

Social Criticism in Hariri's Maqamat with a Focus on Al-Wasiti's Miniature Paintings

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Abstract

“Hariri's Maqamat” is one of the most prominent and sophisticated books of Arabic literature in the Middle Ages that has been influential in the formation of novel stories in world literature. Apart from the beauty of the style, literary tune and various educational aspects, it presents social life and human behavior in the Arab world of the Middle Age in terms of a visually narrative format. Hariri's Maqamat is a long illustrated story in Baghdad School which has been composed by Hariri and then illustrated by Mahmoud al-Wasiti. Al-Wasiti's miniature paintings provide a lot of visual information about people's behavior and their environment. This research aims at understanding social criticism scheme in that time by cooperation of text and image. Accordingly, several Maqamat and miniatures, which included more social information, were selected and considered using descriptive analysis technique. The results showed that al-Wasiti has clearly discovered Hariri's social critical viewpoint behind the complex language and emphasized that idea. He has also added some information which it would not be easily understandable by a reader of Maqamat book without applying pictures.

Keywords: Hariri's Maqamat, Al-Wasiti, literature illustration, social criticism, Arab society, middle age

1. Introduction

Painting is the visual expression of literary text and depicts literary concepts in the language of line and color. To express the literary texts more clearly in manuscripts, graphics and images were used. Illustrator receives text features and exhibits it in the format of images. How the painter converts text data into the image or makes it easy to understand are considerable topics for many researchers. Among the comic books in Arabic language related to the early centuries of Islam, Hariri's illustrated book is an exception (634 AH / 1237 AD). Hariri's Maqamat has been composed in eloquent Arabic prose and has an expression appropriate for educated stratum of society. The moral and educational contents are continually induced among stories and events with a hero called Abu Zeid. This book is provided in a way that should not only be read, but you should see and hear it at the same time (Roxburgh, 2013). Some experts on manuscripts believe that the text of Hariri's Maqamat is very rich and fruitful and does not require any image as complement and the images far away the reader from the narrative space of the book. This is a point that requires much contemplation because Mahmud Al-Wasiti's paintings in addition to providing the required fields to create Baghdad School and the future schools, introduce many visual information of his time and this is the issue which cannot be visualized through words without the presence of images (634 AH / 1237 AD) (Roxburgh, 2013). It is remarkable that the characteristics of the book orderer and the kings that have possessed it have not been mentioned in the book. The only visible mark on Maqamat is the Charles Scheffe's seal that has kept this book until 1800 AD and the National Library in Paris has purchased it from him in this year (Grabar, 2006). This study aims at investigating the visual information and the effect of literature and art cooperation in the embodiment of social realities with an Analytical-Descriptive method. Obviously, this is realized with analyzing several selected paintings that give us more sociological information that can be further discussed. In this regard, after reviewing the conducted studies and the knowledge of Maqamat-writing technique, Hariri and his book have been introduced. In the following, the available illustrated versions of Hariri's Maqamat were investigated and some paintings of the desired version (Al-Wasiti's version) and its properties are described and analyzed from the perspective of social criticism.

2. Research Literature

Western scholars have recently researched about Hariri's Maqamat and its multiple illustrated copies. One of

them is Oleg Grabar that has published comprehensive studies on Islamic Art and Architecture in 1984 and 2009 AD. He has reviewed and analyzed multiple-version paintings in terms of the ability to depict Maqamat. He has assigned two chapters of “Shahkar-haye Honar-e Islami book” (Islamic art masterpieces book) into Hariri’s Maqamat. He has explained illustrations of Maqama 3, 11, 12, 21, 31 and 32 from two different versions and believes that these paintings have acted very well in translating text to image (Grabar, 2006, p. 14). David Roxburgh has addressed debate and the relationship between text and image after analyzing some paintings from different versions (especially Wasiti’s version) and enumerates common features between Hariri’s Maqamat and Saye-bazi (shadow plays) (Roxburgh, 2013). Tharwat Okasha has devoted a chapter to Hariri’s Maqamat in Negar-gari-ye Islami book (Islamic painting book) and introduces six illustrated copies in it. He acknowledges that it is possible to acquire visions of imaginations and painters’ styles through miniatures of these versions (Okasha, 2001). Some scholars and investigators of Persian and Arabic literature have researched about Hariri’s Maqamat in Iran and in Persian language. One of these cases is an article published in 2008 by Leila Jamshidi and Dr. Hasan Dadkhah that deals with the element of scene in Hariri and Hamidi’s Maqamat. In this study, how to address the scenes and how to act successfully in applying each element to establish the relationship between the readers and the story text is interpreted. Finally it is concluded that Hariri has acted more successful than Hamidi in describing the scenes and application of tabloid style in addressing the scene elements (Jamshidi & Dadkhah, 2008). Another article was written by Dr. Fatemeh Mahvan in 2013 that investigates visual capabilities of Maqamat Genre with the aim of adapting elements of text and image structures of Hariri’s Maqamat. The result of this adaptation has been considered as consistency and limitations of the text imaging elements (Mahvan, 2013). Mahvan is specialized in the field of Persian Language and Literature and it seems that she has only observed similar cliches and patterns in the depth of Wasiti’s paintings. Numerous articles have been written in Persian in about Hariri’s Maqamat which is thoroughly in the field of Maqamat-writing skills and comparing it literally with Hamidi’s Maqamat or literary genre “Pikarsk” (inspired by Maqamat). Due to lack of investigation in Persian language in this field, we have tried to focus on researches in this area.

