

## Chapter IX

### Pictures or Commentaries: The Illustrations of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri\*

One of the most common illustrations found in manuals of Islamic art, in books on Muslim history or civilization, in very general works touching only briefly on the Near East or the Muslim world, even on such non-academic items as postage stamps and greeting cards is the representation of a [86] drove of camels with an apparently old and certainly stout woman guarding the animals or pushing them on (Fig. 1). It is indeed a striking image whose creator picked up a number of very characteristic natural details of camels – the long neck, the rather absurdly prehistoric head, the awkward legs, the peculiarly open mouth, the unique outline, the heavily pompous gait and stance – and then recomposed these details no longer realistically but in a rhythmic pattern of legs, necks, humps and heads. The pattern is set in an essentially two-dimensional space, although a suggestion of depth is provided by the very ancient convention of successive parallel outlines and by the fact that the two camels eating grass which serve to frame the drove itself are clearly if awkwardly set on different planes. Without entering into the detail of a composition of fascinating complexity, it may suffice to say that its charm and success lie not only in that it represents animals easily associated with the Middle East but also in its unique blend of visual observation and pictorial convention. The purpose of this paper is not to investigate the stylistic peculiarities of this representation by the painter al-Wasiti in a celebrated manuscript now kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale (arabe 5847, fol. 101) and completed in 1237.<sup>1</sup> The questions I should rather like to raise are: what exactly is represented in this well-known image? And why?

The book from which it comes is that of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri. It was written in the early part of the twelfth century and deals with the adventures

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\* First published in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (Middle Eastern Center University of Utah and New York University Press, 1974), pp. 85–104.

<sup>1</sup> Although never published in its entirety, this manuscript, also known as the Schefer *Maqamat*, has often been discussed; see Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1962), pp. 111 ff.



1 Paris arabe  
5847, fol. 101;  
thirty-second  
*maqama*

of a picaresque hero, Abu Zayd, who lives off the world by his wits and by his knowledge, at times through sheer dishonesty, but who succeeds in extricating himself from difficult situations or in forcing others to accede to his needs because of his incomparable use of the Arabic language.<sup>2</sup> Although the genre of such individual stories about a roguish hero was not new, Hariri's work became successful for several reasons. One is that he simplified his plots and limited them to fifty stories, all but one of which are introduced by a witness-narrator, al-Harith; some of his predecessors are reputed to have written four hundred stories, a number which obviously made recall difficult. But a more important reason for Hariri's success was his extraordinary mastery of [87] Arabic, of its vocabulary, of its nuances, of its opportunities for all sorts of

<sup>2</sup> For the most convenient summary of the history of the *Maqamat* as a literary genre, see Régis Blachère and Paul Masnou, *Al-Hamadani, Choix de Maqamat* (Paris, 1957). Introduction; art, "Hariri" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II. There are many editions of the book; the translation into English to be quoted hereafter is by Chenery and Steingass (London, 1867 and 1898) with important commentaries.

linguistic puns and even visual tricks such as alternating dotted and undotted lines of poetry. These verbal pyrotechnics seem to have become almost immediately popular, as over two hundred twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts of the work are known and the book was soon translated into other Semitic languages. Modern critics have often been surprised by this popularity, inasmuch as it appears to have declined somewhat after the fifteenth century, but we may agree on two key points about the book. One is that its appeal was primarily linguistic, and the other that this appeal was in all likelihood limited to a highly literate Arabic-speaking bourgeoisie.<sup>3</sup> The image of the camels is an illustration of the thirty-second *maqama*, a very long one without any real plot but consisting of Abu Zayd giving all sorts of legal opinions in fancy language. At the end the Beduins who had asked for these opinions gave him as a reward a “drove of camels with a slave-girl.” Since it is rather difficult to interpret the woman in the illustration as the beautiful female singer suggested by the word *qaynah*, we must assume that in some fashion or other the represented personage comes with the camels and that sexiness is not one of her attributes. But a more important point is that even the identification of the exact subject of this image is difficult to make in visual terms alone. A very minor point was picked up by al-Wasiti and illustrated in a curious way, since the main hero of the story is not even present. In fact one may legitimately wonder whether any viewer of the image alone could recognize its exact subject and even that it is an illustration from the *Maqamat*. But, in this case, why was the image made? Part of the answer appears if one simply looks at folio 100, the page in the manuscript which precedes and faces the one with the camels (Fig. 2). There we see standing under a tree our two heroes, Abu Zayd and al-Harith, discussing the former’s success. Abu Zayd is shown pointing toward the camels and both personages, one roguishly sly and the other stupidly amazed, are obviously involved with them. In other words, an image which has always been published alone, as a completed entity, is in fact only half of an iconographic unit extending over two pages of the manuscript. In two other manuscripts (British Museum, oriental 1200, fol. 106 and Leningrad, Asiatic Museum 523, fol. 223), these two halves have been unified into a single image (Figs 3 and 4). Although aesthetically quite ungainly, these miniatures are iconographically or as illustration [88] clearer than the much more brilliantly executed spread over two pages in the Schefer manuscript.

