
The *Maqāmāt* as a Palimpsest: A Reading of Travel and Belonging in *al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah* (1715)

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Abstract

This article explores the theme of the journey in Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin Bā ‘Abbūd al-‘Alawī’s *al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah* (the Indian assemblies), completed in 1111/1715. Drawing from the concept of the palimpsest as used by Abdelfattah Kilito to define the structure of the narrative, the article argues that it comprises layers of separate but interconnected narratives accommodating divergent and at times contradictory viewpoints on the journey motif that can emerge in isolation in a single story. The theme of the journey, embedded within a repetitive narrative, thus unfolds through various refractions and variations, some repeating and thus corroborating a view, others varying and thus contributing to the mosaic of the theme’s image. This process of thematic fragmentary development mirrors the inscription and re-inscription of the journey motif, presenting different perspectives on space, travel, and belonging. Putting together this palimpsestuous layering of narration, the theme of travel gives way from a cry for a lost *waṭan* homeland to the transfer of the *waṭan* within the subcontinent.

Keywords

maqāmāt | Bā ‘Abbūd | palimpsest | Arabic travel writing | India

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Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin Bā ‘Abbūd al-‘Alawī travelled to India at the beginning of the eighteenth century and probably remained there and never returned to Yemen, founding his family and weaving his future in the courts of the subcontinent.¹ He described his experience in *al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah*, “The Indian Assemblies” (completed in 1128/1716), also known as *al-Maqāmāt al-nazariyyah* (the visual assembly).² A notable work in the eighteenth-century landscape of the *maqāmah* genre, it exhibits a strong drive towards experimentalism and the reinvention of classic forms, in line with several other works of the period analyzed by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila.³ Bā ‘Abbūd’s collection follows the narrative structure crystallized by Ḥarīrī based on the forms of al-Hamadhānī and his successor Ibn al-Ṣayqal al-Jazarī (d. 701/1301) aiming to be a simplification for less erudite readers. Some *maqāmāt* of Bā ‘Abbūd are just rewrites of stories

¹ ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ḥibshī, “Introduction,” in *al-Maqāmāt al-nazariyyah*, ed. Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ḥibshī (Abu Dhabi: al-Majma ‘al-ṭaqāfi, 1999), 9.

² ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ḥibshī, in his critical edition, has chosen to title the collection *nazariyya*, based on the absence of any *maqāmāt* that incorporate the designation of a specific location within their title; see al-Ḥibshī, 9. However, the meaning of the title remains uncertain. Gianluca Saitta posits that the title alludes to the visual aspect of landscape representation narratives; see Gianluca Saitta, “Le genre séance au Yémen entre tradition et innovation: les *Maqāmāt hindiyya* d’Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin Bā ‘Abbūd Al-‘Alawī (XVIIIe Siècle),” *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 3 (2014), <http://journals.openedition.org/cy/2710> (accessed December 12, 2023). The title chosen by the author, “Indian Assemblies,” can be deemed an apt selection considering its explicit purpose of situating the narratives within the context of the Indian subcontinent and portraying the diverse gatherings and encounters transpiring in that geographical realm. It is noteworthy that the first lithograph of the work published in India, in *nasta‘liq*, bears the Persian title *Maqāmāt-i hindī*. Whether this was a result of the haste of the lithographers or a deliberate choice is unclear; see Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin al-‘Alawī Bā ‘Abbūd, *Maqāmāt-i hindī* (Delhi: Maṭba ‘at al-‘ulūm, 1848). Shaykhū Luwys has included two *maqāmāt* in his anthology of Arabic literature; see Luwys Shaykhū, *Majāmi‘ al-adab*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Maṭba ‘at al-abā’, 1913), 74–79. Two *maqāmāt* of the collection were edited and translated in Rifaat Y. Ebeid and M. J. L. Young, “Arabic Literature in India: Two *Maqāmāt* of Abū Bakr al-Ḥaḍramī,” *Studies in Islam* 15 (1978): 14–20. Two *maqāmā* were edited in Aḥmad Idrīs Aḥmad Idrīs, *Al-Adab al-‘arabī fī shibh al-qārrah al-hindiyyah ḥattā awākhir al-qarn al-‘ishrīn* (Elharam Egypt: ‘Ayn, 1998). See also M. G. Zubaid Ahmad, *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature from Ancient Times to 1857* (Allahabad: Dikshit Press, 1946), 74. For a recollection of the manuscripts of *al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyya* in India, see ‘Abbās Hānī al-Sharāḥ, *al-Maqāmāt al-‘arabiyyah wa āthāru-hā fī al-ādāb al-‘ālamiyyah* (Amman: Al-Raḍwān, 2014), 46; Gianluca Saitta, “Notices de manuscrits de *maqāmāt* yéménites de la période postclassique, 1ère partie,” *Chroniques du manuscrit au Yémen*, no. 17 (2014), <http://journals.openedition.org/cmy/2054> (accessed April 10, 2024); Gianluca Saitta, “Notices de manuscrits de *maqāmāt* yéménites de la période postclassique, 2e Partie,” *Chroniques du manuscrit au Yémen*, no. 18 (2014), <http://journals.openedition.org/cmy/2092> (accessed December 13, 2023).

³ Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, “An Old-Fashioned Genre – *Maqāma* in the 18th Century,” *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 65, no. 2 (2012): 7.

by Ḥarīrī and Ibn al-Jazarī with easier syntax and vocabulary.⁴ The use of rare words and complex syntax in al-Jazarī's *al-Maqāmāt al-zayniyyah* renders the text almost incomprehensible, as noted by Katia Zakharia.⁵ The author affirms as well being influenced by al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Nawābigh*.

Bā 'Abbūd's tale unfolds with al-Nāṣir b. al-Fattāḥ, "the victorious son of the One who gives victory," departing Yemen, lured by tales of India's splendor. Upon his arrival, he travels from one city to another, in pursuit of beauty, wisdom, and a livelihood, whether through alms or trade. On arriving at each city, within almost every *maqāma*, he joins a crowd captivated by an eloquent orator. Yet, invariably, this orator cons the people, stealing their wealth with cunning. As in Ḥarīrī, the narrator follows the protagonist, who is escaping with their goods. In almost every encounter, he identifies the escapee as the notorious Abū al-Ẓafar al-Hindī, "the father of victory the Indian." Betrayed, he voices his contempt and blame, and the protagonist defends his actions by citing the struggle to sustain himself as a scholar and poet in a time marked by a declining literary market and a scarcity of patrons. The trickster's repentance is foreshadowed throughout the *maqāmāt*, where the trickster acts as a mentor and guide to al-Nāṣir b. Fattāḥ and avoids cunning. The end mirrors al-Jazarī, capturing Abū al-Ẓafar's last act of repentance for his cunning life through poems with doctors and scholars at his bedside as he dies.