3. Maqamat-writing

Arabic term مقامه (translated in English as Maqama) with vowel point on the first letter is derived from the Arabic roots of “قام، يقوم و قوماً، قومة” (translated in English as qama, yaqum, quman, qumahu) with the literal meaning of the Uprising of Speaker Among Gathering of People. This is an Arabic term which became common for a particular kind of prose after the semantic mutations in 4th Century AH. Generally, Maqamat includes different types of ancient stories about championship with a prose interwoven with poetry that anonymously appears in the stories and creates events and disappears just when it is known at the end of story and appears in another form in the next Maqama (Shamisa, 2006). Thus, Maqamat can be considered as a collection of separate stories with a thematic unity. Ibn Duraid invented this writing technique for the first time in 4 AH (10 AD) and Jahez in 3 AH (9 AD). But later it found its final form by “Bediuzzaman Hamadani” and “Hariri”. Historians of literary sciences have attributed the initiative of Maqamat-writing to Hamadani and have neglected Ibn Duraid and Jahez and this is resulting from two factors:

- 1) Hamadani’s surprising element of imagination and other events of his time are much more important than the events of Jahez and Ibn Duraid’s time events. Because Hamadani lived in turbulent era and the stability and security had gone from the community, and people looked at Bediuzzaman Hamadani’s Maqamat like a mirror of events and stresses of the time.
- 2) After Bediuzzaman Hamadani, many authors began to imitate his style. But because these writers were mostly acting wordplay and used obsolete words in Arabic, their works are not leveled with Hamadani’s Maqamat. This decline in Maqamat-writing technique continued and some authors’ efforts to draw some people’s attention through imaginative applications did not avail and none of Maqamat-writers reached Bediuzzaman’s level except Hariri that not only reached to his level but could attract more fans (Okasha, 2001).

4. Hariri and His Maqamat

Abu Muhammad Qasim ibn Ali Hariri (Basri) born in 446 AH. / 1054 AD and died in 516 AH. / 1122 AD is one of the famous poets and scholars and the writer of Hariri’s Maqamat. He was born in Mishan village near Basra and went to Basra after reaching the age of maturity and settled in Bani Haram neighborhood and completed his studies in theology, Hadith (religious traditions) and especially Literature and Vocabulary and soon became a scholar of literature of his time. Hariri has a book on “syntax” called Mulhat al-Irab and a book called “durrat al-Ghawas fi awham alkhawas” in criticizing the common errors among literary scholars which is unique in its field. Hariri’s Maqamat has been formed as stories in which two constant characters are synchronized with each other and convey a series of events and thereby book messages. One of the two characters is “Harith bin