One could stop the investigation at this stage by simply pointing out that many other instances exist in the 1237 manuscript of such double-page compositions, that most of them are not clearly composed and seem to consist of two juxtaposed pictures, each one of which is a separate visual entity, even though only making iconographic sense in conjunction with its partner. One

<sup>3</sup> H. Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter* (London, 1938), p. 50; K. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex* (Princeton, 1947), pp. 84 ff.





2 Paris arabe  
5847, fol. 100v;  
thirty-second  
*maqama*

can even wonder whether we do not meet here with an extension into the body of the manuscript of a type of antithetic arrangement which occurs on many frontispieces and for which models may be found in Byzantine and Western manuscripts.<sup>4</sup> But the incongruity of the overall composition when compared to the quality of each of its two components and the peculiarity of the poor quality of iconographically more appropriate illustrations raise, it seems to me, [89] an entirely different question, that of the actual purpose of these miniatures in the *Maqamat*. For even if the image of the camels makes iconographic sense with the miniature facing it, and even if its belonging to the *Maqamat* is [90] evident because of the presence of the two heroes, why choose this very minor episode in an otherwise uneventful story? Is it purely arbitrarily that certain folios were provided with images? And what do these images do to a text which was only valued for its verbal acrobatics? The key

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, "Islamic Scientific Illustrations," *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam E. Herzfeld*, ed. G. C. Miles (Locust Valley, 1952).



3 Leningrad 523,  
fol. 223; thirty-  
second *maqama*

questions posed by the celebrated image of the camels seem to me those of the motivation and function of a visual addition to a written text. Is it a paraphrase or an explanation of the text? Is it a translation into another medium? Are these images commentaries to be seen and appreciated with the text or pictures which were perhaps inspired *by* the text but which are meant to be enjoyed separately as visual experiences? It is to these questions of much wider significance than the *Maqamat* that we shall seek to provide some tentative answers. Methodologically, however, a book without the complex liturgical or symbolic functions of the Bible and without the obvious narrative importance





4 London, oriental 1200, fol. 106; thirty-second *maqama*

of the *Shahname* or of *Kalilah and Dimna* may serve as a particularly interesting case for a far more general theory of book illustration.

Thirteen illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat* are known, four in the British Museum, three in the Bibliothèque Nationale, one each in Oxford, [91] Vienna, Leningrad, Istanbul, Manchester, and in a library in Yemen.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> BM or. 1200 (dated 1256), or. 9718 (before 1310), add. 22.114 (undated), add. 7293 (between 1323 and 1376, unfinished); BN arabe 5847 (dated 1237), arabe 3929 (undated), arabe 6094 (dated 1222); Leningrad, Academy of Sciences 523 (undated); Oxford, Marsh 458 (dated 1337); Istanbul, Süleymaniye *esad efendi* 2916 (datable 1242–58); Manchester, John Rylands Library, arab 680 (later than the fifteenth century); Yemen, no location available, manuscript completed in 1709 but with a few early pages. The last of these manuscripts was discovered by Professor Mahmud al-Ghul of the American University of Beirut, who has kindly shown me his photographs. A discussion of nine of the others with full bibliography is found in D. S. Rice, "The Oldest Illustrated Arabic Manuscript," *BSOAS*, 25 (1959). He inadvertently forgot one of the London manuscripts discussed by H. Buchthal, "Three Illustrated Hariri Manuscripts," *Burlington Magazine*, 77 (1940). The Istanbul manuscript discovered by R. Ettinghausen was published by O. Grabar, "A Newly Discovered Manuscript," *Ars Orientalis*, 5 (1963).

