Qur'anic Quotes in Al-Hariri's Maqamats

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Keywords: Medieval Arabic literature, classic Arabic literature, maqama genre, saj', rhyming prose, al-Hariri, Qur'anic
               studies, textual studies.

Abstract: This article examines the use of Qur'anic quotations in the maqamats of Abu Muhammad al-Qasim al-Hariri
               (1054-1122), written in saj', that is, rhymed prose, a principal form of medieval Arabic artistic expression.
               The Holy Qur'an is known to have greatly influenced Arab and Muslim literature in the Middle Ages. The
               spirit of Islam and Qur'anic quotations are reflected not only in religious literature and treatises on Muslim
               law, but this influence is also observed in other works of medieval art. This aspect will be examined in the
               context of al-Hariri's maqamats, considered to be amongst the finest Arabic novellas focusing on eloquence,
               ambition, knowledge across various fields, asceticism, and other themes in medieval Arabic literature. The
               maqamats reveal that Qur'anic quotations used in the discourse of two pivotal characters - the narrator and the
               protagonist - are skilfully employed in various situations, topics, and relationships. Furthermore, the main
               character justifies his actions through these Qur'anic quotations.

1   INTRODUCTION

Maqamats have held a significant place in Arabic literature since their inception as a genre. Badi'-uz-Zaman al-Hamadani (969-1057) is acknowledged as the founder of this genre. However, the genre of maqama is deemed to have reached its zenith in al-Hariri's work (Talimat, 1957, 8).

The maqamas are composed in saj', or rhymed prose. Each sentence is teeming with dozens of metaphors, similes, parallelisms, exaggerations, ironies, proverbs, and verses from the Holy Qur'an. Authors of these works employ the breadth of Arabic vocabulary extensively, demonstrating skilful use of wordplay and distinctive features of Arabic writing throughout the narrative process.

In this respect, the hero of the maqama is not only a deceptive charlatan but also a highly educated individual. Moreover, he is a skilled poet and orator with profound knowledge in fiqh, shari'a, sarf, and nahw, demonstrating his flair for oratory and verse.

His discourse is poetic, and even when it takes the form of prose, it represents the pinnacle of maqamats.

It should be noted here that Hariri's maqamats profoundly influenced his contemporary, the renowned scholar Mahmud Abulqasim al-Zamakhshari (1074-1143). Unlike the works of al-Hamadani and al-Hariri, which later became a tradition, al-Zamakhshari introduced a fresh approach to this genre. His maqamats also bear scholarly value as they serve as a serious source in other disciplines such as medieval history, Islamic jurisprudence, and linguistics.

Numerous authors in Arabic literature attempted to emulate al-Hamadani and al-Hariri but fell short of reaching their calibre. Works of this genre continued to be produced even into the 20th century, with more than seventy writers known to have explored the genre of maqama. Attempts to imitate the maqama genre persist in the present era.

Typically, an author creates a collection of several dozen maqamats, each of which contains an independent and complete story. All maqamats are unified by the constant presence of two characters.

The first of these – the main participant in the maqamats – is an educated, jovial, ingenious, and nonchalant wanderer. His speech draws people towards him, captivates them with his eloquence, and

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then he deceives them, robbing them of their money and possessions.

In each maqama, the primary character emerges in a new city, often after which the maqama is named. The setting of events in maqamats is usually a market, mosque, courthouse, or junction, that is, a crowded location.

The second constant character is the narrator. The narration of the entire set of maqamats is executed by him. He is typically a merchant who journeys from town to town and encounters the main character, who presents himself in a new disguise each time. Sometimes, even though the narrator falls into the main character's trap, he nonetheless supports the protagonist. Sooner or later, the narrator recognises the main character either by his speech or behaviour, confronts him, argues with him, and reprimands him for his deceit. The wanderer-hero responds with clever rhetoric or an impromptu poem and leaves the narrator to encounter him in a new maqama.