Hamam" who tells the story. Harith's character in Maqamat is the same as Hariri's, and in fact is a nick name that Hariri has selected it for himself in Maqamat. His counterpart character is Abu-Zeid. The first Hariri's Maqama is called Haramieh written after encountering with someone with the name of Abu Zeid Surooji in Bani Haram Mosque of Basra. Abu Zaid is from Surooj located in Basra destructed by Crusaders in 494 AH/1100 AD. From among those people who came to Basra from Surooj, Hariri meets a poor person faced with the shortness of livelihood due to troubles of the time and is begging but is very eloquent and can easily transfer many different meanings to words and create beautiful speech formats. Influenced by this actual character, he composes his first Maqama under the title of Haramieh Maqama and creates adventures with a hero called Abu Zaid Surooji. Although Haramieh is his first Maqama but due to his special procedure for evolution of Abu Zaid's character, has set it as his 48th Maqama, and terminates it with the repentance of sins by Abu Zaid. Many of the evils of the times represent in the sins that Abu Zaid is doing. Hariri recounts and depicts the deficiencies of his community by Abu Zaid with buffoonery and irreverence bitterly. Using bad image of the heroes, he transfers his intended concepts to readers. In fact, he reflects the evils of society in the face of a man that misery has brought him a tragic recklessness and debauchery. Abu Zaid is a victim of the wrong policies of the government and the false social traditions (Nazemian, 2006). Regardless of interesting narratives, literary tone, attractive fictions and educational aspects, Maqamat is a visual-fictional reflection from the mentality, society, life and humans' activity during the Middle Age in the Arab world. In fact Maqamat is a long illustrated social story in the form of polite literature of Baghdad School composed by Hariri and illustrated by Mahmoud al-Wasiti. Oleg Grabar believes that that Hariri's tone and style in Maqamat is much more valuable than the content of stories (Grabar, 2006).

5. Available Versions

As scholars and philologists found Hariri's Maqamat a good source in the field of their knowledge, painters also found many aspects in it for their works and despite a lack of appeal to the story and recurring events, they were inspired by adventures of Maqamat stories and created delicate miniatures from them that now forms a part of the unique Islamic heritage of painting. The desirable goal of composing Maqamat is to choose words and acquire desolate and unfamiliar words because many people had forgotten entirely of words at that time and the illustrators of Maqamat had faced with a challenge in this regard. Consequently, they were forced to derive the details of each subject from among unfamiliar and obsolete words and various lexical complex structures and reach the depths of theology to understand its secrets and depict them on painting (Okasha, 2001). Eleven illustrated manuscripts of Maqamat book have ever been found in libraries and historical collections around the world among which four versions are considered as the most valid copies as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The most prestigious versions of Hariri's Maqamat

Row	Title	Date	Keeping Place	Considerations
1	Hariri's Maqamat	504 AH. / 1115 AD.	National Library in Cairo Ms.Cario Adab 105	According to experts, this is the most basic version of Maqamat book
2	Hariri's Maqamat	About 633 AH. / 1225 AD.	East Studies Center of St. Petersburg	
3	Hariri's Maqamat	634 AH. / 1237 AD.	National Library in Paris Ms.Arabe 5847	With the most images and the most prestigious events (a total of 50 events)
4	Hariri's Maqamat	733 AH. / 1332 AD.	National Library in Vienna	

During various and continuous efforts carried out to illustrate Maqamat manuscripts in Baghdad, Arabic painting achieved new successes. However, Hariri's Maqamat text did not pave the path for the painters, because the basic element in this text has been formed based on the skilled dialogues and rhetoric techniques of the story hero, Abu Zaid. As represented by Hariri, Abu Zaid is a repartee, scoffer and lying old man who is not afraid of interlacing truth and lies. He can easily influence others with his power of the words and attract them to himself with their satisfaction (Okasha, 2001). Arab readers were surprised through the centuries by tips and expressive metaphors and paradox techniques abundant in these charming adventures. It is clear that the painters couldn't represent these verbal innovations in their works and focus their efforts only in areas that the author has used to

pose these talks.

6. Al-Wasiti's Version

Al-Wasiti's Version has been written and illustrated by "Yahya Bin Mahmoud" attributed to the Wasiti city in southern Iraq. This version which is kept in the National Library in Paris under No. 5847 is one of the most prominent examples of Baghdad School works among the most elite Islamic painting works (Okasha, 2001). A variety of topics and the innovations used in it, while maintaining the original characteristics and the impact of strength and liveliness manifested, has made it the best evidence on this point in history. This manuscript is the first Islamic miniature painting work whose artist is certainly known to us. It seems that Al-Wasiti is benefiting from his unique style and has used the power of his imagination instead of being surrendered to traditional forms or accepting Sassanid or Christian shapes examples without modification and changes and has represented familiar scenes of life in the Islamic period. He has created some works through Hariri's valuable book with the help of daily life elements that represent life realities and not just images for decorating the writings. The canvases of this manuscript are distinct from the perspective of the aspects depicted and the structure beauty and are more illustrated painting than miniature. They have an independent value regardless from the illustrated fiction because delicate colors and limited degrees of the applied colors are at most sensitivity and elegance (Okasha, 2001) and they are true expressive of life. In-depth observation of Maqamat and paintings of this version can offer a correct and complete understanding of the different aspects of Arab society of that era, such as social life, rituals, morals and manners of the people and the rulers, architecture, decorations, climate, women and men's clothing etc. This research aims at performing a social criticism from the perspective of Hariri's Maqamat with focusing on Al-Wasiti's Images based on describing and analyzing several Maqamat and paintings related to them.

