Chapter VIII

The Illustrated *Maqamat* of the Thirteenth Century: the Bourgeoisie and the Arts*[1]

It is only too rarely that evidence provided by the arts other than architecture is used for the study of a social or geographical problem such as that of the city. It is even rarer that a historian of art be led, during the investigation of documents like miniatures, which seem to be meant primarily for aesthetic appreciation, to problems of possible consequence to social history. However, the preparation of what is expected to be a complete corpus with commentaries of the illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri has led me to a series of questions which go beyond technical problems of stylistic and iconographic analyses or of relationships between manuscripts; and, as I will attempt to show, some of these questions are central to the problem of the colloquium, for they may permit the definition of certain intellectual and historical coordinates of a precisely identifiable segment of a city's population. In other words, this paper starts from a methodological premise which is quite different from the premises of most papers presented at the colloquium. Instead of beginning with some specific urban center or with some institution or problem which can be assumed to have existed in the Muslim city, the series of investigations which led to the foregoing remarks began with an attempt to solve in traditional techniques of the history of art a classic type of problem, i.e. the identification of the meaning of a body of images. But it soon became apparent, in the course of our investigations, that the illustrated *Maqamat* can also be seen as a rather curious document on the *taste* of their time and [208] that this taste

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leads us directly into the problem of the intellectual and spiritual configuration of the urban order of Islam in the Middle Ages.

The very fact of the existence of illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat* raises three central questions which may serve to focus more clearly their documentary significance or what Max van Berchem would have called their "archaeological index."

The first one is that of the actual reasons for their creation. For, while it is true that al-Hariri picked his stories from a vast store of literary and folk sources, the central characteristic of his work and the principal reason for its success was its purely artificial, even if at times fascinating, "acrobatie verbale," as it has recently been called by Professor Blachère.[2] Examples of this are familiar to all Arabists, but for our purposes their central significance is that almost by definition these linguistic pyrotechnics cannot be illustrated. Hence, in almost all instances, the illustrations are dealing with the frame of events which serves as an excuse for speeches, poems, artful descriptions, puns, and the like. The extent of this frame varies from story to story, at times considerably; yet it is also true that, if we except half a dozen involved narratives, the general feeling for a reader is one of contrived repetitiousness. It is clear that the function of the events which were illustrated is secondary to the point of the book or at least to the reasons for its success. We have thus a paradox of illustrations which at first glance miss the most significant aspect of the book they illustrate. It would not be farfetched to suggest that there is as much outward need to illustrate the *Maqamat* as there is to illustrate a Platonic dialogue. In both cases there is a cast of personages and an audience; stories or adventures may be told or related, but these bear comparatively little relation to the main purpose of the work.

The few instances in which an illustrator of the *Maqamat* attempted to go beyond the simple story and to depict a more abstract idea or a more complex emotion are usually failures in the sense that the image by itself fails to convey its purpose without thorough awareness on the part of the viewer of details of the text. To give but one instance, fol. 6v of the so-called Schefer *Maqamat* illustrates the departure of Abu Zayd in the second *maqama* from the crowd he has just entertained: "then he rose and departed from his place, and carried away our hearts with him" (Fig. 1). All that appears on the miniature is al-Harith and a group of seated personages showing with the gestures of their hands and, in spite of retouches, with their facial expressions, their sorrow at the departure of an invisible Abu Zayd. The open composition is rather daring for a [209] medieval miniature, but the point is that an image with a limited attempt at expressing an emotion does not automatically identify itself visually as an illustration of the precise passage it illustrates. Furthermore, its specific depiction of sorrow is weak because no ready-made

2   R. Blachère and P. Masnou, *Al-Hamadani, Choix de Maqamat* (Paris, 1957), p. 46.

1   Abu Zayd departing. Paris, arabe 5847

and understandable visual language existed for this purpose, as it did for instance in a Christian Pietà; elsewhere the same gestures and facial features express a different emotion: surprise, for instance. If as simple a subject and one as close to the narrative as this one finds it difficult to project its specific meaning, how much more unlikely is it that the more abstract values of the book as a whole could have been translated into images?

Therefore some reason must exist for the development of *Maqamat* illustrations which is to a degree independent of the reasons for the actual success of al-Hariri's masterpiece, a success which was by its very nature different from that of *Kalila and Dimna* or of the *Shahname* where, regardless of the moral or esoteric meanings given to stories or heroes, an element of purely narrative entertainment always existed. Some explanation must clearly be found for the *fact* of the existence of these particular cycles of images.

