the questions that will guide my discussion of selected *Maqamat* narratives and their illustrations.

In Chapter One, I will review the leading modern art-historical literature that has contributed to our knowledge about al-Hariri's illustrated *Maqamat* manuscripts. Early twentieth-century scholarship identified extant manuscripts, offered brief descriptions of selected illustrations, and posed questions for further research. Kurt Holter's (1937) "Die Galen Handschrift und die Makamen des Hariri der Wiener Nationalbibliothek" is the

earliest article about the 1334 Mamluk manuscript.³³ Holter provides a detailed condition report, an annotated list of the narratives, and a brief discussion of each image, accompanied by copies of the frontispiece and thirty-eight miniatures. The variable condition of the illustrations allows Holter to describe the painting process. Holter's close inspection of the compositions and painting styles leads him to make two hypotheses. First, he speculates that more than one artist was involved in painting the miniatures. Second, he suggests that the manuscript originated in Egypt. Holter's investigation laid the groundwork for future research about the manuscript.

Soon after, Hugo Buchthal (1940) wrote about three illustrated al-Hariri manuscripts housed at the British Museum (London, British Museum, *or.* 1200, *or. add.* 7293, and *or. add.* 22114).³⁴ Buchthal examines a small selection of miniatures in each manuscript. His goal is to attribute each miniature to one of three Arab schools of painting: Mosul, Baghdad in the early thirteenth century, or early Mamluk (after 1260) in Syria. Buchthal discusses compositional elements: the types, proportions, and physical characteristics of human figures, animals, landscape, and architecture. He makes two important observations about the British Museum manuscripts. First, all three schools contributed to painting styles. Second, Mamluk miniature painting in Egypt evolved via Syria as a continuation of the Syrian and Mesopotamian style. Buchthal concludes by situating the three London manuscripts within the context of knowledge about the development of Islamic painting. They are among the few surviving examples to show

³³ Holter, "Die Galen-Handschrift und die Makemen des Hariri der Wiener Nationalbibliothek," 1-48.

³⁴ Hugo Buchthal, "Three Illustrated Hariri Manuscripts in the British Museum," *Burlington Magazine* 77 (1940): 144-152.

the communication of the painting practices of the Mesopotamian schools to Mamluk Egypt.

It was not until twenty years later that Rice (1959) applied a thematic methodology to the study of *Maqamat* illustrations in "The Oldest Illustrated Arabic Manuscript."³⁵ Rice's investigation of burial customs focuses on one specific *maqama* and its illustrations. He examines the representation of tombs and cemeteries in the miniatures that accompany al-Hariri's eleventh *maqama*, which occurs in the city of Saweh. He compares artistic approaches in the nine manuscripts that illustrate the anecdote and identifies a range of representations.

In 1960, Richard Ettinghausen studied the *Maqamat* manuscript housed at the Süleymaniye Library (Istanbul, *Esad Efendi* 2961). Both Ettinghausen and his colleague, Oleg Grabar, recognized the manuscript as a major work of the thirteenth century. Incorporating Ettinghausen's notes and photographs, Grabar (1963) published the initial account about the manuscript in "A Newly Discovered Illustrated Manuscript of the *Maqamat* of Hariri."³⁶ Grabar briefly discusses each of the forty-two best-preserved illustrations from a total of fifty-six. In one or two paragraphs he identifies the *maqama* and its plot, and describes the associated image(s).

Grabar has preconceived ideas about how an illustration should appear; it should be a faithful representation of the story. He points out notable features in an illustration and identifies any inconsistencies between text and image. In his "preliminary report"

³⁵ D. S. Rice, "The Oldest Illustrated Arabic Manuscript," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959): 207-220.

³⁶ Oleg Grabar, "A Newly Discovered Illustrated Manuscript of the *Maqamat* of Hariri," *Ars Orientalis* 5 (1963): 97-109.

Grabar focuses on iconography and painting style, which he believes should structure the framework of future in-depth study of all *Maqamat* illustrations. Grabar compares the Istanbul 2916 manuscript with two other *Maqamat* volumes (St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. 23; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 5847) because all three are illustrated with “expanded” images. He recognizes the artistic merit of the three manuscripts as well as their value as historical texts of the Arab world.

At the same time, Ettinghausen was writing about the illustrated *Maqamat* in the classic book *Arab Painting* (1962), the first modern scholarly survey of Islamic art.³⁷ The text addresses the fundamental question: What is Arab painting? Ettinghausen locates a spectrum of painting including frescoes, mosaics, ceramics, illustrated manuscripts, and illuminated *Qur’ans* within a historical context that extends from the seventh to the fourteenth century. He investigates how classical, Iranian, and Byzantine cultures contributed to Islamic painting composition, style, and iconography and the catalysts that facilitated the process.

Ettinghausen regards the St. Petersburg S. 23 and Paris 5847 manuscripts as exemplars of Arab manuscript illustration at its peak.³⁸ His Western perspective is evident by frequent references to the illustrators as “the master.” Ettinghausen’s evaluation of the manuscripts emphasizes certain features: compositional design, rich details, psychological insight, strong colours, and draftsmanship. These qualities are the

³⁷ Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva: Albert Skira, 1962).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 104-24.

domain of connoisseurship, the leading method of Western art-historical discourse from the early to mid 1900s.

Ettinghausen calls the 1334 *Maqamat* the “outstanding manuscript” of the Mamluk period; its seventy illustrations are the “most characteristic” of Mamluk painting.³⁹ As with the St. Petersburg S. 23 and Paris 5847 manuscripts mentioned above, Ettinghausen undertakes a discussion of several illustrations, which revolves around stylistic analysis and sources of influence.

Unfortunately, Ettinghausen’s text is hampered by its analytical framework, which is founded on an assumption of the progress and decline of culture. This methodology can lead to aesthetic and value judgments about the quality of painting. Ettinghausen places the artwork in its historical perspective, but his coverage is broad, and he rarely identifies specific textual sources. These weaknesses arose because the book was designed for a general audience. Overall, Ettinghausen made an important contribution by producing a more thorough study of Arab painting than had been achieved before.

A colloquium about the Islamic city led Grabar to a more focused investigation of illustrations and to the publication of “The Illustrated *Maqamat* of the Thirteenth Century: The Bourgeoisie and the Arts” (1970).⁴⁰ Grabar addresses three questions: Why were *Maqamat* manuscripts illustrated? Based on the illustrations, how did the bourgeoisie envision the city? What were the models for the pictures? Grabar presents a

³⁹ Ibid., 147-48.

⁴⁰ Oleg Grabar, “The Illustrated *Maqamat* of the Thirteenth Century: The Bourgeoisie and the Arts,” in *The Islamic City: A Colloquium*, ed. A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern (Oxford and Philadelphia: Bruno Cassirer and University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 207-222.

disjointed discussion that is unconvincing and difficult to follow. He also overlooks artistic license, referring to the illustrations as historical documents that provide scientific or factual evidence rather than as the illustrator's personal interpretation of the anecdotes.

By 1974, Grabar's interest in the *Maqamat* illustrations had taken a new direction. In "Pictures or Commentaries: The Illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri," Grabar considers the motivation for and function of the miniatures.⁴¹ Grabar proposes five "attitudes" or points of view about text-image relations. First, the "literal" attitude ties the illustrations closely to the text, with images being difficult to understand without the textual passage. Grabar proposes that the illustrations "must be considered as a random commentary on a most elementary reading of the text rather than as a coherent visual interpretation of incidents or of characters."⁴² He assumes the artist had a superficial understanding of the text and, therefore, created pictures disconnected from the anecdotes. Grabar, however, underestimates the illustrator's creativity and the planning needed to implement the painting program. Second, the "descriptive" viewpoint highlights the visual representation of a story's physical setting, a particular type of person, or activities of daily life.

Third, the "interpretive" attitude, is limited to a small number of illustrations in one manuscript (Paris 5847). Grabar believes the illustrator al-Wasiti tried to convey a psychological or intellectual interpretation of the text.⁴³ Grabar suggests that a cemetery

⁴¹ Grabar, "Pictures or Commentaries: The Illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri," 85-104.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 98.

scene (eleventh *maqama*) evokes the emotional and somber mood of the story, and the simple image (third *maqama*) that juxtaposes Abu Zayd and al-Harith provokes deeper thought.

The fourth attitude is concerned with creating visually interesting images independent of story content by repeating the same pictorial features throughout the manuscript to achieve consistent communication.⁴⁴ The related fifth approach, which Grabar associates with the Vienna *A.F. 9* manuscript, maintains that some miniatures are “meaningless” and are solely decorations for visual enjoyment.

Grabar concludes that the five attitudes toward illustration explain the variety between manuscripts and reflect the range of contemporary taste. At the same time, the illustrations make a manuscript more enjoyable to read and to look at. Finally, Grabar challenges scholars to imagine what the people who made, purchased, and valued the paintings were thinking. He introduces the unexplored topics of artistic practice, the marketplace, and audience reception of al-Hariri’s images.⁴⁵

Grabar’s long-term interest in al-Hariri’s manuscripts culminates with the release of his *Illustrations of the Maqamat* (1984).⁴⁶ Grabar synthesizes his previous publications and incorporates much of the earlier art-historical research about the topic. He summarizes the information about each of the thirteen extant illustrated manuscripts,

⁴⁴ The London 22114 manuscript, for example, shows Abu Zayd and al-Harith with the same physical qualities throughout the book. The former always wears a light grey coat and the latter always has a red beard, creating a sense of continuity between the miniatures.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁶ Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*.

identifying its date, geographic origins, illustrator (if known), condition, style, and unique features. Following this introduction, Grabar confines his discussion to the eleven manuscripts made between ca. 1220 and ca. 1375. For each anecdote, Grabar identifies the related illustrated folios in the manuscripts and explains the anecdote and its miniatures. Next, Grabar analyzes what he calls the “morphology” of the illustrations: the characters Abu Zayd and al-Harith, types of people and their actions, the natural and urban landscapes, and architecture. Lastly, Grabar proposes potential sources for the illustrations.

An original feature of the book is a set of nine microfiches, which contain all the illustrations from the eleven manuscripts. Grabar’s admirable goal is to promote easy public access to all the illustrations in one location. The medium allows the illustrations to be reproduced in a physically accessible and cost-efficient way in one publication. Unfortunately, the nature of fiche and the organization of the images make them awkward to use. Even now, however, microfiche is the only medium that contains all the miniatures in one place.

Grabar’s study of the miniatures has made a substantial contribution to art-historical knowledge. His writing is notable for its rhetorical questions that challenge the reader to consider difficult subjects.⁴⁷ What is more, Grabar’s analyses concentrate on the fundamental issues of place and date of origin, stylistic analysis, iconography, and

⁴⁷ Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (2003): 172. This thorough and insightful essay reviews the historiography of Islamic art, clarifies critical and methodological issues, and identifies challenges facing the discipline. It is informative reading for the Islamic art historian.

historical models. His discussion of these topics has laid the groundwork for later contextual studies.

While Grabar has pursued a diversity of topics, David James addresses the formal organization of the paintings and the value of the artists' technical expertise. In "Space-forms in the Work of the Baghdad *Maqamat* Illustrators, 1225-58" (1974), James traces the origins and development of compositional forms.⁴⁸ He is concerned with ideas about pictorial organization and the techniques used to create two- and three-dimensional space. James establishes and promotes the importance of studying the compositional forms of *Maqamat* illustrations. He does this in two ways. First, James compares the study of "space-forms" with the traditional study of iconography, stating that both draw attention to the cultural legacy of the illustrators. He then elevates the status of studying composition. James argues that it creates an awareness of the illustrators' inventiveness and experimental approach that cannot be achieved by the study of iconography alone. Second, James argues that technical information can be the basis of an initial framework for understanding the organization of the illustrations.

In an offhand statement, James makes an acute observation about the relation between the text and images in the Paris 5847 *Maqamat*. He notes the independence between the miniature and the text. James argues that the scribe and artist al-Wasiti did not regard the illustrations as subservient and complementary to the text. Instead, al-Wasiti had freed the miniature from the text. Although James's comment is a small detail in his article, it raises key issues about text-image relations that had not been addressed before.

⁴⁸ David James, "Space-forms in the Work of the Baghdad *Maqamat* Illustrators, 1225-58," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37 (1974): 305-320.

In addition to the general studies of *Maqamat* illustrations, some scholars have concentrated on a specific time period and society. Duncan Haldane's research has concentrated on the Mamluk manuscripts. In 1975, Haldane participated in a seminar that brought together historians studying medieval Europe and the Islamic Near East, which resulted in a volume of eight articles. Haldane's cursory paper "Scenes of Daily Life from Mamluk Miniatures" mentions the importance of ordinary life the London 22114 manuscript, which was produced in ca. 1300, possibly in Syria.⁴⁹ He lists types of genre scenes that are popular subjects: hunting, trials before judges, rulers and governors, banquets and celebrations, libraries, schools, pharmacists' shops, boats, tents, camps on journeys and pilgrimages, inns, mosques, and funerals. In addition, Haldane identifies the general characteristics and style of Mamluk painting and types of clothing. In his subsequent article "Three Mamluk Manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*" (1985), Haldane notes the contributions of the Byzantine, Sassanian, and Central Asian cultures to the painting styles found in three manuscripts (London 7293, London 22114, and London, British Library, Or. 9718) produced in Syria around 1300.⁵⁰

Haldane's most inclusive work on the Mamluk manuscripts is his *Mamluk Painting* (1978).⁵¹ The text redresses the lack of attention given to the study of Arab

⁴⁹ Duncan Haldane, "Scenes of Daily Life from Mamluk Miniatures," in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Peter M. Holt (Warminster: Aries & Phillips, 1977), 78-89.

⁵⁰ Duncan Haldane, "Three Mamluk Manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*," *Orientalia* 16, no. 1 (1985): 44-50.

⁵¹ Duncan Haldane, *Mamluk Painting* (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 1978).

illuminated manuscripts of the Mamluk period. It features the first annotated list of thirty-two Mamluk manuscripts, including the five known *Maqamat*.⁵² Haldane, however, returns to the same issues dealt with by his contemporaries. Within the Mamluk context, he discusses sources of Arab painting and the development of a Mamluk style, subject matter, general characteristics and motifs, organization of the composition, representation of people and animals, and decoration and ornament of textiles (mainly clothing).

A related text that features Mamluk culture is Esin Atil's exhibition catalogue *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks* (1981).⁵³ Atil includes sections on illuminated manuscripts (mainly copies of the *Qur'an*), metalwork, glass, ceramics, woodwork, ivory and stone, textiles and rugs, and illustrated manuscripts. A total of 133 artifacts are represented. Each chapter consists of an introductory essay followed by catalogue entries; a photograph and page-long description are supplied for an object.

The catalogue, however, is disappointing in its coverage of illustrated manuscripts. There are high-quality colour photographs of all objects, except for the twenty black-and-white photographs of the five illustrated manuscripts in the exhibition. The latter include only four photographs from the 1334 *Maqamat*. The commentary about the *Maqamat* manuscript conveys information that could be novel and interesting to the targeted general audience, but would be familiar to the Islamic art historian.

⁵² Ibid., 100. Most of Haldane's information about the 1334 Mamluk manuscript was adapted from Holter, "Die Galen-Handschrift und die Makemen des Hariri der Wiener Nationalbibliothek."

⁵³ Esin Atil, *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981).

Consequently, the catalogue does not add scholarly knowledge about al-Hariri's illustrated text.

It was not until the 1990s that Shirley Guthrie introduced a new way of thinking about the *Maqamat* illustrations.⁵⁴ In *Arab Social Life in the Middle Ages: An Illustrated Study* (1995), Guthrie moves beyond the historical focus on dating, origins, painting style, and iconography. She enlarges on Haldane's earlier reference to ordinary life by adopting a broader strategy that considers how activities of daily life were interpreted visually. Her objective is to show that the illustrations of the thirteenth-century *Maqamat* mirror everyday events in the Arab world.

Guthrie uses the illustrations to analyze medieval Islamic society and culture in conjunction with an extensive selection of literary and historical sources. Guthrie organizes her study around seven themes: religious life, power and authority, trade, urban life, women and hospitality. Several topics are considered within each theme: in religious life, the month of fasting (Ramadan) and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*); in power and authority, the governor as ruler and the judiciary (*qadi*); in trade, the caravan, *khan*, and the slave market; in urban life, the cupper, library, schoolroom, musicians, and professional mourners; in rural life, the water wheel, the village, and the Bedouin; in women, the virtuous wife, childbirth, women and the law, the slave girl, and women in the mosque; and, in hospitality, drinking, food, and etiquette.

The text is not a study of the *Maqamat* per se. Instead, Guthrie selectively mines illustrations from seven manuscripts, searching for visual nuggets that contribute to a

⁵⁴ Shirley Guthrie, *Arab Social Life in the Middle Ages: An Illustrated Study* (London: Saqi Books, 1995). Guthrie's book is based on her dissertation. See Shirley Guthrie, "Everyday Life in the Near East: The Evidence of the Seventh- to Thirteenth-century Illustrations of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1992).

particular subject. She deconstructs a suitable illustration and discusses features within the historical and social context of numerous primary sources of the period such as personal memoirs, travel journals, a manual for royal governance, a guide of rules and regulations for proper behaviour at court, and biographical dictionaries. Unfortunately, Guthrie treats al-Hariri's anecdotes and the illustrations as factual evidence rather than as the fictive and artistic creations they are.