Al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah stands out in the *maqāmāh* genre by telling the classical story of the *maqāmāh* to a broader audience with the addition of themes related to traveling and belonging that can be seen as evocative of the Hadramis diaspora in the Indian subcontinent. This integration enriches the narrative, offering a layered discourse on diaspora and intercultural dynamics. Space functions as more than just a neutral, familiar (in the word of Kilito)⁶ background, as in the *Ḥarīriān maqāmāh*, which has been seen reflective of an Islamicate context as emphasized by Houari Touati and bin Sara

⁴ For a definition of the traits of the typical story of the *maqāmāh*, see Abdelfattah Kilito, *Les Séances: Récits et Codes Culturels Chez Hamadhānī et Harīrī*, La Bibliothèque Arabe (Paris: Sindbad, 1983), 48; Mahmoud Tarchouna, *Les marginaux dans les récits picaresques arabes et espagnols* (Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1982), 289; James T. Monroe, *The Art of Badī' Az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: The American University of Beirut Press, 1983), 23; Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 45; Devin Stewart, "The Maqāma," in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and Donald Sydney Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 147; Andrea Maria Negri, "The Narration of the *Maqāmāt*: A Reading of 'Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin Bā 'Abbūd's *al-Maqāmāt al-Hindiyya* (1715) through Propp," *Folia Orientalia*, 2023, 99–144.

⁵ Katia Zakharia, "Ibn Ṣayqal al-Jazarī auteur de *maqāmāt*," *Synergies monde arabe* 6 (2009): 75.

⁶ Kilito, *Les Séances*, 48.

R. Tyer,⁷ situated within a world governed by accepted religious practices and a shared cultural framework. *Al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah* is suffused with the intricate emotions and observations of a voyager navigating culturally unfamiliar terrain. Al-Nāṣir b. al-Fattāḥ's journey follows an unpredictable path, where space is fraught with surprises, some welcome, others not. Those that are welcome are the wonders of India, such as for instance the Gwalior Fort, gardens, mosques, and distinguished scholars. Those that are not so welcome in the *maqāmah* and cause shock and dread in al-Nāṣir b. al-Fattāḥ are urban pollution, storms, and floods, as well as religious practices he finds deviant, such as Sufi saint veneration,⁸ temporary marriages in Shiism, Kharijism, or the Hindu tradition of Sati, the practice of a widow's funeral pyre.⁹ Negative perceptions are sometimes arguably due to the apparent desire to promote virtue, but sometimes also the result of nostalgia for his homeland, which merely renders any place other than his Hadramout undesirable. This is illustrated, for example, by the general perception of Indian faces as ugly and unwelcome, particularly during moments of distress and grief fueled by nostalgia.

The purpose of this article is twofold: firstly, to explore the discourse on space, travel, and belonging, and secondly, to illuminate the various forms in which this discourse is presented through the prism of the *maqāmah* as a form of narration. This article aims to show the palimpsestuous nature of the *maqāmah*'s narrative fabric, a characteristic first identified by Abdelfattah Kilito. Integrating Sarah Dillon's scholarship on literary analysis of the palimpsest, I argue that this concept is particularly fitting for characterizing the *maqāmah*'s narratological structure. By illustrating the development of the travel theme, I show that the genre acts as a series of literary palimpsests, or rewritings, which enable stories to be introduced and perpetually re-envisioned as standalone units. I argue that these narratives maintain thematic connections, facilitating an exploration of varied positions within a thematic paradigm despite a virtual absence of direct relationships.¹⁰ The *maqāmah* arguably acts as a lens onto

⁷ Houari Touati, *Islam et voyage au moyen âge: histoire et anthropologie d'une pratique lettrée* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 33; Sara R. Tyer, "The Literary Geography of Meaning in the *Maqāmāt* of Al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī," in *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Nizar F. Hermes and Gretchen Head (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 67.

⁸ Anīs Kharrām, "al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah: dirāsah taḥlīliyyah," *Al-Debil*, 2016, 127.

⁹ Andrea Maria Negri, "Representations of Death in *al-Maqāmāt al-Hindiyya*," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 42 (2022): 41.

¹⁰ The characterization of the *maqāmah* as a "layered *adab*" is proposed by Ghayde Ghraoui; see Ghayde Ghraoui, "Losing the Plot in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Satire and Sociability in the *Maqāma Rūmiyya*," *Philological Encounters* 7, no. 3–4 (2022): 268.

a multilayered discourse on migration. The outcome is a mosaic of fragments that, in a non-linear sequence, capture the emotions associated with leaving the homeland (*waṭan*), the initial refusal to accept the new space, and the gradual fading of this rejection. The first part of the article defines the palimpsestuous nature of the *maqāmah*'s narrative structure. The second part traces fragments of discourse on migration within India as they appear across the fifty palimpsests of the narrative, uncovering a palimpsestuous development of the theme.

THE MAQĀMĀT AS PALIMSESTUOUS WRITING

The *maqāmāt* is generally not seen as a type of pre-modern novel as a result of its repetitive storyline, and is considered closer to the form of the short story and anecdotes, *khābar*. The fifty *maqāmāt* can be summarized as revolving around the narrator's back-and-forth journey to a protagonist and this protagonist's continual cunning, culminating in his repentance. Unlike novels, which feature a continuous and interconnected narrative, the *maqāmāt* consists of stories that serve primarily to reiterate the content of previous narrations. These stories reflect the *maqāmah*'s "iterative model" of plot building, according to Philip F. Kennedy.¹¹ The recurring recognition, or anagnorisis, in each *maqāmah* creates a sense of repetition, as if implying that each *maqāmah* could exist alone. With the repeated anagnorisis, the narrator unrealistically and consistently fails to recognize the protagonist until the story's conclusion, although many of the disguises he uses are the same.¹² In the final analysis, the broader story depicted in the fifty *maqāmāt* (except for the final *maqāmah*) could be told while omitting any or most of the *maqāmāt* in the collection, or possibly just by selecting a couple of them.

It is indisputable that the *maqāmāt* can be regarded as distinct units, given that events within a single *maqāma* do not have significant repercussions, rendering them standalone episodes in the hero's journey.¹³ However, merely because they are part of the same collection, it cannot be asserted that these *maqāmāt* are

¹¹ Philip F. Kennedy, *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition: Discovery, Deliverance and Delusion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 278.

¹² Rina Drory, James T. Monroe, and Philip F. Kennedy interpret this trait as intended to signal the fictionality of the writing, thus rendering fiction acceptable in a context where it could be unacceptable because it was seen as being a lie and a falsehood. See Monroe, *The Art of Badi' Az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative*, 25; Kennedy, *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition: Discovery, Deliverance and Delusion*, 277; Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 3.

