

Doctoral Dissertation

**POETICS OF AMBIVALENCE IN AL-MA‘ARRĪ’S *LUZŪMĪYĀT* AND THE QUESTION  
OF FREETHINKING**

by

Sona Grigoryan

Supervisor: Aziz Al-Azmeh

Submitted to  
the Medieval Studies Department,  
Central European University, Budapest

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval Studies

Budapest

2018

## TABLE OF CONTENT

Acknowledgements .....	iv
List of Abbreviations.....	v
Some Matters of Usage .....	vi
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Al-Ma‘arrī-an Intriguing Figure.....	1
2. The Aim and Focus of the Thesis.....	4
3. Working Material .....	13
<b>CHAPTER 1. AL-MA‘ARRĪ AND HIS CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>15</b>
1.1. Historical Setting .....	15
1.2. Al-Ma‘arrī’s Life .....	23
1.3. Works.....	28
1.4. Social Standing and Network .....	51
1.5. Reputation of Unbeliever .....	63
1.6. Possible Affiliations?.....	64
<b>CHAPTER 2. LUZŪMĪYĀT AND SOME OF ITS LITERARY FEATURES .....</b>	<b>69</b>
2.1. Introductory Remarks .....	69
2.2. <i>Luzūm</i> as a “Sheer” Poetry? .....	70
2.3. Genre and Meaning .....	75
2.4. Structure and Style.....	83
2.5. Thematic Landscape .....	94
<b>CHAPTER 3. ISSUES OF DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF UNBELIEF, AND THE CASE OF LUZŪM .....</b>	<b>98</b>
3.1. General Terms and Interpretations of Unbelief.....	98
3.2. Studies of the ‘Abbasid Context of Unbelief .....	108
3.3. Modern Readings of Belief and Unbelief in <i>Luzūm</i> .....	123
3.4. Revisiting <i>Luzūm</i> in the Light of Ambivalence and Polemics .....	134
<b>CHAPTER 4. REGISTERS OF OPPOSITES IN LUZŪM: GOD, REVELATION, AND REASON..</b>	<b>142</b>
4.1. God: The Problem .....	142
4.2. God in <i>Luzūm</i> .....	148
The Unbeliever’s God .....	153
Believer’s God .....	157
Irony .....	161

4.3.	Conclusion: Is there a Definition? .....	164
4.4.	Prophecy: The Problem.....	166
4.5.	Prophecy in <i>Luzūm</i> .....	168
4.6.	Scriptures: the Problem.....	172
4.7.	Scriptures in <i>Luzūm</i> .....	173
4.8.	Conclusion: Religion Simplified? .....	177
4.9.	Reason: The Problem.....	181
4.10.	Al-Ma‘arrī’s Rationalism .....	185
4.11.	Reason constrained .....	190
	Conclusion.....	191
<b>CHAPTER 5. ISSUES OF RECEPTION AND PERSECUTION.....</b>		<b>194</b>
5.1.	Denunciations, Censures and Responses during Lifetime .....	195
5.2.	The Issue of Persecution .....	209
5.3.	Image in Posterity .....	217
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>		<b>230</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRPAHY .....</b>		<b>235</b>

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply thankful and grateful to my supervisor Aziz Al-Azmeh for his support, wisdom, and advice. I thank him for always carefully reading drafts of my chapters in the shortest possible time, for always providing me with clear suggestions and questions of inquiry, and for being available for conversations when I needed them. Most of all, I am grateful to him for so wonderfully combining his demanding attitude with patience and great understanding.

I thank Professor Nadia al-Bagdadi not only for her scholarly advice and support, but also for directing me towards practical solutions in academic matters, as well as non-academic.

I am thankful to professors Alice Coyke and Volker Menze for their constant encouragement, Csilla Dobos for all her logistical help and for her warmth, Esther Holbrook for taking care of many administrative arrangements and for cheering me up.

I have immensely benefited from my research visits to the Orient Institute-Beirut. My regular consultations with Professor Stefan Leder were always enlightening and encouraging. I also thank Dahlia Gubara at American University of Beirut for the enthusiasm she has always shown towards my research. I thank Alfred El-Khoury and Safaa Ibrahim, two wonderful students of Arabic literature at AUB, for their help in linguistic and literary matters.

I am thankful to my colleagues Stephan Tölke and Marijana Misevic for their help in providing me with literature, which they did so smoothly, to Courtney Krolikoski for correcting my English in some parts of the thesis, to Andras Kraft for being a nice colleague and for providing me with suggestions.

All this time, I have been surrounded with kindness and care of my friends Veronica Ferreri, Jana Bacova, Anna Ohanjanyan, Judit Veres, Szilvia Nyari, Zoja Ivanisevic, Asli Karaca, Pamela Klasova, Elena Sahin, Ruben Jengibarjan, Piruza Hayrapetyan, Tatev Beknazaryan, and Artak Galyan.

I am the luckiest person for having in my life Dora Ivanisevic and Kristina Grigoryan, for their unwavering support and endless love. My gratitude to all members of my wonderful family, kids and adults, has no limit.

This thesis has been, for better or worse, a journey for two. Mamikon shared my burden with care, and optimism and had to deal with my anxieties as much as no one did. I thank him for making these years colorful and very special.

## List of Abbreviations

BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
EAI	Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, ed Julia Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey. London, Routledge, 1998
EI <sup>2</sup>	Encyclopedia of Islam, ed. H.A.R. Gibb et al., 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition. Leiden: Brill, 1960-2004
EI <sup>3</sup>	Encyclopedia of Islam, ed. Kate Fleet et al., 3 <sup>rd</sup> edition, Leiden; Brill, 2007-
HAWT	History of Arabic Written Tradition. English translation of <i>Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur</i> by Carl Brockelmann. Trans. by Joep Lameer. Leiden: Brill, 2014
GAL	Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur. Carl Brockelmann. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1937-42
JAL	Journal of Arabic Literature
JRAS	Journal of Royal Asiatic Studies
JSAL	Journal of South-Asian Linguistics
NPEPP	New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger, T.V.F. Brogan et al., Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993
SI	Studia Islamica
TQ	Ta'rīf al-Qudamā' bi-Abī'l-Alā' al-Ma'arrī, ed. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn , Muṣṭafā s-Saqqā et al., Cairo: Dāral-qawmīya li-ṭ-Ṭibā'a wa-n-Nashr, 1965
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

## **Some Matters of Usage**

For transliterating purpose, I followed the system of *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*. However, Arabic words which are frequently used in English, such as Sunni, Shi‘i, Imam, shaykh and so forth, are left with English spelling and are not in italics.

I have only used Gregorian dates for the sake of simple flow of the text.

I have used Yusuf Ali’s translation for quoting qur’anic verses in English.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Al-Ma‘arrī-an Intriguing Figure

It was reported in February 2013 that the armed fighters of *Jabhat an-Nuṣra* beheaded the statue<sup>1</sup> of the eleventh century blind poet Abū l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī (d.1058) which stood in his birthplace Ma‘arat al-Nu‘man, a small town close to Aleppo.<sup>2</sup> Although the speculations over the reason for attacking the bust varied,<sup>3</sup> the major reason was declared al-Ma‘arrī’s anti-Islamism. The event attracted the attention of Western media too, where a few broadcasts and essays appeared labeling the poet as an atheist and a freethinker.<sup>4</sup> Centuries after his death the name of the blind vegan and his image as a freethinker, heretic, skeptic or religious critic came on the scene again.

Al-Ma‘arrī never enjoyed a simple treatment; his reputation revolved around his poetic genius and his unbelief, which generated a complex image of the poet throughout centuries. The famous biographer Yāqūt Ḥamawī (d. 1229) recorded the following about him: “People hold different opinions about him: some say he was a heretic (*zindīq*)...others say he was a pious ascetic, extremely abstemious (*mutaqallilan*) who imposed harshness on himself and turned away from worldly things.”<sup>5</sup> While of similar opinions from pre-modern times more will follow in the next pages, a few general opinions about and references to al-Ma‘arrī by contemporary thinkers are worthy to highlight.

<sup>1</sup> The statue was made in 1945 by the sculptor Muḥammad Faṭḥī. The same year was al-Ma‘arrī’s millennial commemoration by a conference in Damascus results of which, numerous article and essays, were published in *Mihrajān al-Alfī l- Abī l- ‘Alā al-Ma ‘arrī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1945).

<sup>2</sup> <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyrialatestnews/armed-men-behead-syria-poet-statue> (accessed: 3 Aug, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> <http://observers.france24.com/en/20130214-jihadists-behead-statue-syrian-poet-abul-ala-al-maari> (accessed: 3 Aug, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> See for instance the broadcast by BBC radio: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072jftc>; also, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/syrian-rebels-have-taken-iconoclasm-to-new-depths-with-shrines-statues-and-even-a-tree-destroyed-but-9021017.html>; <https://www.historyanswers.co.uk/medieval-renaissance/al-maari-the-11th-century-poet-that-pissed-off-al-qaeda/> (accessed: 8 August, 2017). Al-Ma‘arrī’s name also appears in the online discussions of vegan communities. The poet admired, for instance, by British vegan poet Benjamin Zephaniah: see <http://theveganooption.org/2012/03/06/benjamin-zephaniah-al-ma%CA%BFarri/> (accessed: 25 February, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’ aw Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma‘rifat al-Adīb*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 1:326.

Al-Ma‘arrī has been frequently referred to in modern and contemporary discourses of critique of religions and rationalism in order to demonstrate that those themes are not alien the Arab-Muslim thought. For instance, Shibli Shumayyil (d.1917), the first who introduced the theory of evolution in Arabic, a materialist and Darwinist, referred to al-Ma‘arrī, albeit briefly, in order to show that the critique of revelations and materialist views are not foreign to Arab thought.<sup>6</sup> Another thinker, the Ottoman intellectual and materialist Abdullah Cevdet (d.1932) called al-Ma‘arrī “anarchist precursor,” and saw *Luzūm* as an interpretation of the Qur’an by a *libre-penseur*.<sup>7</sup> Amīn Rīhānī (d.1940), the famous Lebanese American writer, referred to al-Ma‘arrī, “a liberal thinker, a trenchant writer, a free, candid and honest man,” as an antidote against “Islamic irrationalism,” as “the Lucretius of Islam, the Diogenes of Arabica, and Voltaire of the East.”<sup>8</sup>

The insufficient attention and appreciation of al-Ma‘arrī was lamented by Muḥammad Zakarīya (b.1951), a Palestinian poet and author for whom Abū’l-‘Alā’ is associated with estrangement and alienation. Despite all the fame surrounding him, al-Ma‘arrī remains a stranger, an expelled one, a fugitive (*ṭarīd*).<sup>9</sup> Irrespective of all influences of his time, including that by his favorite poet al-Mutanabbī, Ma‘arrī was the most self-made. He was a stranger in his time, because he attempted to change the functions of poetry: instead of eulogizing rulers, which almost all poets did, he shifted the main register of poetry towards human sufferings. He remains a stranger nowadays too. Modern scholars have focused on his religious views, seeking to decide on his belief and unbelief, neglecting his poetry. Interestingly, however, the poetry of Abū Nuwās (d.814), for

<sup>6</sup> Shibli Shumayyil, *Falsafat an-Nushū’ wa-l-Irtiqā’* (Beirut: Dār Mārūn ‘Abbūd, 1983), *Introduction*, 29; Marwa El-Shakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 112.

<sup>7</sup> M.Şükrü Hanioğlu, “Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art,” in *Late Ottoman Society: the Intellectual Legacy*, ed.E. Özdamga (London/NY: Routledge, 2005), 52.

<sup>8</sup> Ameen Rihani, *The Quatrains of Abū’ l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī: selected from Luzūm mā lā yalzam and Saqt Uz-Zind* (London: Grand Richards, 1904), xv. Al-Ma‘arrī is perhaps the second Arab author after Ibn Khaldun so frequently compared with non-Arab authors such as Lucian of Samosata for his critique of religion, Dante for the ironic and allegoric representations of Afterlife, Schopenhauer for his pessimism: See, for instance, Gregor Schoeler, *Paradies und Hölle* (München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002), 31-33; ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād, “Al-Ma‘arrī wa-falsafatuhu,” *Muqataṭaf* 49 (1916): 465-474. For Rihani’s reception of al-Ma‘arrī, see S. Hassan, *Immigration Narratives: Orinetalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44-46.

<sup>9</sup> See Muḥammad Zakarīya, *Ar-Rāhib al-Kūrī* (Ramallah: Muwatin, 2005), 161.



instance, who has also been thought of as a *zindīq* (pseudo-Manichean or heretic in general) and skeptic, has been in great demand. Ma‘arrī could have been considered as the father of modernity, yet he has been abandoned, Zakariya thinks.

The poet represented a heroic figure to Fu‘ād Ḥaddād (d.1985), the Egyptian poet famous for writing in the Egyptian dialect. Voiced with the tongue of *misahḥaratī* (Ramaḍān drummer) during Ramaḍān to awaken people for their pre-dawn meal before the fast, al-Ma‘arrī symbolized the glorious and powerful past of the Arabs:<sup>10</sup>

Rapping my drum  
my teachings brighten the minds.  
In the atomic age we must let the  
poetry of al-Ma‘arrī be read  
and we must teach first grade  
the alphabet  
and honoring the ancestry  
People are principals.  
The books of the great  
are mounts and summits  
you either climb to the top  
or roll to the bottom.  
Your mind in your head  
will lead you to salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī is a hero for the staunch rejecter of Islam known under the pseudonym Ibn Warraq, who considered al-Ma‘arrī nothing less than a radical critic of Islam and who concluded his account on the poet with the celebratory expression “viva al-Ma‘arrī!”<sup>12</sup>

In addition, al-Ma‘arrī’s charm went past the Arab and Muslim readership. For example, a translation of his poetry found its place on Franz Kafka’s shelf.<sup>13</sup> Most probably it was the

<sup>10</sup>Ḥaddād composed his *al-Misahḥaratī* in 1951, and Sayid Makkawi composed the music for it. It was aired in radio during Ramaḍān for many years. See N. Radwan, “The land speaks Arabic: Shi‘r al-‘Āmiyya and Arab Nationalism,” in *Poetry and History: the Value of Poetry in reconstructing Arab History*, ed. R. Baalbaki, S. Agha, T. Khalidi (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2011). On the fascination of modern Arab poets, such as Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawāhirī, Ṣalāḥ ‘abd aṣ-Ṣabūr, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, and Adūnis, by al-Ma‘arrī, see Muhsin Musawi, “Engaging Tradition in Modern Arab Poetics,” *JAL* 33, no.2 (2002):172-210.

<sup>11</sup> This was written and read in Egyptian dialect: Ibid., 426.

<sup>12</sup> See Ibn Warraq, *Why I am not a Muslim* (New York: Prometheus Book, 1995), 289.

<sup>13</sup>Jens Hanssen, “Kafka and Arabs,” *Critical Inquiry* (2012), 175.

fragmentary translation by Alfred von Kremer of al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūmīyāt* (published in 1889), that is, possibly the same translation which inspired the Armenian canonical poet Avetiq Isahakyan (d. 1957) to compose one of the most popular poems in Armenian, entitled *Abu Lala Mahari*.<sup>14</sup>

This brief sketch of the modern references to Ma‘arrī is indicative of how variously the poet has been received and imagined, from symbolizing rationalism, the glorious Arab past, or as a rebel towards religions and signifying modernity and advance thinking.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. The Aim and Focus of the Thesis

The focus of this thesis is al-Ma‘arrī’s collection of poems entitled *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (*The Necessity of the Unnecessary*; hereafter, *Luzūm*), a work which has been deemed challenging for its abstruse language and even more so for its contradictory nature and distinguished with extraordinary rigidity of structure, prosody and versification. Contradictions relate mostly to matters of religion and faith, and are bluntly placed together in one and the same composition. For instance, many verses urge the dismissal of all the religions, yet others call for the opposite. One finds an orthodox portrayal of God next to His heretical representations. The conflictual arrangement shapes and informs a profoundly ambiguous text with a potential of being read and received differently.

This ambiguity, however, was not liked or, to put it in Thomas Bauer’s words,<sup>16</sup> was not tolerated by the Western scholars who sought to explain away contradictions and establish coherence in order to prove al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking and unbelief. Whereas medieval authors saw al-Ma‘arrī as doubting and confused, contemporary authors made a coherent (philosophical) thinker out of the poet and explained the contradictions away through the notion of *taqīya* (dissimulation).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>It is a rather long poem divided into 8 “suras,” where Mahari appears as quite a tragic figure, spiritual and rebellious at the same time. The poem is widely taught in Armenian schools, and al-Ma‘arrī’s name would ring a bell with many.

<sup>15</sup> In fact, modern receptions and reading of al-Ma‘arrī and his works among various intellectual milieu is a theme which merits a thorough examination and a separate study.

<sup>16</sup>The reference is to Thomas Bauer’s *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Verlag der Weltreligionen: Berlin, 2011), 15-25.

<sup>17</sup> The concept is mostly used for Shi‘i context but it is not peculiar only to Shi‘ism. It is attested among individual and small groups subscribing to minority views. See, van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*

By introducing this notion, contemporary scholars asserted that in order to avoid persecution, the poet had to conceal his unorthodox ideas through contradicting himself. This kind of reading has been established without any examination of socio-historical context or a critical approach to the notion of persecution.<sup>18</sup> This has been the reading practice from Alfred von Kremer in 1889 who was the first to extensively translate poems from *Luzūm* into German and write about al-Ma‘arrī’s religious views, to Kevin Lacey whose dissertation in 1984 is the most recent comprehensive study on *Luzūm*.

This theory of “concealed writing” was embraced by modern Arab authors too. Ṭaha Ḥussayn (d.1973), one of the most prominent Arab scholars on al-Ma‘arrī, who perhaps had a personal affection towards the poet due to the shared condition of blindness,<sup>19</sup> attempted to reconstruct a systematic framework of Ma‘arrī’s thought following the paradigm of the Western authors (he, like many others, called al-Ma‘arrī *al-shā‘ir al-faylasūf* (the poet-philosopher), an epithet one does not find in medieval sources).<sup>20</sup>

Yet the other current in ma‘arrīan scholarship, somewhat apologetic in manner, wanted to present al-Ma‘arrī as a sincere Muslim believer. Such was al-Ma‘arrī in the eyes of Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī one of the most enthusiastic scholars of al-Ma‘arrī, the author of the most

---

(Berlin/NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1991-1995), vol. 1, 313 (henceforth: *TG*). See also E. Kohlberg, “Taqīyya in Shi‘ī theology and religion,” in Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds. *Secrecy and concealment. Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 345-379.

<sup>18</sup>The main studies along these lines, which will be discussed separately, are A. von Kremer, *Über die philosophischen Gedichte des Abul ‘alā Ma‘arry: eine culturgeschichtliche Studie* (Wien: Tempsky, 1889); R. A. Nicholson, “The Meditations of Ma‘arrī,” *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921); R.K. Lacey, *Man and Society in the Luzūmiyyāt of al-Ma‘arrī* (Unpublished PhD dissertation: Harvard University, 1984).

<sup>19</sup>For Ṭ Ḥusayn’s identification with al-Ma‘arrī, see F. Malti-Douglas, *Blindness and Autobiography: Al-Ayyām of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), esp.23-25; 53-59; 159-161.

<sup>20</sup>Ṭ Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī ‘l-‘Alā* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1963) which was Ḥusayn’s first doctoral dissertation topic completed in 1914 at the Cairo University (known as Egyptian University from 1908 to 1940, and King Fuad University from 1940 to 1950); idem., *Al-Ma‘arrīfī Sijnihi* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1935); idem., *Ṣawt Abī ‘l-‘Alā* (Cairo: Maktabat Ma‘ārif, n.d.). For Ḥusayn intolerance towards ambiguity, see: T. Bauer. *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*, 95-101.

comprehensive study on al-Ma‘arrī’s life, milieu, and works.<sup>21</sup> Another important ma‘arrīan scholar Aisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭi’) too strived to present al-Ma‘arrī in an orthodox veil.<sup>22</sup>

All the above mentioned studies on al-Ma‘arrī and *Luzūm* will be critically examined in the third chapter. In addition, this research aims at bringing forth all the important studies on al-Ma‘arrī and *Luzūm* both Arabic and international. References to and reviews of relevant studies will be made in specific contexts within the thesis. At this point, the following needs to be registered regarding the gap this research aims to fill.

All these studies ignored the relationship of the text with the context and the historical milieu from which it emerged. Or if a relation was made, it largely reflected the flaws of the contemporary studies on the age al-Ma‘arrī lived in. The core dynamic of the period has been for a long time characterized as a rigid division between theregnant Islamic orthodoxy and the humanist elite. One of the most popular studies of the period, J. Kramer’s *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, identified the Renaissance with individualism, cosmopolitanism, and secularism and opposed all of them to the traditional Islamic society.<sup>23</sup> One of the ways to arrange this dichotomy was, according to Kraemer, *taqīya*, which he expanded to cover the broad dissonance between *ẓāhir* (outward meaning) and *bāṭin* (hidden meaning) and with which he described the relationship between Islamic societal norms and iconoclastic individuals in the Buyid period. When it was difficult to place, for instance, Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī (d.1023), one of the most significant intellectual figures of the time, in either on the side of orthodoxy or humanism, he was then presented as “deeply alienated, a

<sup>21</sup> See Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmi‘ fī Akhbār Abī l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī wa-Āthārihi* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1963).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Āisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman, *Ma‘ Abī l-‘Alā’ fī Riḥlati Ḥayātihi* (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, 1972); also, Abd al-Muīn al-Mallūhī, *Difā’ ‘an Abī l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī* (Mu’assasat ar-Risāla: Beirut, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> J. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: the Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 11-13. Another problematic aspect of the study is the narrow definition of humanism for the Islamic context: Kraemer equated humanism with the scientific heritage of antiquity and Greek *paideia* representing philosophical and literary humanism respectively in Islam. Kraemer’s other study on the philosopher as-Sijistānī implied the same dichotomy and the same understanding of humanism: J. Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam: Abū Suleymān as-Sijistānī and his Circle* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

true outsider” who had to practice *taqīya*.<sup>24</sup> Marc Bergé too presented at-Tawhīdī as a suspect figure in the eyes of many Muslims because of his “unflinching promotion of humanist ideas.”<sup>25</sup> The rigid distinction between humanism and orthodoxy drew clear boundaries between *adab* and religion whereby an *adīb* (a humanist) would take the side of rationalism in contrast to tradition. These dichotomies support the general assumption that philosophical ideas were produced in a hostile environment and therefore disguised with religion,<sup>26</sup> for which, however, as Gutas has argued, there is no historical evidence.<sup>27</sup> These dichotomies also assumed that already in the tenth century there existed one regnant orthodoxy instead of many competing orthodoxies.

By and large, these are the assumptions that stood behind the study of al-Ma‘arrī who has been presented as an outsider, an exceptional thinker in a highly dichotomized environment who had to cover his ideas under the cloak of orthodox enunciations. This is how *Luzūm* was presented as unconventional and unusual, and in a way, unrelated to its age. In addition, in the studies of al-Ma‘arrī and of *Luzūm* in particular, notions such as covert writing, sincerity, and persecution, all essential concepts for studying of universal ideas of unbelief and freethinking, were examined

<sup>24</sup> Kraemer, *Humanism*, 208.

<sup>25</sup> M. Bergé, “Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawhīdī,” in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. J. Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112. In his other major study, on Abū Ḥayyān, Bergé, however, reduces the emphasis on humanist distinction but still uses the concept of humanism in order to integrate at-Tawhīdī in the Western narrative of intellectual development: see his *Pour un humanisme vécu: Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi: Commission des Publications de la Direction Générale des Relations Culturelles, Scientifiques et de la Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1979). G. Makdisi, too, made such a distinction between humanism and Islamic orthodoxy or scholasticism that when those who did not fit the boundaries, were attributed with cynicism or seen as unwanted heretics: such was, according to Makdisi, Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawhīdī: see G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in the Classical Islam and the Christian West with Special Reference to Scholasticism* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1990), 114-115. Mohammed Arkoun’s *Humanisme et islam. Combats et propositions* (Paris: Librairie Philosophie J. Vrin: 2005) implied the same dichotomy for describing the age of Miskawayh. Alexander Key has discussed and criticized the use of the term ‘humanism’ by the above mentioned authors in the most nuanced manner: see A. Key, “The Applicability of the term ‘Humanism’ to Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawhīdī,” *SI*, no. 100/101 (2005): 71-112. For another comprehensive review of these studies, see Nuha Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawhīdī and his Contemporaries* (London/NY: Routledge, 2015), 1-9. For the various use of the term of “humanism” often with unclear denotations in the Islamic context, see Marco Schoeller, “Zum Begriff des ‘islamischen Humanismus,’” *ZDMG*, vol. 151, no. 2 (2001): 275-320.

<sup>26</sup> This is the straussian paradigm of political philosophy dominant in the works of Mushin Mahdī too. See Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1959: see especially the study on al-Fārābī, 134-154; see also M. Mahdī, *Al-Fārābī and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> See Dimitri Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: an Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2002): 5-25.

neither in relation to their textual and historical contexts, nor was the use of these concepts enriched through relating them to universal history of unbelief and freethinking. Thus, as analytical tools, the notions were used uncritically and without deep scrutiny.

This thesis revisits the reading of *Luzūm* through properly relocating the text and the author into their time and context and through a reassessment of their contradictory and inconsistent nature. A major consideration for the study of *Luzūm* is that it came into being in a period which witnessed rigorous tensions between different fields of knowledge, debates among different theological and philosophical schools, a great interest in ethics, law and ascetic-mystical movements, and, finally, competing orthodoxies. This was an age of doubt and uncertainties which affected men of letters as well as religious scholars. *Luzūm* expresses the epistemological anxiety produced as a result of all these tensions and as such, it is a work deeply embedded in the time and context in which it was composed. Through *Luzūm*, al-Ma‘arrī contested current intellectual trends, challenged tradition, questioned religions, went against the mainstream, and criticized the ruling elite, but with all that, he remained an insider deeply rooted in the ambience from which *Luzūm* emerged.<sup>28</sup>

In order to introduce a revised reading of *Luzūm*, this research relies on the notion of ambivalence, i.e. co-existence in one person or in one work of contradictory emotions or attitudes towards the same object or the same situation. The notion of ambivalence allows for a hermeneutical possibility of reading *Luzūm* in the light of opposites, tensions, and contradictions. Instead of explaining away or dismissing diametrically opposite statements especially in matters of faith, for the sake of establishing coherence and consistency, the ambiguous and contradictory nature of *Luzūm* is reassessed and given a different value. The thesis will establish such an interpretative paradigm that will make each of the existing contradictory discourses of belief and unbelief stand on their own in one and the same text. Through hermeneutics of ambivalence an appropriate space is

<sup>28</sup> Criticizing persons of authority was not uncommon at least in Buyyid period: see M. Tuwātī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa fī l-Ḥaḍāra al-‘Arabīya: Ad-Dawla al-Buwayhīya Namūmadhajan* (Tunis: Manshūrat al-Ma‘had al-‘Ālī li-Lugha, 1999), 2:16-17.

given to doubt, confusion, irony and uncertainly. The notion unveils an experiential and skeptical attitude blended with playfulness and needlessness for definite conclusions. The purpose is to maintain a systemic reading as opposed to the previous reductive readings of *Luzūm*.

There is no intention here to necessarily see ambivalence as something Islamic and as a crucial part of *being* Muslim (lived *as* Islam) in the way Shahab Ahmad discussed it in his widelydebated *What is Islam*. While Ahmad has made an important point by showing that the process of making meaning through contradictions and ambivalence was not governed “by an authoritative urge to *fix the limitations of the correct*” (emphasis is from the original text) but by the urge to *explore and expand the dimensions of the meaningful*,<sup>29</sup> and also by emphasizing that modern Muslims are less cognitively habituated to thinking in terms of ambiguity, ambivalence and contradictions than their predecessors, he has overstretched his argument by seeing every ambivalent experience and sentiment as Islamic.<sup>30</sup>In Aḥmad’ lens, when the poet Ḥāfīz Shīrazī (d.1390) exposes ambivalence towards love as simultaneously carnal, Platonic, and Divine experience, it is Islamic, nothing else.

Certainly, in the case of al-Ma‘arrī, attributing an Islamic nature to his ambivalence and contradictions would cause more questions if not troublesand would first of all require redefinition of Islam. At least with regard to al-Ma‘arrī’s age, this would be a rather thorny task to solve. The ambivalence and contradictions discussed in this thesis could relate to any context which is deeply charged with intellectual anxieties, which witnesses a great degree of accumulation of knowledge and tension thereof in addition to religious and cultural diversities and alternating political powers. Such was al-Ma‘arrī’s age.

<sup>29</sup> Shahab Aḥmad, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Muslim* (Princeton/London: Princeton University Press, 2016), 286.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 397. The study has been widely reviewed: I would distinguish two of them: Frank Griffel, “Contradictions and Lots of Ambiguity: Two New Perspectives on Premodern (and Postclassical) Islamic Societies,” *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review*, vol. 8. no.1 (2017):1-21; Elias Muhanna, “Contradictions and Diversity,” *The Nation* (2016), 28-32.

Al-Ma‘arrī shifts between poles of affirmation and negation, expressed in unsupported assertions, meant to remain unresolved, and freed from the burden of arriving at final assertion and clear conclusion. There is an awareness of endless ambivalence caused by the unwillingness to overcome tension between the self and the world, the self and the other, and perhaps most dramatically, between the self and God. Deliberately remaining ambivalent and reluctant to conclusions, al-Ma‘arrī, in the most intense manner, demonstrated the intellectual struggles and epistemological anxiety of the age. Thus it can be claimed that *Luzūm* manifests both the richness and the futility of epistemological paradigms of the time.

Another aim of the thesis is to reevaluate al-Ma‘arrī’s place in the freethinking tradition. Al-Ma‘arrī has been ranked among the famous freethinkers such as Ibn ar-Rāwandī (d. ca. 911) and Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī (d. 925). However, no comparative effort has been put in order to understand al-Ma‘arrī’s views on religion and faith in relation to the previous critiques of religion. For ideas of unbelief were not new to al-Ma‘arrī, and by his time a strong tradition of unbelief and freethinking has been already established. Al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking must be looked at in the light of the ambivalence described above. *Luzūm* consists of contradictory discourses of belief and unbelief. It is the conjunction of these opposites that informs his freethinking, namely a kind of freethinking which allows the reader to opt for any either of the discourses. It is an intense yet a moderate type of freethinking, different from the kinds which will be discussed in the next pages.

In brief, this research revolves around the following set of inquiries: what does al-Ma‘arrī’s relation with the cultural, religious, and intellectual milieu of his time reveal about *Luzūm*? How should *Luzūm* be read in the light of its contradictory and incoherent content and extremely rigid formal and structural consistency? And how is his freethinking to be related to that of others? In addition, the thesis seeks to reevaluate applications of such terms as *taqīya*, sincerity, and



persecution to the study of al-Ma‘arrī and, in particular, to his *Luzūm* accompanied with a relevant aspects of their reception history.

The first chapter is about al-Ma‘arrī and his times. It provides a general overview of the historical time al-Ma‘arrī lived in underscoring the essential aspects of intellectual, cultural, and political life of the period. It then proceeds to a thorough examination of al-Ma‘arrī’s life, networks, social status, and reputation. The chapter also provides an overview of al-Ma‘arrī’s *oeuvre* whose examination shows that among al-Ma‘arrī’s other works *Luzūm* does not stand as exceptional.

The second chapter examines *Luzūm* in the light of its literary characteristics, the rigid structure, rhyme, form, and style of the collection and its mannerist implications. It also highlights the most current thematic motifs and tone of *Luzūm*. Unlike its content, the structure of *Luzūm* is rigorously consistent and imposing. It will be emphasized that the poet’s aim was to establish a certain relation to the outer world (even without panegyrics and eulogies) and claim cultural and social capital through the exposition of mannerist virtuosity and linguistic and literary excellence, which eventually constituted the major aspect of al-Ma‘arrī’s standing.

The third chapter will discuss unbelief and freethinking and look at the major interpretative paradigms and patterns of their histories both within European and Arab-Muslim contexts. The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate complexities of interpretations and highlight shared notions in the history of freethinking and unbelief across time and space. The chapter will then move to the case of al-Ma‘arrī and discuss in detail the previous readings of *Luzūm* and definitions of al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking and unbelief. The chapter will, to a great extent, question the notion of dissimulation and concealed writing with regard to *Luzūm* and re-assess the contradictory nature of this composition in the light of ambivalence. In addition to the notion of ambivalence, *ad hoc* expressions of polemics against other religions, spread throughout the collection, will be taken into consideration.

The fourth chapter will construct registers of opposites in relation to the notions of God, revelation and reason. It will illustrate parallel enunciations of affirmation and negation regarding these notions. The discussions will show that the notion of God is the most ambiguous in *Luzūm* imaged and portrayed through endless tension, anxiety, and irony. The attitude towards God was central in the formation of al-Ma‘arrī’s ambivalence and overall skepticism. Regarding revelation and law, it will be shown that although frequently dismissed, they were at the same time given moral value and potential and thus positively confirmed. Further, the chapter will nuance al-Ma‘arrī’s much celebrated rationalism through examining the parameters and restraints of reason. In order to depict a rich picture, background discussions will be provided throughout the chapter so as to how all the notions under examination were seen by other critics of religions predating al-Ma‘arrī, most importantly (but not only) by the theologian Ibn ar-Rāwandī and the philosopher Ibn Zakarīyā ar-Rāzī . In addition, views of modern scholars will be indicated.

The fifth and final chapter will explore some aspects of al-Ma‘arrī’s reception in his own time and among posterity. It will demonstrate that al-Ma‘arrī was occasionally accused of unbelief already during his life time; however, his religious views did not constitute the central aspect of his standing and role. It will be argued that the primary aspects in the construction of his social status were his linguistic and poetic excellence, his piety, teaching activity, and not least his belonging to a family of judges and notables. All these features built up an authority for al-Ma‘arrī to which religious accusations stood as secondary during his life-time. The chapter will show that the sharp polarization of Ma‘arrī’s image between unbelief and orthodoxy happened only in the subsequent centuries after his death. The conclusion of the thesis will bring all the discussions together and summarize the major outcomes, and suggest new questions and inquiries.

### 3. Working Material

A good edition of *Luzūm* is still awaited. I have embarked upon the reading of *Luzūm* with the edition of ‘Azīz Zand, which is an old but solid edition also used by R. Nicholson, H. Laoust, and R.K. Lacey, and it is therefore convenient for citation and referencing. This is the second complete edition after the Bombay lithographic publication by Ḥusaynīya printing in 1885. This second edition was published in 1891 and 1895 in two volumes by the *Maḥrūsa* printing house. The editor relied on a manuscript dating back to 1235 provided by the library of Yūsuf Bek Wahbī in Egypt. This was the earliest attempt to edit the text with a critical apparatus. Later on, I discovered the edition by Kamāl al-Yāziji published by *Dār al-Jīl* in Beirut in 1992. It consists of two volumes (611 and 522 respectively) and is based on four manuscripts, of which two are held in Leiden, one in Princeton University, and one at the disposal of Rāghib Pasha Library in Istanbul. I occasionally used this edition for the purpose of clarifications and comparisons since it contains many comments.<sup>31</sup>

I had at my disposal the digital copy of Leiden University Libraries MS Oriental 100 (UBL Or. 100). This is the oldest manuscript written in the very beautiful handwriting of Ibn al-Jawālīqī (d. 1145), who in turn copied it from the manuscript of al-Tabrīzī (d. 1109), a known disciple of al-Ma‘arrī who had read the poems in audition under the author himself. It is said that Ibn al-Jawālīqī, after copying the manuscript and comparing it with the original one, also read the book with al-Tabrīzī.<sup>32</sup> There are discrepancies between Zand’s edition and UBL Or. 100, and many of them have been noted and brought forth in the study of Lacey. Since the Leiden manuscript is the most reliable recension, in case of discrepancies, preference will be given to the manuscript reading.

<sup>31</sup> A widespread edition is Dār Ṣādir’s publication (Beirut, 1952), edited by Ibrāhīm al-A‘rabī in four parts (332, 346, 285, and 442 pages accordingly). This edition has been reprinted in 1961 and 1994. It is more for a popular use and its critical apparatus is weaker than the previous ones. Another known edition is by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1924.

<sup>32</sup> See S.M. Stern, “Some noteworthy Manuscripts of the Poems of Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī.” *Oriens* 7, No. 2 (1954): 322-347. See also: J. J. Witkam, “The *Ijāza* in Arabic Manuscripts” in *The History of the Book in the Middle East*, ed. J. Roper (London: Routledge, 2013), 91.

Some parts of *Luzūm* have been translated into English by Amīn Rīḥānī<sup>33</sup> and Henry Baerlein.<sup>34</sup> Betsy Shidfar edited massive translations into Russian.<sup>35</sup> The content of the *diwān* has been largely brought forth in the above-mentioned studies of von Kremer, R. Nicholson, and K.R. Lacey. A bigger part is brought forth in Abdullah el Tayeb's dissertation (1950).<sup>36</sup> I have frequently relied on the translations by Lacey since he checked the verses extensively against the UBL Or. 100. Although the existing translations have been very useful and I did rely on them to some extent, as it will be indicated, I have myself carried out translations of many verses and poems some of them with a help of experts in Arabic language and literature especially during my stays in Beirut. My task, however, was not to provide literary translations.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ameen Rihani, *Quatrains*.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Baerlein, *The Diwan of Abu'l-'Ala* (London: NYEP Dutton and Co., 1909).

<sup>35</sup> B. Shidfar, *Abu'l-'Ala al-Ma'arri: Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1990), 37-164.

<sup>36</sup> A. Tayyeb, *Abū' l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī as a Poet: an Aesthetic Appreciation* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: SOAS, 1950). A number of poems of *Luzūm* has been translated in into French: see Hoa-Hoï Vuong and Patrick Mégarbané, trans., *Les Impératifs : Poèmes de l'ascèse, Edition bilingue* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2009).

## CHAPTER 1. AL-MA‘ARRĪ AND HIS CONTEXT

This chapter provides a comprehensive backound of the ‘Abbasid cultural and political life in the tenth and eleventh centuries with a focus on Baghdad and North Syria. It aims to illustrate the main trajectories of knowledge production, intellectual concerns, and political settings of the time, and the historical milieu in which al-Ma‘arrī lived and worked. The chapter will provide a narrative of al-Ma‘arrī’s biography, his network, fame in the light of his literary and teaching activity as well as his reputation as an unbeliever, and possible political or religious affiliations. Most importantly, a section will discuss the corpus of al-Ma‘arrī’s works, its general nature, and highlight main characteristics of his prose and poetry.

### 1.1. Historical Setting

From the middle of the tenth century, the political power of the ‘Abbasid caliphate was reduced to a mere religious authority. In 945 the Buyids made Baghdad their capital, then in 969 the Fatimids took over Egypt and the Hamdanid dynasty took over the northern Iraq and Syria. These were all Shi‘i dynasties.

The time between the tenth and eleventh centuries was a period of remarkable intellectual activity, distinct due to its religious and cultural diversity. For example, cities like Baghdad, Rayy, Samarqand, and Shiraz became flourishing centers of knowledge during the Buyid reign. This period also introduced a number of masters of philosophy, theology, poetry, and grammar; including al-Mutanabbī (d.965), famous *littérateurs* Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023) and Ibn Miskawayh (d.1030) who were members of Buyid literary and scholarly circles, the great philosopher Ibn Sina (d. 1037), masters of grammar including Abū Sa‘īd as-Sīrāfī (d.979), the most learned authority on morphology Ibn Jinnī (d. 1002), and Ibn Fāris, (d. 1004) who was the teacher of both Badī‘ az-

Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d.1007), the author of the famous *Maqāmāt*, and the Buyid vizier Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād.

Many fundamental works on the Shi‘i and Sunni traditions were composed during this period. Works of scholars such as Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.1022), Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.1044), and Shaykh at-Ṭūsī (d.1067) had significant and lasting influence on Shi‘i intellectual history. At the same time, works of other Shiite scholars — such as al-Mas‘ūdī’s (d.956) history, Abū’l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī’s (967) collection of poetry and songs, and Ibn al-Nadīm’s (d.998) catalogue of Arabic book titles — played an important role in the preservation of Islamic heritage.

Sunni works, on the other hand, were intended to provide ideological ground for the restoration of Sunni power. The famous theologian and Mālikī jurist al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) systematized the Ash‘arī *kalām*, while Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d.1025), a Shāfi‘ī scholar, did the same for Mu‘tazilī *kalām*. Two treatises on public law and governance, both titled *Al-aḥkām as-Sulṭānīya*, were written during the reign of ‘Abbasid caliph al-Qādir (991-1031), one by the Shāfi‘ī scholar al-Māwardī (d.1058) and the other by the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Farrā’ (d. 1066). All these competing currents directed towards establishing orthodoxy intensified at once the intellectual vividness and tension of the period.

Intellectuals of the period comprised a distinct class with a sense of awareness of a shared interest. The relationship between ruling members and intellectuals was also conditioned by a mutual interest. Ruling parties used intellectuals to reinforce their authority and to extol their power, while intellectuals needed the rulers in order to sell their profession.<sup>37</sup> Members of *ahl al-udabā’* can be linked to two dominant social groups, the elite and the commoners (*al-khāṣṣa wa-l-‘āmma*), yet, intellectually, they moved between different religious or philosophical circles by using their

<sup>37</sup> M. Tuwātī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa*, 2:5-6.

language and rhetoric. Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī is an important example of an intellectual who did this.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that the Buyids were adherents of Shi‘i Islam did not preclude the participation of other, non-Shi‘i scholars and intellectuals in the cultural life of the period. This can be best seen in the nature of the scholarly and literary environments that were created in Buyid courts, especially in Baghdad and Rayy. The most significant circles of cultural and religious diversity were found in the literary and scholarly assemblies (*majālis*) of individual men or in courtly salons where both formal and informal interactions occurred between those in attendance.<sup>39</sup> Since they were independent of mosques, which also served as sites of scholarly gatherings, literary salons brought together poets, philosophers, grammarians, judges, astrologers, merchants, and other men of various religious backgrounds. In these locations, there was an intense interplay of secular and religious knowledge. Salons allowed the space for intellectual exchanges that were both serious and fun. At-Tawḥīdī told a story where a teacher, after having heavily discussed the Book, the *Sunna*, and issues of law and other themes, asked the attendants of the gathering to have fun. Frivolity (*bishr*) was seen as necessary in order to bring balance (*ta’dīl*) to the soul in such a way that it was not overwhelmed by serious matters and so that it could regain energy and receive what was needed.<sup>40</sup>

In Baghdad, one famous literary circle was organized by Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī (d.963), a writer of poetry and prose who was also the vizier and chief minister of Mu‘izz ad-Dawla. Al-Muhallabī achieved fame not only because of his successful political and military career, but also due to his role as a literary patron. Twice a week, this circle brought together men of letters with *qāḍīs* and merchants. Frequent attendants of his circle were the *qāḍī* and poet Abu’ l-Qāsim b.

<sup>38</sup> Based on the theory of Gramsci, Tuwātī divided the intellectuals of Buyid era into traditional, including ‘*ulamā*’ and the most ancient class of poets, and organic-intellectual which is a thinking and organizing element in society: *ibid.*, 2:237-259.

<sup>39</sup> In his study on literary salons, Samer Alī put clear distinction between courtly hierarchical salons (*majlis*, pl. *majālis*) with certain rules and etiquette, and collegial and more intimate salons (*mujālasa*, pl. *mujālasāt*): see Samer Alī, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages. Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 17.

<sup>40</sup> At-Tawḥīdī, *Imtā’ wa-l-Mu’ānasa*, 2:197.

Muḥammad b. Tanūkhī, the historian and collector of poems Abū'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, and the poet Ibn al-Ḥajjāj.<sup>41</sup>

Another famous patron, Abū 'Abdallāh b. Sa'dān (d.985), was an inspector in the army ('*ārid*) of the Buyid amir 'Aḏūd ad-Dawla from 980 and the vizier Ṣamsām ad-Dawla from 983. Literary sessions held by Ibn Sa'dān, a literary person himself, are best pictured through *Imtā' wa-l-Mu'ānasa* and *Kitāb aṣ-Ṣadāqa wa-ṣ-Ṣadīq*, both of which were dedicated to the vizier.<sup>42</sup> These sessions were attended by the philosopher Abū Suleymān as-Sijistānī, the mentor of Abū Ḥayyān, the Christian philosophers Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and 'Isā b. Zur'a, the famous *littérateur* Miskawayh, the mathematician and engineer Abū l-Wafā'-l-Būzajānī, and many other notable figures.<sup>43</sup> Abū Suleymān as-Sijistānī often arranged similar gatherings in his home, where educated people from various parts of the Islamic world would come together and this is well portrayed Abū Ḥayyān.<sup>44</sup>

If Ibn Sa'dān attracted philosophers, the vizier of Bahā' ad-Dawla (r. 988 – 1012) Sābūr b. Ardashīr (d.1025), attracted poets to his circles. Sābūr founded the *Dār al-'Ilm*, known as the Academy of Sābūr, around 996 in the quarter of Baghdad called *Bayn Sūrayn*.<sup>45</sup> What made the Academy such a significant institution was its library. So much that the whole institution was often referred to simply as "The Library."<sup>46</sup> Tha'ālibī recorded a list of the poets who attended Sabūr's circle and dedicated praise poems to him.<sup>47</sup> Al-Ma'arrī, as we shall see, was one of the visitors to Sabūr's library and salon.

In Buyyid Rayy there was also an active cultural and literary scene, especially within the circle of the two viziers. The vizier of Rukn ad-Dawla (r.935-976), Abū Faḍl b. 'Amīd (970), was a

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, ath-Tha'ālibī, *Yatīmat ad-Dahr*, 2:265-287; M. Tawātī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa*, 1:248-258.

<sup>42</sup> M. Bergé, "Genèse et Fortune du *Imtā' wa-l-Mu'ānasa* d'Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī," *Bulletin d'études orientales* (1972):97-104; N. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam*, 92-97.

<sup>43</sup> M. Tuwātī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa*, 2:38-39; J. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 191-206.

<sup>44</sup> See J. Kraemer, *Philosophy*, 31-45.

<sup>45</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 5:2377.

<sup>46</sup> For this and other libraries of Baghdad, see: R.S. Mackenson, "Four Great Libraries of Medieval Baghdad," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1932): 279-299.

<sup>47</sup> Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Yatīmat ad-Dahr*, 3:154ff.



literary person who surrounded himself with a circle of educated men, including the philosopher al-‘Amirī (d.992), the famous Miskawayh, his librarian, and at-Tawḥīdī for a short time.<sup>48</sup> The other prominent vizier in Rayy during the reigns of Mu’ayyad ad-Dawl (r.981-983) and Fakhr ad-Dawla (r.984-997) was Ṣāḥib b. ‘Abbād (d.995), a friend of Ibn al-‘Amīd and a patron of scholars and literary men.<sup>49</sup> Ibn ‘Abbād’s court was a place where at-Tawḥīdī travelled to after his unsuccessful career in Baghdad, even though his relationship with Ibn ‘Abbād was also strained. The famous Mu‘tazilī Abd al-Jabbār also belonged to the circle of the vizier.<sup>50</sup>

North Syria also witnessed a peak in cultural life in the tenth century, especially during the reign of the famous Hamdanid amir, Sayf ad-Dawla (r.945-967). The amir of Aleppo put significant effort into establishing a literary and scholarly circle in his court by bringing together poets, grammarians, scientists, *qāḍīs*, theologians, and philosophers. Prominent members of Sayf ad-Dawla’s court included the poets al-Mutanabbī and Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī (d.968), the philosopher al-Fārābī (d.950), who was also a statesman, grammarian and tutor to Sayf ad-Dawla’s son Ibn Khālawayh (d.980), the master of musical lore Abū’l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d.967), the astrologer and mathematician ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Qabīsī (d.967), and the preacher Ibn Nubāta (d.985).<sup>51</sup>

The Mirdasid court in Aleppo, however, was not as intellectually and culturally prosperous as that of Hamdanids, though many poets lived in the court of Mirdasid amirs. One such poet was Ibn Abī Ḥaṣīna (d.1065) from Ma‘arrat an-Nu’mān. He was a friend of al-Ma‘arrī, who worked in the court of Thimāl b. Mirdās, and always remained loyal to Mirdasids.<sup>52</sup> Another famous poet in this court was Ibn Ḥayyūs (d.1080), who began his poetic career as a eulogist of Anūshtakīn ad-

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Tawātī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa*, 1:238-248; For Ibn al-‘Amīd’s works, see al-Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat*, 3:183 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Tawātī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa*, 1:259-264; al-Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat*, 3:225-240.

<sup>50</sup> For more information about cultural life under Ibn ‘Abbād and Tawḥīdī’s place in his courts, see E. Naaman, *Literature and Islamic Court: Cultural Life Under al-Ṣāḥib b. ‘Abbād* (London/ NY: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> For tracing the majority of the eminent people at the court of Aleppo, see Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, index under ‘Alī b. Ḥamdān Sayf ad-Dawla, 2512; for poems dedicated to the amir by his poets, see al-Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat*, 1:38-53; especially for al-Mutanabbī and Sayf ad-Dawla, see Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat Ḥalab*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya, 1996), 2:639-686.

<sup>52</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 3:118-1128. More in relation to al-Ma‘arrī will follow below.

Dizbirī in Damascus. Despite this, he ended up residing in the court of Mirdasid Maḥmūd b. Naṣr.<sup>53</sup> Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (d.1070), who pursued both literary and political career, also worked in the court of Maḥmūd b. Naṣr. Al-Khafājī was a student of al-Ma‘arrī, and received much acclaim for his work entitled *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa*.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the flourishing cultural life, political stability in this period was not easily achieved. Political life in North Syria was particularly turbulent, with long-lasting struggles among various Muslim and Christian powers. As such, Al-Ma‘arrī was born at the time when the power of the Hamdanid emirate of Aleppo was in a state of disintegration.

In 944 Sayf ad-Dawla (d.967), the founder of the dynasty, conquered Homs and Aleppo and replaced the Ikshidis. He quickly established control over northern Syria and gained independence from the Buyids. During the last years of Sayf ad-Dawla’s rule (945-967), the political and cultural strength famously established by the amir had already started to fall into decline. In 962 the Byzantine army conquered Aleppo and, although this occupation did not last long, it signaled the weakening control of the Hamdanids over northern Syria. In 969, during the reign of Sa‘d ad-Dawla (r.967-991), the Byzantines took Antioch which would remain under the Byzantine control until 1084. After the conquest of Antioch, northern Syria became a tributary zone for Byzantium.

Also at this time, the Fatimids, who had conquered Egypt in 969 and established Cairo as their capital, showed a strong desire to capture North Syria for their own. Sa‘d ad-Dawla, who had maintained a close relationship with the Buyids, managed to consolidate his power for a short time until, ultimately, the capital was taken over by the Fatimid general Bakjūr in 975. Sa‘d had to rely on Byzantine support to regain power. Throughout his reign, Sa‘d ad-Dawla had to fluctuate between Byzantine, Buyid, and Fatimid powers.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 4:438-44, van Gelder, “Ibn Ḥayyūs,” in *EAL*; HAWT, 1:258

<sup>54</sup> More related to al-Ma‘arrī will follow below. See van Gelder, “Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī,” in *EAL*.

During the reign of Sa‘d’s successor, Sa‘id ad-Dawla (r. 991-1002), the Byzantine control over the region increased especially when the Byzantine emperor established power over Aleppo, Homs, and Shayzar in 995. However, the Fatimid influence on North Syria increased significantly with the arrival of ‘Azīz ad-Dawla (r. 1016-1022), who was appointed governor of Aleppo by the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim (r.996-1021). By the end of his rule, ‘Azīz ad-Dawla had established independence from Cairo, as well as from the Greeks. This was also the time when the Mirdasid family of Banū Kilāb actively entered into the political scene of Aleppo. It was this family who took over power in northern Syria after the murder of ‘Azīz ad-Dawla.

Şāliḥ b. Mirdās (r.1025-1029) founded the Mirdasid dynasty. It was under his rule that Aleppo was brought under Mirdasid control, as well as Homs, Ba‘alback, and Sidon. The Fatimid tolerance for Mirdasid achievements, however, did not last long. Their ambitious general, Anūshtakīn ad-Dizbarī, dramatically changed the political scene first time establishing Fatimid control over the entirety of Syria. However, in 1042 Thimal b. Şāliḥ (1042-1057) managed to regain power in Aleppo with the support of the Byzantines. The situation began to change with the slow appearance of the Seljuk Turks. Byzantium, under Seljuk pressure, no longer fought to have a control over Aleppo, but, rather, preferred to use the city as a buffer zone. After Thimal ‘s death (1062), the Mirdasids dynasty suffered greatly from the conflicts that arose between his sons and other members of their family. This infighting ultimately led to the devastation of their power and the loss of Aleppo to Seljuk Turks.<sup>55</sup>

During these volatile periods, Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān appeared in the possession of rival powers. The Byzantine army, under the leadership of Nicephorus Phocas, advanced towards North

---

<sup>55</sup>For the detailed history of Hamdanids and Mirdasids, see: Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat*, parts 5-17; Suhayl Zakkar, *The Emirate of Aleppo 1004-1094* (Beirut, 1971); Marius Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des Hamdanides de Jazīra et de Syrie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), part 4 and 5; idem, “Hamdanids,” in *EP*; R. J. Bikhazi, *The Ḥamdānīd dynasty of Mesopotamia and north Syria, 254-404/868-1014* ( PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1981); P. Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*; Th. Bianquis, S. Shamma, “Mirdās, Banū or Mirdasids,” in *EP*; H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphate* (London/NY: Longman, 1986), 273-282, 300-305.

Syria in 968, conquering Ma'arra and destroying the Great Mosque. When Sa'd ad-Dawla signed a peace treaty with Byzantium, the latter did not have a force sufficient to sustain full control over the region. When the Byzantines withdrew from Aleppo in 969, Sa'd recaptured Ma'arra. However, the town and its governor, Zuhayr, displayed defiance towards the Hamdanid amir, who managed to seize Ma'arra in 977. When the Fatimids moved towards Aleppo during the reign of Sa'id ad-Dawla, Ma'arra rebelled against the Hamdanids and joined forces with Mangūtakīn, the Turkish leader of the Fatimid army. However, Ma'arra appeared in the Hamdanid domain again in 1003. When the Mirdasids came to power in Aleppo, Ma'arra remained a battle field between them and the members of the Hamdanid family who still hoped to regain power in the north. The Hamdanid Nāṣir ad-Dawla took Ma'arra in 1043, then the town passed to Mirdasids in 1066, and a few years later it was captured by some Turks advancing from the Byzantine territory. After this tumultuous period, Ma'arra was ultimately devastated by the attacks of the Seljuks and the Crusaders.<sup>56</sup>

As has been mentioned already, both the Hamdanid and Mirdasid rulers, as well as the population of Aleppo, had an inclination towards the Shi'ifaith.<sup>57</sup> There were also lingering members of the Qarāmiṭa in the region — certainly in Ma'arra—towards the end of the tenth century. Christians did not only live in Aleppo, Ma'arra, and surrounding places, but they also took part in Mirdasid politics. Further, Jews and Christians were also involved with the military and in trade.<sup>58</sup>

This was the cultural, political, and religious environment in which al-Ma'arrī lived. There was no predominant orthodoxy, which led to competing religious and intellectual trends during this period as well as rival political powers. As will be seen, Al-Ma'arrī and his *Luzūm* are both genuine

<sup>56</sup> See Eliseeff, N. "Ma'arrat al-Nu'man," *EP*; S. al-Jundī, *Tarīkh al-Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān* (Damascus, 1994), 1:111-140.