During the twentieth century, issues of dating, attribution, painting style, and iconography governed the study of Islamic painting, including the *Maqamat*. Art historians believed there were identifiable cultural sources of influence that steered the evolution of painting.⁵⁵ It was a period of discovery in which scholars located extant illustrated *Maqamat* manuscripts and wrote about the fundamental information that is the basis of future study. Leading art historians such as Ettinghausen and Grabar dominated opinion and research about al-Hariri's illustrated works. Methods of study remained unchanged for many years. Most often, scholars treated the illustrations separately from al-Hariri's anecdotes. At the same time, they were concerned with the components of a painting, not the painting as a whole. Guthrie's work bridges these practices and more

⁵⁵ Michael Baxandall argues that art historians in general have used the word "influence" inappropriately. The way the word has been used implies that scribes and illustrators were passive participants, and had no choice in how they created pictures. For a discussion of the idea of artistic influence, see Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 58-62. Baxandall contends that "influence" reverses the roles of agent and client. For an application of Baxandall's argument in an Islamic context, see Jonathan Bloom, *Minaret: Symbol of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 18. In his study of the invention of the minaret, Bloom argues emphatically that preceding cultures were in no position to influence Islam directly. "Rather, Islam could only have adapted, misunderstood, copied, addressed, paraphrased, emulated, parodied, distorted, referred to, drawn on, resorted to, appropriated from, reacted to, differentiated itself from, engaged in a meditation on, responded to, or even ignored the tower [minaret] traditions of the past." The same case can be made for the creation of *Maqamat* paintings.

current methods. She has facilitated the movement of inquiry toward a more inclusive situation, one that draws on supporting historical documents and tries to situate the *Maqamat* illustrations within a social and historical context.

At the start of the twenty-first century, art historians are adopting new strategies for their study of Islamic painting. Oya Pancaroğlu, for instance, advocates a comprehensive study of early Arab manuscript illustration.⁵⁶ Her examination of an Arabic text about antidotes for snake venom is an instructive example for the analysis of *Maqamat* illustrations. Pancaroğlu's innovative readings of two copies of the *Book of Antidotes* (*Kitab al-diryaq*), one dated 1199 and one produced in the first half of the thirteenth century, consider the entire painting program. For each manuscript, she adopts a holistic approach for her analysis of illustrations. Pancaroğlu constructs a logical and convincing argument that emphasizes how the illustrations function and contribute to the philosophy of knowledge and learning at the time.

For the 1199 *Book of Antidotes* manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 2964), Pancaroğlu synthesizes information about humanistic attitudes towards the acquisition and transmission of knowledge from physician to student, pharmacology, and cosmology. She identifies relations between text and images as well as between images. A series of paintings has several simultaneous functions, explanatory and enhancing text. Images also function independently of the text and in relationship to each other.

⁵⁶ Pancaroğlu, "Socializing Medicine: Illustrations of the *Kitab al-Diryaq*," 155-172.

Anna Contadini reinforces Pancaroğlu's position for a comprehensive analysis of the Islamic illustrated manuscript.⁵⁷ Contadini argues that traditional Eurocentric research on early Islamic miniature painting has been dominated by two approaches; either the miniatures have been viewed as subordinate to the accompanying text or they have been studied as independent of the text. She is particularly concerned about the relatively limited study of early Arab painting. Contadini believes that recent scholarship such as Pancaroğlu's has introduced a significant new perspective. This new approach demands an inclusive study of the entire manuscript, both text and associated illustrations, and it requires that the manuscript be considered within the historical and social context it was created. Contadini herself contributes to the discourse by exploring the dynamic relationship between text and the image of the unicorn in the ca. 1220 bestiary manuscript *Kitab na't al-hayawan* (London, British Library, or. 2784).⁵⁸

A comprehensive understanding of illustrations in *Maqamat* manuscripts also requires the consideration of text and image within the whole manuscript.⁵⁹ Studying the theme of old age will contribute to the process. Old age is the prominent thread running through both al-Hariri's anecdotes and the manuscript illustrations, connecting all together. An examination of old age occurs at the intersection of classical Arabic literature, Islam, history, and art history and will be the focus of Chapter Two.

⁵⁷ Anna Contadini, "A Bestiary Tale: Text and Image of the Unicorn in the *Kitab na't al-hayawan* (British Library, Or. 2784)," *Muqarnas* 20 (2003): 18-19.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ A future art-historical interpretation of the illustrated *Maqamat* will be David J. Roxburgh, "Chasing Shadows: Word and Image in al-Hariri's *Maqamat*," *Muqarnas* 25 (2008).

Chapter Two: Ways of Seeing Old Age

What did it mean to be old in the Islamic Middle East during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? Was an old man seen as a discarded person or as a respected elder to whom others turned for guidance? How were Islamic ideas about old age reflected in contemporary culture? These are questions that will direct my study of old age in medieval Islamic culture. In Chapter Two, I discuss beliefs about old age that originated and developed in early Islamic society and how attitudes toward the elderly were expressed in a selection of texts and images.

Islam and Old Age

Islam is a religion and a political philosophy, and may be a sign of individual and collective identity.⁶⁰ Islamic society looked to the *Qur'an* and *hadith* (collections of reports) as sources of authority that prescribed correct behaviour. Fundamental ideas about the elderly are identified in the text of the *Qur'an* and in *hadith*. The *Qur'an* is the sacred text of Islam and the essence of Islam's religious and cultural beliefs. The *sunna* (Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions) complement the *Qur'an* and are guides to exemplary behaviour for all Muslims. Muhammad's companions remembered and recorded the *sunna*, which were compiled into *hadith*. Together, the *Qur'an* and *hadith* constitute the nucleus of Muslim jurisprudence, religious practice, and proper behaviour. The *Qur'an*, *hadith*, and *sunna* continued to be the essential authoritative texts that governed Muslims' behaviour throughout the medieval Islamic period.

⁶⁰ Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.

The compilations of al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (Muslim) (d. 875) have the highest degree of reliability and are regarded as second in importance only to the *Qur'an*.⁶¹ Their collections add to our understanding of attitudes toward old age. I refer to examples from their texts in my thesis as well as to the collections of *hadith* compiled by Malik ibn Anas (ca. 715-96), Abu Dawud (d. 889) and al-Tirmidhi (d. 892).

The *Qur'an* has relatively few references to old age. A small number of verses make explicit or implicit references to issues related to aging. In *A Concordance of the Qur'an*, Hanna Kassis identifies the Arabic words that define old age: *kabir/kabira* (old age, being an old person) is mentioned in seven verses, *shaykh* (old man, elder) in four verses, *ajuz* (old woman) in four verses, and *shaba* (hoariness, greyness of hair, old age) in two verses.⁶² Infrequently used terms include *itiy* (old age), *shib* (grey-headed, old), *qadim* (ancient, old, aged), and *nakhira* (old and wasted, crumbled), each word occurring in one verse apiece.⁶³

In the *Qur'an*, grey hair, physical weakness, and vulnerability personify physical and biological old age. The elderly body is made of “bones old and wasted” (79:11). In his plea to God, Zachariah (Zakariyya) refers to his own body as he says, “O my Lord, behold the bones within me are feeble and my head is all aflame with hoariness [grey or

⁶¹ Ibid., 40.

⁶² Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'an* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁶³ Kassis, *Concordance*. The specific verses that refer to each word are: *kabira* – 4:6, 2:266, 3:40, 14:39, 15:54, 17:23, 19:8; *shaykh* – 11:72, 12:78, 28:23, 40:67; *ajuz* – 11:72, 26:171, 37:135, 51:29; *shaba* – 19:4, 30:54; *qadim* – 26:76; *itiy* – 19:8; *nakhirah* – 79:11; *shib* – 73:17.

white hair from age]" (19:4). At the same time, the aged Muslim acknowledges his or her acceptance of and surrender to God, who controls life:

God is He who created you in weakness, then He appointed after weakness strength, then after strength He appointed weakness and grey hairs; He creates what He will, and He is the All-knowing, the All-powerful. (30:54)

Similarly, God's power over life is obvious in another passage:

It is He who created you of dust then of a sperm-drop, then of a blood-clot, then He delivers you as infants, then that you may come of age, then that you may be old men – though some of you there are who die before it – and that you may reach a stated term; haply you will understand. It is He who gives life, and makes to die. (40:67-70)

The verses above apply to both men and women, but there are differences in attitudes based on gender. A woman could be old by the age of forty.⁶⁴ The old woman (*ajuz*) is referred to as "barren," unable to have children, and past her childbearing years (51:29). She is also physically slow and unable to keep up with others. Lot's wife "tarried" and was left behind by God as punishment (26:171, 37:135). The *Qur'an* emphasizes a woman's primary role as a mother and her responsibilities for the family; her social status declines after she has finished raising children.

The elderly man (*shaykh*), however, while physically fragile, acquires social status in old age. The word *shaykh* refers to a man over fifty years old, someone whose age is advanced, and whose hair has turned white.⁶⁵ Furthermore, *shaykh* has been associated with the idea of authority and prestige since the pre-Islamic period, referring to

⁶⁴ Thomas J. O'Shaugnessy and S. J. Manila, "The Qur'anic View of Youth and Old Age," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morganlanischen Gesellschaft* 141 (1991): 34.

⁶⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "shaykh."

any male leader of a group such as a family, trade or professional guild, and religious organization.⁶⁶

In addition to addressing the individual, the *Qur'an* deals with the position of an elder within the family. A key passage expresses the prescribed relationship between an adult child and an aged parent:

Thy Lord has decreed you shall not serve any but Him, and to be good to parents, whether one or both of them attains old age with thee; say not to them 'Fie' neither chide them, but speak unto them words respectful, and lower to them the wing of humbleness out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little.' (17: 23-26)

These verses recognize the nurturing role of parents in a child's early development and stress the need for a lifelong bond between child and parents. In adulthood, a child must respect his or her aged parents, not reproach them, and show humility.⁶⁷

Many of the *Qur'an's* teachings about old age are placed in the context of biblical narratives.⁶⁸ Although both are elderly, the prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) and his wife Sarah are told they will have a son (11:72, 14:39, 15:54). Similarly, old Zakariyya and his old wife have a child John (Yahya) (19:8). In the story of Joseph (Yusuf) and his brothers, their elderly father is thought to be above them, but below the authority of God (12:78). Finally, as Moses (Musa) starts his exile from Egypt, he helps an elderly man water his flock and is welcomed into the family's life (28:23).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ O'Shaugnessy and Manila, "The Qur'anic View of Youth and Old Age," 35-51. O'Shaugnessy and Manila provide an in-depth study of the *Qur'an's* treatment of youth and old age.

⁶⁸ Gene R. Thursby, "Aging in Eastern Religious Traditions," in *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging*, ed. Thomas R. Cole, Robert Kastenbaum, and Ruth E. Kay (New York: Springer, 2000), 159.

Ideas in the *Qur'an* about the treatment of the elderly are reinforced and elaborated in *hadith*. The *hadith* remind the Muslim of the physical changes and illnesses linked to old age. The Prophet Muhammad's wife 'Aisha, for example, describes an old Quraysh woman as having a toothless mouth and red gums.⁶⁹ Other reports describe "a very aged man, having lost his eyesight,"⁷⁰ and a man whose "eyebrows were overhanging his eyes owing to old age."⁷¹ Four reports documented by Muslim warn the person who is leading a congregation in prayer to be brief, because the aged, sick, and weak are in attendance.⁷² In other words, the old person is automatically associated with ideas of illness and frailty. At the same time, however, the elevated status of the old man is evident in reports that instruct the eldest of a group of men to lead a prayer, or make a speech first.⁷³

⁶⁹ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 58,"
 <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/058.sbt.html#005.058.168>>
 (14 November 2003).

⁷⁰ "Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 4,"
 <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/004.smt.html#004.1385>>
 (14 November 2003).

⁷¹ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 12,"
 <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/012.sbt.html#001.012.722>>
 (14 November 2003).

⁷² "Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 4,"
 <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/004.smt.html#004.0940>>
 (14 November 2003).

⁷³ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 40,"
 <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/052.sbt.html#004.052.101>>
 (14 November 2003).

The *hadith* repeat the *Qur'an*'s position on an old woman's status and role in Islamic society. According to the *Qur'an*, a woman's responsibilities centre on family and childrearing. One *hadith* report states that a husband may divorce his wife, because she is old.⁷⁴ Another report asserts that it is preferable for a brother to be pragmatic, and to marry an experienced old "matron" when he has a large family of orphaned siblings who need a caregiver.⁷⁵

Certain *hadith* reports are concerned with the performance of religious obligations. Some relate the anxiety felt by an elderly person about his or her ability to make the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Muslim gives an account of a woman who tells Prophet Muhammad that her elderly father is unable to travel safely to Mecca. The Prophet indicates that she can perform the *hajj* on her father's behalf.⁷⁶ Three similar accounts reported by Bukhari indicate that the father is an extremely old man, is weak, and cannot sit properly.⁷⁷ Malik ibn Anas tells of a similar account when a woman said "Messenger of Allah, Allah's making the *hajj* obligatory finds my father a very old man,

⁷⁴ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 49,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/049.sbt.html#003.049.859>>
(14 November 2003).

⁷⁵ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 59,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/059.sbt.html#005.059.382>>
(14 November 2003).

⁷⁶ "Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 7,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/007.smt.html#007.3089>>
(14 November 2003).

⁷⁷ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 29,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/029.sbt.html#003.029.078>>
(14 November 2003).

unable to stay firm on his riding-beast. Can I do the *hajj* for him?, and he said 'Yes.' This was during the Farewell Hajj."⁷⁸

Concern is also expressed about the inability to complete the fast during Ramadan. Malik ibn Anas, for instance, paid compensation in food for each day missed when he was too old to fast. He states, "I do not consider that to do so is obligatory, but what I like most is that a man does the fast when he is strong enough."⁷⁹

The recurring concept in *hadith* is the need for respect for the elderly and the recognition of their rights. A *hadith* in al-Tirmidhi's collection states that, "He is not of us who does not have mercy on young children, nor honor the elderly."⁸⁰ Abu Dawud repeats this message, adding that showing honour for the "grey-haired Muslim and to one who can expound the *Qur'an*" is part of glorifying God.⁸¹ Abu Dawud adds that one can demonstrate respect by maintaining the rights of the aged, stating, "Those who do not show mercy to our young ones and do not realise the right of our elders are not from us."⁸² The elderly are associated with young children, showing that the two groups have different concerns in life, but both are vulnerable and need particular attention.

⁷⁸ Malik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas: The First Formulation of Islamic Law*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (London: Kegan Paul, 1989), 143.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸⁰ "The *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* about the Elderly,"
<<http://www.soundvision.com/info/misc/elderly/qur'anelderly.asp>> (14 November 2003).

⁸¹ "Translation of *Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 41*,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/abudawud/041.sat.html#041.4825>>
(14 November 2003).

⁸² "Translation of *Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 41*,"

If they treat their parents with compassion, God will reward the adult children of an old person with entry into paradise.⁸³ Not only should children care for their parents in old age, they must show respect for their parents after death. At least three reports in Muslim's collection support this belief. One report states, "The finest act of goodness is the kind treatment of a person to the loved ones of his father after his death."⁸⁴

Bukhari mentions the dread felt about getting old in at least ten reports. For example:

O Allah! I seek refuge with You from helplessness, laziness, cowardice and feeble old age; I seek refuge with You from the afflictions of life and death and seek refuge with You from the punishment of the grave.⁸⁵

Only God is able to relieve the burden of aging and eventual death. The elder will be rewarded when the Resurrection comes. Abu Dawud reports that any Muslim, who "grows a grey hair in Islam, he will have light on the Day of Resurrection."⁸⁶ Together,

<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/abudawud/041.sat.html#041.4925>>
(14 November 2003).

⁸³ "Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 32,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/032.smt.html#032.6189>>
(14 November 2003).

⁸⁴ "Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 32,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/032.smt.html#032.6192>>
(14 November 2003).

⁸⁵ "Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 52,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/052.sbt.html#004.052.077>>
(14 November 2003).

⁸⁶ "Translation of Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 33,"
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/abudawud/033.sat.html#033.4190>>
(14 November 2003).

the *hadith* passages discussed above supplement and strengthen the Islamic view of old age that was established in the *Qur'an*.

Interpretations of Old Age

Although prescriptive texts (*Qur'an*, *sunna*, *hadith*) counselled the individual Muslim and the Muslim community on proper behaviour, they do not tell us how society actually behaved toward the elderly. How were the elderly thought of and treated on a daily basis? In this section, I present a historical survey of a sample of critical texts from Arab Muslim and Jewish sources as well as pictorial works that depict the elderly. Collectively, texts and images contribute a diversity of ways to picture old age and locate its place in medieval Islamic society.

I explore a range of medieval texts that address old age. First, in *Muqadimma*, an introduction to world history, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) gives a critique of historiography and his interpretation of society's development. A noteworthy section makes an unusual comparison between the lifespan of a person and the life cycle of a governing dynasty. Second, in medieval biographical texts, Islamic historians identify notable people and describe their perceived contributions to society. These texts often note a person's exceptional old age, along with distinctive qualities and accomplishments. Third, the numerous documents of the Cairo Geniza contain valuable information about ordinary people. They reveal facets about daily Jewish life, including issues concerning the elderly, from the eighth century through the medieval period. Fourth, popular oral stories, which evolved into the written literature known as *Thousand and One Nights* (*Arabian*

Nights), integrate societal attitudes about the elderly into entertaining and satirical narratives.