A second problem posed by the illustrations of the *Maqamat* is chrono-logical. Of the twelve known manuscripts, eleven were made within about 120 years. The earliest dated one is 1222 and the latest 1337.[3] Of these

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[3]   A complete and up-to-date list with a discussion of each manuscript will be found in D. S. Rice, "The oldest illustrated Arabic manuscript," *BSOAS*, 22 (1959), p. 215. To these should be added the manuscript discovered by R. Ettinghausen and published by O. Grabar, "A newly discovered manuscript," *Ars Orientalis*, 5 (1963).

manuscripts four are fourteenth century and can be shown to have a primarily derivative illustration, i.e. one based on earlier models. The six thirteenth-century manuscripts,[4] on the other hand, do not show obvious earlier models, at least not at first glance, and we may properly conclude that *prima facie* the illustration of the *Maqamat* is a phenomenon which grew in the first half of the thirteenth century. Although it is dangerous to judge from negative evidence, the point is strengthened by the fact that a number of twelfth-century manuscripts of the work are known, including two dated before al-Hariri's death, and none shows any sign of having been illustrated. It seems likely therefore that we are dealing with a fairly precisely definable moment of time. Its upward limit is the second half of the fourteenth century when there occurred a general decline in artistic creativity within the Arab world. Its lower limit may be put around 1200 [210] and some explanation must be found for the apparently sudden popularity of illustrations of the book about 100 years after its appearance as one of the most spectacular best-sellers of the medieval world.

The third problem is somewhat more complex to define. We may establish as a premise that the appreciation and appeal of a book of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* was limited to a highly literate Arab milieu.[5] Because of the presumption of elevated literary interest and because of the inherent financial investment involved in an illustrated book, this milieu may be, at least hypothetically, defined as that of the mercantile, artisanal and scholarly bourgeoisie of the larger Arabic-speaking cities. Thus the illustrations depict an element of the taste of a comparatively limited social stratum within the urban setting. And the problem then is: how did this particular Arab milieu create an imagery? In other words, what components went into the making of a visual language whose meaningfulness in its time we must as a working hypothesis at least assume? A definition of the language can on the other hand provide us with a unique instance of what may be called a self-view as well as a world-view of the literate Arab world of the thirteenth century.

Such then are the questions which are raised by the mere existence of illustrations to the *Maqamat*. The answers to them have to be sought almost entirely within the manuscripts themselves, since to my knowledge there is no outside literary source which even acknowledges the existence of these images, while such sources do exist for the book of *Kalila and Dimna* or for

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4   These are three manuscripts in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale arabe 3929, 5847, 6094), one in Leningrad (Academy of Sciences S 23), one in Istanbul (Süleymaniye, Esad Efendi 2916), and one in London (British Museum, oriental 1200).

5   The very Arab character of the audience can be shown, for instance, in the transformation of the preserved frontispieces of one of the manuscripts (Paris 5847) from the usual princely subject matter to a depiction of a group of personages listening to a story. For a description and discussion (but with a somewhat different interpretation), see R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1962), pp. 110–15.

the *Shahname*.[6] The methods which I have followed are essentially an attempt
to adapt certain practices developed in linguistics or ethnography by which
one tries first to define the *structure* of the images in describing and explaining
in as much detail as possible every element which appears in the 800-odd
known illustrations. Then a first synthesis is put together in which the
general characteristics of the visual language are identified and these are then
related to other artistic traditions in order to make up what may be called
the dialectal position of the *Maqamat* [211] miniatures within contemporary
Islamic art as well as within other traditions of medieval Mediterranean art.

Since much of this work is still unfinished and many of its aspects
concern technical problems of the history of art such as the identification of
meaningful forms, the nature of narrative illustration, the relationship between
pre-established typological models and specific needs of the text, and the
internal characteristics of individual manuscripts, what I propose to do here
is to concentrate on three separate questions which are particularly pertinent
to the subject of the colloquium: (1) Can one define, from the miniatures,
the ways in which the bourgeois milieu for which the pictures were made
saw the city? (2) Is the art of the *Maqamat* the only available evidence of an
art of the bourgeoisie? (3) Can one determine the ways in which this artistic
tradition formed itself from other traditions of images? In conclusion I shall
try to suggest an explanation for the existence of this unusual cycle of
illustrations and ask a question which I am unable at the moment to answer.

To answer our first question, that of the way in which the artist of the
Maqamat saw the city, the images provide us with three elements: landscape
and natural setting, architecture, personages. There is not much to glean
out of the first element, since it can be shown that almost all features of
natural landscape are part of an artificial convention probably belonging
to a general vocabulary of Mediterranean origin used almost exclusively
for compositional purposes. It would seem, on the whole, that the milieu
with which we are dealing did not go out to look at nature or for that
matter at the animal world for its own sake. The few instances to the
contrary are either small details, probably part of otherwise definable
iconographic entities, or quite unusual, such as the celebrated drove of
camels in the Schefer manuscript.[7]

The representation of architecture, on the other hand, suggests far more
interesting conclusions. The three major manuscripts of the thirteenth century
– one in Paris (5847), one in Istanbul, and one in Leningrad – have developed
three more or less standardized architectural settings which occur throughout

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6   For *Kalila and Dimna*, see, for instance, the celebrated text discussed by T. Arnold,
     Painting in Islam (reprinted edition, New York, 1965), p. 26. For the *Shahname*, the
     matter still awaits full elucidation, but the presumption of illustrated manuscripts is
     suggested by such objects as the Freer Gallery goblet, G. D. Guest, "Notes on the
     Miniatures on a thirteenth century beaker," *Ars Islamica*, 10 (1943).
7   Illustrated quite often, lastly in Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 117.

with only minor variations from one miniature to the other, although more significant ones from one manuscript to another.