¹³ Alexander E. Elinson, "Tears Shed over the Poetic Past: The Prosification of Rithā' al-Mudun in al-Saraqustī's Maqāma Qayrawāniyya," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 1 (2005): 7.

entirely unrelated; such a connection inevitably affects their interpretation and influences choices and thematic variations in the collection. Even without events significantly influencing the narrative in another *maqāmah*, their inclusion in the same collection fosters a sense of *déjà vu*, where events become predictable and certain themes are emphasized by repetition. This interconnectedness compels a reading that diverges from their interpretation as merely isolated anecdotes. The inclusion of stories within a collection implies that the author does not need to elaborate all aspects of his setting in each *maqāmah*, as they have been extensively explored in other stories of the collection. Certain characteristics of the story remain anchored in the imagination through the repetition of the stories even if they are not clearly stated, such as the poor appearance of the trickster or the characterization of the narrator. Furthermore, each *maqāmah* is expected to be different from the others, arguably implying that the author aims to build a spectrum of thematic possibilities through the fifty *maqāmāt*. Thematic coherence, as indicated by David J. Roxburg, can possibly be seen as the most prominent element giving coherence to the narration:

The *Maqāmāt* was an aggregate of parts whose coherence, if any, lay not in sequence but in theme: the individual *maqāmas* were interrelated more paradigmatically than syntagmatically.¹⁴

Katia Zakharia offers a comparable perspective, noting:

[Il] est non seulement une collection (dont chaque *maqāma* est un piece) mais également une structure (dont chaque *maqāma* est un element organisateur).¹⁵

To describe this simultaneous condition of separation and union through themes in his seminal article on the *maqāmāt*, Abdelfattah Kilito defines it with the term “palimpsest”:

A quoi renvoient ces allusions? Aux discours antérieurs. Ceux-ci sont mimés, représentés; palimpseste sur lequel le sens de ce fragment se surimprime. La lecture d'un texte particulier apparaît alors comme une sorte de plongée abyssale dans ce miroir sans fond qu'est la tradition poétique. La signification (la relation signifié/signifiant) ne suffit pas à elle seule à dégager le sens du mot poétique'. Ce dernier ne dégage toutes ses potentialités que par une association

¹⁴ David J. Roxburgh, “In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri’s *Maqāmāt*,” *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World*, no. 30 (2013): 191.

¹⁵ Zakharia, “Les références coraniques dans les *maqāmāt* d'al-Ḥariri : Éléments d'une Lecture Sémiologique,” 276.

avec d'autres mots du même domaine, qui se trouvent dans le contexte immédiate (voisinage sémantique) et dans l'ensemble des textes poétiques.¹⁶

The palimpsest encapsulates the condition of influence among stories within the genre, where narratives appear to be continuously echoed,¹⁷ forming part of a unified whole while also consisting of separate,¹⁸ independent units, as palimpsesting implies erasing the story that stays behind—"a chain of continuous overwriting."¹⁹ The term "palimpsest" presents the *maqāmāt* collection as a manifestation of layers of stories,²⁰ a process through which the stories are erased and rewritten, and through this process of rewriting related²¹ elements in the stories are emphasized. In a palimpsest, each *maqāmāh* contributes to the overarching narrative by leaving an imprint of its events or by adding shades to a mosaic of variations. This narrative technique is about the variation of the elements²² which are woven into the stories to clarify and corroborate threads in the general picture²³ which emerge through repetition.²⁴

Like "revision," the concept of the palimpsest balances the idea of absence with presence, erasure with revelation. Literally, a manuscript that has been erased

¹⁶ Abd al-Fattah Kilito, "Contribution à l'étude de l'écriture 'littéraire' Classique: L'exemple de Hariri," *Arabica* 25, no. 1 (1978): 28–29.

¹⁷ The *maqāma* is a literary genre that Philip Kennedy describes as a "literary cornucopia." See Philip F. Kennedy, "The *Maqāmāt* as a Nexus of Interests: Reflections on Abdelfattah Kilito's *Les séances*," in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons*, ed. Julia Bray (London: Routledge, 2006), 153. Leopold Jacobi emphasizes that this genre was intended to showcase the brilliance and wealth of the Arabic language through the use of images, metaphors, and wordplay, often drawing connections to the words of the Quran and employing intricate rhyming schemes without being bound to any particular meter: "den Glanz un den Reichtum der arabishe Sprache in Bildern, Gleichnissen am liebten um Anschlusse an die Worte des Koran, in Wortwitz und Wortspielen und in Kunstvoll verschlungen Reimen aufzuzeigen, ohne an irgend ein Versmaß gebunden zu sein." See: Leopold Jacoby, *Die deutsche Makame nach einem Vortrag gehalten zu Triest, im "Schillerverein"* (Zürich: Verlag von Caejar Schmidt, 1883), 3. Ailin Qian proposes the term prosimetrum to define the form of the *maqāma* between prose and poetry sections. See Ailin Qian, "The *Maqāmāh* as Prosimetrum: A Comparative Investigation of Its Origin Form and Function" (University of Pennsylvania, 2012).

¹⁸ Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2014), 4.

¹⁹ Syed Jamil Ahmed, "Mimicry and Counter-Discourse on the Palimpsest of Nagori: The Play of Saint Anthony and His Double, Sādhu Āntoni," *Asian Theatre Journal* 27, no. 1 (2010): 46.

²⁰ Dillon, *The Palimpsest*, 2.

²¹ Dillon, 2.

²² Shawqī Dayf, *Al-Maqāmāh* (Cairo: Dār al-ma 'ārif, 1973), 7.

²³ Abdelfattah Kilito, "Foreword: In Praise of Pretense," in *Impostures*, ed. Michael Cooperson (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 4.

²⁴ Daniel Beaumont, "A Mighty and Never Ending Affair: Comic Anecdote and Story in Medieval Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24, no. 2 (1993): 144.

and written over again, the palimpsest bears textual traces of its history as visible evidence of change. In poststructuralist criticism, the palimpsest is a marker of skepticism about the notion of origin and suggests the endless deferral of final and fixed meaning that lies at the heart of language.²⁵

The palimpsest narration of the *maqāmāt*, considered collectively, portrays a form of instability in which “the narrator can never grasp [the protagonist] stably,”²⁶ as Daniel Beaumont highlights, akin to Zeno’s paradox, where the arrow never meets the target.²⁷

In the palimpsestuous narration of *al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah*, this aspect gives shape to the themes of diaspora,²⁸ traveling, and belonging as embedded in the *maqāmāt*. The framework fragments this theme into disparate emotional experiences depicted in the text as variations and refractions that emerge in the spatial perception of the characters of the stories. This fragmented discourse, made up of still images capturing variations in the perception of travel, space, and belonging, brings together a cultural discourse of space, with the story of al-Ḥarīrī piecing together a coherent whole. The subsequent section aims to put together the dispersed contradictory fragments of this discourse found across fifty palimpsests. Through the reassembly of this puzzle, it is argued that an initial nostalgia surfaces in various forms, ultimately transitioning towards a form of settlement in India where the traveler came to perceive it as a new potential homeland.

