
PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

O. G. Bolshakov

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

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

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

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

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

knowledge. Its full understanding awaits future investigations in social and cultural history" [4].

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

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

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

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

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