<sup>57</sup> Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 8-9. Another Shi'i government was the Numayrid emirate established in the Upper Mesopotamia at the end of the tenth century having under control Harran, Raqqa, and Saruj. At the end of the tenth century. For the Numayrid dynasty and their rule see Stefan Heidemann, *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien. Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqa und Harran von der Zeit der beduinischen Vorherrschaft bis zu den Seldschuken* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> See S. Zakkar, *Emirate of Aleppo*, 244-249.

products of this period in the sense of expressing the intellectual, cultural, and political tensions of the time.

## 1.2. Al-Ma‘arrī’s Life

Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Sulaymān Abū’ l-‘Alā’<sup>59</sup> was born in 973 in the small town of Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān that was situated between Aleppo and Homs. It has been described as the town of pistachios, figs, olives, and water wells.<sup>60</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī was born to a notable family of shāfi‘ī *qāḍīs* (judges) who belonged to the tribe of *Tanūkh*. His grandfather was a judge of Ma‘arra and Homs, and his father, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Sulaymān, along with some of his brothers, also held the positions of judge and composed poetry. Some of his relatives on his maternal side held positions in the city governments of Aleppo, Damascus, and Baghdad.<sup>61</sup>

At the age of four, al-Ma‘arrī suffered from smallpox which left him blind and scarred in the face. He compensated for this blindness by developing an extraordinary memory, something which is often mentioned by his biographers.<sup>62</sup> The blindness also meant that, throughout his life, al-Ma‘arrī had to rely on his scribes to write down his works.<sup>63</sup> Blindness, however, did not prevent

<sup>59</sup> Summaries on al-Ma‘arrī’s biography are many. See, for instance, Pieter Smoor, “Al-Ma‘arrī Abū’ l-‘Alā’,” in *EP*; David S. Margoliouth, *Introduction to Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1898), xi-xlii; Tayeb, *Abu’ l-‘Alā*, 3-32; ‘Aisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman, “Abū’ l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” in *‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, 328-334. Sinan Antoon, “Abū’ l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 925-1350*, eds. Terry De Young and Mary St. Germain (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 228-234; Henri Laoust, “La vie et la philosophie d’Abou’l-‘Ala’ al-Ma‘arrī,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* (1944): 115-157; I. Filshstinsky, *Istoriya Arabskoi Literatury X-XVIII Veka* (Moscow, 1991), 131-150. G. Schoeler, Gregor Schoeler, *Introduction to Paradise and Hölle* (München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002), 11-18. Ṭ. Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd Dhikr*, 103-159.

<sup>60</sup> For Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān which was a battleground from the very beginning of the Syrian civil war, see: Nāṣir-I Khasraw, *The Book of Travel (Safarnama)*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston J. (Costa Meza, CA: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2001), 14; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Kitāb Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: Tuḥfat al-Anẓār fī-Gharā’ibi l-Amsār wa-‘Ajā’ib al-Asfār*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-‘Aryān (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm, 1987), 84; Kamāl ad-Dīn Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat at-Ṭalab fī Tarīkh al-Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 1:27; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), 5:156.

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed description of his family see Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:296-297.

<sup>62</sup> References to his extraordinary memory are many in the sources: the following anecdote appears frequently: One day, while in a mosque, al-Tabrīzī, a disciple of al-Ma‘arrī met someone from his own country and started a conversation with him in their language. After they finished their conversation, al-Ma‘arrī, without knowing the language at all, repeated it word for word: see ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Sam‘ānī, *al-Ansāb*, ed. al-Mu‘allimī al-Yamānī (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīya, 1985), 3:92; see also Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 131-144.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-‘Adīm mentions that he had four scribes and one female servant to record his works: see Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, 896-897, idem, *Inṣāf*, 102-104.

him from his literary pursuits or from playing chess and backgammon.<sup>64</sup> At the age of eleven, he began to write poetry and received both religious and linguistic instruction from various shaykhs. The scholar Ibn al-Qiftī (d.1248) records that one shaykh was Ibn Kauthar from Ma'arra, about whom no further information is given. Al-Ma'arrī also received part of his education in the circle of the famous grammarian Ibn Khālawayh from Aleppo,<sup>65</sup> who participated in literary gatherings at the court of Ṣayf ad-Dawla.<sup>66</sup> He also studied under Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Sa'īd an-Naḥawī, the transmitter of the famous al-Mutanabbī's (d.865) poems.<sup>67</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm (d.1262), the notable historian of Aleppo, tells us that al-Ma'arrī was so advanced in poetry that, by an early age, he would correct his teacher over Mutanabbī's poems.<sup>68</sup>

According to some sources, it was said that before traveling to Baghdad, al-Ma'arrī sought to further his education in Tripoli and Antioch between 988 and 994. Some sources suggest that, on his way to Tripoli, he attended the Christian monastery *Dayr al-Fārūs* in Latakia, where he was introduced to Hellenic philosophy which provoked certain doubts in his mind (*ḥaṣala la-hu bi-hi shukūkun lam yakun 'indahū*).<sup>69</sup> The famous seventeenth-century Syrian philologist and man of letters, al-Badī'ī, in his work dedicated to al-Mutanabbī, *aṣ-Ṣubḥ al-Munabbī*, cites a lengthy anecdote by a certain Usāma b. Munqidh, who was told by a Shi'i door-keeper of the library in Antioch, about a young blind man who visited the library and astonished people with his outstanding memory. Sometime later, Ibn Munqidh met the young man in the library and was assured of his ability to indeed remember long stories just by hearing them once.<sup>70</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm,

<sup>64</sup> See Tha'ālibī, *Tatimmat*, 5:16.

<sup>65</sup> Originally from Hamadan; see *ibid.*, 1:136.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn al-Qiftī, *Inbāh ar-Ruwāt 'alā Anbāhi n-Nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1986), 1:84.

<sup>67</sup> See ath-Tha'ālibī, *Tatimmat*, 1:137.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *Kitāb al-Inṣāf wa-t-Taḥarrī fī Daf'i' z-Zulm w-at-Tajarrī 'an Abī'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Ḥarfūsh (Damascus: Dār al-Jawlān, 2007), 92.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 84; Shams ad-Din adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh al-Islām wa-Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa-l-A'lām*. ed. 'Abd as-Salām Tadmūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1994), 30:200.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Badī'ī, *aṣ-Ṣubḥ al-Munabbī 'an ḥaythiyyat al-Mutanabbī*, eds., Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Muḥammad Shattā, and 'Abduh Ziyāda 'Abduh (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1963), 22-23.

however, denied any trip to Antioch and Christian influence on al-Ma'arrī and, instead, insisted that the episode with Abū'l-Mutawwaj b. al-Munqidh (and not Usama b. Munqidh, as reported by al-Badī'ī) did not happen in Antioch. Instead, he claimed that the episode occurred in a place called Kafr Ṭāb, located between Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān and Aleppo, which, according to Ibn al-'Adīm, was a flourishing scholarly center until the invasion of Crusaders in 1099 and was where the Banū Munqidh was a prominent clan.<sup>71</sup> Relying on the works of Ibn al-'Adīm, a contemporary scholar of al-Ma'arrī Salīm al-Jundī also denied Abū'l-'Alā's trip to Antioch, showing that the story of Ibn Munkidh in Antioch could not be true since he was only born in 1095,<sup>72</sup> almost eighteen years after al-Ma'arrī's death.<sup>73</sup> Al-Jundī also doubted al-Ma'arrī's trip to Latakia and instead connected his familiarity with Christianity and Christian thought not to Byzantine Latakia, but to Kafr Nabl which at the time was populated by Christians.<sup>74</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm also does not confirm al-Ma'arrī's visit to Tripolito attend *Dār al-'Ilm*, pointing out that such a library was only founded in 1079-80, well after al-Ma'arrī's death.<sup>75</sup>

Although the sources related to al-Ma'arrī's trips to Latakia, Antioch, and Tripoli are contradictory,<sup>76</sup> it is possible to assume that al-Ma'arrī, who actively sought knowledge outside of his small town, would have been greatly motivated to visit these cities in order to obtain both philosophical knowledge and knowledge of Christianity and Judaism. This would have been especially true for Antioch,<sup>77</sup> which, after the conquest of the Byzantines in 969, became an important intellectual center where numerous works were translated from Greek into Arabic.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *al-Inṣāf*, 135-136; see also "Munkidh" in *EP*.

<sup>72</sup> Which is rightly so: see S. Humphreys, "Banū Munqidh," in *EP*.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi*, 199.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Some modern scholars of al-Ma'arrī were strongly convinced of his trip to these cities: see Ṭ. Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-'Alā* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'āif, 1963), 124; 'Abd al-'Azīz ar-Rājkūtī, *al-Ma'arrī wā-mā ilayhi* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a as-salafiya, 1926), 66-71. See also Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 123-124.

<sup>77</sup> for Christian presence around Aleppo, see, for instance, S. Zakkar, *Emirate of Aleppo*, 239-244.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Alexander Treiger, "Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch: 'Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭaki and his Discourse on the Holy Trinity," *Le Muséon* 124 (2011):371-417.

One of the most difficult events that al-Ma‘arrī experienced during his lifetime was the death of his father. This event greatly affected al-Ma‘arrī and inspired him to write his most famous elegy that was included in his first *diwān*.<sup>79</sup> The precise date of his father’s death varies in the sources. Ibn al-‘Adīm reports that it occurred in 1005, when al-Ma‘arrī was thirty-three.<sup>80</sup> This, however, contradicts the date given by Yāqūt who claims that al-Ma‘arrī lost his father when he was only thirteen years old.<sup>81</sup> It seems as though Ibn al-‘Adīm’s is the more plausible version, as the elegy is composed by an experienced voice and is therefore too mature to have been written by a teenager.

A few years later, in 1008, al-Ma‘arrī traveled to the cosmopolitan city of Baghdad. This journey,<sup>82</sup> it is said, was motivated by his interest in the city’s libraries.<sup>83</sup> However, some historians report that the poet encountered financial troubles in Ma‘arra, namely the thirty dinars that he used to receive from Aleppo had been reduced enough that it no longer covered his modest expenses. Without specifying the source of the thirty dinars, al-Qiftī reports that al-Ma‘arrī went to Baghdad to complain about this (*shākiyan dhalika*).<sup>84</sup> Al-Jundī, however, excludes that any financial complaints were made to anyone in Baghdad. Lu’lu’ was the amir of Aleppo at that time, and Baghdad could have no power over him.<sup>85</sup> While we do not know the exact motivations of al-Ma‘arrī’s trip to Baghdad, it is totally plausible to assume that he hoped for a good literary career in the cosmopolitan city and integration into a broader intellectual milieu.

<sup>79</sup> *Shurūḥ Saqt az-Zand*, ed. Muṣṭafā s-Saqqāt et al. (Cairo: 1945), 2:907 (henceforth; *Shurūḥ Sz*).

<sup>80</sup> See Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 296.

<sup>82</sup> During the journey commissioned by al-Ma‘arrī’s maternal uncle, the vessel carrying him down the Tigris was confiscated by the officers of Bahā’ ad-Dawla. In Baghdad, we learn from *Sz*, al-Ma‘arrī tried to receive his confiscated vessel through the interference of Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarā’inī, a famous theologian at that time. However, his request was not met by the scholar, and the issue in the end was solved by a certain Abū Aḥmad al-Hakkārī: see *Shurūḥ Sz*, 1651; Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat ad-Dahr*, 5:308.

<sup>83</sup> See *The Letters of al-Ma‘arrī* ed. by David S. Margoliouth (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1898), *Letter VII*, p.40, 44: see also *Letter XXV*.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:85; see also adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:201.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 212. Ibn al-‘Adīm also mentions that al-Ma‘arrī did not go to Baghdad because of any mundane demands (*ṭalab ad-dunyā*): see Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, 93.



Although al-Ma‘arrī did participate in the cultural life of Baghdad, which will be discussed later, he only remained in the capital city for less than two years, ultimately choosing to return to his hometown. Opinions about his return to Ma‘arra differ as his reasons for leaving Baghdad are not clear. According to an anecdote, one reason was that al-Ma‘arrī disagreed with the religious scholars on some juristic rules,<sup>86</sup> while another might be his conflict with Sharīf al-Murtaḍā which will be discussed in detail below. From al-Ma‘arrī’s verses we learn that he left Baghdad because of his dwindling funds and because his mother was ill, who he found dead upon his return to Ma‘arra.<sup>87</sup> In a letter to his relative and friend, Abū ‘l-Qāsim b. Sabīka, he explains that he was treated well in Baghdad, with courtesy and honor, and that when he decided to leave, many were in sorrow and tears.<sup>88</sup> His friends and connections in Baghdad will be analyzed in greater detail below during a discussion of al-Ma‘arrī’s social profile and network.

In 1010, al-Ma‘arrī began his journey back to his home town and upon his arrival, he committed himself to seclusion and strict vegetarianism. This is what gained him his most famous sobriquet, that of *rahn al-maḥbisayn* (the hostage to two prisons, that is, of his blindness and his seclusion).<sup>89</sup> He ate vegetables, lentils, and figs for sweet and wore woolen clothes, and, as reported, was in constant fast.<sup>90</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī never married and, according to his profoundly pessimist view, procreation was a sin. He thus spent the rest of his life dedicated to his writing and teaching. In 1057, after spending three days in bed, he died at the age of eighty-five. It is reported that the famous Christian doctor Ibn Buṭlān (d.1075), a close friend of the poet, when told that al-Ma‘arrī had made a mistake while dictating, immediately predicted his death since there would be no other

<sup>86</sup> Ibn al-Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-Nihāya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘arīf, 1991), 12:73.

<sup>87</sup> We learn this from a poem written to Abū al-Qāsim at-Tanūkhi, the son of the famous author of *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara* of whom more will come below: see *Shurūḥ Sz* 4:1634; on his mother’s death see *Letter VII*.

<sup>88</sup> *Letter VII*, 40, 41.

<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:303; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:85. Yāqūt reports an anecdote according to which once, when al-Ma‘arrī was sick, the doctor prescribed chicken for him to eat which al-Ma‘arrī rejected not willing to improve his health through destroying another creature: see Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:303.

<sup>90</sup> al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:85.

reason that the poet would make a mistake in language.<sup>91</sup> Prior to his death, Al-Ma'arrī asked that this epitaph be inscribed on his gravestone: “This was the crime my father committed against me, but I have done so to no one” (*hādhā janāhu abī ‘alayya wa-mā janaytu ‘alā aḥadin*).<sup>92</sup> At his funeral, eighty dirges were chanted and included among the mourners were many famous figures, including the Mirdasid poet Ibn Ḥaṣīna.<sup>93</sup>

### 1.3. Works

Contemporaries describe al-Ma'arrī as a true *adīb*, an erudite man of letters who composed numerous works in both prose and verse. Tha'ālibī reports that al-Ma'arrī was a witty poet (*shā'iran zarīfan*) and exercised all kinds of *jidd* and *hazl* (*yadkhulu fī kullī fannin min al-jiddi wal-hazl*).<sup>94</sup> Another contemporary of al-Ma'arrī, the historian al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, describes him as a good poet, eloquent and fluent in speech, deeply learned in *adab*, extremely eloquent in language, and was its protector (*kāna ḥasana sh-shi'ri, jazla l-kalāmi, faṣīḥa l-lisāni, ghazīra l-adabi, 'āliman bi-l-lugha, ḥāfiẓan bi-hā*).<sup>95</sup> Abū l-Ḥasan al-Bakharzī similarly confirmed that no one could beat Abū'l-'Alā' in various kinds of *adab* (*mā la-hu fī anwā'i l-adabi ḍarībun*).<sup>96</sup>

It was noted that Al-Ma'arrī declared, after his seclusion, that it was his decision to compose only those writings where he would glorify and praise God. However, contrary to this wish, he often composed other things as well.<sup>97</sup> It is true, though, that admonitory, exhortative, ascetic, and moralistic writings dominate al-Ma'arrī's repertoire, as can be seen by a list of his works, both

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 1:117.

<sup>92</sup> See, for instance, Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 76.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat*, 2:910.

<sup>94</sup> See ath-Tha'ālibī, *Tatimmat*, 5:16; van Gelder, “Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature,” in *JAL* 13 (1992): 177-82.

<sup>95</sup> See al-Baghdādī, *Tarīkh Madīnat as-Salām*, 5:397.

<sup>96</sup> Al-Bākhazrī, *Dumīyat al-Qaṣr*, 1:157.

<sup>97</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:327; al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:91; adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:212.

extant and lost, found in the accounts of Yāqūt,<sup>98</sup> al-Qifṭī,<sup>99</sup> adh-Dhahabī,<sup>100</sup> and Ibn al-‘Adīm.<sup>101</sup> Almost all of al-Ma‘arrī’s works are didactic in nature and it is possible that most were composed to be read by his disciples. In addition, many of al-Ma‘arrī’s works were written using complex forms and techniques. This implies that these works were not only written in order to display a sense of literary virtuosity, but also to serve as teaching and instructive aids. Before discussing some of al-Ma‘arrī’s works separately, it is necessary to first describe his *oeuvre* in general.

To begin, al-Ma‘arrī’s *oeuvre* can be divided roughly into works of prose and works of poetry. Besides the well known collections of *Saqṭ az-Zand* and *Luzūm*, there are at least two other poetry collections, which have unfortunately been lost. One is called *Staghfir wa-staghfirī*, a poetry collection of exhortations, asceticism, and forgiveness where each line started with *staghfir Allāh*.<sup>102</sup> The other, called *Jāmi‘ al-Awzān al-Khamsa*, is a collection in which it is said that al-Ma‘arrī used all consonants in rhyme and in all poetic meters.<sup>103</sup> Thus we see that *Luzūm* is not the only collection of poetry with strict prosodic rules.

Although al-Ma‘arrī is better known for his works of poetry, he in fact has more works of prose. Al-Ma‘arrī’s prose could be classified broadly to the following categories: admonitory and moralistic works, commentaries and self-commentaries, epistles of various natures, treatises on grammar, philology, and prosody, and purely instructive works. The majority of his works can be grouped into the first category of moralistic and admonitory writings, with the most copious work being the *al-Ayk wa-l-Ghuṣūn*. This book has unfortunately been lost, but al-Qifṭī tells us that he saw the book’s table of contents and it seemed to contain around sixty volumes. We also know that it contained 308 prose passages, rhyming in all the letters of the alphabet, each rhyming consonant,

<sup>98</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:327ff.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:91ff.

<sup>100</sup> See adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:212 ff.

<sup>101</sup> Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 105ff. For a whole list of known works, lost and extant see Saleh, “Abū l-‘Ālā’ al-Ma‘arrī: bibliographie critique,” Part I, *Bulletin d’Études orientales* xxii (1969):133-204: Appendix 1. See also detail descriptions in al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 696-801; Brockelman, *HAWT*, 1:256ff.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 114; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:334

<sup>103</sup> al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:96.

in turn, appears in nineteen forms.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, *Mawā'iz as-Sitt* was a didactic admonitory prose. It was addressed, in sequence, to a man, then to two men, and to several men. Then it was repeated in the same way for women. The book resembled a handbook for grammar and rhetoric.<sup>105</sup>

Another admonitory work, the *Tāj al-Hurra*, preached on women. According to Ibn al-'Adīm, this book was written for some princely women, and most likely for the wife of the governor of Aleppo, Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās.<sup>106</sup> It was written so that it rhymed with the second person feminine singular suffixes. In the work known as the *Khumāssiyatu r-Rāḥ*, al-Ma'arrī rebuked those who drank wine. This was prose that rhymed in all letters of alphabet, in all vowels and in the quiscient form (i.e. without any vowel).<sup>107</sup>

In a few of his moralistic writings, al-Ma'arrī spoke in the tongue of animals. In a work of exhortations and admonishments called *Saj' al-Ḥamā'im*, al-Ma'arrī wrote from the perspective of four doves.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, in *Khuṭab al-Khayl* al-Ma'arrī conveyed his sayings from the mouth of a horse.<sup>109</sup> Al-Marrī's *al-Qā'if*, contains instructions through the use of fables, that were written for the Faṭimid governor of Aleppo, 'Azīz ad-Dawla (r.1016-1022). This text resembled, according to his biographers, the famous *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. Al-Ma'arrī also wrote a commentary on this work called *Manār al-Qā'if*.<sup>110</sup>

Another text, *Sharaf as-Sayf*, which was an advisory work, was written in honor of the commander of the Faṭimid army, Anūshtakin ad-Dizbirī (1038-1041).<sup>111</sup> Further, Al-Ma'arrī's

<sup>104</sup> Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:101; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:328; Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:213.

<sup>105</sup> See al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1: 95; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:333; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 107.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 107; al-Qiftī, 1:93.

<sup>107</sup> Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:95; Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:214.

<sup>108</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:329; Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:218.

<sup>109</sup> Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:93.

<sup>110</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:338; Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:98; adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:116.

<sup>111</sup> It is reported that when this commander was moving onto Aleppo, he stopped on his way in Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān and asked the inhabitants about al-Ma'arrī (*sa'alahum 'an Abī l-'Alā' bn Sulaymān*). Al-Ma'arrī composed this book as a token of gratitude for the good words the latter said about the poet. See Ibn al-Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, 144; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 332.

prayers or personal invocations, such as *Du‘ā’ s-Sā‘at* and *Du‘ā’ l-Ayyām as-Sab‘a*,<sup>112</sup> along with the compilation of virtues of ‘Alī called *Ba‘ḍ Faḍā’il ‘Alī*,<sup>113</sup> can similarly be grouped into works that could be classified as admonitory and moralistic.

Another ascetic and admonitory work, *Mulqā s-Sabīl fī-l-wa‘z wa-z-zuhd*, is unusually brief and simple. It is a small collection of moral *sententiae*, which appear to have been greatly influenced by classic Arabic ascetic writings. *Mulqā s-Sabīl* consists of alphabetically arranged rhyming prose paragraphs that are followed by poetic lines which paraphrase the meaning of the preceding prose.<sup>114</sup> According to Krachkovsky, al-Ma‘arrī wrote this unsophisticated work in his youth, rather than in the later period of his life as was suggested by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.<sup>115</sup> Either way, this work was extremely popular in the Muslim West and was even imitated by Andalusian Dhu-l-Wizāratayn al-Ghāfiqī (d.1145).<sup>116</sup>

Another prominent set of al-Ma‘arrī’s prose works is the treatises. Al-Ma‘arrī’s epistles are included in his *Dīwān ar-Rasā’il*, which was composed in three parts. The first part contained lengthy epistles, including *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, *Risālat al-Malā’ika*, and *Risālat-As-Sanadīya*. The second part included letters of medium length that he had written to various notables, like *Risālat al-Manīh* and *Risālata al-Ighrīd* written to his friend, the vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Maghribī. The third part contained short letters of ordinary content. Al-Ma‘arrī wrote a commentary on this collection of epistles titled *Khādim ar-Rasā’il*.<sup>117</sup> Some of these epistles will be discussed below.

Al-Ma‘arrī’s commentaries were similarly popular. He composed two commentaries on the works of his favorite poet, al-Mutanabbī — the *Mu‘jiz al-Aḥmad* and the more extensive *al-Lāmi‘al-*

<sup>112</sup>Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:329; Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:100. Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 108.

<sup>113</sup> al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 101; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:333.

<sup>114</sup> See the edition by Ḥasan Ḥusnī ‘Abd al-Wahāb (Damascus, 1909).

<sup>115</sup>I. Krachkovsky, *Arabskaya Srednevekovaya Khudozhestvennaya Literatura*, 2:185; Abd al-Wahāb, *Introduction to Mulqā s-Sabīl*, 3.

<sup>116</sup>See Brockelman, *HAWT*, 1:258; *TQ*, 455-457; for the influence of al-Ma‘arrī’s works on the Andalusian literature, see Hanā’ Abū r-Rab, *Athar Abī’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī fī-l-Adabi l-Andalusī* (Amman: Dar Books, 2009), esp. 125-158.

<sup>117</sup> Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:100; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 110-111. For editions of some of these letters see of the See *Rasā’il Abī’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rafa, 2005); *The Letters of al-Ma‘arrī* ed. by David S. Margoliouth (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1898).

*Azīzī* that was dedicated to the Mirdasid amir, ‘Azīz ad-Dawla Thābit b. Thimāl.<sup>118</sup> Krachkovsky was one of the first scholars to analyze the importance of these commentaries. He labeled the *Mu‘jiz al-Aḥmad* as an ordinary work, as it contained no features that are characteristic of more sophisticated works of the period. He highlighted how the text of the *Mu‘jiz al-Aḥmad* was limited to narrow philological discussions and showed that it was inferior to the commentary by the philologist Abū l-Ḥasan al-Wāḥidī (d.1076).<sup>119</sup> Margaret Larkin, in her comparison of some of the commentaries of al-Ma‘arrī and al-Wāḥidī, concluded that aesthetic criteria and issues, such as poetic voice, lyricism, politics and culture, were beyond the interest of either commentator and suggests, instead, that more impressionistic and artistic discussions may have occurred in less formal oral exchanges.<sup>120</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī’s other commentaries are on selected verses of al-Buḥturī (d.897), entitled ‘*Abath al-Walīd*, on the dīwān of Abū Tammām (d.845), called *Dhikrā Ḥabīb*,<sup>121</sup> and on the *Dīwān* of the Mirdasid poet Ibn ‘Alī Ḥaṣīna (d.1065).<sup>122</sup>

A large portion of al-Ma‘arrī’s works are dedicated to grammar, rhetoric, and prosody. His works of grammar include *Haqīr an-Nāfi‘*<sup>123</sup> and *aḥ-Ḥill at-Ṭāhirī*, both written for Abū Ṭāhirī al-Muslim b. Taghlib, a dignitary of Thimāl b. Ṣāliḥ.<sup>124</sup> *Khuṭbat al-Faṣīḥ* is a book on rhetoric in which al-Ma‘arrī, according to Ibn al-‘Adīm, incorporated the *Kitāb al-Faṣīḥ* by the famous philologist and grammarian of the Kufan school, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Tha’lab, and turned it into more eloquent

<sup>118</sup> Some thought that the book was dedicated to the Faṭimid governor Azīz ad-Dawlā. It was also wrongly assumed by Sezgin that there was one commentary on Mutanabbī’s poems with two different titles: see GAS, 2:493; ‘Abd al-Majīd Diyāb, Introduction to *Mu‘jiz Aḥmad* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1988), 13-17; also A’ishā ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Introduction to Risālat as-Ṣāḥil wa-sh-Shāhij* ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1984), 12-16. An edition of *al-Lāmi‘ al-Azīzī* was prepared by Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Mawlawī (Riyadh, 2008). For references to these commentaries see, for instance, Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:334; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:100; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 109.

<sup>119</sup> I. Krachkovsky, *Arabskaya Literatura*, 2:63-115.

<sup>120</sup> For al-Ma‘arrī’s commentary on al-Mutanabbī’s work, see M. Larkin, “Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s Mu‘jiz Aḥmad and the Limits of Poetic Commentary,” *Oriens* 41 (2013):479-497; idem, *Al-Mutanabbī: Voice of the ‘Abbasid Poetic Ideal* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 116-117.

<sup>121</sup> See, for instance, al-Qifṭī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:98; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 117. Al-Ma‘arrī also wrote purely philological commentaries such as the incomplete commentary on Sībawayh: see, for instance, al-Qifṭī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:101, Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 116.

<sup>122</sup> See Ibn Abī Ḥaṣīna, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad As‘ad Ṭalas (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1991): the second volume contains al-Ma‘arrī’s commentary.

<sup>123</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 332, Dhahabi, *Tarikh*, 30:217.

<sup>124</sup> Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:99.

prose.<sup>125</sup> The texts *Al-Awzān al-Qawāfī* and *Mithqāl an-Naẓm* are works which were dedicated to prosody.<sup>126</sup> His *Risālat al-Malā'ika* is a treatise on morphology that was written as a response to inquiries by his students and discusses the morphological aspects of words such as *malak*, *sundus*, *'Azrā'il*.<sup>127</sup>

While many of his works were meant to be read and enjoyed, some of al-Ma'arrī's works were specifically meant for instructional purposes. We know that he composed a collection of dictations, known as *al-Amālī*. These dictations (a parallel to the Latin *dictamina*) resulted from studying *adab* and *ḥadīth*. The treated themes related to grammar, lexicography, anecdotal and historical accounts, and included excerpts from poetry, the Qur'ān, Prophetic traditions, and letters and speeches.<sup>128</sup> Further, there were works that al-Ma'arrī wrote for practical reasons. His *Saj' Muḍṭarin*, for instance, was written for the use of travelers to consult when they were in unfamiliar places.<sup>129</sup>

Finally, al-Qifṭī tells us that al-Ma'arrī dedicated some time to Tradition. His student at-Tibrīzī reported that al-Ma'arrī commented on a *ḥadīth* master Abū 'Ubayd's *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* called *Tahdhīb Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*. Al-Qifṭī saw the book copied by a certain al-Fārisī, who was a friend of at-Tabrīzī. The latter reported that he had read the book with his teacher.<sup>130</sup>

In order to have a better understanding of the characteristics of al-Ma'arrī's works and, in turn, *Luzūm*'s place among them, an in-depth discussion of some of his more important works is necessary. These works are al-Ma'arrī's first collection of poems, *Saqṭ az-Zand*, his provocative rhymed prose *al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghāyāt*, and two of his epistles, *Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil wa-sh-Shāḥij* and *Risālat al-Ghufrān*.

<sup>125</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 107.

<sup>126</sup> See, for instance, Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:215.

<sup>127</sup> See Salīm al-Jundī, Introduction to *Risālat al-Malā'ika*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1992), a-q; Martino Diez, "Teaching Arabic to the Angels: a Scherzo by al-Ma'arrī on Heavenly Morphology," in *Approaches to the History and Dialectology of Arabic in the Honour of Pierre Larcher*, ed. M. Sartori et al (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 267-286.

<sup>128</sup> Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism*, 326.

<sup>129</sup> See, for instance, Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:331.

<sup>130</sup> Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:104.

*Saqṭ az-Zand (Sz)* (*The Spark from the Flint*): This is al-Ma‘arrī’s most famous collection of poems which he wrote early on in his life. Sz was considered by medieval scholars to be a fine book (*kitāb laṭīf*),<sup>131</sup> and was popular and beloved by many.<sup>132</sup> For instance, Ibn ‘Aqīl, the famous Ḥanbalī scholar who would otherwise accuse al-Ma‘arrī of heresy, thought that some poems in Sz were delightful and used to be sung,<sup>133</sup> something al-Ma‘arrī himself was not proud of.<sup>134</sup>

In this *dīwān*, we can see the principle of the tripartite division of a poem into *nasīb*, *raḥīl*, and *madīḥ*. However, *nasīb* is often absent and *raḥīl* instead is the most elaborate.<sup>135</sup> According to al-Ma‘arrī’s student at-Tabrīzī, the poems in this collection resembled those of al-Mutanabbī and Abū Tamām.<sup>136</sup> Thirty poems from this collection are separated into a group called *Dir‘īyāt* (*Armor Poems*), wherein the three major themes of *raḥīl*, and *madīḥ* are mostly eliminated and the *nasīb* is found occasionally. These poems are presented in the form of a dialogue and are written in the tongue of a person related to a suit of armor.<sup>137</sup> Elegies are also an important part of this collection.<sup>138</sup> *Dir‘īyāt*, that is in the last stage of *Saqṭ az-Zand*, most probably written at the age of fifty,<sup>139</sup> already alludes to the complex use of rhyme later fully developed in *Luzūm*.<sup>140</sup>

It is in *Saqṭ az-Zand* that it is most clearly evident that al-Ma‘arrī was not indifferent to the political life of North Syria. Indeed, like other poets of this period, he showed a keen interest in the

<sup>131</sup> See, for instance, al-Qifṭī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:97; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:330.

<sup>132</sup> A good portion of Sz was translated into English by Arthur Wormhoudt, *Saqṭal –Zand: The spark from the Flint* (Oskaloosa, Iowa: William Penn College, 1972). A big part was translated into Russian collected in Shidfar, *Abu’l-‘Ala al-Ma‘arrī: Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1990), 23-36. Good English translations are done by Pieter Smoor in relevant articles and works which will be cited below.

<sup>133</sup> The reference is to the poem in rhyme *qaḍā*, see *Shurūḥ Sz*, 2:654; see Ibn al-‘Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, ed. G. Makdisi (Beirut, 1970-71), 2:674; on this poem see P. Smoor, “The Theme of Travel in al-Ma‘arrī’s early Poems,” in *The Challenges of the Middle East*, ed. Ibrahim A. El-Sheikh et al (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1982), 133-211.

<sup>134</sup> See al-Badī‘ī, *Awj at-Taḥarrī*, 7.

<sup>135</sup> See P. Smoor, “The Theme of Travel,” 133-211.

<sup>136</sup> See the at-Tabrīzī, *Introduction to Shurūḥ Sz*, 1:4.

<sup>137</sup> See P. Smoor, “Armour description as an independent Theme in the Work of al-Ma‘arrī,” in *Actes du 8<sup>me</sup> Congrès de l’Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants* (Aix-en-Provence, 1978), 298-303; P. J. Cachia, “Dramatic Monologues of al-Ma‘arrī” *JAL*, no. 1 (1970): 129-136.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Mutanabbī’s influence is especially has been discerned in al-Ma‘arrī’s elegiac poems; see Smoor’s article on Al-Ma‘arrī in *EP*.

<sup>139</sup> See the discussion in A. Tayeb, *Abū’ l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*, 209-210.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-192.



various rulers and composed eulogies for them in similar, formulaic terms. In fact, *Saqṭ az-Zand* contains eulogies for rival figures. We know, for instance, that he had a close relationship with the family of al-Maghribī,<sup>141</sup> particularly the vizier ‘Alī Ḥusayn b. al-Maghribī, a high ranked and intimate friend of Sayf ad-Dawla, the ruler of Aleppo, and also the vizier of Sa’d ad-Dawla.<sup>142</sup> After having fallen out of favor with Sa’d ad-Dawla, the vizier joined forces with his rival Bakjūr, the Circassian governor of Raqqa, who had been trying to gain control over Aleppo. Soon ‘Alī Ḥusayn also fell out of favor with this leader and escaped to Egypt, ultimately joining the Faṭimid court. Al-Ma‘arrī eulogized Alī Ḥusayn in *Saqṭ az-Zand* in relation to the Battle of the Ford between the Faṭimid and Byzantine armies. It was in this battle that Alī Ḥusayn gained control over North Syria around 994, where al-Maghribī was the *mudabbir al-jaysh* (chief army official) of the Faṭimid army that was fighting under the command of Bangūtakin the Turk.<sup>143</sup> In the same *diwān*, however, there are also poems dedicated to the Faṭimid rivals, the Ḥamdanids, including one poem that eulogized Sa‘īd ad-Dawla.<sup>144</sup>

Pieter Smoor has rightly suggested that al-Ma‘arrī’s changing attitude may signify that, in his early life, the poet still hoped for a prosperous career as a panegyrist, perhaps influenced by his favorite poet al-Mutanabbī. However, when he was writing the *Saqṭ az-Zand*, al-Ma‘arrī declared that his praise poetry was merely a stylistic exercise.<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, there is another plausible reason for the poet’s panegyrist motivations: he might have been a spokesman for his own people in Ma‘arra and wanted to represent their voice to the external world. Smoor also noted that his praise

<sup>141</sup> See more about this Persian family in Smoor, “al-Maghribī, Banū,” in *EP*.

<sup>142</sup> Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 14-15. See also, H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphate* (London/NY: Longman, 1986), 262. Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat*, 5:34.

<sup>143</sup> There is a eulogy dedicated to this general and though al-Ma‘arrī does not provide the name of the praised person explicitly, it appears from the commentaries, and especially from that of Baṭalyawsī that the praised one was the general fighting for Faṭimids; see *Shurūḥ Sz* II, 602-9; , III, 1046-66: Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 35-36:42-43

<sup>144</sup> See *Shurūḥ Sz* I, 25-113; 172-223; Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 53-62.

<sup>145</sup> Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 63-64.

of the Faṭimid functionaries might have been related to the pro-Faṭimid position of Ma'arra, whose populations was heavily Shi'i.<sup>146</sup>

*Sz* was broadly commented on and interpreted by at least seven known scholars, including at-Tabrīzī (al-Ma'arrī's most famous student), Ibn as-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 1127, an Andalusian grammarian and philologist) whose commentary includes selected poems from *Luzūm* too, Abū Rashād al-Akhsīkathī (d. 1134, a courtly man of letters in Fergana, whose commentary is lost), Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. Khū'ī (a Persian scholar who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> c.), Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 1210, a famous shāfi'i scholar whose commentary is lost), and Ṣadr Afāḍil al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn al-Khwārazmī (d. 1221, a poet from Samarqand), Sharafu d-Dīn al-Bārīzī (d.1337, a judge and scholar in Hama' whose commentary is lost). In addition, Al-Ma'arrī also commented on his own work and named his commentary *Ḍaw Saqṭ az-Zand*, unfortunately this text is no longer extant.<sup>147</sup>

*Sz* was an important work in al-Ma'arrī's poetical career and also approved by numerous literary circles. We know, for example, that it was read and well received in Baghdad.<sup>148</sup> However, *Saqṭ az-Zand* is not the major work in which al-Ma'arrī demonstrated his literary virtuosity and authority.

***Kitāb al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghayāt fī Tamjīd Allāh wa-l-Mawā'iz (The Book of Chapters and Paragraphs about Glorification of God and Admonition):*** This text is perhaps the most intriguing of all of al-Ma'arrī's works, as it was suspected to be a parody of the Qur'ān. It was written in rhyming prose (*saj'*) that was arranged as separate paragraphs (*fuṣūl*), which, in turn, are arranged alphabetically in double-ended rhyme (*ghāyāt*). Only one quarter of the text has survived and an edition was produced by Muḥammad Zanātī in 1938.

The *Fuṣūl* is distinguished by its highly admonitory tone and its constant references to God and His glory. Both in the Middle Ages and today, the assumption that this book was potentially a

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> See more details in the introduction to *Shurūḥ Sz* by the editors, d-ḥ.

<sup>148</sup> See al-Qifṭī, *Inbāḥ*, 1: 85, ad-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:201.

parody of the Qur'ān made it more intriguing than other works by al-Ma'arrī and its popular reception is almost entirely related to this notion. Despite this, in many ways *Fuṣūl*, with its moralistic quality and both its structural and stylistic restrictions, is not that exceptional when compared to al-Ma'arrī's many other works.

The historian al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d.1071) stated in his history of Baghdad that the poet composed many books and imitated *sūras* from the Qur'an.<sup>149</sup> In addition, while Abū'l-Ḥassan 'Alī al-Bākhārī (d.1075) did not make a direct statement on the subject, he did imply that *Fuṣūl* could be the parody of the Qur'an. Bākhārī similarly wrote that many people said offensive things about al-Ma'arrī regarding a book which was claimed to be a parody of the Qur'an (*wa-innamā taḥaddathati l-alsunu bi-isā'atihi li-kitābihi alladhī za'amū annahu 'āraḍa bihi l-Qur'āna*), and that it was called *al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghāyāt* in order to match with the terms of the Qur'an (*muḥādathātan li-l-suwar wa-l-āyāt*).<sup>150</sup>

On the other hand, one of al-Ma'arrī's students, Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (d.1073), claimed that if an intelligent person looked closely at *Fuṣūl* it would be clear that it was not a rival to the Qur'an, and moreover, it was far from being similar to the composition of the Qur'an (*wa-hādhā kitābu idhā ta'ammala l-'āqilu 'alima annahu ba'idun 'ani l-mu'āraḍa, wa-huwa bi-ma'zilin 'an tashbīhihi bi-naẓm al-Qur'ān*).<sup>151</sup> Al-Khafājī was a follower of *ṣarfā* doctrine (dissuasion) which supposedly originated with Mu'tazilī Ibrāhīm an-Nazzām and was later renewed by Shī'i Mu'tazilī Shari'f Murtaḍā. According to *ṣarfā* doctrine, people in theory might be able to write a rival to the

<sup>149</sup> Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Bashār Ma'rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharbī l-Islāmī), 5:398.

<sup>150</sup> Al-Bākhārī 'Alī, Abū l-Ḥasan. *Dumīyat al-Qaṣr wa-'Uṣratu-l-Ahl*, ed. Muḥammad at-Tunjī (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1993), 1:157.

<sup>151</sup> Al-Badī'ī, *aṣ-Ṣubḥ al-Munabbī*, 56-57. It is interesting to look at the footnotes by the editors of the work where they deny the possibility of *Fuṣūl* being a parody in a very defensive and apologetic tone. See *ibid.*, f.n. 1, p.57. The same is done by the editors of Faḍlalah al-'Umarī's *Masālik* who state that malevolent people presented *Fuṣūl* as a parody to the Qur'an: see Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jabūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 2010), 15: 291, f.n. 3. To this and other accounts we will return in the fifth chapter on the ambiguous reception of the poet. See also Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat*, 880.

Qur'an, however, God prevents them from doing so.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, denying that *Fuṣūl* was a rival to the Qur'an was not solely for the purpose of defending his teacher from accusations of imitating God's book, but also for the purpose of defending the theory of *ṣarfā*.<sup>153</sup>

The most unambiguous critique of *Fuṣūl* came from the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201), who set the harsh tone towards al-Ma'arrī that would be echoed by later authors. According to Ibn al-Jawzī, *Fuṣūl*, which he claims to have had a chance to see himself, was a parody of the *sūras* and *āyas* of the Qur'an. He states that it was written in the most feeble and silly speech (*wa-huwa kalāmun fī-n-nihāyati r-rikka wa-l-burūda*).<sup>154</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī's disapproval can be seen in the next sentence in which he refers to the poet's blindness as an appropriate compensation for his irreverent writing (*wa-ṣubḥāna man a'mā baṣarahu wa-baṣīratahu*).<sup>155</sup> Another prominent Ḥanbalī scholar, Ibn Taymīya, also claims that *Fuṣūl* was nothing but a parody of the Qur'an alongside other parodies.<sup>156</sup>

In the subsequent centuries, however, there were many who tried to promote *Fuṣūl* only as a glorification of God and expression of piety. The strongest defense came from Ibn al-'Adīm, the Ayyubid (d.1262) historian and biographer. In his *Kitāb al-Inṣāf wa-t-Taḥarrī fī Daf'i' z-Ẓulm wa't-Tajarrī 'an Abī'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī*, written as a defense of the poet against the accusation of heresy, he firmly denies the idea that *Fuṣūl* was a rival to the Qur'an, noting that the two are extremely distinct in style. He further claims that *Fuṣūl* only achieved its notorious fame due to the envious

<sup>152</sup> See Martin, R.C., "Inimitability, in *EF*: Yasir Suleyman, "The concept of Fasaha in Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji," *New Arabian Studies* 3 (1996):219-237; see also Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:325.

<sup>153</sup> Interestingly, the famous commentator az-Zamakhsharī saw a parodying intent in a verse from the elegy al-Ma'arrī composed for Sharīf al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī which, according to Zamakhsharī, clearly imitated the qur'anic verse on hell-fire: "Indeed it throws out sparks as [huge] as a fortress" (*innahu tarmī bi-shararin ka-l-qaṣr* (Q77:32)). The verse from *Saqṭ az-Zand* is the following: A red fire, with shining blades in darkness, each spark it throws off is like a tent (*ḥamrā 'a sāṭi'ata dh-dhawā 'ibi fī-d-dujā tarmī bi-kulli sharāratin ka-ṭirāf*): *Shurūḥ Sz*, 3:1307; see *TQ*, 383. Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī disagreed with Zamakhsharī's evaluation: according to him, al-Ma'arrī used the language to create an imagery which, however, was inferior to that in the Qur'an: see Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *at-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1981):30:277-278.

<sup>154</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū'l-Faraj, *al-Muntaẓam fī-Tarīkh al-Mulūk wa-l-Umam*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub 'Ilmiya, 1992), 16:24.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> See Ibn Taymīya, *Majmū'a l-Fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān bn Muḥammad bn Qāsim and Muḥammad b. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān (Cairo: Dār ar-Raḥma, n.d.), 7:571.

slanderers of the poet.<sup>157</sup> Yūsuf al-Badī'ī (d.1663) also defends al-Ma'arrī in his work *Awj at-Taḥarrī 'an Ḥaythiyyat Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*. Written in an attempt to free the poet's name from defamations, al-Badī'ī cited fragments of *Fuṣūl* within the section dedicated to the glorification of God's power and His oneness, thus implying that the work was an exaltation of God and not a parody of His book.<sup>158</sup>

Many scholars today also have contradictory opinions regarding *Fuṣūl*. Nicholson and Brockelman briefly discuss the work, explicitly calling it a parody of the Qur'ān.<sup>159</sup> The first detailed study on *Fuṣūl*, however, was conducted August Fischer who ruled out the possibility that the work was an imitation of the Qur'ān, claiming that the similarities between the two were not significant enough to count *Fuṣūl* as an imitation of the Qur'ān. According to Fischer, *Fuṣūl* resembled other religious writings of the time.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, Richard Hartmann's work suggested that the *Fuṣūl* not be seen as a parody of the Qur'ān, but instead as a work against mainstream prose of al-Ma'arrī's age.<sup>161</sup> Louis Massignon likewise denied that *Fuṣūl* was a parody, on account that God did not speak in the first person.<sup>162</sup> Furhter, Betsy Shidfar suggested that *Fuṣūl* had didactic and moral intentions that are full of autobiographic motifs and, as such, was not a parody of the Qur'ān.<sup>163</sup> Another scholar, Ṭ. Ḥusayn, observed an Epicurean philosophy within *Fuṣūl* and concluded that imitating the Qur'ān would have been too dangerous for al-Ma'arrī and, therefore, it could not have been a deliberate parody or a challenge to the Qur'an. Since the Holy Book was an object of great veneration, al-Ma'arrī would have been cautious enough "not to rival against the

<sup>157</sup> See Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 105.

<sup>158</sup> Yūsuf al-Badī'ī, *Awj at-Taḥarrī 'an Ḥaythiyyat Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī (Damascus: 1944), 48-59.

<sup>159</sup> Nicholson, "Meditation," 165-66; Brockelman, *GAL, Supplement 1, KAPITEL Die Poesie*, in: *Brockelmann Online*, by Carl Brockelmann. Consulted online on 30 March 2017

<sup>160</sup> A. Fischer, "Der Koran" des Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1942), 94-95.

<sup>161</sup> R. Hartmann, *Zu dem Kitāb al al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghayātdes Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī* (Berlin: Verlag de Akademie de Wissenschaften, 1944).

<sup>162</sup> See Massignon, "Sur la loyauté d'al-Ma'arrī en matière de Tawḥīd," in *Ilā Ṭāhā Ḥusayn fī 'īd mīlādihi al-sab'īn; Dirāsāt muḥdāh min aṣḍiqā'ihī wa talāmīdhīh*, ed. Abū al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962) in Peltz, *Der Koran*, 6.

<sup>163</sup> B. I. Shidfar, *Abu-l-Ala Al-Maari* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), 163-170.

unrivaled.”<sup>164</sup> Muḥammad al-Jundī also rejects the accusations of parody and concluded that *Fuṣūl* was solely meant for glorifying God.<sup>165</sup>

The most recent and detailed study of *Fuṣūl* was written by Christian Peltz,<sup>166</sup> who thoroughly scrutinized the work’s stylistic, linguistic, and formal features as well as its complex vocabulary. Peltz sees a close relationship between the structural elements of *Fuṣūl* and other genres like hymns, prayers, exhortations, and even psalms.<sup>167</sup> In his analysis of *Fuṣūl*, Peltz pays careful attention to the use of God’s epithets that recall the Qur’ānic style and emphasizes al-Ma‘arrī’s intention to urge a monotheism based on reason and natural law that, subsequently, rules out any prophecies.<sup>168</sup> However, in spite of this, Peltz does not provide a definite conclusion. Instead he insists that the question of parody is open and suggests that further investigation and a detailed examination of the relationship between the two texts ought to be made.<sup>169</sup>

Devin Stewart, however, produced more conclusive results and raised a few important points on the study of *Fuṣūl*.<sup>170</sup> Stewart argued that, even though the Qur’ān and *Fuṣūl* widely differ in their form, structure, and rhyming, *Fuṣūl* does contain a number of features that made it different from other examples of religious literature, including qur’anic allusion and influence. For example, passages with oaths, exhortations, declarative statements, and constant mentioning of afterlife punishments clearly allude to the qur’anic style. Stewart suggests that *Fuṣūl* might be better understood through an analysis of other writings by al-Ma‘arrī in relation to the Qur’ān. One such work would be the commentary on al-Mutanabbī’s poetry mentioned earlier. The title of this text,

<sup>164</sup>T. Husayn, *Ma‘a Abī l-‘Alā*, ch. 9.

<sup>165</sup>See M. al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmi‘ fī Akhbār*, 779-784.

<sup>166</sup> Christian Peltz, *Der Koran des Abū l-‘Alā* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 2 vols.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 1:167-170.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 179-200.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 212. See also the review and comment on Peltz’s work by Pieter Smoor, “A Flash of Understanding. The Book *al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghāyāt fī Tamjīd Allāh wa-l-Mawā‘iz* by Abū l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī.” *Bibliotheca orientalis* LXXI, no.5-9(2014):672-709.

<sup>170</sup> D. Stewart, “Rhythmical Anxiety: Notes on Abū l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī’s (d. 449/1058) *al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghāyāt* and Its Reception,” in *The Qur’an and Adab: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*, ed. Nuha Alshaar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

*Mu'jiz Aḥmad* (*Miracle of Aḥmad*), conveys either the standard doctrine that the Qur'ān is miraculous (in this case Aḥmad refers to the prophet Muḥammad), or the blasphemous view that Mutanabbī's *dīwān* is miraculous (Aḥmad in this case referring to Mutanabbī).<sup>171</sup>

Other works directly related to Qur'ān are even more vital to this sort of analysis. One such text is *Taḍmīn al-āy*, based on the rhetorical figure of *taḍmīn*, the incorporation of a verse or a passage from the Qur'ān. The end rhyme present in this work, which might be considered a twin of *Fuṣūl*, was followed by a verse, or a few short verses, of the Qur'ān. Another work which clearly echos the sacred text appears in the bibliography as *Taẓallum al-suwar* (*The Suras' Grievances*). In this text, al-Ma'arrī personifies the suras, portraying them as complaining about the deviant readings and mistreatments people apply to them. Another work mentioned by the bibliographer Ibn al-'Adīm, is *'Iẓāt-suwar* (*Sermons of the Suras*) which supposedly contains the same features as *Taẓallum al-suwar*. According to Stewart, the personification of the suras opens them to the possibility of having imperfection and human qualities attributed to them.<sup>172</sup> Finally, and perhaps most obviously, the use of the terms *fuṣūl* and *ghāyāt* are directly connected with the Qur'ānic suras and *āyāt*.

Stewart enhances his arguments for the qur'anic parody by analyzing the titles of the two lost commentaries of *Fuṣūl*. One was called *As-Sādin* (*The Custodian of the Shrine*) and the other was *Iqlīd al-Ghāyāt* (*The Key to the Ends*).<sup>173</sup> *Sādin* is a religious specialist who observed the custodianship of all temples. Stewart concludes that both of these commentaries' "titles treat the main book, *al-Fuṣūl wa'l-ghāyāt* metaphorically as a holy shrine, of which the primary example would be the Ka'ba. This suggests and intentional allusion to Islam and to Islam's sacred texts."<sup>174</sup> When Al-Ma'arrī himself was asked how *Fuṣūl* could be compared with the Qur'ān, he is

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 255-256.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 260-61.

<sup>173</sup> For these two lost books see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:328.

<sup>174</sup> Stewart, "Rhythmical Anxiety," 260.

recorded as having said: “Wait until tongues will polish it at the prayer-niches, then you will see” (*lam yaşqulhu l-maḥārību arba‘mi’ati sana*).<sup>175</sup> Here he is implying that *Fuṣūl* would one day be equal to the Qur’ān if it is cited and mentioned as much as the latter was.

In many ways, *Fuṣūl* is the closest text to *Luzūm* in regards to its proverbial, admonitory, and warning style — especially in the passages regarding God. Although *Fuṣūl* expresses little or no ambivalence regarding God’s omnipotence and eternity, we shall see later that ironic expressions also appear here nonetheless. The essential difference between the two, however, is that, unlike in *Luzūm*, prophets and prophecy are absent from *Fuṣūl*, and the reader remains alone with the invocations, warnings, prayers, and admonitions. The textual evidence, complete omission of prophecy, intense glorification of God and His omnipotence, and the complex literary enterprise behind the work makes it hard to dismiss the parodic intent of *Fuṣūl*.

***Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil wa-sh-Shāḥij (The Epistle of Horse and Mule)*** was composed for the governor of Aleppo ‘Azīz ad-Dawla.<sup>176</sup> The children of al-Ma‘arrī’s brother had financial problems, so the poet wrote to Azīz ad-Dawla to ask him for an annulment of the taxes for the lands that al-Ma‘arrī shared with his relatives.<sup>177</sup>

The main protagonist in *Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil*<sup>178</sup> is the Mule (*ash-Shāḥij*) who meets the Horse (*aṣ-Ṣāhil*). In other episodes the Mule also meets other protagonists including the Camel (*Abū Ayyūb*), the Dove (*al-Fākhita*), the Hyena (*Umm ‘Amr*), and the Fox (*Thu‘āla*). The Mule, based on all of its main characteristics, can be understood to be al-Ma‘arrī himself. It suffers from blindness, from a

<sup>175</sup> The anecdote is recorded in many sources, see, for instance, Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat* 879-80; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 305.

<sup>176</sup> The epistle was discovered and edited by ‘Aisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān in Morocco; see al-Ma‘arrī, *Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil wa-sh-Shāḥij*, ed., A‘isha ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1984),

<sup>177</sup> See the poet’s introductory notes in al-Ma‘arrī, *Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil*, 84; The request seems to not have been met by ‘Azīz ad-Dawla since al-Ma‘arrī had to write another letter-*Risāla Sanadīya* addressed to the next amir Sanad ad-Dawla for the same taxation issue: see Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 110; Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 133.

<sup>178</sup> For a detailed review of the content of this didactic work and its style, see Smoor, “Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Ma‘arrī’s newly discovered Letter of a Horse and a Mule,” *JAL* 12(1981):49-73 (Part I) and *JAL* 13 (1982):23-52 (Part II).



painful back and neck, from the violent treatment of a hired servant, and from being bound to a water-wheel.

In the text, the Mule has to work hard to fill the trough with water so that other animals may drink. However, the Mule is distinguished from the rest of animals by its wisdom, deep observation, erudition, intelligence, and excellent capacity to compose poetry. The Mule, as a result of his miserable state, wants to complain to the governor of Aleppo. It asks the Horse to take his complaint to the amir, but the Horse is too arrogant. He is too proud of himself and his prestigious place in human society and about the poetry that humans composed about horses, to meet the request of the Mule.<sup>179</sup> The Horse instead suggests that the Dove might be able to complete the task. The Mule, however, does not like the recommendation of the Horse because of the dove's well-known bad reputation.<sup>180</sup> The Camel then appears on the scene, and the Mule hopes that he might be the one to finally convey his complaint to the amir.