In addition to textual sources, I discuss visual representations of old age. First, the unlikely location of the royal bathhouse at Qusayr ‘Amra contains fresco paintings that portray old age within the human life cycle. Second, the pictures in selected Arab Muslim manuscripts reveal artistic interpretations of old age. The illustrated texts I consider are Ibn Butlan’s *The Banquet of Physicians* and al-Mubashshir ibn Fatik’s *The Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings*. Third, the author portrait found in thirteenth-century Arabic manuscripts links old age with the figures of the intellectual and sage.

Interpretations: Writing about Old Age

Old Age and the Lifespan of Dynasties

The politician, teacher, judge, and historian Ibn Khaldun proposed a useful analogy between the lifespan of the individual and the life cycle of a political dynasty. In 1377, Ibn Khaldun completed *Muqaddima* (“Introduction”), the first volume of *History*, an ambitious historical and sociological study of the world.⁸⁷ In the chapter “On Dynasties, Royal Authority, the Caliphate, Government Ranks, and all that Goes with These Things,” Ibn Khaldun argues that all dynasties go through a natural process of evolution in about 120 years or three “generations,” from growth to maturity to decline,

⁸⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958).

each generation being about forty years long.⁸⁸ The average life of a Muslim is between sixty and seventy years long.⁸⁹

Ibn Khaldun describes the changes that occur during the evolution of a dynasty. The first generation of a dynasty keeps “the desert qualities, desert roughness, and desert savagery,” and maintains “the strength of group feeling.” The second generation sheds its desert habits, adopts a “sedentary culture,” and changes “from privation to luxury and plenty.” Group attachment starts to break down. The third generation has completely forgotten the desert existence and lost any affinity for the group. Over the three generations the dynasty becomes isolated from its community bonds, senile, and worn out. Ibn Khaldun concludes that a dynasty, like an individual, “grows up and passes into an age of stagnation and thence into retrogression.”

The analogy reinforces that old age is a natural accepted part of life. In addition, Ibn Khaldun views old age as a terminal disease with its own etiology:

We have already cited the symptoms and causes of senility [old age], one by one. We have explained that it is natural for the causes of senility to affect the dynasty. All of them are natural in (a dynasty). If, then, senility is something natural in (the life of) the dynasty, it must come about in the same way natural things come about, exactly as senility affects the temper of living beings. Senility is a chronic disease that cannot be cured or made to disappear because it is something natural, and natural things do not change.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 343-346. Rosenthal translated the chapter title.

⁸⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, 343.

⁹⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, 117. Translator Franz Rosenthal inserted parentheses in his English translation to help the reader better understand the context of the text.

Similarly, after senility appears in a dynasty, it cannot be eliminated. The process of aging is so powerful to Ibn Khaldun that he has constructed a vivid analogy between old age and political governance.

Biography and Old Age

Whereas Ibn Khaldun considers society at-large, biographical texts concentrate on the individual experience. In "Images without Illustrations: The Visual Imagination in Classical Arabic Biography," Michael Cooperson stresses the value of imagination for the audience (reader or listener) of classical Arabic biography, a literary genre that lacked illustrations.⁹¹ Instead of looking at a physical picture of a person, the audience was expected to visualize the person described in a biographical text. The biographer tried to evoke the physical appearance of the subject as well as a visual image of the person's "character and disposition."

Imagining old age is exemplified in a biography of the Sufi saint Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801), a female ascetic renowned for her spiritual virtue. The narrator describes Rabi'a and her environment:

She was aged and ancient, eighty years old, like a tottering waterskin. In her room I saw a reed mat and a Persian clothes-stand made of cane, standing two cubits high and blocking off most of the room with its bulk. Often she had there a mat, a large jar, a jug, and a woolen mat where she slept and prayed. On the clothes-stand lay her shroud.⁹²

⁹¹ Michael Cooperson, "Images without Illustrations: The Visual Imagination in Classical Arabic Biography," in *Islamic Art and Literature*, ed. Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 7-20.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 13. A modern biography of Rabi'a is Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam: Being the Life and Teachings of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya of Basra Together with Some Account of the Place of the Women Saints in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 1928).

Cooperson argues that the description of Rabi‘a is a miniature verbal portrait that frames the subject in an architectural space, including items that act as symbols of her austerity and her awareness of mortality.⁹³

Cooperson also tackles an unanswered question: why did biography never adopt illustrations? He contends that biography, like history, consisted of reports narrated by supposed witnesses, passed along by a continuous chain of authorities (*isnad*), and ending with the compiler. Reports were organized to form a composite image of the subject. A painting could not conform to this idea of portraiture, because the artist could not have seen the subject. Even if a painting had been made from life, there was no procedure for verifying and communicating the information. An illustrator could recreate the subject’s physical appearance from the verbal portrait or other sources (as is also seen in the illustrations of the *maqamat*). In biography, the onus was on the reader or listener to construct a personal image.⁹⁴ Cooperson suggests that this intellectual exercise might encourage “a more active appreciation of texts whose illustrations come ready-made.”⁹⁵

Two examples affirm the power of imagination when approaching biographical descriptions of old age and death. Both texts encourage the audience to imagine the subject’s physical decline. More importantly, they encourage the audience to imagine the person’s good character. A biography of Saladin (1137-93), the military opponent of the

⁹³ Cooperson, "Images without Illustrations: The Visual Imagination in Classical Arabic Biography," 13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

Crusaders, gives a full account of the last twelve days of his life: his debilitating illness, the care he received, his death at fifty-seven, and the ritual of his funeral.⁹⁶ When he became ill, Saladin “experienced a great sluggishness” and developed “a bilious fever” and “a torpid state.” We learn that “His illness was in his head.” After he was bled “his illness intensified. The moist humours of his body became fewer and dryness came to dominate greatly. The illness continued to increase until he reached the extremity of weakness.” In addition, “His mind wandered... a shaking began and he declined to take a drink.” The text continues, repeating phrases over and over for emphasis. The imam Shaykh Abu Ja’far attended Saladin in case “death throes began,” and Saladin could “rehearse his confession of faith and keep God before his mind.” The biographer reports that when the imam reached “‘There is no god but He and in Him have I trusted,’ the sultan smiled, his face beamed with joy and he surrendered his soul to his Lord.” The reader understands that after great physical suffering, Saladin had been released to God. The text’s dense description encourages the reader or listener to envision Saladin, his suffering, and his final release in death.

In his biography of the Prophet Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq (d. ca. 768) describes the Prophet’s last illness and death. On the day Muhammad died, he went to attend morning prayers:

When the Muslims caught sight of him they were almost diverted from their prayers through joy at his presence. He signaled them to continue their devotions, and smiled with pleasure as he watched them pray; never had the watchers seen him wear a more beautiful expression than then.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Baha' al-Din ibn Shaddad, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin or al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa'l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya*, trans. D. S. Richards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 240-245.

⁹⁷ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad, Apostle of Allah*, ed. Michael Edwardes, trans. Edward Rehatsek (London: Folio Society, 1964), 172-173.

Events are often told from the perspective of Aisha, the Prophet's wife. The text tells us that, as Muhammad rested on Aisha's lap, he lost the ability to speak. Aisha relates Muhammad's moment of death:

...I looked at him and saw that his eyes were turned upwards; and he said, "Nay! Rather the companion in paradise!" I had often heard the apostle say, "Allah takes no prophet away without giving him a choice", and when he died his last words were, "Rather the companion in paradise". Then I [Aisha] thought, "He has not chosen our companionship". And I said to him, "The choice was thine, and I swear by Him who sent thee That thou has chosen what is right." Then the apostle of Allah died, at noon on Monday.⁹⁸

The reader can readily picture Muhammad's death through Ibn Ishaq's poignant account. Muhammad's decision and last words serve as an exemplary death for Muslims.

Old Age and Jewish Life in the Cairo Geniza

The Cairo Geniza is an exceptional source of information about the social and economic history of medieval Egyptian Jewry. The Geniza is the store of discarded writings that accumulated in the Fustat (Old Cairo) Ben Ezra synagogue over hundreds of years, from the mid-eighth to the late nineteenth century. Papers include personal and business correspondence, records about public affairs, estate inventories, court depositions, and legal deeds (marriage contracts, bills of divorce, wills, powers of attorney). In *A Mediterranean Society*, S. D. Goitein examines the mass of documents under five broad categories: the economy, community, family, daily life, and the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

individual.⁹⁹ Goitein's study focuses on the interval from about 950 to 1200 during the Fatimid (969-1171) and Ayyubid (1169-1260) periods. The documents present a chance to learn about old age in the context of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities that co-existed in Fustat. One theme Goitein explores is the meaning of old age in Judaism.

The local Jewish community focused on one or two synagogues and their congregation. Based on the Geniza material, Goitein constructs a hierarchy of nine groups that formed the congregation. First are judges and scholars in general, followed by "the renowned elders," the recognized community leaders, in second place.¹⁰⁰

The Hebrew word *zaqen* is synonymous with the Arabic *shaykh*. Both mean "old man" and are associated with experience, the ability to lead one's family and others, authority, and respect.¹⁰¹ The status of the old is expressed in the statement "Rise up in the presence of gray hair and honor the face of an old man." (Leviticus 19:32) and in the commandment "Honor your father and mother."

⁹⁹ S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1967-1993).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 40-42.

¹⁰¹ For an introduction to medieval Judaism and the origins of Jewish ideas about old age, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.v. "age and the aged"; Norman Roth, ed., *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

In 1140, the Hebrew writer, philosopher and physician Judah Halevi (before 1075-1141) started a poem with:

Chasing after youth at fifty
when your days are about to vanish?!¹⁰²

He later wrote, "Our master--may he live forever--has rightly said: a man who has reached the decade of his seventies--no one listens to his words and no one pays attention to his advice, *let him return to his origin*" (the earth [Genesis 3:19])¹⁰³ (Goitein's italics)

Judah Halevi's colleague Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) laments:

At fifty man remembers life's futility,
And mourns, for mourning is near.
He despises the pleasures of this world
And fears that his hour has come.¹⁰⁴

Goitein indicates that the Geniza contains little information about sickness in old age.¹⁰⁵ A typical complaint was about *nahda*, a lack of energy or drive. A scholar in Baghdad wrote to Nahray b. Nissim in Cairo, "I am really pitiable, of little *nahda*. I don't dare to buy books and have no *nahda* for copying some."¹⁰⁶ According to one old

¹⁰² Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol. 5, 119. For a biography, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Judah Halevi."

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. For a biography, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ibn Ezra, Abraham Ben Meir."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., vol. 5, 119, 539 note 399.

woman, “As long as I was healthy and my eyesight not impaired, I was not in need of support.” Another commented about “little strength for work.”¹⁰⁷

Solomon b. Judah Gaon was the president of the Jerusalem *yeshiva* and a leader of the Jews in the Fatimid period. His colleague, Abraham b. Sahlan, had recently died. In his grief, Gaon wrote a letter to Sahlan’s son in which he calls himself “a descending sun, soon to set.” Later in the same letter, Gaon reveals his thoughts on being old:

Take notice, my dear, that I am going about like a shadow [cf. Psalms 39:7]. I have no authority, only the title. My strength is gone, my knee is feeble, and my foot staggers. My eyes are dim, and when I write, it is as if I was learning it, sometime the lines are straight and sometimes crooked, and so is my style...¹⁰⁸

Goitein also considers who cared for the elderly, concluding that it was the elderly themselves. Those with financial resources stored their cash or had promissory notes (written and unwritten) for services. A trusted merchant was given control of an elderly person’s property with the understanding that he would fulfill agreed upon conditions after the person’s death.¹⁰⁹ People with few resources and no family support used “insurance contracts.” An old man or woman gave a part of a house to a trusted person on the condition that the elder would be taken care of as long as he or she lived and would receive a proper funeral.¹¹⁰ A woman gave the judge Nathan b. he-Haver, who operated a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., vol. 5, 539 note 400.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., vol. 5, 120, 539 note 402.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 120-121.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 121.

hospice for the old and sick, her savings of seventeen dinars with the understanding that he care for her and plan her funeral.¹¹¹

Goitein states that, in the Jewish community, a good old age was the reward for and evidence of a moral life. Old age was “a crown of dignity, to be worn with pride.” He points to the Old Testament verse “Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God has blessed him with everything” (Genesis 24:1). In addition, Goitein refers to the Psalm that begins the Sabbath service and praises old age:

The pious flourish like the palm tree
And grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They bring forth fruit in old age.
They are full of sap and freshness (Psalms 92: 13, 15)

Goitein concludes with the unmistakable belief that in spite of any physical, emotional, and mental hardship that may have challenged elderly Jews in medieval Egypt, old age was a valued phase of life.

*Old Age in Popular Literature: Thousand and One Nights*¹¹²

Islamic attitudes concerning the elderly were integrated into popular stories about everyday life. *Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf layla wa-layla*) or *Arabian Nights* is a medieval collection of narratives that originated and evolved from Persian, Indian,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 122.

¹¹² For an introduction to the vast literature on *Thousand and One Nights*, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "Alf layla wa-layla"; Meisami and Starkey, eds., *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, 69-77. See also Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Allen Lane, 1994). Irwin's book is a useful survey of the history of the text(s). A later publication by Irmeli Perho evaluates the representation of daily life in the *Nights*, in particular, the Hunchback-cycle, compared to real Mamluk life described in historical documents. See Irmeli Perho, "The Arabian Nights as a Source for Daily Life in the Mamluk Period," *Studia Orientalia* 85 (1999): 139-162.

Baghdadi, and Cairene cultures. The *Nights* is another set of texts that never seems to have been illustrated.¹¹³ Originally, the stories were “oral evening-entertainments” performed or recited by storytellers and adapted to conform to local Arab social norms.¹¹⁴ The stories were staged by professional storytellers in the marketplace and were accessible to anyone who wanted to listen. The first authoritative version of the stories was recorded in writing in the first half of the thirteenth century by the Mamluks in either Syria or Jordan.¹¹⁵

The *Nights* was a collection of stories told to delight the Arabic audience. The narratives included fables, fairy tales, romances, novels, legends, didactic stories, and comic and historical anecdotes. The division of stories into “nights” creates suspense for the audience and makes the action more realistic.¹¹⁶ Imaginative and adventurous stories are successful, because they appeal to anyone, combining “the unusual, the extraordinary,

¹¹³ In Europe, the first illustration of the *Arabian Nights* was published in England in 1706 in the frontispiece of a translation of Antoine Galland's 1704 French edition. For a survey of the origins and development of illustrations in the numerous editions of *Arabian Nights*, see Kazue Kobayashi, "The Evolution of the *Arabian Nights* Illustrations: An Art-historical Review," in *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*, ed. Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2006). Kobayashi supplies a thorough list of the illustrated books and their artists produced from the early eighteenth century to 1936. The book in which Kobayashi's article appears is an innovative collection of ten papers about literary and art-historical issues. Many papers are from a Japanese perspective or examine the Japanese reception of the *Arabian Nights*.

¹¹⁴ Meisami and Starkey, eds., *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, 72.

¹¹⁵ *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddawy (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), xii.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

the marvelous, and the supernatural into the fabric of daily life.”¹¹⁷ At first, the amusing narratives appear removed from the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *hadith*. On closer reading, however, the stories disclose many of the same ideas about old age.

A set of stories nested within the framework of *The Tale of the Hunchback* contains examples of the treatment of elderly characters. In *The Tailor's Tale: The Lame Young Man from Baghdad and the Barber*, eight anecdotes relate the adventures of a wealthy, vain, and lovelorn young man, and his dealings with a seemingly humble old barber.¹¹⁸ The farcical encounter between the young man and the barber is not only entertaining, it puts the old man firmly in charge of events. The barber plays the role of a wise father or *shaykh*. The outspoken barber tells the young man about his many talents: astrology, alchemy, mathematics, architecture, the arts of logic, rhetoric, elocution, the theory of grammar, and the *Qur'an*. Renowned for his sound judgment, the learned barber was the advisor to the young man's father and grandfather. Although their relationship is strained, the young man shows trust and respect for the barber.

In subsequent stories, the barber recounts the misfortunes of his brothers. The barber's second brother, al-Haddar, and fifth brother, al-Ashar, readily trust old women and are deceived by them. A cunning old bearded man cheats the fourth brother, al-Kuz, out of his money. An elderly man invites Shakashik, the sixth brother, to dine with him, and Shakashik finds himself eating an imaginary meal. The old man rewards Shakashik's patience and respect with a genuine meal and his lifelong friendship. In all these

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ For English translations of these stories and other *Arabian Nights*, see Ibid., 249-295; *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*, trans. N. J. Dawood (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 30-76.

humorous stories, naive young men trust and accept advice from a peculiar assortment of elderly people who become parental figures, sometimes leading to disaster.

The *Qur'an* and *hadith* established the formal theological foundations of Islamic attitudes toward the elderly. The fictional adventures of the *Arabian Nights* incorporate the concepts into popular culture. In *The Tailor's Tale*, young and old are juxtaposed in a comedy where, at first, the young person is the focus, but is quickly displaced by the wise experienced elder. The events of the stories are orchestrated and controlled by an old man or woman. An elderly man may have the role of the benevolent father, deceitful swindler, or a combination of both. An old woman may play the good mother, trickster, matchmaker, or person who runs a brothel. Regardless of the outcome, the elder is simply accepted and shown consideration because he or she is old, just as the *Qur'an* and *hadith* instruct.