These thirteen manuscripts divide themselves chronologically rather neatly. Two (Manchester and Yemen) are very late and highly derivative. Five of them are from the first half of the fourteenth century, probably made in Egypt. Six of them are from the thirteenth century, dating roughly from *c.* 1220 to *c.* 1260. These form the most interesting group, and with a few exceptions my remarks will concentrate on them. Before proceeding to a discussion of two stories and to an attempt at a typology of the images created in the various manuscripts, one point should be emphasized, although it will not be demonstrated. It is that, while there are in some 1,100 illustrations known to me several instances where the same iconographic details or interpretations are found, there is not a single instance in which one could prove that any one known manuscript derives from any other known manuscript or from its immediate model. While it is roughly possible to propose a general relationship between the manuscripts, this relationship can be better expressed through manners of illustration than through the formal system of stemmata developed in philological studies. The reasons for this conclusion form, however, an entirely different subject. For our immediate purposes what matters is that each manuscript must be seen as a creation independent of any other known one.

Let me begin with the eleventh *maqama*, whose illustrations have for the most part been published.<sup>6</sup> Al-Harith, the narrator, saddened by a personal misfortune, goes to a cemetery for peace and meditation. A burial is taking place and, before the mourners have departed, an old man appears on a neighboring hill, leaning on a staff and with his face hidden by his cloak. He makes a long and moving speech on human fickleness in the face of death and on the transitory character of life. Then he begs for money and comes down [92] from the hill; al-Harith stops him and upbraids him for his hypocrisy, but Abu Zayd answers that everything is fair in this world and the two part angrily. There are thirteen illustrations of this story. Seven of these deal with the main event, the speech at the cemetery; although varying in many details, all but one show one or more tombs, a group of mourners, and Abu Zayd making his speech. The exception (Fig. 5) is by al-Wasiti; its most remarkable feature is the absence of the hero of the story but, while it thus fails as an illustration of a precise event, it succeeds best in evoking the mood of the story. The frozen silence of the personages, the quietude of the setting, the elaborately massive composition, the gestures stopped in mid air, all paraphrase superbly the meditation on death of Abu Zayd's poem.

At the exact opposite pole as illustrations are the two poor images in BM or. 1200 and especially the four (not two, as was thought by Rice) miniatures in Paris 3929. Two of the latter have frequently been reproduced and show al-Harith walking distressedly in the midst of the tombs and Abu Zayd [93]

<sup>6</sup> Rice, *BSOAS*, Pls II–VII; Grabar, "A Newly Discovered Manuscript," Fig. 4.



5 Paris arabe  
5847, fol. 29v;  
eleventh *maqama*

making his speech. But the other two are even more interesting for our purposes; one (Fig. 6) shows Abu Zayd descending from the hillside from which he spoke, while the other one (Fig. 7) illustrates in a strikingly precise fashion how al-Harith stopped Abu Zayd by pulling at the hem of his cloak, a direct translation of a passage from the text whose understanding is further made clear by a sort of caption introduced into the text.

As a second example we can take the twelfth *maqama*, in which Abu Zayd poses as a holy man and gets a lot of money from a caravan he accompanies across the desert. Then he disappears and al-Harith finds him in a tavern “amid casks and wine vats and about him were cup-bearers surpassing in beauty, and light that glittered, and the myrtle and the jasmine, and the pipe and the lute. And at one time he bade broach the wine casks, and at another he called the lutes to give utterance; and now he inhaled the perfumes, and now he courted the gazelles.”<sup>7</sup> The comparison between the illustration [94]

<sup>7</sup> Chenery translation, p. 173.





of this scene in Paris 5847 (Fig. 8) and Paris 3929 (Fig. 9) is clear enough. Whereas the latter fills its image with almost all the specific details of the text without composing them, the former skips many a detail but provides the picture of a bar in the thirteenth-century Muslim world and adds a number of elements not suggested by the story, including the representation of Abu Zayd as a prince, a detail very important in understanding the formation of the imagery. Another illustration, in the Vienna manuscript, is also quite specific and even shows the hero caressing a youth.