Meanwhile, the Mule changes its mind and decides to compose the complaint in rhyming prose because it despises conventional poetry and does not want to be compared to human beings who produce poetry for benefit and wealth. Instead, the Mule prefers poetry that glorifies God alone.<sup>181</sup> The Mule then prepares rhyming prose where it displays its mastery of *ilghāz*, enigmatic allusions and riddles, which it then has to explain to the Camel, whose knowledge of Arabic is poor. The Camel, confused with the complexity of the message, ultimately refuses to take it to the governor. Next appears the Hyena, an ignorant female who is willing to take the message to Aleppo. The Hyena, however, is so stupid that the Mule cannot help but mock her.<sup>182</sup>

The disappointed Mule slowly gives up sending his complaint to the governor and, upon the arrival of the Fox, the scene takes a different turn. The Fox is a lively figure who gathers news and

---

<sup>179</sup> *R. aṣ-Ṣāhil*, 156-157.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>181</sup> See *ibid.*, 219.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

rumors from ordinary people and then shares it with the animals. The Fox thus informs the rest of the animals that the common people are in panic because of an expected attack by the Byzantines led by the emperor Basil II. The Fox then begins to praise Azīz ad-Dawlā for his almost superhuman power. The amir, for example, holds two swords in his two hands while riding his horse at the highest speed. Further, despite all of his obligations, the governor also finds time to master Khalīl's *'Arūd*.<sup>183</sup> So much praise is given to Azīz ad-Dawlā, that the irony by excessive praise is impossible not to detect. In addition, the name of the governor is followed with long honorific formulae throughout the work.

Contained within the Mule's complaint were also questions for amir's jurists and theologians. The jurists are asked to evaluate the degree of offense to the rules of Islamic jurisprudence when someone recites *qifā nabkī* while performing *tawāf* (circumambulation) around Ka'ba. The theologians, in turn, are asked whether *qifā nabkī* existed before Imru'l-Qays or after him, and whether such a problem needs to be considered as a substance or as an essence.<sup>184</sup> However, no answer comes in the *Risāla*, since the purpose of the text is not to give answers, but, rather, to show the futility of such questions that were central at the time al-Ma'arrī was writing. With the absurdity of these questions, al-Ma'arrī thus ridicules religious scholars and their endless and fruitless disputes.

*Risālat as-Ṣāhil* seems to have been quite popular and its circulation reached far into the western part of the Islamic world where, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, 'Abd al-Ghafūr al-Kalā'ī tried to imitate the work. Al-Kalā'ī's work, entitled *Risālat as-Sāj' wa-l-Ghirbib* (*The Epistle of Dove and Raven*) and partially preserved, makes intense use of *tawrīya* (double entendre) and *ilghāz* (riddle) in order

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 703-706

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 190-191, 221 ff.

to achieve the same result as al-Ma‘arrī.<sup>185</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī himself composed a commentary on this epistle entitled *Lisān aṣ-Ṣāhil wa-sh-Shāḥij* written again for Azīz ad-Dawla.<sup>186</sup>

*Risālat al-Ghufrān (The Epistle of Forgiveness)* was among the less popular of al-Ma‘arrī’s works. Biographers Yāqūt and al-Qiftī<sup>187</sup> mention the work briefly, while Ibn al-‘Adīm does not mention it at all. Adh-Dhahabī describes the work as one full of much erudition that contained matters of heresy and levity (*qad ihtawat ‘alā mazdakatin wa-stikhfāf wa-fī-hā adabun kathīrun*).<sup>188</sup>

*Ghufrān* is a reply to a short letter which a man of letters from Aleppo, called Ibn al-Qāriḥ, wrote to al-Ma‘arrī around 1033.<sup>189</sup> In this letter, Ibn al-Qāriḥ imagines himself as a pious believer, worried about heretics who attack the Islamic faith, and wonders what the famous man of al-Ma‘arra thinks of them. One of the purposes of Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s letter is to justify the accusations of ingratitude towards a man who had patronized him, namely Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Maghribī (d.1010), a close friend of Abū ‘l-‘Alā’. Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s attacks on Abū ‘l-Qāsim, his unpleasant self-praise, and his self-righteous appeal intrigued al-Ma‘arrī enough that he wrote a lengthy response which ultimately became a remarkable piece of satire of classical Arabic literature.

Al-Ma‘arrī’s epistle consists of two parts. The first is a description of Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s imaginary journey to Heaven and Hell after his revival on the Day of Judgment and the second contains his thoughts on heretics. The second part of this letter will be examined in greater detail later. To the great surprise of Ibn al-Qāriḥ, Paradise is populated with poets of *jāhilīya* including A‘shā Maymūn,<sup>190</sup> Labīd. Further, even Christians like ‘Adī b. Zayd<sup>191</sup> are present, having been forgiven by the merciful and wise Creator. Among the inhabitants of Hell, however, Ibn al-Qāriḥ

<sup>185</sup> See *TQ*, 439-454; P. Smoor, “Enigmatic Allusions,” Part II, 46-47.

<sup>186</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:333; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 109.

<sup>187</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:333; al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:100.

<sup>188</sup> Ad-Dhahabī, *Tarikh*, 30:199-200.

<sup>189</sup> For a good recent edition of *Ghufrān* along with English translation: see van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler, *Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī: The Epistle of Forgiveness* (NY: New York University Press, 2014), 2 vols.: from now on referred as *Forgiveness*.

<sup>190</sup> *Forgiveness*, 1:103

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:113.

finds the famous Bashshār b. Burd, who had been condemned for his irreligious verses and his alliance with Satan. Here, Ibn al-Qāriḥ is also given special eyesight in order to see the hell-fire and other torturous scenes.<sup>192</sup> Paradise and Hell are depicted through traditional images with references to the Qur’ān and popular beliefs. In this work of satire, paradise is turned into a scene of superficial conversations with lengthy philological digressions. Some episodes are impossible to read without laughter, for example, the bureaucratic procedure of Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s entrance to paradise,<sup>193</sup> the story where the ugliest and smelliest woman of Aleppo was turned into a beautiful and alluring houri in Paradise,<sup>194</sup> the scene of various fruits turning into damsels,<sup>195</sup> or the scene of women changing the shapes of their body according to the wish of the shaykh.<sup>196</sup>

The present fame of *Ghufrān* originates with the eminent scholar Reynold Nicholson, who discovered the epistle among some Arabic and Persian manuscripts and assessed to be a genuine and previously unknown work of al-Ma‘arrī.<sup>197</sup> Soon after his discovery, Nicholson published the partial edition along with a translation of the epistle.<sup>198</sup> He suggested that the epistle bore similarities with Virgil’s *The Sixth Book of Aeneid*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and the *Book of Arda Viraf*, even though all these, as Nicholson observed, “are distinguished by a calm sincerity and a lofty seriousness which at once degrade the *Ghufrān* to the level of an impudent parody.”<sup>199</sup> Another significant parallel, Nicholson suggested, can be drawn with Lucian’s *True History* in which the author describes his journey to the Happy Isles and his conversations with Homer on issues of grammar

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 1:251.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 1:193.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 1:222-23.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 1:223.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 1:225.

<sup>197</sup> See R. Nicholson, “Persian Manuscript attributed to Fakhruddin ar-Rāzī, with a note on *Risālatu l-Ghufrān* by Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī and Other MSS. in the same Collection,” *JRAS* (1899), 669-674.

<sup>198</sup> R. Nicholson, “The *Risālatu l-Ghufrān* by Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” *JRAS* (1900):637-720; (1902):75-101; 813-847. The next valuable contribution was by Ā’isha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman’s edition of *Ghufrān*; see *Risālat al-Ghufrān li-Abī ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī wa- ma-‘hā Risālatat Ibn al-Qāriḥ* (Cairo: 1963). The Epistle was partially translated into other European languages too: see *L’Épître du Pardon*, trans. V.M. Monteil (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). *Paradies und Hölle*, trans. G. Scheoler, 1<sup>st</sup> part, (München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002); *Poslanieno Tsarstve Proshaniya*, trans. by B. Shidfar, in *Abu’l-‘Ala al-Ma‘arri: Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1990), 165-405.

<sup>199</sup> Nicholson, “*Risālatu l-Ghufrān*,” part II, 76.

and poetry. Further, another parallel can be drawn with Aristophane's *The Frogs*. Although the two works are quite different, and al-Ma'arrī's writing appears weaker next to the Greek genius, Nicholson suggests that both writers "agree in the burlesque handling of the Afterlife."<sup>200</sup>

The fame of *Ghufrān* has much to do with the well-rounded thesis presented by the Spanish Arabist Miguel Asin Palacios that suggested the extent to which the work could have influenced Dante's *Divine Comedy*.<sup>201</sup> The direct influence of al-Ma'arrī on Dante cannot yet be proven, but it is plausible that both authors might have been influenced by the famous *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* (*The Book of the Night Journey*), an anonymous work about the prophet Muḥammad's journey through the seven heavens. This text was well-known in Islamic world and was translated into Old Spanish, Latin, and French during Dante's life-time.<sup>202</sup>

It has also been suggested that al-Ma'arrī was inspired by the work of an Andalusian man of letters, Ibn Shuhayd al-Ashja'ī (d.1036), who was a friend of the famous Ibn Ḥazm (d.1064). Ibn Shuhayd's epistle, *Risālat at-Tawābi' wa-z-Zawābi* (*The Treatise of Familiar Spirits and Demons*),<sup>203</sup> was written before 1011 and is only preserved in fragments.<sup>204</sup> It is about a journey to the valley of the genies where the author meets the spirits of the great authors of the past— including poets, prose writers, and judges of literary works. It is not only the imaginary journey to the Other World that is common among these epistles, but also the use of animal protagonists such as asses, mules, and geese. Perhaps more could be understood about the nature of these texts had the *Risālat at-Tawābi' wa-z-Zawābi* of Ibn Shuhayd been completely preserved.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>201</sup> A. Palacios, *La Escatología Musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, 1919), trans. and abridged by H. Sunderland, (London: Murray, 1926). For some time, the thesis was in the center of debates: see, for instance, Nāshid Sayfayn, "La Comédie Divine," *al-Muqataṭaf* 81(1932): 201-205; for a review of works treating the theme see H. Osman, "Dante in Arabic," *Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 73 (1955):47-52.

<sup>202</sup> See on this theme M.R. Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: Forgotten Heritage* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 115-136.

<sup>203</sup> See Ibn Shuhayd, *Risālat at-Tawābi' wa-z-Zawābi: The Treatise of Familiar Spirits and Demons* tran. by James Monroe (Berkley, 1971).

<sup>204</sup> See Ch. Pellat, "Ibn Shuhayd," in *EF*; also the references in M. Saleh, "Bibliographie Critique," " part II, 217, 220, 270.

Suggestions that *Ghufrān* ought to be analyzed within a broader context and in relation to Greek literature provoked a number of debates among Arab intellectuals of the 1960s. Perhaps influenced by Nicholson's remarks, Louis 'Awāḍ (d.1990), a prominent Egyptian intellectual and writer, proposed to contextualize al-Ma'arrī's epistle within the Greek literary heritage which, at the time of al-Ma'arrī, had a strong cultural presence in Antioch, Latakia, and, to a certain degree, Aleppo. As a result of this, 'Awāḍ insists that al-Ma'arrī was deeply influenced by Homer's *Odyssey*, Aristophanes's *Frogs*, and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* and *Dialogues of the Gods*. He claims that all of these texts are united by the theme of *katabasis*, a trip to underworld and its imaginary representations often presented through satire. 'Awāḍ suggested that al-Ma'arrī could have read these works in Arabic translations, which have likely been lost, or even in their original languages, thus suggesting that al-Ma'arrī knew Greek.<sup>205</sup> 'Awāḍ's ideas, however, were not well received. The Egyptian scholar, Maḥmūd Shākir, believed that 'Awāḍ's analysis was an attack on Arabic and Islamic literary heritage and wrote several essays on the topic that were later collected under the title *Abāṭil wa-l-Asmār* in order to refute 'Awāḍ and deny any Greek influence on al-Ma'arrī.<sup>206</sup>

Certainly, there is no proof that al-Ma'arrī knew Greek nor is there any clear evidence that suggests that al-Ma'arrī read these works in Arabic. However, it is hard to completely deny the possibility of Greek influence, especially when considering the place and time in which al-Ma'arrī lived. Lucian, for instance, was popular among the Byzantines — his works were not only read but also widely imitated and orally transmitted.<sup>207</sup> It is therefore plausible to assume that al-Ma'arrī would at least be familiar with the themes. The role of comparative literature and the examination of

<sup>205</sup> Initially 'Awāḍ published his essays in *Ahrām* and later collected them in a book: see L. 'Awāḍ, *Alā Hāmish al-Ghufrān* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1966), 137-38.

<sup>206</sup> Maḥmūd Shākir, *Abāṭil wa-l-Asmār* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1965). The controversy between 'Awāḍ and Shākir is well rooted in the debates on secularism and nationalism in Egypt. In the same book, Shākir also severely attacked 'Awāḍ's call for establishing Egyptian dialect as a language of literature.

<sup>207</sup> See, for instance, "Lucian," in *The Oxford Anthology of Roman Literature*, ed. P. E. Knox and J.C. McKeown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 584.

common *topoi* and visions deployed from Homer to al-Ma‘arrī and Milton should not be undermined. Indeed, a study of *Ghufrān* within the context of world literature, rather than studied solely in isolation, would be a significant contribution to our understanding of Arabic literature.

*Ghufrān* also enjoyed fame in the Arab world due to its dramatic features. It was ‘Āisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman who first suggested that *Ghufrān* might be seen as a dramatic play with three acts. This challenges the common belief that, apart from the shadow-plays of Ibn Dāniyāl, there were no pre-modern dramatic writing in Arabic.<sup>208</sup> *Ghufrān*’s dramaturgic potential was used by the famous Tunisian playwright ‘Izz ad-Dīn al-Madanī, whose *Ghufrān*, a free travesty of al-Ma‘arrī’s epistle, was performed in Casablanca in 1976.<sup>209</sup>

As was the case with other works by al-Ma‘arrī, *Ghufrān* was also the subject of contradictory interpretations. As van Gelder noted, *Ghufrān* is a peculiar mixture of satire and philology, explaining that “among its merits is the fact that jest and earnest is not always easily distinguished, and that different categories of readers will discern different objects of satire in it.”<sup>210</sup> Indeed, many scholars who worked on *Ghufrān* in the early twentieth century, like R. Nicholson and I. Krachkovsky, thought that the satire was directed toward certain religious understandings in Islam, especially that of Heaven and Hell.<sup>211</sup> Conversely, ‘Āisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman saw no ridicule of heaven in the text, with all the satire instead directed towards Ibn al-Qāriḥ.<sup>212</sup>

What al-Ma‘arrī does severely satirize, however, is Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s certainty in both faith and religious perceptions. He ridicules the simplicity and the formalistic nature of belief and, through the use of satire and irony, questions popular manifestations of religion. Ibn al-Qāriḥ is attacked primarily for his certitude in his understanding of what belief is and for his confidence in his

<sup>208</sup> ‘Āisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman, *Qirā’a Jadīda fī Risālat al-Ghufrān: Naṣ Masraḥī min al-Qarni l-Khāmisi l-Hijrī* (Cairo, 1970).

<sup>209</sup> See, for instance, E. Machut-Mendecka, “The Living Stones of Tunisia: ‘Izz ad-Dīn al-Madanī and the Theatre of Revival,” *Oriente Moderno* 16 (1997):130.

<sup>210</sup> See van Gelder, “Satire, Medieval,” in *EAL*. See also idem, “Mixtures of Jest and Earnest,” 177.

<sup>211</sup> Krachkovsky, “Zur Entstehung und Komposition von Abū’l-‘Alā’s *Risālat al-Ghufrān*,” *Islamica* 1(1925):344-356.

<sup>212</sup> ‘Abd ar-Raḥman, “Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 338.

division of heretics and true believers. Though in the first part of the epistle al-Ma'arrī locates Bashshār in Hell, in the second part he expresses some uncertainty about whether the poet's place is actually in Hell as God is, after-all, forbearing and munificent.<sup>213</sup> It can be noted here that Al-Ma'arrī's aversion is ultimately towards unquestioned and absolute certainty in matters of belief.

In conclusion, it is clear that al-Ma'arrī was extremely well learned and composed voluminous works, almost all of which have a didactic nature and are heavily driven by philological inquiries. Among his works of prose, the moralistic, ascetic, admonitory works are the most abundant and are mostly meditative and contemplative texts that revolve around the notion of God. Among them, *Fuṣūl* is the most important example. These are followed by his works on language and grammar and his works that were composed for instructive and practical purposes. Two of al-Ma'arrī's epistles, *Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil wa-sh-Shāḥij* and *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, stand out as original works. Both are flavored with irony, satire, and ridicule of simplistic representations of religion and are, at the same time, heavily loaded with linguistic and philological discussions.

Most of al-Ma'arrī's works are distinguished by their extraordinary formal techniques and stringent compositional rules, through which al-Ma'arrī showcased his undeniable literary virtuosity. *Luzūm* is a key example of al-Ma'arrī's repertoire, as it contains all of the major features that he has come to be known for: didactic, moralistic and admonitory, and composed with rigorous formal techniques and meticulous prosodic rules. More importantly, among the preserved works of al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm*, in the most expressive manner, brings forth uncertainties, confusion, and anxieties in intellectual and religious matters and illustrates not only the personal state of the author, but also the whole epistemological ambience of the age.

---

<sup>213</sup>For remarks along this line see Tilman Nagel, "The *Risālat al-Ghufrān* and the Crisis of the Certainty of Faith," in *Actes du 10<sup>me</sup> Congrès de l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisant*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1982), 55-60; Martino Diez, "Wandering around in Heaven: between Satire and Doubt," *Oasis* 16 (2012):101-105.



#### 1.4. Social Standing and Network

Although Ma'arrian scholars do mention the poet's fame and his social engagement, the general impression of al-Ma'arrī that has been presented by scholarship suggests that he was foremost a spiritual figure who was separated from all earthly matters. It also seems that he has an almost supernatural nature or, at the very least, he was merely an awkward and anti-social individual. In order to create an adequate profile of the poet, we first need to look at al-Ma'arrī's social and political involvements as well as his social network. Although he was an ascetic, al-Ma'arrī had a keen interest in the social matters of his time and was a prominent member and representative of his town. An eloquent and expressive summary of al-Ma'arrī's social distinction and fame was recorded by the Persian poet, philosopher, and Ismā'ilī scholar, Nāṣir-i Khasraw (d.1088) in the *Book of Travel* (*Safanama*). Khasraw reported that at the time when he passed through the poet's region, he was still alive:

In the town [of al-Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān] was a man named Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī. Although blind, he was the head of the city and very wealthy, with many slaves and servants. Everyone in the city, in fact, was like a slave to him, but he himself had chosen the ascetic life. He allotted himself half a maund of barley bread, and he would content himself with only one loaf throughout the entire day and night. Besides that, he ate nothing. I heard that the door to his house was always open and his agents and deputies did all the work of the city, except for the overall supervision, which he saw to himself... This man has attained such a rank in poetry and literature that all the learned from Syria, the Maghreb and Iraq confess that in this age there is no one of comparable stature. He has composed a book called *al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghayāt* in which he speaks in enigmatic parables. Although eloquent and amazing, the book can be understood by a very few and by those who have read it with him. He has even been accused of trying to rival the Koran. There are always more than two hundred persons from all over gather about him reading literature and poetry.<sup>214</sup>

This summary indicates all of the important aspects of al-Ma'arrī's life: highlighting primarily his fame, prestige, recognition, while also making note of his dubious reputation in regards to his beliefs.

---

<sup>214</sup> Nāṣir-I Khasraw, *The Book of Travel*, 15.

With this in mind, it is clear that in order to accurately reconstruct al-Ma‘arrī’s place in his milieu and time, it is important to assess his integration into and interest in the local cultural, socio-political arenas, his professional and intellectual activities, and finally his social network and individual friendships. One way to reconstruct this picture is by analyzing his network of disciples, visitors, and correspondents.

Due primarily to his authority in literature and teaching, al-Ma‘arrī’s renown extended into many diverse and distinct sections of society. His network included men of letters, religious scholars, persons of authority, and common folk. This section intends to provide a detailed depiction of both al-Ma‘arrī’s social profile and his network by analyzing his involvement in the literary circles, some of his prominent friends and disciples, his relationships with authority figures, and, finally, his relationships with the people of his town.

Although al-Ma‘arrī’s stay in Baghdad was short, having ultimately given up on pursuing a more mainstream poetic career, he managed to establish a number of important connections and friendships in the capital and, as a result, became part of the city’s cultural life. It is known that he even attended some of the salons of the city, including one held by the prominent Imami scholar, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.1044),<sup>215</sup> who was the compiler of the sayings and sermons of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, entitled *Nahj al-Balagha*. Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, a great *littérateur*, theologian, and jurist<sup>216</sup> showed great respect and admiration towards al-Ma‘arrī, who composed an elegy for his father, Sharīf al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī, also known as Sharīf Dhū-l Manāqib.<sup>217</sup> According to one anecdote, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s admiration for al-Ma‘arrī’s philological knowledge grew when, one day in his salon, al-Ma‘arrī happened to step on a man’s foot. The man shouted at the poet “who is

<sup>215</sup> He was also the brother of the famous poet ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī (d.1015),

<sup>216</sup> For a recent account on Sharīf al-Murtaḍā see Hussein Ali Abdulsater, *Shi‘i Doctrine, Mu‘tazili Theology: al Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and Imami Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). See also W. Madelung, “‘Alam al-Hoda,” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

<sup>217</sup> See *Shurūḥ Sz*, 3:1264ff; Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat*, 5:69; for a positive accounts on the relationship between al-Ma‘arrī and Sharīf al-Murtaḍā see also Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt*, 4:420, al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 85, Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 122.

this dog?” To which al-Ma‘arrī answered, “The dog is the one who does not know seventy synonyms for the word ‘dog’.” After this, Al-Murtaḍā requested that al-Ma‘arrī participate in conversations on various topics of learning.<sup>218</sup> However, stories concerning al-Ma‘arrī and Sharīf al-Murtaḍā are also told in a negative light. According to some, the poet attacked Sharīf for criticizing al-Mutanabbī, which resulted in the host of the salon chasing the poet out from his place.<sup>219</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, whom al-Ma‘arrī called simply, “the poet” (*ash-shā‘ir*), was by this time al-Ma‘arrī’s favorite poet and the only one whom he praised. Despite this negative representation of their relationship, there are no such extant writings by al-Ma‘arrī that were composed against Sharīf.<sup>220</sup>

Another prestigious location and lively center of cultural life in Baghdad frequented by al-Ma‘arrī was the circle of Sābūr b. Ardashīr. Al-Ma‘arrī belonged to the circle of Sābūr’s House of Knowledge, famous for its library, and was friends with some of its other members.<sup>221</sup> One of those was the custodian of Sābūr’s library, ‘Abd as-Salām al-Baṣrī, who was known as-al-Wajikā and was also a philologist and grammarian.<sup>222</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī frequently attended literary sessions held by al-Wajikā that were rumored to be a host to the clandestine community of *Ikhwān as-Ṣafā*.<sup>223</sup> From one of al-Ma‘arrī’s letters we learn that he was also friends with the other custodian of the library, Abū Maṣṣūr. However, not much is known about him.<sup>224</sup>

Among al-Ma‘arrī’s other friends in Baghdad were the grammarian Ibn Fūrajja, who was known for his commentary on al-Mutanabbī, the prominent man of letters Abū l-Qāsim Ibn

<sup>218</sup> The incident or the anecdote inspired the celebrated scholar as-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) to compose a didactic poem, an *urjūza* entitled *al-Tabarī min Ma‘arrat al-Ma‘arrī* where over sixty synonyms of the word “dog” are used. See *TQ*, 429-457. Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 302.

<sup>219</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:302; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, 2:665. See also Margaret Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbī: Voice of the ‘Abbasid Poetic Ideal* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 116-117.

<sup>220</sup> The Shi‘i scholar aṭ-Ṭabarsī (d.1153) who transmitted a dialogue between al-Ma‘arrī and al-Murtaḍā clearly showing al-Ma‘arrī’s belief in the eternity of the world (*dahrīya*), mentioned that al-Ma‘arrī always spoke well of Sharīf: see Aṭ-Ṭabarsī, Abū Maṣṣūr, *Al-Ihtijāj*, annotated by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Khursān (Beirut: Mu‘asasa l-A‘lamī li-l-Maṭbū‘āt, 1965), 1:504-506.

<sup>221</sup> For al-Ma‘arrī’s attendance to Sābūr’s library, see Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt*, 5:356; see also the commentaries of Sz in *Shurūḥ Saqṭ az-Zand*, 1239.

<sup>222</sup> See al-Qifī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:85; 2:175; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 122; *Letter XVI*.

<sup>223</sup> See *Shurūḥ Sz*, 3:1543; 3:1981.

<sup>224</sup> See *Letter XIX*.

Jalabāt,<sup>225</sup> and Abū l-Qāsim at-Tanūkhī, the son of the famous author al-Qāḍī at-Tanūkhī who is best known for *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*. Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Jalabāt, who was also known for his sympathies towards Mu‘tazilis and Shi‘is, also took sessions of reading from al-Ma‘arrī.<sup>226</sup> We learn from a letter that al-Ma‘arrī had a good relationship with the famous shāf‘ī jurist Abū Tayyīb al-Ṭabarī (d.1058) with whom he had literary discussions during his stay in Baghdad.<sup>227</sup>

Based on these examples<sup>228</sup> it appears that al-Ma‘arrī quickly gained significant access to and acknowledgement from many of the literary circles in Baghdad. His early poetry was recognized among the men of letters in Baghdad and parts of *Saqt az-Zand* were read and circulated there during al-Ma‘arrī’s time in the cosmopolitan capital.<sup>229</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī’s most dynamic network, however, was composed of his disciples who came, for periods of varying lengths, to study under him in Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān. People from diverse backgrounds came to take lessons from the skillful master of Arabic, to consult with him on linguistic and literary matters, to obtain a better knowledge of religious themes,<sup>230</sup> and to consult with him on specific books and works.<sup>231</sup> It was even said that al-Ma‘arrī supported some of his poor students financially.<sup>232</sup> The list of people who came to study under the poet highlights just how diverse this circle was. They were men of letters, grammarians, poets, and religious scholars. Importantly, al-Ma‘arrī accepted students not only from Ma‘arra, but also from various cities and

<sup>225</sup> See Margoliouth’s notes in *Introduction to Letters*, XXV, XXXVI; Rājkūtī, *al-Ma‘arrī*, 143, 162.

<sup>226</sup> See Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat*, 2:405; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, 879; Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt*, 4:162; Rājkūtī, *al-Ma‘arrī*, 130-134.

<sup>227</sup> See Letter XXV; al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 217, 222.

<sup>228</sup> There is, however, another bitter episode related to the famous grammarian of the time ‘Alī b. ‘Isā ar-Raba‘ī (d.1029), a student of well-known judge and grammarian as-Sīrāfi: When al-Ma‘arrī appeared at his lecture, the grammarian gave a disrespectful welcome by saying “let the blind enter” (*li-yaṣ‘ada l-iṣṭubl*) upon which al-Ma‘arrī left with anger and never returned. For ar-Raba‘ī, see al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 2:297; for the anecdote, see Y āqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:302.

<sup>229</sup> See, for instance, al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 85; Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:201.

<sup>230</sup> See Khalliqān, *Wafayāt*, 1:114; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 92-94; see also al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 603-604;

<sup>231</sup> For example, according to a story, a man visited al-Ma‘arrī to inquire about a fine book the first part of which was lost, and no one could know who penned it. The man came to Abū ‘-l’Alā’ and read fragments from the book after which al-Ma‘arrī could identify the author and the missing content. The man took the book to Yemen and told about it to the men of letters. It was assumed that book was by the philologist Ishaq b. Ibrāhīm al-Fārābī (d.961), and the name was *Diwān al-Adab*; see Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:87.

<sup>232</sup> See Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 156.

regions of the Islamic world, including Baghdad, Tabriz, Rayy, Kkwarezm, Andalus, and Samarkand.

One of his students, Sinān al-Khafājī, was discussed above.<sup>233</sup> However, perhaps the most famous figure listed among al-Ma‘arrī’s disciples was Abū Zakarīyā at-Tabrīzī (d.1109). In about 1047 at-Tabrīzī, at a very young age, went to Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān in order to take lessons from al-Ma‘arrī, supposedly staying there for seven years. After studying philology with Abū’l-‘Alā’, at-Tabrīzī then moved to Baghdad and began his teaching career in the famous Sunni school, *Nizāmīya*. At-Tabrīzī, was undoubtedly one of the most important grammarians and philologists of the Arabic language, who, among other works, wrote a commentary on al-Ma‘arrī’s *Saqṭ az-Zand* (no work on *Luzūm*, though it is known that he did study part of it).<sup>234</sup>

Also among al-Ma‘arrī’s disciples were many religious scholars, including Imam Isma‘īl aṣ-Ṣābūnī (the pious *shaykh al-Islam*, scholar of *ḥadīth* and shafi‘i jurist),<sup>235</sup> the Mu‘tazilī shaykh from Rayy, Abū Sa‘ad ar-Rāzī,<sup>236</sup> Abū l-Walīd al-Ḥasan from Derbent (who studied in Alexandria, took classes with al-Ma‘arrī and returned to Samarkand),<sup>237</sup> and the judge Abū Faḍl Hibat Allah, who was an ancestor of the famous historian Ibn al-‘Adīm.<sup>238</sup>

Many poets and philologists were frequent attendants of al-Ma‘arrī’s lessons. A philologist who studied under al-Ma‘arrī was Abū Qāsim ar-Raqī. He made a career in Baghdad and was a linguist, grammarian, and one of the most knowledgeable men of letters.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, the scholar Abū l-Makārim al-Abharī from Samarkand studied under al-Ma‘arrī’s supervision for four years and

<sup>233</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:325.

<sup>234</sup> See al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 4:28-30; Laoust, “Vie et Philosophie,” 134-135; van Gelder, “Al-Khatīb at-Tibrīzī,” in *EAL*, 440.

<sup>235</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 7:2267; see also, as-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt Shāfi‘īya al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭanāḥī, Muḥammad al-Ḥilw (Cairo, Dār ihyā’ l-kutub al-‘arabīya, 1964), 3:117. He is mentioned also in al-Bākhārī, *Dumīyat al-Qaṣr*, 1:157; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 98.

<sup>236</sup> See al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 360-361.

<sup>237</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:309; idem, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*, 2:449;

<sup>238</sup> al-Jundī, *Jāmi‘*, 471.

<sup>239</sup> See Sam‘ānī, *Ansāb*, 6:157; al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi*, 172.

is often considered to be one of his most prominent of his students.<sup>240</sup> A few of al-Ma‘arrī’s students were connected with Andalusia. Aḥmad b. Ṣandīd, for instance, studied with al-Ma‘arrī, and both transmitted and commented on some of his poetry. Ṣandīd then moved to al-Andalus and became the panegyrist of the vizier Ibn Ṭāhir in Murcia.<sup>241</sup> Another example was recorded by Ibn al-Khayr al-Ishbīlī from Seville (d. 1108) who recounts that the grammarian Abū’l-Qāsim al-Qayrawānī studied *Saqt az-Zand* with al-Ma‘arrī and ultimately went to Andalus and taught it there. We further learn from al-Ishbīlī that al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūmīyāt* as well as most of the Epistles were known to al-Qayrawānī<sup>242</sup> who taught Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (d.1127), the famous grammarian and the author of the commentary on *Saqt az-Zand* (which includes in it some poems from *Luzūm*). It was through these Andalusian<sup>243</sup> connections that al-Ma‘arrī’s ideas reached to the lands of Europe on which more will follow below.

The circle of al-Ma‘arrī’s disciples was not limited only to members of the Muslim community. In the eleventh century, a Melkite translator and theologian named ‘Abdallah b. Faḍl al-Anṭākī is reported to have studied under the supervision of Abū’l-‘Alā’. There is a mention of al-Anṭākī in the margins of Ibn Faḍl’s *Kitāb ar-Rawḍa*. He is also known to have studied grammar and lexicography under al-Ma‘arrī, specifically Ibn al-Sikkit’s *Iṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq*.<sup>244</sup>

Besides his regular disciples, al-Ma‘arrī also had numerous visitors of varying rank and profession<sup>245</sup> who travelled to consult with him on various issues of grammar and literature. Interestingly, among the visitors are individuals who did not necessarily agree with al-Ma‘arrī’s on his religious views. These included Abū Yūsuf ‘Abd as-Salām al-Qazwīnī, a Mu‘tazilī Zaydī scholar

<sup>240</sup> See Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 96; adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 30:219.

<sup>241</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:282; al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 458.

<sup>242</sup> See Ibn al-khayr al-Ishbīlī, “Fahrasa,” in *TQ*, 386.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. Ibn al-‘Adīm mentions a few other Andalusians like learned man Abū’l-Khaṭṭāb b. Ḥazm and others: see Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 96; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:83; al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 466.

<sup>244</sup> See Alexander Treiger, ‘Abdallah Ibn Faḍl al-Anṭākī,’ in *Christian-Muslim Relations, 600-1500, Online 1*.

<sup>245</sup> Rājīkūfī gives a detailed list of visitors: see *al-Ma‘arrī*, 222ff.

and commentator of the Qur'an, who is reported to have been suspicious of al-Ma'arrī's belief in prophets.<sup>246</sup>

Another prestigious visitor was Abū Nasr al-Munāzī, a poet and vizier of the ruler of Mayyāfāriqīn.<sup>247</sup> One story about al-Munāzī frequently appears in the sources in which, upon meeting al-Ma'arrī, al-Munāzī inquired about the rumours related to the poet to which the poet answered, "Because they have been envious of me." The vizier then replied, "Why would they be envious of you for you have left both this world and the Afterlife?" Al-Ma'arrī replied to this with a question of his own: "And the Afterlife too?" Al-Munāzī's final reply to this was: "I swear by God, yes." The anecdote is illustrative, whether true or not, because it can be interpreted in few ways. One cannot help but see the typical Ma'arrīan wit when he poses the question about the Afterlife to Munāzī, as it is an ironic rhetorical question on something which the poet might have thought did not exist. This story also shows that al-Ma'arrī's reputation as an unbeliever was present during his lifetime. However, this did not undermine his prestige as a *littérateur* and, importantly, did not prevent people from traveling to Ma'arra to learn from him.

Two important observations regarding the network of al-Ma'arrī's disciples and visitors can be made. First, Abū'l-'Alā's philological and literary skills were appealing, not only for men pursuing literary, philological, and linguistic knowledge, but also for those who were interested in matters of tradition and religion. Second, the geographical scope of those who read and knew al-Ma'arrī's poetry and studied under him extended from Samarkand to Andalus. This is important because it shows that al-Ma'arrī's name and works, transmitted orally or through writing, were well circulated throughout various parts of the Islamic world and beyond.

Al-Ma'arrī wrote about his fame and popularity in a self-abnegating verse:

<sup>246</sup> There is a well-rounded story in the sources going back to al-Qazwīnī: allegedly, al-Ma'arrī told al-Qazwīnī: "I have never instigated anyone," to which al-Qazwīnī replied: "You have not believed in the prophets." Al-Ma'arrī turned his face from him: see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 303.

<sup>247</sup> See Dhahabī, *Tarīkh al-Islām*, 30:206-207; Ibn Khalliqan, *Wafayāt*, 1:143; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat*, 3:1280; -Badi'ī, *Difā'*, 36. See also Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 125.

People visit me: one is from Yemen,  
the other one is from Tabas.  
They say: “we have heard about you,”  
I tell them let God curse those who spread false news.

yazūrunīl-qawmu hādhā arḍuhu Yamanun  
mina l-bilādiwa-hādhā dāruhiu ṭ-Ṭabasū.  
qālū sami‘nā ḥadīthan ‘anka qultu lahum  
lā yub‘idu llāhu illā ma‘sharan labbasū. (Lz2.15.1-2)<sup>248</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī’s role as a transmitter of knowledge bears much comparison with the authority scholars achieved through *ḥalqas*, study circles of individual shaykhs.<sup>249</sup> A modern wrote: “The wise men f Arabs, in whose days Maarrat an-Nu‘mān was the Mecca for the students and men of letters (*wa-qad kānati l-Ma‘arra fī ayāmihi Ka‘bata l-quṣṣādi, min ṭulābi wa-adābi*). Al-Ma‘arrī made his town a house of wisdom.”<sup>250</sup>

The other significant aspect of al-Ma‘arrī’s social profile is his relationship with figures of authority. We can see this particularly through al-Ma‘arrī’s works that were composed for the governors discussed above. We also are able to learn a great deal about this aspect of his social standing through his correspondence. Some of these exchanges, for example, occurred between al-Ma‘arrī and the son of ‘Alī Ḥusayn, Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī (d.1027), who has already been introduced. Abū l-Qāsim, already during his father’s lifetime, held an influential position in *Diwān as-Sawād* (Iraq). Later, he was the only prominent member of his family who escaped execution by the Faṭimid caliph al-Ḥākim, and moved to Iraq in search of ways to exact revenge against the Faṭimids. After a turbulent political career, Abū’ l-Qāsim was finally established in the court of Marwānid Naṣr al-Dawla in Mayyāfāriqīn, where he remained until his death.<sup>251</sup> Outside his political career, Abū’ l-Qāsim was engaged in literary activities and wrote several works, among

<sup>248</sup> This quotation means that the verse is from the volume 2 of Zand’s edition, page 15, lines 1-2.

<sup>249</sup> See, for instance, for this see D. Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘Ulamā’ of Eleventh-Century Baghdad* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 69

<sup>250</sup> See Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī, *Khiṭaṭ ash-Shām* (Damascus: Maktabat an-Nūrī, 1983), 6 vol., 4:29.

<sup>251</sup> Smoor, “Maghribī,” *EP*.



them is the abridgment of *Iṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq* by Ibn al-Sikkīt, which is the theme of one of the correspondences between Abū'l-Qāsim and al-Ma'arrī.

One of the letters, likely written around 1008, is al-Ma'arrī's response to an official letter from al-Maghribī to the people of Ma'arra. When al-Maghribī was still favored by the Faṭimids, he took the opportunity to renew his relationship with Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān.<sup>252</sup> Based on the favorable response by al-Ma'arrī, it seems as though the people of Ma'arra approved of the request made by the governor. This letter is full of praise for al-Maghribī and it is clear, based on the words of al-Ma'arrī, that the people of al-Ma'arra were addressed by Abū'l-Qāsim (*ulqiyā ilaynā kitābun karīmun*)<sup>253</sup> and that they chose al-Ma'arrī to be their representative to speak with the notable person.

Another correspondence from around 1009 between these two men relates to Abū'l-Qāsim's abridgment of *Iṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq* by Ibn al-Sikkīt. It seems that the author wished to know al-Ma'arrī's opinion on his work. Abū'l-'Alā' answered with much praise and approval.<sup>254</sup> Further, there is another short response by al-Ma'arrī to a letter from al-Maghribī where the poet, perhaps as a response to Abū'l-Qāsim's invitation for him to visit him, answered that, while he would like to do so, his weak condition would not allow him to travel.<sup>255</sup> By and large, the correspondence with al-Maghribī shows that al-Ma'arrī enjoyed a certain authority and respect both from officials and from the people of al-Ma'arra.<sup>256</sup>

Another statesman who had much respect for the poet was the Faṭimid governor of Aleppo, 'Azīz ad-Dawla, for whom, as we have seen, al-Ma'arrī composed a few works. 'Azīz ad-Dawla visited the poet in Ma'arra to invite him to the court of caliph al-Ḥākim (r.996-1021) in Egypt so

<sup>252</sup> See Margoliouth, "Introduction to the Letters," xx.

<sup>253</sup> See *Rasā'il Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār ash-Shurūq, 1982), 153.

<sup>254</sup> See *Letter II*, 16-26.

<sup>255</sup> See *Letter XXI*, 63.

<sup>256</sup> That the relationship between al-Ma'arrī and Abū'l-Qāsim lasted long, can be judged by the elegy the poet dedicated to the death of the vizier: see Lz2.434:6-12.

that he could take up a career there. According to as-Suyūṭī, caliph al-Ḥākim had heard about the poet from Naṣr b. Ṣadaqa al-Qābisī, a grammarian who spent some time reading al-Ma'arrī's poetry under the poet's supervision. Al-Qābisī told the caliph al-Ḥākim many favorable things about his teacher and presented to him the *diwān* of *Saqṭ az-Zand*. Al-Ḥākim liked al-Ma'arrī's poetry and wanted him to move to Cairo and hold a position in the newly founded *Dār al-'Ilm*. Al-Ma'arrī ultimately declined the invitation and apologized, after which the governor withdrew from the matter and left him alone (*fa-'itadhara wa-kaffa 'an-hu*).<sup>257</sup> However, based on the story of Ibn al-'Adīm and the letter written by al-Ma'arrī about this invitation, we learn that the letter of invitation on behalf of 'Azīz ad-Dawla was actually written by a vizier named Ibn Yūsuf al-Fallāḥī. Further, it to al-Fallāḥī that the poet addressed his replied. Unlike as-Suyūṭī's story, it appears from the letter, which does not mention al-Ḥākim,<sup>258</sup> that 'Azīz ad-Dawla in fact wanted a gradual promotion for the poet, where he would first move to his court in Aleppo and, only after becoming accustomed to the courtly environment there, would he be allowed to move to Egypt. Al-Ma'arrī asked for some time to consider it and, after some time, replied to al-Fallāḥī and politely declined the offer.<sup>259</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm's version of the story seems more plausible. However, both versions indicate the interest that figures of authority had in al-Ma'arrī. Further, even though the poet did not work in the court of Azīz ad-Dawla, he did maintain some contact with it through the panegyrist Abū l-Kayr al-Mufaḍḍal, who was originally from Ma'arra and had taken some classes from al-Ma'arrī.<sup>260</sup>

We also learn from the sources that there were other authority figures who visited al-Ma'arrī. For example, Abū l-Faḍl al-Baghdādī, a vizier and ambassador who was sent by the 'Abbasid

<sup>257</sup> See Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-Wu'ā* in *TQ*, 417.

<sup>258</sup> There are verses in *Luzūm* reflecting on the disappearance of al-Ḥākim where al-Ma'arrī rejected the possibility of his return and thought that he must have died and would only return in the day of Resurrection: see Lz2.243.3-13; a translation is found in Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 98.

<sup>259</sup> Some sources indicate to another late offer to al-Ma'arrī by the Faṭimid caliph al-Mustanṣir (r.1036-1094) which was again declined: see, for example, Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, 1:326.

<sup>260</sup> See ath-Tha'ālibī, *Tatimmat*, 5:15; see also *Shurūḥ SZ*, 2:673; P. Smoor, "Enigmatic allusions," part 1, 51.

caliph al-Qā'im to Tunis, stopped by al-Ma'arra to visit the poet.<sup>261</sup> As mentioned above, al-Ma'arrī's *Sharaf as-Sayf* was composed in the honor of Anūshtakin ad-Dizbirī, who also paid a visit to the poet in his hometown.

Some of al-Ma'arrī's letters clearly indicate his involvement in political matters. It appears from Letters XX and XL that, in the absence of the Sultan (meaning Azīz ad-Dawla), the deputy governor of Aleppo, Abū'l-Ḥasan b. Sa'īd b. Sinān, planned to perform the Ḥajj to Mecca. On his way he intended to stop at Ma'arra, whose people wanted the help of the deputy governor to protect them from the Byzantines. However, there was strong opposition from Aleppo to Ibn Sa'īd's decision because of troublesome political conditions. Al-Ma'arrī's letter XL was written to Ibn Sa'īd to discourage him from his journey. The poet mentioned, however, that this would be something the people of his town would not approve.<sup>262</sup>

The support and prestige al-Ma'arrī enjoyed among authorities, both Mirdasid and Fatimid, and the fame and respect that he gained from the scholarly and literary circles made him an authority in his hometown of Ma'arra. The fact that he was an important part of their life can be best seen in a letter he wrote to his people from Baghdad, informing them about his decision on seclusion. He told his people that he had given it much thought and had ultimately decided to return to Ma'arra, even if many had fled because of the fear of the Byzantine attacks.<sup>263</sup>

An even stronger indication of al-Ma'arrī's high standing among his people was an event that occurred during the rule of Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās. At a Friday congregational meeting in Ma'arra in 1029, with many notable figures and common people present, a woman entered the mosque shouting that she had been molested in a tavern (*mākhūr*-usually associated with a place of wine drinking and prostitution) run by a Christian. People attending Friday prayer, including a *qāḍī* and other

<sup>261</sup> Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 157-158.

<sup>262</sup> See Letter XX, 60-64; Letter XL, 142-143.

<sup>263</sup> Byzantine invasion of the region were frequent in that period, see Letter VIII, 43, n. 10. The letter is preserved also in Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, 319-320; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Inṣāf*, 129-130.

important men, all rushed to the tavern in anger, and destroyed and plundered it in retaliation. The powerful Christian vizier, Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās Tādhurus,<sup>264</sup> persuaded his ruler to impose punitive measures for this, which sent seventy people to prison, including the brother of al-Ma'arrī Abū'l-Majd, and fined each participant a thousand dinars. The prisoners' situation became worse and worse and, finally, the inhabitants of al-Ma'arra asked Abū'l-'Alā' to intercede. Al-Ma'arrī agreed to intercede on their behalf and met with Ṣāliḥ, urging him in rhymed prose to set the prisoners free. The ruler listened to the poet's pleading and, as a result, released the people of al-Ma'arra.<sup>265</sup> This event is a testimony to al-Ma'arrī's respected position both among the common citizens of al-Ma'arra and the authorities.

In addition to all of these events and relationships, al-Ma'arrī also dealt with daily matters like arranging for a house-maid,<sup>266</sup> enjoying a circle of close friends (especially members of the Sabika family who were his relatives on his mother's side and apparently also supported him financially),<sup>267</sup> and keeping in touch with other poets and prose writers.<sup>268</sup> Thus, it can be seen that al-Ma'arrī's willful rejection of a courtly career and mainstream literary circles did not prevent him from establishing for himself an alternative authority that was based primarily — but not entirely — on literary virtuosity and excellence. The blind poet of Ma'arra was withdrawn, but he was neither socially awkward nor isolated in the way that he is frequently depicted in modern scholarship. Finally, it is necessary to conclude with a discussion on al-Ma'arrī's possible affiliations with the Shi'i currents of his time.

<sup>264</sup> It was not unusual for Mirdasids to have Christian viziers: see S. Zakkar, *Emirate of Aleppo*, 243-244.

<sup>265</sup> For slightly different versions of the story see: Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:355-356; al-Qiftī, *Inbāḥ ar-Ruwāt*, 1:88-89; Dhahabī, *Tarīkh*, 201-202; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat*, 1:132-133; idem, *Inṣāf*, 147-49. For a summary see also Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 132; Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 144ff. Al-Ma'arrī's reflections on the event is expressed in Lz1.355.11-17-356.1-9; Lz1.302.4; Lz2.133.8; 228.14; 234.11. Not always did al-Ma'arrī approve Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās as a good ruler but in the unconventional elegy dedicated to this ruler the poet showed respect to him: see Lz2.50.1-9-51.1.

<sup>266</sup> See *Letter XVIII*.

<sup>267</sup> See, for instance, *XVII*, *XVII*, *XXX*. This goes against some opinions (for instance, the Nāṣir-I Khasraw's account) that al-Ma'arrī was wealthy.

<sup>268</sup> The addressees of *Letters XXIII* and *XXVIII* are poets though unknown.

### 1.5. Reputation of Unbeliever

There was, of course, another side to al-Ma‘arrī’s image. Next to his fame as a literary person and educator, al-Ma‘arrī also gained the reputation of an unbeliever. While a more thorough and detailed discussion of the accusations of unbelief directed at al-Ma‘arrī, and his responses to them will come in the last chapter, it needs to be said at this point here that in his lifetime he was already suspected of *zandaqa* for three reasons: for parodying the Qur’ān, denying prophecy and other tenets of Islam, and for abstaining from meat. These accusations can be clearly seen in the description presented in Nāṣir Khasraw’s account.

Already during his stay in Baghdad, some *fuqahā’* showed a hostile attitude towards al-Ma‘arrī because of his critical views on some rules of Islamic law. The poet, according to some reports, entered into a quarrel with some jurists, which was said to be the reason that al-Ma‘arrī had to leave Bagdad. On this issue, reference was made to this verse:

There is a contradiction, against which we only remain silent  
And take refuge in our Lord to escape hell.  
A hand is redeemed with five hundred pieces of gold,  
Why then to cut off [a hand] for merely a quarter of a dinar?<sup>269</sup>

tanāquḍun mā la-nā illā s-sukūtu la-hu  
wa-an na‘ūdha bi-mawlānā mina n-nārī.  
yadun bi-khamsi mi‘īna ‘asjadin fudīyat  
mā bāluhā quṭī‘at fī rub‘i dīnārī. (Lz1. 386.3-4)

Some accusations during his lifetime, however, had greater weight than just rumors<sup>270</sup> and scarce reports. We know this because they triggered correspondence between the poet and his accuser. One such correspondence occurs between al-Ma‘arrī and the Ismā‘ilī statesman and *dā‘ī*

<sup>269</sup> These verses echo Ibn Karrām (d. 869) who writes: “Where is the wisdom when somebody’s hand is cut off for one and a half *dāng* stolen, although the blood-money for it amounts to 600 *dīnār*?” cited in van Ess, *Ibn ar-Rēwandī*, 7. It is said that these verses caused animosity of the jurists in Baghdad towards al-Ma‘arrī: see Ibn al-Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 12:73; Ibn Kathīr does not specify who the judges were. See also Rājīkūtī, *al-Ma‘arrī*, 135-137; “Vie et Philosophy,” 128. ‘Āisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥman, *Ma‘ Abī l-‘Alā*, 258.

<sup>270</sup> Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat* 2:895; see also P. Smoor, *Kings and Beduins*, 66.

Hibat Allah b. Abī ‘Imrān ash-Shīrāzī (d.1078) who was intrigued by al-Ma‘arrī’s vegetarianism.<sup>271</sup> The correspondence is preserved in Yāqūt’s account of al-Ma‘arrī and will be analyzed in greater depth below. Another accusation was made by Ibn al-Qāriḥ, a mediocre grammarian and stylist who wrote his letter to al-Ma‘arrī in order to discredit heretics like Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd al-Quddūs, Ibn ar-Rāwandī, and al-Ḥajjāj. It is probable that Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s charge was against al-Ma‘arrī too, though not explicitly. Instead of giving into Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s provocation, al-Ma‘arrī instead replied with a lengthy answer that would become known as his most playful and ironic composition, *Risālat al-Gufrān*.

It can be clearly seen from the self-commentaries he had to write on some of its verses that parts of al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm* indeed sparked a wave of accusations against him from some religious scholars. This will be examined in depth in the last chapter where an analysis of how matters of his belief and unbelief were received during his life-time and after his death will be offered. At this point, it needs to be emphasized that during his life time, his fame as a poet, teacher and master of Arabic was dominant over his fame of an unbeliever.

## 1.6. Possible Affiliations?

There some efforts in the modern scholarship to ascribe to al-Ma‘arrī a particular religious tradition or to prove his strong sympathy for a religious group. More specifically, it has been suggested that

---

<sup>271</sup> There are a few opinions regarding the influence which led to al-Ma‘arrī’s vegetarianism and asceticism. Some thought al-Ma‘arrī was influenced by Hindu teaching, especially of *barāhima* who also denied prophets: see, for instance, Laoust, “Vie et Philosophie,” 152; T. Ḥussayn, *Tajdīd*, 286-287; von Kremer, *Über die philosophischen Gedichte*, 82. M. Zākī did not exclude the influence from Greek teachings, especially by Pythagoras and Diogenes: Zākī al-Maḥāsini, *Abū’l ‘Alā’ Nāqid al-Mujtama’a* (Beirut, 1963), 17-18.E. Ghali thought the roots in Christian teachings and that al-Ma‘arrī was attracted to the idea of vegetarianism and asceticism while he visited the monastery *Dayr al-Fārūs* in Latakia and spent some time with monks: see E. Ghali “Le Végétalisme et le Doute,” 110-112. All these are plausible suggestions, and for al-Ma‘arrī’s times none needs to be excluded with the consideration that none of the influences caused al-Ma‘arrī to develop a systematic view regarding the vegetarianism.

al-Ma'arrī was affiliated with *bāṭinīya*, and more precisely the Ismā'īlī-Qartmaṭī trends. As we have seen, al-Ma'arrī had a good relationship with the Faṭimid governors, 'Azīz ad-Dawla and Anūshtakin ad-Dizbirī. We also know that Qartamtians had an influential position in some parts of North Syria, and certainly in Ma'arra. What speaks here to a possible inclination towards Ismā'īlī thought is al-Ma'arrī's inspiration by the *bāṭinī* notion of *tashkīk* — the process of the gradual casting of doubt in the minds of listeners. According to L. Massignon, the skeptical bitterness in *Luzūmīyāt* and in *Ghufrān* should no longer be seen as a singular expression of skepticism, but rather as expressions of methodical doubt that are strongly present in Ismā'īlī thought.<sup>272</sup> Another sign of proximity with *bāṭinīya* could be al-Ma'arrī's unambiguous rejection of the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Qarmaṭīs strongly opposed it, considering it to be a pagan practice).<sup>273</sup>

Yet another argument could be that al-Ma'arrī, in his correspondence with a prominent Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* and statesman Hibat Allah b. Abī 'Imrān Mu'ayyad fī-d-Dīn ash-Shīrāzī (d. 1078) declared himself a *wālī*,<sup>274</sup> thus indicating his loyalty to the supreme preacher. Based on this, Elias S. Ghali has suggested that, at the time of the correspondence, around 1047 when al-Ma'arrī was seventy-five, he could have been a Fatimid missionary or, at least, pro-Fatimid.<sup>275</sup>

Further, 'Umar Farrūkh has also suggested that Ma'arrī was involved in Ismā'īlī propaganda. While it is true that al-Ma'arrī denied some Druze doctrines, especially the extreme forms of transmigration of the soul,<sup>276</sup> according to Farrūkh the Druze ideas had a particularly heavy influence on the poet. This religious group appeared in 1017 with the disappearance of the caliph al-

<sup>272</sup> See L. Massignon, "Mutanabbī devant le siècle ismaélien de l'Islam," in *Écrits memorables*, II, ed. Christian Jambet et al. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009), 647; See also, Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 128; 137.

<sup>273</sup> See, for instance, Lz1.130.1; Lz1.177.5; Lz2.2.4.

<sup>274</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:347.

<sup>275</sup> Elias Saad Ghali, "Le Végétalisme et le Doute chez Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 32/33(1980-1981), 103, esp. n.3.

<sup>276</sup> Indeed, al-Ma'arrī found the extreme expressions of the notion, especially of Druze and Nuṣayrī explanations, illogical and foolish, although he did not seem too harsh towards its moderate form, e.i. when a human soul passes from a body to another. Against the idea of al-Ḥākim being the incarnation of God, see Lz2.200. 8-10; see also Lz2.166.14-16 against Nuṣayrīs; also, *Epistle of Forgiveness*, 2:89. For more on the topic, see Farrūkh, *Ḥakīm al-Ma'arra*, 186; Lacey, *Man and Society*, 101-102. For a general discussion on the theme, see Y. Friedman, *Nuṣayrī 'Alawīs: Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 102-110.

