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PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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THE ST. PETERSBURG MANUSCRIPT OF THE *MAQĀMĀT* BY AL-ḤARĪRĪ AND ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF ARAB PAINTING

Medieval Arab book miniatures have received significantly less study than their Iranian counterparts. This is due both to their brief history (from the end of the twelfth to the middle of the fourteenth century) and to the relatively small number of surviving illustrated manuscripts. Only a single work of Arab literature has reached us in a significant quantity of illustrated manuscripts (13). This work, however, allows us to trace the development of style and depictive technique on the basis of uniform subject material — the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī [1]. These illustrations, which make up more than half of the Arab miniatures which have reached us, represent at the same time the overwhelming majority of genre scenes.

Despite the long-standing and deserved attention they have received, no more than one hundred illustrations to the *Maqāmāt* have been published (of the more than seven hundred), mainly in black-and-white reproductions [2]. Aside from mentions in general works on the history of the arts, few special studies have appeared, all reviewing individual aspects of the illustrations.

The first, and thus far only study which covers the entirety of illustrations in the *Maqāmāt* is O. Grabar's monograph. It appeared in 1984 and contains in an appendix microfiches of 732 miniatures from 12 manuscripts, which allows those unable to consult the manuscripts *de visu* better to acquaint themselves with the material. The study by O. Grabar treats a number of historical issues raised by the depictive language of the *Maqāmat*'s illustrators and the interrelation of various manuscripts.

In terms of iconography and chronology, the manuscripts form two groups. The first includes six manuscripts from the first half of the thirteenth century, produced in Baghdad or the zone of its strong artistic influence; the second contains six manuscripts from the first half of the fourteenth century which originated in Syria and Egypt. Artistically, the latter are a pale reflection of the early thirteenth-century Baghdad school and its traditions. There are no later manuscripts of the *Maqāmat* of al-Ḥarīrī with illustrations [3], which testifies to the total decline of Arab miniature painting. The reasons for this have not yet been convincingly explained. O. Grabar proposes that society's changing tastes may explain this. As he puts it, "it was a change in spirit, in the expectations of visually acquired knowledge. Its full understanding awaits future investigations in social and cultural history" [4].

This is a truly interesting question, the relevance of which extends beyond the illustrations to the *Maqāmāt*, but we are here concerned with a concrete problem — the mechanisms in the copying process which impoverish the original image.

Most useful for our purposes are the three best illustrated manuscripts from the first group: arabe 5847 from the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (henceforth — P 5847); Esad Efendi 2916 from the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (henceforth — St) and C 23 from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (henceforth — Pb). O. Grabar groups the latter two together, attributing them to a single set in which "the setting plays a part equal to or greater than the incidents of the story" [5]. In his view, however, their similarity is determined not by chronological proximity but by their dependence on a single depictive prototype [6].

In the case of P 5847, we not only know the date of its completion down to the day (6 Ramaḍān 634/3 May 1237), but also the name of the calligrapher and illustrator — Yaḥyā b. Maḥmud b. Yaḥyā b. Abī-l-Ḥasan al-Wāsiṭī. St is dated to the rule of the last 'Abbāsid, al-Musta'ṣim (1242—1258) on the basis of a benevolent inscription with his name on the frieze of a mosque depicted in illustration 48 to the *Maqāmāt* (fol. 204a). The presence of an analogous inscription in P 5847 with the name of al-Mustanṣir, during whose rule (1226—1242) the manuscript was copied, removes all doubt that St could reproduce an inscription on a mosque which pre-dates the copy.

The dating of Pb is more difficult, as it lacks both the beginning and the final folios, and the mosques are depicted without epigraphic friezes. S. D. Rice, an expert in Arab miniatures, concluded on the basis of a comparison of illustrations to the twelfth *maqāma* in Pb and P 5847 that Pb is older, but he did not give an exact date [7]. Rice's view in this point is shared by R. Ettinghausen [8].

Pb has badly suffered from the passage of time. More than one eighth of the original folios are missing. Judging by the paper and writing, the absent folios were replaced at least four times. Two miniatures of fourteenth-century style were added in the first restoration (perhaps there were more,