It would be easy to multiply examples of the ways in which individual stories were illustrated, but from these two the conclusion can be proposed that more than one attitude existed toward the text and that each one of these as well as their collective existence may suggest an answer to our original questions of why images could possibly have been added to manuscripts of the *Maqamat*. Five such attitudes can be identified.

The first, best exemplified by Paris 3929, is essentially *literal*. At certain places in the book, without any apparent reason, a passage in the text is suddenly followed by an image, frequently introduced as “and this is a picture [95] of it” (whatever immediately precedes). At times, as in a

6 Paris arabe  
3929, fol. 30;  
eleventh *maqama*



7 Paris arabe  
3929, fol. 30v;  
eleventh *maqama*

representation of Miss Near East, early thirteenth century,<sup>8</sup> or in a wonderful composition from the thirty-first *maqama* (Fig. 10) showing Abu Zayd and al-Harith embracing and becoming like an *alif-lam*, the results are quite striking visually or historically, and culturally interesting.<sup>9</sup> But as illustrations they are so closely related to the text that it is almost impossible to understand them without the literary referent. They are almost totally bound to the text, but it is difficult to determine in what way, if any, they add to the text. It is doubtful that they made it more accessible and they do not form a separate visual translation of the text, for their occurrence is not systematic enough within the text and the [97] internal structure of the imagery is not sufficiently consistent. The illustrations of Paris 3929, literal as they are, must be considered as a random commentary on a most elementary reading of the text rather than as a coherent visual interpretation of incidents or of characters. Two corollaries may be derived from this observation, although both require

<sup>8</sup> Illustrated by O. Grabar in *The Islamic City*, ed. A. Hourani (Oxford, 1970), Fig. 8.

<sup>9</sup> So far only Ettinghausen has discussed this manuscript (*Arab Painting*, p. 83) with any sort of seriousness; in fact it is an extremely curious one, full of very unusual and unexpected features which came out as I finally succeeded in identifying every single scene of its mixed-up folios.





8 Paris arabe  
5847, fol. 33;  
twelfth *maqama*

deeper elaboration than can be developed within the context of this paper. One is that in a manuscript of this literal type the fact of the existence of illustration in general is more important than any one illustration; it is a book which was provided with images and not a text. The other corollary is that this type of illustration is more likely to arise as a result of already existing images than as a spontaneous generation from the text; it is an attempt to adapt to a new book a practice which was already reasonably common. A different kind of analysis from those provided here is needed to determine whether the inspiration for the illustrations of Paris 3929 had to come from earlier *Maqamat* illustrations or from illustrations of other texts, although my tendency is to prefer the former suggestion.

An entirely different attitude prevails in the Leningrad and Istanbul manuscripts as well as in Paris 5847. We may call it *descriptive*. Since the attitude has frequently been mentioned by other scholars and recently







summarized [98] by Ettinghausen in the formula of “life encompassed,” it does not require as much theoretical elaboration and most of its examples are well known.<sup>10</sup> From our point of view of understanding a body of images and their relationship to the text, this attitude led primarily to the visual elaboration of a setting for the stories. It is a physical setting of private houses, mosques, cities, villages, schools, caravans, outings on boats or in gardens, nomadic camps, caravanserais, and so forth. It is also a human center of governors, *qadis*, merchants, holy men, and simply passers-by; these people all appear in typical activities: riding, eating, praying, fasting, dying, being sick, having fun. Occasionally, but quite rarely, and generally limited to illustrations of the thirty-ninth *maqama*, there appears also a world of romantic fantasy. As I sought to argue elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> the setting is that of the Arab bourgeoisie of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the very world most likely to have enjoyed Hariri’s text. From our point of view of understanding images, there is nothing surprising about the elaboration of

10 Paris arabe  
3929, fol. 68v;  
thirty-first  
*maqama*

<sup>10</sup> Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp. 104ff. for the most accessible group of illustrations: Grabar, *Ars Orientalis*, 5, for its Istanbul manuscript; unfortunately the Leningrad manuscript is mostly unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> Grabar in *Islamic City*.