TWO ENTANGLED STORIES: THE ḤARĪRĪAN MAQĀMAH AND THE HADRAMI DIASPORA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The narrative commences with a preface from the author, wherein he suggests a significant connection between the implied author and his intradiegetic narrator. Both travelled from Yemen to India in search of fortune. In the introduction, Bā‘Abbūd affirms that he started to compose his work after he had left his *waṭan*, a realm of plenty and paradisiacal existence.²⁹ Becoming a foreigner is described as being struck by an arrow, a deadly misfortune:

²⁵ Susan Watkins, “‘Grande Dame’ or ‘New Woman’: Doris Lessing and the Palimpsest,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 17, no. 3–4 (December 2006): 243–62.

²⁶ Kennedy, *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition: Discovery, Deliverance and Delusion*, 295.

²⁷ Beaumont, “A Mighty and Never Ending Affair,” 144.

²⁸ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, The California World History Library 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 9.

²⁹ Brigitte Foulon, “Le « chez Soi » dans la culture arabe archaïque et classique,” in *Tropics of Travel*, ed. Frédéric Bauden (Homes: Peeters, 2015), 64.

خادم خدام الحديث النبوي السيد أبو بكر بن محسن با عبود الحسيني العلوي لما رماني البين بسهام الاغتراب
وفارق بيني وبين الوطن والأحباب خرجت ذات يوم بعد صلاة العصر إلى منتزه مع لبعض أدباء العصر
واستصحبت معي المقامات الحريرية والنوابغ والمقامات الزينية³⁰

The servant of the servants of the prophetic hadeeth the sayyid Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin Bā ‘Abbūd al-Ḥusaynī al-‘Alawī said: when I was struck by the dart of estrangement and was separated from the *waṭan* and from the beloved, that day I went out after the *al-‘aṣr* prayer to go to some garden with some scholars of the time keeping us company with the *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Nawābiḡh* and *al-Maqāmāt al-zayniyyah*.

The term *ightirāb*, meaning estrangement, implies more than just leaving one’s *waṭan*; it reflects not merely expatriation but also the departure from the home of one’s family to seek opportunities elsewhere.³¹ This facet is initially hidden, with the motivation for travel purportedly stemming from the desire to uncover something beautiful in the first *maqāmah*. Al-Nāṣir b. Fattāḥ expresses his desire to travel after having a conversation with some friends in Yemen.³² This fascination is attributed to the destination’s extraordinary characteristics and its esteemed, almost mythical, reputation. Bā ‘Abbūd’s narrative follows the Ḥarīrīan *maqāmah* by linking travel with the pursuit of knowledge and encounters with scholars and poets (‘*ālim*). For al-Nāṣir b. Fattāḥ, the impetus for the journey is broadly driven by beauty, be it in literature, art, commerce, the allure of beautiful women,³³ or the pursuit of entertainment, all of which render a specific location in India irresistibly appealing.³⁴

Al-Nāṣir than makes it clear that the motivation for travel was influenced by more than just the desire to see beautiful places; it was driven by the search for a setting where one could feel better, echoing the adage that affluence and well-being in exile (or the site of estrangement *ghurbah*) were preferable to poverty and hardship in the *waṭan*.³⁵ This viewpoint is highlighted by an elderly man encountered by al-Nāṣir, who offers a kind of generalization about travelers in the subcontinent.³⁶

³⁰ Abū Bakr b. Muḥsin Bā ‘Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-naẓariyya*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ḥibshī (Abu Dhabi: Al-Majma ‘al-thaqāfi, 1999), 20.

³¹ Yaseen Noorani, “Estrangement and Selfhood in the Classical Concept of *Waṭan*,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, no. 1–2 (2016): 19.

³² Bā ‘Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-naẓariyyah*, 25.

³³ Bā ‘Abbūd, 205.

³⁴ Bā ‘Abbūd, 89.

³⁵ Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22.

³⁶ Antrim, 23.

اعلم أن الذين يخرجون من أرضه في كل عام على ثلاثة أقسام منهم من حَكَمَت عليه المقادير بلبس الصوف بعد لبس الحرير وبشرب الحَمَاءُ وأكل الشعير بعد أكل الحواري باللحم وشرب الماء النمير ومنهم من سَوَلَّت له نفسه الأمانة بأن في الاغتراب الرِّيح والتجارة ومنهم من نزع به شيطانه وامتدت في الغي أشطانه فنفاه الكبير والصغير والسادة والعبيد لأن أرضهم تَنفِي الخبث كما تنقي النارُ حَبْث الحديد³⁷

Know that those who wander from their birthplace each year can be divided into three distinct groups. Firstly, there are those whom destiny has ordered to wear wool after having wearied silk, and drink mud and eat barley after having drunk clear waters and meats. Secondly, there are those who embark on their journeys of their own accord, lured by the promise of wealth and commerce. And finally, there are those whose travels are spurred by a malevolent entity, a personal demon that has ensnared their hearts and minds. Whether they be mighty great or humble, the rulers and the strangers all have been forced to flee because their land banishes malevolence, such as fire and the taints of iron.

Traveling, as depicted in the narrative, oscillates between being perceived as a work-related activity and a form of punishment. The shaykh delineates two principal types of travelers: those who embark on journeys seeking pleasure or wealth, and those compelled to leave their homes due to economic or societal duress. The first category is often glamorized, replete with elaborate depictions of feasts and the conferment of sumptuous robes of honor. Yet, this romanticized image sharply contrasts with the reality of life as a merchant, marked by financial difficulties and adversity, far from a life of luxury and ease. Beyond the pursuits of pleasure and commerce, the *maqāmāt* explore a third cadre of travelers: those in exile, whether due to external forces or self-imposed, as retribution for misdeeds. This group is typically portrayed as having fallen out of favor at court, with their banishment signifying a breach of trust so severe it indicates that they are entwined with the devil's machinations. Central to the narrative is the character of Abū al-Ẓafar al-Hindī, the Ḥarīrīan trickster, who consistently emerges as a focal point of critique among the denizens of the subcontinent. His notoriety and the societal disapproval he incurs are encapsulated, for instance, in the following poem:

مسقط الرأس بفتنه وبها لم أخش فتنه

كنت فيها كمليك لم تَنِّ الأفكار منته

ففناني الدَّهر لَمَّا أسعط الأنفاس ننته³⁸

³⁷ Bā 'Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-naẓariyya*, 157.