7. Hariri's Era Social Criticism and Its Reflection in Wasiti's Paintings

Hariri reveals many of the evils of his time through his stories. He has given a real personality to his story heroes to introduce them as recalcitrant humans that use people's negligence in society and extort from them. They never settle in a city or village and they are always travelling. The story hero has tested all ways of making money in the society and is not interested in none of them and finally begins begging. He knows use of public offices worthless, because it needs the political and military establishment and such security is not usually available. He rejects experiencing trade because disasters and bandits' ambush and attack always threaten it. Likewise, he is not interested in crafts due to low profit and much difficulty. He believes that people lose their independence in all these occupations and suffer from adherence to others. With posing such a hero and way of thinking, Hariri mocks the values of his time and knows the character of his hero created by the nature of the society he is living in. One of the issues that Hariri sees in society and discusses on it is hypocrisy. Hariri was observing this common trait among government officials and religious figures and ordinary people and suffers from this issue. He expresses his social criticism in various Maqamat in the form of stories. With investigating numerous Maqamat and their paintings, the way of creating this social criticism is investigated.

8. Social Critique of the Governors and Preachers' Corruption

8.1 "Tenth and Twelfth Maqamat"

Hariri mocks the judges' way of thinking in the tenth Maqama called Rahba. In this Maqama, Hariri sends Abu Zaid to court judgment with a handsome young boy despite knowing that the judge is homosexual and has a growing passion in teenage boys, Abu Zaid claims that this young boy has killed his child and must be retaliated but there are no witness and evidence to prove this. Consequently, he asks the young boy to swear that he has not killed Abu Zaid's child. On the other hand, the judge is charmed by the young boy's beautiful face and asks Abu Zaid to accept ransom and release the boy. Considering that the boy does not have any money to pay ransom, the judge pays a part of ransom and commits to pay the rest tomorrow. Abu Zaid states that he will not release the boy before receiving the whole ransom. The judge accepts his request and Abu Zaid leaves court judgment while pressing in fist the part of ransom he has received. The judge thinks that has successfully deceived Abu Zaid and saved that handsome young boy but the fact is that he himself is the real loser because Abu Zaid escapes with that young boy who is his own child in the night. In the following, he writes some poems mocking the judge's thinking way on the paper and gives it to Harith bin Hammam to submit it to the judge (Roxburgh, 2013). Social satire is obvious on the theme of this Maqama just as his other Maqamat are also full of biting social criticisms. Al-Wasiti's art features are obvious in the painting associated with this Maqam. Figure 1 is representing a scene in which Abu Zeid has taken the boy's hand and is talking with the governor (judge) and the governor is charmed by the boy's charming beauty (Al-Wasiti has painted the painting background with a bright yellow color to help other colors manifest better and emphasize on the amazing brightness of scene). Al-Wasiti has paid a

considerable attention to states of faces and there are many differences between this painting and paintings used for other versions. The governor's lusty glances to the boy are apparent in the picture. He tries to hide his desire to the boy by moving the left hand and the spear put in front of his face. On the other hand, Abu Zaid's fraud and deceit is clearly observed through the painting with upward angle of spear, his evil eyes and white-bearded show. However, he has hidden these features behind his false wisdom words. The painter illustrates a teenager behind the governor's ruling seat who is looking at his new rival (and in fact is another victim of the homosexual governor). But the newcomer boy has been depicted with a feminine face, long lashes and hooded eyes. He has been represented with such a plump face and decorated with fresh clothing that guarantees the governor's sexual interest to him.