11 Paris arabe  
5847, fol. 8v;  
third *maqama*

this particular setting, nor is it surprising to note, as most characteristically occurs in the Leningrad manuscripts, that this setting is quite repetitive and becomes even predictably dull, for such is the case with the plot and setting of the stories themselves. The interesting point lies, it seems to me, in the fact that the emphasis on the setting can be understood either as a conscious attempt to translate the literary work into one only of its components or as a resigned realization that only the setting could be given a visual expression. I shall return to some further implications of either alternative in conclusion, but in the meantime we can say that this second attitude created pictures rather than illustrations; it was concerned with formal problems and its images are meaningful in themselves, almost independently of their actual textual inspiration.

A third attitude is limited to a relatively small number of miniatures by Wasiti in Paris 5847 and may be called *interpretative*. In the illustration of the eleventh *maqama* discussed earlier (Fig. 5), just as in the wonderful representation of Abu Zayd in front of a governor in the tenth *maqama* analyzed by Ettinghausen, Wasiti sought to transfer into visual terms a perfectly valid psychological or intellectual interpretation of Hariri's text. As simple an image as that of Abu Zayd explaining his ways to al-Harith in the third *maqama* (Fig. 11) is a wonderful study of contrasts between the [99] innocent-looking old rogue and the naïve and perennially gullible bourgeois.



And scores of such images appear in the manuscript, frequently satirical, at times deeply human, as in the cemetery miniature. Perhaps it is therefore on purpose that in the illustration of the camels with which we began this paper (Fig. 1) the singing girl appears as an old hag; the painter exercises his satirical wit at the expense of Abu Zayd. In order to appreciate these interpretations a knowledge of the text is necessary, but not in the literal sense of Paris 3929, for quite frequently Wasiti went beyond the objective requirement of the story. He sought to translate the text into visual terms and, as in any good translation, provided in fact his own commentary. Whether, as in Delacroix's illustration of Dante, we are dealing with a personal interpretation or whether, as in the Demotte *Shahname*, there is an ideological side to Wasiti's miniatures is still an unresolved matter. The former may be more likely since his impact seems to have been limited and, more importantly, the same quality and interest does not appear throughout the manuscript. It is as though only certain scenes and stories inspired him to create more than a simple description of a setting.

The last two attitudes are far less interesting from the point of view of visual commentaries around a text but they are important because they illustrate very common processes in book illustrations. London, add. 22.114, with a large number of consistently similar miniatures of good quality, is the only manuscript which provided Abu Zayd and al-Harith with the same physical characteristics throughout. The rogue always wears a light gray coat and the narrator always has a red beard (Fig. 12). The interesting points of this occurrence are that neither feature is inspired by the text but that such arbitrary means of identification are elementary requirements of any consistent mode of communication. A conscious effort was made to create an iconographic vocabulary and its arbitrariness indicates a predominating *visual* rather than literary concern. A similarly visual concern occurs in the Vienna manuscript, whose images are striking for their coloristic effects and for their frozen masses.<sup>12</sup> But, however impressive their pictorial success may be and whatever quality may exist in its expensive colors, the important aspect of the Vienna manuscript from an iconographic point of view is how frequently its miniatures are meaningless. To give but one example, it would be difficult to guess [101] that one of its illustrations of the twenty-first *maqama* (Fig. 13) represents a preacher speaking in a mosque to a huge crowd and to a prince. Actually the miniature's elements can be explained as arbitrary excerpts from earlier illustrations, but they are meaningless in their immediate context as well as in their interpretations. But they are "pretty pictures" adorning an expensive book. Their purpose was purely visual and they are no longer really illustrations.

<sup>12</sup> Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, pp. 147 ff.



12 London add.  
22.114, fol. 59v;  
twenty-first  
*maqama*

The preceding remarks do not exhaust the problems posed by the illustrations of the *Maqamat*, either seen *en masse* or as sets illustrating any one of the fifty stories or any one of the thirteen manuscripts. Simplifying for the purposes of this paper a great deal of evidence, even about the miniatures which have been illustrated or discussed in some detail, our purpose was rather to propose some answers to the questions of how and why thirteenth- and fourteenth-century artists managed to provide a visual commentary to the literary values of Hariri's *Maqamat*.