The first type may be broadly called the *house* type. At its most common it occurs in the Leningrad manuscript and shows usually a large central area covered with a wooden conical dome which can be opened up by having a section of the dome rolled to the side or by folding up mats set [212] over a wooden frame. This house also has chimneys for ventilation which can be turned in different directions, a stairway also used as a cooling place for water jars, and a heavy door with knockers generally sculpted. In most instances there is also a second floor, but it is rarely depicted. Details of internal arrangements are few and usually only brought in when required by the text. Altogether this general type is an artificial combination of features which can be assumed to identify a bourgeois *dar* in the city[8] (Fig. 2).

The second general type is that of the mosque. Variations occur here fairly often in the degree of elaboration but the most common system includes a *riwaq*, a *mihrab*, a *minbar*, at times a sort of *maqsura* railing, a dome on the axis of the building, and more rarely a minaret. Additional details of construction are found occasionally, but as a rule they do not alter the basic type, which is essentially that of the early Islamic hypostyle mosque and not the new centrally planned *iwan*-mosques or dome-mosques spreading from Iran in the twelfth century[9] (Fig. 3).

The third general type is of lesser significance to our purpose here but I shall mention it because it is a particularly fascinating one and because its origins still puzzle me. It is the type of the caravan at rest and its most remarkable utilization is found in the Leningrad manuscript. There, almost always regardless of the precise needs of the story, we find the same groups of tents: large square ones, circular ones, and an ubiquitous small blue and white tent-like object, which it is tempting to interpret as a *mahmal* or as a *markab*,[10] in which case we could formulate the hypothesis that it is the specific practice of the pilgrimage that created the general type for the depiction of the caravan. It should be added, however, that the tent type shows greater variations from manuscript to manuscript than the house type and that any final conclusions about its origin and significance must await a more complete analysis than can be made here.

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8   For typical examples, see ibid., pp. 105, 107, 113 (unfortunately the examples shown here had to be chosen on the basis of aesthetic merit as well as state of preservation and do not show all the characteristic features of the house); Grabar, "A newly discovered manuscript," figs 1, 7, 37, 41. (Fig. 7 is reproduced here as Fig. 2.)

9   For examples see Grabar, figs 20, 23, 42. (Fig. 20 = Fig. 3 here.)

10   Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 112. Exceptions occur either in such cases when a specifically Bedouin setting is required (ibid., p. 111) and the traditional wide and low black tent appears, or when, in the 26th *maqama*, the tent is supposed to be a luxurious one and a princely model is used (Grabar, fig. 17 for the only published example; p. 101).

2   House. Istanbul manuscript

However interesting each of these three types may be in identifying some aspects of the material setting of the thirteenth-century world as seen by the Arab bourgeoisie, it is dangerous to go too far in utilizing them as [213] historical documents because to a degree they were iconographic types whose compositional significance as settings for a precise subject matter often overshadowed any attempt at verisimilitude. What is more significant is to relate the type to incidents or settings required by the text or to note exceptional compositions of architecture.

3   Mosque.
Istanbul
manuscript

It may be noted first of all that what I have called the house type is not limited in its use to instances when the text requires a private dwelling. It is particularly interesting to note that it occurs consistently as an illustration of the courts of the *qadi* and of various officials, *walis* or heads of *diwans*, in front of whom Abu Zayd has occasion to perform. In other words – at least within the precise optical system with which we are involved – there does not seem to be an identifiable architectural vision of the publicly accessible official building, or else we should assume that these institutions did not have an architecturally identifiable setting different from the house. Such is likely to be the case for the school which forms the setting of the forty-sixth

maqama; it is architecturally undistinguishable from the house type and, like the court of the judge or of the governor, it is only identified by the actions which take place within it.

This point acquires its full significance, however, when it is related to the fact that certain other kinds of buildings were clearly and systematically shown as different. The most obvious instance occurs in the twenty-ninth *maqama* where all manuscripts without exception have introduced an architectural construction identifiable by its monumental proportions, two superimposed floors with rooms opening on a balcony, an exterior stairway, in one instance a well.[11] It is a *khan* and it may be worthwhile mentioning that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are the first centuries for which we have clear architectural evidence of the existence of superb new caravanserais from Iran to Anatolia and Syria (Fig. 4).