Figure 1. Hariri's Maqamat, in 1237 AD, Maqama 10, the French National Library, Version 5847, No. a6

In 12th Maqama (Dameshqieh), Abu Zeid is depicted in the clothes of religious preachers that traps a caravan in which Harith bin Hammam is present with his oratory. He fascinates the caravan members with religious sermons and recommends them not to seek for worldly interests but attempt for Provision of Hereafter. Finally he receives some money from all of them for his sermons and escapes from there. Harith bin Hammam becomes curious and follows him and finds him drunken in his home beside the wine jars involved in vinosity (Hariri, 1986). Al-Wasiti embodies this space with a transparent manner in the painting related to 12th Maqama as observed in Figure 2. He represents Abu Zeid sitting on a bench sometimes listening to singers and sometimes glancing to comely subjects and using fragrant aromas (for acts incompatible with chastity). Harith has been depicted while blaming him for his contradictory behavior (sermons for caravan members and vinosity and acts incompatible with chastity) Looking at Figure 3, which is related to Version 3929 of Paris (the French National Library), precise details of Al-Wasiti's painting can be analyzed thoroughly (Version 5847 of Paris) that includes a pub picture in thirteenth-century of the Islamic world and suggests numerous elements not depicted by the story, e.g., representing Abu Zeid's situation such as a prince and the significant details that offers. Whereas, the painting represented in Figure 3 depicts the only hero in companion and orgy with the comely subjects. With comparing these two illustrated paintings, it can be analyzed that what Al-Wasiti has added to text and suggested for better understanding and visualizing the space is obvious and can respond the question that what visualization has added to Maqamat.

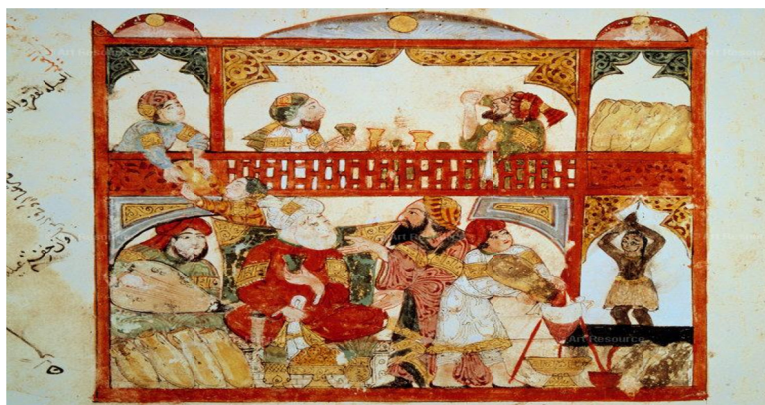


Figure 2. Hariri's Maqamat, 1237 AD, Maqama 12, the French National Library, Version 5847, No. 33a



Figure 3. Maqama 12, the French National Library, Version 3929, No. 34 v

8.2 Social Ethics (Recognizing the Values and Non-values)

According to Maqama 43, Abu Zeid and Harith encounter a teenager near a village whose residents were known to avarice and a conversation takes place between them. In the meanwhile, Hariri begins to retell social ethics of his community at that time. This Maqama narrates this story as follows:

“...until we came to a village that goodness and good behavior had gone from it”. We, both devoid of provision and seeking for it, went into the village. Before the landing, we encountered a stripling boy that had placed a batch of forage on his shoulders. Abu Zeid said hello to him in Islamic way. The boy said: What do you want? Do the residents of the village sell some date in exchange for an oration? Abu Zeid answered. After listening to Abu Zeid’s words, the boy knew that he is an interlocutor who wants to be paid for his oration and responded as follows:

I swear to God, not unripe dates are sold in exchange for salty remarks, and not any poem is bought in exchange for a barley grain. They do not care a bit to this prose and tale. They never trade listening to an ode with a fraction of bread or Luqman’s wisdom to bite of food or martial story with a meat fraction. Then, Abu Zeid says to Harith that, as you see the market of literature is slack and its lovers are elusive! Know that the rhythmic speeches don’t fill an empty stomach (Okasha, 2001)” Al-Wasiti has selected the moment of Abu Zeid and Harith’s arrival to village for his painting (Figure 4) and has divided the painting to 3 scenes:

Abu Zeid and Harith are observed riding a camel in the lower scene with a young boy standing in front of them and speaking with them. Al-Wasiti has managed to manifest astonishment and despair in Abu Zayd and al-Harith’s faces in the implications of their hands and even heads and feet states of camels. Likewise decisiveness is obvious in the boy’s eyes. Interestingly, a bearded-man has been depicted in the painting instead of a young boy for better correspondence with the uttered remarks. In the middle scene, a water pond has been illustrated around which a plant design garland is also observed as well as four goats grazing freely beside the pond. The surface of the pond is colored in Blue Green and a plant garland has also been colored in dark green in addition to two brown goats and two black goats depicted without similarity. The painter has embodied rural life artistically, and illustrated them in the upper scene inside and outside the home at work and effort in a horizontal cut through houses and shops; and has shown internal and external space at the same time by adopting this procedure. But still, dome and minaret of a mosque in the left corner and part of a palm emerged from the back wall of the mosque are displayed (Figure 4). While trying to narrate the story through paintings parallel with the text, Al-Wasiti has clearly depicted architecture and geographic area of the region and there are some specific signs in the painting in this regard. For example, the hen which has found a safe corner for herself under the shelter of rooster and is picking seeds. They have sat above the highest roof of the village and the amaranth has