Interpretations: Picturing Old Age

Old Age in the Bathhouse at Qusayr 'Amra

An explicit and surprising reference to old age is located on the frescoed vault in the apodyterium of the bathhouse at Qusayr 'Amra.¹¹⁹ The Umayyad caliph al-Walid II (708/9-44) (r. 743-4) is the probable person who built the hunting lodge and baths at 'Amra during the early eighth century. Ornate paintings and mosaics of scenes of music-

¹¹⁹ Garth Fowden has published a thorough and critical interpretation of Qusayr 'Amra in the context of material evidence (inscriptions, coins, papyri, architecture, painting) and literary sources, especially poetry. Consult Garth Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Fowden's text, however, has few illustrations. An earlier work by Almagro includes many colour photographs of the paintings in the bathhouse. See Martin Almagro et al., *Qusayr 'Amra Residencia y Banos Omeyas en el Desierto de Jordania* (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1975).

making, singing, dancing, and women decorate the buildings. All are images linked to the wealth, entertainment, and erotic luxuries intrinsic to the court and bathhouse customs.

The bathhouse's architecture consists of an audience hall with a doorway leading to a bath complex, a sequence of three small rooms, the apodyterium, tepidarium, and caldarium. The apodyterium (first room) is a changing area, a place to store clothes and other belongings, and the main entrance to the baths. It leads to the tepidarium or warm chamber, designed for a gradual increase in body temperature. The caldarium or hot chamber (third room) contains the full baths.¹²⁰

On the east side of the apodyterium, frescoes of a naked man and half-naked woman flank the apodyterium window, and a baby is painted in the lunette above. On the opposite west side, the lunette over the entrance leading into the audience hall contains, according to Garth Fowden, a symbolic painting of the death of Salma, al-Walid's love interest (Figure 2).¹²¹ The frescoed vault of the apodyterium is divided into a lozenge pattern; each diamond-shaped section encloses a human or animal figure, some playing music or dancing (Figure 3). Three male busts representing the "three ages of life" form a line across the middle of the vault and connect the two paintings at the east and west.¹²² Youth is at the east end, maturity or adulthood in the middle, and old age, embodied by a white-haired and -bearded man, at the west end (Figure 4).

¹²⁰ Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, 38-43.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 257-265.

¹²² Almagro uses the phrase "three ages of life" when referring to the apodyterium vault painting. See Almagro et al., *Qusayr 'Amra Residencia y Banos Omeyas en el Desierto de Jordania*.

Fowden maintains that the grouping of these five paintings in the apodyterium stands for the human life cycle, making a “neat sequence, the three ages parenthesized by birth on the east wall and death on the west.”¹²³ Fowden also points out that:

It would be a mistake to assume that this is an inappropriate theme, just because bath house decorations tended to strike a joyous – or at least active rather than reflective – note. Baths are for the care of the body, and each body has its own history, never more obviously than when unclothed, as were all those that passed through this room.¹²⁴

Extrapolating Fowden’s argument, the apodyterium and its “three ages of life” can be viewed as a private transitional space where one could contemplate mortality, imminent old age, and the afterlife while naked, both literally and symbolically. The Greek philosopher Polemo (270/269 BCE) expressed a similar idea when he spoke to a painter who was decorating a bathhouse with wall paintings. Polemo told the painter, “Decorate it well, for bath houses are decorated for the benefit of the people. On emerging, they are preoccupied with contemplation of the beautiful pictures, and thus they do not hurry to put on their clothes and go outside.”¹²⁵ Polemo’s statement is equally applicable at Qusayr ‘Amra. Even in al-Walid’s bathhouse, where the ultimate goal was sensuous pleasure, there was available time and a particular place to consider more profound matters such as old age and the afterlife.

¹²³ Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, 259.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 138.

Illustrations of Old Age

An eleventh-century text of social and political commentary on physicians, Ibn Butlan's (d. 1066) *The Banquet of the Physicians (Da'wat al-Atibba')*, conveys the author's opinions about old age. The mid-thirteenth-century copy of the manuscript (Jerusalem, L. A. Mayer Memorial) presents his perspective on old age through a combination of text and images.¹²⁶ In 1054, Ibn Butlan, a physician and Christian theologian in Baghdad, wrote his medical treatise, an example of *maqama* literature. The story contains two main characters, a greedy, narrow-minded seventy-year-old medical *shaykh* who symbolizes the old way of medical thinking and a young enlightened physician who represents the new approach to medicine, as reflected in Ibn Butlan.¹²⁷

Illustrations alone give no hint of the text's theme. Half of the thirteen illustrations depict the two protagonists in discussion, and several more portray the old *shaykh* in banquet scenes. Only by reading the story in conjunction with the images does the audience obtain an understanding of the ideological divide between old and new, youth and old age. Old age is synonymous with being overly concerned with money, having outdated ideas, and resistance to change. The latter quality is alluded to in the final illustration in which the elderly *shaykh* seems imprisoned inside a building where he stands behind the grillwork of a window (Figure 5). In contrast, the young physician is

¹²⁶ Eva Baer, "The Illustrations for an Early Manuscript of Ibn Butlan's *Da'wat al-atibba'* in the L. A. Mayer Memorial in Jerusalem," *Muqarnas* 19 (2002): 1-11. Baer reproduces for the first time all thirteen illustrations from the manuscript. She discusses the source of the miniatures, place and date of origin, painting style, and the manuscript's potential relation to other manuscripts made between the late twelfth and early fourteenth century including Mamluk painting.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*: 1.

outside, free of constraints and pursuing medical innovation. Together, the text of the *Banquet of the Physicians* and its illustrations evoke negative images of old age.

Rather different representations of old age appear in an illustrated copy of the manuscript of *The Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings (Mukhtar al-hikam wa-mahasin al-kalim)* (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, Ahmet III, 3206), produced during the first half of the thirteenth century, probably in Syria. Al-Mubashshir ibn Fatik (ca. 1020-ca. 1095) wrote the text in the eleventh century based on Arabic translations of Greek texts about the lives and work of Greek intellectuals such as Homer, Solon, Hippocrates, Socrates, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and Galen.¹²⁸ The prototypical illustration juxtaposes a mature or elderly Greek scholar teaching an animated lesson with a group of attentive young adult male students.¹²⁹ As I discuss below, many of these scholars wrote about their personal experience of old age and composed literary works on the topic.

Franz Rosenthal emphasizes that the significance attributed to physiognomy was responsible for the in-depth reports about the appearance and personal qualities of the intellectuals in al-Mubashshir's original text.¹³⁰ Greek physiognomists believed facial characteristics indicated a person's character. Rosenthal maintains Muslims believed that

¹²⁸ Al-Mubashshir's dates are based on Franz Rosenthal's discussion in Franz Rosenthal, "Al-Mubashshir ibn Fatik: Prolegomena to an Abortive Edition," *Oriens* 13-14 (1960-61): 136-138.

¹²⁹ Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 74-79. Ettinghausen discusses two illustrations, one of Socrates with two students and one of Solon addressing three students.

¹³⁰ Franz Rosenthal, "On Art and Aesthetics in Graeco-Arabic Wisdom Literature," in *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam*, ed. Franz Rosenthal (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 7-8.

physiognomically correct portraits existed and that al-Mubashshir's descriptions were based on such pictures.¹³¹

Choicest Maxims includes an assortment of sayings about old age. Protarchus (or possibly Plutarch) was asked why a man dyed his hair black. Protarchus answered, "He does not want anyone to try to find the experience of the old in him."¹³² An adage by Pittacus warns "When a man becomes very old, he finds it difficult to be a friend. That is because then a great deal works against him, time, luck and repute. They remain with none, but pass swiftly to others."¹³³ A saying by Plutarch holds that "...one can deduce the distemper in their hearts from the words of angry people. This is proved by the fact that...sick people are more bad tempered than the healthy, and the aged remain angry longer than young men. This shows that anger stems from weakness and folly of the soul, not from its strength and courage."¹³⁴ Although these sayings assign negative qualities to old age, the elderly could also be associated with scholarly intellect.

The connotation of old age was used to enhance the impression of an intellectual when depicting older people in ancient Greek art.¹³⁵ In *Mask of Socrates: The Image of*

¹³¹ Ibid., 8.

¹³² Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, 124.

¹³³ Ibid., 138.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹³⁵ Paul Zanker and H. A. Shapiro, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Zanker discusses the portrayal of ancient Greek intellectuals in sculpture within the historical context that a particular portrait was created and displayed.

the Intellectual in Antiquity, German classical archaeologist Paul Zanker contends that “In the Greek imagination, all great intellectuals were old.”¹³⁶ Socrates reinforces the association of old age and intellect in an anecdote. Socrates saw that an old man who wanted to study philosophy was embarrassed to pursue his interest, because of his age. Socrates challenged him by asking “Are you ashamed of being better at the end of your life than you were at the beginning?”¹³⁷

The belief that old age and the intellectual go hand in hand is dominant in *Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings*. One miniature, for example, portrays the grey-haired and -bearded philosopher Socrates (469-399 BCE) crouched on top of a rock as he addresses the two students facing him (Figure 6). Socrates adopts “the dual role of speaker and thinker” as he supports his heavy head with his left hand.¹³⁸ (A similar pictorial format is used to portray Abu Zayd addressing pilgrims to Mecca (Figure 7)). The illustrator could have associated Socrates with the physical, emotional, or mental worries of old age, but chose to highlight an optimistic relation between old age and Socrates’ virtuosity by portraying him as an engaging teacher.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁷ Franz Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients from Ibn Durayd’s *Kitab al-Mujtana*,” in *Greek Philosophy in the Arab World: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Franz Rosenthal (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), 49.

¹³⁸ Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 78.

¹³⁹ Two recent comprehensive studies of old age in the ancient world are Karen Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). Both texts contain a thorough treatment of Greek and Roman writers along with extensive notes and bibliographies.

Another illustration depicts Athenian lawmaker and poet Solon (ca. 630-ca. 560 BCE) seated on a cushion as he speaks to an audience of several students (Figure 8). In *Elegy on the Ages of Men*, Solon divides the human lifespan into ten successive seven-year periods up to the age of seventy years. He identifies the final period, which began at age sixty-three years, as one of decline:

He can still do much in his ninth period, but there is a weakening
seen in his ability both to think and speak. [ages 56-63]
but if he completes ten ages of seven years each, full measure,
death, when it comes, can no longer be said to come too soon.
[ages 63-70]¹⁴⁰

Overall, Solon has a negative view of old age. Solon, however, lived to the age of about seventy-nine years, and stated that, even in old age, he learned something new every day.¹⁴¹ In one of his contributions to Athenian law, Solon required children to support elderly parents or lose citizen rights.¹⁴²

A third illustration depicts the white-bearded Aristotle (384-322 BCE) surrounded by a group of followers sitting on the ground. Aristotle contributed a range of ideas about the biological, social, and psychological issues of old age. In *Rhetoric*, written when he was about fifty-four years old, Aristotle divides life into three age groups, youth, adulthood, and old age, without attaching specific ages to each. He associates the groups with growth, balance, and decline, respectively. Aristotle (*Politics*) also believed that the

¹⁴⁰ Solon's *Elegy on the Ages of Men*, 11-18, quoted from trans. R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1962, in Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome*, 60.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, 207.

government should be ruled by the old and wise.¹⁴³ He argues in *Problems* that a man's insight and understanding improved with age. The mind was at its best in old age, because wisdom was obtained through experience.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, Aristotle assigns negative personality traits to the elderly; they are pessimistic, indecisive, malicious, argumentative, bad-tempered, greedy, cowardly, lacked energy, and talked too much.¹⁴⁵

Old Age and the Author Portrait

The illustrations of Aristotle, Socrates, Solon, and other elderly intellectuals with their colleagues are painted in the format of an author portrait. Thirteenth-century Islamic manuscript illustrators adapted the popular arrangement from the classical Greek and Roman author portraits. In "The Author Portrait in Thirteenth-century Arabic Manuscripts: A New Islamic Context for a Late-antique Tradition," Eva Hoffman traces the origins and development of the author portrait in illustrations.¹⁴⁶ In particular, Hoffman examines the interplay between history, biography, and the author portrait. The Islamic philosopher and scientist al-Farabi (870-950) had linked history with biography. Al-Farabi believed that history and biography belonged to the type of knowledge that is acquired, because it provides pleasure and entertainment, similar to myths, stories, and

¹⁴³ Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome*, 61.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

¹⁴⁶ Eva R. Hoffman, "The Author Portrait in Thirteenth-century Arabic Manuscripts: A New Islamic Context for a Late-antique Tradition," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993).

the dramatic arts.¹⁴⁷ Hoffman extends the boundaries of this body of knowledge to include the “biography-portrait.”¹⁴⁸ She argues that, in addition to giving enjoyment, the biography-portrait helped to establish a scholarly Islamic ancestral lineage.¹⁴⁹ According to Hoffman, biographical collections establish a continuous link from Greek to Muslim scholars, shown visually by the image of the Greek physician Dioscorides (ca. 40-ca. 90) with his Muslim students in the double frontispiece mentioned above and in the double portrait of al-Hariri and al-Hamadhani in the Paris 5847 *Maqamat*.

Illustrations of the 1229 Arabic translation of Dioscorides’ *De Materia Medica* (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, Ahmet III, 2127) echo the positive correlation between old age and the transmission of knowledge. The manuscript consists of scientific illustrations of plants and their uses in medicinal drugs. In the double frontispiece, the illustrator portrayed Dioscorides in the format of an author portrait. Dioscorides, on the right side of the frontispiece, is receiving two students carrying books (Figures 9a and 9b). The model for this type of elderly writer is, in fact, the Evangelists as they appear on the frontispieces of the Gospels. (A painting of St. John the Evangelist is a representative example of an elderly Evangelist posed in the author portrait (Figure 10)). The next folio depicts another version of an author portrait by depicting a grey-bearded Dioscorides and a beardless student discussing a mandrake plant (Figure 11). Again, knowledge and wisdom are portrayed as they are transferred from elder to youth.

¹⁴⁷ Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 32.

¹⁴⁸ Hoffman, "The Author Portrait in Thirteenth-century Arabic Manuscripts: A New Islamic Context for a Late-antique Tradition," 16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 16-17.

In Chapter Two, I have discussed a range of interpretations of old age in early and medieval Islamic society. The *Qur'an*, *sunna*, and *hadith* prescribe correct behaviour for the individual Muslim and the Muslim community. These texts are the foundation of Islamic jurisprudence. Other texts depict everyday societal interpretations of old age. I have shown that there is no single perspective about what it meant to be elderly; old age was both ridiculed and revered. Ibn Khaldun's historical writing compares the process of aging with the decline of political dynasties. The individual's imagination fashions a personal meaning of old age from the texts of biography and history, and from stories such as in *Thousand and One Nights*. In his study of the Cairo Geniza, Goitein has tried to make sense of fragmentary authentic documents to create snapshots of the daily lives of elderly Egyptian Jews. He shows that Judaism values old age, and elders were as self-reliant as possible.

Visual expressions of old age occur in painting. Fresco paintings in the bathhouse at Qusayr 'Amra portray old age as a phase in the human life cycle. Manuscripts with a combination of text and illustrations, such as *The Banquet of the Physicians* and *The Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings*, may assign connotations to the images that corroborate the message of the text, as in the former, and elicit and reinforce qualities associated with the elderly men, as in the latter. Old age is associated with the intellectual in the author portrait. It is a pictorial format that is used effectively again in the Vienna 1334 illustrated *Maqamat* to join old age with the transmission of knowledge and authority. I will discuss the illustrations of this manuscript in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Spaces of Old Age in the Illustrated *Maqamat*

What did it mean to be old in the Islamic Middle East during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? How were Islamic ideas about old age interpreted in texts and visual culture? In Chapter Three, I show how old age, as represented by the character of Abu Zayd and his portrayal in the illustrations of four anecdotes in the 1334 Mamluk version of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, embodies the transmission of knowledge and authority. Certainly, an audience's appreciation of the Arabic language and social satire has been the centre of the *Maqamat*. The underlying theme of old age, however, threads its way through the anecdotes and illustrations. Text and illustrations may function together or independently. Illustrations may relate to each other without the text. Regardless of how text and images work, they depict old age as a powerful stage in life that commands attention and directs the transmission of knowledge. In all cases, I show how the illustrations can be interpreted in the context of early (1250-1382) Mamluk society.

The Mamluk sultanate governed Egypt and Syria from 1250 to 1517.¹⁵⁰

Throughout the Mamluk period, children from Turkish-speaking Central Asia were sold as slaves (mamluks), brought to Egypt, taught Arabic, and given a religious and military education. The mamluk became a slave soldier. After converting to Islam and completing his rigorous military training, the mamluk might have been freed, but was obligated to serve the reigning sultan. As the military elite, the Mamluks occupied most positions of

¹⁵⁰ General references about the history of the Mamluk period are *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "mamluk"; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986-2002); Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Carl F. Petry, ed., *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For more detailed analyses of the Mamluk period, social and political relations with the local population, and issues around education and the transmission of knowledge, see the many publications listed in the bibliography of this thesis.

military and political power. The local population tended to hold positions in business, education, religion, and government administration.

Mamluks, however, were not isolated from local communities. Berkey emphasizes “the depth and organic nature of the bonds connecting the Mamluks to Egyptian and Syrian society.”¹⁵¹ To ensure their own wealth and property and to encourage positive relations with the native community, the Mamluks built mosques, convents, and schools, which fulfilled the religious and educational needs of the local *‘ulama*, the academic and religious leaders of society. By promoting and contributing to the prosperity of religious education, the Mamluks enhanced their legitimacy as rulers.