A second modification of the architectural norm occurs in representations of the *suq*, of markets in general. In the forty-seventh *maqama*, the celebrated representation of the barbershop-cupping place shows a very small narrow building around which a crowd has gathered.[12] In the fifteenth *maqama* the shop of a seller of milk and dates is also shown suddenly as a small opening cut out of a wall and, in the Istanbul manuscript, it even appears in a unique profile elevation.[13] It seems clear that there was an original visual expression of the small shops in narrow covered streets which characterized the mercantile context: one may mention the slave-[214]market, which in two manuscripts is shown with a wooden architecture and a tiled roof quite different from other types of roofs,[14] and the representation of a tavern in the Leningrad manuscript. In the same context of a unique imagery dealing with a precise urban feature one should mention the well-known series of cemeteries discussed by the late D. S. Rice.[15]

A unique type of architectural background is provided in the illustrations of the forty-third *maqama.* There, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the illustrators of the three principal manuscripts decided to represent a panorama of a small village characterized in the text as a Boeotian village of stupid people. Two manuscripts, and especially the Schefer one, used the opportunity to give us a curious glimpse of the simpler people of a small town as they appeared to the large city's visitor: small houses and shops, pools of water, a few primitive activities like spinning, the silhouette of a mosque on the unusual central domical plan and not the proper traditional hypostyle one, and especially a mass of animals everywhere.[16] The very originality of this image testifies to its meaningful character as a document (Fig. 5).

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[11]   Grabar, fig. 21; E. Blochet, *Musulman Painting* (London, 1929), pl. XXX (= Fig. 4 here).
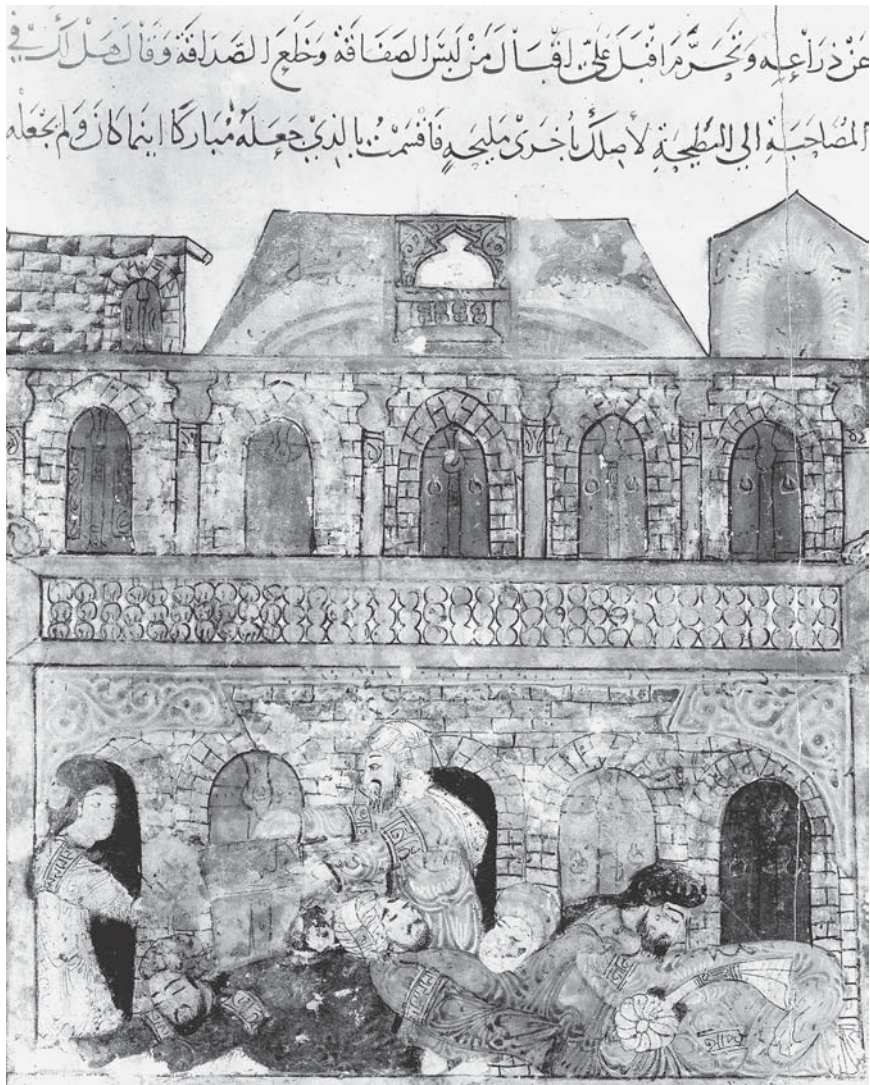[12]   Grabar, fig. 39.
[13]   Grabar, fig. 8.
[14]   Blochet, *Musulman Painting*, pl. XXVII.
[15]   Above, note 3.
[16]   Ettinghausen, p. 116 (= Fig. 5 here); Grabar, figs 33–4 and pp. 105–106.