been visualized like a glorious and majestic crown as a metaphor pointing to the position of women and men in society. He also shows residents of the village while doing something in separate spaces of the painting. A woman who is spinning thread and a baker is putting bread dough in the oven in the side chamber. After him, a woman is looking outside her home and a woman is observed haggling with a salesman and two little daughters are seen waiting behind them. In an adjacent space, cow is observed while coming out of the barn and in the end, the man has finished his prayer and heading to leave the mosque. Thus, we see that Al-Wasiti has not neglected to provide the tiniest details even arched buildings style. In addition to the fiduciary to the story text, the painter has used from his rich imagination and has depicted deeper and more interesting designs.



Figure 4. Hariri's Maqamat, 1237 AD, Maqama 43, the French National Library, Version 5847, No. 134a.

In Maqama 31, Hariri addresses members of the Hajj caravan and states spiritual states and roars of them to heavy criticism and humor:

- Hajj is not marching all nights and days
- And not riding camels and carriers
- Hajj is heading to the house of God
- In hajj pilgrimage, you should not realize your private goals and must just think to spiritual affairs
- And ride on vehicle of equity
- And fight against the whims and head to God's way
- And help those have asked for your help as much as you can Such Hajj is perfect.

If lacking these features, Hajj is incomplete and flawed O' brother, seek for affairs leading to pleasure of God Where you step in and where you leave (Okasha, 2001). Al-Wasiti has depicted Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) miniature with a deep understanding of Hariri's intention and has used special colors to reflect humor satire. Movement in this scene is depicted as chaos among Hajj-pilgrims such as a boasting and zany population crowd and the camels' faces have more or less a ridiculous color. The head of the caravan has a feelingless face. In other words, the painter has illustrated these subjects free of signs of sanctity and dignity which is indispensable for Hajj-pilgrim members. If we compare this painting with that of Maqama 7 (Figure 3), we will find out that in a caravan headed for celebration, adorned discipline, integrity and decisive determination of the caravan members to reach the destination are observed. The strong will that not only is not observed in Hajj-pilgrims

caravan, but also it violates it.

9. Conclusion

With creating this work, Hariri has been able to fascinate everybody with his seductive words and preach Maqamat-writing with the best method. He offers sketching a character like Abu Zeid and his critical view to the people and the common traditions of that era behind a high wall of beautiful words and exquisite combinations and rhythmic prose. However, the readers cannot understand their concept and meaning easily and here the art of drawing is very important. Painter's working practices and the impact of cooperation between literature and art will be realized in the embodiment of truth. In these images, the painter reflects his perceptions of the Arab world, especially Iraq environment. Because these events of these 50 Maqamat have occurred in multiple places, the painter has also tried to show the same environmental conditions in the paintings so that a scene of an incident occurs in a mosque and another scene in a library, inn, market, cemetery or camps in the desert. In some images, a ruler's royal palace with heaps of slaves and servants, the scene of a classroom or a caravan of camels are viewed. These paintings unfold shots from different social classes, the rich and poor, sad and happy, generous and stingy people before our eyes and criticizes and reveals many social phenomena of life in the Middle Ages as a unique mirror. As mentioned before, Al-Wasiti's version is one of the most prominent illustrations of Hariri's Maqamat which is capable in providing various aspects of Arab life. Through the paintings of this illustrated version, we can have notions, emotions and imagination of social conditions of the time. Al-Wasiti illustrates the community space for the audience along with Hariri's work and offers information and many details of the society at that time with the help of his imagination power as it was investigated. He has managed to reflect all internal states of his painting characters and distinguish figures' faces so that for example Abu Zeid's face is known in all his canvases at first glance. He has depicted the social and ethical criticism of the people and the rulers, par with Hariri's text and always adds associated tangible and enlightening elements to it. Hariri's Maqamat and images of these versions in addition to the descriptive aspect, has a more critical attitude toward the society of his time.

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