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Fig. 1, a

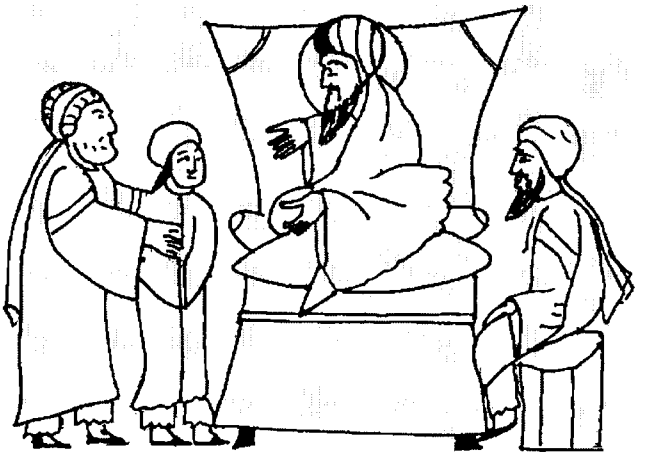

Fig. 1, b

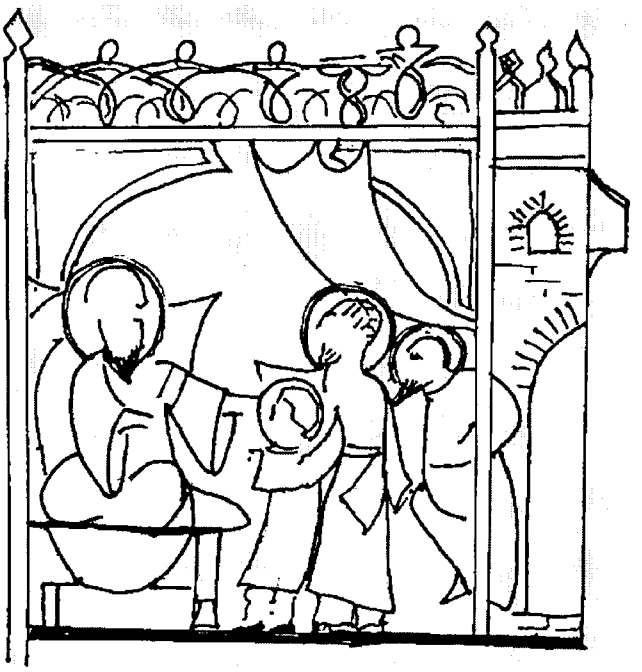

Fig. 1, c

but they have been lost). Later, folios were added with space left on them for four miniatures. The last restoration is dated by European paper with a "three-crescents" watermark. For a certain time before the first restoration, the manuscript was stored in a damp place, and many of the miniatures stuck to the surface of the facing page or, worse yet, to each other. When they were separated, some paint remained where it had stuck. Of the 96 remaining original miniatures, nine were seriously damaged in this fashion. Finally, one of the pious owners of the manuscript smeared the paint on the faces with a moist finger in order to destroy the sinful depictions, and another "finished them off" by crossing out in ink the necks of people and animals.

Taking into account the number of replaced folios, one can presume that Pb originally contained no less than 120 miniatures, that is, more than the well-preserved P 5847.

St is even more seriously damaged: there are no unharmed miniatures at all, and of the surviving 56 only 44 are discernible.

There are only 25 intact miniatures which are shared by all three manuscripts. These miniatures allow us to juxtapose the treatment of the same thematic material by three unquestionably talented and independent artists of the same school. For this aim, differences in the colour scheme are not significant (all the more so, as the author of this article was compelled, in the overwhelming majority of cases, to work with black-and-white reproductions of the miniatures from P 5847 and St). We also omit differences in the depiction of faces and clothing. For the purpose of our study differences in the level of detail and the composition of the scenes are of much more importance.

O. Grabar notes a similarity between Pb and St in an especial fondness for depicting details and in an equally realistic, unstylized depiction of architecture. (However, no less common are cases of similar compositional decisions in P 5847 and St, which set them apart from Pb.) One can cite, for example, the depiction of a reception by the *qāḍī* Zabīd (thirty-fourth *maqāma*) (Pb, p. 236; P 5847, fol. 107a; St, fol. 136b; see *figs. 1a, b, c*). The multi-figured composition of Pb in the detailed depiction of the architectural setting is in al-Wāsiṭī reduced to the four figures of the main characters: Abū Zayd, his son, whom he is attempting to sell by deception, al-Ḥārith (on the right) and the *qāḍī* — the architectural setting is absent. It is present in St, but the number of figures is also reduced to four. The arrangement of persons in St is entirely different than in P 5847, but closer to Pb, if one views the composition from right to left. In the architectural setting in St, somewhat simplified in comparison to Pb, one should note two characteristic architectural details: a closed balcony and the depiction of half of an arched entrance.

In another instance, we find a clear similarity between the composition in P 5847 and St in the miniature which depicts the meeting of Abū Zayd and al-Ḥārith at the reception of the governor of Merv in the thirty-eighth *maqāma* (Pb, p. 256; P 5847, fol. 118a; St, fol. 150b). As in the illustrations to the thirty-fourth *maqāma*, the complex multi-figured composition in the architectural setting in Pb (*fig. 2a*) is reduced in P 5847 to five figures: the ruler on the throne, Abū Zayd and al-Ḥārith and two young male servants (*ghulām*) at either side of the throne (*fig. 2b*); the architectural setting is absent. St copies this composition, but in ludicrously primitive form (*fig. 2c*).

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Fig. 2, a

An example of nearly complete compositional coincidence can be found in the illustrations to the fifteenth *maqāma*, which depict the arrival of Abū Zayd at the home of al-Ḥārith (*figs. 3a, b*). The location of the entrance, the ventilation system in the roof and even the depiction of a large vessel for water under the first flight of stairs (routine for Pb, but not found in P 5847) coincide here. The arrangement of the two figures coincides as well.

The presence in many miniatures in St of compositional similarities with P 5847 may indicate borrowings between the two manuscripts, but is more likely an indication of various forms of borrowing from general prototypes.

Such similarities are absent between Pb and P 5847, although they should be chronologically closer than Pb and St. The examples cited above demonstrate greater simplicity in the depiction of thematic material in P 5847 in comparison with Pb. But the differences in composition are so great that one cannot speak of simplification — they are simply different, and different throughout. Pb presents us with significantly more complex compositions.