The primary character of the maqamats, his actions, the foundation of the narrative, and the hero's struggle to earn a living, all echo the distinct features of the period in which maqamats originated and evolved.

These amusing, engaging stories and anecdotes about cunning deceivers, common among the people, can be found both in the medieval Arab anthology and in "One Thousand and One Nights".

The main character, with his strange adventures, belongs to the "Banu Sasan" category.

However, maqamats are not linked to folk literature in any way. On the contrary, they emerged as an original literary genre, satisfying all the criteria of high-style literature.

Critics of medieval Arabic literature greatly appreciated the maqamats because they were articulated with exquisite and delicate expressions, thereby elevating their content to a superior level. They regard Abu Muhammad al-Qasim al-Hariri, a descendant of Badi-uz-Zaman al-Hamadani, the founder of this genre, to be the most skilled master of the maqama genre. European researchers rank al-Hamadani first and criticise al-Hariri for what they perceive as his pompous and reticent language. Nevertheless, they accept the opinion of Eastern literary critics.

Abu Muhammad al-Qasim ibn Ali al-Hariri al-Basri (1054-1122), who was born into the family of a wealthy silk merchant and landowner in Basra, received a good education, primarily in jurisprudence, the Arabic literary language, and its rich vocabulary. Al-Hariri, like many renowned writers of his time, lived amongst the Bedouins, who were then considered to be the custodians of the "purest" Arabic language, the pre-Islamic poetry, and the language of the Qur'an.

2 STUDY, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

Quotations from the Holy Qur'an frequently appear in many of al-Hariri's maqamas: they include verses from the Qur'an, paraphrasing of Qur'anic expressions, allusions to imagery in the Qur'an, and irony.

In al-Hariri's maqamas of Ray, Fiqh, Euphrates, Sur, Marw, Oman, Rahbiya, and Sasan, certain phrases from the Qur'anic verses are quoted directly, and all these quotations are presented in the speech of the main character, Abu Zayd al-Saruji.

Often, Abu Zayd's speech, whether it be a sermon or a lecture before a gathering of people, concludes with such quotations. In these instances, the quotations serve as evidence or an undeniable conclusion of the "veracity" of his words, and the Qur'anic verses are used to fully or partially corroborate their meaning (Grunebaum, 1981, 142). These quotations blend seamlessly with the saj' in the text. Quotations from the Euphrates and Sasan maqamas may seem unrhymed from the exterior, but they become an integral part of the content. When Abu Zayd aged in the maqama of Sasan, he advised his son that deception was now the most beneficial profession, stating, "Do not despair of the mercy of Allah."

"and do not despair of God's comfort."

This sentence is taken from verse 87 of Surah Yusuf in the Holy Qur'an.

("Do not despair of God's comfort. Only disbelieving people despair of God's comfort.") (Holy Qur'an, 12:87).

In the maqama of Sawa, the main character, Abu Zayd al-Saruji, delivers a sermon to the people assembled in the cemetery, preaching about the necessity for everyone to remember their mortality and divine punishment in the Hereafter. He concludes his sermon with the phrase:

("Indeed, you will come to know.") (Holy Qur'an, 102:4).

In the maqama of Ray, Abu Zayd discusses how the Almighty Allah will reward his obedient servants according to their deeds on the Day of Judgment, and he quotes the following verses from the Holy Qur'an in his speech:

(Does man think that he will be left without purpose?) (Holy Qur'an, 75:36)

(and restrained the soul from desires.) (Holy Qur'an, 79:40).

("And that man attains only what he strives for, and that his efforts will be seen.") (Holy Qur'an, 53:39-41).

Abu Zayd continues his speech and references verses 7-9 of Surah al-Rahman in the Holy Qur'an.

While comparing the art of accounting and secretarial work in the maqama of Euphrates, Abu Zayd concludes his speech with the Qur'anic verse: "... and between the clerks and us, when they accept bribes, disagreement will arise, after all, among them were those who believed and did good deeds" (Hariri, 243).