Ḥākīm and was well established in North Syria, especially within the tribe of Tanūkh to which al-Ma‘arrī belonged. Further, most of this tribe eventually adopted the Druze faith.<sup>277</sup> Farrūkh suggests that al-Ma‘arrī’s denial of revealed message and prophets, his disagreement with inheritance law (*irth*) for women,<sup>278</sup> his belief that there were many Adams and not one,<sup>279</sup> and finally the belief that “there is no *imām* other than reason” (*lā imāma siwā l-‘aqli*: Lz1. 65.5-6), all highlight Druzi influence. The last idea, Farrūkh explains in a far-fetched and somewhat incoherent manner, comes from the Druze veneration of the ‘*uqqāl*’ (sages, sg. ‘*āqil*’), the elite of initiates who alone knew the truth and had an access to Druze scriptures.<sup>280</sup>

In addition to all these arguments, it is also important to remember al-Ma‘arrī’s strong sympathy for al-Mutanabbī and his tendencies towards Nuṣayrīya present especially in the region of Aleppo and Latakia. His work on the virtues of ‘Alī, which were discussed earlier, might also provide some evidence to support al-Ma‘arrī’s potential Shi‘i inclination. When taken together, this information would support the thesis that al-Ma‘arrī was inclined to or even was affiliated with Shi‘i currents.

There is, however, the other side of the coin. Many of the verses in *Luzūm* are clearly directed against Shi‘i doctrines, especially to the doctrine of imamate. The verses that Farrūkh attributed to Druze influence need to be revisited. When read along with their preceding verses, this quatrain might also express anti-Shi‘ite views.

People expect a speaking imam  
to stand up within the dumb.  
Opinion lies to us: there is no imam,  
except for the mind guiding us in the mornings and evenings.

yartajī n-nāsu an yaqūma imāmun nāṭiqun fī l-katībatī l-kharsa’ī  
kadhaba ṣ-ṣannu lā imāma siwā

<sup>277</sup> See Irfan Shahid, “Tanūkh,” in *EP*.

<sup>278</sup> In Lz2.81.1 al-Ma‘arrī says women do not get a fair proportion of inheritance.

<sup>279</sup> See Lz2.261.9; Lz2.326.15; see also Lacey, *Man and Society*, 278.

<sup>280</sup> See Farrūkh, *Ḥākīm al-Ma‘arra*, 184-185.



l-‘aqli mushīran fī ṣubḥihi wa-l-masā’ī. (Lz1. 65.5-6)

Imamhere might symbolize any traditional guide or religious authority, however, more specifically, the use of *nāṭiq* directly alludes to the Faṭimid understanding of the six speakers or law-givers (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) which was widely preached at al-Ma‘arrī’s time. These verses thus are promotion of reason which is clearly given a preference over the notion of imam.

Further, in another verse, al-Ma‘arrī says that the walking stick of a blind man is a better guide than their imam (*khayrun la’umrī wa-ahdā min imāmihim ‘ukkāzu a’mā*).<sup>281</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī goes as far as declaring that ‘Ali did not have more virtues than his servant, Qanbar (*fa-l-ḥaqqu yaḥlifū mā ‘Alīyun ‘indahū illā ka-Qanbarin*).<sup>282</sup> Some verses in *Luzūm* are also directed against Qartmatains for their obedience to lust, following the footsteps of Satan being worse than Zoroastrians, abusing wine, treating the Qur’ān with scorn, for ignoring the Ramadan fast and prayers, and for their lie that an Imam would appear at the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, something which never happened.<sup>283</sup>

The assumption that Al-Ma‘arrī had sympathies for Shi‘i beliefs, therefore, is hard to support.<sup>284</sup> It is important here to remember that al-Ma‘arrī declined the invitations of the Faṭimid caliphs al-Ḥākim and al-Mustansir to work in their courts. When it comes to the correspondence between the poet and the Faṭimid supreme preacher, the tone is far too polemical to assume that it was an interaction between two people who might have thought alike. As for the work al-Ma‘arrī dedicated to ‘Alī’s virtues, is most likely an attempt to sober the extreme currents of Shi’a and to contrast the virtues of their imam to their indecent behavior, such as, for example, abusing wine or

<sup>281</sup> Lz2.193.13.

<sup>282</sup> Lz1.421.10: See also, Lacey, *Man and Society*, 162.

<sup>283</sup> Lz1.185.2-7-186.1-8. Lz1.279.6-11 (here Qarmatians are referred to as Hajarite group (*‘Usba hajarīya*) referring to the qarmatian capital in Bahrein). The Qarmati ruler Abū Ṭāhir al-Janābī predicted the conjunction in 928: see F. Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 146.

<sup>284</sup> Al-Jundī is one who categorically denies all these affiliations ascribed to al-Ma‘arrī: see al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 410-412.

mistreating women, two things that the poet showed his discontent for a few times. It is likely that, initially, the poet sympathized with Ismā'īlī currents and believed in their somewhat revolutionary spirit, as many did, including people from his hometown who had emphatically showed their positive attitude towards the Faṭimids. However, establishing certainty and trust for any religious and political view would have been too alien a concept for Ma'arrian spirit. In the face of various religious beliefs and doctrines, al-Ma'arrī was only left with anxiety so deeply expressed in *Luzūm*.

This chapter has set the stage for the historical time and milieu in which al-Ma'arrī composed his *Luzūm*. It has been emphasized that the age was distinct with intellectual and cultural tensions and diversities, competing orthodoxies, and political instabilities from Iraq to Syria. The chapter reconstructed an image of al-Ma'arrī based on his literary and teaching activities as well as his involvement with societal matters. It has been shown that the image of him as a withdrawn and thoroughly unearthly person is rather unhistorical. Regarding his *oeuvre*, the major characteristics of his works has been brought forth in order to better understand *Luzūm*'s place among his other compositions. From the extant titles and descriptions of his lost works in the sources, it has become obvious that admonitory and didactic works designed for teaching purposes dominated in his corpus. Another distinct aspect has to do with al-Ma'arrī's writing through restrictions and rigid rules of which *Luzūm* is just one example. It has also been shown that satire and irony are indeed peculiar to al-Ma'arrī's thinking and they are best expressed in his few epistles. Having set the general background for al-Ma'arrī and his output, we now move to the examination of *Luzūm*.

## CHAPTER 2. *LUZŪMĪYĀT* AND SOME OF ITS LITERARY FEATURES

### 2.1. Introductory Remarks

*Luzūm* is widely mentioned by al-Ma‘arrī’s biographers in two regards: for its strict versification rules characteristic of many of his works too, and second, for its heretical enunciations. The *diwān* does not seem as popular as *Saqṭ az-Zand* but it was certainly known to al-Ma‘arrī’s students and wider circles already at al-Ma‘arrī’s life time. The reason to assume so is that in response to readers’ reactions, al-Ma‘arrī composed three commentaries on *Luzūm*: *Zajr an-Nābiḥ*, *Najr az-Zajr*, and *Rāḥat al-Luzūm*<sup>285</sup> of which only *Zajr an-Nābiḥ* is partially extant and will be discussed in the last chapter.

Most plausibly, al-Ma‘arrī started to write *Luzūm* in the beginning of his fifties. The reason is that al-Ma‘arrī wrote his *Dir‘iyāt* which signifies the last stage of *Saqṭaz-Zand*, when he was already at the age of fifty. When he started *Luzūm*, he referred *Saqṭaz-Zand* as an old work and declared his break from it.<sup>286</sup> This means al-Ma‘arrī started *Luzūm* around the year 1023. As for the duration of writing, A. Tayeb has suggested that most probably the collection was complete around the year 1029. One argument is that al-Ma‘arrī, who frequently mentioned the name of the governor of Aleppo Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās (as we shall see below) does not mention his death which occurred in 1029. The same way, when al-Ma‘arrī often refers to the king Maḥmūd of Ghazna, he talks about him as a living contemporary and never mentions his death which occurred in 1030.<sup>287</sup> If we also consider that al-Ma‘arrī managed to compose three commentaries in response to attacks on *Luzūm* and that accusers appeared already in 1030s (Ibn al-Qāriḥ, for instance), then the assumption that *Luzūm* was written between 1023-1029/30 is plausible.

<sup>285</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1: 330: al-Qiftī, *Inbāḥ*, 1:95.

<sup>286</sup> *Luzūm*, Introduction, 41.

<sup>287</sup> See A. Tayeb, *Abū’ l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*, 227.

It is well known that *Luzūm* is distinct by the withdrawal from the traditional themes of *qaṣīda* and by a strict formal and structural order. The following pages examine *Luzūm* in the light of some literary aspects. This chapter will engage with issues of meaning and genre, structure and style with reference to the mannerist implications of the composition, and will highlight the major thematic motifs of the collection.

## 2.2. *Luzūm* as a “Sheer” Poetry?

In her two articles written in Arabic, Suzanne Stetkevych, comparing the two *diwāns* of al-Ma‘arrī, *Saqt az-Zand* and *Luzūm*, argues that while the first one belongs to the Arabic literary tradition and rules, the second constitutes a break with it.<sup>288</sup> *Luzūm*, limited in themes and revolving around ascetic and poems, symbolizes al-Ma‘arrī’s isolation and withdrawal from society. Al-Ma‘arrī’s isolation, according to Stetkevych, was the result of the failed career in Baghdad and escape from competition with the poets of his time. His vegetarianism also symbolizes his withdrawal from societal functions and societal life. Through *Luzūm* al-Ma‘arrī self-consciously sheltered himself under cover of *qawāfi*, whereas in *Saqt*, through themes of eulogy, elegy, and lampoon, he followed the traditional ways of making poetry and composed poetry which fulfilled its performative role in the construction of the relationship between the poet and society (reader, receiver). Through the application of traditional themes and poetic customs, the poet demonstrates his skills and creativity in *Saqt*, whereas he withdraws from all this in *Luzūm* which displays no poetic imagination: there is a craft without spark (*bi-duna sh-sharāra*) of which the poet is completely aware.<sup>289</sup>

In the other article, Stetkevych illustrates a passage in al-Ma‘arrī’s work from imagery (*Saqt*) to abstraction (*Luzūm*) and draws her conclusion based on the examples of visual art. Stetkevych

<sup>288</sup> Suzanne Stetkevych, “Qaḍāyā l-Qaṣīdati l-‘Arabīya: al-Manāhij wa-l-Manhajīyat Taṭbīq Naẓarīyati l-Adā’ ‘alā Saqt az-Zand wa-Luzūmīyāt: Madkhal fī Ishkālīyāt Shi‘r Abī l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” in *An-Nadwa d-Duwalīya: Qaḍāyā l-Minhaj fī Dirasāti l-Lughawīya wa-l-Adabīya: an-Naẓariya wa-Taṭbīq* (Riyad: Jāmi‘at al-Malai Su‘ūd, 2010), 333-349.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 342.

compares two paintings, Diego Velasquez's "Les Meninas"<sup>290</sup> and McNeil Whistler's "Mother." (1871)!<sup>291</sup> The first represents a type of expression which relies on the tight relation between the object of mimetic representation and the work of art. It is representational (Foucault referred to it as pure Classical representation) and imitative. The second is non-representational and abstract. Whistler, a representative of the movement called "art for art's sake," belittled the value of the object and abstracted his art through color, form, medium, in order to produce through the interaction of these elements sheer art and nothing else. The same applies to Pollock's "Full Fathom Five, Number 8,"<sup>292</sup> where objects of the external world do not become part of imagery and mimetic representation. Stetkevych draws this parallel between *Sz* and *Luzūm*, and sees the first as a mimetic representation and the second as an abstract representation. The first reflects reality and is outward; the second is a break from reality and is inward. She then asks whether al-Ma'arrī succeeded in his project of *Luzūm* in terms of making a good poetry, and gives a negative answer. This is poetry, according to Stetkevych, which bores the reader with repetitions and monotony, revolves around the themes of *zandaqa* and *zuhdīya*, and although intellectual, it remains superficial. It is not possible to follow a development and depth of thought in *Luzūm*. It seems al-Ma'arrī was trapped by his own decision of withdrawing from traditional ways of making poetry: for "true poetry" is mostly poor poetry (*radī*).<sup>293</sup>

<sup>290</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Las\\_Meninas#/media/File:Las\\_Meninas,\\_by\\_Diego\\_Vel%C3%A1zquez,\\_from\\_Prado\\_in\\_Google\\_Earth.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Las_Meninas#/media/File:Las_Meninas,_by_Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez,_from_Prado_in_Google_Earth.jpg)

<sup>291</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistler%27s\\_Mother#/media/File:Whistlers\\_Mother\\_high\\_res.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistler%27s_Mother#/media/File:Whistlers_Mother_high_res.jpg)

<sup>292</sup> <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79070>

<sup>293</sup> Suzanne Stetkevych, "Mīna l-Mujtama'ar ilā l-Mu'jam: mīna t-Taṣwīriya ilā t-Tajrībīya fī Shi'r Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī," *al-Majallat al-'Arabīya li-l-'Ulum al-Insāniya* (2013): 187-206. Compare with the description of *Luzūm* by S. Dayf who saw it a production of *taṣannu* (contrivance), a stylistic school marked by constraints and lack of imaginative and creative expressions. *Luzūm* is seen as devoid of artistic beauty, abundant with repetitions: S. Dayf, *Al-Fann wa-Madhāhibuhu fī sh-Shi'r al-'Arabī* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 2005), 402. Compare with the description of Adonis: "T. S. Eliot's observation that Blake's poetry has the unpleasantness of great poetry" applies to al-Ma'arrī's writing. To call it unpleasant does not mean that it is sick, or complex, and without passion but rather that it holds its reader constantly over a chasm of absurdity and nothingness." Adonis, *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. from French by Catherine Cobham (London: Saqi Books, 1988), 67.

Introducing the notion of art for art's sake might indeed help drawing some suggestive parallels. The idea of art for art's sake, controversial and debated in the field of art history and philosophy, is often seen as an artist's declaration of independence and alienation from society. It is a complaint and claim at the same time and aims at subverting art and at its justification.<sup>294</sup> The concept is also related to the rise of skepticism and growth of individualism, when the artist starts to seek a new kind of faith. The search for a new *Weltanschauung*, however, is accompanied by the artist's awareness that he does not have the capacity for creating any stable outlook. This realization of incapacity, in turn, leads to pervasive irresponsibility and detachment from "everything but sensuous intuition and technical proficiency."<sup>295</sup> With these features, the notion of art for art's sake has plausible applications for *Luzūm*. While Stetkevych's observations are suggestive in many respects, the question of the break from society and *Luzūm* being thoroughly abstracted from and disconnected with reality needs to be questioned.

However, there is more to this notion. Art for art's sake implies that a work of art, a "sheer or pure poetry," as Stetkevych refers to *Luzūm*, is an autonomous and self-contained entity and that it does not acquire significance from biographical, psychological, historical, and social sources. The significance lies solely in the formal structure realised in a medium. Stetkevych's statement that *Luzūm* is a self-conscious work and project, which symbolizes a passage in the author's life from the societal to the individual (this goes in line Stetkevych's theory on the theory of rite of passage - *tuqūs al-'ubūr*), already signals to amore complex compositional procedure and intent than that of poetry for poetry's sake.

Much attention has been given to performative and ceremonial aspects of Arabic poetry allowing it to be integrated in the social, political, economic and religious contexts of its time,

<sup>294</sup> See "art for art sake" in the *Dictionary of History of Ideas*:  
<http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=DicHist/uvaBook/tei/DicHist1.xml;chunk.id=dv1-18;toc.depth=1;toc.id=dv1-18;brand=default;query=%22art%20for%20art%27s%20sake%22#1> (accessed: 7July 2017).

<sup>295</sup> See Irving Singer, "Aesthetics of Art for Art's Sake," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 2, no.13 (1954), 359.

especially through application of speech act theory. Beatrice Gruendler, for example, analyzing the panegyric poetry of Ibn ar-Rūmī, showed through speech act theory how, invoking ethics and responsibility, panegyric poetry created a relationship between the poet and the patron thus performing specific acts. S. Stetkevych showed that Umayyad panegyric ode established legitimacy and authority and the ‘Abbasid one transferred allegiance and homage from one ruler to another.<sup>296</sup> *Luzūm*’s poems were not meant for the court and *majālis* and were not presented to patrons. Does this mean that *Luzūm* did not do anything with words and did not have any communicative role?

In order to show that *Luzūm* signifies an attitude towards society rather than a withdrawal, and that there is more to it than “sheer” poetry, we need to look at some compositional aspects of the collection with a reference to the notion of mannerism. The notion was introduced into literary studies by Ernst R. Curtius in his seminal work *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948; English translation *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 1953).<sup>297</sup> For Arabic poetry, it has been applied by Wolfhart Heinrichs who claimed that the characteristic opposition between classicism and mannerism did not exist in Arabic poetry and associated mannerism with the

<sup>296</sup> See Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron’s Redemption* (London/NY: Routledge, 2003), esp. 79-93; S. Stetkevych, “Umayyad Panegyric and the Poetics of Islamic Hegemony: Al-Akḥṭal’s Khafa Al-Qaṭinu (Those That Dwelt With You Have Left In Haste).” *JAL* 28 (1997): 89-122; idem, “Abbāsid Panegyric and the Poetics of Political Allegiance: Two Poems of al-Mutanabbī on Kāfūr,” in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 1., 35-53; vol. 2, 92-105; see also her more recent “Performative Poetics in ‘Abbāsid Poetry: Re-reading of Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī’s Rā’iyyah Arāka ‘aṣiyya al-dam‘i,” *Journal of Japan Association of Middle East Studies*, no. 29-2 (2013):107-144. On the same theme see Majd Yaser al-Mallah, “Doing Things with Odes: A Poet’s Pledges of Allegiance: Ibn Darrāj al-Qaṣṭallī’s *Hā’iyyah* to al-Manṣūr and *Rā’iyyah* to al-Mundhir,” *JAL* 34, no.1-2 (2003): 45-80; for *qasida*’s role in performance, ritual and courtly patronage see Samer Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), esp. 75-116.

<sup>297</sup> Of course, Categories like Mannerism (as well as Baroque) pertain to the field of art history, and their application to literature is somewhat unstable; see “Mannersim” in *NPEPP*. It is apt to mention here that Curtius is the one to introduce the features of literary mannerism from other arts such as painting and music. For general inquiries of Mannerism and Baroque in art history with references to both styles in European literature, see J. Shearman, *Mannerism* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), and J.R. Martin, *Baroque* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); European demarcations of mannerism and baroque in terms of what they communicate is hard to follow. Religious and philosophical writings and ideas are often associated with Baroque rather than Mannerism: see K. Donaldson-Evans, “Two Stages of Renaissance Style: Mannerism and Baroque in French Poetry,” *French Forum*, vol. 7, no. 3(1982):210-223.

rise of *badī'* style accompanied with the emphasis on form over content.<sup>298</sup> Sperl, who applied Jacobsonian structural analysis to poems by Buḥturī, Miḥyār al-Daylamī, Abū'l-‘Atāhiya and al-Ma‘arrī, has argued in his *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry* (1989) that mannerism involves more than mere rhetorical enforcement. He saw mannerism as a different type of mimesis-the one he called “semiological mimesis” which, unlike the classicist mimesis of reality, was the mimesis of the literary language itself. Sperl reinstated the dichotomy of classicism versus mannerism as different approaches to the language: in the case of the first style is a concord between signifier and signified and in the second case there is a discord between the two. The mannerist aim of this discord presupposes an attitude to reality as much as to the language. Sperl nuanced and modified the previous presumption that classical poetry imitated reality and mannerist poetry imitated the language itself, and claimed that both classicism and mannerism represent attitudes towards reality. Mannerist style creates an immense tension between language and the world; it creates an awareness of incongruity between them and “inadequacy of language coupled with despairing perception that it is the seminal core of all order.”<sup>299</sup> What is important to register is the mannerist reappraisal of traditional values and poetic forms with which the poet shapes his relationship with reality. This mannerist turn is further enhanced with a brilliant use of language with which the poet seeks to impress. We shall see below that al-Ma‘arrī’s dismissal of major traditional genres and the idiosyncratic use of some others, served this very purpose of impressing and establishing relations with outer world.

One more notion of literary mannerism needs to be kept in mind. J.V. Mirollo saw mannerism in two expressions--the first is identified with formal eccentricity, verbal ornamentation, and pointed thought. The second is mannerism of *Angst* whose determinant notions are “tension,

<sup>298</sup>See Heinrichs, “Mannerismus,” in der arabischen Literatur,” *Islamwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen: Fritz Meier zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. R. Gramlich (Wiesbaden, 1974), 121, and also his ‘Literary theory-the problem of its efficiency,’ in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. G. E. von Grünebaum (Wiesbaden, 1973), 19-69.

<sup>299</sup> Sperl, *Mannerism*, 164.



anxiety, alienation, ambiguity, strain, discord, doubt” causes by religious, social and political issues.<sup>300</sup> Both mannerisms are pertinent to *Luzūm* as will be clear once we proceed. With all these considerations of mannerist implications, it is hard to see *Luzūm* merely as a “sheer” poetry. In order to illustrate points made here, let us now turn to some aspects of genre, meaning, and structure in relation to *Luzūm*.

### 2.3. Genre and Meaning

There is no commonly accepted understanding or definition of genres and their relation to meaning (*ma‘nā*) in classical Arabic poetry. Often *qaṣīda* itself is considered to be a genre in contemporary studies. However, another common term often translated as genre is *gharaḍ* (pl. *aghrāḍ*) which is the theme or thematic unit largely including *madḥ* (eulogy), *hijā’* (lampoon), *fakhr* (boasting), *rithā’* (elegy), *nasīb* (elegiac prelude), and *raḥīl* (desert journey). These are the major thematic units and are constitutive of a polythematic *qaṣīdah*. This list of thematic units, however, is presented differently by medieval critics.<sup>301</sup> The recognized poetic themes are only sparingly present in *Luzūm* which provoked some modern scholars to view al-Ma‘arrī’s work as incompatible with traditional

<sup>300</sup> See J.V. Mirollo, “The Mannered and the Mannerist in Late Renaissance Literature,” in *The Meaning of Mannerism*, eds., F.W. Robinsom and S.G. Nichols (New Hampshire: University Press of New England Hanover, 1972), 12-13.

<sup>301</sup> See Geert Jan van Gelder, “Some Brave Attempts at Generic Classification in Pre-modern Arabic Literature,” in *Aspects of Genre and Type in Pre-modern Literary Cultures*, eds. H. L. Vansitphout and B. Roest (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999), 16. The article reflects on the ways “Arabs themselves classified texts” without applying any existing Western theory on genres since the full triadic classification of genres into lyrical, epical and dramatic is questionable in the context of Arabic literature which is mostly defined by the prevalence of lyric as a “large genre.” This, however, does not mean that there is no strong sense of genre and that the major form of poetry, *qaṣīdah*, excluded everything which is not lyrical. Genres may converge with one another in a manner of shared *topoi*, which, as J. Stetkevych described, is the cause of “unresolved inner tension” within the *qaṣīdah*. See J. Stetkevych, “Lyrical Phenomenon in Context,” *JAL*, Vol. 6(1975):57-77; J. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, n.8, p.440. On the tension between thematically conflicting parts of *qaṣīdah* such as for example *nasīb* and *hijā’* see: G.V. Gelder, “Genres in Collision: *Nasīb* and *Hijā’*,” *JAL*, vol. 21, no.1 (1990):14-25. For the development of *qaṣīdah* from pre-Islamic to Abbasid times and its characteristic, changes see; M. Badawi, “From Primary to Secondary *Qaṣīdas*: Thought on the Development of Classical Arabic Poetry,” *JAL*, vol. 11 (1980):1-31; G. Schoeler, “The Genres of Classical Arabic Poetry: Classification of Poetic Themes and Poems by Pre-Modern critics and redactors of *diwāns*,” *QSA*, vol. 5, no.6 (2010-2011):1-48; See J. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, 27-28; S. P. Stetkevych, ed. *Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics*, (Farnham: Ashgate Varorium, 2009), xv.

ways of making poetry.<sup>302</sup> In his introduction to *Luzūm*, al-Ma‘arrī declares his denial of traditional themes claiming that they constitute falsehood which he disapproves:

Among things fated in the past I composed metrical structures in which I aimed at the truth of the word stripping it of untruth and false judgment. I do not claim them to be a well-arranged pearl-string, but I also hope they are not deemed as merely a pure structure of bricks. It is then a glorification of God who is beyond all glorifications and who hangs blessings around every neck, and some of it is reminder for the forgetful, some of it awakening the heedless, and some warn against the greatest world which deceived our ancestors. I put down moral exhortation and many other things in accordance with what my disposition allows me, and if at times I have gone further than what is required [from me to write] at the expense of something else, what I have achieved [at least] is a discourse stripped of falsehood. All of these I collected in a book I have entitled *Luzūm ma lā yalzamam*.<sup>303</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī thus does not want to accept the common maxim that the best poet (*ash‘aru n-nāsi*) was the one who lied best, and the best or original poetry was the most false one (*a‘dhabu shi‘ri akdhabuhu*).<sup>304</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī asserts his denial of the “discourses of falsehood” at the end of the introduction where he tells the reader that he once decided to give up poetry like a new-born camel would get rid of the placenta (*rafaḍtu ash-shi‘ra rafḍa s-saqqabi*).<sup>305</sup> He was referring to a poetry which allowed falsehood, and in whose composition dubious matters were adopted (*stujīza fī-hi l-kadhibu wa-stu‘īna ‘alā niẓāmihi bi-shubuhāt*).<sup>306</sup> He then apologetically stated that the poetry he composed, and in fact whatever poetry is made in the way of *Luzūm*, will be deemed deficient for it is not embellished with *ghazal*, and not beautified by descriptions of women, camels, and the pleasures of wine. Al-Ma‘arrī then refers to a saying attributed to al-Aṣma‘ī, the ninth-century

<sup>302</sup> See, for example, Nicholson, *Studies*, 50.

<sup>303</sup> kāna min sawālifi l-aqdiyyati annī ansha‘tu abniyata awzānin tawakkhaytu fī-hā ṣidqa l-kalimati wa-nazzahtuhā ‘ani l-kadhibi wa-l-mayṭi wa-lā az‘umuhā ka-s-simṭi l-muttakhadhi fa-arjū allā tuḥsaba minā s-sumayṭi fa-min-hā mā huwa tamjīdun li-llāhi lladhī sharufa ‘ani t-tamjīdi wa-waḍa‘a l-minana fī kulli jīdin wa-ba‘ḍuhā tadhkūrun li-n-nāsina wa-tanbīhun li-r-raqadati l-ghāfilīna wa-taḥdhūrun min wālidatina al-kubrā llatī ghadarat bi-l-uwali. wa-aḍaftu ilā mā waṣaftuashyā‘a minā l-‘izati wa-afānūna‘alā ḥasabi mā tasmaḥū bi-hi l-gharīzatu fa-in jāwaztu l-mushtarāta ilā siwāhu fa-inna llhadhī jāwaztu ilayhi qawlun ‘urriya minal-mayni wa-jama‘tu dhālika kullahu fī kitābin laqqabtuhu luzūma ma lāyaLuzūmamu: UBL Or.100, p.1.

<sup>304</sup> The relation between truth and poetry is not at all that simple and has been received differently by various critics. al-Marzūqī (d.1030), for instance, chose a middle way to assess poetry stating that the best poetry is the most moderate one (*aḥsan ash-shi‘ru aqṣaduhu*). For this and for a review on the topic, see Mansour Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory: The Dialectic of Truthfulness Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988); see also V. Cantarino, *The Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 35-40.

<sup>305</sup> Luzūm1, *Introduction*, 41.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

philologist and critic: “there is a maxim attributed to al-Aṣma‘ī whose meaning is that poetry is one of the gates to the falsehood” (*wa-yurwā ‘an al-Aṣma‘ī kalāmūn ma‘nāhu anna sh-shi‘ra bābun min abwābi l-bāṭili*).<sup>307</sup> As Yohannan Friedmann also noted, this introduction is a conscious declaration of the poet’s literary and moral creed and of a certain withdrawal from existing patterns which al-Ma‘arrī still exercised in his earlier *diwān-Saqṭ az-Zand*.<sup>308</sup> There is a testimonial poem to this withdrawal in *Luzūm*:

O men of letters, for a long time flowery words,  
like buzzing of flies, have deceived you.  
Your poets are nothing but wolves who steal  
eulogy and lampoons from each other.  
They are more harmful than you can think of any enemy,  
and sayings and meaning they steal are more than mice do steal.  
If I praise you with no truth behind it  
It is as if I am slamming you.  
Shall I waste among you the days of my old age  
as I wasted the days of my youth?

banī l-ādābi gharratkum qadīman  
zakhārifu mithlu zamzamati dh-dhubābi  
wa-mā shu‘arā’ukum illā dhi’ābun  
talaṣṣaṣu fī-l-madā’ihī wa-s-sibābī.  
aḍarru bi-man tawaddu mina l-a‘ādī,  
wa-asraq li-l-maqāli mina z-zabābī  
uqārīḍukum thanā’an ghayra ḥaqqin  
ka-annā min-hu fī majrā sibābī.  
a udhhibu fī-kum ayāma shaybī  
kamā adhhabtu ayāma sh-shabābī? (Lz2. 127.5-9)

Al-Ma‘arrī’s strict distinction between discourses of falsehood and truth leads to ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s (d.1078) theory on *ma‘ānī ‘aqlīyya* and *ma‘ānī takhyīlīyya*, most pertinent for understanding the preeminent meaning of *Luzūm*. *Ma‘nā ‘aqlī* represents ideas agreed upon by people of all ages and nations, these are accessible to ‘aql as universal truths, and include necessary knowledge mainly expressed in aphorisms and proverbs. *Ma‘nā ‘aqlī* is expressed through discourse of truth (*ṣidq*),

<sup>307</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>308</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī’s student at-Tabrīzī writes in his commentary on *Saqṭ az-Zand* that his teacher was much dissatisfied with his first *diwān* because it looked like the poetry of previous poets, and advised to read his *Luzūm* and his other works instead: see At-Tibrīzī’s introduction in *Shurūḥ Saqṭ az-Zand*, ed. Muṣṭafā s-Saqqāt et al. (Cairo: 1945), 1:3-4.

denoting notions of wisdom compatible with reason. *Ma'nā takhyīlī*, on the other hand, communicates illusory images, or phantasmagorical poetic notions and is expressed through discourse of falsehood (*kadhib*).<sup>309</sup> *Luzūm* belongs to that category of poetry which expresses *ma'nā 'aqlī*. 'Aql here, however, is not connoted with logical or demonstrative meaning. It is rather an ethical force to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong.

In order to express the *ma'nā 'aqlī*, al-Ma'arrī heavily relies on two poetic genres, wisdom poetry and ascetic poetry, *ḥikma* and *zuhdīya* respectively whose boundaries are not clearly marked. *Ḥikma*, gnomic wisdom poetry, is mentioned in Arabic literary criticism as one of the poetics themes.<sup>310</sup> and is known through pre-Islamic and early Islamic poets such as Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulma and 'Adī ibn Zayd often but not always associated with *zuhd*. The theme gained popularity with the availability of Greek material and the use of *sententiae* in poetry, and achieved considerable fame with modern poets (*muḥdathūn*).<sup>311</sup> A prominent use of gnomological poetry and its stylistic integration is registered in the poetry of the famous poet al-Mutanabbī (d.965).<sup>312</sup> Gnomic verses, as it will be frequently noticed, are the most dominant in *Luzūm*. A good proportion in *Luzūm* reads in the way of such universal maxims like “Do unto others as you would wish them to do [unto you]. (Lz2.87.7) or “In the time of prosperity do not forget those who were with you in the time of hardship (Lz1.64.13). Al-Ma'arrī's lamentations about the misery of humans on the one hand and his calls for doing good and being virtuous, which constitute an essential part of *Luzūm*, are heavily expressed in admonitory gnomic verses. The admonitory tone, we have mentioned above, was a major characteristic of al-Ma'arrī's *oeuvre*.

<sup>309</sup> See al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-Balāghah*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1954), 250.

<sup>310</sup> See D. Gutas, “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope,” *JAOS* 101 (1981):62.

<sup>311</sup> In prose, *ḥikma* is used as aphorism, maxim, and proverb found, for instance, in the sayings of Luqmān (mentioned in the Qur'an) and in Bedouin lore. Non-Arabic sources include Greek and Persian writings of political and ethical nature, Sanskrit material, mainly “Mirror of Princes” entered into Arabic through Persian translations and Syriac material. See Gutas, “Wisdom Literature,” 57-62; “Ḥikma,” in *EAL*; G. Strohmaier, “Ethical Sentences and Anecdotes of Greek Philosophers in Arabic Tradition.” *UAEI, Proceedings, 5<sup>th</sup>, Brussels* (1975), 463-71.

<sup>312</sup> B. Gruendler, “In Aristotle's Words...al-Hātimī's (?) Epistle on al-Mutanabbī and Aristotle,” in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, eds. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden; Brill, 2012), 106-113.

The other dominant theme of *Luzūm* is expressed by ascetic poetry often blended with wisdom poetry. In Arabic poetic tradition, *zuhdīya* as a distinct poetic genre, is connected with the name of Abū'l-‘Atāhiya (d.828) although, especially with stoical lamentations about Fate (*ad-dahr*), it has roots in pre-Islamic and early Islamic didactic poetry.<sup>313</sup> Mortality and the transience of human life, trust in God (*tawakkul*), the heedlessness of man, fear, and hope in God’s mercy were the main motifs of *zuhdīya* expressed through maxims, simple sequence of argument and pointed epigrams.<sup>314</sup> Most profoundly, the genre was a medium for expressing feelings of unease and anxiety. A constitutive feature of *zuhdīya* was its relation to Islamic sermons (*wa‘z*). Thematic and structural similarities are found, for instance, in the sermon literature and *zuhdīyāt* of Abū'l-‘Atāhiya.<sup>315</sup>

*Luzūm* is indeed abundant in motifs of *zuhdīya*: the themes of death and transience colored with pessimism, piety, and most frequent references to God, form the considerable part of the work and shape the ethical stance of the poet. As Stefan Sperl has profoundly shown, with the enforcement of mannerist style, the use of *zuhdīya* gained such a power in *Luzūm* that other traditional thematic units were revalued by the poet in the light of its prominence.<sup>316</sup> *Nasīb* and *raḥīl* were used with a modified function: “both are symbols of the afflicted condition of man: his seduction by the deceptive pleasures of life, and his suffering during a “night journey” which ends only in death.”<sup>317</sup> One way of showing how al-Ma‘arrī modified and revalued the traditional

<sup>313</sup> For example in the poetry of Ṣāliḥ b. Quddūs: roots are found in the Qur’ān too. The pessimistic tone of *zuhdīya* in the early Islamic age is connected with the name of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.728) and his pious admonitions in the light of worldly evil. Some *topoi*, such as *ubi sunt*, meditation on mortality and transience is considered to be of Christian influence: see A. Hamori, “Ascetic Poetry” in *‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 265-269; “Zuhdiyya,” in *EP*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Hamori, “Ascetic Poetry,” 269.

<sup>315</sup> N. K. Schmidt shows the thematic and structural similarities of sermon literature and Abū'l-‘Atāhiya’s poems but concludes that Abū'l-‘Atāhiya was not a preacher-poet of the common people, his admonishments were directed to the court for upper classes: see N. Schmidt, “Abū'l-‘Atāhiya and the Versification of Disenchantment,” in *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750-1000 C.E.* eds. Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin Press, 2014), 147-182.

<sup>316</sup> See Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of selected Texts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 109.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

thematic elements is the description of the wolf (*wasf adh-dhi'b*). Sperl illustrated the re-interpretation of this common theme in the following verses in *Luzūm* in the light of *zuhd* again:

Had the wolf cub understood the crime he committed,  
Before attacking a flock of sheep he would have chosen to die,  
For among the vilest deeds hunger's victim  
can ever perform some day is bloodshed (trans. by Sperl, 110).

law kāna yadrī mā janat yaduhū  
la-khtāra dūna mughārī l-thullatī l-'adamā  
fa-inna min aqbaḥī l-ashyā'ī yaf' aluhū  
shākī l-majā'ati yawman an yurīqa dammā. (Lz2. 284. 10-11)

In the older poems by al-Buḥturī for example, Sperl has shown how the figure of the wolf embodied a heroic figure, the moral ideal of *muruwwa* (honourable prowess). In al-Ma'arrī's poem, the wolf, however, is not an image of virtue but that of ignorance and evil. As the poem continues, the figure of the wolf, stealing and devouring all he can, is contrasted to the figure of man and his ethical spirit:

Each time you feed you combine theft and murder;  
why don't you [for once] steal bread and the heat [of the oven]  
In glorification of his creator, a penitent long used to eat his loaf well-seasoned  
may restrict himself to unseasoned bread! (trans. by Sperl, 110)

jama'ta fī kulli riyyin sallatan wa-radā  
nafsin fa-hallā saraqta l-qurṣa wa-l-ḥadamā  
qad yaqṣuru n-nafsa i'zāman li-bārī'ihī  
'ala l-qafārī munībun ṭālama 'tadamā. (Lz2. 285.1-2)

If in traditional motifs "one, however, seeks the metaphor of his ideal in the ferocious resilience of animal nature, the other orientates his ideal towards divine." This is how Sperl showed the revaluation of traditional motifs in *Luzūm* where common *topoi* and imagery are blended to contrast moral codes of *muruwwa* and *zuhd*.

Motifs of *zuhdīya* and *ḥikma* and the strong accent on the *ma'nā 'aqlī* are best supported with the form of *qiṭ'a*. *Qiṭ'a* (or *maqṭū'a*) is a short monothematic poem or a fragment of *qaṣīda*. For medieval Arab critics, the main criterion of distinguishing *qiṭ'a* from *qaṣīda* was its size, although

there was no agreement on the precise length for *qit'a*.<sup>318</sup> This is a short form easy to remember and cite.<sup>319</sup> Brevity (*ijāz*) was seen as an ideal of style, however, it was on the poet to decide on the length.<sup>320</sup> The use of *qit'a* does not have thematic limitations, and although the most typical poems expressed in *qit'a* are *hijā'*, *ḥikma*, *zuhdīya* and *wasf*, van Gelder has shown that elegiac and encomiastic poems also quite frequently appear in epigrammatic *qit'a* forms--short, pointed, and well rounded.<sup>321</sup> They are epigrammatic in nature defined by "aphoristic observation with wit, extreme condensation and, and above all, brevity."<sup>322</sup> The development of the form is often connected to courtly demands. These poems were composed in order to be sung, hence they were simpler and shorter than usual *qaṣīda*.<sup>323</sup> However, the important aspect is that this form, much more than *qaṣīda*, accentuates the poet's personal spirit. Poems in *qit'a* form "centre on the poet's "individual" psyche,"<sup>324</sup> and the poet composed *qit'a* for himself, for releasing his emotions and not for amusing the patron.<sup>325</sup> The peculiarity of this form is not only a matter of length: as Jaroslav Stetkevych put it, *qit'a* has its "place in the overall role of poetry in the humanistic-cultural orientation of Arab intellectual and social aspirations, for these were the lines to be memorized and

<sup>318</sup> According to different opinions, they could be twenty, sixteen or fifteen, ten or seven and even three lines: see van Gelder, "Brevity: the Long and the Short of it in Classical Arabic Literary Theory," in *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. Rudolph Peters (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 79.

<sup>319</sup> According to Ibn Rashīq's description, brevity is for memorization (*yūjazu wa-yukhtaṣaru li-yuhfaza*) and *qit'a* is good for dispute and exemplarity (*al-munāza'āt wa-t-tamaththul*): see Ibn Ibn Rashīq, *Al-'Umda fī Maḥāsina sh-Shi'r wa-Ādābihi* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981), 1:186.

<sup>320</sup> For al-Jāhīz, it was for the ideal of *balāgha*, however, even though short, witty poems could achieve fame and be known, *itāla*, prolixity, was important for displaying the poets' skills, and the "perfect" poet (*kāmil*) was the one who could compose in both brevity and length: see *ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>321</sup> See van Gelder, "Pointed and Well-Rounded: Arabic Encomiastic and Elegiac Epigrams," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 26 (1995):101-140: see also see "Ḳit'a," in *EP*; R. Allen, *Introduction to Arabic Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72-84.

<sup>322</sup> See "Epigram" in *NPEPP*; see also "Conceit," in *NPEPP*; Benedikt Reinert, "Der Concetto-Stil in den islamischen Literaturen," in *Orientalisches Mittelalter*, ed. Wolfhart Heinrichs (Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft, Band 5, Wiesbaden, 1990), 366-408.

<sup>323</sup> See M. Badawi, "Development of *qit'a*," in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, 152-154.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>325</sup> M. Badawi, "From Primary to Secondary *Qaṣīdas*," 12.

appropriately quoted as proof not only of a utilitarian courtly polish, but also of an authentic, autochthonous humanistic culture.”<sup>326</sup>

Most of the poems by al-Ma‘arrī, cited both by medieval and modern readers, are epigrammatic in nature. *Qit‘a* form provided the best support for expressing the overall meaning of the collection which might be best described as Wisdom poetry, the one “deprived of falsehood,”<sup>327</sup> pointed and easy to memorize. Al-Ma‘arrī’s critique of almost all spheres of human life is clarified by acute, precise, crisp speech. The dominant part of his poetry, however, remains mainly within the realm of asceticism and wisdom.

The fact that al-Ma‘arrī avoided the usual applications of traditional thematic units or genres has not been critically approached in terms of genre and its relationship to the text and context. The choice of genre is, after all, hardly accidental. “The processes by which genres are established always involve the human need for distinction and interrelations.”<sup>328</sup> The generic choice is a deliberate one. Al-Ma‘arrī renounced the traditional use of genres and instead enriched ascetic and gnomic poetry with intense intellectual and emotional facets cast with extraordinary linguistic and structural characteristics which will be discussed below. This was at once an act of self-exclusion and self-acclaim. Through recognizing the old traditional poetic habits, but renouncing their traditional use and endowing them with a new ethical and moral value, al-Ma‘arrī declared his integration into and separation from existing poetic practices at the same time through the same text. In so doing, he formulated his relation to society: *Luzūm* was a claim for recognition and distinction. In addition, this claim was supported with the manifestation of literary and lexical virtuosity and extra-ordinary compositional complexity which is the theme of the next sub-chapter.

<sup>326</sup> J. Stetkevych, “Lyrical Phenomenon in Context,” *JAL*, vol. 6 (1975):62.

<sup>327</sup> *Luzūm* I, *Introduction*, 9

<sup>328</sup> R. Cohen, “History and Genre,” *New Literary History* (1986):204.



## 2.4. Structure and Style

According to E. Curtius, one of the most essential drives in mannerist writing is the desire to impress and “say things not normally but abnormally.”<sup>329</sup> This seems to be what al-Ma‘arrī wanted to achieve through *Luzūm* next to its use for instructive and didactic purposes in front of students. With regard to structure and arrangement, *Luzūm* is an extra-ordinary work, carefully planned and designed. The structural aspects of *Luzūm* should be examined not only because of their purely poetic qualities but also because structural arrangement is as much intentional as the choice and production of the meaning. Its unique and extremely coherent structure, as we shall see, is a principal marker for distinguishing *Luzūm* from other *diwāns*.

It needs to be emphasized that my focus here is not on separate whole poems, compositional connections between their various and conflicting parts, but on the arrangements of larger sections (*fuṣūl*), the choice of rhyme and its impact on the overall structure of the collection. The aim here is to show that the structural features of *Luzūm* and its order serve not only the internal aspects of poetic accomplishment but also for extrinsic objectives, for an ambitious and exhibitionist drive to negotiate and establish a literary authority through the act of complex composition.

The strategy of structuring and ordering the poems is highlighted in the introduction of *Luzūm*. Al-Ma‘arrī described the ways and principles he applied to the composition and arrangement of his collection. He explained that he composed it according to three main “conceits” (*kulaḡ*): 1) composing poems rhyming in all consonants of the alphabet (something that, as he was aware, no other poet did), 2) using consonants with all three vowels and in quiescent form (i.e. Arabic vocalizations and *sukūn*), and 3) adding to the rhyme of each poem an element which is not

---

<sup>329</sup>See R. Curtius, *European Literature*, 282. The notion of intent to impress has not been received uncritically: see, for example, R. Tuve, “Baroque and Mannerist Milton” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 60, no. 4 (1961):824.

obligatory according to the rules of prosody.<sup>330</sup> It is not by accident that al-Ma‘arrī gave so much space to the theme of rhyming. Much of the peculiarity of this collection lies in its uncommon prosodic procedures. These conceits affect the whole composition at three levels. The first informs the shape of the works as a whole: every letter of the alphabet (including *alif* and *hamza*) is used as a rhyme letter (*rawiyy*) which divides the work into twenty-nine sections (according to twenty-eight letters of alphabet and a section on *alif*). The second conceit affects the shape of these sections. Each section is divided into four units (*fuṣūl*) since every rhyme letter appears in three vocalizations and *sukūn*. Only the section rhyming on *alif* appears only with *fatha*. All this equals 113 units in *Luzūm*. The third conceit affects the individual poems requiring each *rawiyy* to be supplemented by an additional letter. The adherence to all these constraints as compositional guidelines made *Luzūm* a unit consisting of 1600 poems and 13.000 lines. While the first two constraints were never used by anyone before al-Ma‘arrī, he mentions that before him Kuthayyir (d.723), an ‘Udhri poet in the Umayyad period, used the third constraint to a small extent.<sup>331</sup> Certainly al-Ma‘arrī remains unique in applying this technique to a voluminous work.

The third conceit merits a more detail description. According to the rules of Arabic versification, rhyming is considered complete by the repetition of a syllable which is commonly a consonant-vowel or vowel-consonant sequence at the end of every second hemistich. As long as the consonant and accompanying vowel remain the same throughout the entire poem, the basic requirements of rhyming are achieved. Similarly, in the case of vowel-consonant sequence, as long as the vowel is repeated with the consonant, the monorhyme is complete. However, instead of following these basic rules, al-Ma‘arrī added one or more identical consonants before the basic rhyming syllable. Thus al-Ma‘arrī doubled the rhyme consonant adopting a second rhyme consonant introducing a rule not prescribed by the theorists. The technical term for this is *luzūm mā lā*

<sup>330</sup> Luzūm, Introduction, 32.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

*yalzamor iltizām, i‘nāt or tashdīd*.<sup>332</sup> In the following ethical verses, the monorhyme *zī* is increased to *jzī* whereas only *zī* would have been sufficient to achieve a rhyme.

tawakhkhay jamīlan wa-f‘alīhi li-ḥusniḥī  
wa-lā taḥkumī anna l-malīka bi-hī yajzī.  
fa-dhāka ilayhī in arāda fa-mulkuḥū  
‘aẓīmun wa-illā fa-l-ḥimāmu la-nā mujzī (Lz1. 434.4-5)

This example, however, is a simple one: in some poems, al-Ma‘arrī added two extra-consonants so as to make a rhyme such as *rā‘irī*, for example:

idhā kunta dhā thintayni fa-ghdu muḥāriban  
‘adūwayni wa-ḥdhar min thalāhi ḍarā‘ī’rī.  
fa-in hunna abdayna l-mawaddatawa-r-riḍā  
fa-kam min ḥuqūdin ghuyyibat fī s-sarā‘irī.

Even more complicated structure is produced when al-Ma‘arrī enriched the rhyme imposing on it not only a consonant but also vowels while keeping the latter constant. Thus instead of having simple *um*, the poem would have *[s]arā‘irikum* as a full rhyme:

yā ummatan fī t-turābi hāmidatan  
tajāwaza lāhū‘an sarā‘irikum.  
yā laytakum lam taṭaw imā‘ukumu  
wa-lā danawtum ilā ḥarā‘irukum. (Lz2.326.5-6)

Another challenge al-Ma‘arrī presented to himself is related with the usage of *ridf* (long vowel proceeding the rhyme letter). In a *qāfiyah murdaḥa*, a rhyme part of which consists of one letter of prolongation (*alif*, *wāw*, *yā’*), *wāw* and *yā’* can change but *alif* must remain unchangeable. What al-Ma‘arrī did was keep all of them constant in all the poems with *qāfiyah murdaḥa*. Here, for example, he kept *wāw* constant along with the preceding *hā’*, though he could alternate it with *yā* so that *hūrū* makes the rhyme:

lahfī ‘alā laylatin wa-waymin  
ta‘allafat minhumā sh-shuhūrū.  
wa-ulfiyā ‘unṣuray zamānin  
laysa li-asrāriḥī ḡuhūrū.<sup>333</sup>

<sup>332</sup> See “qāfiya” in *EL2*.

It has been noted by some contemporary scholars that the rhyme scheme described above was so essential for al-Ma‘arrī that he scattered parts of the same story in *Luzūm* not according to narrative logic but according to *qāfiya*. ‘Umar Farrūkh claimed that al-Ma‘arrī composed the poems of *Luzūm* at different times and later put them together in one *diwān* according to *qāfiya*. What indicates this is that references in the text to contemporary events do not follow a chronological order but are scattered throughout *Luzūm*. An indicative example is the one connected to the story of Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās, his *wazīr*, the Christian Theodore, and the story with the locals already mentioned above. Verses concerning this story are scattered throughout *Luzūm* with no continuous narrative, chronologically disordered. Lz1.355.11-12 (in *faṣl al-rā’*), which describes the beginning of the story, comes later in the collection:

A woman with a child came to the mosque on Friday  
To tell her case to the witnesses of the town.  
Had they not risen to help her upon her outcry  
I would imagine God’s heaven sending down burning coals.

atat jāmi‘un yaum al-‘arūbatī jāmi‘an  
taquṣṣu ‘alā sh-shuhhādī bi-l-miṣri amrahā  
fa-lau lam yaqūmū nāṣirīna li-ṣautihā  
la-khiltu sama’a llāhi tumṭiru jamrahā

The verses, however, where the author says that he had been chosen as a mediator between the rival sides comes earlier (*faṣl al-dāl*) than the story itself:

I was sent to intercede with Ṣāliḥ,  
And that is a unsound idea from the side of the people.

bu‘ithu shafī‘ān ilā Ṣāliḥin  
wa dhāka min al-qaumi ray’un fasad. (Lz1.302.4)<sup>334</sup>

The same principle applies in the verses where al-Ma‘arrī mentions his own age. Verses which tell about the age of forty occur later in the textual sequence of the work than those saying that he was

<sup>333</sup> All these techniques of Abū ‘Alā are well explained by Lacey and Friedman: See K. Lacey, *Man and Society*, 7-14; Y. Friedmann, “Literary and Cultural Aspects of the *Luzūmiyyat*,” in *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D.H. Beneth Dedicata* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1979):349-52.

<sup>334</sup> There are other verses concerning the story scattered in different parts of the *Luzūm* (Luzūm2.133.8; 228.14; 234.11).

fifty. The following verse, which shows al-Ma‘arrī was fifty when he wrote it, belongs to *faṣl al-shīn*:

I am tied with the rope of life for fifty years,  
and it became so worn that it was almost severed.

‘aliqtu bi-ḥabli l-‘umri khamsīna ḥijatan  
fa-qad raththa ḥatā kāda yanqaṭi‘u l-ḥablu. (Lz2.170.9)

Yet the verse which tells that the author is forty belongs to *faṣl al-‘ayn*, that is to say, it comes later:

I have unwillingly drunk forty years of my life;  
however they were not useful for me [although bitter medicine is usually useful].

sharibtu sinīya l-arba‘ūna tajarru‘an  
fa-yā maqīran mā shurbuhu fī-ya nāji‘ū. (Lz2.77.12)<sup>335</sup>

That some of the verses were composed at different times and inserted in the collection according to very specific formal criteria is an indicator to a deliberately designed structure in the poet’s mind. There is no intention to narrate a story. The continuous narrative of one series of events is irrelevant. What is important is the overarching classificatory template-*qāfiya*.<sup>336</sup> However, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the whole *diwān* is a result of combining together poems composed separately in different times during al-Ma‘arrī’s life-time.<sup>337</sup> The kind of allocation described above was not the major compositional principle but rather an auxiliary practice for meeting the formal requirements of the collection.<sup>338</sup>

Through intensifying and complicating the rules of poetic composition, al-Ma‘arrī put himself in a compositional process which was controlled but not restricted. The strict formal rules increased the possibilities of compositional parameters. This is how Sperl rightly explained the function of the three rules al-Ma‘arrī applied to *Luzūm*:

<sup>335</sup> See Farūkh, *Ḥakīm al-Ma‘arra*, 65-81.

<sup>336</sup> This parataxis is much comparable with the *History* of al-Ṭabarī and other chroniclers who scattered the elements of a continuous narrative and clustered them together with elements of other stories that happened at the same time. The classificatory template in this case was the year.

<sup>337</sup> This has been also suggested by ‘Abd al-Wahāb ‘Azzām, “Luzūm mā lā yaLuzūmam: matā nuẓima wa-kayfa nuẓima wa-rutiba,” in *Mihrajān*, 252-269.

<sup>338</sup> A. Tayeb, *Abū’ l- ‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*, 223; Sperl, *Mannerism*, 128.

Rule one enriches the collection by the inclusion of unusual rhyme letters, like *dhāl*, *zā'*, *ḍād*, *za'* etc. Rule two affects the vowels. It provides variety by requiring the comprehensive declension of all *rawiyy*s. The third rule, finally, greatly increases the number of possible monorhymes. Instead of the ordinary 113 (one rhyme letter plus vowel), the imposition of *luzūm mā lā yaLuzūmam* creates, in theory, over 5000 different possibilities.<sup>339</sup>

The rules al-Ma'arrī applied served as a creative and productive force. It is this new structure that comes as an inspiring impetus and enables the creation of such a text where constraints stimulate variety. This type of writing was after all not unknown. Constraints and challenging rules were applied from ancient times to modern days. Ernst R. Curtius demonstrated examples of formal mannerism from the old times such as the one performed by a poet and musician, Lasus who wrote poems in which no letter [σ] appeared. Another one is Ennius's poems with the "pangrammatic" affectation which aims at having as many successive words as possible with the same starting letter or poems whose outlines in manuscript represent an object, *e.i.* an egg, an altar and so forth.<sup>340</sup> Formodern times, one might refer to the literary group called *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (OuLiPo), found in 1960. This group of mostly mathematicians sought to promote constraint writing. The most famous work is Georges Perec's novel "La Disparition" in which the author totally excludes the letter [e]. For this group, constraints were considered as tool of efficiency. The success of a written work was conditioned and guaranteed only by the perfect implementation of the pre-established rules.<sup>341</sup> This is also the case with *Luzūm* and al-Ma'arrī's some other works mentioned above, as well as the poetry of Kuthayyir and Ibn ar-Rūmī (d.896).

On the mannerist implications of *Luzūm* more will be said below. For now, what needs to be emphasized is that formal mannerism, leading to a unique formal coherence, is what freed the author from the restrictions in content which in its wider sense turned *Luzūm* into an open-ended text. In other words, dissonance in content is compensated with formal coherence. It has to be mentioned

<sup>339</sup> See Sperl, *Mannerism*, 102.

<sup>340</sup> For more examples, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 282-291.

<sup>341</sup> For the introduction on *OuLiPo* see Warren Motte Jr., *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1986).

that *Luzūm* remains potentially an open and “unending” work: had the letters of the Arabic alphabet been more than twenty-eight, the collection would be respectively extended. In Arabic poetry, this enterprise seems to remain unique. More broadly speaking, this artistic endeavor might be compared to Bach’s *Well-tempered clavier*, where the composer explored all twenty-four tonalities of his preludes and fugues like al-Ma‘arrī did with all 113 possible vowelled and unvowelled rhyme letters.<sup>342</sup> This is indeed a telling comparison: both are extensive explorations and demonstration of compositional possibilities and of skills at the same time. We also need to remember that of we remember that *Well-tempered clavier* was intended as advanced practice exercises in scales for the skilled young musicians. Such was the intention of al-Ma‘arrī whose *Luzūm* would be first read for his students.