The clearest example of this is found in the illustrations to the third *maqāma*, in which Abū Zayd holds forth before a large gathering of admirers of rhetoric, at first praising, and later censuring in verse gold coin. In Pb (p. 17; *fig. 4a*), Abū Zayd stands before forty listeners, arranged around a reservoir; in P 5847 (fol. 7a), the artist depicts only five listeners (*fig. 4b*).

In some cases, a certain connection is visible between these two manuscripts — for example, in the illustrations to the fourth *maqāma*, which depict the appearance of Abū Zayd at the caravan's halting place (Pb, p. 22, 25; P 5847, fol. 9b). In the first manuscript, two miniatures are dedicated to this scene. One of them depicts the caravan at rest. The depiction is three-tiered, divided by zigzag strips of grass. On the upper tier, six persons sit, lie and converse in various poses in tents, and on the ground among saddles and packs; on the second tier, al-Ḥārith lies in a tent, propping himself on his hand; the lower tier shows two more tents, a camel-driver and six camels in various poses (*Plate 1*).

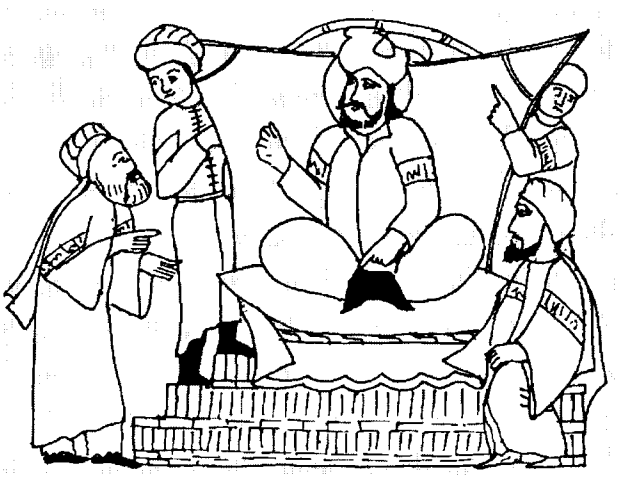

Fig. 2, b

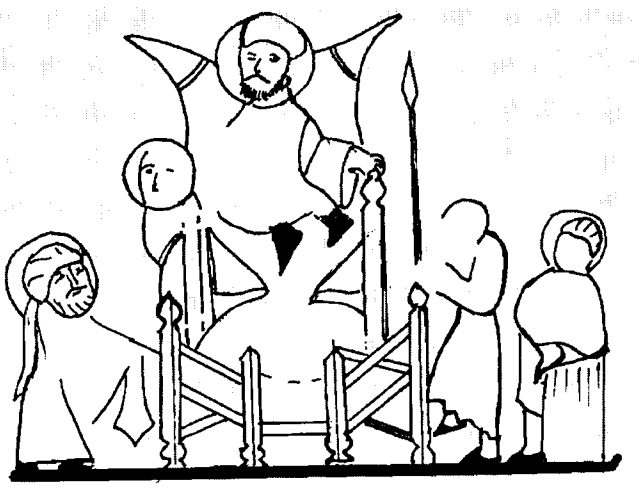

Fig. 2, c

In the second miniature, which depicts Abū Zayd's arrival, the action unfolds in two tiers; the artist has eliminated the third, lower tier as insignificant. Al-Ḥārith, having heard Abū Zayd, prepares to leave his tent and is putting on a boot. There is no doubt that the person lying in the tent in the first miniature and the person putting on the boot are the same person: the tent is drawn identically from the inside and the same large chest (?), which resembles a small house, stands behind the tent.

P 5847 contains no analogue of the first miniature. There is only a small miniature with a two-tiered depiction of the sleeping caravan, which coincides in general with the composition of the second miniature. But in place of the lively scene in Pb, we find a schematic representation: there are no tents, five travelers sleep in the upper tier among packs, al-Ḥārith sleeps in the lower right, as in Pb, p. 22, and three camels lie to his left (*fig. 5*).

The simplified composition is not accompanied by a corresponding drop in the artistic level of the miniature: we see the same sure lines and individuated faces. The core of the matter rests in a different conception of the necessary level of detail in the depiction.

Telling are the similarities and differences in the depiction of a scene in the illustrations to the fifth *maqāma*, in which Abū Zayd tells of his chance visit to the house of his wife, whom he had left. The existence of a general model for both al-Wāsiṭī and the illustrator of Pb is beyond doubt,

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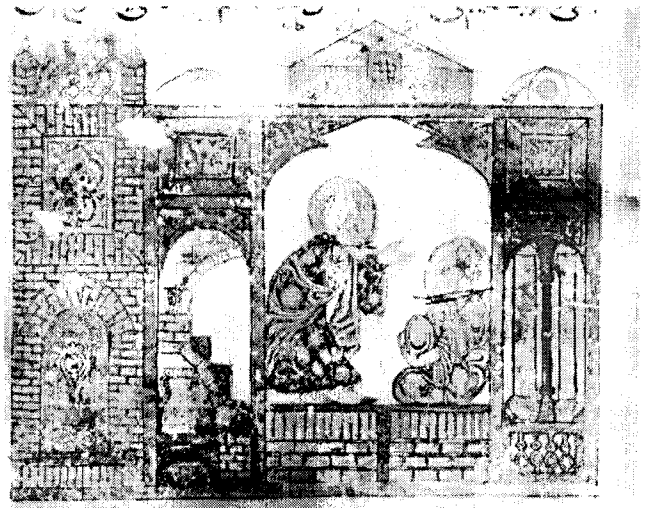