("Those who believe and do good deeds.") (Holy Qur'an, 47:2)

In his speech in the Omani maqama, Abu Zayd quotes the following phrase.

"Shall I guide you to a commerce that will deliver you from a painful torment?"

This verse, echoed in Abu Zayd's speech, entices the listener to pay attention to the subsequent words of the speaker. Abu Zayd concludes his speech with the following words. "Embark in it the ship.

"In the name of God shall be its sailing and its anchorage.") (Holy Qur'an, 11:41)

The Qur'anic verses in the examples above are presented by the author in the speech of Abu Zayd. The verses conclude his sermon or public lecture, and serve as the climax of his speech, followed by poetic verses on the same topic.

Quoting verses from the Qur'an is also characteristic of the narrator's speech. For instance, here's a short excerpt from the maqama of Samarkand.

("I took a place in the middle of the mosque to listen to the sermon, and people came to worship (literally: the religion of God) in groups, singly and in pairs.")

The phrase "the people entering God's religion (Islam) in multitudes" is quoted from the Holy Qur'an (Holy Qur'an, 110:2).

Also, in the maqama of Wasit:

The phrase "he swore by the mountain of Tur and by the name of the holy book" is also quoted from the Qur'an (Hariri, 334).

("I swear by Mount Tur, by the written Book (Qur'an)...") (Holy Qur'an, 52:1-3).

In the maqama of Sur, the narrator accidentally stumbles upon a wedding in the family of "Banu Sasan", a class of beggars and impoverished individuals. Addressing those present at the wedding, the respected sheikh, undoubtedly Abu Zayd, praises Allah for "ordaining zakat from one's property, forbidding the expulsion of poor beggars, and commanding his servants to give a specific share to the poor." (Hariri, 352).

The verse is quoted from the Holy Qur'an (Holy Qur'an, 70:74). The phrase at the beginning of this passage is also quoted from the 36th verse of Surah "Hajj" of the Holy Qur'an, "...eat of them (yourself) and feed the contented and the beggar." (eat of them and feed the contented and the beggar.) Words meaning "you will eat" are adopted.

As the speech in this maqama is given at a wedding, Abu Zayd has an example from the Holy Qur'an ready for this occasion. After all, "marriage is ordained by God" for people.

(O people! We created you from a male (Adam) and a female (Eve), and made you into (different) peoples and tribes, that you may know one another.) (Holy Qur'an, 49:13).

As can be seen from the above, the main character's elevated level of vocabulary is reinforced by Quranic quotations at different stylistic levels of the speech, which are characteristic of various elements that harmonise in the content of the maqamats.

The hero of maqamats not only makes a living by skilfully deceiving but also demonstrates his high level of education, his knowledge of Islamic law, grammar, rhetoric, poetry and other fields.

Qur'anic verses are quoted in maqamats as well as in the form of appropriate expressions. When the narrator criticises the main character, Abu Zayd, for lying and cheating, he responds in such a way that his response is more convincing than the criticism. The divine word, that is, excerpts (verses) from the Holy Qur'an and hadiths, are often used as a means of justification. For instance, in the maqama about "the Dinar", the hero appears as a lame old man in ragged clothes, lamenting the changes in his fortune - he was once rich and generous, but now he has become a poor old man. In this, as in other roles, he demonstrates his impressive eloquence and quick-witted inventiveness. He shows that he is ready to elevate it (the dinar) to the sky in order to earn it, and if necessary, to devalue it on the spot. At the end of the story, al-Harith ibn Hammam recognises Abu Zayd in the guise of an old man, and asks the question: "Why did you pretend to be lame?", to which Abu Zayd responds,

("There is no sin in the lame" - an ironic reference to the Holy Qur'an, Surah 48, verse 17, which states that the blind, the lame, and the sick may not participate in the holy war - Jihad).

"There is no blame on the blind, nor any blame on the lame, nor any blame on the sick." (that is, he is not blamed for not participating in jihad) (Holy Qur'an, 48:17).