There is in *Luzūm* another formal constraint which is apparently little known. Within each chapter, poems are arranged according to alphabetical order of meters in the system of al-Khalīl. This arrangement makes the whole collection even more of a unique enterprise. Frolov has diligently examined all the chapters of *Luzūm* according to their metric arrangements and presented the results in a detailed table. The summary of the technique is the following:<sup>343</sup>

The verses within the chapter of each *ḥarf* are arranged so that the chapter usually begins with the first meter of the first circle (*tawīl*) and ends with what is the only meter of the last fifth circle according to Khalīl-*mutaqārib*. Between these two boundaries or extremes marking the “metrical range” verses make several “rounds” along with the linear sequence of meters tied in a big circle. These “rounds” approximately coincide with the paragraphs of each chapter (based on *ḥarakāt* and *sukūn*), but occasionally include not one, but two or more paragraphs, and sometimes they even overlap the border line between paragraphs.<sup>344</sup>

Frolov has expressed these regularities through an extensive table and has shown that violations within a round are rare. The order in the distribution of meters is unparalleled in any other *diwān*.

<sup>342</sup> See the remark in Sperl, *Mannerism*, 101.

<sup>343</sup> That there is a prosodic structure in the collection according to the model of circles of Khalīl, had been noted by Friedman too: see his “*Literary and Cultural Aspects of the Luzūmiyyāt*”, 351. However D. Frolov is the first to make a detailed examination and show it through an extensive table. See D. Frolov, “The Circles of Khalīl and the Structure of *Luzūmiyyāt* of Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī,” in *Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures*, ed. P. Zemánek (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1996). 223-236.

<sup>344</sup> Frolov, “The Circles of Khalīl,” 226. This asymmetry is preserved throughout the collection with some minor exceptions marked by asterisks. See *Ibid*, n. 7, and Table 2, 226-234.

Thus al-Ma‘arrī made the rhyme and meter “two coordinates” of his poetic enterprise establishing through them an unparalleled degree of order. He undertook an extremely ambitious enterprise of producing new rules or extending the old ones, which, as he is aware, could even lead his poetry to be considered as “non-poetry,” or “anti-poetry.”

Finally, al-Ma‘arrī accomplished the structural congruity of the collection through stylistics approach. Al-Ma‘arrī’s employment of rhetorical means comes in conjunction with rhyme resulting in the use of a rich vocabulary. This is partially “a result of the difficult rhyme scheme which requires a full set of the lexical range of language.”<sup>345</sup> The author did this through rhetorical figures<sup>346</sup> going beyond the requirements of *luzūm mā lā yalzam* (as a rhyming ornament) and largely relying on *tajnīs* (also called *jinās*, paronomasia) and *radd al-‘ajz ‘alā ṣ-ṣadr*, i.e. “having the end echoing the beginning” (also called *taṣdīr*).<sup>347</sup> In *Luzūm* one finds all of the figures however *tajnīs* and *taṣdīr* constitute the most spectacular usages. *Tajnīs* is indeed the rhetorical device that al-Ma‘arrī loved. As a figure this is one that allows vigilant exploration and use of meaning and employment of semantic and morphological variety. Al-Ma‘arrī used paronomasia in its two main forms: 1) the one producing different meanings of words from the same root or varying nuanced meanings of one word, and 2) the one combining the words of different roots.<sup>348</sup> Regarding the first form, examples like this are abundant. The plays on words are italicized:

wiqābu asmā‘unā jā‘at bi-manfa‘atin  
wa- mā atatnā bi-shay’in yuḥmidu *s-surrurū*  
*sarrā’u* dahrika lam takmal laday aḥadin  
fa-layta ṭiflaka lam taqṭa’ la-hu *sirarū*  
*asarraka* alāna an taflā ‘alā qalaqin

<sup>345</sup> Sperl, *Mannerism*, 104.

<sup>346</sup> These are figures of *badī’* systematized by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in his *Kitāb al-Badī’*, among them *isti‘ārah* (metaphor), *tajnīs* (paronomasia), *muṭābaqah* (antithesis), *radd al-‘ajz ‘alā ṣ-ṣadr* (repetition), and *al-madhab al-kalāmī* (theological approach). The classification of the figures varies across authors. The 14<sup>th</sup> century critic al-Khāṭib al-Qazwīnī (d.1338) divided them between figures of meaning (such as *muṭābaqah* from this list) and figures of wording (such as *tajnīs*, *radd al-‘ajz ‘alā ṣ-ṣadr*). These two types of figures are in the category of ‘*ilm al-badī’*’, the first part of rhetorics. The second part is ‘*ilm al-bayān*’, science of clarity and clarification, and according to this classification, *isti‘ārah* belongs here (along with *tashbīh* (simile), *kināyah* (synecdoche) and others.

<sup>347</sup> See “‘Ilm al-Balagha” in *EF*<sup>2</sup>, “Badī’” in *EF*<sup>3</sup>, and “Rhetorical Figures” in *EAL*.

<sup>348</sup> Sperl, *Mannerism*, 105.



mithla l-*asarri* aḥmāhu naumahu *s-sararū*  
 lam nahjar al-mā'a illā ba'da tajribatin  
 la-qad sharibnāfa-lam tadhhab bi-nā l-ḥīrarū  
*sarāratu* l-wahdi talqā l-junubu maḍja'ahā  
 khayrun mina t-tibari mansūjan bi-hi *s-surarū*. (Lz1.315. 16-317.1-4)

The hollows of our ears brought benefit to us but  
 yet nothing that wrinkles would praise.  
 The joy of lifetime is incomplete for all,  
 if only the birth cord of your child would not have been cut!  
 It makes you happy now when you stumble upon trouble,  
 like a camel burnt by pain deprived of sleep.  
 We abandoned water only after trying it,  
 we have already drunk it but our thirst is still with us.  
 The bottom of the valley where strangers sleep  
 is better than the pure gold of which the throne is made.

In these five verses, al-Ma'arrī deployed eight different words all deriving from the *srr* root. In the first verse, it comes as a wrinkle (or a line on a forehead, *surrur*), in the second one-joy (*sarrā'*, in the first hemistich), and umbilical cord (*sirar*, pl. form in the second hemistich), in the third as to give happiness (*asarra*, in the first hemistich), a wounded camel (*asarri*, in the second hemistich), and wound (*sarar*, in the second hemistich again), and finally in the fifth it comes as a bottom of a valley (*sarāratu*, in the first hemistich), and throne (or bed, *surar*, in the second hemistich).<sup>349</sup>

The puns of second form are also plenty, and here is one example:

'adhīrī mina d-dunyā 'aratnī bi-zulmihā  
 fa-tamnaḥunī *qūtī* li-ta'khudha *qūwatī*.  
 wajadtu bi-hā *dīnī danīyan* fa-ḍarranī  
 wa-aḍlaltu minhā fī *murūtīn murūwatī*. (Lz1. 179.8-10)

Bring me one who will excuse me for what I  
 do to the world, for she has afflicted me with  
 her injustice and then allows my sustenance  
 only to take my strength.  
 In her presence, I have found my religion weak, so  
 this has harmed me; and I have deserted in her, in a  
 desert, my manly qualities.<sup>350</sup>

<sup>349</sup> See *ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>350</sup> Translation is taken from Lacey, *Man and Society*, 30-31.

The other device al-Ma‘arrī uses intensively is *radd al-‘ajz ‘alā ṣ-ṣadr* (“having the end echoing the beginning”). This is especially clear in the case where the impact of *qāfiya* becomes visible. Very often the poet combines this device with *tajnīs*. The following piece is only one example of an intensive use of these two figures (the words which echo each other are italicized):

a *tarāka* yauman qā’ilan ‘an nīyatin  
 khalaṣat li-nafsika yā lajūju *tarākī*?  
 a *darāka* dahruka ‘an tuqāka bi-juhdiḥ  
 fa-darāki min qabli l-fuāti *darākī*?  
*abrāka* rabbuka fauqa maṭīyatin  
 sārāt li-tablugha sā‘ati l-*ibrākī*.  
 a fa-*rākinun* anā li-z-zamāni bi-muḥsidin  
 bānat ‘alayhi shawāhidu l-*ifrākī*?  
*asharāka* dhanbuka? wa-l-muḥayminu ghāfirun  
 mā kāna min khaṭā’i siwā l-*ishrākī*.  
 mā bālu dīnuka nāqīṣan ālā’uhu  
 wa- n-na‘lu mā nafa‘atbi-ghayri *shirākī*.  
 wa - ‘*arāka* zārīyatu l-ḥuqūi fa-lam taqum  
 bi-l-ḥaḥqī illa ba‘da ṭūli ‘*irākī*.  
 wa-*ārāka* yā sam‘u-l-ḥimāmu fa-lam tubin  
 saj‘a l-ḥamāmi bi-ishḥilin wa-*arāki*. (Lz2. 160. 2-9)

Is there a day when you tell yourself with an  
 honest intention “oh stubborn matters, go away? ”  
 Did the world forbid you piety with all its efforts?  
 Beware of things before you perish!  
 Did not your Lord created you on the back of a camel  
 which rides until the time of his rest comes?  
 Do I rely on time when the fruit  
 reached the state of its utmost growth.  
 Are you burnt by your sins? Yet God is forgiving  
 unless you commit the gravest sin to Him.  
 What is with your religion the tenets of which are defunct  
 like sandals of no use without laces.  
 The flaws of the Law were made obvious to you  
 Yet you followed the truth only after a long [inner] battle [between right and wrong].  
 The [idea of] death occupied you in such a way that you did not  
 hear the cooing of doves on a tamarisk plant and on a twig-tree.

There is an intense use of *radd al-‘ajz ‘alā ṣ-ṣadr* in *Luzūm*. With the exhaustive use of rhyme, meter and vocabulary, *Luzūm* emerged a unique poetic enterprise of order, rigidity and consistency

counter- opposed to the ambiguous and incoherent nature of its content. There were two purposes for this extraordinary exercise: to instruct his students and to claim literary virtuosity and authority.

It has already been discussed by others that invention of new topics and the extension of the old ones were central to ‘Abbasid poetry. It is so not only in regard with meaning or themes but also the form and structure: these two contain bigger capacity to challenge tradition.<sup>351</sup> ‘Abbasid *badī‘* varied from unsophisticated *maṭbū‘* type, i.e. poetry composed by natural talent, to refined intellectualist *maṣnū‘* poetry, i.e. poetry composed laboriously and smoothed out over a long period of time.<sup>352</sup> For its highly elaborate, refined *techne* (*ṣinā‘a*), *Luzūm* could be described as *maṣnū‘* poetry (artificial type), whose formal and structural rules and establishment of such a rigid textual order could be often unwelcome,<sup>353</sup> but its excellent *techne* and sophistication could not be unappreciated.<sup>354</sup> The artificiality of *maṣnū‘* poetry was not always welcome but its extreme sophistication and excellence could not go unvalued. For as Ibn Rashīq put it, when the lack of naturalness does not impress and its affectation (*ta‘ammul*) is not explicit, then the artificial one is the most excellent among the two. Having the major aspects of meaning and structure outlines, let us now see what the main thematic motifs are in *Luzūm*.

<sup>351</sup> Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, 24.

<sup>352</sup> See Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der Arabischen Welt des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts. Eine Literatur- und Mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des Arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 108. There are no separate schools distinguishing these two: a poet could write in both ways. see Ibn Rashīq, ‘*Umda*, 1:131; also V. Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics*, 51-61; see “*maṣnū‘* and *maṭbū‘*” in *EAL*.

<sup>353</sup> For Ibn Khaldūn, the poetry of al-Ma‘arrī deviated from the standards of Arabic poetry: Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1967), 3:382; Abu’ Fidā’ found al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry feeble (*rakīk*): see Abū’l-Fidā’, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*, in *Ta’rīf*, 187. In modern times, Amjad aṭ-Ṭarabluṣī described the insistence on compositional rigidity fatiguing without playfulness: see his *La critique poétique des Arabes jusqu’au V<sup>e</sup> siècle de l’Hégire* (Damascus, 1956), 178-180.

<sup>354</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī’s student al-Khafājī writes that his teacher imposed difficult *qāfiya* on himself voluntarily (*taw‘an wa-khtiyāran*) and although his *Luzūm* had much artificiality and was difficult to understand, everyone appreciated it and praised it duly: see Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī, *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa* (Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1982), 71-72.

## 2.5. Thematic Landscape

Many previous studies, as has been mentioned above, explored the main themes of *Luzūm*. In the next few pages, the outline of the major thematic motifs of *Luzūm* is provided.

**The world and life.** Perhaps the most persistent theme is the lamentation of the treacherous world and the life. It is no exaggeration to say that on almost each page of *Luzūm*, one encounters pessimist reflections about *dunyā* and *dahr*. Already the introduction of *Luzūm* states that one of the aims of the work is the cautioning against the great world (*taḥdhīrun mina dunyā l-kubrā*).<sup>355</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī frequently calls *dunyā* “mother of stench” (*umm dafr*: Lz2. 144.7; Lz1. 136.1), an evil mother who only tortures her children (Lz2.401.4-5; Lz2.202.2), a she camel which never feeds her young (Lz2.385.1), and an eloquent orator who says no word of good (Luzūm1.83.5). Life on earth, therefore, is misfortune, calamity, perdition (*ṣarf, ḥuṭām, balā’*), and nothing but experience of horror (Lz1.175.3).

**Death.** The extremely gloomy picture of the world and earthly life is reinforced by the theme of death (*manāyā, radā, ḥimām, mawt, miqdār*) the next most iterated theme in the collection. Life has no joy because of death in pursuit (Lz1.64.11). On the other hand, life is a disease whose only cure is death (*wa-mā l-‘ayshu illā ‘illatun bur’uhā r-radā* (Lz1.182.2). Thus *Luzūm* both laments death and extols it. Death is a virtue, the greatest comfort (Lz1.399.7; Lz1.79.5), the truest (Lz2.275.4), the only escape from the misfortunes of life (Lz2.267.13). For all these reasons, procreation is senseless, and the best woman is a barren one (*in shi’ta yawman waṣlatin bi-qarīnatin fa-khayru nisā’i l-‘ālimina ‘aqīmuḥā*; Lz2.261.13; Lz2.265.3). Al-Ma‘arrī opposes marriage and family (Lz1.44.6; Lz2.236.5) and sees children only as victims (Lz1.45.3-5; Lz1.253).

**Ecce Homo.** Human kind is an essential part in the making of this darkest picture. Contemplation of humans, their nature and behavior constitute the next dominant theme in *Luzūm*. If we were to group

---

<sup>355</sup> UBL Or.100, p.1

ideas on humankind spread throughout *Luzūm*, we would have two extensive clusters, one telling what humankind is, the other telling what it should be. The human as he is comes in the most negative descriptions: men are destructive (Lz1.388.1), hostages to passions (Lz1.99.11, Lz1.125.1-3), unhelpful (Lz2.96.8-9), and envious (Lz1.25.6). More dreadful is the way al-Ma‘arrī pictures women; they are devoid of intellect (Lz1.163.5), unsupportive of men (Lz1.165.9), immersed in sin and lust (Lz1.188.9; Lz1.192.1; Lz2.418.8-9).<sup>356</sup>

There is hardly any aspect of human behavior and enterprise which al-Ma‘arrī approves. He has no appreciation for men of authority. Rulers in general are deceivers (*fī af‘ālihim dalasū*; Lz2.11.9-10). Amirs are profligate (*hal al-umarā’ illa fī khisārin*), viziers are sinners (*ahl al-wizr*, Lz1.389.8), and the business of kings is nothing but entertainment and exhaustion by drinking (*‘azfun wa-nazfun*, Lz1.218.6).

No class of society is given any positive appraisal. Jurists are liars who call all kind of absurdities “science” (Lz2.363.1-2). They are deep in errors and use the holy Book to justify their errors (*wa-kam min faqīhin khābiṭin fī ḍalālātin, wa-ḥujjatuhu fī-hā l-kitābu l-munazzalū*; Lz2.172.6). There is no use of jurisprudence at all (*wa-lā khayra fī kasbin atāka mina l-fiqhi*; Lz2.419.1). Theologians are good only at rhetoric and all they do is for the sake of competition between each other (Lz1.249.4-5). Neither Mu‘tazilites nor Ash‘arites are to be taken seriously (Lz1.131.5; Lz2.172.4-5). Poets are shameful money-seekers (Lz1.55.7; Lz1.137.5) and their speech is corrupt (*lafẓ fāsīd*; Lz1.243.9). Neither does al-Ma‘arrī approve of philosophers who tell all kinds of lies about God and man (Lz1.327.18; Lz2.74.1-2). Astrologers are shameful and vulgar fortune-

<sup>356</sup> Ṭāhā Ḥusayn thought that al-Ma‘arrī, influenced by Mazdakism, and was of the opinion that a woman could be shared by men: see Ṭ. Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd*, 281. The opinion is not accepted by others: see Farrūkh, *Ḥakīm*, 139; al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 409. Al-Maḥāsīnī provided a Freudian interpretation for al-Ma‘arrī’s misogyny: suppressing passion and affection for women, led to the exposition of opposite sentiments and thoughts; al-Maḥāsīnī, *Abū’l -‘Alā’*, 47. See also, Lacey, *Man and Society*, 195-207; Suaad A. al-Mana, “The Female Imagery in Abū’l -‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*,” *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, no. 4 (1992):21-50.

tellers and are greedy (Lz2.415.6-7; Lz2.269.5; Lz2.97.8). Al-Ma‘arrī spares no one from criticism.<sup>357</sup>

**Humans as they ought to be.** Al-Ma‘arrī’s ideas of how humans need to live are encapsulated in the notion of asceticism. First and foremost, humans should live in seclusion and isolation (Lz1.63.1; Lz1.95.12; Lz2.143; Lz2.316.1; Lz1.95.12). The greatest rest is solitude (Lz2.176.11) and any desert is better than living among people (Lz2.143.6). Further, one should live modestly, without any luxury (Lz1.293.6; Lz1.212.4; Lz2.78.7; Lz2.314.4-5) and with abstinence from meat, fish, eggs (Lz1.232.7-10; Lz2.264.11.), and wine (Lz1. 96.9; Lz1.144.2-5; Lz2.299.1). Seclusion and vegetarianism are essential parts of ethical commitment. Al-Ma‘arrī exhorts people to be virtuous and do good (*khayr*) even if death is the haunting force (Lz2.249.1) and even if the only beauty of doing good is in hearing (Lz2.90.3). In some verses, al-Ma‘arrī calls for a noble life simply for the sake of virtue, without expecting any reward (Lz1.142.3; Lz2.342.1-2) and in some others, he urges doing good since virtue is the only credit on Day of Judgment (Lz1.422.10; Lz2.266.11). Indeed, a good portion of *Luzūm* consists of exhortative verses of this kind.

Thus, humankind, its relationship to the world, and to the universe, constitutes the core of *Luzūm*’s thematic landscape. An important ingredient of this thematic sketch has to do with human’s relation to God and the idea of faith and belief enunciated in many different ways in *Luzūm*, and this is what interests us particularly within the scope of this inquiry. All these themes are most preeminently voiced through three main tones: pessimistic, admonitory, and ironic, well fitting to the medium of wisdom and ascetic poetry. The themes are scattered throughout the collection without a coherent line or a regular sequence.

This chapter examined *Luzūm* in the light of its literary features, namely, the choice of genre, and its use in relation to meaning, and stringency in structure established through extraordinary rules

<sup>357</sup> This aspect of *Luzūm* is thoroughly explored in Zakī al-Maḥāsini’s *Abū’l -‘Alā’*: see also Lacey, *Man and Society*, 194-236.

of versification and prosody. The above discussion, in fact, could be linked to the aim of composing *Luzūm* declared in its introduction. Al-Ma‘arrī’s introduction of *Luzūm*, though highly technical in part, but distinct in its clarity and coherence, is indeed a manifestation which declares his aim and intent of making a different poetry. The uncommon conditions for this are truthfulness of content, exhaustiveness of form and complexity of the rules of prosody and versification resulting in a rigorous structural coherence. The severance of poetic communication in the common way is in itself communicable act which is further amplified by literary exhibitionism. The intent to reject the traditional way of making poetry and the intent to maintain a literary excellence, therefore, authority signify the author’s relation to the outer world. The chapter also illustrated the overall thematic landscape of the collection. The theme of belief and unbelief, as it appears in *Luzūm*, is central to this inquiry, and the next chapters are dedicated to its examination on various levels. We first need to explore the ways the notions belief and unbelief have been examined and interpreted both generally and with regard to al-Ma‘arrī.

### CHAPTER 3. ISSUES OF DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF UNBELIEF, AND THE CASE OF *LUZŪM*

This chapter will bring together those interpretative patterns which have been important for understanding the history of unbelief in both European and ‘Abbasid contexts and also draws attention to the vocabularies of unbelief and freethinking. The review of some major studies of unbelief, both in European and Arab histories, will provide a background for the study of al-Ma‘arrī’s thought and prompt us to remain open to possibilities and complexities of interpretations and some caveats. After having established backgrounds of previous histories, the chapter will proceed to examine how notions of unbelief and freethinking were seen with regard to al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm*. The last section of the chapter will offer an alternative paradigm of interpretation based on the notions of ambivalence and polemics in order to avoid reductive readings of *Luzūm* and in order to bring forth a more nuanced understanding of al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking.

#### 3.1. General Terms and Interpretations of Unbelief

The most general term for referring to notions of unbelief and irreligion is freethinking. As a term “freethinking” appeared in the English literature at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>358</sup> In France, freethinking was originally interchangeably used with “libertinism” which in the eighteenth century turned to mean profligacy. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the term “libertine” (“libertin” in French) was replaced by “free-thinker” or “libre penseur” without ceasing to imply philosophical and intellectual posture through skepticism described in Pintard’s phrase as “libertinage érudit.”<sup>359</sup> In most general terms, freethinking implied a rejection of religious authority

---

<sup>358</sup> See J. M. Robertson, *A History of Free Thought: Ancient and Modern to the Period of the French Revolution* (London: Watts & Co, 1963), 1-3. One has to take into account that freethinking has local varieties such as English, French Italian, Dutch and so forth.

<sup>359</sup> See J. S. Spink, *French Free-thought: from Gassendi to Voltaire* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 1960), 3-4.



in matters of religious beliefs and, most importantly, refusal to submit reason to the control of religious authority. The idea also connoted rejection of the whole Christianity at the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>360</sup> For some, freethinking had a wider range of applications: for Margaret Jacob, for instance, the term referred to the eighteenth century pantheists, sexual libertines, millenarians, and masons. Thus, even though the association of the term with atheism and deism is common<sup>361</sup>

both atheism and deism were *shifting designators* in this period and often cannot be understood in twentieth-century or even twenty-first-century terms. Further, the relationship between atheism and deism remains relatively underexplored, even though work in this area may sometimes undermine both categories.<sup>362</sup>

To begin with deism, it often counts as one of the most central criticisms of religion at the age of the Enlightenment. Associated in England with, among others, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (d. 1648) and Charles Blount (d. 1693), deism was considered an anti-religionist movement due to its anticlericalism, denial of prophecies and revealed religions, and skepticism towards the validity of Scriptures or their rejection in general.<sup>363</sup> Deism has been reduced to general ideas and conceptions which claim that God does not intervene in the world or that the existence of God can be arrived at only by reason, or that the natural religion is sufficient for salvation,<sup>364</sup> thus inclining towards the claim of some Greek philosophical teachings which established rational accounts of deity.<sup>365</sup> Some, however, concluded that deism was not as radical towards Christianity as it has been traditionally presented, and that those who advocated deism did not consider deism as a totalizing

<sup>360</sup> See "Freethinking," *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989.

<sup>361</sup> See M. Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment: pantheists, freemasons, and republicans* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 109-182.

<sup>362</sup> W. Hudson, D. Lucci, J.R. Wigelsworth, *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800* (Surrey/Burlington: Ashtage, 2014), 3.

<sup>363</sup> For the lack of one determinate meaning for deism see R. D. Lund, *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response 1660-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). However, some scholars insist that, based on some consistent features of deist thinking like, for example, the rejection of Scriptures, one can provide comprehensive definition for deism: see James E. Force, "Biblical Interpretation, Newton, and Deism," in *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Richard H. Popkin, Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 284.

<sup>364</sup> Deism has been seen as a reverse movement tending to reduce religion to simple set of notions: see Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1932):281-299. For deists developing theories of natural religion close to those of ancient pagans, see: Richard H. Popkin, "The Deist Challenge," in *From Persecution to Toleration*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Jonathan I. Israel (Oxford, 1991), 205.

<sup>365</sup> See W. Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 32-33.

creed which would replace Christianity.<sup>366</sup> People called “English deists” thus did not have single religious affiliations to be reduced to either Christianity or deism, and they “need to be read in light of the different personae and social roles.”<sup>367</sup>

More complicated is the application of the term “atheism” etymologically derived from Greek *a-* (without) and *theos*-(God). It appears in English in the mid-sixteenth century with the translation of Plutarch’s *atheotēs*.<sup>368</sup> In Latin literature, the term did not occur before the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.<sup>369</sup> The history of atheism has presented a challenge especially in regard to its medieval period. Dorothea Weltecke claims that atheism, as a denial of God’s existence in medieval times existed as an idea, with various expressions of doubt, but not as an intellectual system that could be logically argued: it is only a construct by modern scholars who present histories of unbelief through heroic narratives.<sup>370</sup>

From the beginning of its use, the notion of atheism was marked by imprecision and competing definitions. Among Medievalists, atheism was considered “a conception too young for the period” and was softly replaced by the term “unbelief” for the period where no theoretical atheistic thought is known.”<sup>371</sup> The term unbelief, in turn, is not precisely used and ranges from meaning not attending churches to doubting God’s existence.<sup>372</sup> The history of Medieval unbelief is challenged by two contradictory presumptions: that (1) there were persecution and refutations of

---

<sup>366</sup>Ibid: through interpreting works of Cherbury, Blount, Toland, Collin and Tindal, Hudson tries to reconstruct a more complex history of Enlightenment and point to multiple deisms. The same purpose of a more complex history of deisms lies at the core of J. A. Champion’s works: See his, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Champion claims that deists and freethinkers in general need to be read in specific religious contexts, and that freethinkers attempted to purify rather than destroy religion as all societies need some kind of public religion or “civic theology,” 170ff; see also idem, “Enlightened Erudition and the Politics of Reading in John Toland’s Circle,” *The Historical Journal*, 49:1 (2006):111–41.

<sup>367</sup> Hudson, *English Deists*, 1.

<sup>368</sup>See S. Bullivant, “Defining ‘Atheism,’” in *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 23.

<sup>369</sup> D. Weltecke, “Atheism in the Medieval Period,” in *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 146.

<sup>370</sup>Idem, “Der Narr spricht: Es ist kein Gott.” *Atheismus, Unglauben und Glaubenszweifel vom 12. Jahrhundert bis zur Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2010), 23–99.

<sup>371</sup>Idem, “Beyond Religion: On the Lack of Belief during the Central and Late Middle Ages,” in *Religion and Its Other: Secular and Sacral Concepts and Practices in Interaction*, eds., Heike Bock, Jörg Feuchter, Michi Knecht (Campus Verlag, 2009), 101–114.

<sup>372</sup>See John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005); also F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta (eds.), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1999).

unbelief on the one hand, and in fact modern histories sustain their theses on unbelief through going back to its medieval roots, and, (2) on the other hand, there is the claim that Middle Ages are marked by intellectual and conceptual incapacities to think and prove that God does not exist. Weltecke challenges these two theses arguing that it is an anachronism to think that disbelief in God was the most extreme deviance and heresy. First of all, disbelief in God did not mean denying the existence of God and did not signify absence of faith; it signified the peak of foolishness.<sup>373</sup> Second, based on the examination of legal sources and inquisition manuals, Weltecke claims that there were no fixed norms against absence of faith in the divine, and the alleged persecution of atheism is a myth with no historical ground.<sup>374</sup>

On the other hand, there was a vast theological or scholastic literature produced in the Middle Ages proving the existence of God (the same is in *kalām* and *falsafa*) which would suggest that there were thinkers who were seeking to prove or at least to claim the opposite.<sup>375</sup> Some modern scholars see these disputations as reactions towards real atheism.<sup>376</sup> Again, this has never been a convincing claim for true atheism since none of the polemical writings contain specific names or refer to certain individuals. For Thomas Aquinas “atheism” did not form any systematic part of “infidelitas” and was never mentioned unambiguously to assert “that there is no God.”<sup>377</sup> Atheism was associated with immorality and even madness and mental illness, thus, often treated as a spiritual problem that needed to be dealt with by educational instructions. Even the Biblical Psalm 14 “The fool said in his heart there is no God” refers to a person with irresponsible and immoral nature who thinks that denying God will free him from His commands and prohibition, and not to a truly

---

<sup>373</sup>D. Weltecke, *Der Narr*, 465,

<sup>374</sup>*Ibid.*, 367

<sup>375</sup>See, for instance, the study by Herbert Davidson where he systematically analyzes various principal arguments for the existence of God, creation and eternity in Medieval Muslim and Jewish. Davidson’s contention is that at the core of the debate was not whether God existed or not but whether His existence could be adequately proved: H. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>376</sup>Susan Reynolds, “Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Skepticism,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6/1 (1991):21–41.

<sup>377</sup>D. Weltecke, *Der Nacht*, 268; idem, “Beyond Religion,” 113.

godless person.<sup>378</sup> The same is with the notion of doubt and especially doubt in faith which was approached positively only in the modern period.<sup>379</sup> Medieval worlds, as Weltecke asserts, never took atheism all too seriously, unlike the modern world. Alternative religious convictions instead were considered much more dangerous. For the later periods in history, atheism has been largely seen as a polemical *topos* for expressing varieties of unbelief.<sup>380</sup>

The lack of self-professed and identifiable atheism is what caused real problems for studying atheism and has triggered controversies especially after the influential study of Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle* (1942), which indeed marks the outset of stimulating debates, mainly between those who supported Febvre and those who argued against him. Febvre argued that “speculative” atheism in the sixteenth century was impossible as a coherent thought. Atheism was then literary unthinkable (“impensable”) or impossible to advance before the philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century, especially before the rise of Cartesianism. In addition to the lack of mental tools to elaborate atheism, there was no medium for its existence. The sixteenth century was a century that wanted to believe, Febvre claimed. Atheism in the sixteenth century was used polemically and meant nothing precise.<sup>381</sup> Accusations of atheism could mean many things mostly designed as rhetorical devices towards various adversaries; however, one cannot talk about “speculative” atheism, the one which is meant to be proved. Denials which rested on personal impulses and moods, according to Febvre did not matter historically and did not have social significance.<sup>382</sup> In other words, unbelief existed but with no social and intellectual significance. Rabelais could not find any support to establish and verify atheism either through

<sup>378</sup>Idem, *Der Narr spricht*, 261.

<sup>379</sup>Ibid., 268. There were various expressions of doubt for example through *acedia* and *murmur*-inertia of faith or impotent protest of laity questioning the justice and omnipotence of God: *Der Narr*, 425ff; see also idem, “Orte des Zweifels. Zu Glaubenszweifel und Nichtglauben im lateinischen Mittelalter,” in *Orte der europäischen Religionsgeschichte*, eds. Adrian Hermann, Jürgen Mohn (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2015), 363-392.

<sup>380</sup>D.J. Robichaud, “Atheism in Renaissance and Reformation,” in *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 160. See also D. Weltecke, “Atheism in the Medieval Period,” 148-49.

<sup>381</sup>Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. B. Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). 131.

<sup>382</sup>Ibid., 351.

sources of philosophy or science in 1532, therefore, Febvre claimed, to speak of atheism at this time was “to perpetrate, under the cover of fine-sounding words and an impressive vocabulary, the most serious and most ridiculous of all anachronisms; in the realm of ideas it was like giving Diogenes an umbrella and Mars a machine gun.”<sup>383</sup> The true history of irreligion, according to Febvre, had its seeds only in the second half of the seventeenth century when Cartesian philosophy could equip minds with tools to handle atheism. Febvre’s influence has been strong and durable.<sup>384</sup>

Paul Oskar Kristeller, in his famous essay on Paduan Aristotelians, argued that the original documents “fail to substantiate the view that its representatives were freethinkers, and that this view seems to emerge rather gradually in a series of later layers of the tradition that appear to have influenced the outlook of the French school of historians.”<sup>385</sup> Kristeller denied the theory of double truth, which assumed that some views were claimed true philosophically but not theologically and that which was considered by French historians as a technique for covering disbelief. Pomponazzi (d.1525) Cremonini (d.1631), and Paduan Aristotelians in general attempted to balance reason and faith, but considering them to be atheists, Kristeller argued, was an anachronistic reading and misinterpretation. Kristeller dismissed the charges of heresy against these thinkers by their contemporaries, seeing them instead within the scheme of internal Christian polemics.<sup>386</sup> Although Kristeller did not mention openly that his thesis was against Leo Strauss’s famous thesis on covert writing, some claim “his warning seems to apply perfectly to the hermeneutics proposed in Strauss’s

---

<sup>383</sup>Ibid., 353.

<sup>384</sup>François Berriot gave to the French atheism of the sixteenth century a normative and behavioral value but not cognitive and conceptual one. Libertines limited themselves to arguments close to those of Julian the Apostate and Celsus, thus they did not go beyond talking against Christianity: François Berriot, *Atheismes et athéistes au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle en France*, 2 vols. (Lille, 1977). For a discussion of Febvre and Berriot see Alan Charles Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650-1729: The Orthodox Sources of Unbelief*, Volume 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1990), 7-11.

<sup>385</sup>O. Kristeller, “The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume 6, No. 6 (1968):236.

<sup>386</sup>For example, jokes and stories by Pomponazzi were seen as a good way to express heretical ideas against the Church: *ibid.*, 237.

*Persecution and the Art of Writing*.<sup>387</sup> It is certain, however, that Kristeller was arguing against the famous work of Ernest Renan, *Averroès et l'averroïsme* where the author claimed that the Aristotelian philosophers of Padua were Averroists and that they were forerunners of European libertinism and freethinking.<sup>388</sup> Renan applied the theory of double truth to Averroes who had to manipulate the religious language of the Qur'an in such a way that it would not contradict the teaching of Aristotle. Averroes was an atheist who appeared outwardly Muslim.<sup>389</sup> Despite the criticism of Renan's thesis, many in line with Kristeller's arguments,<sup>390</sup> Paduan Aristotelianism continues to be seen as a precondition of the Enlightenment due to the emphasis on secular rationality.<sup>391</sup>

Richard Popkin who, examining slightly later thinkers, claimed that showing skepticism towards religious tenets and doctrines does not necessarily indicate to unbelief:

“...skeptical” and “believer” are not opposing classifications. The skeptic is raising doubts about the rational or evidential merits of the reasons given for a belief; he doubts that necessary and sufficient reasons either have been or could be discovered to show that any particular belief must be true, and cannot possibly be false. But the skeptic may, like anyone else, still accept various beliefs.<sup>392</sup>

Examination of the milieu of some thinkers such as Gassendi (d.1655), a seventeenth-century philosopher, priest and scientist, Popkin suggested, might deprive him of this unambiguous nature of freethinking and shape a more complex image of him. Gassendi “was a friend of some very immoral libertines like Lullier and Bouchard. His religious friends found him a most sincere Christian.”<sup>393</sup> Yet some scholars stretched arguments of freethinking as far as to declare that he was a true libertine

<sup>387</sup> Winfried. Shreoder (ed.), *Reading between the Lines: Leo Strauss and the History of Early Modern Philosophy* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 2.

<sup>388</sup> E. Renan *Averroès et l'averroïsme* (Paris, Lévy Press, 1852), 322ff.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 257-259.

<sup>390</sup> For a good review and reflections on criticisms, see C. Martin, “Rethinking Renaissance Averroism,” *Intellectual History Review* 17 (2007):3-28.

<sup>391</sup> See, for instance, I. Wade, *The Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 61-76.

<sup>392</sup> R. Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum&Co., 1963), xiv.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 107.

at heart.<sup>394</sup> Further, Popkin applied the notion of skeptical fideism to Francois de La Mothe Le Vayer (d.1672), a primary libertine of his time and a courtly writer of seventeenth century, to give due both to reason and belief in one's thinking. In this regard, an interesting case is the seventeenth century English poet and libertine John Wilmot, Lord Rochester (d.1680) whose "Satyre," with all its affinity to Montaigne, Pyrrhonist skeptics, Hobbes and Epicurian traditions, was deeply occupied with faith. Sarah Ellenzweig shows that while the Church adopted reason as a weapon against irreligion, freethinkers then found a resort in pure faith deprived of embellishments of reason.<sup>395</sup>

An intriguing contribution to the history of unbelief was made by Alan Charles Kors who argued in his *Atheism in France* that atheism was the invention of orthodox theology, initially a theological fiction which later took its own path to become a separate object. While the Catholic Church insisted that there was no atheism in France in the seventeenth century, it nevertheless obliged itself to prove that God existed. This theological and philosophical writing with rigorous arguments for the existence of God became the best sources for the libertine thought and atheism by the time of Jean Meslier (d. 1729). The "thinkability" of atheism, its philosophical arguments and heritage thus were available in orthodox writings and did not need a philosophical revolution as claimed by Febvre.<sup>396</sup>

Among the arguments opposing Febvre, perhaps the most important and stimulating were those of David Wootton who took real issue with the problem of unbelief.<sup>397</sup> According to Wootton, ambiguous texts by Charron, Naudé or Sarpi should be read between the lines. A text might differ in

---

<sup>394</sup> Pokin referred here to Pintard and Rochot who respectively argued for Gassendi's libertinism and lack of it. See *ibid.*, n. 3, 4.

<sup>395</sup> Sarah Ellenzweig, "The Faith of Unbelief: Rochester's "Satyre," Deism, and religious Freethinking in Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 44, no.1 (2005):28-29; See also *idem*, *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660-1760* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>396</sup> One major criticism against Kors's theory is the limitation of his study to French thinkers only when at that time Spinoza and Hobbes, for example, were already translated into French and known to French authors: see D. Wootton, "New Histories of Atheism," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and D. Wootton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24.

<sup>397</sup> Wootton in fact claimed that the studies of Febvre and Kristeller inhibited the study of irreligion: see D. Wootton, "New Histories of Atheism," 13-53. See also Michael Hunter, "The Problem of "Atheism" in early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 35 (1985): 135-157.

its public and private readings. Unbelievers, he claimed, had reason for self-censorship. These authors find deception in writing a legitimate method following the motto “think what you like in private, but pretend to agree with everyone else in public.”<sup>398</sup> That is to say, one has to be alert to the devices which support conveying unbelief without declaring it. It was not the absence of modern science or philosophical tools that prevented unbelievers from cognitive speculations on atheism in the sixteenth century, as Febvre would say, but the fact “that both believers and unbelievers accepted that religion was socially necessary.”<sup>399</sup> Wootton’s assertion was that Febvre failed to consider that sixteenth-century authors had different, rather than simply weaker argument against religion than the authors of the Enlightenment and that Febvre took for granted that there was only one modern way of thinking that could be identified with rationalism.<sup>400</sup> For Wootton, hypocrisy and insincerity are not incompatible with intellectual life, unlike the views of other historians of unbelief.<sup>401</sup>

Along the lines underscored by Wootton, David Berman introduced the notion of theological lying as a way of subterfuge in the writings of freethinkers, such as English deist Charles Blount and Irish John Toland. Theological lying is lying for truth’s sake so that “the intelligent would know or could unravel the truth, while the authorities could not punish or victimize the writer.”<sup>402</sup> Deism and atheism were exhibited through negation. When these freethinkers deny their atheism in a preface, there should always be a suspicious reading of the denial. These freethinkers do not write in a straightforward way, they always hide something. The theological lying serves the following purposes for a freethinker 1) protecting himself; 2) signaling his true irreligious position to other knowing unbelievers; and 3) insinuating this irreligious position to open-minded and or unwary

---

<sup>398</sup> D. Wootton, “Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (1988), 710-711; idem., “Unbelief in Early Modern Europe,” *History Workshop* 20 (1985):88.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 727.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 729.

<sup>401</sup> D. Wootton, “New Histories of Atheism,” 21.

<sup>402</sup> See David Berman, “Disclaimers as Offence Mechanisms in Charles Blount and John Toland,” in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, 257.



believers, Berman claims.<sup>403</sup> Theological lying thus functions for three sets of readers: potential enemies (civil and legal authorities), freethinking friends, and unwary and open minded believers, and for each of them, the effect is different. Berman himself is aware that his thesis is not universally applicable and needs to be seen in the light specific historical contexts.

Wootton and his supporters of his line of arguments did not escape criticism. Silvia Berti, for instance, criticized Wootton's reading between the lines arguing that merely eliminating ambiguity through "suppressing one of the two sides of the conflict" does not solve the problem.<sup>404</sup> Emphasizing the complexity of the matter, Berti claimed that one could be both a Christian and a skeptic at the same time, and this complexity needs to be given due attention. Although Wootton himself had claimed he was not Straussian, Berti insisted that he used "Straussian criteria when he asserts that "a text in which conventional sentiments seem to be at odds with unconventional ones" would warrant "an unshakeable" reading between the lines." <sup>405</sup>Berti also warned that the kind of readings Wootton suggested was dangerous because they caused what Quentin Skinner called a "mythology of coherence," constructed completely *a posteriori* by a historian. Moreover, these readings allow a historian to use only the evidence which satisfy a specific reading and to ignore others.<sup>406</sup>

Finally, an important point of the debate relates to the sociology of unbelief. The question is whether unbelief was available for the common and uneducated. On this theme, Carlo Ginsburg brought his much admired work, *The Cheese and the Worms*, where he argued that someone like a peasant in the sixteenth-century Italy could have anti-Christian thoughts and heterodox ideas on cosmology and creation. For Ginsburg the miller Menocchio could have come to these conclusions

---

<sup>403</sup>Ibid., 259.

<sup>404</sup> Silvia Berti, "At the Roots of Unbelief," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 56, No. 4 (1995):560.

<sup>405</sup>Ibid., 559

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

due to the continuity of popular beliefs of Ancient Rome and India which were still preserved in popular culture of the sixteenth century Italy.<sup>407</sup>

What we have seen so far is that the study of European history of unbelief, irreligion, and freethinking, with their entire plethora of meaning is a fairly complex task, open to various and contradictory interpretation. Three major points need to be emphasized and distinguished here: first is the problem of proof and the claim that atheism (or any other type of unbelief) is not atheism unless it be speculative and philosophical. This claim deprives the phenomenon of complexity and subtlety. Unbelief could be asserted, felt, and proclaimed without any need for philosophical demonstration-much like its opposite, belief, which, too, existed even if not always philosophically and speculatively demonstrated. This point is important to bear in mind especially while studying belief and unbelief as expressed in poetry, a genre which does not require proofs, evidence and arguments but bring forth moods and impulses no less important as proofs. Second, for discussions on unbelief and freethinking, concealed writing, theological lying, reading between lines, and similar notions are always essential, however, none of these notions might make sense without taking specific and concrete historical contexts and milieu into serious account. Each context needs to be closely examined. Third, the notion of sincerity in relation to the discourses of unbelief and irreligion cannot be a tool for a historian for the reason that it cannot be verified.

### **3.2. Studies of the ‘Abbasid Context of Unbelief**

This section will discuss terms, definitions, and notions of unbelief in the ‘Abbasid context and reflect on a few contemporary studies. The aim is to highlight some complexities and conceptual problems one might encounter in the study of the ‘Abbasid unbelief and related notions.

---

<sup>407</sup> C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, English trans. by John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Let us first have a brief look at the Arabic terms which signify various notions of unbelief. The most common Arabic terms for expressing unbelief are *zandaqa*, *ilhād*, and *dahriya*. All three have been mostly used as umbrella terms frequently, these terms are freely replaced by each other or put together. The term *zandaqa*<sup>408</sup> was associated with Manichaeism, and this meaning was also adopted by Arabs especially during the age of caliph al-Mahdī (r.775-785) who initiated the persecution against crypto-Manichaeans.<sup>409</sup> However, this was only one aspect of the plethora of the word's meanings. Everything could be *zandaqa* if it had "a whiff of freethinking: a dualistic explanation of the world, as well as theology that in one way or another appeared to endanger *tawhīd*, and finally even purely intellectual or moral libertinage."<sup>410</sup> As Joseph van Ess warned, the term should not be trusted since it grouped together very heterogeneous thinkers as it is clear from the list of an-Nādim in *Fihrist*.<sup>411</sup> Chokr showed in his study on *zandaqa* that it is futile too look for a strict and precise meaning of *zindīq*. For some authors, such as Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Ḥazm, *zindīq* meant an unbeliever or an atheist (*dahrī*) and Manichean at the same time. In any case, they were perceived as enemies of Islam and identified with Satan since they opposed such central tenets of Islam as *tawhīd*, inimitability of the Qur'ān, and the validity of *Ḥadīth*.<sup>412</sup>

<sup>408</sup> The most common meaning of *zandaqa*, summarized by the historian al-Mas'ūdī (d.956), suggested that the term derived from the Zand, the commentary to the Avesta, designating anything that was in variance with the revelation, namely the Avesta. Some think the origin of the word is from Aramaic Zaddik which means "righteous." For the etymology of the term, its possibly Persian or Syriac origins, and its Arabization see Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 27-44; Chokr, *Zandaqa et Zindīqs*, 43-45; de Blois, "zindīq," in *EF*; I.T. Kristó-Nagy, "Denouncing the Damned *Zindīq*," in *Accusation of Unbelief in Islam*, ed. C. Adang, H. Ansari et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 56-57. Other helpful studies are M.I. Fierro Bello, "Accusations of 'zandaqa' in al-Andalus," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, vol. 5/6 (1987-88):251-258; Gabrieli Franco, "La « zandaqa » au Ier siècle abbaside," in *L'élaboration de l'Islam, Colloque de Strasbourg, 12-13-14 juin 1959*, ed. C. Cahen (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1961), 23-38. Interestingly, in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. European authors such as D'Herbelot, Bayle, and Brucker presented *zindīqs* as a separate sect, "Zindikites," who rejected revelation and miracles, and whose leader was the famous Abū Muslim, and whose name derives from "Sadduceen." The sect preserved, according to Bayle, ancient Greek monist philosophical tendencies and had views akin to Spinozism. See J. Israel, *Enlightenment contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Men, 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 637-38.

<sup>409</sup> Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 45-48. For the reference of the term to Mazdakeans and dualist-Gnostics, see 48-53; for the relation of *zindīqs* to the Daysanites and Marconites, see Chokr, *Zandaqa*, 32-48; 56-58.

<sup>410</sup> Van Ess, trans. J. O. Kahne, *Theology and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 488ff. idem, *TGI*, 416ff.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid; Vajda, "Le *Zindīqs*," 175-178.

<sup>412</sup> Chokr, *Zandaqa*, 150-51.

*Zandaqa* was often associated with *mujūn*-that is with licentiousness. “Many so-called *zindīqs* could not be strictly categorized as Manicheans, agnostics or political opponents, but seem to have acquired the title merely through licentiousness.”<sup>413</sup> Such license also implied license to blaspheme, casually or seriously, which was widespread in early Abbasid society especially among the men of letters. This is when themes of homosexuality, erotic love, drinking, sensuality, and orgy become parts of poetic content,<sup>414</sup> often with verses which were taken as insults to the basic tenets of Islam.<sup>415</sup> At the hand of jurists, *zandaqa* was used for defining *kufr* (unbelief) and *irtidād* (apostasy).<sup>416</sup> Later, the term was mostly used in reference to philosophers.<sup>417</sup> For al-Ghazālī, *zindīqs* were crypto-infidels and mainly represented *falāsifa*.<sup>418</sup>

*Ilhād*, another widely used term for unbelief, is perhaps the most unspecific one in the classical period.<sup>419</sup> Literally, it means deviation from the right path, rebellion, rejection. In his study of Muslim unbelief Badawī relates *ilhād* to denial of prophecies - a specific way of unbelief for Muslims unlike for other religious traditions where unbelief is directed towards God.<sup>420</sup> In classical times, the term covered *zindīqs* and *dahrīs* and in modern times, it is often translated as “atheism,” and recently as “godlessness.”<sup>421</sup>

<sup>413</sup> Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 144. For the connection between libertinism and *zandaqa* see Chokr, *Zandaqa*, 240-250.

<sup>414</sup> For general studies on *mujūn* and *mājin* see Z. Szombathy, *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature* (Gibb Memorial Trust: Exeter, 2013), 47-98; T. Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*, 242-246; A. Talib, M. Hammond and A. Schippers, eds., *The Rude, the Bad, and the Bawdy* (Gibb Memorial Trust: Exeter, 2014).

<sup>415</sup> Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 159-160.

<sup>416</sup> Van Ess, *Der Eine*, 2:1282.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Jackson Sherman A, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafrīq Bayna l-Islām wa -l-Zandaqa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 55-59.

<sup>419</sup> Nowadays *ilhād* has more specific meaning designating atheism in the modern sense connotated with *lā-dīnīya*-nonreligioun: see S. Schielke, “Islamic World,” in *Oxford Handbook for Atheism*, 524.

<sup>420</sup> ‘Abd ar-Raḥman Badawī, *Min Tarīkh al-lhād fī-l-Islām* (Beirut: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabīya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-n-Nashr, 1970), 5.

<sup>421</sup> Crone, “Ungodly Cosmologies,” in *Islam, the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 118.

*Dahrīyah* too is translated “godlessness” but also as “atheism.”<sup>422</sup> The first-hand characteristic of *dahrīyah* is the assigning to time (*dahr*) the sole cause of death leaving no room for God. They were called either *aṣḥāb aṭ-ṭabā’ī*‘ who believed the ultimate constituents of the world to be fire, air, water, and earth (the spirit (*rūḥ*) sometimes to was added to this) or *aṣḥāb al-hayūlā* who held the pre-eternity of prime matter (*hayūlā*, Gr. *hylē*).<sup>423</sup> Belief in the eternity of the matter violated such crucial theological concept as the creation *ex nihilo* and consequently the whole idea of eschatology, since denial of the beginning runs in parallel with denial of the end.<sup>424</sup> The eleventh-century heresiographer Abū l-Muẓaffar al-Isfārāyīnī presented them as people who claimed that the world is eternal and reject the Creator (*yaqūlūna bi-qidami l-‘ālamī wa-yunkirūna ṣ-ṣāni*’).<sup>425</sup> Discussions on *dahrī* are found in two treatises from the ninth-tenth centuries, both belonging to the Shi‘i tradition.<sup>426</sup> The *Kitābat-Tawḥīd* or *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal* and *Kitāb al-Ihlīlaja* (both found in al-Majlisī’s *Bihār al-Anwār*) are designed as dialogues between Imam Ja‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq and a *dahrī* called ‘Ab al-Karīm b. Abī-‘Awjā’ (presented by Mufaḍḍal, the other dialogue is between the Imam and an Indian doctor) The *dahrī* rejected God and His design (*tadbīr*) and believed that the world came into being by chance (*bi-l-ihmāl*). Ja‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq’s proofs for the existence of God revolve around Argument from Design that is to say because the world is so perfectly shaped it cannot have been created by accident and must have a creator.<sup>427</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ gave an elaborate polemical image of *dahrīs*. He described the *dahrī* as one who denied divinity (*rubūbīyah*), found divine command and prohibition absurd, denied the possibility of

<sup>422</sup>For a general discussion see D. Gimaret “*Dahrī*” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*; I. Goldziher and A.-M. Goichon (1965), “*Dahrīyya*”, *EF*<sup>2</sup>; P. Crone, “*Dahrīs*,” in *EF*<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>423</sup> See “*Dahrīs*,” in *EF*<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>424</sup> See van Ess, *TG*<sup>4</sup>, 451.

<sup>425</sup> Abū l-Muẓaffar al-Isfārāyīnī, *At-tabṣīr fī-d-dīn wa-tamyīz al-firqa al-nājiya ‘ani l-firaq al-hālikīn*, ed. Kamāl Yusūf al-Jawt (Beirut: Ālam al-kutub, 1983), 149.

<sup>426</sup> I thank Mushegh Asatryan for bringing these texts to my attention. For the treatises, see Majlisī. *Bihār al-anwār*, (Beirut, 1983), 3:57-198

<sup>427</sup>For the history of these texts and theological issues discussed in them see, M. Asatryan, *Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: the Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-Tradition* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012), 242-296.

prophecy, believed in the eternity of the matter, and did not acknowledge the Creator and the created:

Since there is no God, there is not any religion on earth either in his [the *dahrī*] view, or in other words, he does not think that any of the many religions found on earth is true; and since it is only from the revelation that we know about rewards and punishments after death, he does not believe in them either. He is described as an outright denier, not a sceptic or agnostic.<sup>428</sup>

*Dahrī* teachings were in rivalry with monotheistic ones-*madhāhib al-dahriyya* versus *madhāhib al-muwahhīdīn*-where “*muwahhīd* was the opposite of an atheist, not of a *mushrik*.”<sup>429</sup> It was, therefore, disbelief in God that affected the cosmological and religious views of these people. God was under attack in first place. Later on, *dahrīs* were called *mulhids* who denied afterlife and claimed that people turn into nothing after death.<sup>430</sup>

The applications of terms discussed above were not used unambiguously in contemporary scholarship written especially in European languages.<sup>431</sup> Fakhry, in his study of Muslim philosophy, grouped thinkers such as an-Nazzām (d. 845), ar-Rāzī and al-Ma‘arrī together because they all “fell outside the mainstream of thought in Islam.”<sup>432</sup> They were the dissident voices of Islam, as Fakhry put it without explaining what dissidence would mean in the ninth-tenth centuries. Ibn ar-Rāwandī is termed freethinker<sup>433</sup> due to his rejection of prophecy and miracles, and for considering the world eternal, ar-Rāzī is called the greatest non-conformist in the whole history of Islam again for going against prophecy and possessing strange ideas on God. Al-Ma‘arrī is named agnostic for dismissing all the religious creeds of his day.<sup>434</sup> Fakhry’s descriptions, far from being precise, already raised

<sup>428</sup> Crone, “*Dahrīs*,” 99.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>430</sup> See “*Dahrīs*,” in *EP*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>431</sup> Note that the term “freethinking” was used for Mu‘tazilites by Heinrich Steiner in 1865 to describe the rationalist aspect of the school. See W. M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (New Brunswick/London: Aldine Transaction, 2009), 58.

<sup>432</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), xxiv.

<sup>433</sup> Also called “atheist:” see F. Niewöner, *Veritas sive Varietas: Lessings Toleranzparabel und das Buch von drei Betrügen* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1988), 238; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 124-125.