Fig. 3, a

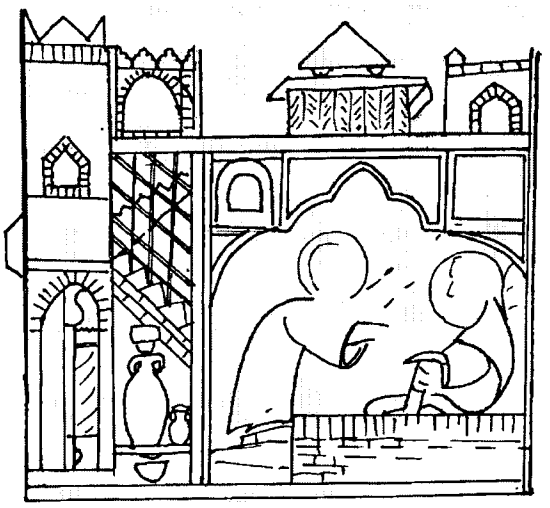

Fig. 3, b

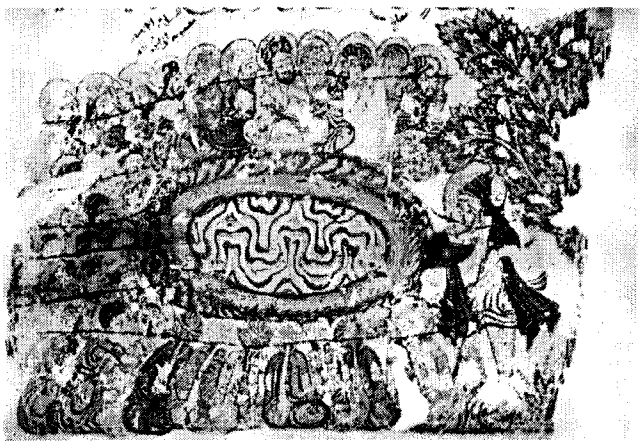

Fig. 4, a

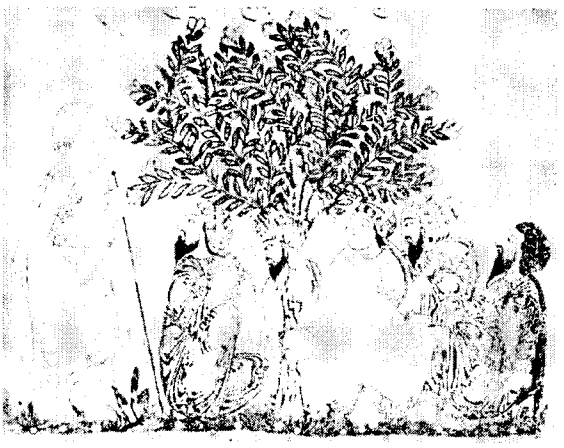

Fig. 4, b

as the central figure in both miniatures is a woman working a spinning-wheel. She is not mentioned in the text, and the obvious similarity between the two miniatures can only be explained by the presence of a single depictive prototype (*fig. 6a, b, c*). As usual, the illustrator of Pb provides a more detailed depiction of the details (the façade, the stairs to the roof, the vessel for water beneath it). Here also, as in the depiction of the caravan at its halting place, he conveys the unfolding events with the help of a second miniature, in which a cat indicates the pace of movement. In the first miniature, it lies peacefully to the right of the woman at the spinning-wheel; in the second, disturbed by the knock at the door, it has retreated to a different place (*fig. 6b*). In this scene as well, al-Wāsiṭī contents himself with a single illustration. Unfortunately, the illustration of this episode has not survived in St, where there is only a scene of Abū Zayd's arrival at the house, where he tells of his meeting with his son (fol. 14b).

It is mainly the unusual topics, the individuality of which fades less with copying and reworking, which give us an opportunity to imagine with greater clarity the process of changes and degree to which various manuscripts are dependent on their protographs. Among these are the scene at the cemetery (Pb, p. 65; P 5847, fol. 29b; St, fol. 34a), boating on the Euphrates (Pb, pp. 135, 139; P 5847, fol. 61a; St, fol. 73b), the theft in the caravan-saray (Pb, p. 196; P 5847, fol. 89a; St, fol. 110a), the slave market (Pb, p. 231; P 5847, fol. 105a; St, fol. 134a), the ship (Pb, p. 260; P 5847, fol. 119a; St. fol. 153a), and the scene in school (Pb, p. 318, see also the *Plate* on the back cover of the present issue; P 5847, fol. 148b; St, fol. 192a).

An analysis of all the preceding instances goes beyond the parameters of this study; it is sufficient here to limit ourselves to the most telling example: the depiction of the ship. First, it has survived in all three manuscripts; and second, the substantial similarities ease our understanding of the differences and how they appeared.