The Mamluks established pious endowments (*waqfs*), which they used to construct religious and secular monuments in cities such as Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Alexandria, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. A *waqf* is a permanent trust bestowed by its donor to support charitable activities that benefit the Muslim community.¹⁵² Typically, the foundation focused on the founder’s tomb and included other religious and charitable components such as a mosque, buildings for the schools of law, hospital, drinking fountain (*sabil*), and Sufi convent (*khanqah*). In Cairo, the first Mamluk sultan, Baybars al-Bunduqdari (r. 1260-77) built a free-standing congregational mosque. Sultan al-Mansur Qala’un (r. 1279-90) combined a *madrassa*, mausoleum, and a hospital in his complex. Baybars al-Jashnakir (r. 1308-10) financed a complex that incorporated both his mausoleum and a *khanqah*. Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad’s (r. 1293-4; 1298-1308; 1309-41) complex, built between 1295 and 1304, included a mausoleum, mosque, and

¹⁵¹ Jonathan P. Berkey, “‘Silver Threads among the Coal’: A Well-educated Mamluk of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century,” *Studia Islamica* 73 (1991): 111.

¹⁵² Petry, ed., *Cambridge History of Egypt*, 539.

madrasa. He also constructed a public drinking fountain beside his father Qala'un's *madrasa*. In addition, Mamluks contributed to employment through the endowments because funds were used to hire teachers and other staff at these institutions.

The Mamluks' children (*awlad al-nas*) brought the Mamluks closer to the *'ulama*. The *awlad al-nas* played an intermediary role between the military elite and *'ulama*. The Arabic-speaking *awlad al-nas* were born free Muslims, were prohibited from holding the highest military ranks, and, consequently, were more likely to integrate into local society. Many studied religious sciences, *hadith*, grammar, poetry, calligraphy, and mathematics. Fourteen-century biographical dictionaries suggest that about 50 percent of the *awlad al-nas* combined an academic career with military service. Mamluks, therefore, became familiar with Muslim religious institutions and education.

Composing Literature at the Public Library in Basra

The communal space of the public library in Basra is an early setting in the *Maqamat* where the relation between old age and the transmission of knowledge and authority is established. The second assembly opens in Hulwan, east of Baghdad, and moves to the library in Basra. Al-Harith describes his visit to Hulwan where he seeks the company of intellectuals and finds Abu Zayd with them. Al-Harith is effusive when he expresses his admiration for the learned Abu Zayd's talents:

He is adorned with grace and information, and courtesy and knowledge, and astonishing eloquence, and obedient improvisation, and excelling accomplishments, and a foot that mounts the hill of sciences...through the largeness of his information there is a fondness for the sight of him; and through the blandishment of his fair-speaking men are loath to oppose him; and through the sweetness of his address he is helped to his desire. --Then I clung to his skirts

for the sake of his peculiar accomplishments, and valued highly his affection by reason of his precious qualities.¹⁵³

Eventually, Abu Zayd disappears from Hulwan. Several months later, al-Harith travels to his hometown of Basra where he recounts an experience “in the town library, which is the council-hall of scholars, the meeting place of residents and strangers.”¹⁵⁴ While in the library, al-Harith notes the arrival of a man “with a thick beard and squalid aspect” who sat in one of the last rows. Around him, men are reciting and discussing verses of the celebrated poet al-Buhturi (821-97).¹⁵⁵ Born in Syria, al-Buhturi is known for his panegyric poetry to patrons and notables in Baghdad, including the caliphs al-Muntasir and al-Mu ‘tadid, and the Turkish general al-Fath ibn Khaqan. Al-Buhturi was also the panegyrist for Khumarawayh (d. 896), governor of Egypt and Syria. The newcomer impresses the group when he spontaneously composes and performs his own verses that surpass al-Buhturi’s. Of course, the man is Abu Zayd, and his companions show appreciation for his skills by giving him fine clothing.

By this time, al-Harith has recognized the man as “our Shaykh of Seruj [Saruj].” Al-Harith informs the reader that, surprisingly, Abu Zayd’s hair has become grey with age, using the phrase “his dark night was moon-lit.”¹⁵⁶ With some concern, al-Harith

¹⁵³ Chenery, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 113-114.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 114-116, 292. In his text, Chenery transliterates the poet's name as Abu 'Obadeh or Welid ibn 'Obayd al Bohtori. The modern transliteration of his full name is Abu 'Ubada al-Walid ibn 'Ubayd al-Buhturi. Meisami and Starkey, eds., *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, 161-162.

¹⁵⁶ Chenery, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 116-117, 294.

asks, "What has changed thy appearance, so that I could not recognize thee? What has made thy beard gray, so that I knew not thy countenance?"¹⁵⁷ After explaining that misfortunes have turned him grey, the aging Abu Zayd leaves. Initially, it is not Abu Zayd's appearance but his knowledge of classical poetry and excellent compositions that prompts al-Harith to take a closer look at him. Quickly, however, through al-Harith's pointed questioning, the grey/white hair and beard symbolic of an old *shaykh* are brought to the forefront and coupled with literary expertise and its transmission to an eager audience.

Seven of the eleven *Maqamat* manuscripts include illustrations of the second assembly.¹⁵⁸ One volume contains three images, and six contain one image. Several manuscripts include illustrations with obvious details of the library and its books (Figures 12 and 13). In the 1334 volume, the artist has inserted one illustration (fol. 8v, 156 x 135 mm), which includes virtually no physical environment; people fill the composition and seem to live in an empty space (Figure 14).¹⁵⁹ The presence of several plants, including as a cypress tree, suggest that the scene may be outdoors.¹⁶⁰

A grey/white-bearded Abu Zayd stands isolated on the left side of the composition, facing a cluster of five diverse men and boys on the right. Abu Zayd's

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 3929 and *arabe* 5847; St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. 23; London, British Library, *or.* 1200, *or.* 9718, and *or. add.* 22114; Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9.

¹⁵⁹ The measurements of the 1334 *Maqamat* are taken from Holter, "Die Galen-Handschrift und die Makemen des Hariri der Wiener Nationalbibliothek."

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 17.

separateness and extraordinary status is highlighted by the deliberately empty vertical space between him and the group. The composition is evocative of illustrations in *Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings* where elderly learned men such as Aristotle, Socrates, and Solon are separated from their students. Other than bare feet, there is nothing to suggest Abu Zayd's "squalid" condition. On the contrary, he is dressed in a cloak made of luxurious fabric with an elaborate vegetal pattern and a *tiraz* band on his right sleeve. Abu Zayd's unusually long arms gesture toward the group. Simultaneously, the men and boys are waving their arms. A lively conversation is in progress.

Is the picture showing the moment that Abu Zayd enters the library or is he reciting poetry for the men? We cannot know what the artist's intention was. The most dynamic and poignant time in the anecdote, however, occurs when Abu Zayd creates verses and shares them with the group. This suggests the illustration is depicting the men listening and talking to Abu Zayd as he invents and performs outstanding original poems. The focus of the assemblies is always recitation, usually in a public place. The location has a supportive, but secondary, role. Essentially, the illustrator expects the reader to imagine the library's interior.

In "Images without Illustrations: The Visual Imagination in Classical Arabic Biography," discussed in Chapter Two, Michael Cooperson emphasizes the importance of imagination for the reader or listener of classical Arabic biography, which lacked illustrations.¹⁶¹ The biographer tried to evoke the physical appearance and temperament of the person he wrote about. Cooperson asserts that the reader of a biographical text

¹⁶¹ Cooperson, "Images without Illustrations: The Visual Imagination in Classical Arabic Biography."

must apply his or her visual imagination to create a personal meaningful image. Visual imagination is also pertinent for an illustration that is integral to a text. In the case of the second assembly in the 1334 *Maqamat*, which has a single picture containing a minimal setting, the viewer must envision both the library's architecture and its book collection. Certainly, the text can always be appreciated on its own. By forcing the reader to think of an intimate representation of a library, the text becomes more closely bound to the illustration. Text and image develop a symbiotic relationship. In turn, both text and illustration become more meaningful to the reader, separately and together.

An educated mamluk may have owned a book collection and could visualize a library. Most likely, he had a personal image of a library, which he could draw on if reading the second assembly and viewing the associated illustration. According to Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (1372-1449), the amir Uzdamur al-Kashif had memorized al-Hariri's *Maqamat* and had considerable knowledge of other Arabic poetry.¹⁶² Such familiarity with al-Hariri's text would encourage a viewer of the illustration to reflect on the elder Abu Zayd's eloquence, knowledge of poetry, and skill that outstripped the famed al-Buhturi's.

There are other examples of Mamluk involvement with books and learning. Sultans al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412-21) and al-Zahir Jaqmaq (r. 1438-53) were avid book collectors.¹⁶³ In 1303-5, Baybars al-Jashnakir (r. 1308-10) donated 500 manuscripts

¹⁶² Ulrich Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33, no. 1 (1988): 83.

¹⁶³ Robert Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," *Mamluk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 1.

on “religious sciences, literature, and history” to the restored mosque of caliph al-Hakim (r. 996-1021) in Cairo.¹⁶⁴ Through his study of al-Safadi’s (d. 1363) *al-Wafi bi’l-wafayat* (“The Complement of the *Wafayat* [obituaries]”) and Ibn Hajar’s fourteenth-century *al-Durar al-kamina fi a’yan al-mi’a al-thamin* (“Hidden Pearls about the Notables of the Eighth [Islamic] Century”), both biographical dictionaries, Ulrich Haarmann has identified mamluks who had a passion for books.¹⁶⁵ The vizier Amir Badr al-Din Baydara (d. 1293) purchased and copied numerous books and owned valuable manuscripts. Shaykhu al-Saqi al-Qazani (d. 1351) was a “book addict” who obtained books regardless of content or cost. Baktamur al-Saqi’s (d. 1335) large estate included copies of al-Bukhari’s *Sahih*. Arghun al-Nasiri, the vice-regent of Egypt from 1311 to 1324, showed “immense care” for books. Rather than spend his money, Taybugha al-Dawadar al-Anuki (d. 1351), a supervisor of the chancery, preferred to borrow books.¹⁶⁶ Clearly, many wealthy mamluks were bibliophiles who relished the possession of books, and their “bookish tastes” contributed to the development of literature in medieval Egypt and Syria.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Donald Little, "Religion under the Mamluks," *Muslim World* 73, no. 3-4 (1983): 170.

¹⁶⁵ Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-century Egypt and Syria," 85. The Arabic titles and English translations are from Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.

¹⁶⁶ Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-century Egypt and Syria," 93-94.

¹⁶⁷ Irwin, "Mamluk Literature."

In his survey of Mamluk period literary production, Robert Irwin's discussion of Mamluk poetry is especially relevant for al-Hariri's second assembly. During the Mamluk period, panegyric poetry was written in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, 'ulama, holy men, and Mamluk sultans.¹⁶⁸ For example, Safi al-Din al-Hilli (1278-ca. 1349), from Iraq, lived in Egypt and Iraq, and wrote in praise of the Prophet. Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Nubata (1287-1366) wrote panegyrics for his patron al-Mu 'ayyad Abu al-Fida', and later for the Mamluk sultan al-Nasir Hasan (r. 1347-51; 1354-61).¹⁶⁹ Not only could the Mamluk audience appreciate the eulogies of poet al-Buhturi in the second *maqama*, it could think about the panegyrics of Mamluk contemporaries at the same time. Old Abu Zayd, therefore, is linked with both the historical work of al-Buhturi and contemporary poetry that mamluks could be familiar with. The illustration strengthens the connection as it shows the elderly man creating and transmitting his unique poetry to the Mamluk audience.

Judging Old Age at Ma'arra

In the *Muqadimma*, Ibn Khaldun explains the origin and evolution of the office of judge (*qadi*) in Islam.¹⁷⁰ The office was one of several "functions of the religious institution of the caliphate." Other functions included the leadership of prayer, office of

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.: 10.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.: 10-11.

¹⁷⁰ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, vol. 1, 452-456. See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "kadi."

mufti, the police, the position of official witness, market supervisor, and supervisor of the mint. Ibn Khaldun indicates the office of judge “is an institution that serves the purpose of settling suits and breaking off disputes and dissensions,” based on the laws established by the *Qur’an* and *sunna*. Originally, only caliphs exercised the office of judge, which had the duty “merely to settle suits between litigants.” ‘Umar was the first caliph to appoint someone to serve as judge in his place. As the ruler’s political concerns increased, however, the office of judge undertook more wide-ranging responsibilities:

Finally, the office of judge came to include, in addition to the settling of suits...supervision of the property of insane persons, orphans, bankrupts, and incompetents who are under the care of guardians; supervision of wills and mortmain donations and of the marrying of marriageable women without guardians (*wali*) to give them away...supervision of (public) roads and buildings; examination of witnesses, attorneys, and court substitutes, to acquire complete knowledge and full acquaintance relative to their reliability or unreliability. All these things have become part of the position and duties of a judge.¹⁷¹

In the eighth assembly, Abu Zayd appears before a judge (*qadi*) in Ma‘arra (Ma‘arrat al-Nu‘man), in central Syria, performing the role of the innocent defendant. Abu Zayd’s goal is a pardon and compensation by impressing the judge with his eloquence. The eighth assembly is a prime example of Abu Zayd’s manipulation of government officials, a theme that runs throughout the *Maqamat*. Abu Zayd appears before a judge and a governor in seven and four *maqamat*, respectively.

Al-Harith witnesses and describes a lengthy argument between an old man and a youth in front of a judge over the employment of a slave. (Abu Zayd’s identity is not discovered in this narrative.) Their story is so confusing the judge dismisses them and gives them a small amount of money. Soon after, suspecting that he has been cheated, the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., vol. 1, 455.

judge calls them back. The youth asks for forgiveness, and Abu Zayd readily admits they are father and son, declares his poverty, and announces he is a professional liar. Amazed by Abu Zayd's audacity, honesty, and oratory, the judge is sympathetic and allows them to leave with only a warning.

In his introduction to the *maqama*, Chenery notes with frustration that the complex text "is so essentially Arabic as almost to forbid intelligible translation."¹⁷² Both Chenery and Steingass frequently refer to the challenges they faced in translating text composed only for the enjoyment of language. The question of understanding and translating Arabic into English (or any other language) is an important issue. Can translations of the *Maqamat* into English reveal medieval attitudes about old age? If so, how are these ideas portrayed in the illustrations? The eighth *maqama* is one case in which the text and its images are not necessarily in agreement.

Nine of the eleven *Maqamat* manuscripts contain images with the eighth assembly.¹⁷³ Four volumes include two illustrations and five include one image. Two pictures illustrate the eighth assembly in the 1334 manuscript (fol. 28, 156 x 120 mm and fol. 30v, 147 x 126 mm). In my thesis I limit my discussion to fol. 30v (Figure 15).

The illustration contains four figures in a nearly empty environment. The tied drapery hanging from the ceiling suggests an interior space, perhaps a court. The image portrays Abu Zayd in the middle of the composition as he bows forward from the waist toward the judge of Ma'arra.

¹⁷² Chenery, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, vol. 1, 145.

¹⁷³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 3929, *arabe* 6094 and *arabe* 5847; St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. 23; Istanbul, Süleymaniye, *Esad Efendi* 2961; London, British Library, *or.* 1200, *or.* 9718, and *or. add.* 22114; Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9.

Separated from the text, the illustration conveys a different story. The judge is the centre of attention sitting cross-legged on a patterned cushion on the left side of the picture, with Abu Zayd looking in his direction. The latter's youthful son and a bearded man, possibly al-Harith, stand in the background on the right side. To show his respect Abu Zayd bows deeply from the waist. At first, this pose seems to contradict his wily personality. On the contrary, Abu Zayd's posture is indicative of a combination of his astuteness, opportunistic nature, and esteem for the judge's position and status. He wants to establish a rapport with the judge. In the illustration, they are equals engaged in an intimate conversation as Abu Zayd cleverly argues his case. Their faces are at the same level, and both men gesture with animated outstretched arms. Their intimacy is further emphasized by the physical isolation of the son and al-Harith, both mere observers standing in the background.

All four males wear similar turbans, but the judge's rank is identified by his white head-shawl (*taylasan*) and robe, which outlines his body. Abu Zayd's similar clothing strengthens the sense of equality between him and the *qadi*. Abu Zayd wears the clothing of a prosperous man, not of a vagrant. The luxurious robe is comparable to the judge's, decorated with a *tiraz* armband and bands of gold-coloured fabric around the neck, and at the bottom of the sleeves and robe. On the one hand, this may be a visual attempt to refer to satirical aspects of the text. On the other hand, however, there is little to suggest to the viewer that a ruse is underway. A subtle allusion to Abu Zayd's poverty is his bare feet, which may also be a reference to the austerity of Sufism. Meanwhile, all the other men wear black boots. The illustration is a portrayal of camaraderie and mutual understanding between two elderly men of similar rank who are having a conversation.

The scene presents clues about the physical features of the generic old Arab man and the relationship between two elderly acquaintances. In the illustration, the two men seem to have an informal friendly rapport, rather than a formal one. The bond of old age between the two men overrides the unequal formal relationship of judge and plaintiff. There is no difference between the physical appearance of the judge and Abu Zayd; both have the facial features characteristic of an old man, long grey beards, moustaches, hair and thick eyebrows. The thick grey outline around the eyes infers fatigue, drooping eyelids, and wrinkled sagging skin.

This sense of affinity between Abu Zayd and the *qadi* is repeated in scenes in the St. Petersburg S. 23 *Maqamat*. In the thirty-seventh assembly, Abu Zayd demonstrates a confidence in his bearing and speech that contradicts his poverty when he appears before the *qadi* of Sa'da, a town in Yemen. Although the text states that he is in rags, in the image Abu Zayd wears clothing, a turban, robe, and cloak, similar to the *qadi*'s (Figure 16). The two elders are busy discussing Abu Zayd's impressive address. The *qadi* is seated above Abu Zayd and is leaning forward, his left hand resting on his knee and his right hand open and extended toward his colleague. Abu Zayd is animated as he holds his right hand out in the *qadi*'s direction. The postures and gestures of the two old men suggest a personal bond that is not constrained by their different social positions.