³⁸ Bā 'Abbūd, 70.

The homeland is in Patna there I never feared distress.

The I was like a king and the thoughts did not consume power,

But destiny drove me away when the people sniffed fetor.

The text also employs symbolism to depict the perceived wickedness of certain characters, notably through the motif of filthiness, such as their offensive odor. Additionally, the *maqāmāt* genre illuminates the array of business opportunities accessible to travelers. This includes the possibility of securing a role as a soldier for a governor or king, showcasing the variety of avenues for financial and social advancement. The practice of begging is portrayed not merely as an act of desperation but as a form of business in its own right, further underscoring the myriad opportunities available to these itinerant individuals.

This depiction of travel as a necessity is also paired with the perspective that it is invariably undesirable. In the twenty-fourth *maqāmāh*, the inability of a king to prevent his subjects from migrating is highlighted as incontrovertible evidence of his failure as a ruler. During a gathering where the emir meets his officials and emirs, concealed behind a curtain, one of the emirs extols a legendary king from an unnamed territory as a paragon of leadership and prosperity. Al-Nāṣir remarks:

إن وصفك له بهذه الأوصاف يُشتمُّ منه رائحة الخلف فإننا نرى أكثر أهل بلاده يفارق الرجل منهم ما أحب من أهله وأولاده ولو كان في الأرض خصب وسعة ما اختار الفراق والدعة ولو خلصت نبيته ما تغرّبت رعيته³⁹

Your portrayal, with these characteristics, exudes the smell of contradiction. We observe men bidding farewell to what they hold dearest—their families and offspring. Had there been prosperity, they would not have elected to embrace separation and affability. Had his motives been sincere, his followers would not have been reduced to foreigners.

³⁹ Bā ‘Abbūd, 157.

BEING A FOREIGNER

This recurring theme of estrangement in the narrative serves to underscore the narrator's othering of space and being considered "other" in return. Upon encountering the narrator, the inhabitants of India frequently highlight his foreignness with the greeting *ahhala ghurbatī*, "He greeted my being a stranger." This foreignness is depicted as a condition marked by loneliness and distress. The narrator's experience of melancholy and discomfort catalyzes empathy towards others facing similar adversity. A poignant example is found in a *maqāmah* where al-Nāṣir b. Fattāh, having already dined, offers a meal to a traveler seeking comfort in the night as a gesture of companionship aimed to relieve the hardship of estrangement.

فقلت في نفسي إن هذا الوقت لا يطرق فيه الباب إلا أحد من الأحباب أو الأصحاب وخرجت بنفسي وقلت من هذا فقال غريب رمته الغربة في الأذى وأصاب عينه منها القذى وهو طالب للقوى والغدا فأخذته إلى سطح البيت وقدمت إليه طعاماً وأكلت معه مع إنني قد تعشيت⁴⁰

At this hour, only a cherished one or companion could rap upon the door, so I queried the visitor's identity. "I am a traveler," he replied, "tormented by the anguish of parting, my eyes stinging from a mote of dust, seeking solace and sustenance." So, I led him to the roof of my dwelling. I offered him a meal and shared it with him, despite having already appeased my own hunger.

Being *gharīb* is intertwined with nostalgia for a homeland—a nostalgia that inherently signifies longing for something lost. As Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh observe:

The dominant theme [...] is lost happiness. The strangers vent feelings of homesickness, lovesickness, longing for a happy past or better future, misery, anxiety, fear, and deep melancholia. Almost all blame their misfortunes on time (*al-zaman*, *al-ayyām*).⁴¹

This sense of empathy can also be exploited, as shown in a *maqāma* adapted from al-Ḥarīrī, where the trickster, Abū al-Zafar, manipulates these emotions to gain gifts. In the tenth *maqāma* Abū al-Zafar pretends that he had a son who died in the *ghurbah* and whom he did not have enough money to bury. The entire brigade is stirred by compassion upon hearing this tale, not primarily

⁴⁰ Bā 'Abbūd, 235.

⁴¹ Patricia Crone and Shamū 'il Mūrīh, *The Book of Strangers: Mediaeval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia*, Princeton Series on the Middle East (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2000), 9.

because of the demise of a young poet, but due to the fact that his death took place in exile, almost as if this state underscored that this young man had never experienced happiness. The author employs evocative language to capture the acute feelings of anxiety and discomfort associated with being *gharīb*. Phrases like “*ḍaqa ṣadrī, li- ‘adam al-anīs*” (my chest tightened from the lack of companionship) in the twenty-ninth *maqāmah* vividly convey the emotional suffocation that accompanies displacement and the yearning for the familiar comfort of home and friendship. This yearning embodies memories of the past and, occasionally, hopes for the future, but seldom represents a current reality.⁴² The pain associated with this condition of estrangement can only be mitigated through the companionship of others.

The *waṭan* is portrayed as a domain profoundly ingrained in an individual’s memory, envisioned as a constantly imagined space. The memory of home surfaces in the thirtieth *maqāmah*, where the trickster recalls in an assembly in a court a list of the best places according to some criterion (food, dressings, teaching...). Though it is not directly pivotal to the story, the trickster mentions a place in a valley, admitting that he has forgotten its name yet recalling the names of ‘Aydīd and Nā ‘īr. This enigmatic location is likely an allusion to one of Hadramaut’s valleys, which contain Tarīm or Būr, the last of which is identified by ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥībshī as Bā ‘Abbūd’s place of origin. The narrative’s allusion to Yemen is further emphasized through the portrayal of a Bedouin incursion into the valleys, a scene placed against the backdrop of the Indian Deccan but reminiscent of Hadramawt’s geography. Additionally, references to water scarcity and famine arguably allude to the reasons for migration. This place was deemed the best for religion, a facet that appears to hold significant importance for the author, positioning this locale as possessing the highest quality among the cities mentioned in this *maqāmah*. The hesitancy to recall its name indicates a reluctance to fully conjure the memory of a place from which separation remains a source of anguish.

Nostalgia is also emphasized in the forty-ninth *maqāmah*, which showcases characters that behave in unexpected ways within the genre’s⁴³ loose

⁴² Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 11–12.