Another example: At the maqama of Dimyat, Abu Zayd received a reward for his eloquent mastery and, having devised a false pretext and promising to return soon, departed from the group. Subsequently, the narrator discovered a letter written by Abu Zayd to justify his actions: "Oh, you who aided me, don't blame me for leaving you, it's not due to fatigue or arrogance, but because I am abiding by the rule: 'Is your stomach full? – then leave!'" Let's compare:

("…And when you have eaten, disperse…") (Holy Qur'an, 33:53).

In addition to quoting and paraphrasing the words of the Qur'an, al-Hariri refers to or alludes to images from the Qur'an in order to characterise one or another quality and trait of the heroes of his work. Let's provide an example. In the maqama of Kufa, Abu Zayd speaks about his situation and says: "... I was cast onto this earth as a stranger, I was poor and hungry, my purse became like the heart of Musa's mother" (Hariri, 47).

("The heart of Musa's mother became vacant. She was about to disclose him, had We not steadied her heart, that she may remain a believer.") (Holy Qur'an, 28:10).

In the maqama of Rahbiya, the Holy Qur'an refers to Surah Yusuf (No. 12). "... He is considered as innocent as an innocent wolf in the death of Ibn Ya'qub." Yusuf's brothers sold him into slavery and lied to their father, alleging that he had been eaten by a wolf.

("They said, "O father, we went off racing one another, and left Yusuf by our belongings; and the wolf ate him.") (Holy Qur'an, 12-17).

Another example is given in the maqama of "Qahqariya". The reason why this maqama is so named is because it contains one treatise, which is recited the same way from beginning to end and from end to beginning.

"Then they separated and dispersed like the Sabaeans" (Hariri, 186).

This is a reference to the story of the tribe of Saba in South Arabia, who were warned by God about a flood, as told in Surah Saba (#34) of the Qur'an. The words of Allah Almighty are mentioned in the commentary of the maqamats.

("…and We scattered them in every direction.") (Holy Qur'an, 34:19).

In the maqama of Makkah, we read the following: "Is our promise like Urquba's promise? Is there anything left in Ya'qub's heart?" When the narrator says, "the need in Ya'qub's heart" here, he refers to the following verse in Surah Yusuf.

("It was just a need in the soul of Ya'qub, which he carried out.") (Holy Qur'an, 12:67). It is known that this expression "the need in the heart of Ya'qub" has become a famous proverb among the people. The author also mentions Atiya Urquba, which became the nation's proverbs when the fulfillment of the promise was delayed, and "Books of Parables" (Al-Maydani, 447; Al-Askari, 433; Al-Zamakhshari, 176) uses the phrase "Urquba's promise" ("The day Urquba said").

In the maqama of Sinjar (Hariri, 169), the narrator recalls the events mentioned in Surah Shams, and admonishes Abu Zayd not to be like Qudar from the tribe of Thamud. It is mentioned in this surah that the tribe of Thamud was tormented because they betrayed Prophet Salih, peace be upon him, and slaughtered the camel he brought.

Furthermore, this maqama refers to verse 102 of Surah Al-Baqarah.

It is mentioned that Babylon was renowned for magic with the phrases (...but who teaches people magic and what was revealed to the angels named Harut and Marut in Babylon...).

There is a covert reference to the story mentioned in Surah Yusuf in the maqama of Zabidiya. The protagonist brings in a young man and sells him to the narrator. The narrator overlooks the young man's hidden message and loses his money.

In the maqama of Saadia, the narrator recounts the tale of a sheikh. The sheikh brings a boy before a judge, complaining that the boy does not heed his instructions. The judge pronounces: "If the child does not obey his father's commands, the father is considered to have lost the child." Angered, the boy recites beautiful verses proclaiming that he does everything his father instructs him to, that he learned manners from his father, and he cites the example of the rejection of Khidr and Musa, peace be upon them. Here is a reference to verse 77 of Surah Kahf.