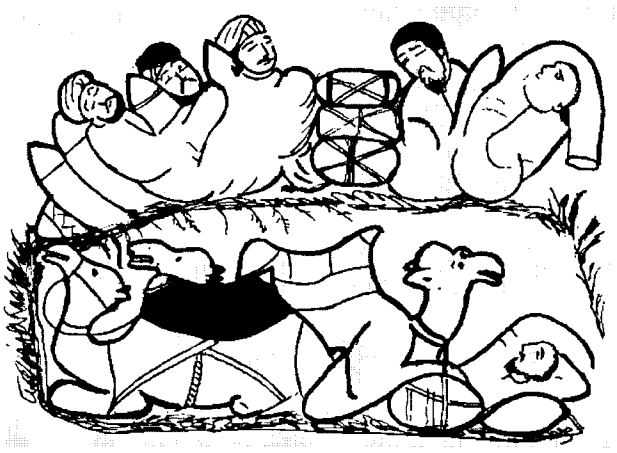

Fig. 5

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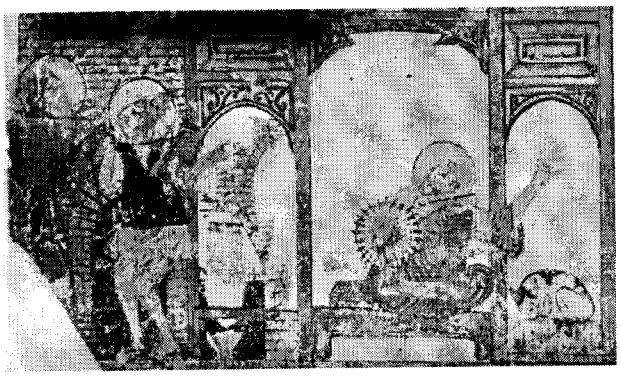