⁴³ O. G. Bol’shakov and Andrey O. Bolshakov argue that the *maqāmah*, despite its sophisticated style, has more in common with farce than with high literature when its elaborate stylistic elements are removed. See O. G. Bol’shakov and Andrey O. Bolshakov, *Miniatures of the St. Petersburg Manuscript of the “Maqamat” of al-Hariri* (St. Petersburg: Slavica; Medina, 2018), 10. This perspective is echoed by David Roxburgh, who likens the *maqāma* to a shadow play, a reflection of the literary psychology inherent in popular tales. See Roxburgh, “In Pursuit of Shadows: Al-Hariri’s *Maqāmāt*,” 205–6. Similarly, Edmond Saussey contends that while the *maqāmah* is a highly refined literary form, it is rooted in the same literary psychology that underpins popular folk tales: “L’art des *maqāmat*, art très raffiné, mais procédant exactement de la même psychologie littéraire que les contes populaires.” See E. Saussey, “Ibrāhīm al-Māzīnī et son ‘Roman d’Ibrāhīm,’” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 2, no. 2 (1932): 162.

plot.⁴⁴ At the heart of this *maqāmah* is an enigmatic Persian king, a departure from the customary trickster protagonist. The narrative delves into the sovereign's profound feelings of alienation, which plunge him into deep melancholy. Seeking a remedy, he consults various physicians until a particularly esteemed doctor suggests finding solace in the contemplation of natural beauty and cheerful countenances. The king's despair is rooted in his observation that, while natural splendor abounds, there is a scarcity of beauty in the faces around him. This reflects more than the actual lack of beauty, which is described as being found all over India. Rather, it is the inability to see beauty of a *gharīb* suffering nostalgia for his homeland. From this perspective, India is depicted as a land unable to offer the king any comfort or joy in the visages of its inhabitants, underscoring his aversion to their presence. This sentiment is not unique but resonates with other narrators and tricksters throughout the narrative. His situation worsens when an army blocks his return to Persia, effectively trapping him in exile. Confronted by this obstacle, the king is compelled to engage in battle against his adversary, a seemingly reckless act considering his inferior numbers and resources. Relief comes to the prince through divine intervention, almost as a *deus ex machina*, where God, moved by the prince's distress, aids his forces and secures for him a miraculous and unforeseen victory.

THE PAIN OF TRAVELING

The text delves into the characteristics of travel, presenting the journey's inception as a mental state sparked by the enchantment with a specific locale, as conceived in the mind of an aspirant traveler. Al-Nāṣir b. Fattāḥ becomes captivated by a specific destination as a result of wondrous stories and affirmations from fellow travelers about a city. Bā 'Abbūd then describes the journey undertaken by al-Nāṣir b. Fattāḥ as notably arduous and tiring. This nuanced depiction highlights the complexity of travel, where the initial allure and excitement are tempered by the realities of hardship and exhaustion, offering a more grounded perspective on the experiences of the traveler. Following the dream of beauty, the narrator transitions into detailing the journey, portrayed as a laborious and challenging endeavor that imposes a significant burden on the traveler, leading to considerable discomfort.

⁴⁴ Yūsuf Nūr 'Awḍ, *Fann al-maqāmāt bayna al-mashriq wa al-maghrib* (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, 1979), 57.

فقيل لي إن أهل هذه المدينة يريدون أن يبعثوا إليها سفينة فاتخذت الأهبة وتَهَيَّأت لركوب مَرَكَبِ العُربَةِ
وتَوَكَّلْتُ على مالك الملك وَرَكِبْتُ في ذلك الفلْكَ ومنذ مُشِينَا من المراسي ونحن نُقَاسِي من الأهوال ما نقاسي
وحين خُفْنَا على ذهاب النُفوس لاح لنا بندر سورت المحروس⁴⁵

I heard that the folks in this town planned to send a ship out, so I quickly made preparations to join them. With a strong belief in the Almighty, I got on board the foreign vessel. The voyage was not without its challenges, passing through crowded ports and rough waters that filled me with anxiety. Our journey has taken us through bustling harbors and tumultuous seas, causing great unease in my heart. Yet, as we feared the detachment of our very souls, the well-fortified port of Surat finally came into view.

The text offers an in-depth exploration of the myriad forms of suffering encountered throughout the journey, encompassing various types of adversity such as extreme heat and cold, hunger, thirst, sleep deprivation, physical pain, grief, and even instances of madness.

سافرت إلى سنقمبر مع بعض الأقبال وكانت سفرتي من العثرات التي لا تقال لأن عيني لم تر فرحاً إلاً بنقطة
مزادة ولا خيراً إلاً بلا ياء ودونه خرط القتادة ولا بشرأ إلاً بلا باء ولا بشرأ إلاً لم يعرف حلاوة الآباء ولولا
حلاوة رمانها لفارقتها بَعْضاً لها ولولدانها⁴⁶

I went to Sangamner with some notables and my journey was one of bewildering discoveries which must not be told as my eyes saw no joy except with an extra dot, saw no good except without a *yā*—and it was not like touching a talus, neither joy but no *bā*’ and no man, but who had not known the sweetness of their parents, except the sweetness of their pomegranates since they were separated from their children.⁴⁷

This theme is reiterated in the text through proverbs like “*Inda al-ṣabāḥ yaḥmadu al-qawm al-surā*” (in the morning, the night’s journey is lauded), and “*dūna ijtinā’ al-naḥl ma janat al-naḥl*” (without the bees’ toil, there would be no honey),⁴⁸ encapsulating the idea that rewards are the fruits of enduring hardship. These remarks underscore the narrator’s heightened expectations, which in turn nourish his patience and endurance.

⁴⁵ Bā ‘Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-naẓariyyah*, 25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁴⁷ In this passage, Bā ‘Abbūd plays with the change in meaning of words by subtracting letters or adding dots to them. : *farḥah* joy therefore becomes *qarḥah* wound, *khayr* good therefore becomes *kharr* fall, *bishr* joy therefore becomes *shirr* which indicates evil.

⁴⁸ Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Al-Maydānī, *Majma‘a al-amṭāl*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-sunnah al-muḥammadiyyah, 1955), 2382.

After enduring significant hardships throughout his journey, the narrator, al-Nāṣir, ultimately arrives at his destination, finding his perseverance amply rewarded. He encounters the aspects of India he had anticipated and longed to witness. Within the *maqāmāt*, there is repeatedly a scene where the traveler extols the virtues of the city, an element that is not present in Ḥarīrī's *maqāma* and that is arguably reminiscent of travel writing. This segment seems to capture the traveler's fervor upon exploring a new place for the first time and his wonder at its marvels. For instance:

وقصّدت إلى آثارها واجتمعت بأخبارها ورأيتها جنة ذات أنهار وأشجار وجنة تقي البؤس والعار لم يجد أبو
 مرة سبباً إلى دخولها فضلاً عن سكاها وحلولها ثم خرجت إلى متنزّهاتها فحدثتني عن الخلد ولذاتها ومكثت
 بها زمناً وأنا في عيش رغيد وظل مديد وسعد يتجدد ويزيد⁴⁹

I aimed at its monuments and joined in the city's beauty. It resembled a verdant paradise, with flowing rivers and leafy trees sheltered by a sturdy armor against poverty and disgrace. Abū Murra found no allure to enter this haven, nor did he gain any favor with its residents. Afterwards, I explored its recreational spots and discovered the endless delight and merriment it offered. I lingered there, basking in the reassuring protection of its imposing fortifications, my happiness repeatedly amplified.