("When they reached the people of a town, they asked them for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality.") (Holy Qur'an, 18:77).

There are such lines in Halab's maqam: "May Allah bless you with this "talo" (the offspring of the deer), just as He blessed the non-existent and the non-existent," referring to the 35th verse of Surah Noor.

("The lamp is within a glass. The glass is like a brilliant planet, fuelled by a blessed tree, an olive tree, neither eastern nor western.") (Holy Qur'an, 24:35).

The intriguing aspect of this example is how the "no and no" can possess a blessing. In order to comprehend this phrase, the reader must have a philological sense and he must have committed the Holy Qur'an to memory, as well as being capable of interpreting it. In the Holy Quran, it is stated that the olive tree is "neither eastern nor western".

When Abu Zayd delivered a speech in the maqam of Basra, he portrayed this city, founded by Caliph Umar, as "the symbol of purity", and he recalled a number of scholars along with their qualities. For instance, he describes Abu Ubaydah, the collector of "Ayyam al-Arab" as a "scholar of all times", Abu Aswad al-Duali as "the founder of grammar", and Khalil ibn Ahmad as the one who determined the metre of poems. In his speech, he uses expressions such as "Ya'qub's lament", "When you decide, then rely on God", and "this is where you and I part ways". "Ya'qub's lament" refers to the story of Yusuf's father Ya'qub, peace be upon him, in Surah Yusuf. "When you decide to do something, rely on God" is a reference to verse 159 of Surah Al-Imran.

 ("And when you have decided, then rely on God").
The phrases "This is the parting between you and me" and "Would that I was to be forgotten" in the poetic passage of this maqama are taken from Surahs Kahf and Maryam.

At this point, in our view, it is essential to emphasise a significant aspect in Arabic literature, particularly in al-Hariri's maqamats – that is the reflection of the spirit of Islam (Grunebaum, 176-191). After all, the entirety of medieval Arab and Muslim world's literature, heavily influenced by the Qur'an, was imbued with the Qur'anic worldview and enriched with quotations from the holy book and allusions to Qur'anic imagery.

This trend is apparent in Hariri's works, which are a unique genre combining features of prose and poetry, merging elegant literature and vivid speech on various topics, as seen in all medieval authors' works. In Hariri's ascetic maqamats, the character Abu Zayd's speeches, the transience of earthly pleasures, divine retribution for any sin, and the call to perform good deeds are portrayed. The maqams collections of Sana, Sav, Ray, Samarkand, Ramliya, Tinnis and Basra were written in this style. In the examination of these maqamats, the author's image, "closely associated with the style of the oratorical art of exposition", can be more vividly discerned. (Polyakov, 193).

The author of the 11th-16th centuries was always a khatib (or a preacher) to a certain degree... hence the oratorical style of narration can be sensed throughout the entire literature of the Middle Ages. (Likhachyov, 133).

3   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that 26 out of the 50 maqamats composing the collection contain Quranic quotations. In 35 instances, 18 maqamats refer to one image or another from the Qur'an, and 5 maqams quote the verses of the Qur'an using borrowed expressions.

Consequently, we have examined a) direct quotations, b) quotations of the Qur'anic verses in the form of catchphrases, c) irony and allusions to the images of the Qur'an, and finally, word-formative forms. These are predominantly characteristic of the speech of Abu Zayd al-Saruji, but can also be found in the narrator's speech, and to a lesser extent, in the dialogue of other characters. Quotations from the Holy Qur'an in al-Hariri's maqamats, whether they are direct quotations, paraphrases of the Qur'anic verses, or references to Qur'anic images, were utilised to justify various actions of the main character of the maqamats, Abu Zayd. His oration before the people serves as the conclusive evidence of his discourse; it reinforces the author's viewpoint, expressed through the language of the main character or narrator, and also assists in fully revealing the signs, qualities, characters, and essence of the main protagonists.

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