<sup>434</sup> Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 96, 97, 107.

questions regarding the terms and more importantly regarding the criteria for putting an-Nazzām (who was controversial in his discussions on free will and determinism), seen by others as a Muslim, next to ar-Rāzī, seen by others as a staunch freethinker. Not to mention, that the term “mainstream” for the period tells us nothing. The same confusion of registers appears when Ibn ar-Rāwandī is put next to ‘Amr Ibn ‘Ubayd (“rationalist” Mu‘tazilī, d. 761) by Nyberg.<sup>435</sup>

Some intriguing controversies evolved around Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s complex figure. Through different works, he contradicted himself in matters of prophecy, free will and other tenets of religion. This theologian was perceived as an arch-heretic (referred in sources *mulḥid*, *zindīq* or *dahrī*)<sup>436</sup> for rebelling against God, challenging prophecy and for believing in the eternity of the world.<sup>437</sup> The most prominent of Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s works is the lost *Kitāb az-Zumurrud* (*The Book of Emerald*) which conveyed his anti-religious thoughts. Paul Kraus has reconstructed the work through quotations by Mu‘ayyad fī-d-Dīn ash-Shirāzī, Faṭimid chief missionary, in his *Majalis Mu‘ayyadīya*, through quotes by the Mu‘tazilī al-Khayyāt in his *Kitāb al-Intiṣār: ar-Radd ‘alā Ibn ar-Rāwandī al-Mulḥid*, and by Ibn al-Jawzī in his *al-Muntaẓam fī Tarīkh al-Mulūk wa-l-Umam*. From the available fragments, Kraus reconstructed Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s work which could be summarized in three major positions: the primacy of reason over revelation, critique of Islam and denial of prophecies.<sup>438</sup> However, the difficulty with *Kitāb az-Zumurrud* is that it was composed in the form of dialogue where one of the participants appeared as a heretic and the other as a defender of religion. It has been assumed by contemporary scholars that the other participant was Abū ‘Isā al-

<sup>435</sup> The same goes for Ibn Karrām who cannot be ranked among unbelievers though he showed some hard criticism of some theological concepts, especially in matters of theodicy: see van Ess, “Ibn ar-Rēwāndī or the Making of an Image,” *Al-abḥāth* 27 (1978/79), 25; idem, *TG4*, 300; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 11.

<sup>436</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 124, 126.

<sup>437</sup> Believing in the eternity of the world gave Ibn ar-Rāwandī another epithet-Aristotelian: *ibid.*, 126.

<sup>438</sup> See P. Kraus, “Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte: Das Kitāb az-Zumurrud des Ibn al-Rāwandī,” in idem., *Alchemie, Ketzerei, Apokryphen im frühen Islam*, ed. Rémi Brague (Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 1994), 109-190. The most diligent work, surveying medieval sources on Ibn ar-Rāwandī, however, belongs to ‘Abd al-‘Amīr al-A‘ṣam: see his *Tarīkh Ibn ar-Rāwandī al-Mulḥid* (Damascus: Dār at-Takwīn, 2010). For the fragments by al-Khayyāt, ash-Shirāzī, and Ibn al-Jawzī; see *Tarīkh*, 16-40; 120-137; 153-167. Al-A‘ṣam also surveyed later and modern sources: see his *Ibn ar-Rāwandī fī-l-Marāji‘ al-‘Arabīya al-Ḥadītha* (Damascus: Dār at-Takwīn, 2010), 2 vols.

Warrāq (d.994), also known for his anti-religious thoughts. The question was who spoke for whatform in order to express his thoughts with the tongue of the other.

Van Ess did not trust the above-mentioned sources as much as Kraus did. In an extremely rich article, van Ess claimed that the notorious image of Ibn ar-Rēwāndī was constructed by his Mu'tazilite former colleagues turned into enemies, who created "the back legend" on him when he left Baghdad.<sup>439</sup> This is seen in the context of internal theological quarrels, mainly in the collision of different intellectual traditions. In Iraq he was portrayed as a heretic, yet in Iran, as a defender of Islam. It is true that Ibn ar-Rēwāndī was "aggressive and capricious" in style, eccentric and scandalous, but his provocative ideas do not always amount to unbelief as it is portrayed. For in his time, Baghdadian Mu'atzilites were far from being in agreement and internal competitions shaped a big part of their intellectual enterprises. One should not forget as well that Ibn ar-Rēwāndī did not originally belong to Baghdad (he was born in the village called Rēwand near Isfahan) and could have been perceived as an outsider. Thus al-Khayyāt, a major refuter of Ibn ar-Rēwāndī, "may have seen Ibn ar-Rēwāndī not only a foreigner but also a competitor," and wrote against Ibn ar-Rēwāndī not simply "out of indignation against heresy."<sup>440</sup> Further, van Ess's pointed out that at that time central issues such as the infallibility of the Prophet (*iṣma*) and the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz*) were yet open to discussions and not seen as final dogmas, which gave Ibn ar-Rēwāndī and many of his contemporaries liberty to speculate. That among many it was Ibn ar-Rēwāndī who was disgraced, had to do with his eccentric personality and his relation to his milieu. In contrast, non-hostile sources presented Ibn ar-Rēwāndī in the positive light regarding his religious thought. One such source is al-Māturīdī (d.944) who shows that in Samarkand, Ibn ar-Rēwāndī was not perceived

<sup>439</sup>See van Ess, "Image," 9. One argument for this is that there is no proper biography of Ibn ar-Rēwāndī in the sources, neither proper listing of his works. Van Ess criticized P. Kraus and later Stroumsa for relying too much on fragmentary sources, especially those of Khayyāt: Ibid., 17, *TG4*, 320.

<sup>440</sup>Ibid., 23.



a heretic at all.<sup>441</sup> Van Ess suggested that, in his *Kitāb az-Zumurrud*, Ibn ar-Rēwāndī defended Islam or his special interpretation of Islam, and that his aim, in general, was to cast doubt in the hearts of people without him being a skeptic.<sup>442</sup> Van Ess gave no explanation why would one try to cast doubt in people without being a skeptic himself. According to van Ess, al-Warrāq too, who was the one in the book to attack prophecies, was not really a heretic, and that this dialogue was one between two Muslims both of whom were still right.<sup>443</sup> Although it is understandable that both authors could be right in the environment where no mainstream orthodoxy was shaped, it is hard to see the reason why van Ess eliminated the option that Ibn ar-Rāwandī could have been a skeptic himself and cast doubt in others at the same time.

The question here is why Ibn ar-Rāwandī chose to defend prophecy if, in reality, he denied it. Predicting that the answer would be found in the famous thesis proposed by Leo Strauss on the technique of concealing and careful writing which would suggest that Ibn ar-Rāwandī, in order to remain safe, attributed his own ideas to al-Warrāq, Sarah Stroumsa dismissed this possibility right away. This would not be convincing since Ibn ar-Rāwandī did publish other books no less offensive to Islam. Moreover, according to al-Khayyāt, Ibn ar-Rāwandī never himself denied that he was an unbeliever (*mulhid*).<sup>444</sup> Stroumsa's conclusion is in contrast with that of van Ess: she sees here a real reflection of the relationship between the two thinkers. What happened is that Ibn ar-Rāwandī used al-Warrāq's arguments against prophecies to attack Manicheanism, the original religion of al-Warrāq which was not considered by his opponent any better than Islam.<sup>445</sup>

<sup>441</sup> This view was advanced by Rudolph Ulrich in his *al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); there is a recent translation of the book: *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarkand*, transl. by Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 46, 57; see also A'sam, *Tarikh*, 54-73.

<sup>442</sup> Van Ess, "Al-Fārābī and Ibn ar-Rēwāndī," *Hamdard Islamicus* vol. 3, no.4 (1980):5.

<sup>443</sup> Van Ess, "Image," 21. Both, van Ess and Stroumsa, assumed that al-Māturīdī relied on *Kitāb az-Zumurrud*, but later van Ess suggested that al-Māturīdī perhaps rested on a book by Ibn ar-Rāwandī written against his own *Zumurrud*. However, van Ess stayed in his position that Ibn ar-Rāwandī was not a skeptic: see van Ess, *TG* 4, 343.

<sup>444</sup> See A'sam, *Tarikh*, 23.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72. To some, van Ess's arguments remain unconvincing, and Ibn ar-Rāwandī is mostly held to be a true freethinker: see Crone, "Oral Transmission of Subversive Ideas from the Islamic World to Europe: The Case of the

According to A'sam's survey, two authors had a positive attitude towards Ibn ar-Rāwandī-ash-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.1044) and Ibn Khallikān (d.1282).<sup>446</sup> However, according to Stroumsa, both authors were aware of Ibn ar-Rāwandī's heretical views, and their favorable accounts had to do with other intentions: al-Murtaḍā favored Ibn ar-Rāwandī in order to defame Mu'tazilites (especially 'Abd al-Jabbār). As for Ibn Khallikān, his reluctance to repeat previous theologian's accusations against the heretic was because they were not of interest to him, Stroumsa suggested.<sup>447</sup> The case of Ibn ar-Rāwandī is first of all complicated because of insufficient sources. It also shows that the study of unbelief requires a complex approach, one that requires engagement with historical and intellectual contexts and milieu.

Stroumsa's use of the term "freethinking" deserves more attention since it is one of the most cited studies on the issue. She saw both Ibn ar-Rāwandī and ar-Rāzī as "full-time freethinkers" on the account of their rejection of prophecies which appeared as a consistent pattern even in fragmentary sources. Stroumsa tells us that she is aware of the shortcomings of using the term "freethinking," a term associated with European intellectual history, to describe a phenomenon in Medieval Islamic world when "even in Europe."<sup>448</sup> The term did not have a specific meaning and was applied to various movements and people, Stroumsa writes vaguely without specific references to time and place.<sup>449</sup> To avoid inaccuracy and loose applications of the term, Stroumsa limited the application of the term "freethinkers" to a narrow sense: the term was used for a type of religious criticism which denotes rejection of prophecies and Scriptures. Unlike philosophy which based its understanding of prophecy on wrong principles used by philosophers, freethinking rejected prophecy in total.

---

Three Impostors," in *Islam, and Ancient Near East*, 210; Ilkka Lindstedt, "Anti-Religious Views in the Works of Ibn ar-Rāwandī and Abū'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī," *Studia Orientalia*, vol.11 (2011):134-135.

<sup>446</sup> See A'sam, *Tarīkh*, 98-107; 191-192.

<sup>447</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinking*, 67-69.

<sup>448</sup> The use of "even" locution is not appropriate since it implies that if not in Europe, then in no other context can the term make any sense.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Stroumsa disagreed that freethinking was a form of non-conformism and eccentricity. Neither was it fair to equate skeptics with freethinkers since it would lead us having more freethinkers than there were in reality. Stroumsa suggested that the type of unbelief she looked at was purely Islamic, a part of Islamic religiosity and that at the core of this unbelief was the denial of prophecy and revelation:

Freethinking in its radical form was a typical Islamic phenomenon, a heresy whose particular character developed in response to the centrality of the concept of prophecy in Islam. The circumstances of the period probably encouraged the full-fledged manifestations of this phenomenon, but they were not the main cause of its appearance. The study of freethinking in Medieval Islam is therefore conceived here as part of the attempt to shed light on the development of the Islamic creed and its manifestations. This most radical form of disbelief is, paradoxically, an integral part of Islamic religiosity.<sup>450</sup>

Although it is useful to use terms in a precise manner, especially regarding such an entangled theme as unbelief, as Stroumsa has done, too much narrowing down might, on the other hand, lead to losing some parts of the picture. Stroumsa looked for too much consistency which might not have been there at all and shaped a kind of coherence which threatened complexities. Moreover, the freethinking she spoke of was a type of Muslim phenomenon, a heresy to be understood solely within Islam, which makes the whole study of free thought an isolated enterprise, unrelated and unconnected to the overall history of the thought, ancient or modern.

The notion of atheism falls out of Stroumsa's study. The term itself, according to Stroumsa, is totally inaccurate since these critics never implied rejection of God's existence.<sup>451</sup> It is well known that many refutations were composed against deniers of God (*mulhids* or *jāhids*) which would suggest that they did exist, and an extensive amount of *kalām* was dedicated to proof the

---

<sup>450</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 13-14. This is why the denial of the prophecy is the worst possible unbelief for al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymīyah; *ibid.*, 192.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

existence of God.<sup>452</sup> However, one does not find any specific individual reference and specific identification of atheists:

Atheists themselves always remain faceless and nameless. When a name does appear, it is always that of a person accused of some specific heretical doctrine which, the theologians say, is *as bad as* atheism or *may lead to* atheism-never of somebody the core of whose heresy is actually identified as atheism.<sup>453</sup>

Moreover, atheistic propositions were looked at from a moral point of view, and those who held them were seen as arrogant, foolish or spiritually corrupt, deliberately denying God in order to evade His commands, living as if God did not exist (applying practical atheism). They were thus called “ignorant” (*jāhil*), “fool” (*saḥīh*), “cursed” (*la’īn*), licentious (*mājin*) and so on.<sup>454</sup> Atheism then, as we saw in the case of Latin West, here too was used as a polemical and rhetorical tool on the one hand, and was seen as a spiritual problem rather than a real possibility for denying God on the other.

Deism, because it spoke of natural religion and did not accept prophecy, could be a better term to designate Muslim freethinkers, however “because many central components of deism, such as for example the belief in the goodness of divine providence, do not exist in the views of Islamic freethinkers (an exception might be al-Rāzī), “deists” do not designate an accurate portrayal either.”<sup>455</sup> In this case, Stroumsa’s study would benefit from bringing clarity to different notions of God which appear in those critiques. For if we are speaking about the God of scriptural religions, His affirmation by the thinkers Stroumsa discussed is hard to assert. Instead we have a notion of God as a physical and cosmic principle without revelation or theodicy. A more complex discussion on the notions of God would certainly provide a better picture of what atheism might have meant.

---

<sup>452</sup>One of them is al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm’s *Radd ‘alā l-Mulḥid*, which discusses proofs for the existence of the Creator. In his other two books (“The Small Book of Proof,” and “The Big Book of Proof”) al-Qāsim provided answers to those who had to encounter the heretics and unbelievers (*az-zanādiqa wa l-mulḥidīn*): *ibid.*, 4; for additional works on reputations and proofs on the existence of God, see P. Crone, “The *Dahrīs* according to al- Jāhīz,” 97, n.3 and p. 111, n.43.

<sup>453</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 123.

<sup>454</sup>*Ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

While too narrow applications of terms contain the risk of simplifying a complex picture, too wide and unspecified applications likewise contain the same risk. For instance, James Montgomery sees al-Jāhiz as a freethinker for the reason that he considered doubt, the one that does not lead to the emptiness of skepticism, as a necessary tool to reach certainty and truth. Al-Jāhiz was not a relativist for he distinguished clearly between criteria of wrong and right, neither an anti-authoritarian for he believed in God's authority vested in the caliph. Yet he was still a freethinker for not abiding by *taqlīd* without any deep scrutiny of a given issue himself and not allowing his reader to do so.<sup>456</sup> In line with Montgomery's method, Ibn Taymīya is a freethinker too, because he did not abide by *taqlīd*. Such wide applications thus weaken the analytical potentiality of the terms.

Two studies need to be distinguished due to their different and inclusive approach towards the history of 'Abbasid unbelief and due to locating it in a broader context of free thought and critique of religion. Dominique Urvoy's approach is broader since he put together thinkers such as Ibn al-Muqaffa', al-Warrāq, Ibn ar-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī, al-Ma'arrī, and some of non-Muslims such as Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq, Ḥayawayh al-Balḥī, Ramon Lull, and Ibn Kammūna, on account of an internal logic in the critique of religion by these thinkers expressed in independent critical reflections and use of reason. The "penseurs libres" were *zindīqs* whose rational treatment of religious matters allowed them to see religion objectively specifically through affirmation of the autonomy of reason and through demythologization of the sacred texts. These traits united thinkers from different religious traditions even when there was no connection between them in reality. The merit of Urvoy's method is that he put religious criticism in a broader context of critique of religion and detected treatments and patterns of criticism common across traditions.<sup>457</sup>

<sup>456</sup>J. E. Montgomery, "Jāhiz: dangerous Freethinking," in *Critical Muslim* 12, 15. In this volume, thinkers such as Ibn al-Jāhiz, Rushd, al-Ḥallaj, al-Birunī, Adonis, Mahmood Taha are grouped together as (dangerous) freethinkers because their thought "challenges, or attempts to undermine, the conventional, the orthodox, and the dominant perspectives." See Ziauddin Sardar, "The Circumference of Freethought," 5.

<sup>457</sup>See D. Urvoy, *Les Penseurs Libres dans l'Islam Classique: L'interrogation sur la religion chez les penseurs arabes indépendants* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996). Stroumsa's review of this book in *Bulletin critique des annales islamologiques*

A more recent contribution belongs to Aziz al-Azmeh who suggests the most inclusive reading of the Abbasid freethinking through locating it in universal history of humanism.<sup>458</sup> He presents the critique of all religions by Abbasid freethinkers through articulation of four major theses that might be briefly summarized as follows: 1) religion and consequently prophecy are not necessary, neither are they credible in the face of natural reason which is the ultimate source of knowledge, 2) prophets are imposters and the Books they brought lack validity, 3) religions are self-contradictory and contradict each other, 4) religions are full absurdities insulting to sound reason.<sup>459</sup> Further, Al-Azmeh distinguishes two main registers of Abbasid freethinking: one is unstructured, playful, jocular, and blasphemous, often associated with libertine poets and courtly elites. Abū Nuwās is a vivid representative of this type. This register, despite its playfulness, offered a generally fatalistic and pessimistic turn, sustained by an urbane skepticism of sophisticated impious temperaments tending towards humanism, set against the *‘ulamā’*, the representative of officious religiosity, with derision and satire.<sup>460</sup>

The enunciations and details of these points will be discussed in the pertinent parts of this thesis. For now, it will suffice to highlight is that these motifs, as al-Azmeh asserts, bear much continuity not only with antique thinkers such as Euhemerus, Lucretius, Cicero and with critiques of Christianity by Porphyry, Celsus, and emperor Julian, but also surface in European history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in connection with deism, atheism, and the Radical Enlightenment. Freethinking history thus witnesses three chief moments in the crystallization of its motifs and moods-the pagan antiquity, Abbasid period (especially 9-11<sup>th</sup> cc.) and the European Age

---

14 (1998): 97-100: her major criticism is that independent thinking, criticism against Scriptures, and skepticism do not mean freethinking, and it is not clear why for example al-Farābī and Maimonides are not included in the group of thinkers Urvoy examines.

<sup>458</sup> See Al-Azmeh, Aziz, “Freidenkertum und Humanismus: Stimmungen, Motive und Themen in Zeitalter der Abbasiden (8-13jh.),” in *Vielfalt statt Reformation: Humanistische Beiträge zum Dialog der Weltanschauungen*, ed. Ralf Schöppner. Alibri: Auflage, 2017), 234-255: see also idem, “Abbasid Culture and the Universal History of Freethinking Humanism,” *Critical Muslim* 12 (2014): 73-88.

<sup>459</sup> Al-Azmeh, “Freidenkertum und Humanismus,” 250-54.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 246-247.

of Reason and early Enlightenment. In addition to this, it needs to be emphasized that while freethinking in Europe was mostly directed towards Christianity, the Abbasid one targeted all the three religions in general, producing thus more cosmopolitan critique of religion than Europeans did at that period.

One manifestation of that universal critique is the enigmatic treatise *De Tribus Impostoribus*,<sup>461</sup> the intriguing clandestine work which claims that the three prophets-Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad were tricksters and impostors. It has been long held that the origins of the treatise might have come from Arabic sources.<sup>462</sup> The theme of transmission of the anti-prophetic motifs is not new and recently has been given more considerations although so far with no significant results.<sup>463</sup> Whatever the sources might be, they reached Europe through oral transmission, P. Crone suggested in her latest study.<sup>464</sup> She did not exclude that these were Isma‘ilī anti-prophetic formulations (or the way Sunni sources presented them) that reached Europe, an old view proposed by Massignon,<sup>465</sup> but suggested that there could be more ways for the transmission of anti-prophetic ideas, and that thesis of the three imposters

actually reflects the sentiments of Ibn al-Rāwandī, al-Sarakhsī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and other radical philosophers better than those of the Ismā‘īlīs, who must have borrowed it from such philosophers, wittingly or unwittingly not because they hated the prophets, but on the contrary because they loved them too much: they had to vilify and throw dirt at them in order to enable themselves to part with them for the sake of the new world, and what the radical philosophers offered was a ready-made language with which to do it.<sup>466</sup>

<sup>461</sup> The literature on this mysterious work is vast, to mention two important ones: Berti, F. Charles-Daubert, R. H. Popkin, eds., *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early Eighteenth Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des trois Imposteurs* (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996); Georges Minois, *The Atheist's Bible: The Most Dangerous Book That Never Existed* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>462</sup> E. Renan, *Averroès et l'averroïsme* (Paris, Lévy Press, 1852), 290ff; Louis Massignon made connection to Qarmaṭīs: see his “La légende *De tribus impostoribus* et ses origines islamiques,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 82 (1920): 74-78; Minois, *The Atheist's Bible*, 25-30.

<sup>463</sup> There was a series of workshops on “Islamic Freethinking and Western Radicalism” held at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton initiated by Patricia Crone and Jonathan Israel in 2008. Some results of the workshop were published. See, for instance, Martin Mulsow, “Socinianism, Islam, and the Radical Uses of Arabic Scholarship,” *al-Qantara XXXI* 2 (2010): 549-586; P. Crone, “Oral Transmission of Subversive Ideas from the Islamic World to Europe: The Case of the Three Impostors,” in *Islam in the Ancient Near East*, 200-238.

<https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2008/freethinking-and-radicalism> (accessed: 15 January, 2017).

<sup>464</sup> See Crone, “Oral Transmission,” 200-239.

<sup>465</sup> L. Massignon, “La légende,” 83.

<sup>466</sup> Crone, “Post-Colonialism in the Tenth Century Islam,” *Der Islam* 83 (2006):32. See also, F. Niewöner, *Veritas*, 205-404.

What deserves to be emphasized here is the idea of *three* imposters. Unlike Christians, Muslims venerated all three prophets, and in the case of rejection, all three would be dismissed as wrong-doers.<sup>467</sup> Giving a way to the notion of the continuity between ‘Abbasid freethinking and modern European ideas rooted in antique and late antique traditions will only enrich the interpretative tools of this particular history without ignoring details of specific historical context.

One last observation is due at this point. The term “freethinking” does encounter resistance when it is used for Muslim/Arab contexts. In line with the strong academic habit that the idea is only applicable to the European history, I was occasionally enjoined at my presentations to drop the term and to talk about all these things, motifs, arguments, anti-religious theses, without referring to them as freethinking. The resistance revolved around the assertion that the term immediately invoked associations with the European history and that in Arabic the term does not even exist. Another argument I was offered, was that while in European history freethinking, as an age, has been followed by paradigmatic changes, the same did not happen in the Islamic history.

It is true that we do not find in Arabic sources the exact linguistic equivalent of freethinking (in modern times, *mufakkir ḥurr* is used for a freethinker) but it does not mean that we do not find equivalent notions, concepts, motifs, and moods, as the foregoing discussion showed. In both histories, we find protagonists who thought apart and who produced notions of critique which could be assembled in a shared body of ideas without ignoring diversity and variety of forms. As for the other argument, that these critics in Islam were marginal and did not paradigmatically change and inform the subsequent periods, is not enough a good reason to dismiss a whole chapter of history whose contributions went beyond the boundaries of Arab-Muslim contexts as we have already discussed. In any case, it is important to emphasize that in both European and ‘Abbasid contexts,

---

<sup>467</sup>D. Weltecke, *Der Narr Spricht*, 143; Crone, “Oral Transmissions,” 227.



freethinking has various forms and might vary from one thinker to another, which becomes obvious when we juxtapose al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking with Rāzī’s or Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s, for instance.

### 3.3. Modern Readings of Belief and Unbelief in *Luzūm*

In fact, al-Ma‘arrī’s name found a place in the attempts to detect the itineraries of the famous *Book of the Three Imposters* already mentioned above. We find citations from *Luzūm* in Renan’s *Averroès et l’averroïsme* when he talks about the possible Arabic origin’s of the treatise on the three impostors:

Hanifs erred, Christians are misguided,  
Jews are puzzled, and Mazdeans go astray.

ḥafatī l-Hanīfatu wa-n-Naṣārā mā ihtadat  
wa-l-Yahūdu ḥārat wa-l-Majūsu muḍalla (Lz2.201.5-6)

Moses preached and disappeared, and then Jesus rose,  
then came Muḥammad with five prayers.  
And it was said that another religion will come,  
and people perished between yesterday and tomorrow.

da‘ā Mūsā fa-zāla wa-qāma ‘Īsā

wa-jā’a Muḥammadun bi-ṣalātin khamsin  
wa-qīla yajī’u dīnun ghayru ḥādhā  
wa-awdā n-nāsu bayna ghadin wa-amsin. (Lz2.36.5-6)<sup>468</sup>

In an article published in 1950, August Fischer suggested that there were similar motifs in al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm* and in *De Tribus Impostoribus*. Motifs, possibly, traveled to Southern Italy and found their way to Andalusia through lively intellectual and trade connections, since *Luzūm* and al-Ma‘arrī were popular in their time and could “enter many eyes and ears.”<sup>469</sup> Fischer cited a few verses from *Luzūm* to illustrate his point, including the ones found in Renan’s book:

Religion, unbelief, and stories are told

<sup>468</sup>Renan, *Averroès*, 293. Verese are in French.

<sup>469</sup>See A. Fischer, “Abu l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī und das Buch “De tribus impostoribus.” *Die Welt des Orients* (1950):416-420.

The Qur'an, the Torah, and the Gospels are written down.  
In every generation there are falsehoods considered religion,  
was any of them at all distinguished by the true path?

dīnun wa-kufrun wa-anbā'un tuqaṣṣu wa-furqānun  
yunaṣṣu wa-Tawrātun wa-Injīlu  
fī-kulli jīlin abāṭīlun yudānu bi-hā  
fa-hal tafarrada yawman bi-l-hudājīlu. (Lz2. 177. 7-11)

Do not be hostile to me,  
for I consider your Jesus the equal of Muḥammad,  
will the morning light save the observer of the twilight  
or are we all in the eternal darkness?

lā tabda'ūnī bi-'adāwati minkumū  
fa-Masīḥukum 'indi nazīru Muḥammadi  
a-yughīthu ḍaw'u ṣ-ṣubḥi nāzira madlajin  
am naḥnu ajma'u fī ḡalāmin sarmadī? (Lz1. 295.1-2)<sup>470</sup>

The similarities of the views on prophets expressed in these verses and in the treatise on the three impostors, Frischer thought, was hardly coincidental. Crone, too, did not exclude the effects of al-Ma'arrī's verses in this regard, suggesting that anti-prophetic ideas such as the following, could have reached the court of Frederick II:

Some people say your God did not send  
to mankind either Jesus or Moses,  
but they only made for people means of leaving  
and made a law to deceit them all.

qālat ma'āshiru lam yab'ath ilāhukumu  
ilā l-barīyati 'Isāhā wa-lā Mūsā,  
wa-innamā ja'alū r-raḥmāna ma'kalatan  
wa-ṣayyarū dīnahum li-l-mulki nāmūsā. (Lz2.22.12-13)<sup>471</sup>

It is hard to push the idea of this transmission beyond hypothesis, but given the memorable, short and terse nature of *Luzūm*'s verses, the thesis is a plausible one. In addition, Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān was always an important crossroad and economic center. It was a point of exchange between

<sup>470</sup>Ibid., 417-418.

<sup>471</sup>Crone, "Oral Transmissions," 226; Nicholson, "Meditations," 171. Lacey, "Man and Society," 166; see also F. Niewöner, *Veritas*, 267.

mountains and plain, it had close trade connections with Damascus and cities in Egypt,<sup>472</sup> and a road passed through it which linked Ḥamat with Antakia. Certainly, for motifs to travel, short poems would be a more convenient medium than sophisticated treatises. While Fischer's suggestions that ideas of *Luzūm* could have traveled through trade routines is a plausible one, more credible is the assumption that al-Ma'arrī's ideas reached to Andalus through the network of his students.

Al-Ma'arrī's name was circulated in some intellectual venues of eighteenth-century Europe. In 1748, during his class about classical Islamic culture in Leipzig, Johan Jacob Reiske, a German scholar and physician, spoke of religious criticism in Islam in the following way:

Just as certain freethinkers among us, who have dared to attack the unprotected flank of religion, there were a certain Ma'arrī and a certain Ibn ar-Rāwandī among the Arabs, whom it pleased to mock all kinds of sects and to tear them apart, by saying that there was no sound basis save in pure reason.<sup>473</sup>

More than a century later, in 1875, al-Ma'arrī reappeared in the European scholarship as a freethinker in an article by Austrian scholar von Kremer. He, translating a few verses into German, spoke of the free-thought, skepticism, anti-superstitious views of the poet.<sup>474</sup> This article was only an introduction to the bigger and detailed work on al-Ma'arrī that would be published later von Kremer. Meanwhile, in the same year, following von Kremer, Ignaz Goldziher published an article on al-Ma'arrī the freethinker (*Freidenker*). Goldziher quoted two epigrams, one of which is widely quoted by many until nowadays to show that al-Ma'arri did not take any religion seriously. Yet the verses belong to the group of many others which are not found either in *Saqṭ az-Zand* or in *Luzūm*. It reads as follows:

There is a squabble in Jerusalem  
between the Muslim and the Christian:  
one beats his bell, the other one is loud with his muezzin.  
Each one testifies for his religion,

<sup>472</sup> Ibn Baṭūṭa, for instance, mentions that the town's fig and pistachio was exported to Shām and Miṣr: his *Kitāb Riḥlat* 84.

<sup>473</sup> Cited in M. Mulsow, "Socinianism," 550. These names though are not found in the standard works of the time on Islam, such as Hottinger's *Historia Orientalis* (1651) or Bayle's works which describe *zindīqs*, see n. 44.

<sup>474</sup> A. von Kremer, "Ein Freidenker des Islam," *ZDMG* 29 (1875):304-312.

but can I know which is the right one?

fī l-Qudsi qāmat ǧajjatun  
mā bayna Aḥmada wa- l-Masīḥ  
hādhā bi-nāqūsin yarni  
wa-dhā bi-ādhinin yaṣīḥ.  
kullun yushahhidu dīnahu  
yā layta shi'ri mā ṣaḥīḥ.<sup>475</sup>

The second epigram, quoted by Goldziher,<sup>476</sup> was already mentioned above with regard to al-Ma'arrī's reputation of unbeliever. These verses were quoted in order to show that al-Ma'arrī questioned the rules of Islamic jurisprudence and found it absurd to impose a cutting off a hand as a punishment for stealing a quarter dinar (Lz1. 386.3-4). Some claimed that, because of these verses, al-Ma'arrī had won an "unorthodox" reputation since Middle Ages. Goldziher suggested that al-Mutanabbī had a specific influence on al-Ma'arrī in particular, because they both were accused of imitating the Qur'ān.

In 1888, von Kremer published a book<sup>477</sup> on the philosophical and religious aspects of al-Ma'arrī's thought which remained a fundamental study for the few others which came afterwards. In this work, von Kremer nicely summarized *Luzūm*'s content and also provided valuable translations. He introduced major topics of *Luzūm* such as religious philosophy, pessimism and asceticism, outlined questions that al-Ma'arrī asked about death and immortality, belief and unbelief, God and the world, about humans and their passions, free will and predestination, as well as many questions related to society such as family, marriage, parenthood, and slavery.<sup>478</sup> In von Kremer's words, al-Ma'arrī was a true freethinker and moralist, and genuinely humanist, significantly ahead of his time.

<sup>475</sup>Goldziher mentions that a certain Damascene Mustāfa Efendi Sbā'ī dictated these verses to him, which he himself did not find in *Saqt az-Zand*, and was not sure if the verses were found in other collections. See I. Goldziher, "Abū-l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī als Freidenker," *ZDMG* 29 (1875):637-38. There are discrepancies in almost all citations of these verses; it is often *Lādhīqīya* instead of *Quds*, or *yu'aẓimu* instead of *yushayyidu*. This shows once again that a proper examination of the manuscript history of the *diwāns* by al-Ma'arrī needs to be undertaken. For the undetected verses in the collections see 'Abd al-'Azīz ar-Rājkūtī, *al-Ma'arrī wā-mā ilayhi* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a as-salafīya, 1926).

<sup>476</sup>Goldziher, "Abū-l-'Alā," 639.

<sup>477</sup>Before that von Kremer spoke of al-Ma'arrī and his views in his seminal work *Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1877), 379-395.

<sup>478</sup>See A. von Kremer, *Über die philosophischen Gedichte des Abul'alā Ma'arrī: eine culturgeschichtliche Studie* (Wien: Tempsky, 1889).

al-Ma‘arrī advanced a humanist character that are thought to be one of the most beautiful achievements in modern European culture and Christian civilization.<sup>479</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking, von Kremer thought, lay in his denial of revelation and the afterlife, two fundamental doctrines whose rejection lead to the rejection of the entire religion. The most general anti-religious idea was that religion was seen as a human fabrication.

Von Kremer was the first to pay attention to the unconventional, contradictory, and inconsistent nature of *Luzūm* and perhaps the first to introduce an explanation meant to be a long-persistent one within the later scholarship. Von Kremer detected many passages with “orthodox” verses and in open contradiction to others. Those related to God resemble the religious enunciations of a firm believer.<sup>480</sup> Von Kremer insisted that the religiously inclined verses should not be given much weight, for al-Ma‘arrī, more often than not, appeared as a heretic rather than a believer. As to the question as to why *Luzūm* contained “orthodox” verses, von Kremer answered:

Ich habe die Überzeugung gewonnen, dass ein grosser Theil der bei Abul’ala vorkommenden echt mohammedanisch gefärbten Redensarten und Bilder solchen Ursprunges ist. Aber der andere Theil scheint mir nicht ohne Absicht entstanden. Es sollte offenbar das viele Ketzerische, welches in seinen Gedichten vorkommt, aufgewogen werden durch fromme Brocken, die den Orthodoxen den Angriff gegen den Verfasser zu erschweren bestimmt waren oder sie ganz irre führen sollten.<sup>481</sup>

Similar to theological lies evoked above, the contradictions were meant to conceal irreligion in order to avoid persecution or, in the best case, religious or pious articulations were the result of habit and did not bear essential meaning. Al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking would be valid only if we disregard the pious and “orthodox” verses from the text. Von Kremer’s interpretation became compelling to many.

In 1889, al-Ma‘arrī’s name appeared in the *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* by Joseph Mazzini Wheeler. Abū l-‘Alā’ was presented as a celebrated Arabian poet whose “free

---

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 12.

opinions gave much scandal to devout Moslems.” The poet, as the entry goes, “took no pain to conceal that he believed in no revealed religion”<sup>482</sup> much unlike what von Kremer thought of concealing and disguise.<sup>483</sup>

Reynold Nicholson brought the next important contribution. He separately discussed the themes of life and death, human society, asceticism, philosophy, and religion, often accompanied with insightful and helpful propositions. Nicholson’s work is especially important since it provided translations of considerable number of poems and verses (with old-fashioned English though). Nicholson wrote:

What gives al-Ma‘arrī importance in the history of Moslem thought is his critical attitude, his assertion of the rights of reason against the claim of custom, tradition, and authority, and his appeal from the code of religion to the unwritten law of justice and conscience: in a word, his rationalism. He is a free-thinker at heart.<sup>484</sup>

This is a fairly solid summary. However, Nicholson, too, in order to secure freethinking for al-Ma‘arrī, sought to explain away the contradiction under the name of persecution explaining that “history shows that many freethinkers, not daring to express their thoughts freely, have sheltered themselves behind a religion in which they disbelieved. Such was Euripides, and such was Ma‘arrī.”<sup>485</sup> Nicholson then asked in a straightforward manner: “If the author was a Moslem, why should he have written so equivocally and yet significantly? If he was not a Moslem but wished to pass for one, it is easy to understand both the orthodox expression and his peculiar method insinuating disbelief.”<sup>486</sup> The question by Nicholson whether al-Ma‘arrī was a Muslim or not is one which requires either “yes or no” does no justice either to the complex texture of *Luzūm* or al-Ma‘arrī’s intricate figure itself. Further, discussing al-Ma‘arrī’s ideas on the eternity of time, where

<sup>482</sup>J. M. Wheeler, *The Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of all ages and Nations* (London: Progressive Publishing Company, 1988), 8. The dictionary, one must note, presents wide notions of freethinking: caliph al-Ma‘mūn, for example, is also considered a freethinker since he gave rise to the translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic.

<sup>483</sup> There are some early works naming al-Ma‘arrī a freethinker: see M. Saleh, “Abū l-‘Ālā al-Ma‘arrī: bibliographie critique,” Part II, *Bulletin d’Études orientales* xxii (1969):206, 219, 223.

<sup>484</sup>R. A. Nicholson, “Meditations,” 142.

<sup>485</sup>*Ibid.*, 146-147.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

he accepted it in one passage and rejected it in another, Nicholson wrote: “It appears to me difficult to explain these and similar contradictions, which occur regularly when his orthodoxy is at stake, except by supposing that he *means* to contradict himself and that his real or predominant view is the one which a writer accused of infidelity would be anxious to disown.”<sup>487</sup> Nicholson then described *taqīya* (dissimulation) as a common practice by freethinkers: “Religious dissimulation is well understood by Moslems: almost every *zindīq* (freethinker) employed it in self-defense, and it was cultivated as a fine art.”<sup>488</sup> Paradoxically enough, Nicholson continued: “As it was, he ran no great risk. The Fatimids were indulgent, and the Mirdasids indifferent, to religious skepticism, which indeed found plenty of support both amongst the learned classes and men of world.”<sup>489</sup> With this statement, Nicholson himself shook the grounds of his own theory on *taqīya*, and dissimulative writing.

The theory of *taqīya* found supporters among Arab scholars too, becoming a standard part of any discourse on the poet’s freethinking. To begin with, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn had firmly upheld the theory, affirming that al-Ma‘arrī had to limit his critical expressions, and therefore had applied a practice that is well followed by Shi‘is. The poet, Ḥusayn wrote, at times denied revelation and accepted it another time, spoke for predestination and then against it elsewhere, often ridiculed religion and urged belief as well. All these ambiguities, Ḥusayn stated forcefully, were intentional. Since it is clear that the poet had concealed, dressed and mystified his ideas often through metaphors, Ḥusayn suggested that one should, on the one hand, use logical reasoning to comprehend his philosophical ideas, and psychology, on the other hand, to understand his spirit. As for the open contradictions in the text, they might be explained away through simply overlooking the pious utterances.<sup>490</sup>

---

<sup>487</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>490</sup> See Ṭ Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd*, 243-245.

‘Umar Farrūkh, too, thought that al-Ma‘arrī found shelter in *taqīya*. According to Farrūkh, being explicit about his belief would harm Abū’l-’Alā, therefore he found escape either in concealment or in complex structures, metaphors, and innuendos.<sup>491</sup> That was, as Farrūkh further tried to argue but without any specification, a usual practice among many thinkers both in the East and West, since their sincerity had often caused them trouble.<sup>492</sup> In general, Farrūkh himself was contradictory too: in the same book under the subtitle “A kāna al-Ma‘arrī zindīqan am taqīyan?” he firmly concluded that the poet was a truly pious person who only denied some formal obligations (*furūd shaklīyah*) of his religion.<sup>493</sup> In this case, one asks, why *taqīyah* and the need for self-defense?

K. Lacey, whose dissertation on the *Luzūm* might be considered so far the closest and the most thorough reading of the work, referring to von Kremer, Nicholson, and Ḥusayn, affirmed the concealing and hiding strategy applied in *Luzūm*. Assuming that the poet meant both Islamic and anti-Islamic expressions, Lacey thought, would make *Luzūm* insignificant and totally incomprehensible. Moreover, it would mean that the poet was confused all his life and never came to a conclusion. Why, Lacey asked, would the poet express many anti-Islamic views if he really meant and seriously believed his Muslim views? It was only for the purpose of hiding his unbelief. It is suggested therefore that al-Ma‘arrī’s anti-Islamic views ought to be considered and the rest needs to be dismissed.<sup>494</sup> Lacey referred to Leo Strauss’s *Persecution and the Art of Writing* in order to explain away the contradictions:

Like other thinkers of the medieval Islamic community who sought to express their ideas on doctrines of fundamental importance to that community, al-Ma‘arrī had to write faced with a threat of persecution. He had to conduct his inquiry into the nature of things, his search for the truth, knowing that if the truth as he saw it contradicted or called into question the truth as interpreted by the religious orthodoxy—which being based on divine revelation was to be taken as *the truth* and dictated the beliefs,

<sup>491</sup> See U. Farrūkh, *Ḥakīm al-Ma‘arra* (Beirut: Dār al-Lubnān lī’l-Ṭibā‘awa’l-Nashr, 1986), 81.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>494</sup> See R.K. Lacey, *Man and Society*, 48-50.



values, institutions, and behavior of his community-then he ran the risk of being censored, ostracized, or condemned as heretic and put to death. ...We ought to assume that in general al-Ma‘arrī sincerely intended to mean and seriously hoped to espouse the ideas that are inconsistent with or alien to orthodox Islam; that the ideas to the contrary and Lz’s aura of orthodox religiosity in general were advanced primarily to mislead, confuse, and thereby fend off his co-religionist critics; and that Lz as a whole was meant to be esoterism?.<sup>495</sup>

With this, Lacey added another problematic concept next to “orthodoxy” and “persecution”, that is esotericism in order to avoid the term *taqīyah* which has a strong connotation of a Shi‘i teaching. He then illustrated his point with the following examples: “If you were to lay bare what I am concealing about things you would never call me by name (*law kashafta mā anā muḍmirun minā l-amri mā sammaytanī abadan bi-smī* (i.e. Aḥmad, laudable) (Lz2.293.8)); or “Whenever you speak the truth they throw stones at you angrily” (*matā ṣadaqtafa-hum ghiḍābun rujjamū* (Lz2.270.7)) or “You should not inform cunning people of the true essence of your faith; if you do, you are rushing into peril” ( *lā tukhbiranna bi-kunhi dīnika ma‘sharan shuṭuran wa-in taf‘al fa-anta mugharrir*(Lz1.326.14)) or “I am cautious with people because if I were to uncover what lies in secrecy it would put me to shame (*ujāmīlu n-nāsa wa-law innanī kashaftu mā fī s-sirri akhzānī* (Lz2.270.1)).<sup>496</sup>These quotations would be appropriate ones to argue for the theory of esotericism and *taqīya*, had they not triggered the question as to why someone who by all manners endeavored to conceal his ideas, was so open and candid about the ways of his concealment. And another question relates to the criteria one applies in taking these verses seriously and many others non-seriously. Lacey, on the other hand, did not mean that al-Ma‘arrī would have said things differently had he lived under more favorable social-historical circumstances for free thought, and that every troublesome feature was deliberately and carefully chosen for the sake of esotericism. Lacey, however, was apt in asserting the following in relation to the anti-Islamic sentiments in *Luzūm*:

<sup>495</sup>Ibid.,50; see note 46 on page 72 with references to Muhsin Mahdi and Leo Strauss’s *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.,56-57

...the main question this and all future critical studies of *Luzūm* need address is not whether al-Ma‘arrī really meant his anti-Islamic and generally non-conformist ideas, but what they were exactly, how unorthodox they might actually be, what pattern of thought emerges from them as a whole, and how we might characterize them beyond simply saying they are unorthodox, anti-Islamic, or non-conformist, which really tells us very little.<sup>497</sup>

Dominique Urvoy is perhaps the only one who looked at al-Ma‘arrī’s thought without these limiting presumptions of hiding and concealing. In his brief account on Abū’ l-‘Alā’, Urvoy concluded that the poet, while rejecting atheism and attacking all religions, declaring and denying the eternity of the matter, asserting and rejecting determinism, never did attempt to find a middle way out of all. What we see is a constant wavering from one side to another without any categorical orientations. Each expression stands valid by itself. What mattered for al-Ma‘arrī was the perfection in the unity of form.<sup>498</sup> Had Urvoy elaborated these points, we might have had by now a more complex account on al-Ma‘arrī’s thought in general.<sup>499</sup>

Scholars on the opposite side portrayed al-Ma‘arrī in a totally different light. In their reconstructions, al-Ma‘arrī appears as a Sunni believer. Salīm al-Jundī, himself from Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān and indeed a dedicated scholar of his compatriot, found all the narratives where al-Ma‘arrī appears as an unbeliever groundless. Moreover, al-Ma‘arrī’s reputation of unbeliever was built by some people jealous of him (*ḥasad*), a common motif for almost all those who tried to clean off al-Ma‘arrī the stain of unbelief, going back to Ibn al-Adīm as we shall see.<sup>500</sup> Instead, al-Jundī

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>498</sup> D. Urvoy, *Penseurs Libres*, 176. See also a similar remark in *Les Impératifs*, 197.

<sup>499</sup> There were some efforts to provide an alternative understanding of the incoherence: Amīn al-Khūlī, for example, tried to establish a connection between psychological state of al-Ma‘arrī and his incoherence, which, according to al-Khūlī, related not only matters of faith and belief but all the aspects of his life. Al-Ma‘arrī’s inconsistent mind might do with his blindness, suffering, and aspirations. The poet’s incoherence thus was a psychological matter. Al-Khūlī’s approach was hardly substantial but he was right to assert that al-Ma‘arrī’s blasphemous expressions, regardless of his pious ones, would be sufficient for anyone wanting to consider them valid and use them for persecution: see A. Al-Khūlī, *Ray’ fī Abī al-‘Alā* (Cairo: Jamā‘at al-Kitāb, 1945), 92-93; 149-157. That last point was made also by H. Laoust: “On ne voit pas pourquoi Abū-l-‘Alā etc éprouve le besoin d’y recourir, quand il use ailleurs de signés des audaces de langage.” See H. Laoust, “Vie et Philosophie,” 143. ‘Abdallah ‘Alāyilī, although criticized the notion of *taqīya* and underscored the meaning of contradictions, he attributed to much *bāṭinī* nature to *Luzūm*: see ‘Abdallah ‘Alāyilī, *Al-Ma‘arrī dhalika l-Majhūl* (Beirut: al-Ahliyat li-n-Nashr wa-t-Tawzi‘, 1981), 48-55.

<sup>500</sup> Ar-Rājkūfī, *al-Ma‘arrī*, 207-208; al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 382, 386; A. Abd ar-Raḥman, *Ma‘ Abī l-‘Alā*, 262.

emphasized that al-Ma‘arrī unambiguously believed in God and that his piety was expressed in prayers and fast.<sup>501</sup> Al-Jundī relied to a great extent on value judgments qualifying al-Ma‘arrī with sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*) and courage (*jur’a*).<sup>502</sup> Al-Jundī denied *taqīyah* through quoting verses from *Luzūm* where al-Ma‘arrī has bold criticism for the rulers thus showing his courage and frankness in speech such as: “Satans with authority have been ruling people, in every city there is a devil among rulers (*sāsa l-ānāma shayāṭīnūn musallaṭatun fī kullī miṣra minā l-wālīna shayṭānū* (Lz2.335.8-9)). These verses showed the “sincerity” of the poet, as al-Jundī put it, implying that al-Ma‘arrī’s frankness would not allow him hypocrisy.<sup>503</sup>

Similar reading is noted in the studies of ‘Āisha ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān who greatly focuses on al-Ma‘arrī’s piety, prayers, fasting and belief in God and avoids discussing such poems and verses which could speak for al-Ma‘arrī’s unbelief.<sup>504</sup> For Aḥmad Taymūr all the assumptions that al-Ma‘arrī did not believe in God (Taymūr puts it vaguely without explaining what is meant by denial) are misinterpretations and exaggerations. He instead tries to prove the opposite by lengthy citations of verses from *Luzūm* with praises of God. The same relates to the denial of prophecies.<sup>505</sup>

There were others who claimed *Luzūm* contained verses sufficient to prove al-Ma‘arrī’s sincere “orthodox” faith.<sup>506</sup> Al-Mallūḥī excerpted from *Luzūm* exclusively those verses which express piety, trust, and belief in God.<sup>507</sup> Kamāl Yāzījī concluded in the end of his study that al-Ma‘arrī, after-all, preferred Islam among other religions. This is because Yāzījī could rely on the following verse:

Is it the religion of Islam that the rejecter denies?  
Yet your God’s will formed it and brought it [to us]

<sup>501</sup> Al-Jundī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 362, 373.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 371, 385, and especially, 416-429.

<sup>503</sup> al-Jundī, “Dīn Abī’l-‘Alā,” in *Mihrajān*, 287.

<sup>504</sup> ‘A. Abd ar-Raḥman, *Ma‘ Abī’l-‘Alā’*, 265, *passim*.

<sup>505</sup> A. Taymūr, *Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookstore, 1970), 168 ff, 186ff.

<sup>506</sup> Sa‘īd ash-Shartūnī, “Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” *al-Mashriq* 23 (1901), cited in Saleh, “Bibliographie critique,” 204. For similar readings see summaries by Saleh on pages 239, 271.

<sup>507</sup> ‘Abd al-Muī’n al-Mallūḥī, *Difā‘ ‘an Abī’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī* (Mu’assasat ar-Risāla: Beirut, 1994).

a fa-millatu l-islāmi yunkiruhu munkirun  
wa-qaḍā'u rabbika ṣāghahā wa-atā bi-hā. (Lz1.141. 12-13)<sup>508</sup>

All the scholarly studies mentioned above, in order to prove either unbelief and freethinking or belief and orthodoxy, subjected *Luzūm* to reductive readings accompanied by dismissive and apologetic efforts. The following discussion aims to introduce correctives in the reading of *Luzūm* through hermeneutics of ambivalence and polemics.

### 3.4. Revisiting *Luzūm* in the Light of Ambivalence and Polemics

Straussian hermeneutics<sup>509</sup> and the notions of esotericism assume that a text is built upon certain writing strategies. Contradiction and dispersal are the most important features of any esoteric text. Let us start with the method of contradiction. According to Strauss, one of the most popular methods for producing an esoteric text is to speak of the same subject in a contradictory manner on pages apart from each other. It is like saying that  $a=b$  on page 15 and that  $a \neq b$  on page 379.<sup>510</sup> With the contradiction method, one states the dangerous idea whole and then negates it by stating the opposite on pages apart.

*Luzūm* does contain contradiction arranged in the way described by Strauss. For instance, there are verses which convey the idea that it is an ignorant and corrupt thinking to claim that prophets are false in Lz2, on page 16. Then, four pages apart, there is a short poem where al-Ma'arrī associates prophets with deceivers and announces their laws as false in Lz2, on page 20.

---

<sup>508</sup> See al-Yāzījī, *Abū 'l-'Alā' wa-Luzūmīyātuhu* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988), 549.

<sup>509</sup> There have already been a few critical studies examining Straussian hermeneutics of Islamic Philosophy: see especially Georges Tamer, *Islamische Philosophie und die Krise der Moderne: Das Verhältnis von Leo Strauss zu Alfarabi, Avicenna und Averroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); James Montgomery, "Leo Strauss and the Alethiometer," in *Renaissance Averroism and its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anna Akasoy and Guido Guglioni, (Springer: NY/Heidelberg), 285-320; Dimitri Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no.1 (2002):5-25; Rémi Brague, "Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca: Leo Strauss's "Muslim" Understanding of Greek Philosophy," *Poetics Today*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1998):235-25; Oliver Leaman, "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *IJMES*, vol. 12, no.4 (1980):525-538.

<sup>510</sup> See L. Strauss, "The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 70.

Contradictory statements appear especially regarding the notion of God. For instance, al-Ma‘arrī states that God could not improve people in *Lz1*, page 110. On pages apart, in *Lz1*, one page 296, he presents God as omnipotent. In the next chapter, there will be a larger exposition of such opposite statement distributed in this fashion throughout *Luzūm* related to other themes as well.

As for dispersal, it means that one divides an idea and presents its parts in different places, so that the whole idea is present in the text but in a dispersed and dismembered manner.<sup>511</sup> In order to demonstrate a deliberate allocation of parts of an idea, one needs to identify a systematic idea or a view in the text. Al-Ma‘arrī dispersed verses on God throughout *Luzūm*, but it is hardly possible to claim that he had a systematic view of the notion of God, as I will show below. When we look at the scattered verses on God, we reconstruct different and contradictory portraits and notions of God, and do not arrive at a systematic view on God. Unlike Maimonides’s *Guide*, to which Strauss refers, *Luzūm* is not about a teaching, neither does it have an argumentative discourse which aims at reaching formal conclusions.

Despite the possible temptation to see contradictions or dispersal as parts of esoteric design, as blunders for hiding or as tricks for the reader, this would be hardly justified in the case of *Luzūm*. Some reasons have to do with genre and circulation. *Luzūm*, as a collection of mainly short poems in epigrammatic nature would be circulated among large audiences not as a whole but rather as fragments and pieces. (As a whole it worked only for literary and didactic purposes to instruct students on matter of versification and prosody). It would be circulated in a piecemeal manner through such separate units as a quatrain or a short poem which would be identified more with the author than with the work. Thus the opposing discourses would always operate separately and in parallel. No part would cover the other one, and each would stand as one and complete. It would depend on the reader which of the opposite discourses to extract and validate.

<sup>511</sup> See, for instance, Ralf Lerner, “Dispersal by Design: the Author’s Choice,” *Reason, Faith, and Politics: Essays in Honor of Werner J. Dannhauser*, ed. Arthur Melzer and Robert Kraynak (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 29–41,

This, in fact, has been the readership practice going back to al-Ma‘arrī’s life-time and what came after, as we shall see in the last chapter. If someone wanted to prove that al-Ma‘arrī was an unbeliever or at least unorthodox, he relied on the anti-religious verses in *Luzūm*. This was Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d.1201) way for whom al-Ma‘arrī was but an unbeliever. Things stood differently for Ibn al-Adīm (d.1262) who wanted to see in al-Ma‘arrī a pious learned man. Contradictions, therefore, established opposite discourses which, extracted from one literary body, operated separately and independently. At this point, it needs to be emphasized that even though parts of *Luzūm* were limited to a small audience due to baroque and complex language, a good part of it could be available to a larger audience due to crisp epigramic verses, expressed in a rather straightforward manner, conducive to memorization.

Further, the whole Straussian paradigm relies on the unquestioned assertion of the almost axiomatic effect of persecution as “eternal and universal.”<sup>512</sup> In the case of al-Ma‘arrī, on the one hand we have blunt and candid enunciations against God, prophets, clerics, jurists, and rulers. On the other hand, al-Ma‘arrī’s social context and his social status provide as a picture where, besides occasional accusations and gossip, no traces of persecution are found in the sense of a normative threat, as will be seen in the last chapter.

Following the patterns mentioned above, one might end up with a “paranoiac interpretation” of seeing secrets everywhere.<sup>513</sup> Moreover, dismissing parts of the text for the sake of proving a point is an overinterpretation and another type of hermeneutic libertinism, to use Gutas’s phrase.<sup>514</sup> Concealment and coherence were not the tasks of al-Ma‘arrī, his task was one—to display mastery of prosodic virtuosity, to excel in language: the problems lay therein and not in producing firm coherence in content. Most importantly, the contemporary readings of *Luzūm* dealt with

<sup>512</sup>J. Montgomery, “Leo Strauss,” 301; Weltecke, *Der Narr spricht*, 367.

<sup>513</sup> See, for instance, Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 48-49.

<sup>514</sup> D. Gutas, “Study of Arabic Philosophy,” 21.

inconsistency and contradictions in such a way as to bring coherence and eliminate notions of doubts, skepticism, irony, uncertainty, and confusion. This was done both by those who wanted to see al-Ma‘arrī as a freethinker and by those who wanted to see in al-Ma‘arrī a pious believer. The last group often could not avoid a highly apologetic tone.