In Banaras, al-Nāṣir extols the city's architecture. He is captivated by the gardens, symbolic of the subcontinent's affluence, frequently found adjoining the villas of nobility. These spaces serve as venues for the elite to revel in poetry or convene assemblies for text readings. The city often emerges as a singular beacon of beauty encountered by the author after a series of trials faced on his journey, offering the narrator, despite his status as a beggar, a chance to momentarily relish a life devoid of financial constraints or the need for gifts. As he notes:

ثم مررت بقرية ذات أشجار وأثمار وحيطان وأنهار فأقمت بها عشرة أيام على عيش أهني من النوم في
 أجفان النيام⁵⁰

I passed a village with trees, fruits and rivers. I was there for ten days of a happier life than those who sleep in numb eyelids.

Yet this favorable depiction often turns out to be transient, abruptly transi-

⁴⁹ Bā 'Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-naẓariyyah*, 35.

⁵⁰ Bā 'Abbūd, 273.

tioning to a starkly negative and grim outlook that reveals a landscape tainted by ugliness and undesirable aspects. This phenomenon can also be interpreted as culturally significant in Arabic literature, stemming from the poetry of *ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān*, where longing for the homeland blinds those who yearn from seeing any goodness in exile.⁵¹ This initial optimism fades when the traveler faces failures in achieving success or happiness, leading to a disillusioned perspective on the once-idealized space. Bā ‘Abbūd presents the narrator’s shock upon discovering that the city is afflicted with poverty, filth, moral decay, and the absence of virtuous people. He suffers from the lack of his homeland and at the same time he is in a territory that offers him conditions that are, if not worse, equal to those he enjoyed at home. At times, these adverse conditions are attributed to economic downturns caused by famine or plagues of grasshoppers and locusts.⁵² This stark change in the narrator’s viewpoint reflects a deep disillusionment, as the encountered reality sharply diverges from his prior expectations. The adverse portrayal of the city may imply a deep-seated desire to leave. Nevertheless, the narrator finds himself trapped in a foreign milieu, mired in poverty and unable to realize his wish to depart. In this context, begging is depicted differently from its portrayal in Ḥarīrī’s *maqāmah*, not just as a vocation for the narrator but as a vital necessity, spurred by the urgent need to gather resources for travel and escape. For example, after leaving a garden in the city of Surat in the first *maqāmah*, al-Nāṣir and Abū al-Ẓafar reach a small village:

ولم أزل مرخياً للزمام إلى أن لاحت لي الخيام فسررت بقدمي عليها ووصولي إليها ثم تأملتُها بعد أن دخلتها
فإذا بيوتها أقباص وحيطانها أخصاص أكثر سكانها نزائل وأخبارها قلائل⁵³

I kept the reins slack as the curtains came into sight. The people rejoiced at my presence. Stepping inside, my eyes took in the surroundings and behold, I beheld a city of shacks and makeshift homes. The unfortunate people were many, while the affluent were but a scarce few.

In another narrative, the narrator becomes ill as soon as he arrives in a place, perceiving the urban space as abject, characterized by dirt, pollution, and famine. The negative dimension of cities is constantly present in the form of dirt, especially in the medina and in the market. We find examples of filth, for example, in the description of Bengal.

⁵¹ Bilal Orfali and Huda Fakhreddine, “Against Cities: On Hijā’ al-Mudun in Arabic Poetry,” in *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Nizar F. Hermes and Gretchen Head (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 39.

⁵² Bā ‘Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-naṣariyyah*, 223.

⁵³ Bā ‘Abbūd, 26.

سافرت إلى بنكالة وكانت عشرة لا يقبل منها إقالة لأسون مائها وتعفن هوائها⁵⁴

I travelled to Bengal and it was a fall from which there was no reviving for its rotten waters and putrefied air.

Occasionally, the adverse circumstances depicted are tied to economic strife, such as famine or devastating infestations of locusts.⁵⁵ Moreover, physical squalor serves as a metaphor for the moral corruption pervasive within these settings, as reflected in the narrator's sweeping assessments of immorality and depravity. Upon reaching Hyderabad, the narrator presents a direct *hijā'* (lampooning) of the city:

لم أزل أجوب الفَيَافِي والبراري وأقطع البحار على متون الجواري حتى وصلت حيدرآباد معدن الفساد⁵⁶

I sailed the seas on ships. Eventually, I arrived in Hyderabad, a hotbed of vice and corruption.

The traveler's negative views are also inflected as manifestations of divine disapproval concerning the land's populace, manifested through natural disasters and ominous signs that allude to apocalyptic scenarios to punish them. Among these signs are destructive storms and lightning strikes that obliterate buildings and entire cities.⁵⁷ This apprehension of impending divine fury is notably illustrated by an incident in *Zafar Ābād* where lightning strikes a madrasa, as if God was not satisfied with the men of religion of India,⁵⁸ compelling the narrator and many others to seek sanctuary within a Sufi shrine. Consequently, the journey transcends mere flight from physical degradation, morphing into an escape from a realm marred by sin and the moral decay of its inhabitants. The narrator fears an unjust punishment from God merely for his presence in such cities. There, they pray for divine intercession and protection against what they perceive as the impending apocalypse, embodying the profound sense of dread and the quest for salvation that permeates their experience. This aspect of India's impending doomsday justifies the text's aim

⁵⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁵ Michelle M. Hamilton, "'Words Sweeter than Honey': The Go-between in al-Saraqūṣī's 'Maqāma 9,'" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34, no. 1/2 (2003): 206.

⁵⁶ Bā 'Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-nazariyyah*, 51.

⁵⁷ See Negri, "Representations of Death in *al-Maqāmāt al-Hindiyya*," 41; Negri, "The Narration of the Maqāmāt," 103.