4   Khan. Paris,
arabe 5847

عند ذراعيه ونحرم ونخر على لقا... من لبس الصفاقة وظع للصدقة وقا ... ...
المصاحبة الى المطبخة لاصلك باخرى مليحة فأقمت بالذى جعله مباركا اينما كان ولم يجعله

Finally, an original architecture occurs in the representation of a mysterious palace in a far-away island as illustrated in the thirty-ninth *maqama.* Projecting balconies, high walls, highly decorated exteriors and a garden illustrate an idealized vision of a palace, like a sort of kiosk for which we have evidence in texts but no remaining instances[17] (Fig. 6).

The conclusion to draw from this brief analysis is then that, however one is to explain the establishment of a generalized typology of architectural settings, the exceptions to it may serve better to illustrate a precise concern

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[17]   Grabar, fig. 30, pp. 104–105; E. Blochet, *Les Enluminures des Manuscrits Orientaux* (Paris, 1926), pl. XIII (= Fig. 6 here).

5   Village. Paris, arabe 5847

of those for whom the manuscripts were made. And it would be primarily the city's mercantile features, markets, caravanserais, which were sufficiently significant to the users of the manuscripts that their interpretation had to be specific. Secondary subjects similarly treated were those which involved imagination of a higher life and a rather more earthy view of a socially lower setting. But therein also lies the limitation of the evidence provided by these images dealing with major architectural features. For they can only be used as archaeological documents when they depart from an

6   Palace. Paris,
arabe 5847

iconographic norm. It is only then that we can be assured that they are
meant to have the concrete meaning demanded by [215] the text. Elsewhere
the task of deciding between iconographic significance and standard
typology is fraught with danger and can never be pursued safely. The
problem exists, however, of the origins of the *topoi* and of their exact index
and to this I shall return below.

The same type of analysis can be used in attempting to discuss and
define the documentary value of the representations of personages, although
there matters are somewhat more complicated by the individual stylistic
peculiarities of each manuscript. The analysis may begin with the realization
of the existence of one personage basically common to all manuscripts.
Dressed in a long robe, the head covered with a simple turban, the face
usually provided with a beard and large eyes, he may be called the typical

7   Arab types with *qadi*. Paris, arabe 5847

Arab male figure[18] (Fig. 7). His ubiquity in all manuscripts makes him an iconographic type without precise documentary value and here again the departures from the norm are more significant in identifying the world recognized by the milieu for whom the *Maqamat* were illustrated. Minor changes such as a veil around the face identify the Bedouin. Slaves and servants are shown as youths, usually with short robes and at times in high boots and braided hair. Dark colors and a mere loincloth depict Indian sailors. Women and children are rarely successfully represented but in one instance illustrating the eighteenth *maqama* we see the image of a paragon of beauty, a sort of Miss Arab World of the thirteenth century[19] (Fig. 8). More interesting are the representations of officials, judges wearing long *taylasans* and long beards, otherwise quite indistinguishable from the Arab crowds, or *walis*, usually in pseudo-military garb and accompanied by attendants; in most of the better miniatures these personages are always made to look a bit ridiculous, thereby illustrating the satirical intent of the author.[20] Within this motley crowd there is yet another essential personage, the beggar or the *sufi*, either in tattered clothes, or, more often, in a short robe, long tight trousers, a headgear with a long and usually pointed

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[18]   A typical example is the central figure on p. 114 of Ettinghausen's book.
[19]   This is a hitherto unpublished miniature of Paris 3929, fol. 151.
[20]   Ettinghausen, p. 115.

8   Woman.
Paris, arabe 3929

qalansuwa and a narrow long scarf around the neck, perhaps in imitation of the *tarha* or of the *taylasan* of the official *qadi.* It is the costume under which Abu Zayd is shown when he cannot clearly be identified by his action, although it is worthwhile to note that there is nowhere a clear iconographic identification of the hero of the stories.

The main significance of this rapid enumeration is, it seems to me, the very narrow range of its typology of human beings. To a degree, of course, [216] no medieval art, in the Islamic world or in Christendom, has seen fit, before the Renaissance, to translate into visual terms the variety of human types which existed in the large urban centers and of which we have written evidence. There was a general medieval tendency to cast all human types into a small number of optically perceived images. The variants on the basic type that do exist and the clear satiric intent of some of the representations of authority would suggest the secondary conclusion that the human vision of the particular world of this bourgeoisie was limited to a few precise groups with which it dealt personally and which would have been meaningless without some vestimentary or facial identification. The touch of exoticism

which appears in a few instances revolved around unusual themes such as that of the fantastic island from the thirty-ninth *maqama*.²¹ In that sense the limited character of the world provided to the reader of the *Maqamat* is reflected in the poverty of the human types found in the illustrations.