The nature of the commentary is remarkable for its variety, from almost senseless literalness to visual systems, images, or psychological and satirical interpretations. Success was not consistent, but attempts at variety can be demonstrated and, except for some of the fourteenth-century manuscripts which share more than one feature, the amazing point is how different the remaining codices are from each other. These differences suggest a remarkable variety in contemporary taste, a conclusion confirmed by analysis of other



13 Vienna, AF 9, fol. 70; twenty-first *maqama*

techniques such as metalwork or ceramics.<sup>13</sup> On a more specific level, two further conclusions emerged. One is that the most successful miniatures

<sup>13</sup> Ettinghausen, "The Flowering of Seljuq Art," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 3 (1970); O. Grabar, "Les Arts Mineurs à partir du milieu du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 11 (1968).



sought to provide the setting for the stories, and the other is that the one attempt at deeper interpretation tended to be satirical rather than a translation into visual form of those verbal qualities which made the book famous. This is perhaps not surprising, for it takes centuries and complex as well as conscious visual concerns to elaborate an acceptable and understandable transfer into images of verbally defined ideas.<sup>14</sup> We still do not know the exact nature of the Muslim visual interests of these centuries, and not enough examples of illustrated *Maqamat* have remained to extrapolate a meaningful hypothesis from the miniatures, even though the job has been partly done but not yet [103] published. Satire, on the other hand, especially in its simplest form of caricature, is a natural visual function and existed even in the least visually oriented settings; it is therefore easy to see why it would appear in the earliest visual interpretations of a text.

But, even if partial answers can be given to the question of how the *Maqamat* were illustrated, it is much more difficult to suggest why. From the preceding remarks, several possibilities exist. One would be that, although verbal acrobatics may have been a formal literary reason for the appreciation of the *Maqamat*, it was not the true reason for the success of the book. Its satirical value as a social commentary would have been predominant in most circles, and Hariri's masterpiece would have been seen more as a description of its own time than as a literary exercise. In this fashion one would explain a success which has puzzled and perhaps misled literary historians; and we may recall that many successful eighteenth-century satirical works strike today's readers as cumbersome bores. Could this not be an instance where the mirror of illustrations serves as a good indicator of the actual nature of literary taste? In this hypothesis, illustrations would simply be the most direct manner for a culture or for a social layer to focus on its own surroundings, quite effectively in some manuscripts and in much cruder form in others, at times emphasizing setting, at other times human peculiarities. And when, in the fourteenth century, the text did become a school piece, instead of commentaries the miniatures became just pictures.

A second and much simpler explanation is to consider that these miniatures served a much more elementary purpose: they made a manuscript more agreeable to read and to behold. They would be simply redundancies which were imposed by the taste of a time and to which only limited importance should be given. At best we may consider them as metaphors, as parts of a system of visual signs parallel to the text, with its own set of rules, but which did not seek to illustrate so much as to provide pleasure, joy, or excitement as one read the book. Wasiti's creation would have been the exception, a unique attempt by one talented artist to give a more specific interpretation to the text. Paris 3929 would have been a primitive effort of the same sort

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<sup>14</sup> A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography* (Princeton, 1968), esp. pp. 109 ff.

whose partial success lay in its painter's wonderful gift for drawing. It should be remembered that neither one of these works had a significant impact, and it is easy enough to show that representations do characterize these centuries all over the Muslim world east of Egypt and that frequently there is a discrepancy between texts and images on contemporary ceramics. Thus it may indeed be [104] possible to see these miniatures simply as pictures only secondarily connected with the text.

Between these two interpretations or any combination of the two it is still difficult to choose. As working hypotheses both should be maintained, for their further elaboration leads to the far more important and far more complex question of the nature of the perception of visual forms which existed in the Arab thirteenth century. But to imagine and to reconstruct what may have been in the minds and attitudes of those who ordered, bought, made and appreciated these images requires the combination of still incomplete art historical investigations of the *Maqamat*<sup>15</sup> with many other techniques of historical and other research. Once this is done, we may have more than an explanation for a unique group of miniatures, and possibly the means to delineate the position of the visual world in medieval Islamic culture in general.

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<sup>15</sup> Most of the immediate identifications of all *Maqamat* miniatures and the elaboration of their visual vocabulary have been completed, but not yet the necessary investigations in related monuments.