Throughout the eighth assembly, al-Harith refers to the elderly character (Abu Zayd) as "the old man." To further emphasize the man's age, al-Harith notes, "the two excellencies of life had departed." Al-Harith means the man is too old to be interested in

either food or sex.¹⁷⁴ Given the similarity between the physical appearance of the judge and Abu Zayd in the Vienna manuscript, the comment is relevant for the judge too.

There is every reason to believe that Abu Zayd is capable of discussing legal issues with the judge. In the thirty-second assembly, al-Harith travels to Medina after performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. He stops at a Bedouin camp where he finds people congregated around learned jurist Abu Zayd answering a challenge of one hundred legal questions. Abu Zayd delivers his innovative interpretations of the law using clever Arabic language.

Certainly, the text of the eighth *maqama* satirizes the *qadi* as a bureaucrat in the government. The Muslim community, however, seems to have had an ambivalent attitude toward the position. Egyptian historian Ibn Taghri Birdi (d. 1470) composed numerous obituary notices (necrologies) of men who occupied the office of *qadi* in Mamluk Egypt and Syria.¹⁷⁵ Obituaries appear at the end of each year in Ibn Taghri Birdi's annalistic chronicle. The entries show that a *qadi*'s reputation ran a gamut of possibilities. Chief Shafi'i *qadi* Shihab al-Din (d. 1390-1) of Damascus, for instance, "did not enjoy a good reputation, being arbitrary and unjust."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Chenery, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 146, 337.

¹⁷⁵ See a selection of entries in Abu L-Mahasin Ibn Taghri Birdi, *History of Egypt 1382-1469 A.D., Part I, 1382-1399 A.D.*, trans. William Popper, 8 vols., vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), 180-205. There are four legal schools in Sunni Islam, which were founded by Abu Hanifa (699-767), Malik ibn Anas al-Asbahi (713-95), Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (767-820), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855).

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

The overwhelming majority of Ibn Taghri Birdi's notices, however, give a positive impression of the judge. The chief Hanbali *qadi* of Damascus (d. 1390-1) was "an erudite jurist who issued juridical decisions and lectured."¹⁷⁷ *Qadi* Fath al-Din Abu Bakr Muhammad (d. 1390-1) "was an excellent bureau chief, was eminent as a litterateur and as a drafter of official documents, possessed a knowledge of many branches of science, and was clever as an expositor of the Koran and also a calligrapher."¹⁷⁸ The career of the chief Hanbali *qadi* of Egypt, Nasir al-Din al-'Asqalani (d. 1393-4), "was a praiseworthy one, and he was beloved of the people."¹⁷⁹ Judge Badr al-Din Muhammad (d. 1393-4) was "confidential secretary of Egypt and its bureau chief." Ibn Taghri Birdi describes him as "a leading bureau chief who excelled in the composition of official documents and in literature, while he had also an excellent knowledge of jurisprudence and other subjects. He had a praiseworthy career and enjoyed an excellent reputation."¹⁸⁰ *Qadi* Taj al-Din Muhammad al-Malihi (d. 1393-4) died at age seventy and held several positions, "market inspector of Cairo, controller of trust properties, and preacher of the College Mosque of Sultan Hasan...he was a good and religious man who had a praiseworthy career."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 181.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 189.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 191.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Ibn Taghri Birdi acknowledges the existence of bribery to obtain a position of *qadi*, but promotes honesty and integrity when filling the post. He relates the story of the successor to Shams al-Din al-Tarabulusi (d. 1396-7), the chief Hanafi judge of Egypt.

The successor:

was summoned by post messenger to Cairo, the office of chief Hanafite *cadi* remaining vacant for 111 days until he arrived. I [Ibn Taghri Birdi] remark that such should be the manner of succession of a judge of the sacred religious law, with pride and honor and by invitation, not as a seeker of the office who has run from the house of a grand emir to that of a governor of Cairo, offering money for assistance in securing the appointment, with no attempt at concealing the object so that every Muslim, and also every Christian and Jew, knows that the appointment has been the result of bribery...¹⁸²

Based on the positive standing of the *qadi* in the Muslim community, Abu Zayd's legal expertise, and the apparent friendly relationship between the two old men, the illustration of the eighth assembly clearly displays the exchange of knowledge between two learned scholars.

*Preaching in the Great Mosque at Samarqand*¹⁸³

In medieval Muslim society, the mosque, along with the religious school (*madrassa*) and Sufi convent (*khanqah*), was the usual location for the transmission of religious knowledge and authority.¹⁸⁴ In the twenty-eighth assembly, al-Harith recalls his

¹⁸² Ibid., 200.

¹⁸³ Today, Samarqand is located in the Central Asian country of Uzbekistan.

¹⁸⁴ During the Mamluk period, popular preachers and storytellers also performed religious preaching in public spaces. Historian Jonathan P. Berkey has introduced new avenues of discussion on this topic. For example, see Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992); Jonathan P. Berkey, "Storytelling, Preaching, and Power in Mamluk Cairo," *Mamluk Studies Review* 4 (2000);

visit to a Samarqand mosque. Arriving in the city on a Friday morning, al-Harith completed his business affairs, performed the traditional washing at a public bath, and went to the main mosque for noontime prayers. Al-Harith describes his experience:

Then I hastened with the bearing of the humble to the cathedral mosque...people ceased not to enter in troops into the faith of Allah, and to arrive singly and in pairs, until, when the mosque was crowded with its assembly...the preacher sallied forth, swaggering in the wake of his acolyths [muezzins], and straightway mounted the steps of the pulpit of the [divine] call, until he stood at its summit, when he gave blessing with a wave of his right hand, sitting down thereafter until the ritual of the cry to prayer was completed. Then he rose and spoke...¹⁸⁵

The preacher (*khatib*) delivered a moving sermon (*khutba*) about destiny and the certainty and horrors of death. Overcome by what he heard, al-Harith scrutinized the preacher more closely. Al-Harith realized the preacher was his acquaintance, referring to Abu Zayd as “our Shaykh, the author of the Assemblies.”¹⁸⁶ Al-Harith approached the old man who invited al-Harith home and offered him a cup of wine. At first, al-Harith was shocked by Abu Zayd’s violation of Muslim custom, but eventually he agreed to drink and vowed to keep the old man’s secret.

A sermon on death was common during medieval Islamic times. In a literary study of form and meaning, David Pinault compares aspects of “The City of Brass,” a story in *Arabian Nights*, with the Samarqand *maqama*.¹⁸⁷ Pinault highlights the dominant

Jonathan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001).

¹⁸⁵ Steingass, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 9, 191.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸⁷ David Pinault, *Storytelling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 231-236.

position of the “genre of the sermon” or “moralizing homily” in both narratives and makes critical observations about the Samarqand text. He points out that the Samarqand *maqama* is an excellent example of a sermon with a moralizing theme. It includes four subjects: the departure from the mortal world to the afterlife; the uncertainty of material wealth; the overwhelming fear of death; and, the need for devotion to God.

Themes about the shortness of earthly life are noteworthy, because they occur in two more assemblies. In Sawa (eleventh assembly) “an old man [Abu Zayd] stood forth on high, from a hillock, leaning on a staff” where he addresses mourners attending a funeral in the local cemetery.¹⁸⁸ He warns that power and wealth are futile against the inevitability of death and advises them to lead a religious life.¹⁸⁹ At Tiflis (thirty-third assembly) Abu Zayd is “an old man, with a face plainly contorted by palsy, worn of garments and strength” who speaks to a group after prayers.¹⁹⁰ He receives sympathy and donations by revealing the misfortunes that led to his decline from a life of luxury to one of poverty.¹⁹¹

Pinault indicates that the mixture of linguistic tricks, picaresque exploits, and moralizing opinions must have been acceptable because al-Hariri’s tales were so highly admired during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁹² Clearly, linguistic skill, humour,

¹⁸⁸ Chenery, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 164.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 163-168.

¹⁹⁰ Steingass, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 58.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 58-62.

¹⁹² Pinault, *Storytelling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*, 236.

and a somber didactic lesson were compatible, not mutually exclusive. Pinault makes two concluding points. First, because serious subjects are satirized in al-Hariri's anecdotes, they must have been well-known to a broad audience. Second, Abu Zayd's sermon occupies almost the whole Samarqand anecdote, suggesting that the sermon was intended to be entertaining for its own sake.

How are these observations relevant for illustrations that accompany the Samarqand *maqama*? The mosque is a frequent public location in al-Hariri's assemblies, occurring in six of the fifty anecdotes. Based on a literal interpretation of the narrative of the twenty-eighth assembly, the illustrator was most likely to represent either the mosque scene or Abu Zayd and al-Harith speaking afterward. Eight of the eleven manuscripts include paintings of the twenty-eighth assembly (Figures 17 and 18).¹⁹³ All eight portray the mosque setting, pointing to both the appeal of the subject matter and the social significance of the mosque and the sermon to everyday life. The mosque illustration gives the viewer a chance to reflect about the elderly Abu Zayd's leadership, wisdom, and his message about life, death, and the Resurrection.

The 1334 Mamluk manuscript contains one image (fol. 95v, 158 x 145 mm) with the twenty-eighth assembly, which depicts the interior of a mosque "crowded with its assembly" listening to the preacher (Figure 19). As with most illustrations in the manuscript, the illustrator creates a spare physical environment and accentuates the people. The mosque setting is recognizable by the inclusion of minimal, but essential, architectural features and regalia that inform the viewer. Three arches and columns represent the mosque; a lamp and a central lantern with seven candleholders light the

¹⁹³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 6094 and *arabe* 5847; Istanbul, Süleymaniye, *Esad Efendi* 2961; London, British Library, *or.* 1200, *or.* 9718, and *or. add.* 22114; Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Marsh* 458.

interior; the minbar (pulpit) is located on the left side; and, outside is the dome of the mosque or a minaret (tower from which the muezzin delivers the call to prayer).¹⁹⁴ A metal box that probably stores the *Qur'an* sits at the base of the minbar in front of the preacher.¹⁹⁵ Above the preacher's head a small arch suggests the mihrab, the niche in the qibla wall of the mosque that signifies the direction of Mecca.

Abu Zayd is an old man, with his full grey/white beard, moustache, and eyebrows, who is performing the role of preacher and addressing the worshippers. Ahmad ibn al-Qalqashandi (1356/7-1418), the Egyptian author of an administrative manual for scribes and bureaucrats, remarks that the *khatib* was "in truth, the most powerful [religious] post and most exalted in rank" of the religious offices one might hold, because the Prophet had carried it out.¹⁹⁶ Abu Zayd wears a black robe and stands beside a black flag. Both items are regalia representative of the Abbasid (750-1258) dynasty, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's uncle 'Abbas (d. 652).¹⁹⁷

According to the text, Abu Zayd stands on the top step of the minbar, his right arm outstretched and gesturing toward the congregation as he gives the blessing. It is obvious to the viewer that Abu Zayd occupies a singular role in the mosque and is the

¹⁹⁴ Bloom, *Minaret*, 177-178. Bloom indicates that the first extant general depictions of mosques and minarets in a manuscript are found in the Paris 5847 (fol. 138r) *Maqamat* illustrated by al-Wasiti and dated 1237. The illustration accompanies the forty-third assembly. Minarets are also illustrated in other *Maqamat*: London, British Library, *or.* 9718, fol. 13; Istanbul, Süleymaniye, *Esad Efendi* 2961, fol. 70; and St. Petersburg, Academy of Sciences, S. 23, 275, 278.

¹⁹⁵ Atil, *Renaissance of Islam*, 259.

¹⁹⁶ Berkey, "Storytelling, Preaching, and Power in Mamluk Cairo," 67.

¹⁹⁷ For a discussion of the origins of the black flag, see Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, vol. 2, 50-51.

centre of attention. The organization of the composition is similar to the generic author portrait discussed in Chapter Three in which the knowledgeable leader interacts with his followers. Abu Zayd is physically separated from both his assistant and the congregation by the minbar and an empty vertical space. Most importantly, standing at the summit of the minbar, Abu Zayd resides in a position of Islamic leadership, knowledge, and authority as he addresses the worshippers.¹⁹⁸

The congregation consists of boys and men of varied ages and ethnicities. All figures are turned toward the minbar, fixated on Abu Zayd. At the centre of the crowd is the large bust of a man with white or grey hair, moustache, beard and eyebrows. Location and size suggest that the man is al-Harith who announced in the *maqama* that he was anxious “to join those who near the prayer-leader,” and later says with relief, “happily I was foremost in the race, and elected the central place for hearing the sermon.”¹⁹⁹ Al-Harith’s physical appearance as an older man, however, contradicts the narrative, which states, “in those days I [al-Harith] was upright of build, brimful of sprightliness.”²⁰⁰ This phrase brings a young person to mind, but the artist has interpreted the character as older than the text suggests. (Al-Harith is illustrated in the same manner throughout the manuscript. Thus, it is a ploy by the illustrator to ensure both Abu Zayd and al-Harith are instantly recognizable. The illustrator felt liberated from following a literal interpretation

¹⁹⁸ For a discussion of the minbar as a symbol of authority in Islam, see Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam a Short History: Signs, Symbols and Values* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 113-137. Tayob also considers the meaning of leadership and suggests alternative models.

¹⁹⁹ Steingass, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 9.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

of the text.) Moreover, not only does the old preacher convey knowledge to the young, he also communicates a message to his peers who look to him for guidance.

The *Maqamat* image of Abu Zayd as a religious leader delivering the Friday sermon resembles an illustration of the Prophet Muhammad forbidding intercalation (Figure 20). The painting is in the earliest (1307-8) illustrated copy of al-Biruni's (973-ca. 1050) *Chronology of Ancient Nations* (*al-Athar al-baqiya 'an al-qurun al-khaliya*), which he wrote in ca. 1000.²⁰¹ The 1307-8 manuscript was likely produced in Iraq during the Ilkhanid (1256-1353) period. The event occurred in 632 during the Prophet's last pilgrimage and near the end of his life.²⁰² The Prophet stands at the top of the minbar addressing a congregation of six men and boys. Although Muhammad was elderly, he is depicted with dark-coloured eyebrows, moustache, and beard. This is consistent with many *hadith*, which state that the Prophet had little grey/white hair.²⁰³ One concession to

²⁰¹ (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Arab 161, fol. 6v). A copy of the illustration is found in Hillenbrand, "Images of Muhammad in al-Biruni's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*," 129-146. See especially, 137, Plate 5 and Hillenbrand's discussion of the illustration, 129-131. Hillenbrand believes that al-Biruni's text (like al-Hariri's anecdotes) was not usually illustrated. He argues that the picture of Muhammad forbidding intercalation was based on images of enthroned *qadis*, *khatibs* and rulers found in Mesopotamian illustrations of the thirteenth century. Hillenbrand points to "the tight, expressive grouping of the figures" and "the simple and dramatic spatial relationships," which are derived from the formulae established in the *Maqamat* manuscripts.

²⁰² Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14. The Prophet's age at his death varies depending on the source of information. He was sixty, sixty-three or sixty-five years old.

²⁰³ For example, see University of Southern California, "USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts," <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/056.sbt.html#004.056.750>> (1 March 2006). The same passage indicates Muhammad did not dye his hair, an accepted and common practice among men with grey hair and beards in the seventh century.

old age, however, is the portrayal of Muhammad stooped forward and supported by the post of the minbar's handrail, which he clutches with his left hand.

The minbar's significance as a symbol of Muhammad's leadership and the transmission of his knowledge to the Muslim community cannot be overstated.²⁰⁴ The minbar was the throne of the Prophet in his role as ruler where he delivered public announcements, speeches, and sermons and performed the daily prayers (*salat*).²⁰⁵ The Prophet used a wooden minbar made with two steps and a seat at the top as a pragmatic way to ensure people could easily see and hear him. At the same time, he was still accessible to people because only two steps elevated him. Similarly, Abu Zayd stands at about eye-level with the congregation and may be on a minbar that is similar to Muhammad's. Perhaps the illustrator was trying to make a comparison with Muhammad's minbar. Over the years, the design of the minbar changed. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the minbar had become much higher because it had more steps, and therefore, was more imposing. The Mamluk minbar incorporated more materials and elaborate geometric designs (Figure 21).

The first three caliphs who succeeded the Prophet, Abu Bakr (r. 632-4), 'Umar (r. 634-44) and 'Uthman (r. 644-56), used the minbar the same way. (The caliph was the main civil and religious leader who was considered the successor of Muhammad.) Each

²⁰⁴ The minbar evolved to become the caliph's throne and the symbol of the ruler's authority as well as that of the governor who represented the ruler. For the origin and history of the minbar, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., s.v. "minbar."

²⁰⁵ *Salat* involves worshipping five times a day and is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. The four other Pillars are: *shahada* (declaration of faith); *zakat* (mandatory charity); *sawm* (the fast during Ramadan); and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

was elected by community elders and placed in the position of political power based on seniority, respect, and leadership ability. Abu Bakr, the elderly *shaykh* and companion of the Prophet, was fifty-nine years old when he was chosen to be the first caliph; he swore his oath of allegiance while on a minbar.

Looking at the illustration of Abu Zayd facing the congregation, the viewer readily associates the elderly *shaykh* with leadership and the transmission of knowledge. The old man is the visual focus of attention as he stands on the minbar, a fixture in the mosque and a symbol of Muhammad's authority. One can imagine listening to his stirring sermon while being crowded by the attentive congregation.