Even though it may be regretted that the illustrations of the *Maqamat* do not provide us with a vaster panorama of a visually perceived Near East in the first half of the thirteenth century, still they do give us a specifically defined view of the scope and of the visual vocabulary which can clearly be assigned to the Arab bourgeoisie of the thirteenth century. Is this the only evidence we have at that time for an art of this particular segment of the population?

As far as architecture is concerned, it is extremely difficult to evaluate the evidence properly. This is true both of the archaeological evidence and of the literary, and one should avoid the temptation of generalizing on the basis of the considerable information available for Fatimid and Mamluk Cairo or for Aleppo and Damascus. To limit myself to archaeological evidence, it seems clear that the large number of caravanserais found in Anatolia certainly bear some relation to mercantile activities, as do bridges and *suqs* there and elsewhere and also the numerous commercial and industrial enterprises created as *waqfs* for religious institutions. Together with baths and warehouses they formed a major part of the official architecture of the city, but too little is known about them at that time to define their character with any degree of certitude.²² In any event, the [217] mercantile function of a building like a caravanserai need not mean that it reflects an architectural taste or style properly to be associated with the bourgeoisie. A greater impact of a social patronage other than that of princes seems to have made itself felt in two other areas: first, in the growth of small sanctuaries, the *mashhads* which at this time begin to identify cities and quarters but whose significance is usually strictly local and whose sponsorship may come from a lower level than that of the bourgeoisie, at least at this time;²³ and second, in city planning or, more correctly, the directions in which cities grew.

Herzfeld noted many years ago that a peculiarity of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century monuments of Syria is their small and sometimes odd size, as though they had to be fitted within immovable existing architectural

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²¹ I have discussed the illustrations of this story in a paper presented at the XXVth International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow; cf. *Proceedings* (Moscow, 1963), II, pp. 46–7. Typical illustrations in Ettinghausen, p. 122.

²² The precise typology of all these buildings is still to be done. For caravanserais, see K. Erdmann, *Das Anatolische Karavanserai* (Berlin, 1961), and Sauvaget's articles in *Ars Islamica*, 6 and 7 (1939 and 1940). For other buildings the best introduction is Sauvaget's *Alep* (Paris, 1941).

²³ Some preliminary remarks in O. Grabar, "The earliest Islamic commemorative buildings," *Ars Orientalis*, 6 (1967).

entities.[24] And he had suggested that this was due to the impact of the local landowners, presumably the very type of rich bourgeois who would appreciate the *Maqamat.* Or in Cairo the transformation of the *shari'at bayn al-qasrayn* into a sort of Fifth Avenue or a rue de la Paix probably reflected internal social and economic transformations in Cairo itself as much as the impact of the newly arrived military aristocracy. Altogether, however, as far as architecture is concerned, the exact impact of the bourgeois component, seen as a taste-making social unit and not merely as a partaker of wider cultural trends, in the stylistic and formal changes brought in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries seems to me to be still very difficult to assess properly.

The matter is far more complex and far more suggestive when we turn to the work of artisans, ceramicists, metalworkers, glass-makers. The evidence there of the existence of a powerful city-bred bourgeois art, on several different levels of quality, is so vast that I should like to limit myself to three points illustrating three different ways in which this art can be approached.

The first point is that the typically Islamic transformation of the common utensil – a plate, a jug, a basin, a glass – into a work of aesthetic quality is a phenomenon which can clearly be attributed to the urban bourgeoisie of the Islamic world. It appeared first in eastern Iran, developed in Fatimid Egypt (not necessarily under the impact of the East), was acknowledged in theoretical writing by the *Ikhwan al-Safa'*, and grew to its most impressive heights in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to dwindle away as a mere appendix to princely workshops after the Mongol [218] conquest. The demonstration of this point would require a lecture by itself and need not be made here.

The second point concerns more particularly the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. During this time, and especially after 1150, two major changes took place in the art of the object. One is the growth of numbers of signed and dated pieces which suggests the increase in marketable value of an individual's work and the opportunity for the artisan to express his pride in his craft; at the same time we have a number of major pieces in metal (usually thought to be a princely medium) specifically made for merchants, like the celebrated Bobrinski bucket in the Hermitage.[25] The other change is the rather sudden tremendous spread of figural representations in all media, more especially in Iran than in other parts of the Muslim world, although it characterizes all eastern provinces. There occurred a sort of revolution in the visual vocabulary available to and understood by a larger social unit than the court of the prince, until then the major patron of representational arts. The consistent use on objects of figural themes was paralleled by the animation of every part of the object, as in the so-called animated scripts, as though at

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24   E. Herzfeld, "Damascus, Studies in Architecture," *Ars Islamica*, 11–12 (1946), p. 37.
25   R. Ettinghausen, "The Bobrinski kettle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th ser., 24 (1943).

that time value could only be expressed properly through figures.[26] These changes in themselves need not all be necessarily connected with an urban art, although *a priori* the character of the objects on which they occurred and the fact that a large number of bronzes and almost all the early ones in the new techniques bear inscriptions with the names of merchants suggests the possibility.