It is being proposed here that the contradictions in *Luzūm* be read in light of two notions: ambivalence and polemic. The ambiguous nature of *Luzūm* is produced due to a vigorous and intense ambivalence not only towards matters of belief but also towards humankind, for which al-Ma‘arrī had no hope for improvement but to which all his calls and admonitions for improvement are directed. Denying and asserting, rejecting and accepting in the same text, al-Ma‘arrī emphatically asserts uncertainty and anxiety. Contradictions are deliberate not for the sake of concealing religiously dangerous ideas, but for the sake of emphasizing that any conclusion regarding God and His creature is not certain. *Luzūm* thus becomes a massive exposure of the epistemological anxieties much pertinent to the age of al-Ma‘arrī.

Shaped by this ambivalence, al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking is far from the vigorous type of Ibn ar-Rawāndī’s freethinking, from the assertive type of Rāzī’s, or from the instructive type of al-Jāhīz’s. There is a self-encounter, self-doubt without imposition in al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking. This freethinking is a function for both the reader and the author. The reader might be as much challenged and compelled as the author, as tense and confounded as the author.

Apart from ambivalence, which is given the most attention in this thesis, another notion which contemporary authors eliminated from interpretations of *Luzūm* is polemics. For *Luzūm* contains verses clearly directed against specific religious groups. In those poems al-Ma‘arrī finds no other way than to attack the other as a Muslim. By polemics is not meant that he developed well-structured arguments against the other or engaged in systematic disputations. Pro-Islamic references bear a symbolic and a rather denominational nature. They serve as a medium for raising discontent

against other religious groups and displaying their flaws. Verses pointing towards the basic tenets of Islam and demonstrating rather pro-Sunni sentiments should not seem odd if we remember that *Luzūm* was written in a time of intense inter and intra-religious struggles. As we have seen in the first chapter, North Syria suffered not only because of continuous wars between Christians and Muslims but also because of conflicts among various groups within Islam. Many parts of *Luzūm* are reactions to the fights and destructions caused by religious tensions between various actors of the region. Calls for prayer or *zakat*, for reverence for women, for abundance of wine are addressed to *ghulāt*, and more specifically, to Qarmatians present in al-Ma‘arrī’s region at his time.<sup>515</sup> Thus, al-Ma‘arrī’s orthodox enunciations must be read in the light of polemics, certainly not in the manner of in-depth disputations but rather as situational reactions towards extremes. They are neither for concealment, as many contemporary scholars would suggest, nor do they express “sincere” attitude towards Islam, as seen by Laoust, for instance.<sup>516</sup> Verses below exemplify such an attitude:

I share nothing with the aberrant and stupid man,  
 rebellious in public and in secret,  
 who abolished the afternoon prayer with scorn,  
 and disdained that of noon too.  
 Donate alms, even if little, to the poor who come to your way,  
 and do not do it with discontent.

fa-bari’tu min ghāwin akhī safahin  
 mutamaridin fī s-sirri wa-l-jahrī  
 alghā ṣalāta l-‘aṣrimuḥtaqiran  
 wa-ramā warā’a z-zuhrī  
 fa-mnaḥ ḍa’īfaka in ‘arāka wa-law  
 nazaran wa-lā taṣrifhu bi-l-kahrī. (Lz1.415.10-12)

I shall pass away, without doubting God,  
 do not weep on me; neither let others do so,

<sup>515</sup> Because the most essential religious obligation was the knowledge of imam, other obligations were not given importance by *ghulāt*, for whom prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimage were not binding obligations, and they were often accused in antinomianism (*Ibāḥa*): See F. Daftary, *The Isma‘ilis*, 66. Also, main charges by Sunnis against Qarmatians were that they preached and practiced communal sex. Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University press, 2015), 68. Qarmatians were also alleged to have approved fornication, incestuous marriage, wine, abandonment of pilgrimage, John, G. Kennedy, *The Flower of Paradise: The Institutionalized Use of the Drug Qat in North Yemen* (NY: Springer, 1987), 41.

<sup>516</sup> See Laoust, “Vie et Philosophie” 143 where he presented those verses as “sincere” attitude towards tenets of Islam.



take my way was an example, for it will be good for you,  
and pray in your life-time and give alms.  
And do not listen to the stories of people  
whose lies appeal to the feeble mind.

azūlu wa-laysa fī l-khallāqī shakkun  
fa-lā tabkū ‘alayya wa-lā tubakkū  
khudhū sayrī fa-hunna la-kum ṣalāḥun  
wa-ṣallū fī ḥayātikum wa-zakkū.  
wa-lā taṣghū ilāakhbāri qawmin  
yuṣaddiqu l-‘aqlu l-arakū. (Lz2.146.8-10)

These poems are directed against those who ignored fasts and canonical prayers, who disrespected the Qur’an, and who misguidedly wait for an imam at the conjunction of two planets (*rajawtum imāman fī-l-qirāni muḍallalan*).<sup>517</sup>

In the same light, it becomes understandable why al-Ma‘arrī, who generally does not give importance to the pilgrimage and sees it as a superstitious act (Lz2.353.6; Lz2. 416.14), calls for it in some other verses (Lz1.321.5), advocates the doctrine of divine reward and punishment (Lz2.74.9; Lz2.337.5-6), recalls the Hell and Heaven (Lz1.79.1-2; Lz2.28.6), and claims that Islam is unique (Lz1.269.6-9). These are polemical reactions, pronounced as *ad hoc* disapproval of certain religious groups. In the same way, when al-Ma'arrī polemicizes against Christians and Jews as superstitious people with flawed doctrines (Lz2.409.2-9; Lz1.158.11; Lz1.313.5; Lz2.408.10-13; Lz2.406.1-3; Lz2.23.1-2; Lz1.295.1-2), he presents Islam as superior religion (Lz1.240.9).<sup>518</sup> For truth, al-Ma‘arrī claims, is hidden from the Torah (Lz1 394, 8) as well as from the Gospels, and it is useless to turn to a Christian bishop or deacon, (Lz1. 44.11-12).

The paucity of pro-Islamic orthodox poems and verses is not a sufficient reason to dismiss them altogether.<sup>519</sup> These ones should be read in the light of polemics together with verses contradicting them. Only in this case we are able to understand *Luzūm* as a whole, as a manifestation of anxieties informed by the religious and intellectual debates of the time and as they developed and

<sup>517</sup> Lz1.182.1-8.

<sup>518</sup> The panegyric to the Prophet which will be mentioned below should be read in the light of polemic too.

<sup>519</sup> See, for instance, Lacey, *Man and Society*, 168.

occurred over the years during which *Luzūm* was composed. Neither should the consistency and coherent writing be seen as something al-Ma‘arrī was not able to achieve. He could have had he wanted as he did in some of his prose letters. Al-Ma‘arrī’s choice of inconsistency and contradictions in *Luzūm* is rather an ironic stance towards all the claims to truth. The only certainty is the assertion that all which is affirmed can be negated. Looking at *Luzūm* in the light of ambivalence and polemics, it becomes deeply rooted in its time, and the claim that it is unconventional, does not bare much justification. The whole work appropriately fits in the age in which it was created.

The chapter, drawing on the European historiography of unbelief and freethinking brought our attention to the idea that unbelief can be articulated through moods and sentiments, not only through speculative proofs much like all the sentiments and moods for belief. This is important to register with regard to al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm*. Further, views on covert writing (or writing between the lines) have been put forward in relation to the risk of persecution and in opposition to the notion of sincerity. All these important concepts, it was emphasized, make proper historical sense (or at least bear higher probability for doing so) only when examined in relation with specific historical contexts, nature of sources at our disposal and the intellectual context of their creation (as the case of Ibn ar-Rāwāndī showed).

It has also been shown that until recently ‘Abbasid notions of unbelief and freethinking have been studied in isolation and perhaps this is the reason why the notion of freethinking and its interpretative and hermeneutical capacities have not been thoroughly investigated for the ‘Abbasid period. Instead, freethinking has been either used in a very narrow sense or else disregarded. However, it was demonstrated that irrespective of the temporal gap, there are similar if not identical set of moods, motifs, and patterns in the European and ‘Abbasid histories of unbelief and freethinking with possible links and channels as illustrated by the famous *Book of the Three*

*Imposters*. Seeing ‘Abbasid freethinking in continuity, moreover, as a connecting link in the universal history of freethinking from antiquity to modern times, will enrich the hermeneutical possibilities of the study of unbelief and freethinking in general.

It was demonstrated that al-Ma‘arrī was given the description of freethinker already in the nineteenth century but since then, this freethinking has been established through discrediting certain parts of the text and through imposing a coherent framework onto it going as far as applying to it an esoteric design. It has been shown that not only was the text of *Luzūm* read reductively but also issues of historical context and social status of the author were not taken into consideration which would prevent uncritical use of such terms as *taqīya*, *sincerity*, and *persecution*. All these notions are important in the study of unbelief, yet for each of them to stand as an appropriate analytical tool it first needs to be examined in relation to both text and context. The chapter’s main analytical contention was that in order to avoid restrictive definitions of al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking, it needs to be linked to and sustained by the notion of ambivalence, as an attitude of doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety. While for the purpose of this thesis the notion of ambivalence is the primary one, another important notion that was introduced is polemics. It has been asserted that these two notions, especially that of ambivalence, promote an inclusive understanding of *Luzūm* and its inconsistency. The detail exploration of ambivalence is the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4. REGISTERS OF OPPOSITES IN *LUZŪM*: GOD, REVELATION, AND REASON

Gone astray from the right path are both, the worthless denier of God,  
and those who try to define Him, is there any definition for God?  
(Lz1.256.4-5)

This chapter will discuss al-Ma‘arrī’s attitude towards religion and faith by exploring notions of God, revelation, and reason, primarily as they appear in *Lz*. The first part of the chapter reconstructs the complex images of al-Ma‘arrī’s God and the ways al-Ma‘arrī presented and portrayed God. Attention will be given to ironic representations, especially verbal irony in the mode of blame by praise. The second part will put together al-Ma‘arrī’s conflicting views on prophecy and scriptures in order to understand the poet’s stances towards revealed religions in general. The third part will explore the parameters of reason as they appear in *Luzūm*. Each section in the chapter will be preceded by discussions on how previous critics of religions saw God, revelation and reason in order to set a proper background for all the themes. The discussions that follow will be related to earlier discussions in contemporary scholarship on the notions under consideration.

### 4.1. God: The Problem

The famous heresiographer ash-Shahrastānī (d.1153), in order to articulate critical motifs on God’s injustice and wisdom, conveyed in the tongue of *Iblīs* (Satan) the question whether it would not be better to arrange the world without evil (*alaysa baqā’u l-‘ālamī ‘alā niẓāmi l-khayri khayran min imtizājihi bi-sh-sharri*)<sup>520</sup>:

Since God knew in advance what was to become of me, what is the wisdom behind Him creating me? Since He created me according to his wish and will, why did He command me to obey Him? What is the wisdom behind His command since He neither benefits nor suffers from obedience and disobedience? Since He created me as I am, why did He drive me out of the Garden of Eden? Why did He allow me to tempt Adam and Eve? Why does he allow me to pester and mislead humanity?<sup>521</sup>

<sup>520</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wan-n-Niḥal*, ed., W. Cureton (London, 1846), 1: 7.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.; cited in Al-Azmeh, “Abbasid Culture and Freethinking Humanism,” 74-75;

Satan, more as a tragic figure in God's unjust plot than an evil one, was a common motif in the Abbasid theological discussions of theodicy.<sup>522</sup> The puzzling question of evil, blended with the question of God's will and justice, led to lengthy disputations and lay at the core of most profound skepticism and confusion within the Islamic tradition. Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī (d.1023), having an understanding for skeptics' sentiments, eloquently voiced their unease towards godly matters in the following words:

If Allah is just, generous, all-knowing, compassionate, and merciful, he would have destined his entire creation for paradise for the following reason: despite their disagreement in belief, they all exert effort to please him and to avoid displeasing him in accordance with their knowledge and intellectual capacity. They only fail to follow his commands when deceived by their own ignorance. Consider a man who goes to take a gift to the ruler but along the way is tricked into handing it over to a conniving bunch of men who convince him that one of them is the ruler. Would not the real ruler, out of the generosity expected of his station, excuse him of his error and not punish him.<sup>523</sup>

The issue of God's punishment, justice, and evil triggered those who were critical of religion in general. Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq (d.994) found it foolish (*safīh*) to order the slave to do things when it is known that he cannot do them. Punishment for that which he cannot do is then out of place (*li-annahū qad waḍa'a l-'uqūbata fī ghayr mawḍi'ihā*) and bears no wisdom (*laysa li-l-'uqūbati wajhun fī-l-ḥikmati*).<sup>524</sup> Overburdening or prescribing the unbearable for His servants (*at-taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāqu*) is thus incompatible with God's wisdom. Ibn ar-Rāwāndī did not spare the most offensive words against God. In Ibn al-Jawzī's words, "We have never heard anyone defame the Creator and make jest about him as much as this cursed one did...Had he denied the Creator

<sup>522</sup> Iblīs is indeed an intriguing and tragic figure appearing as a model of mystic man, absolute monotheist for some Sūfīs like Ḥallāj, and as an advocate of fornication whom Abū Nuwās threatens by incessant recitation of the Qur'ān: see respectively Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption. Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 122-184 and Phillip Kennedy, *Abu Nuwas* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 43-47; Sadik J. al-'Azm, "The Tragedy of Satan (Iblīs)" in idem, *Islam-Submission and Disobedience* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2014), 131-179; Al-Azmeh, "Freidenkertum und Humanismus," 244-245.

<sup>523</sup> Trans. by Paul L. Heck, in his *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (London/NY: Routledge, 2014), 78; Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī, *Imtā' wa-Mūwānasa*, ed. Haytham at-Ta'imī (Beirut: al-Makataba al-'Aṣrīya, 2011), 396.

<sup>524</sup> See Tawḥīdī, *Imtā'*, 395. For the German translation, see van Ess, *TG6*, 432. That Warrāq did not make a direct reference to God does not make his intention ambiguous: see Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 43. Compare D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq against the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 21. Ibn al-Muqaffa too had the same sentiment about divine injustice: see van Ess, *TG5*, 104-108; Urvoy, *Les penseurs*, 29-66. A Manichean articulation of a similar thought is found in the writings of Mardān Farrūkh who is discontented that God "punished people for evil that He Himself had created and made them follow:" see Crone, "Abū Sa'īd al-Ḥaḍrī and the Punishment of Unbelievers Islam," in *Islam, Ancient Near East*, 91.

altogether, it would have been better for him than to admit His existence, than to polemicize against Him and defame Him...”<sup>525</sup> Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s wording was harsh indeed: the God that appears in the Scripture is a “stupid and petty, vindictive and cruel God.”<sup>526</sup> God is inconsistent in His will (He wants something, then changes His mind and wants something else-*yurīdu sh-shay’a thumma yabdū lahu fa-yurīdu ghayrahu*)<sup>527</sup> and in His words.<sup>528</sup> He allows disaster, and injustice.<sup>529</sup> This God “does not know any other remedy against disease than killing, as does an angry and furious enemy,”<sup>530</sup> Ibn ar-Rāwandī mocked God for not possessing the basic ability to count: for He mentioned six days in total and when it came to dividing, he made a mistake by two days.<sup>531</sup> Ibn ar-Rāwandī was also known for his claim that the world was eternal,<sup>532</sup> and for this reason, he was called *dahrī*<sup>533</sup> (eternalist or materialist) and Aristotelian too.<sup>534</sup> Whether he was indeed an Aristotelian and believed in a Prime Mover, or whether he had his own understanding of transcendent God is not clear but it is more than obvious that Ibn ar-Rāwandī went against the God of scriptures and of theologians.<sup>535</sup>

The physician and philosopher Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī formulated his own theodicy but he applied it to a God who shared little with the God of prophetic religions. His was a God of natural philosophy (but not the indifferent God of some of the philosophers),<sup>536</sup> a cosmological principle co-

<sup>525</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 13:117; cited in Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 125.

<sup>526</sup> See Stroumsa, “The Religion of the Freethinker,” in *Atheismus im Mittelalter*, 52-53.

<sup>527</sup> See Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār: ar-Radd ‘alā Ibn ar-Rāwandī al-Mulhid*, ed. H.S. Nyberg (Beirut: Dār Qābis, 1986), 8.

<sup>528</sup> For example saying in one place that He knows all about the hidden and unseen (Q6:59) and saying in another place that He needs Qibla to check who follows the Messenger and who does not (Q2:143). Helmut Ritter, “Philologika, VI: Ibn al-Ġauzīs Bericht über Ibn ar-Rēwandī,” *Der Islam* 19 (1931):6.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>530</sup> See ibid., 19; van Ess, “Image,” 7; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 131-32.

<sup>531</sup> References are to the following quranic verses: “Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and is firmly established on the throne [of authority]” (Q 7:54) and “He set on the [earth], mountains standing firm, high above it, and bestowed blessings on the earth, and measure therein all things to give them nourishment in due proportion, in four Days, in accordance with [the needs of] those who seek [Sustenance]” (Q 41:10), see Ritter, “Philologika,” 6.

<sup>532</sup> Though he refuted his own view on that: see van Ess “Al-Fārābī and Ibn ar-Rēwandī,” 5.

<sup>533</sup> Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, 34-36.

<sup>534</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 126; Crone, “Ungodly Cosmologies,” in *Islam, the Ancient Near East*, 139-40.

<sup>535</sup> Crone, *Islam, the Ancient Near East*, 127; van Ess, *TG4*, 336.

<sup>536</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 129.

eternal with other four principles, time, space, matter, soul,<sup>537</sup> often analogous with deistic divinity.<sup>538</sup> Rāzī's God, though not holding absolute power over the other eternal principles,<sup>539</sup> is wise, compassionate, caring and benevolent.<sup>540</sup> This God is also just and not malicious. Some see Rāzī's creation theory and that of five eternal principles as an attempt to formulate a conception of theodicy. According to ar-Rāzī's view, the soul, the element subject to corruption, is neither natural nor forced into motion. The soul, ignorant and foolish and the cause of imperfection in the cosmos, is not caused by the wise and just God.<sup>541</sup> Pain and suffering therefore are not God's responsibility.<sup>542</sup>

Imitating this just and merciful God lay at the core of Rāzī's ethical stance. He wrote in his *Philosophical Life (Sīra Falsafīya)*:

The Creator is knowing without being ignorant and just without being unjust, and has absolute knowledge, justice and compassion. We have a Creator and a Master and are His servants [...] and the servants most beloved of their masters are those who take up their way of life (*sīra*) and follow their course of action (*sunan*). So the servant closest to God, the exalted, is the one who is most knowing and most just, the most compassionate and benevolent. This whole statement is summarized in the philosophers' remark that

<sup>537</sup> Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām an-Nubūwwa (The proofs of Prophecy)*, ed. and trans. T. Khalidi (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2011), 8-12; for general studies, see Aziz al-Azmeh, Introduction to *Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī* (Beirut: Riad ar-Rayyes Books, 2011), 9-18; P. Adamson "High Five-al-Rāzī," in idem, *Philosophy in the Islamic World: a History of Philosophy without a Gap*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 48-54; idem, "Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī," in *Islamische Philosophie im Mittelalter. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Heidrun Eichner et al. (Darmstadt: WBG, 2013), 199-217; H. Daiber, "Abū Bakr al-Rāzī," in *Philosophie in der Islamische Welt*, 8-10 Jahrhundert, R. Ulrich and R. Würsch, Band 1 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2012), 261-289; L. E. Goodman, "How Epicurean was Rāzī," *Studia graeco-arabica* 5 (2015): 247-280; idem, "Rāzī vs Rāzī: Philosophy in the Majlis," in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Lazarus-Yafeh, S. Griffith et al., (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 84-107; idem, "The Epicurean Ethic of Muḥammad Zakarīyā ar-Rāzī," *Studia Islamica* 34 (1971): 5-26; D. Urvoy, *Penseurs Libres*, 142-152; M. Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 31-32; P. Walker, "The Political Aspects of al-Rāzī's Philosophy," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Charles Butterworth (Cambridge: Mass., 1992): 61-94; M.M. Bar-Asher, "Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī (865-925)," in *Klassiker der Religionsphilosophie: von Platon bis Kierkegaard*, ed. F. Niewöhner (Munich: Beck 1995), 99-111.

<sup>538</sup> Al-Azmeh, Aziz, "Freidenkertum und Humanismus," 238.

<sup>539</sup> Rāzī considered time and space absolute and rejected their Aristotelian relativity. For the Razian understanding of time and its influence from Galen which echo Plato's views on time, see a detailed discussion in P. Adamson, "Galen and Rāzī on Time," in *Medieval Arabic Thought: Essays in the Honor of Fritz Zimmermann*, ed. R. Hansberger et al. (London: Warburg Studies and Texts, 2012), 1-14. For a general discussion on time in Islamic philosophy, see Goodman, "Time in Islam," *Asian Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (1992): 3-19.

<sup>540</sup> Abū Ḥātim, *A'lām*, 1.

<sup>541</sup> Adamson sees here similarities with the views of Plutarch: see "High Five," 53. More for the concept of soul see Druart, "Rāzī's conception of Soul: a Psychological Background to his Ethics," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 249-269.

<sup>542</sup> See Goodman, "How Epicurean," 258-262; idem, "Rāzī's Myth of the Fall of the Soul: its Function in his Philosophy," in *Essays in Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George Hourani, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), 25-40.

“philosophy is imitation (*tashabbuh*) of God, the exalted, insofar as lies within the capacity of man.”<sup>543</sup>

God’s justice and benevolence constitute a paradigmatic exemplar for shaping Rāzī’s ethics<sup>544</sup> and especially his attitude to intellect (‘*aql*’) as we shall see in the section on reason.

The question of evil and justice was at the heart of debates since the beginning of Muslim theological speculations. Different versions of theodicy were formulated in reaction to these questions, especially by Mu‘tazilites and ‘Asharites. For Mu‘tazilites, God’s justice was of cardinal importance. This school categorically denied any relationship between God and evil. God was justified in whatever He does, and Divine justice cannot be arbitrary. By insisting on God’s justice, Mu‘tazilites held that God does not create the voluntary human act, but created in man the power (*istiṭā‘a, qudra*) through which he performs certain deeds and their opposites. Thus humans possess free will through which they respond to the command which God put on them. Humans act either in accordance with these obligations and are rewarded, or they violate the obligations and are punished. These formulations excluded any evil on the part of God. The absolutization of divine justice held that God was incapable of injustice, a conclusion that questions God’s omnipotence, a prime article in ‘Asharite theology. ‘Asharites held that God’s unlimited omnipotence does not exclude injustice, arbitrariness, and unpredictability. God is capable of creating everything and all He creates is a bounty, moreover, God’s will is absolutely free and thus God may create good and evil at the same time if He wills. Everything is a result of divine decree. ‘Asharites insisted that God alone can create acts, thus rejecting the notion of free will. They instead adopted the notion of *kasb*-

---

<sup>543</sup>Cited in P. Adamson, “Abū Bakr al-Rāzī on Animals,” *Archive für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94, (2012):268, the excerpt is from Rāzī, *Rasā’il Falsafīyya (Philosophical Epistles)*, ed. P. Kraus (Cairo, 1939), 108.4-9. Adamson sees infusion of Platonic and Mu‘tazila views in Rāzī’s attitude towards animals. The theme is not new to Rāzī of course: it was actively discussed among Mu‘tazila and also by critics of religions such as Ibn ar-Rāwandī and Ḥayawayh al-Balki who saw sacrifice pointless: see van Ess, “Ibn ar-Rwandī and Fārābī and Urvoy, *Libres Penseurs*, 133-140. More discussion on this will follow in the chapter on al-Ma‘arrī’s ethics and his veganism.

<sup>544</sup> Goodman finds a strong Epicurean line in Rāzī’s thought and ethics, whereas Adamson sees connection with Plato; see especially Goodman, “How Epicurean,” and Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures in Epicurus and Rāzī,” in *The Age of al-Farabi: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, ed. P. Adamson (London and Turin: The Warburg Institute - Nino Aragno Editore, 2008), 71-94; for Rāzī’s Platonic Epicureanism, see also Peter S. Gruff, “Leaving the garden: Al-Rāzī and Nietzsche as Wayward Epicureans,” *Philosophy in East and West* 64, no.4 (2014):913-1017.



acquisition or appropriation. This means that while God created all actions, humans undertake particular actions by the capacity to formulate human responsibility for created acts that they perform. What man has then is the capability to appropriate and acquire an act and, therefore, responsibility for the act.<sup>545</sup>

These efforts and disputes brought no agreement nor were they able to mitigate the anxieties of skeptics. Within the realm of speculative theology, anything could be proved and then disproved if one had sufficient dialectical skills. The equivalence of evidence or equipollence of proofs (*takāfu' l-adilla*), that is the existence of mutually contradictory but equally appealing arguments was a weapon of skepticism.<sup>546</sup> Arguments for God's justice could be as valid and appealing as those for His injustice. This method led to a kind of perplexing absurdity which Tawhīdī sketched through a most telling scene:

A man from Persia went on to pilgrimage to Mecca. Clinging to the curtains of the Ka'ba, he invoked Allah, saying, "You who have created the vicious beasts and creeping vermin and set them on people, and struck them [people] with chronic disease, blindness, and poverty." At this point, his fellow pilgrims pounced on him to stop him from such blasphemy, saying, "Invoke Allah with beautiful names." He returned to the Ka'ba, clinging to its curtains, calling out, "You who have not created the vicious beasts and creeping vermin and have not set them on people and have not struck them with pain and illness." They once again pounced on him, saying, "Do not say this. Allah is the creator of everything." Fed up with them, he said, "I do not know what to do. If I say that Allah is the creator of these things, you pounce on me, and if I say Allah is not the creator of these things, you pounce on me."<sup>547</sup>

<sup>545</sup>For further discussions on the theme, see A. Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Values in Islam: a new Interpretation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. S. Schmidtke, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 384-409; S. Vassalou, *Moral Agents and their Deserts: the Characters of Mu'tazilite Ethics* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7 and passim; R. M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983):204-223; E. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: the Dispute over al-Ghazālī's "Best of all Possible Worlds"* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3-32.

<sup>546</sup>The concept of equivalence of evidence was almost turned into a separate school which triggered responses and refutations by pious circles. The famous Andalusian scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d.1064) dedicated a chapter on this idea in his *Fiṣal* and classified the followers of equivalence of evidence into three groups: the first group believed that one could neither prove nor disprove the existence of God, the second group applied the notion to everything except the existence of God, and finally, the third group admitted the existence of God and Islam as a true religion and limited the application of equivalence of evidence to the inner Muslim theological diversities. Ibn Ḥazm described the followers of this concept as ignorant and licentious. For a comprehensive discussion on the equivalence of evidence see P. Heck, *Skepticism*, 66-107; also, Abdel Magid Turki, "La réfutation du scepticisme et la théorie de la connaissance dans les 'Fiṣal' d'Ibn Ḥazm," *SI* 50 (1979):37-76; Moshe Perlmann, "Ibn Ḥazm on the Equivalence of Proofs," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 40 (1950):279:290.

<sup>547</sup>Trans. by P. Heck, in *Skepticism*, 78-79; Tawhīdī, *Imtā'*, 394.

As Paul Heck aptly brought it out, Tawḥīdī recognized an impasse here: words could lead to anywhere, anything could be said and any position defended. In the midst of disputations, truth ceased to be a target: instead, there was a fight to sustain the position of a sect. The confusion was caused by the inability of scholars to transcend their own partisan attachments.<sup>548</sup> Ironically, in terms of religious truth, theology led to confusions rather than to certainty, and it is this that someone like Ibn ar-Rāwandī found interesting whereas someone like Abu'l-'Ala' found it vexing.

#### 4.2. God in *Luzūm*

The notion of equivalence of proofs has been attributed to al-Ma'arrī too.<sup>549</sup> However, despite all the seemingly appropriate reasons to do so, the attribution of this notion to al-Ma'arrī needs to be considered. He did have a full recognition of the problems related to God's nature and was fully occupied with them. Al-Ma'arrī's resort, however, was neither to theology nor to philosophy. He was not testing arguments and was not playing with proofs: his statements were only juxtapositions of contrasting theses. *Luzūm* was not about proofs, for its author was too reluctant to do what had been uselessly done before. Rooting himself within the poetic medium, al-Ma'arrī candidly integrated into one text all the contradictory sentiments towards God due to his advantage or his conscious decision of belonging to nowhere. As a result, the most ambiguous image of God was portrayed.

Indeed, nothing in *Luzūm* appears as intriguing and ambiguous as the image of God. The tension in the language relevant to God prevails throughout the whole work and remains unresolved. Al-Ma'arrī's ambivalence towards the Creator, often with an emotional engagement and provocative language, keeps the reader continuously alert. God is everywhere in *Luzūm*—He is the one who is

<sup>548</sup>P. Heck, *Skepticism*, 79.

<sup>549</sup>See H. Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 144; van Ess, "Skepticism in Islamic religious Thought," *al-Abḥāth*, Vol. 21, No.1 (1969):7.

challenged, reproached, believed and relied on. He is often the one, the omnipotent and the just, and often the one who prompts or at least does not prevent evil. Al-Ma‘arrī both asserts and denies the ways of God; he relies on God but also rebukes Him, urges people to obey God's commands but also warns them against doing so. Al-Ma‘arrī's God is the perpetual confounder, as al-Ma‘arrī is for his reader.

Al-Ma‘arrī takes issue with God but in such a way that leaves both himself and the reader with no conclusion, rather with a constant bewilderment. The poet did not, in fact, raise any new question, nor did he aim at solving any theological or philosophical problem. The poet was often driven by an instinctive impulse, often with reasoned statements, at times with anger and severe pessimism.

Al-Ma‘arrī challenged, but did not deny God. The idea that the poet was a “monotheist” in generic terms has been put forth by the earliest European scholars of al-Ma‘arrī such as von Kremer and Nicholson. Von Kremer's statements, however, remain somewhat confusing: on the one hand, he thought al-Ma‘arrī was a monotheist on the surface, not more: poet's mentioning of God's name was merely a traditional dressing to his text.<sup>550</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī named God in order to deceive and conceal his unorthodoxy. On the other hand, verses about his faith, von Kremer thought, did not permit any definite conclusions about matters of belief but bore witness to his faithful monotheism which, however, was not in agreement with “orthodox” Islamic tenets.<sup>551</sup> Von Kremer did not develop this idea but stated that in any case, al-Ma‘arrī's God was the source of all the good: “Sein Gott ist der oberste Schutzherr der Gerechtigkeit und alles Guten.”<sup>552</sup> Von Kremer thus exhibited an inconsistent position towards al-Ma‘arrī's understanding of God.

<sup>550</sup>See von Kremer, *Philosophische Gedichte*, 12.

<sup>551</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>552</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

Nicholson provided a more complex picture. On the one hand, al-Ma‘arrī, as a staunch monotheist, believed in a Creator and identified Him with Allah.<sup>553</sup> However, speculation on His attributes and essence are useless since human intellect, even though necessary for the belief in the Supreme Being, does not enable humans to comprehend them.<sup>554</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī, according to Nicholson, was a monotheist, who “emphatically repudiated atheism,” but again, one who could not reconcile his monotheism with the one pertinent to the “Semitic concept of God” since, for him, time and space were infinite and therefore the Creator could not be outside of them.<sup>555</sup> This description would be close to accuracy if we ignored or explained away the verses where al-Ma‘arrī denied the eternity of time, matter, and space. Nicholson’s summary, however, does express the desperate struggle of the poet to reconcile himself with God:

If reason convinced him [al-Ma‘arrī] that the world is eternal and has a Creator, a divine intelligence which eternally moves and maintains it, the facts of life as he saw them stood hopelessly against this theory and threw him back upon the notion of an all-powerful and inscrutable *will* working throughout the universe of evil which it created for some mysterious end. Beyond this, he seems to have been unable to go, and here his rationalism breaks down. He finds the world so radically unreasonable that in order to account for it he must call in *deus ex machina*-the Allah of the Koran. The decree of Allah, i.e. Fate, makes things what they are.<sup>556</sup>

Nicholson saw a deistic representation of God which could be formulated in this creed: “God, the Creator is One: fear and obey Him.”<sup>557</sup> This, according to Nicholson, exposed a “bare deism.”<sup>558</sup> Another formulation of al-Ma‘arrī’s deistic belief is found in an article by Salhi and Abbasi which discusses al-Ma‘arrī’s views on astrology. The summary of the poet’s belief in God follows in this way:

It is possible to see deism as an unsatisfactory compromise between belief and unbelief, and al-Ma‘arrī accepted the existence of God but rejected His revelations, eager to attain the truth

---

<sup>553</sup> Nicholson, “Meditations,” 158.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 160-161.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid. 196.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid. Nicholson does not elaborate what is meant by “bare deism.”

yet scornful of any method other than reason, which he acknowledged was inadequate to deal with the metaphysical realm of the God in whom he believed.<sup>559</sup>

We shall see below that a notion of deism could be attributed to al-Ma‘arrī’s understanding of God only to some extent.

Ṭ. Ḥusayn’s views fluctuated between seeing al-Ma‘arrī’s God as a monotheistic type, and unknowable, Muslim in its attributes such as power and oneness but Greek in essence, such as co-eternity with time and space and thus incompatible with Muslim God.<sup>560</sup> Ḥusayn, however, did not remain consistent with his description of al-Ma‘arrī’s God and, following the common habit of seeing Aristotle everywhere, attempted to establish a coherent philosophical system in order to explain al-Ma‘arrī’s God. Ṭ. Ḥusayn attempted to explain especially the notions of eternity and cosmology in *Luzūm* by philosophical means: his research on metaphysics of al-Ma‘arrī led to the conclusion that the poet saw matter, time, and space as eternal. Al-Ma‘arrī’s understanding of divine, Ḥusayn claimed, was Aristotelian in many ways: al-Ma‘arrī for example described God as silent and unmoved. To explain how the unmoved mover could create a moving universe, Ḥusayn referred to Aristotelian distinction of two types of motions-1) material and 2) potentiality passing into the actuality. The latter is what pertains to God: pure actuality is tantamount to pure motion, and thus God, being in essence a pure motion, is the cause of the motion in the world. The reference is made to these verses:

Do you not see that the stars move in their  
spheres by the power of the unmoved Lord?

a-mā tarā sh-shuhba fī aflākihā ntaqalat bi-qudratin  
min malīkin ghayri muntaqilī. (Lz2. 219.13)<sup>561</sup>

<sup>559</sup>Z. S. Salhi and A. Abbasi, “Astrology between Poetics and Politics in the Abbasid Period: Abū ‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī as a Case Study,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, LVII/2 (2012), 379.

<sup>560</sup>Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd*, 254-257.

<sup>561</sup>Ibid.

Umar Farrūkh's opinion was that al-Ma'arrī had a firm belief in God without trying to know Him. Al-Ma'arrī's faith in God was a sentimental one (*'īmān wijdānī*) and was a primary conviction, according to Farrūkh. Whatever contradictions there might have been in the representation of God, He remained one and omnipotent.<sup>562</sup>

Building on what earlier scholars had brought forth about al-Ma'arrī's God, Henri Laoust confirmed that al-Ma'arrī affirmed and celebrated the existence of one God the creator, and repudiated atheism. Al-Ma'arrī's certitude, though, was based not on the scriptural tradition but on an innate intuition and on reason. Al-Ma'arrī's God appeared as one, eternal, omnipotent and supremely wise. His wisdom was demonstrated by His works, even though the prevalence of evil tempted people to deny this wisdom.<sup>563</sup> Laoust, too, did not exclude Aristotelian presentation of al-Ma'arrī's God though he went as far as to claim a *Bāṭini* (especially Carmathian) influence in al-Ma'arrī's thought in general and on his views on God in particular.<sup>564</sup> *Luzūm*, however, can by no means be put in such a coherent philosophical frame, as we shall see.<sup>565</sup>

All the definitions summarized above could be relevant and irrelevant at the same time. In order to understand the uncertainties which surface in the attempts of defining al-Ma'arrī's God, we need to look at his verses. But before that, let us first register perhaps the most disturbing questions al-Ma'arrī struggled with in relation to God. They can be summarized as follows: could God have created a better world at will? If yes, why did He not? If he could not, is He incapable of doing so? Could God prevent evil and, if yes, why did He not? A pronounced summary of these troubling inquiries – common among critics of religion -- is found in al-Ma'arrī's letter to the chief missionary of Egypt Hibat Allah where the theme of the discussion was the poet's vegetarianism:

<sup>562</sup> Farrūkh, *Ḥakīm*, 100-103.

<sup>563</sup> Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 146-147. For many scholars al-Ma'arrī's God is presented only as just and omnipotence: A'isha 'Abd ar-Rahmān, *Al-Ḥayat al-Insānīya 'inda Abī'l-'Alā'* (Cairo, 1944), 87-148; see Saleh, "Bibliographie II," 248; al-Mallūhī, *Difā'*, 21-50; Yāzījī, *Abū'l-'Alā'*, 213-215; A. Taymūr, *Abū'l-'Alā'*, 168-181.

<sup>564</sup> See Laoust, "Vie et Philosophie," 147, 156.

<sup>565</sup> Lacey rightly thought too that Ḥussayn over-interpreted parts of *Luzūm*, and also argued against Laoust's claiming the proximity of al-Ma'arrī's and Carmathian thought: see Lacey, *Man and Society*, note 26, p.284 and note 42, p.188.

If God wills nothing but good, then of evil one of two things must be true. Either God must know of it or not. If He knows of it, then one of two things must be true. Either He wills it or not. If He wills it then He is practically the doer of it, just as one might say “The governor cut off the robber’s hand,” even though he did not do it with his own hands. But if God did not will it, then He has suffered what such a governor should not suffer upon earth. If there be done in his province what he dislikes, he reproves the doer and commands that the practice stop. This is a knot which the metaphysicians have tried hard to solve, and found insoluble.<sup>566</sup>

This type of argumentation, later called *Sic et Non* at the Sorbonne and among the scholastics, is typical of *kalām* arguments. It also echoes the question of Shahrastānī’s *Iblīs*. In order better to understand al-Ma‘arrī’s God, we now turn to the verses of *Luzūm*. In what follows next, features of God such as justice, omnipotence, wisdom, and eternity will be explored together with their opposites

### The Unbeliever’s God

In this part, I will put together verses from *Luzūm* which feature God as unjust, often unwise, and also co-eternal with time, space and matter. The most troubling of these features is injustice expressed in numerous verses. Al-Ma‘arrī, much like al-Warrāq and Ibn ar-Rāwandī, claimed that all the blame for injustice falls on the Creator:

If someone committed deadly sins compulsorily  
then to punish him for what he does is unjust.  
God, while creating metals, knew that  
whitesword would be made from them, with which  
men who hold horses, curbed with iron and shod, would shed blood.

in-kāna man fa‘ala l-kabā’ira mujbaran  
fa-‘iqābuhu zulmun‘alāmā yaf‘alū  
wa-llāhu idh khalaqa l-ma’ādina ‘ālimun  
anna l-ḥidāda l-bīḍa min-ha tuj‘alū.  
safaka d-dimā’a bi-hā rijālun a‘ṣamū  
bi-l-khayli tuljamu bi-l-ḥadīdi wa-tun‘alū. (Lz2.181.3-6)

<sup>566</sup> see Yāqūt. *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’*, 1:342; for the translation see D. S. Margoliouth, “Abū’l ‘Alā’s Correspondence on Vegetarianism,” *Journal of Royal Asiatic Studies*, (1902):318. Centuries later, Hume, paraphrasing question raised by Epicurus, restated yet again that these questions remained unanswered: “...Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?” in Dorothy Coleman, ed. *David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and other Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 74. For more on the topic, see Ormsby, *Theodicy*, 27.

Frequently, there is no direct reference to and mention of God in verses, however, this does not make al-Ma'arrī's implications ambiguous:

And if man is unjust due to predestination,  
then He who created him so that he does  
injustice towards mankind is more unjust.

wa-in yakini l-insānu bi-l-jabri ḡālīman  
fa-khālīquhu kay yaḡlima l-khalqa aḡlamū. (UBL Or.100, 107)<sup>567</sup>

Whom do you make responsible for a crime on course,  
the bell not having moved until it was caused to move?

li-man tu'ākhidhubi-l-jarrā llatīsalafat  
wa-mā taḡarraka ḡattā ḡurrika l-jarasū. (Lz2.12.9)

It is such a God who not only leaves men alone in the hands of evil but is himself the cause of evil,  
as implied by metaphors in the following poem:

Evils embraced us from which there is no recovery,  
a virtuous one, who deviates from them [evil things], is rare among us  
our morals were not corrupted by our choice  
but with an order caused by the fates.  
The origin is the primary and the branches are what follow  
and how can the son be loyal if the father is treacherous!  
if the verbs are weak the cases, names deriving from them, are as weak as their roots  
so ask the black crow if he can hear: are you able to change your color?

ḡawatnāshurūrun lā ṡalāḡa li-mithlihā  
fa-in shadhdha min-nāṡāliḡun fa-huwa nādirun  
wa-māfasadat akhlāqunā bi-khtiyārīnā  
wa-lākin bi-amrin sabbabathu l-maḡādirū.  
wa-fī -l-aṡli 'ushun wa-l-furū'u tawābi'un  
wa kayfa wafā'u n-najli wa-l-abu ḡhādirū.  
idhā 'tallati l-af'ālu jā'at 'alīlatan  
ka-ḡālātīhāasmā'uhā wa-l-maṡādirū  
fa-qul li-l-ḡhurābi l-jauni in kāna sāmi'an  
a -anta 'alā taghyīri launika qādirū? (Lz1.311.3-5)

More explicitly still, this God is unwilling to prevent people from committing sin:

You wish to keep away the creatures from sin  
but God did not want people to have good morals.

<sup>567</sup>The line was discovered and translated by Lacey from UBL Or.100, it does not exist in the Zand edition: see Lacey, *man and Society*, 138.



tarūmu tahdhība hādhā l-khalqi min danasin  
wa-llāhu mā shā'ali-l-aqwāmiqawāmi tahdhībā. (Lz1.110.8-10)

Ultimately, al-Ma'arrī leaves no hope for humans to improve their behavior since God himself does not want His creatures to behave well. These thoughts lie at the heart of the poet's incurable pessimism:

God could not improve [people],  
so do not wish people to be so.  
Do not believe in what proof denies  
For what you get from that belief is merely a lie.<sup>568</sup>

lam yaqdir allāhu li-'ālatinā  
fa-lā tarūmna li-l-aqwāmi tahdhībā.  
wa-lā tuṣaddiq bi-mā l-burhānu yubṭiluhu  
fa-tastafid min at-taṣḍīqi takdhībā. (Lz1.110.2-3)

God is unjust especially when He makes sinless children suffer:  
O child, calamities befell you, and  
your lungs are severely torn apart because of them.  
What is your sin that you are singled out from among us?<sup>569</sup>

yā ṭiflu ḥallat bi-ka r-razāyā  
fa-anta min-hā ṣarīmu ṣaḥrī  
bi-ayyi dhanbbin akhadhta fī-nā (Lz1.387.3)

Frequently, Ma'arrī's tone becomes personal: some verses convey the outcry of a hurt person:

God nicely dismissed me as a compensation for my kindness,  
and what is cordiality in the state of solitude?

jazā llāhu 'annī mu'nisībi-ṣudūdihi  
jamīlan fa-fī l-iyḥāshi mā huwa iynāsū. (Lz2.5.2)

The other feature which does not fit to the "orthodox" portrait of God relates to the notion of eternity. Al-Ma'arrī often ascribed eternity to matter, time and space thus denying that God is the

<sup>568</sup>Nicholson suggested that some verses in *Luzūm* hint at the notion of *kasb*, that is to say al-Ma'arrī approved that all the acts were created by God but men were given capacity to appropriate them: "I perceived that men are naturally unjust to another, but there is no doubt of the justice of Him who created injustice" (*ra'aytu sabāyā n-nāsi fī-hā tazālumun wa-lā rayba fī 'adli l-ladhī khalaqa z-zulmā*, Lz2.280.6). This means that God's creating injustice does not mean He is unjust. However, Nicholson rightly concludes that had al-Ma'arrī really wanted to subscribe to the theory of *kasb*, he would have done it strongly and explicitly and not in passing. See Nicholson, "Meditations," 163.

<sup>569</sup>The same relates to animals expressed in al-Ma'arrī's strict vegetarianism about which details will follow in the chapter on ethics.

only Eternal and Creator *ex nihilo*. In the following he talks of the eternity of the four natural elements--fire, water, earth, and air:

We are returned to the elements and every living species  
is related to the four eternal.

nuraddu ilā l-uṣūli wa kullu ḥayyin  
la-hu fī l-arba‘i l-quḍumi intisābū (Lz1.91.6)<sup>570</sup>

In the following, al-Ma‘arrī states about the eternity of the space and, and by praising God, perhaps attempts to veil the idea:

I find Time eternal with no end,  
and praise be to the Hegemon, the Perfect one.

arā zamanan taqādama ghayra fānin  
fa-subḥana l-muḥaymini dhī l-kamālī (Lz2.227.15)

Often it is rather hard to guess what al-Ma‘arrī means by time: whether it is a physical principle or simply Fate:

We shall pass away as our ancestors did  
while Time will endure the way you see it.  
A day passes by, a night flows in, a star disappears, a star is seen.

nazūlu ka-mā zāla ajdādunā  
wa-yabqā z-zamānu ‘alā mā tarā.  
nahārun yamurru wa-laylun yakurru  
wa-najmun yaghūru wa-najmun yurā. (Lz1. 86. 12-13)<sup>571</sup>

Based on these verse, previous scholars, in their attempt to find coherence in the poet’s understanding of God and His relation to cosmology, tended to explain al-Ma‘arrī’s thinking through Aristotelian terms ascribing to the poet systematic thought and consistency and thus restricting his views.<sup>572</sup> Reductive reading is also that which ranks al-Ma‘arrī among the materialists, or eternalists (*dahrīyun*) making him comparable with Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī.<sup>573</sup>

<sup>570</sup> See more verses on the eternal matters in Lacey, *Man and Society*, 236-240.

<sup>571</sup> Again, for more examples, see *ibid.*, 252-253.

<sup>572</sup> For a discussion of al-Ma‘arrī’s views on cosmology, see: K. Lacey, “An 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim’s Syncretic Perspective of Cosmology: Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s philosophical poetical Reflections in *luḏūm mā lā yalzam* on Make-up and

## Believer's God

We now turn to the “orthodox” image of God and look at the verses expressed in the tongue of the most pious believer:

If you are a denier of God due to the excess of your folly  
Then bear witness that I am not!  
I fear the punishment of God in the afterlife  
and claim that command is in God's hand alone.  
I saw unbelievers to whom repentance returns  
while they are at the hands of gravediggers.

idhākunta min farṭi s-safāhi mu‘aṭṭilan  
fa-yā jāhidu ashhad innanī ghayru jāhidā,  
āakhāfu mina llāhi l-‘uqūbata ājilan,  
wa-az‘umu anna l-amra fī l-yadi wāhidī.  
fa-n-nīra’aytu l-mulhidīnata‘ūduhum  
nadāmatuhum ‘inda l-akuffi l-lawāhidī. (Lz1.280.3-5)

Verses complaining about God, explicitly or implicitly conveying dissatisfaction and anger towards Him are blended with verses where God appears as just, wise, omnipotent, and the only Eternal:

God is just, even if your doubts hesitate,  
your greatest duty is to heed Him.

wa-llāhu ḥaqqun wa-in mājat zunūnukum  
wa-inna awjaba shay’in an turā‘ūhu. (Lz2. 399.5)

Perhaps life is restlessness and deception,  
and death will bring my rest in dream.  
And God is but justice  
who will not diminish my strength and make my complaint last long.

la‘alla l-‘aysha tashīdun wa-naṣbun  
wa-rāḥatīya l-ḥimāmu atā bi-naumī.  
wa-makāna al-muhayminu wa-huwa ‘adlun  
li-yaqṣira ḥīlatī wa-yuṭīla lawmī. (Lz2.311.13--312.1)

---

Dynamics of the Universe,” *The Muslim World* 85, no.1-2 (1995):122-146. Lacey, in the light of his explanations of contradictions in *Luzūm*, concluded in a straightforward manner that al-Ma‘arrī’s God was co-eternal with time, space, and matter. See also, Lacey, *Man and Society*, 269-272.

<sup>573</sup> See, for instance, Nicholson, “Meditations,” 158-159.

There is a caveat here since these lines bear ambiguity. Al-Ma'arrī might have meant that if God is just he would then not diminish his strength and make him suffer. That is to say, the poet calls God's justice into question. The same is with the following verse too:

God is the truth, and man is ignorant for whom  
lying and cheating is natural state.  
The mind attempted to make people descent,  
but for human beings there is no betterment

wa-llāhu ḥaqqun wa-bnu ādama jāhilun  
min sha'nihi t-tafrītu wa-t-takdhībū  
wa-l-lubbu ḥāwala an yuhadhhibah ahlahu  
fa-idhā l-barīyyatu ma la-ha tahdhību. (Lz1. 94. 10-95.1)

On the one hand, there is a claim that God is true, and man to be blamed for imperfections, on the other hand, this natural state is caused by God so the blame should be on Him.

Frequently, al-Ma'arrī portrays a God who is wise and must be depended on and obeyed:

People are in darkness and no meditation  
brings them to light besides the wisdom of the Almighty.

wa-l-insu fī ghimmā'in lam yatabayyanū  
bi-l-fikri illāḥikmata l-qahhārī. (Lz1.403.17)

He also images a powerful God, much like the God of Scriptures: He is omnipotent and able to resurrect the dead:

And God and His power remain forever  
and everything else perishes.

wa-yathbitu llāhu wa-sultānuhu  
wa-kullu amrin ghayruhu yaḍmaḥil. (Lz2. 247. 10)

The power of God is real, and it is no impossible  
for it to resurrect creatures and raise the dead.

qudratu llāhi ḥaqqun laysa yu'jizuhā  
ḥashrun li-khalqin wa-lā ba'thun li-amwātī. (Lz1.185.14-16)

Even if my bones turn into dust  
it is not hard for God to put them back together.

idhāmāa‘zumī kānathabā’an,  
fa-ina llāhalā-yu‘ayihjam‘ī.(Lz2.92.6)

God’s power is real: he assembles creation,  
and resurrection of the dead is not beyond it.<sup>574</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī’s God of the “orthodox” appears in these verses as the only Eternal and the only agent:

My belief is not in the eternity of stars,  
nor is my teaching the eternity of the world.

laysa intiqādī khulūda n-nujūmi  
wa-lā madhabī qidama l-‘alamī. (Lz2.320.11)

When it is said time destroys something, this only means  
God of time, and time is His servant.

idhā qīla ghāla d-dahru shay’an fa-innamā  
yurādu ilāhu d-dahri wa-d-dahru khādimuhū. (Lz2.261.3)<sup>575</sup>

One of the most illustrious and outspoken motifs in *Luzūm* belong to the preachers’ genre of *wa‘z wa-tadhkīr*. Admonitory motifs, echoing common pietistic motifs such as contrasting the mortality of humans and transitory nature of the world to the eternity of God, are ample in *Luzūm*:

Never in life give up on piety  
and give the due to your Lord,  
for how many kings made noble deeds  
and achieved fame by that, yet perished forever?

fa-lātatrukan wara’an fī-l-ḥayāti  
wa-addi ilā rabbika al-muftaraḍ  
fa-kam malikin shayyada l-makrumāti  
wa-nāla bi-hā aṣ-ṣita thumma inqaraḍ. (Lz2.63.12-13)<sup>576</sup>

*Luzūm* constantly mentions God in a manner of reminder and warning. Mentioning of God and His names more intensively occurs in al-Ma‘arrī’s *Fuṣūl*. Al-Ma‘arrī mentions not only the ninety-nine

<sup>574</sup> In *Fuṣūl* God’s omnipotence is manifest in His capacity to break ordinary laws of nature, like attaching the height of a dog to the sky (*in shi’ta alḥaqta samāwata kalbin bi-s-samā’*), there are many embellished examples on page 328.

<sup>575</sup> Trans. by Lacey, for more verses on the theme, see his *Man and Society*, 266-268.

<sup>576</sup> References of this type are found in *Fuṣūl* too: “Rise and call to your Lord, who gave you. Everything perishes besides him” (*inḥaḍ fa-d’u rabbaka lladhī wahaba; kullu shay’in siwāhu yadhabu*): see *Fuṣūl*, 274:10-11.

names, but also invents new ones coming in such phrases like *muwaffiqu kulli labībin* (comforting every intelligent person) or *muzīlu shuhubāti* (eliminator of uncertainties)<sup>577</sup> and so on.<sup>578</sup>

God must be trusted, relied on, and praised without any condition and limitation:

And if you trust God, your protector  
then leave things to him in word and perception.

idhā kunta bi-llāhi wāthiqan  
fa-sallim ilayhi l-amra fī l-lafzi wa-l-laḥzī. (Lz2.75.10)

Your Lord, He is with no peer,  
deluded is the one who denies and disbelieves.  
Have faith in Him, and the soul will ascend,  
even with the last breath.

mawlākamawlāka l-ladhī mā la-hu  
niddun wa-khāba l-kāfiru l-jāḥidū.  
āmin bi-hi wa-n-nafsu tarqāwa-in  
lam yabqa illā nafasun wāḥidū. (Lz1.267.17)

God and fear of Him are the reason for doing good. Belief in God becomes an assential proponent in one's ethical commitments and a source of moral awareness.

Fear God and do good even if death  
is like an edge of a sword which splits people into pieces.

fa-itqillāha wa-f'ali l-khayra fa-l-mawtu  
ḥusāmun yafrī l-barīyata qāṣil. (Lz2.249.1)

If you have not done any good, do it at least for the sake  
of God, and avoid praising yourself in articulate manner.

idh mā fa'alta l-khayra fa-ja'lhu khāliṣan  
li-rabbika wa-zjur 'an madīḥika alsunā. (Lz2. 341. 11)

<sup>577</sup> See *Fuṣūl*, 207,146.

<sup>578</sup> For the full list of the names or descriptive phrases, see Peltz, *Des Koran*, 174-177.

God appears as a regulative principle, the one which sustains assiduous moral endeavor throughout the course of a human's life. In fact, a significant part of the references to God in *Luzūm*, mostly admonitions, could be read in this light.

### Irony

Frequently, the poet expresses himself through irony. It surfaces in *Luzūm* mostly and especially in matters which pertain to God. Verbal irony, in the mode of blame by praise,<sup>579</sup> *madḥ bi-ma'riḍ adh-dhamm* (literally-praise in the form of blame: inversion) in Arabic,<sup>580</sup> comes forth quite often in *Luzūm*. In all the following verses, the poet praises God in order then to convey that He is responsible for all the disorder, anxiety, evil, inanity, and hardship on earth. Irony by incongruence expresses the profound dissonance between what is expected from God and what the reality is instead.

To Him the glory! He who inspired all the races of men  
with a matter that leads to insanity and disorder.

subḥana man alhama l-ajnāsa kullahum  
amran yaqūdu ilā khablin wa-takhbīlī. (Lz2.224.9)

Praised be God, the Maintainer of life,  
yet, gentleness and shyness became rare among people.

ta'ālā rāziqu l-aḥyā'i ṭurran  
la-qad wahati l-murū'atu wa-l-ḥayā'ū. (Lz1.52.9)

Praised be God! There is not a single tranquil person on earth;  
all of mankind is anxious and tormented.

al-ḥamdu li-llāhi mā fī l-arḍi wādi'atun  
kullu l-barīyyati fī-hammin wa-ta'dhībī. (Lz1.134.7)

<sup>579</sup> For definition of this type of irony see N. Knox, *The Word Irony, and its Context, 1500-1755* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1961), 45-76.