Teaching the Children's Lesson

In the medieval Muslim community, the transmission of religious knowledge was traditionally undertaken in formal settings such as the mosque. Popular itinerant preachers and storytellers, however, were prevalent and challenged the status quo of the powerful *'ulama*, the academic and religious leaders of society. Preachers and storytellers conveyed their versions of religious lessons when they spoke to gatherings of ordinary people in public places.²⁰⁶

The *madrasa* (school) appeared during the tenth and eleventh centuries as an institution of higher learning, mainly in Islamic religious education (jurisprudence,

²⁰⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of the role of popular preachers and storytellers in society, refer to Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*. The role of the storyteller in early Islam is discussed in Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, trans. Michael Robertson (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 86-89.

Qur'an, hadith).²⁰⁷ Throughout Egypt and Syria, the ruling Mamluks established *madrasas* for all four schools of jurisprudence through charitable endowments (*waqf*), which financed the schools' construction and operations. This financial arrangement fostered and maintained political stability with the indigenous leadership and allowed the Mamluks to pass on their wealth to their descendants. During the Mamluk period (1250-1517), at least twenty-two institutions of religious education were re-established or built in Cairo by sultans or their families.²⁰⁸ In addition, Mamluk amirs, military officers, and bureaucrats created over sixty institutions.²⁰⁹

In the forty-sixth assembly, al-Harith travels from Aleppo to Homs (Emesa) to spend the summer.²¹⁰ Soon after pitching his tent, al-Harith notices a teacher surrounded by pupils and describes his meeting with them. Surprisingly, al-Harith reveals a nasty side of his usual generous personality. In the text, al-Harith ridicules the population of Homs for its lack of intellect and maliciously anticipates being amused by the mistakes of instructor and students.

The children's linguistic performances are the focus of the text. Teacher Abu Zayd calls on a series of ten children, assigning each a different challenging linguistic

²⁰⁷ For an examination of the origins and evolution of religious education in Cairo, refer to Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*. Al-Harithy gives an innovative interpretation of the Mamluk's re-use of architecture for educational institutions in terms of the reproduction of social space. See al-Harithy, "The Concept of Space in Mamluk Architecture."

²⁰⁸ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 61.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²¹⁰ Homs, in western Syria, was called Emesa under the Roman Empire and was on the route between Damascus and Aleppo.

task. In an ironic twist, all the students shock al-Harith by their oral and written prowess. In contrast to his crafty behaviour in other *maqamat*, Abu Zayd behaves like a kind elderly *shaykh* who compliments each student for his excellent work. The children's fine work reflects positively on Abu Zayd's personality and teaching abilities.

At the outset, al-Harith directs the reading or listening audience to pay close attention to the teacher's (Abu Zayd) advanced age. Al-Harith remarks that the teacher is "a Shaykh whose old age was coming on and whose youth had turned its back on him, and around him ten youngsters."²¹¹ In addition, al-Harith writes that the teacher received him with "a cheerful face" and "a handsomer greeting than I had given him."²¹² Immediately after these comments, Abu Zayd begins the children's lesson. Consequently, the audience remembers Abu Zayd's old age and associates it with his welcoming manner and effective teaching, which is confirmed by the outstanding performances of the students.

Nine of eleven *Maqamat* manuscripts include illustrations with the forty-sixth assembly (Figures 22, 23, and 24).²¹³ Five manuscripts include one image, three contain two images, and one contains eight images. In the 1334 manuscript, the association between old age and the successful teaching of children is reinforced by the one accompanying illustration (fol. 170v, 150 x 125 mm) (Figure 25). In contrast to the

²¹¹ Steingass, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 148.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 6094 and *arabe* 5847; St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. 23; Istanbul, Süleymaniye, *Esad Efendi* 2961; London, British Library, *or.* 1200, *or.* 9718, *or. add.* 22114; Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Marsh* 458.

content of the text, Abu Zayd is the focus of the picture. (Al-Harith has been excluded from the image.) The illustrator has chosen to juxtapose youth and old age, thereby placing greater attention on Abu Zayd's physical maturity and wisdom. Abu Zayd sits on a platform at the far right, pressed against the picture frame. He is holding up "his little staff" in his left hand as he conducts the lesson. A triangular-shaped group of seven boys is in the centre of the image, two holding writing tablets. Three more boys are to their left; one is writing. All the figures are seated on a floral-patterned rug, which unites them into a complete group led by Abu Zayd. One distinct tablet floats above the figures in the empty space between Abu Zayd and the students, signaling to the viewer that the scene is in a *madrasa*. Most of the boys are looking toward Abu Zayd, while a few appear distracted.

A case study of one particular mamluk tells us about the importance of religious education and the bond between teacher and student. Sayi al-Din Taghri Birmish al-Jalali al-Nasiri al-Mu'ayyadi (ca. 1399-1448) was a well-known Mamluk soldier and scholar during the first half of the fifteenth century who became governor of the citadel in Cairo. Although he lived after the period of study in my thesis, Taghri Birmish's biography offers insights into the complex relationships between a mamluk and the elite *'ulama* who dominated Muslim society. Historian Jonathan Berkey argues convincingly that Taghri Birmish's life is "significant in large part precisely *because* he was, in the most important respects, a typical Mamluk."²¹⁴ Berkey has drawn on Ibn Taghri Birdi's (d.

²¹⁴ Berkey, "'Silver Threads among the Coal': A Well-educated Mamluk of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," 116.

1470) biographical entries about Taghri Birmish to create a profile of his involvement in traditional Islamic learning.²¹⁵

Berkey's article about Taghri Birmish is informative for the discussion of the illustration of Abu Zayd teaching in a *madrasa*. Berkey indicates that "Islamic education was constructed upon the intimate human relationships between teachers and students, and the transmission of knowledge involved the transferral less of an abstract corpus of information than a deeply personal authority over a given text."²¹⁶ Taghri Birmish was fluent in both his native Turkish and in Arabic, which allowed him to excel at history and literature. More importantly, he studied jurisprudence with Hanafi scholars, read critical collections of *hadith*, and learned the names in the chains of transmission (*isnad*) of the authoritative texts. Taghri Birmish's knowledge and experience qualified him to receive licenses (*ijazas*) to oversee others in their study of *hadith*. Berkey believes it is doubtful that he supervised others, because Taghri Birmish died at about age fifty, "a relatively young age." The crucial point is that a person's status as a transmitter increased with age. The *isnad* that connected an elderly person to a transmitter with whom he or she had studied was relatively shorter than the *isnad* of a younger person and, therefore, less susceptible to mistakes in transmission.²¹⁷

In the Mamluk context, and based on the case of Taghri Birmish, the status that can be attributed to the elderly Abu Zayd as a teacher is substantial. The *maqama* text

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.: 111.

²¹⁷ Ibid.: 122-123.

establishes Abu Zayd's status and the illustration enhances it. Even on its own, the image prompts the viewer to remember and imagine his or her own education or that of their children. It was common for scholars to bring their children to assemblies where *hadith* or other texts were being recited, and for the *shaykh* in charge to give licenses to the children.²¹⁸

The teaching *shaykh* had complete authority over his students. In *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldun points out the power a teacher could exert over a primary school pupil:

Severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially little children...Students, slaves, and servants who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose their energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere."²¹⁹

Ibn Khaldun warns that a teacher's harsh treatment of children would lead to their moral and social downfall. Their "souls become too indolent to (attempt to) acquire the virtues and good character qualities," and the children "fall short of their potentialities."²²⁰

In the early fourteenth century, Badr al-Din Ibn Jama'a wrote his treatise on education (*Tadhkirat al-sami'*), which is based on his personal experience in the classroom and reflects real conditions in the Mamluk era.²²¹ He uses a comparison from medicine to explain the relationship between teacher and student. A pupil should comply

²¹⁸ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 31-33. Berkey questions the validity of some licenses, particularly those given to children as young as two, three, or four years old.

²¹⁹ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, vol. 3, 305.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 37.

with his *shaykh* in the same way a patient obeys his doctor.²²² In another treatise, al-

Ansari uses the metaphor of a parent and child:

Every student and teacher should show respect for the other, especially the former [i.e., the student especially should be respectful], because his teacher is like the father, or even greater, since the father brought him into the world of perdition, [while] his teacher leads him to the world of external life.²²³

These medieval texts recommend the desirable qualities and behaviour for a teacher. In word and image, the kindly *shaykh* Abu Zayd personifies the ideal.

The two concluding assemblies in *Maqamat* strengthen the connection between old age and the transmission of knowledge. In the forty-ninth tale, Abu Zayd is ninety-three years old, and “the fetter of old age robbed him of the power of rising.”²²⁴ Believing he is near death, the old man advises his son in a last testament to follow a mendicant’s life. The volume ends with the fiftieth anecdote in which Abu Zayd delivers a moving panegyric to the city of Basra. Abu Zayd’s speech culminates with his outwardly sincere decision to sacrifice his peripatetic life for a new life dedicated to Sufism, another path for linking old age with the transmission of knowledge.

²²² Ibid., 36-37.

²²³ Abu Yahya Zakariyya al-Ansari, *al-Lu'lu' al-nazim fi rawm al-ta'allum wa'l-ta'lim* (Cairo, A. H. 1319), 6-7, quoted in Ibid., 36.

²²⁴ Steingass, ed., *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, 169.

Conclusion

In the illustrations of the 1334 Mamluk volume of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, old age commands attention. The four anecdotes and their respective pictures confirm that the elderly man, embodied by Abu Zayd and similar characters, is a *shaykh*, a leader respected because of his maturity, not in spite of it. Moreover, in particular social roles, "spaces of old age," an elder is synonymous with the transmission of knowledge and authority.

In the text of the four assemblies I investigated, al-Hariri repeatedly reminds the audience of Abu Zayd's advanced years. Al-Hariri calls him old man, aged man, and *shaykh* and uses terse phrases to encapsulate his physical decline. Abu Zayd may be criticized for his trickery, but the audience around him is complicit. Initially, people willingly give Abu Zayd their respect and consideration because he is old. Abu Zayd consolidates the audience's interest with his eloquence.

Old age is the heart of the illustrations. Without reading the text, the viewer understands instantly Abu Zayd is significant. He is the physical focus of the composition. The prominent and familiar grey/white hair, beard, moustache, and eyebrows of old age draw and maintain the viewer's focus. In obvious contrast to the narratives, Abu Zayd appears physically robust. Visually, old age is paramount because it gives Abu Zayd credibility. At the same time, he occupies social spaces of old age that, for the Muslim audience, stood for leadership, education, and the transmission of knowledge. Abu Zayd performs valued social functions, and therefore, is the centre of attention for the surrounding assembly. When Abu Zayd is the literary scholar in the

public library or the man talking to a judge, illustrations alone do not tell the whole story. The image elaborates and enhances a reading of the anecdote. Abu Zayd's portrayal as the preacher in the mosque and the children's teacher are clearer. In these two situations, the images can function independently of the text. Old age is the factor that unites the four anecdotes with their illustrations.

The nature of Mamluk society and patronage encouraged a positive connection between old age and the transmission of knowledge. As foreign invaders in Syria and Egypt, the Mamluks faced hostility and resistance to their governance and needed continually to reinforce political and social stability. The Mamluks implemented an ambitious program of patronage to obtain the support of Muslim leaders and to preserve their political power. Pious endowments financed the construction and maintenance of secular and religious buildings as well as the employment of staff including teachers of jurisprudence, *hadith*, and *Qur'an* recitation and grammar, prayer leaders, and librarians. The combination of the private complex (the mausoleum) with public facilities (the mosque and *madrasa*) brought the native community closer to Mamluk authority. From the perspective of native Muslims in Egypt or Syria, religious patronage reinforced the Mamluk commitment to Sunni Islam. Religious education was central to Muslim life.

The patronage of Mamluk sultans and amirs extended beyond architecture to include the production of illuminated *Qur'ans*, metalwork, glasswork, textiles, ceramics, woodwork, and illustrated manuscripts.²²⁵ Elaborately scripted, illuminated, and gilded *Qur'ans* were created during the Mamluk period. Eleven known *Qur'an* manuscripts,

²²⁵ The breadth of objects produced under the Mamluks is evident in the exhibition catalogue Esin Atil, *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks*.

dating from 1304 to 1330, were produced in Cairo.²²⁶ Most notable is the earliest dated (1304-6) Mamluk *Qur'an*, produced for Baybars al-Jashnakir. This patronage was an act of religious devotion that could be recognized by the native Muslim community.

The early thirteenth-century patrons of the *Maqamat* were the educated literate Arab bourgeoisie, an established social group in Muslim society. For them, the *Maqamat* was literature to be enjoyed for its own sake. During the Mamluk period, however, sponsoring the production of the *Maqamat* may have had a more serious and calculated political purpose. Fostering relations with the Muslim establishment must have been a consideration. By the thirteenth century, al-Hariri's *Maqamat* was a highly regarded classical text that had been integrated into the Arabic literary canon. As the Turkish-speaking patrons of the *Maqamat*, the Mamluks were publicly acknowledging and promoting the Arabic language, which they had learned as part of their training. The Mamluks, therefore, were perpetuating a text that had been celebrated in Arab culture.

Furthermore, the illustrations of the four narratives in the 1334 *Maqamat* portray the elderly Muslim leader in a positive light. The *'ulama* were the leaders or *shaykhs* of the native Muslim community. It was crucial for the Mamluks to maintain constructive relations with them. By acknowledging the significance of the mainly religious positions the *'ulama* occupied, as well as their influence, and by portraying them visually in a positive way, the Mamluks increased the likelihood that the *'ulama* would cooperate with their rulers.

²²⁶ David James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks* (London: Alexandria Press, 1988), 34. The book gives a thorough discussion of dated *Qur'ans* produced in the Bahri Mamluk period.

Appendix²²⁷

The eleven extant illustrated versions of Hariri's *Maqamat* produced between ca. 1220 and ca. 1375 are:

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 3929. Undated, estimated the first half of the thirteenth century; place of origin unknown.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 6094. Inscription (fol. 68r) dated 1222; place of origin unknown, possibly Syria.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *arabe* 5847. Colophon, dated 1237; scribe and illustrator al-Wasiti; place of origin unknown, possibly Baghdad.

St. Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. 23. Undated; place of origin unknown.

Istanbul, Süleymaniye, *Esad Efendi* 2961. Undated, estimated ca. 1242-1258; inscription (fol. 204r) states the name of the last 'Abbasid caliph al-Musta'sim; place of origin unknown.

London, British Library, *or.* 1200. Colophon, dated 1256; marginal note (fol. 177r) states collation was completed by Umar ibn Ali ibn al-Mubarak al-Mawsili who is probably the copyist; place of origin unknown.

London, British Library, *or.* 9718. Undated, but before 1310; inscription (fol. 53r) identifies scribe and artist as Ghazi ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dimashqi (d. 1310); place of origin unknown, possibly Damascus, Syria.

London, British Library, *or. add.* 22114. Undated, estimated ca. 1300; place of origin possibly Syria.

London, British Library, *or. add.* 7293. Colophon, dated 1323; inscription on title page indicates the book came into the position of Ahmad ibn Jullab al-Mawsili, inspector of

²²⁷ Information about the manuscripts has been adapted from Oleg Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat*, 7-17.

alms in Damascus, in 1375-1376, suggesting some images were made after 1375; place of origin unknown.

Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, *A.F.* 9. Colophon, dated 1334; scribe Abu al-Fada'il ibn Abi Ishaq; place of origin probably Cairo, Egypt or Damascus, Syria.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Marsh* 458. Colophon, dated 1337; patron amir Nasir al-Din Muhammad, son of Tarantay, an official at the Mamluk court; place of origin, Cairo, Egypt.

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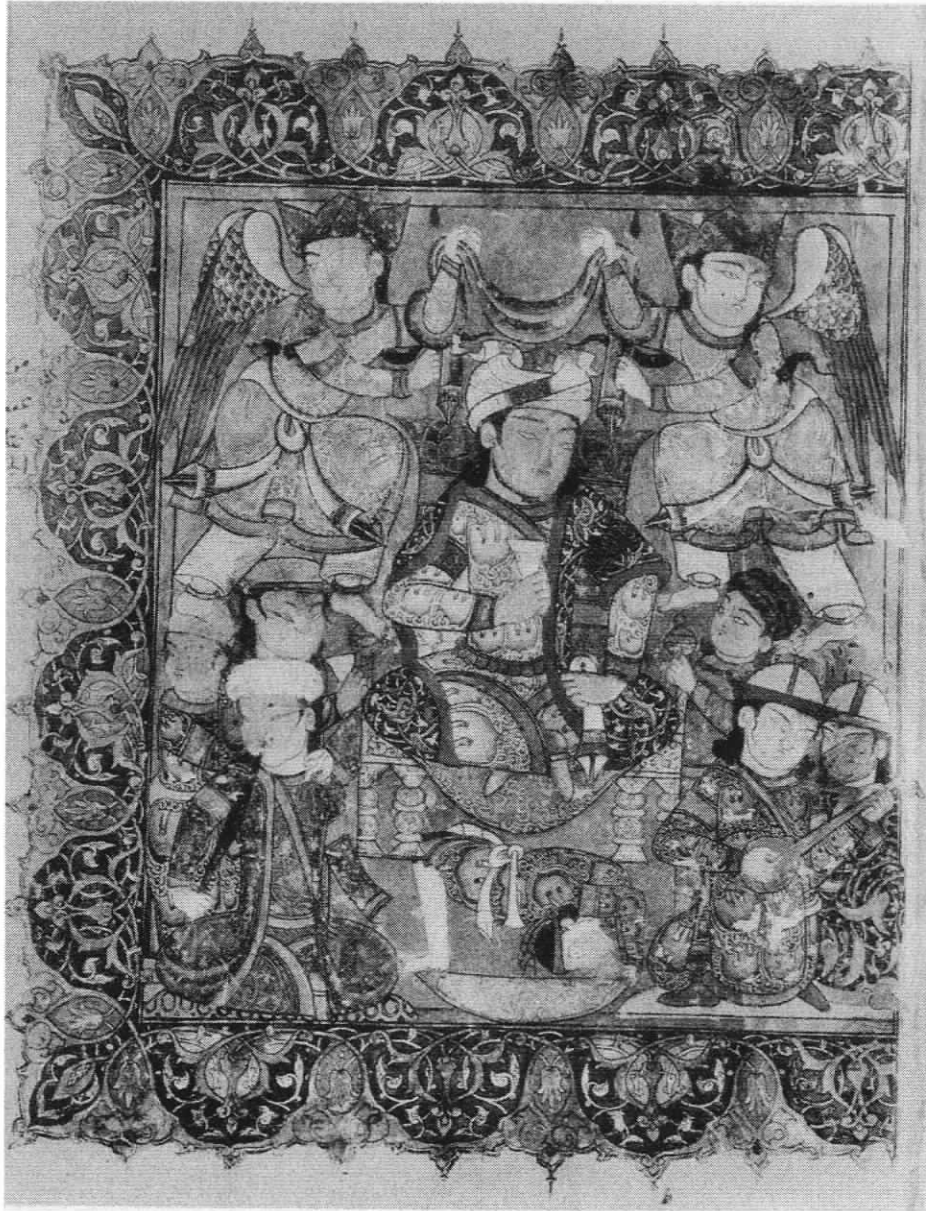


Figure 1. Frontispiece.