But this is where my third point comes in. A study of the inscriptions and of the iconography actually does indicate that it is only within the urban world that these changes can be explained. Three examples may suffice. Giuzalian's study of a series of *Shahname* fragments found on pieces of ceramic has shown that the texts used were popular, spoken versions of the epic rather than courtly written ones.[27] In itself this fact only tells us something about the character and literary make-up of the artisan, but it also suggests the new appropriateness of the less sophisticated as creators of major works of industrial arts. Further, the existence of a large number of luxury objects with Christian subject matter – and perhaps with heterodox overtones although this particular matter still demands further investigation – suggests the participation of non-Muslims among [219] the users and patrons of the objects, a participation otherwise documented in the Geniza documents and which makes sense only within the context of the city. Finally, as a recent study by Ettinghausen has suggested,[28] the imagery on a large group of ceramics may be related to the imagery of Sufism and it is once again in the towns, with their guilds and associations, that we can best imagine the impact of the new vocabulary of a mystical movement whose social overtones have often been recognized.

It would appear then that, except for the ill-documented or improperly studied area of architecture, the illustrated *Maqamat* seen here as an expression of bourgeois art did not appear within a vacuum. In other parts of the Muslim world, however, quite different techniques seem to have been used for its expression and so far the illustrations of the *Maqamat* form the only major cycle of paintings which cannot be explained outside of the specific milieu of the bourgeoisie.

The problem of the relations between the *Maqamat* and the rest of what may be called bourgeois art lies elsewhere. It is that almost never can one show a clear contact between them. Here and there a tile or a glass object does show some stylistic or iconographic resemblance to the miniatures in the *Maqamat*,[29] and one rather odd image in the late Oxford manuscript represents a *jariya* just given as a gift to Abu Zayd in the odd shape of a

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[26]   A definitive study of this theme is being prepared by R. Ettinghausen. In the meantime, see D. S. Rice, *The Wade Cup* (Paris, 1955).

[27]   Series of articles in *Epigrafika Vostoka*, 3, 4, 5 (1949–51).

[28]   R. Ettinghausen, "The Iconography of a Kashan Luster Plate," *Ars Orientalis*, 4 (1961).

[29]   For instance two tiles in the Walters Art Gallery illustrated, among other places, in ibid., figs 71 and 72.

nursing woman, which recalls a still unexplained group of objects in the same shape.[30] But these parallels are few and the sources of the illustrations made for the Arabic *Maqamat* are not the same as those of the Iranian ceramics, even though both can be associated with a related social milieu.

What then are the sources of the Arabic images? Three strands may easily be identified. One is Christian art, most probably Oriental Christian art rather than high Byzantine art. Obvious in one of the Paris manuscripts, this Christian influence is less immediately visible in the other manuscripts, but it is certainly there, as has been demonstrated by Professor Buchthal.[31] A second source is Islamic princely art. A scene in the Schefer *Maqamat* illustrating the twelfth *maqama* shows Abu Zayd drinking in a tavern.[32] Since the act of drinking was a central mode for the [220] representation of the prince, Abu Zayd has been transformed into a prince in pose and composition. Another scene from the Istanbul codex is supposed to represent Abu Zayd wealthy and powerful, and shows him seated in majesty in his tent and surrounded on each side by a military man and by a cleric, representing the *ahl al-sayf* and *ahl al-qalam* of a princely image.[33] Drinking and power have been so fully associated visually with royal images that it is only in such terms that Abu Zayd could properly be represented in these activities. A similar type of relationship exists between the *Maqamat* and a few other identified artistic traditions: the Dioscorides one for plants, travel tales for certain features of foreigners, and perhaps a few others.

The third source is more difficult to define. It has often been called realism in the sense of observation of nature and of man. There is little doubt that such observations played a part in the creation of the *Maqamat* of the thirteenth century. They appear in the formation of the physical type of the Arab, in the reproduction of a multiplicity of telling gestures or characteristic details, and in the many "genre" scenes. Yet, even though there is something tempting about positing a realism of intent, if not always of execution, in these paintings made for a bourgeois milieu – as in Flanders and Holland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the term should be used carefully. In the crucial areas of anatomical verisimilitude, formal compositions, or spatial representations, the art of the *Maqamat* shows very few signs of moving towards any sort of realism. The vision of the painters and of their patrons was still that of a very conventional ideographic system in which the viewer recognized and reinterpreted in his own mind separate visual units which he could understand because he knew the text. Apart from the few exceptions found almost exclusively in al-Wasiti's work, the art

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[30]   Folio 65v.

[31]   H. Buchthal, "Hellenistic Miniatures in Early Islamic Manuscripts," *Ars Islamica*, 7 (1940).