Fig. 6, a

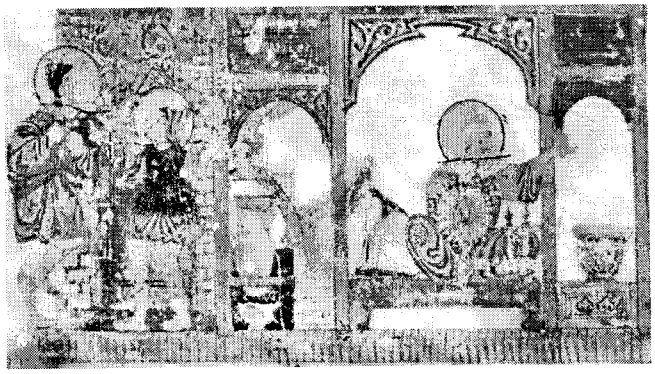

Fig. 6, b

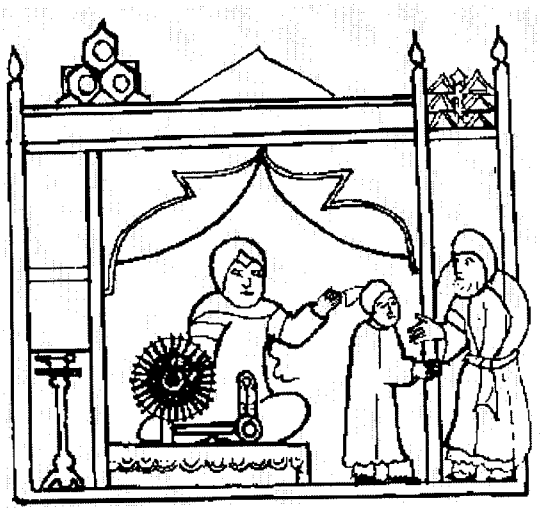

Fig. 6, c

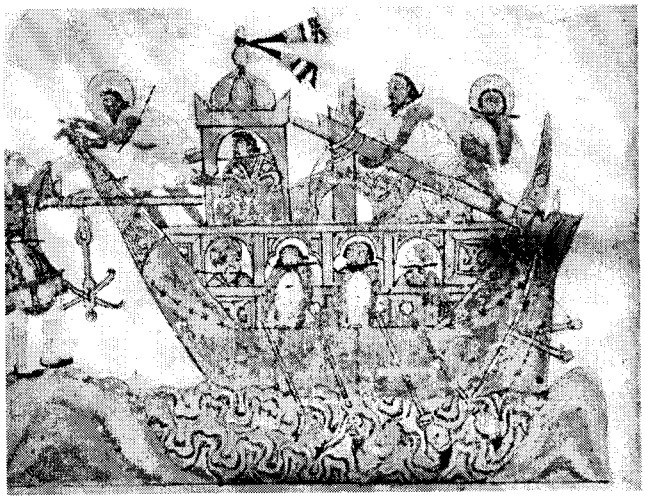

Fig. 7, a

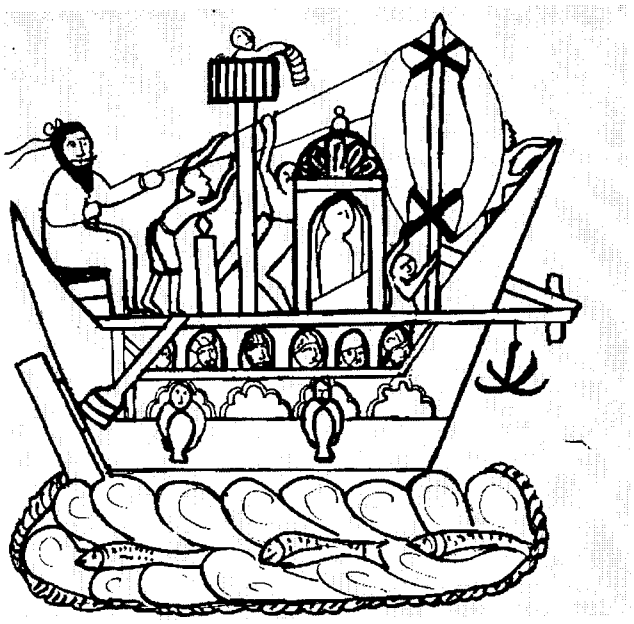

Fig. 7, b

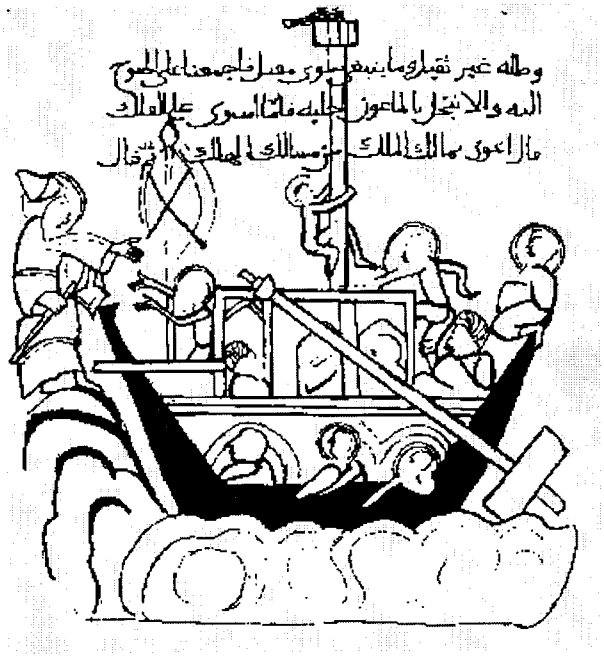

Fig. 7, c

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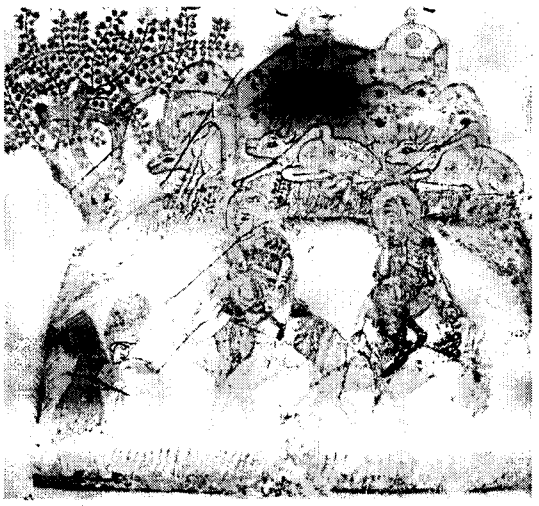

Fig. 8

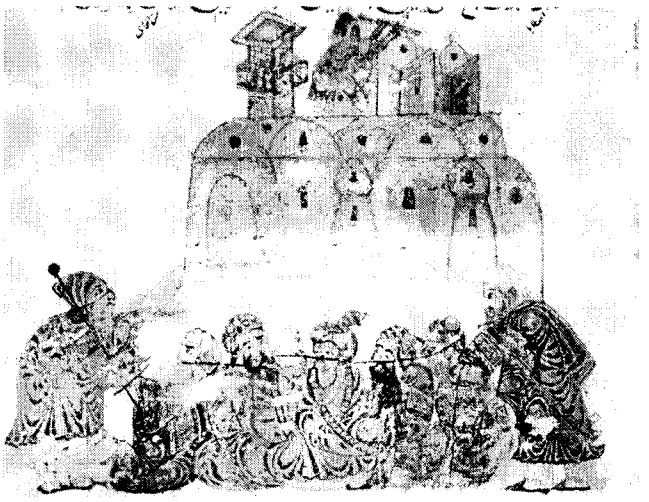

Fig. 9

One notes first that in each of the miniatures, certain details link it with one, and others with another miniature. Certain factors render Pb and St a pair; others, St and P 5847; a third set, Pb and P 5847. Pb and St are alike in that the ship stands with its bow left to the shore, from which Abū Zayd asks that they take him on board. Sailors (two in Pb, three in St) empty jugs of water from the hold out of the lower port-holes (or hatches), and something like a steering oar hangs to the right from the upper deck. They differ in that St lacks the anchor which hangs from the bowsprit in Pb; the latter lacks the sail on a short mast found in St.

In P 5847, the ship sails to the right, and the shore and Abū Zayd are not depicted, although, as in Pb, there is an anchor, helm and the same curious implement hanging from the deck, and two sailors pouring out water (*fig. 7a, b, c*). At the same time, P 5847 and St share certain details lacking in Pb: in the centre stands a mast with a basket in which a scout sits; a second mast with a sail of most unusual form stands at the prow. There are other minor differences and similarities which are not important for our purposes.

All three miniatures contain certain perplexing details. Foremost, it is unclear why the ship which Abū Zayd is asking to board faces the shore with its prow rather than its stern, or why the ship is depicted in Pb without mast or sail. Finally, if the long, hanging object is an oar, as it is depicted in St, where the ship lacks a helm, then why is it depicted (albeit, somewhat differently) in P 5847 and Pb, where the ship has a helm?