⁵⁸ Bā 'Abbūd, *al-Maqāmāt al-nazariyyah*, 223.

to reform the religious practices of Indian Muslims. The motif of social and religious critique is evident in the narrator's disapproval or parody of Indian religious practices in Islam and Hinduism. These are depicted as facades for charlatans who exploit the faithful for personal gain, enriching deceitful Sufi leaders through unscrupulous donations. For instance, Sufism is scrutinized through a narrative in which the protagonist fabricates a shrine over a buried dog, claiming sanctity to falsely amass wealth. Shia Islam is criticized for its allowance of temporary marriage, while Hinduism is portrayed as harboring immoral cults engaged in debauched rituals.⁵⁹

TAWĀTTUN AND THE TRANSFERABILITY OF WAṬĀN

The narrative journey through India unfolds through a kaleidoscope of images and perspectives, shifting from the idyllic to the nightmarish, from the paradisiacal to the infernal, and from a divinely favored to an apocalyptic landscape. In *al-Maqāmāt al-hindiyyah*, the author presents different depictions of the Indian subcontinent, influenced by varying senses of belonging. The change of perception is arguably due to a view of *waṭān* as a “territorial attachment that is transferable over the course of a lifetime,”⁶⁰ suggesting that the longing for the lost original *waṭān* could end as soon as a suitable new place to stay can be found. Bā ‘Abbūd arguably presents a perception of India that leans towards a marked appreciation, implying a view of India as a *waṭān* of al-Nāṣir b. al-Fattāḥ. In certain segments, the protagonist's perspective shifts from that of a mere traveler to that of a resident who has acclimatized to his new surroundings, recognizing the complexity of an environment that defies binary categorization as purely evil or purely good. His admiration extends to notable figures, monuments, and institutions, including Malik ‘Ambar (1548–1626), Aurangzeb (1618–1707), the Gwalior fort, and the region's courts, but also comprises an appreciation of the people of India as they are.

أعجب ما رأيت بدت لي امرأة تصلي ومن عجائب الزمان امرأة بلاهور تقرأ القرآن ورأيت بالمكن رجلين
اختصما بغير حق وصار بينهما مناقشة ورأيت ببيجافور امرأة متظاهرة بالفاحشة ورأيت رجلاً من أهل تنه
يمشي في الفلاة وقد ترك الصلاة ورأيت امرأة طائعة لزوجها بشاهجهان أباد ورأيت بها رجلين اصطحبا لله

⁵⁹ In the forty-fourth *maqāmah*, Bā ‘Abbūd describes a cultural or religious ritual in which a group of Indian men and women convene in a sort of nocturnal gathering that culminates in an orgy. During this event, flour is scattered on the ground and subsequently kneaded into bread at the orgy's conclusion, a bread Bā ‘Abbūd claims was believed to possess special virtues.

⁶⁰ Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 22.

ولم يحصل بينهما فساد ورأيت بالهند رجلاً يحبّ العربَ ويطعم الأضياف ورجل يميل إلى العدل والإنصاف وسائلاً يسأل باسم أبي بكر وعمر وفقيراً يمدح من يأمر بالمعروف وينهي عن المنكر ورجلاً قد وُضِع وراء أذنه السواك وآخر في حال دخوله الصلاة يستاك ورجلاً لا يعتقد تأثير الكواكب والأفلاك وامرأة تعتقد تحريم الزنا وشاباً يعتقد جرمة الخمر والنطق بالخنا وعجوزاً تعتقد وجوب صيام رمضان وشاباً تعتقد حرمة النظر إلى الشبان وشيخاً يقول تعس من أخذ مال الغير بغير حق وآخر يقول خاب من كذب وأفلح من صدق ، ورأيت بأرض الراجبوت بقرة تدبح ورأيت بها رجلاً دخل السوق وهلل وسبّ⁶¹

I saw many things. A woman deep in prayer in Lahore left me in awe. In Deccan, two men brawled while in Bijapur, a woman felt shame. A man in the desert had forgotten his prayers, but in Shahjahanabad, I met a woman who dutifully obeyed her husband. Two men in the same place shared a pure friendship untainted by corruption. In India, I met a generous man who loved Arabs and worked towards justice and equality, invoking Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. I encountered pious faqirs who praised good and condemned evil, one who wore a twig of salvadora persica and another who brushed his teeth before prayer. A woman believed in the prohibition of adultery, and a boy avoided bad words and alcohol. An old woman fasted during Ramadan, while a young girl avoided looking at men. An elder preached, “He who takes what’s not his own is wretched,” and, “Liars don’t succeed; truth-tellers do.” In Rajput, a cow was slaughtered, and a man in the market praised God. These were the sights that stayed with me. I saw in the land of Rajput the slaughter of a cow, and in the marketplace, a man strode in, shouting “There is no god but God” and “Glory to God.”

Furthermore, within the text, the concept of finding a new homeland and no longer being a *gharīb* appears to be explicitly connected with the notion of finding a wife and establishing a family. In the text, Bā ‘Abbūd highlights his admiration for the women of the subcontinent in multiple passages, praising their beauty, wisdom, and religiosity and often seeing them as desirable spouses. Abū al-Ẓafar and al-Nāṣir see in marriage a solution to *ghurbah* in the thirty-eighth *maqāmah*. He expresses his desire for a wife as a remedy for his *ghurbah*, which had caused him great distress, prompting al-Nāṣir b. al-Fattāh to assist him in this endeavor. The text also conveys a sense of idealism regarding the image of the family, portraying it as an aspirational and desirable entity. Abū al-Ẓafar is presented as being blessed by having family with an Indian woman, with whom he has several children and who functions as a symbol of fertility and prosperity. Assuming this was the same woman, in the forty-third *maqāmah* Abū al-Ẓafar married her after rescuing her from the ritual fire intended for Indian widows. Like a valiant knight, Abū al-Ẓafar braved danger to save the woman from the flames,

⁶¹ Bā ‘Abbūd, *Al-Maqāmāt al-nazariyyah*, 262.

fleeing with her on horseback from her pursuing family. She is then introduced to Islam, which she embraces with enthusiasm. This admiration for the women of the subcontinent is also highlighted by the story of a group of Hindu women being converted to Islam in the thirty-seventh *maqāmah*. No Indian men convert to Islam, and nor is there any clear effort by any character to convert other people.

CONCLUSIONS

Viewing the *maqāmah* through the lens of a palimpsest reveals a representation of themes that evolves through refractions and iterations. The theme of travel thus does not adhere to an ordered sequence, and its coherence can arguably only emerge from an examination of the fragments composing the variations on a theme in the repetition of the stories. In a departure from the traditional *maqāmah* plot structure, Bā ‘Abbūd’s narrative journey within the *maqāmah* unfolds through the traveler’s evolving emotional landscapes, intricately depicted across a succession of narrative palimpsests. These overlapping layers of narrative allow for a reimagining and reiteration of al-Ḥarīrī’s tales, integrating the diverse experiences of a Yemeni traveler in the Indian subcontinent. Bā ‘Abbūd’s *maqāmah* portrays travel to India as an experience rich with multifaceted meanings that surface through the process of dismantling prior interpretations and introducing new ones. The text delves into the narrator’s spatial explorations, potentially mirroring the author’s own diasporic experiences in India. It juxtaposes the themes of al-Ḥarīrī’s archetypal traveler with those of a more realistic figure, who encounters foreign environments marked by trauma. Memories emerge sporadically from the depths of the protagonist’s past, compelling the author to deconstruct and reassemble the narrative in search of alternate outcomes. Nonetheless, the story remains inherently fragmented and disjointed, demanding continuous revision and reinterpretation.

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