[32]   This miniature was discussed in a totally different context by D. S. Rice, "Deacon or Drink," *Arabica*, 5 (1958), pl. VI.

[33]   Grabar, fig. 17.

of the *Maqamat* was not an attempt to capture the life and world of the Arab bourgeoisie but to illustrate the setting of the book of the *Maqamat*. Just as the book itself has elements of satire and is a significant source for the social and intellectual history of its time, so are the illustrations, but the point of the book was not to be a satire, and it is only in a relatively small number of images from three manuscripts that one can clearly see attempts to copy directly the physical reality of the contemporary world by differentiating certain elements from the standardized mass of images.

But then how can we explain what I have called the underlying typology of the images, that is the very standard forms in the representation of architecture, landscape or man which are repeated from image to image [221] with minor modifications and without necessarily fitting with the requirements of the text? It would be tempting to assume an iconographic background for these features outside of the *Maqamat* themselves, and in the case of two of the manuscripts we can do so. Paris 6094 clearly derives from Christian art, and the figures of Paris 3929 bear striking resemblances to the little that is known of popular shadow plays;[34] in both instances, it is standard types rather than specific exceptions which are definable as closely related to an external tradition. But no such interpretation of an outside imagery suggests itself for the mass of illustrations in the greater manuscripts in Leningrad, Istanbul and Paris, except in the instance of landscape. In line with the explanation I have suggested for the illustrations in general – i.e. that they illustrate a book and not life – I should like to propose the following hypothesis for the formation of the typology. Just as the setting of each *maqama* shifts from Cairo to Samarkand without alteration of its specifically Arab character, so it is that in a small group of manuscripts a setting was created which reflects at the same time two characteristics of the text's setting: precisely Arab features but also abstract and repetitious formulas like those of literature. It is the standardized typology far more than the exceptions to it which succeeds in illustrating the book itself, but it is the two together which define the vision of the world of the Arab bourgeoisie of the early thirteenth century. To keep to our architectural examples, the novelty of the *khan* was recorded because of its particular meaning to the mercantile class, but the *maison bourgeoise*, the traditional early Islamic mosque, the ancient organization of a caravan were seen as obvious abstract entities identifiable by certain characteristic details but not specific representations of a given house, mosque, or caravan. It is perhaps tempting to imagine that the peculiarities of the typology of the house – and in particular its elaborate system for ventilation – suggest a particularly warm part of the Arab world, namely southern Iraq, and thus that the term School of Baghdad for these manuscripts is justified. Yet I hesitate in doing so precisely because the basic character of the typology, of the standard forms, seems to me to be more

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34   Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp. 82–3.

clearly identifiable with a social level than with a precise land. It remains the case, however, that of all the known expressions of an art of urban centers, this specific group of Arabic manuscripts is the only one which has clearly been interested in reproducing something of the world which surrounded it. Their limitations both as historical documents and as illustrations of the text bring us back to our original question of why it is that they were illustrated altogether. Chronological evidence suggests [222] that around 1150 almost all the arts of the Islamic world – outside of the West – underwent changes which can be attributed to the impact of the needs and tastes of the bourgeoisie. A most significant general characteristic of these changes is that they involved the development of representational images in all media.

Thus the *Maqamat* were illustrated because the milieu which had read them and appreciated them before 1200 developed at that time in a way that demanded a visual expression, just as today a slow-moving novel by Françoise Sagan or the *Leopard* of Lampedusa are automatically made into a film, whether they lend themselves to it particularly well or not. The Arab literate milieu of the city aristocracy, which did not have a tradition of meaningful images, chose its own best-seller, its favorite reading matter, and had it illustrated, because it wanted illustrations, not because this particular book especially lent itself to them.

But what change took place in the character of the urban bourgeoisie some time in the middle of the twelfth century that it suddenly demanded a new and quite revolutionary artistic expression? This I am unable to answer and it is the main question I should like to have answered by social historians. Is there any evidence in other sources which would justify the obvious changes in taste and in creativity?

Aside, then, from this or that archaeologically or historically significant detail provided by the miniatures, the major significance of the *Maqamat* to the historian is that its existence reveals one unusual facet of the complex world of the city in the Arab world of the Near East: its interest in and involvement in images for the sake of images even more than as an illustration of life. That, at the same time, a limited but definable vision of the world seen by a precise group in the city does emerge is due to the character of the book rather than to the character of the men who had it illustrated. All that they expected was a literarily faithful, imaginative and meaningful visual translation of their favorite text and thus an appropriate status symbol for their position. This interest in images did not remain for long. Just as the Iranian ceramic types of the thirteenth century disappear shortly after the Mongol conquest, so the *Maqamat* of the early Mamluk period show great artistic merit but are iconographically almost meaningless or copy earlier models or else are mere compendia. The original impetus for the illustrations was no longer there and the images tended toward dried-up formal compositions, thus closing an original chapter of Islamic art.