The miniature in Pb answers the last question — the upper end of this mysterious object displays fractured wood which matches a similar fracture at the base of the mast in the centre of the ship, around which lies a torn sail. Taken in conjunction with the sailors dumping water from the hold, this shows that the ship has recently weathered a storm. The lower part of the mast fragment, hanging down toward the water, in St is clearly of cylindrical form, unlike the scoop found in P 5847 and Pb. In St, the illustrator has transformed the observation basket atop the broken mast into the blade of an oar; in accordance with this interpretation, he equipped the broken end with an oar loom.

The nature of the similarities and differences does not permit us to view the miniatures as successive stages in the development of a single composition. Clearly, we find here a combination of two miniatures, one of which depicted the departure of the ship which Abū Zayd would like to board; the other depicted a storm-weathered ship approaching an unknown island. In combining these two depictions, the authors of the manuscripts under consideration here, or more likely their predecessors, borrowed various details, which led to differences between their miniatures. In this scheme, the prototype of Pb and P 5847 was clearly closer to the original: one can still see in them the fracture at the end of the mast and the torn sail. Another minor detail confirms this — the artists show the method of ship-building (ships on the Arabian sea were not constructed with nails or spikes, but held together with liana, resulting in small crosses along the seams which ran in horizontal lines along the side of the ship; these are clearly visible). Here, P 5847 and St obviously show two varied re-workings of two depictions of the ship, as is indicated by the similar depictions of the palace on the island (P 5847, fol. 120a; St, fol. 154b). We do not know how this was depicted in Pb, as the needed miniature has not survived.

Another locus of intersection between P 5847 and St is the depiction of a settlement in the illustration to the forty-third *maqāma*, where the resemblance covers not only the type of building, but also a rooster on the roof in both cases (P 5847, fol. 178a; St, fol. 176a—176b).

In this instance, Pb proceeds along entirely different lines. On page 293 (*fig. 8*), we find an utterly different composition: in the foreground, a group of men, to whom Abū Zayd is speaking; in the background, some sort of public building which displays architecture unusual for the miniatures in Pb. We find a similar building in the illustration to the forty-second *maqāma* (*fig. 9*), where the scene takes place in the Yemeni city of Najrān [9]. The resemblance is not coincidental, as the first miniature depicts events in Tihāma, which is located close to Yemen. Perhaps we have here a very rare case where the artist wanted to add local colour. If so, the zebu, typical of Southern Arabia, is quite appropriate.

The depiction of these buildings reveals an unusual, note-worthy perspective: the top of the tower is shown as though from birds-eye view, while on page 293, even the roof is visible (*fig. 10*). There are no analogues of this in Arab miniatures, although such depictions are encountered in Christian art. This perhaps explains the presence of the man on the roof, who holds something like a cross in his

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hand. Possibly, the artist recalled the Christian community and church in Najrān and thus fixed the location of the event. If this is so, we have here an absolutely unique instance.

The analysis performed here of the treatment of identical subject material in three manuscripts does not exhaust the possibilities of comparative analysis, but permits the following conclusions: (1) in the majority of cases, when the composition of the miniatures in P 5847 and St coincides, it is somewhat simplified in the latter; (2) the same relationship exists between Pb and P 5847. We can conclude from this that the first of these is older and, consequently, that in the first half of the thirteenth century, as illustrations to the *Maqāmāt* were repeated, the depictive content became more impoverished, although the artists in each case reproduced the subject matter in their own fashion.

This leads us to yet another conclusion: the cycle of illustrations to al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* did not come together gradually, but was created at a single time by a single very talented artist, who strove to depict as fully as possible the environment in which the hero of the *Maqāmāt* moved. The unusual nature of this cycle and its artistic virtues immediately evoked imitations, the level of which gradually fell. Proof of this can be found in the fact that *Maqāmāt* of al-Hamdānī, similar in subject matter and quite popular, were not illustrated: there was no talented initiator whose work could serve as the basis for imitations.

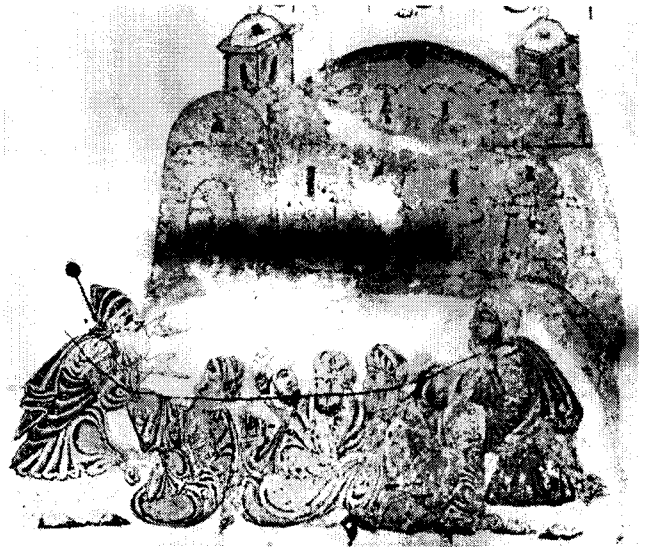

Fig. 10

Notes

1. These were described by O. Grabar in his *The Illustrations of the* ***Maqamat*** (Chicago, 1984), pp. 8—19. One of these, found in the library of the main mosque of Ṣan'ā, is very late (Ṣafar 1121/April 1703), and in style should be attributed to the Moghul school. During a very brief visit to the University of al-'Ayn (Abū Dhābi) in January 1990, I found in the catalogue mention of an illustrated manuscript of the *Maqamat* without a date. Unfortunately, I was unable to see it, as the employees of the library told me that it was impossible to find the manuscript because of renovations. It is therefore difficult to say whether the manuscript at al-'Ayn is a new, unknown copy or a manuscript bought in Ṣan'ā.