Figure 2. Death of Salma.



Figure 3. "Three ages of life" and performers.



Figure 4. Old age in "Three ages of life."



Figure 5. The *shaykh* looking out of a window.



Figure 6. Socrates and two students.



Figure 7. Abu Zayd addresses pilgrims to Mecca.



Figure 8. Solon and students.



Figure 9a. Two students.



Figure 9b. Dioscorides teaching.



Figure 10. St. John the Evangelist.



Figure 11. Dioscorides and student.

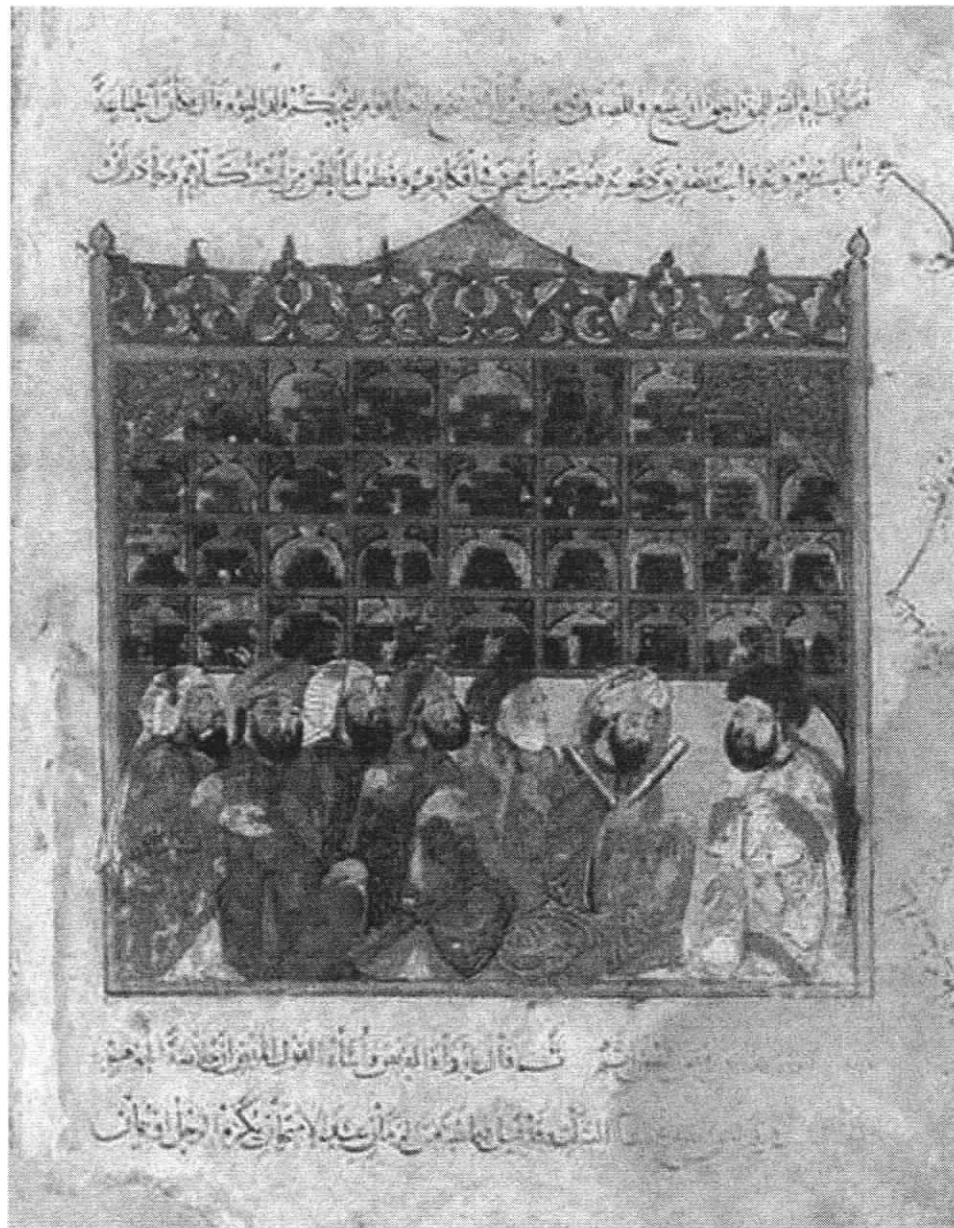


Figure 12. Abu Zayd in the library in Basra.

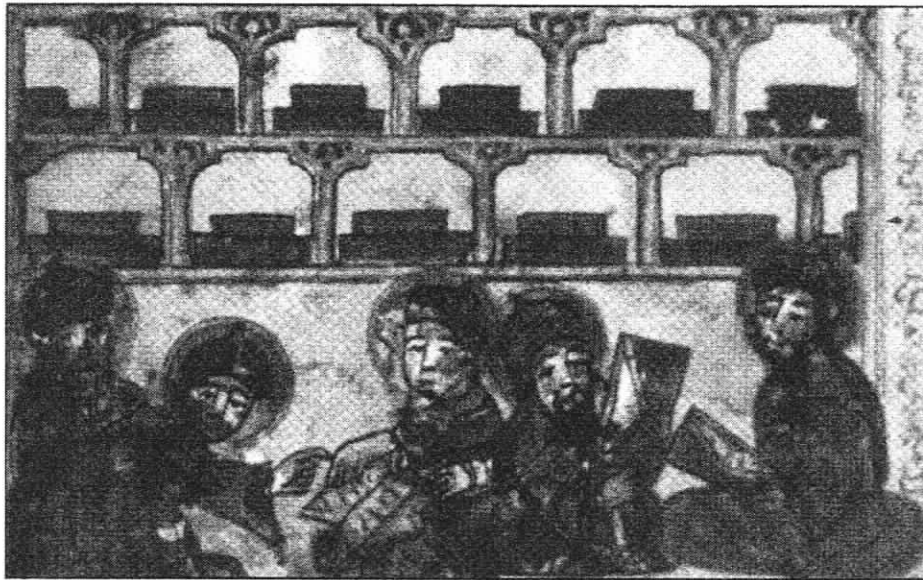


Figure 13. Abu Zayd in the library in Basra.



Figure 14. Abu Zayd in the library in Basra.



Figure 15. Abu Zayd with the judge at Ma'arra.



Figure 16. Abu Zayd before the judge of Sa'da, Yemen.



Figure 17. Abu Zayd gives a sermon in the main mosque in Samarqand.

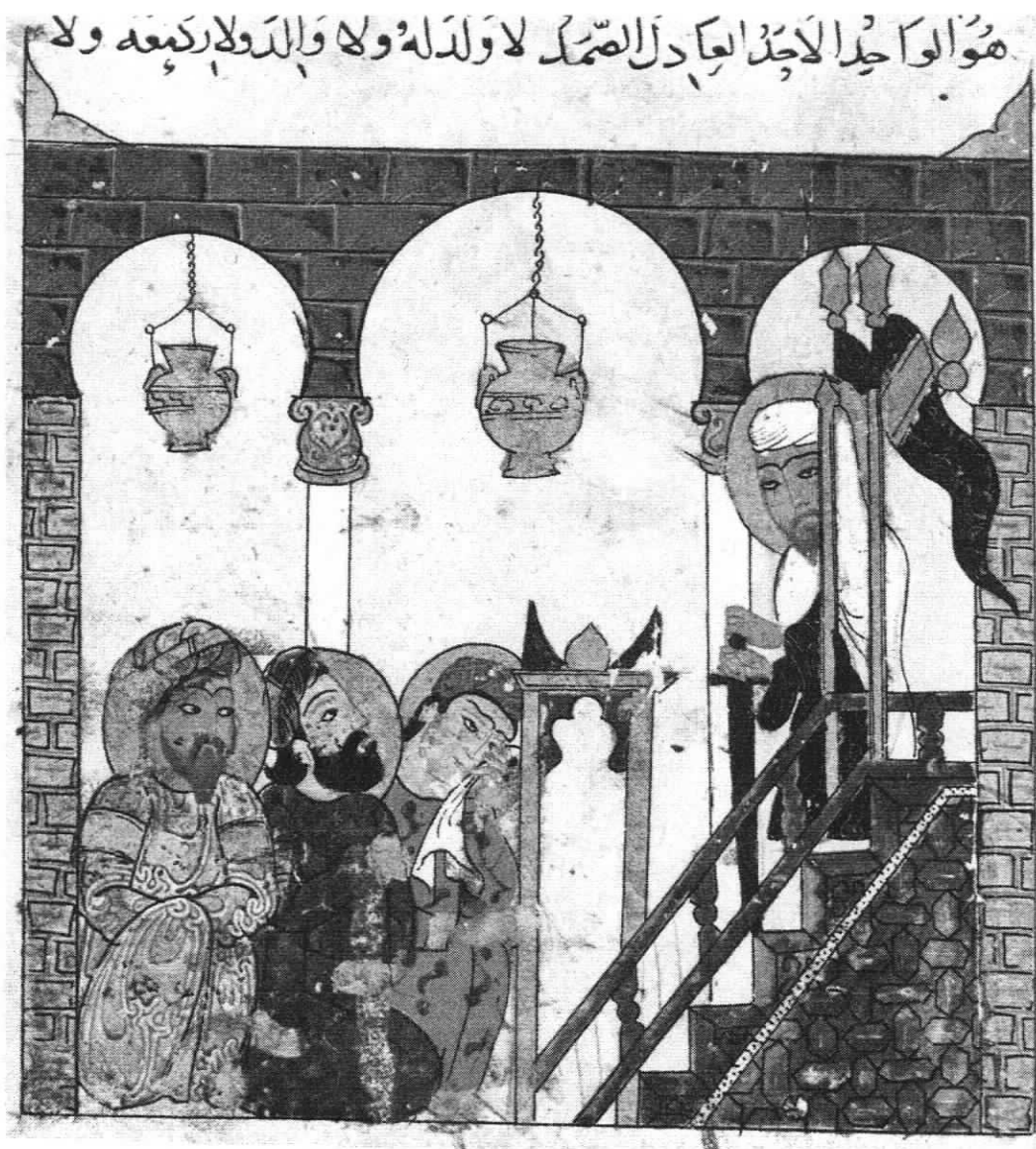


Figure 18. Abu Zayd gives a sermon in the main mosque in Samarqand.

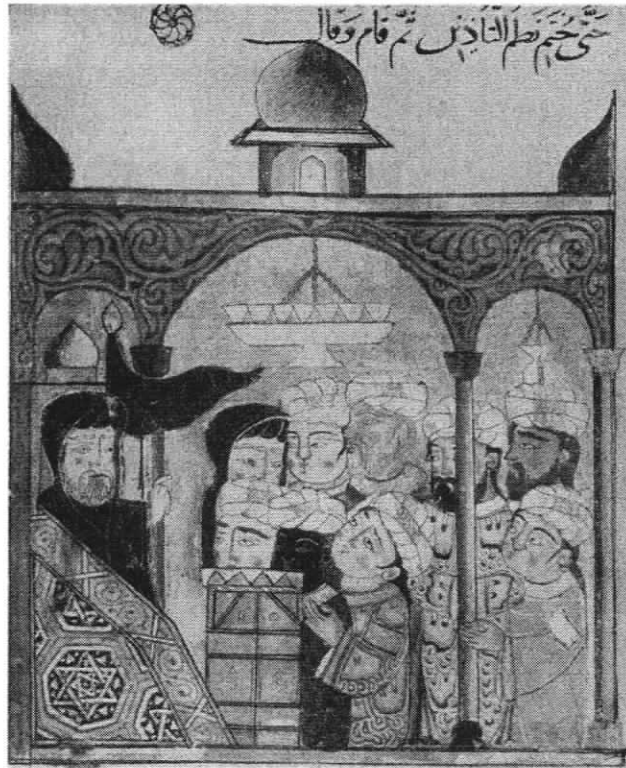


Figure 19. Abu Zayd gives a sermon in the main mosque in Samarqand.



Figure 20. Muhammad forbids intercalation.

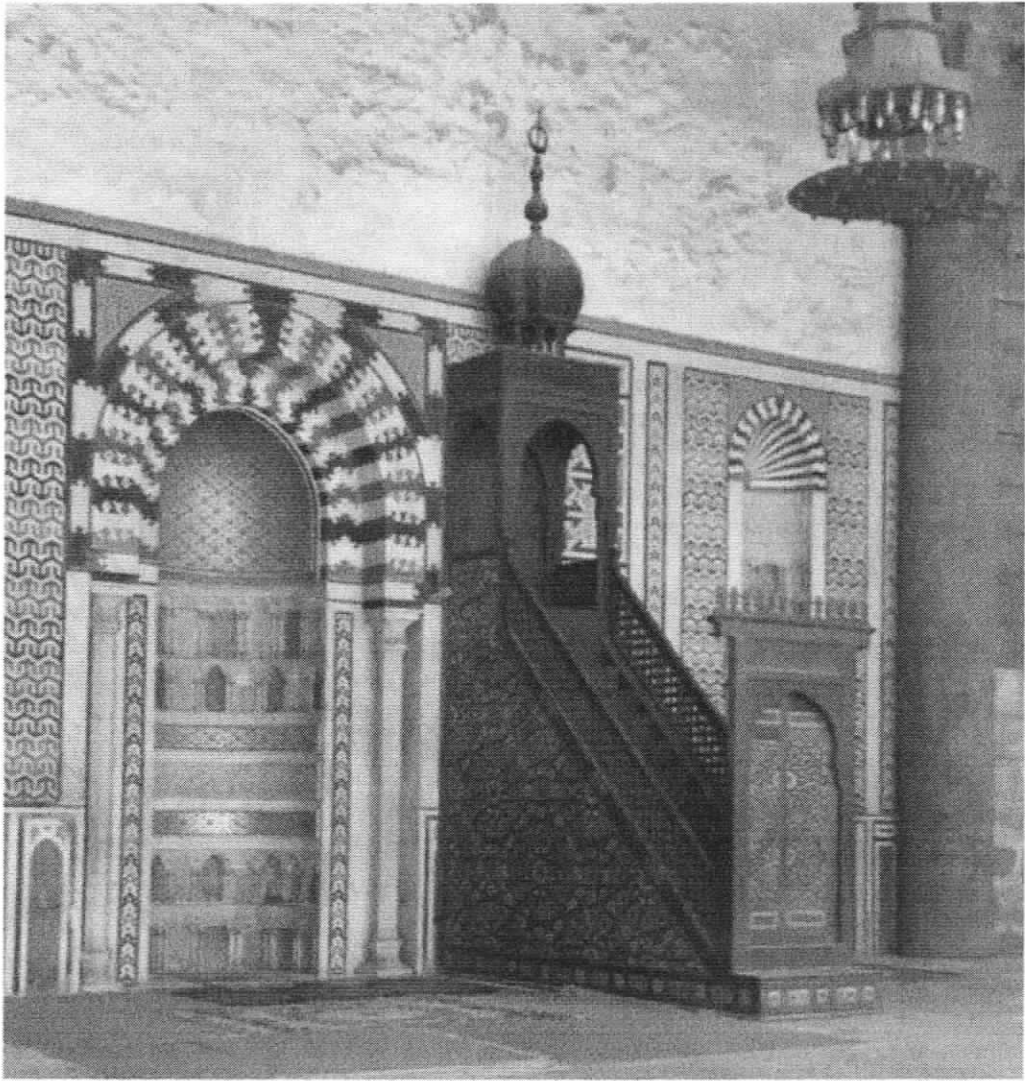


Figure 21. Minbar in the mosque of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad.



Figure 22. Abu Zayd teaching a class in Homs.



Figure 23. Abu Zayd teaching a class in Homs.



Figure 24. Abu Zayd teaching a class in Homs.



Figure 25. Abu Zayd teaching a class in Homs.