2. K. Holter, "Die Galenhandschrift und die Makamen des Harīrī der Wiener Nationalbibliothek", *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, Sonderheft Nr. 104 (1937), pp. 1—48. All illustrations published. Also O. Grabar, "A newly discovered, illustrated manuscript of the *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī", *Ars Orientalis*, 5 (1963), pp. 97, 109, plates 1—24. Fifty-five miniatures from P 5847 are published in 'Isā Salmān, *Al-Wāsiṭī Yaḥyā bin Maḥmūd bin Yaḥyā rassām wa-khaṭṭāt wa-mudhahhab wa-muzakhraf* (Baghdād, 1972). R. Ettinghausen published colour reproductions: one miniature from the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris 6094, one from 3920, six from Pb, seven from P 5847, and one from a manuscript in Vienna. See R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1962).

3. The latest manuscript in Ṣan'ā (see note 1) has not relation to the Baghdad manuscript or to the Arab school of miniatures as a whole (Grabar, *The Illustrations*, pp. 16—7).

4. Grabar, *The Illustrations*, p. 152.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

6. *Ibid.*.

7. See S. D. Rice, "The oldest illustrated Arabic manuscript", *BSOAS*, XXII (1959), pp. 207—20; D. James, "Space-forms in the work of Baghdad *Maqamat* illustrators. 1225—58", *BSOAS*, XXXVII (1974), pp. 305—20.

8. Ettinghausen, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

9. O. Grabar believes it not to be a building but the depiction of Najrān (Grabar, *The Illustrations*, p. 92).

Illustrations

Front cover:

"Abū Zayd and al-Ḥārith talking". Fragment of a miniature from manuscript Pb of the *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī (*maqāma* 50), p. 349, 17.5 × 9.0 cm.

Back cover:

"Abū Zayd as a teacher in a school at Ḥimṣ". A miniature from manuscript Pb (*maqāma* 46), p. 318, 18.0 × 19.5 cm.

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Inside:

Plate 1. "Caravan at rest". Miniature from manuscript Pb (*maqāma* 4), p. 22, 20.0 × 19.2 cm (see p. 53 of the present issue).

Plate 2. "The appearance of Abū Zayd at the caravan's halting place". Miniature from manuscript Pb (*maqāma* 4), p. 25, 19.0 × 13.8 cm (see p. 56 of the present issue).

Fig. 1. "The *qāḍī* of Zabīd receiving Abū Zayd and his son". Illustration to *maqāma* 34:
a — manuscript Pb, p. 236, 18.0 × 15.0 cm; *b* — manuscript P 5847, fol. 107a; *c* — manuscript St, fol. 150b.

Fig. 2. "Abū Zayd and the governor of Merv". Illustration to *maqāma* 38:
a — manuscript Pb, p. 250, 18.0 × 17.7 cm; *b* — manuscript P 5847, fol. 118a; *c* — manuscript St, fol. 150b.

Fig. 3. "Abū Zayd at the home of al-Ḥārith". Illustration to *maqāma* 15:
a — manuscript Pb, p. 94, 16.8 × 13.4 cm; *b* — manuscript St, fol. 47a.

Fig. 4. "Abū Zayd reciting verses in praise of gold coin". Illustration to *maqāma* 3:
a — manuscript Pb, p. 17, 18.5 × 13.0 cm; *b* — manuscript P 5847, fol. 7a.

Fig. 5. "Caravan at rest". Illustration to *maqāma* 4, manuscript P 5847, fol. 9b.

Fig. 6. "Abū Zayd's unexpected visit to his wife's house". Illustration to *maqāma* 5:
a — manuscript Pb, p. 30, 18.0 × 14.0 cm; *b* — manuscript Pb, p. 32, 17.5 × 13.8 cm; *c* — manuscript P 5847, fol. 13b.

Fig. 7. "The sea-craft". Illustration to *maqāma* 39:
a — manuscript Pb, p. 260, 20.0 × 15.0 cm; *b* — manuscript P 5847, fol. 119b; *c* — manuscript St, fol. 153a.

Fig. 8. "Abū Zayd and al-Ḥārith meeting a well-spoken boy in Tihāma". Illustration to *maqāma* 43, manuscript Pb, p. 293, 21.0 × 18.2 cm.

Fig. 9. "Abū Zayd standing before a learned man in Najrān". Illustration to *maqāma* 42, manuscript Pb, p. 278, 19.4 × 15.0 cm.

Fig. 10. "Abū Zayd standing before a learned man in Najrān". Illustration to *maqāma* 42, manuscript Pb, p. 283, 17.5 × 15.5 cm.

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