<sup>580</sup> See "ta' kīd al-madḥ bi-mā yushbih ash-dhamm," in *EAL*.

God's sound reasoning is questioned in this verse, as van Ess put it: "Da mochte man sich dann bald fragen ob Gott überhaupt einen Grund haben mußte:<sup>581</sup>

God created me, yet I don't know why, Praised be Him,  
The One and most omnipotent!

allāhu ṣawwaranī wa lastu bi-‘ālimin  
li-mā dhāka subḥāna l-qadīri l-wāḥidī. (Lz1.296.1)

The problem with irony is that even the obvious ones carry the possibility of not being read as irony. Being blind to irony, ignoring and skipping it are also expected reaction from the reader. In any case, the final responsibility is with the reader. "Irony is not necessarily a matter of ironist intention (and therefore of implication), though it might be; it is, however, a matter of interpretation and attribution."<sup>582</sup> We know that for certain medieval readers, verses similar with the above-mentioned ones did not cause ambiguity and were used to assert the poet's bad faith.<sup>583</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī (d.1200), a staunch Ḥanbalī refuter of the poet did not read the following verse literally:

Corruption and existence occur, both testifying that  
the creation is the work of a wise one.

fasādun wa-kawnun ḥādithāni kilāhumā  
shahīdun bi-anna l-khalquṣun‘u ḥakīmi. (Lz2. 299.12)

Ibn al-Jawzī saw this verse to mean that existence and decay attested the lack of wisdom of their creator. The Sunni scholar Badr ad-Dīn al-‘Aynī (d.1453) interpreted the verses in the same way. Two other similarly ironic verses are quoted in these accounts, but the verses are not found in *Luzūm* (a problem that alerts to the need for researching *Luzūm*'s manuscript history). The verse reads as following:

Existence is seen and decay follows it,  
God blesses, nothing is in vain among His creature.

<sup>581</sup> Van Ess, *TG4*, 456.

<sup>582</sup> L. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994), 45.

<sup>583</sup> What Frye would call a "naive irony," and Wayne C. Booth "an overt irony:" N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 40; W.C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, (London/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 6.



kaunun yurā wa-fasādun yutbi‘uhu,  
tabāraka l-lāhu, mā fī khalqīhi ‘abathū.

The authors perceived the verse to convey that everything by God was but in vain. Another verse they quote reads:

And our lord is Almighty, known for his mercy,  
and how come then children suffer pain.

wa-rabbuna jallun mawṣūfun bi-ra’fatihi,  
fa-kayfa yumḥanu aṭfālun bi-alāmī.<sup>584</sup>

Irony thus did not skip the medieval reader.

There is, however, more to irony. It might be seen not so much as a challenge for and attack on God as much as an acceptance of one’s own weakness in the whole system of creation and one’s incapacity in the relationship to God. It has already been said that “humility is a proper partner of irony.”<sup>585</sup> In the face of profound and insoluble skepticism, the one which leads to no certainty and eventually shapes nothing but ambivalence, al-Ma‘arrī never declares himself for any propositional assertion. All that was asserted is meant to be negated. Perhaps the best way of expressing this sentiment of irony is to refer to what Wayne Booth called “unstable irony” as follows:

The only sure affirmation is that negation begins all ironic play: “this affirmation must be rejected,” leaving the possibility, and in infinite ironies the clear implication, that since the universe (or at least the universe of discourse) is inherently absurd, all statements are subject to ironic undermining. No statement can easily “mean what it says.”<sup>586</sup>

<sup>584</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū’l-Faraj, *al-Muntaẓam*, 16:26; see quotes also in al-‘Aynī, “‘Iqd al-Jumān fī Tarīkh ahl-az-Zamān” in *TQ*, 324.

<sup>585</sup> See K. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Cleveland and New York, 1962), 513; cited in Edmond Reiss, “Medieval Irony,” *Journal of History of Ideas*, vol. 42, no. 2 (1981):213.

<sup>586</sup> W. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 240-41.

### 4.3. Conclusion: Is there a Definition?

We have seen that any feature and attribute that God is given is undermined by its contraries. What is then the nature of God in *Luzūm*, how to define Him, and is He definable at all? In some poems, conveying disappointment with tradition, with all kinds of knowledge generated by disputations, al-Ma‘arrī urges their dismissal and remains with God as the sole resort. The recognition of and reliance on God seems to be a shelter, an escape from all that did not prove valid, rather than a philosophical or theological principle for belief in God:

Had it not been for worldly competition,  
no book of disputation would be composed in the world:  
neither the Mughnī nor the ‘Umad.<sup>587</sup>  
They exaggerated their speech so that its embellishment  
enfeebles the minds, and yet it was not confirmed.  
They keep on inducing analogical reasoning in Sham and in Yemen:  
give them away and their world and what they had been engaged with,  
for the Powerful and the Eternal suffices you.

law lā t-tanāfusu fī d-dunyā lamā wuḍī‘at  
kutubu t-tanāẓuri lā l-mughnīyu wa-lā l-‘umadū,  
qad bālaghū fī kalāmin bi-an zukhrifuhu  
yūhi l-‘uqūla<sup>588</sup> wa-lam tathbut la-hu ‘amadū.  
wa-mā yazālūna fī Shāmin wa-Yamanin  
yastanbiṭūna qiyāsan mā la-hu amadū,  
fa-dharhumu wa-dunyāhum fa-qad shughilū  
bi-hā wa-yakfīka min-hā l-qādiru ṣ-ṣamadū. (Lz1.249.4-7)<sup>589</sup>

It is true that some definitions of God might be credible. For instance, deism, which was already mentioned above, could be a good angle to look at al-Ma‘arrī’s belief. The notion assumes that al-Ma‘arrī believed in a supreme intelligence, the cause of the world order and creation. It also assumes that al-Ma‘arrī did not believe in miracles and rejected revelation as a source of knowledge relying instead on the light of natural reason. Deism could be one of the ways of looking at al-Ma‘arrī’s belief but, again, neither in his depiction of God, nor in his attitude towards revelation and

<sup>587</sup> Referring to ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s works.

<sup>588</sup> It is ‘*uyūna* in Zand’s edition, but ‘*uqūla* stands in the UBL Or.100, p.66.

<sup>589</sup> Lz1.176.6 contains exactly the same.

reason did al-Ma‘arrī overcome his ambivalence in such a way that would allow us to reconstruct an unambiguous definition.

For deists, God exists but remains absent, remote and unengaged. He is an indifferent God “sustaining the delicate mechanisms he had created but never involving himself in the misery and the ecstasy, the generosity and the sinfulness of people’s life. A wonderful cosmic engineer He may have been, but He had little or no concern for the joys and pains of the human condition.”<sup>590</sup> From Lucretius to Rochester, this God has been unconcerned and unengaged with worldly matters as the following poem illustrates:

The *Gods*, by right of Nature, must possess  
An Everlasting Age, of perfect Peace:  
Far off remov’d from us, and our Affairs:  
Neither approach’d by *Dangers*, or by *Cares*:  
Rich in themselves, to whom we cannot add:  
Not pleas’d by *Good Deeds*; nor provok’d by *Bad*.<sup>591</sup>

Unlike the God of deists, al-Ma‘arrī’s is an engaged deity. We have seen the constant and various mentions of God in *Luzūm* in such a way that made this God involved, active, a part of the whole and always present. God is not wished to remain indifferent, God is asked, importuned, praised, thanked, blamed, reproached and scorned and when accepted, still not peacefully. One could claim that deistic God would be much more relevant for al-Ma‘arrī’s *Fuṣūl* where prophecy is almost totally dismissed but, again, in *Fuṣūl* too God is not remote but rather engaged and present.

Finally, one finds a fideist notion of God in *Luzūm*. Al-Ma‘arrī finds God unknowable and incomprehensible and considers all the efforts to know God futile.

God is not matter that one comprehends,  
be careful with your fellow men not to enrage Him!

amma llāhu fa-amrun lasta mudrikahu  
fa-iḥdhar li-jīlika fawqa l-arḍi iskhātā. (Lz2.69.7)

<sup>590</sup> John Butler, *Rock of the Ages: The Changing faces of the Christian God* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2013), 153.

<sup>591</sup> This is Rochester’s translation of Lucretius, *De rerum natura* cited in S. Ellenzweig, *Fringes of Belief*, 43.

We have no knowledge about the secret of our God,  
did the Sun learn it or the star sense it?

wa-laysa la-nā ‘ilmun bi-sirri ilāhinā  
fa-hal ‘alamtu sh-shamsuaw sha‘ara n-najmū. (Lz2.252. 7)

They tell you lies about the highest Lord,  
no man knows affairs of God.

yukhabbirunaka ‘an rabbi l-‘ulā kadhīban  
wa-mā darā bi-shu‘ūni l-lāhi insānū. (Lz2.334.9).<sup>592</sup>

Human efforts are incapable of knowing God and justifying faith. All that remains is to accept God without asking why.

It is important that this complex attitude towards God, the tension, the anxiety and the angst are not dismissed. If we give credibility to only one part of *Luzūm*, let us say to the one expressing doubts towards the ways of God, for the sake of establishing consistency, it is still very hard and problematic to ignore a large portion of the text which speaks for piety, express fear from and reliance on God. The contradictory moods and sentiments, contrasting statements and juxtapositions find their place in one and the same text, on pages apart. It will not be possible to reconstruct a systematic view on God by assembling dispersed ideas. *Luzūm* is rather a collage of ideas where scriptural and philosophical notions of God are put next to each other without any final assertion. All the definitions and features regarding Ma‘arrī’s God might stand valid for a moment to be refuted in the next one by their opposites.

#### 4.4. Prophecy: The Problem

Long before al-Ma‘arrī, there had been critical approaches towards claims for revealed message received from the divine, towards the prophets and the institution of prophecy in general, and towards the scriptures and Law. Already Ibn al-Muqaffa‘(d.759?), a courtly secretary and talented

<sup>592</sup> In *Fuṣūl*, too, one encounters such enunciations: “Say,” as for the understanding [something], the answer is no, as for the omnipotence [of God], the answer is yes,” (*fa-qul ammā fī-l-ma‘qūli fa-lā, wa-ammā fī-l-qudrati fa-balā*), *Fuṣūl*, 109, 12-13.

stylist, thought of prophets as imposters who sought earthly power. The prophet Muḥammad was seen critics of religion as an obscurantist with dubious acts such as his compromises with the heathens, his doubts about his own mission and his primitive portrayal of the paradise.<sup>593</sup> For Abū ‘Isā al-Warrāq, prophets did not introduce anything meaningful. They either said things in accord with reason, in which case their mission was pointless, or they contradicted reason, in which case they were wrong. Before the time of Muḥammad, humans needed no prophetic guidance in order to learn to speak, to observe stars and to reason. Prophetic miracles were nothing but tricks for the uneducated masses.<sup>594</sup> The angels, who reinforced the troops of the Prophet in the battle of Badr, suddenly were absent in the battle of Uḥud: such stories carried no appeal to reason.<sup>595</sup> Ibn ar-Rāwandī considered prophets masters of legerdemain and so no necessity of them.<sup>596</sup>

For ar-Rāzī, the whole idea of prophecy<sup>597</sup> went against the wisdom of God: why would God single out certain individuals and make other people dependent upon them? Prophecies created rival religious groups and spread hostility among them. In ar-Rāzī’s understanding, religions were harmful since they engendered hatred and wars. All this did not fit in ar-Rāzī’s understanding of

<sup>593</sup> See van Ess, *TG4*, 337; *TG5*, 105; D. Urvoy, *Penseurs libres*, 59; for a general survey, see also I. Kristó –Nagy, “La Lumière et les Ténèbres dans l’œuvre d’Ibn al-Muqaffa’,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 61 (2008):265-293. Fragments of Ibn al-Muqaffa’s anti-Islamic work were preserved in the refutation of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm edited and translated by M. Guidi, *La lotta tra l’Islam e il Manicheismo. Un libro di Ibn al-Muqaffa’ contra il Corano confutato da al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1927); See for a partial translation and commentary in German van Ess. *TG2*, 29-37.

<sup>594</sup> Van Ess, “Ibn ar-Rēwandī, 19; idem, *TG4*, 331-334; Urvoy, *Penseurs libres*, 113; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 41, 149.

<sup>595</sup> The same observation about the angels was made by Ibn al-Muqaffa’: Van Ess, “Image,” 20-21. One argument to claim that prophets are unnecessary runs in relation to the nature and animals: if the general governance makes animals flourish without prophets, why wouldn’t it be the case with humans, why do humans need prophets and revealed law? This inquiry induced the dichotomy between prophetic and natural religions among the *Brethern of Purity*, and al-Jāhiz, too, was occupied with this question: see P. Crone, “Dahrīs according to al-Jāhiz,” 101.

<sup>596</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 79-80.

<sup>597</sup> Ar-Rāzī’s *Makhārīq al-anbiyā’* (*Tricks of Prophets*) is his most famous heretical work. Al-Bīrūnī registered two heretical works (*kufīyāt*) by ar-Rāzī against prophethood: *Fī-n-Nubuwwāt* (*On Prophecies*) and *Fī-Ḥiyāl al-Mutanabbīyīn* (*About the Tricks Pretenders to Prophethood*): see P. Walker, “The Political Aspects,” 86.

benevolent and compassionate God.<sup>598</sup> The idea of apostolic miracles too seemed totally absurd to ar-Rāzī.<sup>599</sup>

The anti-prophetic *topoi* were often related to *Barāhima* who appear in Jewish and Islamic theological sources as a group who denied prophecies on the account of supremacy of human intellect and reason. According to *barāhima*, prophecy was not at all necessary to prove God's existence. They refrained from eating meat and rejected idolatry. Though the group was associated with the people of India (*ahl al-hind*), the name "Barāhima" in Muslim tradition signified a stance against prophecy, more as a *topos*, without indicating to a specific group.<sup>600</sup>

#### 4.5. Prophecy in *Luzūm*

Opposite readings of al-Ma'arrī's attitude towards prophecies is a characteristic aspect of ma'arrīan scholarship. One camp affirmed al-Ma'arrī's thorough rejection of prophecies,<sup>601</sup> the other

<sup>598</sup>Ibid., 95-96; Goodman, "Rāzī vs Rāzī," 89ff; P. Crone, "Post Colonialism in Tenth-Century Islam," *Der Islam*, vol. 83 (2006):3-9.

<sup>599</sup> It was noted by P. Walker that at the time of ar-Rāzī the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'ān and prophetic miracles were not fixed, and that ar-Rāzī's attitude seems similar to that of some of Mu'tazila regarding these issues. While this is a valid point, the difference between ar-Rāzī and Mu'tazila is that the former, through the independent status of reason, thoroughly disregarded not only the miracles but the prophets too. See Walker, "Political Aspects," 89; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 111. More on reason will follow below.

<sup>600</sup> See P. Crone, "Barāhima," in *EF*<sup>3</sup>; identification of this group has been controversial in the scholarship: Kraus argued that it was Ibn ar-Rāwānī who invented Barāhimato cover his anti-prophetic views; Shlomo Pines argued that Ibn ar-Rāwānī relied on Sa'īd al-Fayyūmī (d.942) and al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's (d. 860) accounts about *Barāhimah* taken from an encounter with Indian teachings. B. Abrahamov suggested identifying *Barāhimah* with a Sabeian sect whose original name was *Ibrāhīmīyah*, and this was the way to read it in al-Qāsim bn Ibrāhīm's *K. ar-Radd 'alā rāfiḍa*. This, however, does not solve the enigma since Sabeans themselves remain a mystery. N. Calder's position is close to that of Abrahamov suggesting that *Barāhimah* was an unknown Jewish-Christian religion of Abraham. Stroumsa argued that the whole topic of anti-prophetic *Barāhimah* predated Ibn ar-Rāwānī, and that the Arabic sources about Indian thought have to be sought in encounters with Indian religion and not in the ploy of Ibn ar-Rāwānī. She claimed that all existing evidence confirmed the connection of the *Barāhimah* with the east and India rather than to the Jewish-Christian tradition, and that the argument about the supremacy of human intellect seemed to have been attributed to *Barāhimah* independent of Ibn ar-Rāwānī. See Kraus, "Ketzergeschichte," 341-357; Abrahamov, "The Barāhima Enigma; A Search for a new Solution," *Die Welt des Orients*, vol. 18(1987):72-79; N. Calder, "The Barāhima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality," *BSOAS* 57(1994):40-51; Stroumsa, "The Barāhima in early *kalām*," *JSAI* 6 (1985):229-41; idem, *Freethinkers*, 145-188.

<sup>601</sup> Lacey did not think that pro-Islamic "orthodox" verses should be taken seriously relying instead on the comment put down by Nicholson: "After what we have seen of Ma'arrī's views on the subject of religion it is evident that he would not be described accurately by any designation which connotes belief in a divine Word revealed through prophecy or in a religious code deriving its authority from tradition." See Nicholson, "Meditations," 196; Lacey, *Man and Society*, 168-69. Hussayn stated that al-Ma'arrī categorically denied prophecy; see *Tajdīd*, 269-273. 'Abd al-Qādir was of the same

frontasserted the opposite.<sup>602</sup> Certainly, there is a reason for these opposing readings as it will be obvious from the discussion below. What follows next is a scan of al-Ma‘arrī’s attitude towards prophecy. Al-Ma‘arrī at times appears as a staunch denier of prophecies, and religious laws in general but claims at other times that had people followed to what prophets brought to them they might have ended with better morals and state.

Accordingly, prophets appear as deceivers who have not brought any good to humans. They all contradicted each other:

Do not be hostile me,  
for I consider your Jesus the equal of Muḥammad,  
will the morning-light save the observer of the twilight  
or are we all in the eternal darkness?

lā tabda’ūnī bi-‘adāwati min-kumu  
fa-Masīḥukum ‘indī naẓīru Muḥammadi  
a-yughīthu ḍaw’u ṣ-ṣubḥi nāẓira l-madlajin  
am naḥnu ajma’u fī ḡalāmin sarmadī? (Lz1. 295.1-2)

Moses preached and disappeared, and then Jesus rose,  
then came Muḥammad with five prayers.  
And it was said that another religion will come,  
and people perished between yesterday and tomorrow.

da‘ā Mūsā fa-zāla wa-qāma ‘Īsā  
wa-jā’a Muḥammadun bi-ṣalātin khamsin  
wa-qīla yajī’u dīnun ghayru hādhā  
wa-awdā n-nāsu bayna għadin wa-amsin. (Lz2.36.5-6)

Prophets are all the same, none is stronger or more special than the other, and they, like all the people, are in darkness and confusion. They do not stand as examples for good morals and do not hold capacity to rightly guide people:

---

idea; see *Falsafat Abī’ l-‘Alā’* (Cairo: Lajnat al-bayān al-‘arabī, 1950), 136-137. Alfred Guillaume claimed al-Ma‘arrī believed in God and reason but denied the prophecies totally: see the reference in, Saleh, “Bibliographie,” 249.

<sup>602</sup>In Aḥmad Taymūr’s opinion, declaring al-Ma‘arrī as a denier of prophecies is merely a fake accusation; see his *Abū’ l-‘Alā’*, 186-90. Shawqī Ḍayf claimed that verses, in which al-Ma‘arrī criticized the misguided, did not indicate his unbelief and attack on the prophets. These verses were in any case less than those glorifying God (this is of course sheer apologetics): see Ḍ. Shawqī, *Al-Fann*, 392-393; Yāzījī brought in both anti-prophetic and pro-prophetic verses and came to no conclusions: see *Abū’ l-‘Alā’*, 206-209; Narjūs Farr tended to believe in the sincerity of al-Ma‘arrī’s pro-prophetic verses; see his *Abū’ l-‘Alā’: dirāsāt fī mu‘taqīdātihī d-dīniya* (Beirut: Dār aṣ-Ṣādir, 2011), 63. Laoust, too, did not exclude that some pro-prophetic verses were result of “sincerity;” Laoust, “Vie et Philosophie,” 143.

I have looked for religious people  
 who are pious and not hypocrites.  
 But I found instead animals with no minds  
 to guide them, and no light,  
 And people of intelligence in pride,  
 who think themselves as prophets for people.  
 The latter are people of deception and the former are idiots.

wa-qad fattashtu ‘an aṣḥābi dīnin  
 lahum muskun wa-laysa lahum riya’ū.  
 fa-laqaytu l-bahā’ima lā ‘uqūlun  
 tuqīmu lahā d-dalīla wa-lā ḍiyā’ū,  
 wa-khwāna l-faṭānati fī-khtiyālin  
 ka-annahumu li-qawmin anbiyā’ū.  
 fa-amma hawlā’u fa-ahlu makrin  
 wa-mma l-awwalūna fa-ghbiyā’ū. (Lz1.52.12-15)

Prophetic laws are subject to corruption by people; they are fallible and thus should not be  
 blindly obeyed. Religious laws are made by hands of people and corruptly transmitted in the manner  
 of traditions:

The mind wonders: all the laws are  
 imitated stories with no measured proof.  
 Magians, Muslims, Christians,  
 and Jews became durable [with their religions].  
 The houses of fire are visited for worship;  
 populated mosques and churches.  
 Sabeans venerates stars,  
 and the innate nature of all of them passes on.

wa-l-‘aqlu ya’jabu wa-sh-sharā’i’u kulluha  
 khabarun yuqalladu lam yaqishu qā’isū.  
 mutamajjasūna wa-muslimūna wa-ma’sharun  
 mutanaṣṣirūna wa-hā’idūna rasā’isū.  
 wa-buyūtu nīrānin tuzāru ta’abbudan  
 wa-masājidun ma’mūratun wa-kanā’isū.  
 fa-ṣābi’ūna yu’aẓẓimūna kawākiban  
 wa-ṭibā’u kullin fī-sh-shurūri ḥabā’isū. (Lz2.20.14-15-21.1-2)

The laws of all the people came to us  
 on the traces of another one (law) they had arranged.  
 They changed each other’s sayings  
 And reason abolished what they made obligatory.

jā’atnā sharā’i’u kulli qawmin  
 ‘alā āthāri shay’in rattabūhu.



wa-ghayyara ba‘duhum aqwāla ba‘ḍin  
wa-bṭalati n-nuhā mā awjabūhu. (Lz2.404.2-3)

Those laws brought animosity among people and did not save them from wrong-doing, such lawmaking is fraudulent and it causes the opposite of what is pretended:

The religious laws have thrown hatred among us  
and brought varieties of animosity.  
Isn't it due to the judgment of the prophecies  
that women of the Byzantines are considered lawful for the Arabs?

inna sh-sharā'i'u alqat baynanā iḥanan  
wa-awrathatnā afānīna l-'adāwātī.  
wa-hal ubīḥati l-nisā'u r-Rūmi 'an 'araḍin  
li-l-'urbi illā bi-aḥkāmi n-nubuwwātī. (Lz1. 186.2-3)

With all this, al-Ma'arrī would be directly classified as anti-prophetic if *Luzūm* were confined only to the type of verses quoted above. But one finds many verses contradicting the sharp anti-prophetic sentiments and expressing poet's positive mood towards prophecies. Prophets are seen as moral guides, whose message has been dismissed by the ignorant:

The prophet came with a truth in order to improve you,  
but does your character perceive improvement?

jā'a n-nabīyu bi-ḥaqqin kay yuhadhhibakum  
fa-hal aḥassa lakum ṭab'un bi-tahdhībī? (Lz1. 134.8)

People are so corrupt that an ignorant from among them  
thinks that the prophecy is false and deception.

wa-mawwaha n-nāsu ḥattā ẓanna jāhiluhum  
anna n-nubuwwata tamwīhun wa-tadlīsun. (Lz2.16.7).

In these verses, al-Ma'arrī clearly points to the positive role prophets could have in moral improvement of people. Even though *Luzūm* contains many verses with anti-prophetic sentiments, the ones expressing positive attitude towards prophets, even if less in number, should not be dismissed if we want to have a better understanding of al-Ma'arrī's views on religion in general.

#### 4.6. Scriptures: the Problem

Naturally, the authors who criticized prophecies questioned the Qur'ān as a manifestation of revealed message, its miraculous and unrivaled beauty. It is assumed that Ibn al-Muqaffa' had parodied the Qur'ān.<sup>603</sup> At the time of Ibn al-Muqaffa' the doctrine of *i'jāz*, the inimitability of the Qur'ān, was only an embryonic idea in relation to its content, and the question of the meaning remained detached from that of the style. Ibn Muqaffa's endeavor was rather experimental than polemical, and regarded the Qur'ān primarily as a literary composition whose literary merit he challenged. The purpose was not improving or replacing the Book but showing that the literary style of the Qur'an was nothing special.<sup>604</sup> However, there was more to it, according to Urvoy: because of Qur'ān's anthropomorphic views, Ibn al-Muqaffa' saw it as a violation of the transcendence of the Creator.<sup>605</sup> In addition, according to Ibn al-Muqaffa', God in the Qur'ān appeared as an unjust and irrational tyrant.<sup>606</sup> His frustration was that God, prophets, and the Book carried too much that was human and not divine. In this respect, Urvoy spotted a Nietzschean accent in Ibn al-Muqaffa's critique of religion.<sup>607</sup>

For Ibn ar-Rāwandī, who talked of the Qur'ān with sarcasm, the Book did not present any intellectual value, was full of logical flaws, written in faulty Arabic (*lahn*) and was not at all that beautiful, let alone miraculous.<sup>608</sup> The whole being of the Qur'an, its composition and its interpretation were not necessitated by the Prophet (*naẓm al-Qur'ān wa-ta'wīluhu laysa bi-ḥājjatin*

<sup>603</sup> For the authenticity of his *Mu'āraḍat al-Qur'ān* and other works by Ibn al-Muqaffa' see I. Kristó-Nagy, "On the Authenticity of *al-Adab al-ṣaghīr* attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa' and the Titles of the *Kitāb al-ādāb al-kabīr*, *al-Adab al-ṣaghīr*, *al-Yatīma* and the Polemic against Islam," *AOH*, vol. 62 (2009):199-218; more on Mu'āraḍa see van Ess, "Some fragments of the Mu'āraḍat al-Qur'ān attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa'" in: *Studia arabica et islamica. Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās* (1981):151-163. See also Stroumsa on alternative Scriptures, *Freethinkers*, 137.

<sup>604</sup> Van Ess, "Mu'arada" 160; idem, *TG2*, 35-37.

<sup>605</sup> Urvoy, *Penseurs libres*, 59

<sup>606</sup> Van Ess, *TG5*, 104-108.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid., 60; idem, "Demystification," 92-93.

<sup>608</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 81-82; 103-104; Ibn ar-Rāwandī, too, was accused of imitating the Qur'ān, his father, who was allegedly a Jew, had supposedly attempted to parody Torah, idem, 138; van Ess, *TG4*, 330-331. The eloquence of the Qur'ān was not very highly estimated by Ibrāhīm an-Nazzām too who did not see it a proof for prophecy but unlike ar-Rāwandī, he considered the content of the Qur'ān an evidentiary miracle; see Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, 29; van Ess, *TG3*, 408-413.

*li-n-nabī*): even simple persons would be able to compose a similar book (*al-khalqu yaqdurūna ‘alā mithlihi*’).<sup>609</sup> Ar-Rāzī showed the same sentiments. According to Abū Ḥātim, the physician ar-Rāzī talked about the Qur’ān in the following words:

You claim that the miracle is right here and present before us, namely, the Qur’ān. You also state that whoever denies this should be asked to produce a similar text. Now, if by “similar” you mean similar in the ways in which human speech may be said to vary in quality, we would be obliged to adduce a thousand examples like it from the speech of men of eloquence and high style, prose rhymes, and poets. All of these examples would be more fluent in phrasing, more concise in meaning, more eloquent in both substance and form, and more elegant as rhymed prose. If you do not agree to this, then we demand from you texts similar to what you asked from us.... We are truly astonished at the way they speak of a text whose speech resembles ancient legends, added to which it is full of contradictions and without any value or any proof of anything. And yet they say, “Bring us something similar, if you can” [Q52:34].<sup>610</sup>

For Rāzī, the Qur’ān and revelations in general and traditions based on them, were not only of little intellectual value (for *Almagest* is much more important than the Qur’ān),<sup>611</sup> but also a malicious source for bloodshed and tool in the hands of intolerant and tyrannical authorities.<sup>612</sup>

#### 4.7. Scriptures in *Luzūm*

Al-Ma‘arrī talks of prophetic books as total lies fabricated by humans: what is credited is the human intellect alone. In the following verse, al-Ma‘arrī strips scriptures of any divine value:

They transmit their scriptures, yet the reason tells me  
that they are lies from beginning to the end.  
Reason, you are trustful, and let perish the fool  
who formed the Traditions through falsehood or their interpretation.

yatlūna asfārahū wa-l-ḥaqqu yukhbirunī  
bi-anna ākharahā maynun wa-awwalahā.  
ṣadaqta yā ‘aqlu fa-la-ya‘bad akhū safhin  
ṣāgha l-āḥādītha ifkan aw ta’awwalahā. (Lz2.196.3)

<sup>609</sup> Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, 27.

<sup>610</sup> Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A ‘lām an-Nubūwwa*, 168, trans. T. Khalidi.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 105.

The forgoing verses bare indeed a withering criticism: for it can be induced from here that al-Ma‘arrī gives to scriptures a status of a transmitted *ḥadīth* whose validity is questioned. These scriptures stand as ground for false religions and they are not accredited by anything divine. Moreover these books do not improve humanity as it appears in the following verses where religion and unbelief appear on a par:

Religion, unbelief and stories are revealed,  
the Qur’an, the Torah, and the Gospels are written down.  
In every generation there are falsehoods considered religion,  
did even one of them stand out with the true way?

dīnun wa-kufrun wa-anbā’un tuqaṣṣu wa-furqānun  
yunaṣṣu wa-tawrātun wa-injīlu  
fī kullī jīlin abāṭīlun yudānu bi-hā  
fa-hal tafarrada yawman bi-l-hudā jīlu?(Lz2. 177. 7-11)

Often al-Ma‘arrī is more rigid and direct while referring to other monotheistic books rather than to the Qur’ān:

The Jews went astray, and their Torah is  
a lie by religious scholars and rabbis  
who based it upon someone like them and then  
pretended to have it derived from the Almighty.  
And when you overpower someone arguing for his religion  
He will defer to traditions.

ḍallat yahūdu wa-innama tawrātuhumā  
kadhibun mina l-‘ulamā’i wa-l-aḥbārī  
qad stanadū ‘am mithlihim thumma ‘talū  
fa-namaw bi-snādin ilā l-jabbārī.  
wa-idhā ghalabta munāḍīlan ‘an dīnihi  
alqā maqālīdahu ilā l-akhbārī. (Lz1.411.9-11)

All this does not mean that al-Ma‘arrī dismissed the Scriptures and the prophetic message consistently. The poet recognized the value of Scriptures as moral guidance. If only they had not been ignored:

The book of Muḥammad, of Moses,  
the Gospel of the Son of Marry, and the Psalms  
forbade people [to do wrong], but they did not accept them, and lost are  
the true warnings, and People all are corrupted.

kitābu Muḥammadin wa-kitābu Mūsā  
 wa-njīlu bni Maryama wa-z-Zabūrū  
 nahat umaman fa-mā qabalat wa-bārat  
 naṣīhatuhā fa-kullu l-qawmi būrū. (Lz1.324.11-12)

If God judges you according to your disgrace  
 you will all end up in misery.  
 How many preachers preached from among us  
 and how many prophets stood!  
 All of them went away dissatisfied, the misfortune remains,  
 and your disease has not been cured.

idhā qaḍā llāhu bi-l-makhāzī  
 fa-kullu ahlika ashqiya'ū.  
 kam wa'aḍa l-wā'izūna minna  
 wa-qāma fī-l-arḍi anbīyā'ū  
 fa-nṣarafū wa-l-balā'u bāqin  
 wa-lam yazul dā'uki l-'ayā'ū. (Lz1.52.5-6)

Prophecy is contrasted to human nature. Prophetic enterprises stand weak and insufficient against the corrupt nature of humans for whom neither the prophets nor the scriptures serve as a guiding power. Prophecies and prophetic advice are insufficient not because of their nature, but because of the disastrous habit of humans of ignoring them.

As for the Prophet of Islam, there is no implicit criticism of him but there are verses in which al-Ma'arrī expresses skepticism about Muḥammad's prophetic mission. In the following, al-Ma'arrī points to the vulnerable nature of Muḥammad as any ordinary man:

Disaster overtakes man from directions  
 they do not expect: marvel at the adversities of the fates.  
 And Muḥammad, although informed, complained of  
 [his] vein being severed at the time of his meal.

wa-l-mar'u yaghshāhu l-adhā min ḥaythulā  
 yakhshāhu fa-'ujib min ṣurūfī l-adharī.  
 wa-Muḥammadun wa-huwa l-munabba'u yashtakī  
 li-makāni aklatihi nqīṭa' l-abharī. (Lz1. 397. 11-12)

The reference is to the event during which Muḥammad's prophetic faculty was tested and confirmed by a local woman Zaynab who poisoned the prophet's food, and the latter, knowing it, spat the food

out. However, later the prophet fell ill because of the food given by Zaynab thus eventually not meeting the “prophetic test.”

The following verses too can be seen as a rejection of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission, but they could also be seen as a denial of belief in supernatural stories. This, in turn, would refer to the denial of the qur’anic verse where a torch is turned into arrows to drive away the Devil (Q67:5):

I do not say that one day the stars  
were made lamps for Muḥammad’s ascent.

wa-lastu aqūlu anna sh-shuhba yawman  
li-ba‘thi Muḥammadin ju‘ilat rujūmā. (Lz2.289.6)<sup>613</sup>

Despite all this, there is in *Luzūm* a eulogy to Muḥammad:

Muhammad urged you to do virtuous things,  
For these are elevated matters unlike lowly ones.  
He guided you to glorify the One who created dawn and  
the shooting stars of night, the ones [stars] that appear and disappear.  
And he imposed on you the prayers and donations  
that are not impossible even for the weak.  
He urged you to purify your bodies and clothes  
and punished the act of defaming esteemed ladies.  
He prohibited wine which makes, as I imagine,  
the mind of its drinkers as thoughtless as the minds of the mad ostriches.  
Those who are drunk drag their garments like bad women  
drag their skirts upon their appearance.  
So may God bless him as long as the Sun rises  
and as long as his name perfumes, like musk, every gathering.

da‘ākum ilā khayri l-umūri Muḥammadun  
wa-laysa l-‘awālī fī l-qanā ka-s-sawāfilī.  
ḥadākum ‘alā ta‘zīmi man khalaqa ḍ-ḍuhā  
wa-shuhba d-dujā min ṭālī‘āti wāfilī.  
wa-alzamakum mā laysa yu‘jizu ḥamluhu  
akhā ḍ-ḍa‘fī min farḍin la-hu wa-nawāfilī.  
wa-ḥaththa ‘alā taṭhīri jismin wa-malbasin  
wa-‘āqaba fī qadhfi n-nisā’i l-ghawāfilī.  
wa-ḥarrama khamran khiltu albāba shirbuhā

<sup>613</sup>See Lacey, *Man and Society*, 150-151 and n. 20, p.178-180.

mina ṭayshi albāba n-na‘āmi l-jawāfilī,  
 yajurrūna thawba l-mulki jazza awānisin  
 ladā l-badw adhyāla l-ghawānī r-rawāfilī.  
 fa-ṣallā ‘alayhi llāhu mā dharra shāriqun  
 wa-mā fatta miskan dhikruhu fī l-maḥāfilī. (Lz2.214.3-9)

The verses strongly indicate the ethical value of the Prophet’s message. Whether al-Ma‘arrī believe in Muḥammad’s prophecy or not, he certainly valued the ethics expressed in the poem. Moreover, the verses could have direct addressees: like other s mentioned above, they could have been directed against the habits and ill-manners of Qartmaṭīs.

#### 4.8. Conclusion: Religion Simplified?

How then to see al-Ma‘arrī’s attitude to prophecy and to revealed religion? There is, of course, the most common motif of all times that religion has a certain social function and enables people to behave in a way conducive to the common good, and the utility of the prophecy, necessary due to the nature of humankind, comes for the sake of social and political collectivity. In the light of this pessimistic anthropology, fundamental for Muslim political thinking, prophecy signified the “human itinerary from individual to collective existence.”<sup>614</sup> To mention some notable examples: to Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, religion appeared as a God-given condition for conducting proper life: “God has made the happiness of man and the proper condition of his life now and in the hereafter [consist of] two natural gifts--religion and reason.”<sup>615</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ would argue that without prophetic guidance and message, people inherently disposed to evil, would destroy each other because of the ruthless competition and rivalry. They would not be able to solve contradictions by themselves. Prophecies thus made human coexistence possible (the exact counter-argument of what we have seen above). In

<sup>614</sup>A. Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim Christian, and Pagan Politics* (London/NY: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 115-16.

<sup>615</sup>Cited in G.E. Lampe, *Ibn al-Muqaffa‘: Political and Legal Theorist and Reformer* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, John Hopkins University, Washington D.C., 1986), 95. Citation is from Ibn al-Muqaffa‘’s *Risāla fī-’l-Ṣaḥāba* (*Epistle concerning the Entourage of the Caliph*), a letter addressed to the caliph al-Manṣūr containing a political program for building the ‘Abbāsid state.

the ancient world, the role of organizing people was given to sages and lawgivers who were now replaced by prophets.<sup>616</sup> The pessimistic anthropology has been fundamental for Muslim political thinking, specifically implying the political utility of religions.<sup>617</sup>

For Isma‘īlī Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī (d.934) prophecy was linked immediately to leadership: he thought the social order was based on the knowledge prophets brought to people, and ultimately on revelation. Only through obedience to religious law (*sharā‘i*), social order could be established. Questioning the authority of this law and seeking to supersede it through individual thinking, as the philosopher and physician ar-Rāzī thought it must be, would shake the stability of the worldly order. The truth given by revelation and order were thus tightly correlated.<sup>618</sup> Prophets were indeed real to Abū Ḥātim, and even those who denied their status and their miracles, must admit that they were men of superior intelligence and capacity, that they disciplined people and acted as leaders and teachers to them.<sup>619</sup>

For the tenth century scholar Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī (d.992), whose purpose was to refute any skepticism harmful to religions and in particular to Islam, revelation was a rational necessity for solving issues of day-to-day life. Religion was the noblest of all sciences and it alone held political order together in such a way that no other science was able to do. Religion, ranking above philosophy and other types of knowledge, existed as a universal good.<sup>620</sup>

What we see in *Luzūm* is that the constant and commonplace motif of social and political utility of the revelation is reduced to a much simpler meaning: revelation stands merely for its moral value. Appraisals for the political utility and functions of religion are eliminated and what remains is

---

<sup>616</sup>See P. Crone, “What are Prophets for? The Social Unity of Religion in Medieval Islamic Thought,” in *Islam and the Ancient Near East*, 186-189.

<sup>617</sup> See Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 115.

<sup>618</sup> Abū Ḥātim, *A‘lām an-Nubūwwa*, 57-69; Goodman, “Rāzī vs Rāzī,” 103;

<sup>619</sup> The same view was proclaimed later by the chief Ismā‘īlī missionary al-Mu‘ayyad in his response to Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s *Kitāb az-Zumurrud*: prophetic mission of bringing and maintaining social order needs to be accepted even if some deny the institution of the prophethood: P. Kraus, “Beiträge,” 109; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 139, Crone, “Post-Colonialism,” 5.

<sup>620</sup> See Heck, *Skepticism*, 94-95.



the plain moral message of revealed knowledge consisting of the simplest credo: do good and be righteous. Al-Ma‘arrī, however, has no unambiguous guideline of how to do so.

The moment of incongruity is that, on the one hand, prophets brought animosity; they fought for power and earthly gains. On the other hand, there is a moral charge in what they brought and said, and had humanity followed them, it would have been in a better position. While criticizing revealed religion, al-Ma‘arrī at the same time looks for its positive value: religion is not only to enslave and manipulate and to invoke obedience, but also to ennoble. Revelation signifies a link to an individual relationship with God and is a moral guidance. With this, al-Ma‘arrī, instead of making a sharp binary between the commoners and the elite, and instead of withdrawing from religion, conveys the simplest yet the most essential moral interest in religion. Religion is not seen as a means for controlling the credulous commoners and for sustaining a social order, but as a potential for cultivating good morals which applies equally to both the elite and the commoners. In this sense, religion is closer to the most elementary meaning of *dīn*, as behavior, way of life.<sup>621</sup>

Seen in the positive light, religion is an inner quality which cultivates and nourishes the soul:

Religion is when man happily renounces pleasures,  
with rightness and power as long as he lives.

ad-dīnu hajru l-fatā l-ladhdhāti ‘an yusrin  
fī ṣiḥatin wa-qtidārin min-hu mā ‘amarā. (Lz1.371.14)

Religion is the sincerity of the heart  
coupled with the virtue of seclusion.

ad-dīnu naṣḥu juyūbi muqtarinan  
madā l-layālī bi-‘ifati l-ḥajzī (Lz1.438.5)

Religion is that which enables one to overcome hardships of life as it is expressed in the following poem full of puns:

If ever misfortunes become great, they reveal  
themselves quickly, and if ever they come

<sup>621</sup> See, for instance, van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere*, 1266.

uninterruptedly over time, they pass on.  
And if your world becomes diminished, it also  
elevates; if it hates, it also rises and  
saves one from doom through religion.

nawā'ibu in jallat tajallat sarī'atan  
wa-immā tawālat fī z-zamāni tawallatī.  
wa-dunyāka in qallat aqallat wa-in qalat  
fa-min qalatin fī d-dīni najjat wa-'allatī. (Lz1.180.9-10)<sup>622</sup>

Both in classical and modern scholarship, the following verses have been always unambiguously  
read as denial of religion:

Wake up, wake up o gullible ones!  
For your religions are deceptions from the ancients.

aḥqū aḥqū yā ghuwātu fa-innamā  
diyānātukum makrun mina l-quḍamā'i. (Lz1.64.7)

In another light, however, they could be read as a warning against those who diminished the value of  
religion as it reads in the following:

Ask God's forgiveness and leave everything that is said about him  
by Abū Hudhayl and Ibn Kullāb.  
Religion is so diminished that its most noble men  
became trainers of falcons and dogs.

stagħfir allāha wa-truk mā ḥakā lahum  
Abū Hudhayl wa-mā qāla Ibn Kullābī.<sup>623</sup>  
fa-d-dīnu qad khassa ḥatā šāra ashrafuhu  
bāzan li-bāzayni wa-kalban li-kallābī. (Lz1.131.4-5)

Al-Ma'arrī turns to those who easily become a target for political and manipulative power of  
religion, easily become blinded by it as if they lost their capacity for sound thinking, and are open to  
lies and nonsense:

Were a wolf of the thicket to say,  
"I have been sent with religion from my lord:  
some men would reply  
"yes [you have].

<sup>622</sup> Trans. by Lacey, *Man and Society*, 32-33.

<sup>623</sup> Referring to the famous Basran Mu'tazilī theologian Abū Hudhayl Muḥammad (d.842) and another Basran anti-Mu'tazilī scholar Aballāh b. Sa'īd b.Kullāb (d.855?).

Law qāla sīdu ghadan bu‘ithtu bi-millatin  
min ‘indi rabbi qāla ba‘duhuma na‘am. (Lz2.321.13-14)

The following verse is often interpreted as al-Ma‘arrī’s one of the most “atheistic” poems. It has been read as a renunciation of religions and homage to intellect:

Hanifs erred, Christians are misguided,  
Jews are puzzled, and Mazdeans go astray.  
People on the earth are of two kinds:  
Those with intellect without religion,  
And those with religion without intellect.

hafati l-hanīfatu wa-n-naṣārā mā ihtadat  
wa-yahūdu ḥārat wa-l-majūsu muḍallah  
ithnāni ahlu-l-arḍi-dhū ‘aqlin bi-lā  
dīnin wa-ākharu dayyinun lā ‘aqla lah (Lz2.201.5-6)

To say this is only against religion is the one side of the coin. There is not much in these verses showing that al-Ma‘arrī disapproved of men with religion and favoured men with intellect. The verses disprove both sides. The quatrain is a testimony of a failure to find the middle way, the one which would bring religion and intellect into harmony. It is often proclaimed, based on similar verses, that al-Ma‘arrī, like other critics of prophetic religions, considered reason as the sole source of knowledge without giving any credits to revelation. In some studies of *Luzūm* and of al-Ma‘arrī’s thought in general, the notion of reason is counterposed to the notion of revelation, and al-Ma‘arrī is presented as a rationalist thinker. Certainly, some verses of *Luzūm* do support this view, however, some others underscore limitations of reason as we shall see below.

#### 4.9. Reason: The Problem

Al-Ma‘arrī is celebrated for his rationalism. The theme of reason, often invoked by al-Ma‘arrī as a yardstick, however, has not escaped contradictory and conflicting readings too. What kind of reason or reasoning did al-Ma‘arrī mean, is the notion of reason meant to replace the notion of revelation, are there any definitive parameters for this notion, and does the perception of reason by the poet bear parallels with those of other thinkers such as Ibn ar-Rāwandī and ar-Rāzī?

Arguments for reason revolved around the dichotomy of reason versus tradition (*'aql* vs. *naql*), and from these prospective, critics of religions explored the various potentialities, definitions and parameters of reason. Ibn ar-Rāwandī thought moral reason was a sufficient gift, an innate nature of humans and required no external means such as prophecy in order to become a full source of knowledge and in order to confirm what was commanded and what was prohibited.<sup>624</sup> Speech, sciences are cultivated and used only by the use of inborn intellect, by “discernment and power of observation.”<sup>625</sup> Thus one could decide on right or wrong and on how to act through moral and practical reasoning without relying on prophetic message.

It is important to emphasize that Ibn ar-Rāwandī, being a theologian, speculated within the domain of dialectics and challenged its capacities. Dialectics was seen by him as a method to reach probability but not certitude. His attacks on dialectics were signs of crisis within Mu‘tazilites and directed against them.<sup>626</sup> We know that Ibn ar-Rāwandī argued by means of *takāfu’ l-adilla*, equivalence of evidence: he argued for and against revelation, and, therefore, the derived opposite notions held for him the same value within his dialectics, something that was not the usual use of dialectics. Ibn ar-Rāwandī took the possibilities of dialectics to the extreme. While writing pro and against the same topic, he perhaps attempted to stretch the boundaries of dialectic reasoning, at the same time aiming at breaking the arrogance of his theologian colleagues and their confidence in reaching certain knowledge through theological reasoning.<sup>627</sup> In this sense, Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s was an attempt to “liberate” the Mu‘tazilite reason from the limits of dogma<sup>628</sup> through causing skepticism, doubt, and uncertainty.<sup>629</sup> Ibn ar-Rāwandī, unlike ar-Rāzī, as we shall see, did not bother to provide

---

<sup>624</sup> Kraus, *Beiträge*, 97.

<sup>625</sup> Some scholars thought that Ibn ar-Rāwandī referred to *ilhām* without mentioning it: *Freethinkers*, 80; van Ess, *TG4*, 325.

<sup>626</sup> See van Ess, “Ibn ar-Rāwandī,” 24.

<sup>627</sup> Many of Mu‘tazila were prone to the method of equipollence of proofs, see van Ess, *TG4*, 89.

<sup>628</sup> Al-Azmeh, “Introduction,” in *Ibn ar-Rāwandī*, 17.

<sup>629</sup> van Ess dismissed the sharp dichotomy of reason and revelation in Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s thought and considered the presented dilemma a false one: “there is no direct contradiction between reason and revelation, but only a certain

a systematic framework for the parameters of reason: his aim was exploring and employing the potentialities of argumentative, dialectical reason. His, in the end, was an instrumental reasoning, and mostly for the purpose of attacking the kind of reason which was used for the rational defense of dogma.

Ar-Rāzī elaborated more on the theme of reason and gave more precise parameters of this notion. Reason served not only for demonstrative purposes and for practicing logic, but for conducting a righteous life. According to Rāzī, thinking and investigation as precious human capacities were taken away by bearded jackasses who deceived people with lies, falsehood, and with contradictory reports and transmissions.<sup>630</sup> Wise and benevolent God granted all humans reason. Rāzī had full trust in reason since it was endowed to humans by the “Perfect Being,” the benevolent God who was not a deceiver. Judgment and individual thinking, supported by reason, could lead to certainty.

All this did not mean that ar-Rāzī was not cautious about the limits of human intellect and challenges it encountered. The opposite of reason, as Rāzī saw it, was passion (*hawā*). All vices in human beings were attributed to passion. Rāzī discussed the Reason-Passion opposition in his *Spiritual Physic* (*aṭ-Ṭibb ar-Rūḥānī*).<sup>631</sup> Because of the evil disposition of the human nature, people are prone to passions, but passions are subject to moderation through suppression (*qamʿ*), restraint (*radʿ*), overcoming (*mughālabā*), reining (*zamm*) and other efforts.<sup>632</sup> However, the soul is not innately corrupt and needs moderation and reformation through the conduct of Reason in order to get rid of its weaknesses. Reason, ar-Rāzī assured, was the most powerful agent: “It is God’s

---

ambivalence of situations and facts which may be considered to be bad by reason in the beginning, but then discovered to be good or useful by revelation afterwards.” Van Ess, “Ibn ar-Rēwandī,” 11; idem, “Al-Fārābī and Ibn ar-Rēwandī,” 5.

<sup>630</sup> Abū Hātim, *Aʿlām*, 44.

<sup>631</sup> For the text see: Aziz al-Azmeh (ed.), *Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī* (Beirut: Riad ar-Rayyes Books, 2011), 129-162. For an English translation see A. J. Arberry, *The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes* (London: Murray, 1950). For the summary of the work, see M. Mohaghegh, “Notes on the ‘Spiritual Physic’ of al-Rāzī,” *SI* 26 (1967):5-22; Whether ar-Rāzī’s ethical outlook especially in relation to pleasure, passion and reason was informed by Plato or Epicurus see Goodman, “The Epicurean Ethic,” 5-26 and P. Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures,” 71-94.

<sup>632</sup> Mohaghegh, “Notes,” 10.

greatest blessing to us, and there is nothing that surpasses it in procuring our advantage and utility.”<sup>633</sup> Reason was not only of help in deciding practical matters but it is as a means through which soul was lifted up and improved. It did lead to the knowledge of the remote and the obscure and even to the knowledge of the Almighty. But for this, one needed to discipline and subject his Passion.<sup>634</sup>

Rāzī’s understanding of reason differed from Mu‘tazilī rationalism: the latter too considered moral reason sufficient for deciding right and wrong. However, because of many traits of their nature, humans were unable to govern themselves, and this is why prophets became necessary, according to Mu‘tazilites. While Rāzī saw the potential of refinement of the human nature in humans themselves through constant discipline guaranteed by the good will of the Creator, Mu‘tazilites found these ways in external sources—in revelation and in derived sources. Ar-Rāzī’s notion of reason was highly positivistic and universal even though the full utility of human intellect depended on individual hard work. It was this strong position on human empowerment through reason that made prophets harmful, haunted by the passion for power.<sup>635</sup> Ismā‘īlīs too, though they cherished reason, did not see it as self-sufficient, and sought external support in the cosmic intellects present in prophets and imams.<sup>636</sup> In Rāzī’s case, on the contrary, human intellect was a powerful mundane tool to serve for humans’ well-being.<sup>637</sup> Having said this, a caveat is still in order: although ar-Rāzī developed a notion of mind distinct from many others at his time, there is still a possibility that by

<sup>633</sup> Arberry (trans.), *Spiritual Physick*, 20; Al-Azmeh, *ar-Rāzī*, 130.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid. Goodman saw similarities in the passionate rejection of passion between ar-Rāzī and Lucretius (more than Plato); see his “How Epicurean,” 273-74.

<sup>635</sup> Stroumsa observed a strong similarity here in the anti-clerical thought of the eighteenth century deists: see the reference to P. Harrison, “*Religion*” and *Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77-85; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 112.

<sup>636</sup> The inspiration (*ta’yīd*) joins the rational faculty of some elect people (prophets and imams), and only by accepting the instruction of the imam (*ta’līm*) can the rational faculty turn from potentiality into act: see D. de Smet, “Ismā‘īlī Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook for Islamic Theology*, 322.

<sup>637</sup> This is why Stroumsa thought that not counting reason among the five eternal was not a “glaring omission” as it was considered to be by Walker. See Walker, “Political Aspects,” 87; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 117. Also, for Rāzī, reason came from God, unlike soul for example which exists on its own as a cosmic prime principle; see Goodman, “How Epicurean,” 259.

formulating the paradigm of regulating the passion, ar-Rāzī made a statement about religion as political regulation.

#### 4.10. Al-Ma‘arrī’s Rationalism

Some scholars have claimed al-Ma‘arrī saw reason as an absolute source of knowledge and guide for moral conduct.<sup>638</sup> Some others have asserted that the poet did not rely on reason and even attacked it.<sup>639</sup> Others emphasized that al-Ma‘arrī stressed the limited capacity of reason to reach certainty.<sup>640</sup>

Muḥammad Badrān, discussing doubt in al-Ma‘arrī’s thought, claimed that doubting for him was a method for finding the truth (*Zweifel als Methode der Wahrheitsfindung*).<sup>641</sup> While Badrān was right to assert that nothing escaped doubt, that al-Ma‘arrī was in endless internal struggle and in conflict with all the existing institutions and systems, he came to a far-fetched conclusions putting al-Ma‘arrī next to Kant, Descartes and al-Ghazālī. When Kant declared reason as a main principle, Badran wrote, al-Ma‘arrī had done so already eight hundred years before. Apart from a few verses cited from *Luzūm*, no elaboration follows in Badran’s account on this comparison. As for al-Ghazālī, reason was the way to truth, however, he eventually renounced it finding his way through mysticism, unlike al-Ma‘arrī who remained loyal to this way.<sup>642</sup> Further, like Descartes, al-Ma‘arrī saw doubt as the only way to knowledge. So saying, Badran applied the notion of methodic doubt to

<sup>638</sup>See references where it is claimed that for al-Ma‘arrī there was one guiding principle-namely, reason, and that al-Ma‘arrī developed a rational teaching (*madhhab ‘aqlī*) in Saleh, “Bibliographie critique,” Part II, 206; 241; 248; 265-266. T. Hussayn thought reliance on reason was the only definite aspect of al-Ma‘arrī’s thought: *Tajdīd*, 240; See also A. Amīn “Sulṭān al-‘aql ‘inda Abī’l-‘Alā’,” in *Mihrajān*, 49-64.; Nicholson, “Meditations,” 143-145; M. Fakhry too presented al-Ma‘arrī as one who relied unconditionally on reason, see his *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism: A short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 36; Kamāl al-Qanṭār thought that reason for al-Ma‘arrī was the unshakable axis of knowledge inefficiently trying to define its features:<sup>638</sup> Al-Qanṭār, *Fikr al-Ma‘arrī: Malāmiḥ Jadaliya* (Dār al-Fārābī, 2014), 149ff. Yāzījī claimed al-Ma‘arrī’s rationalism was directed towards confirming religion and piety: *Abū’l-‘Alā’*, 533-543. See also: G. Schoeler, *Paradies und Hölle*, 16.

<sup>639</sup> See for example, A. Khulī, *Ra’yī*, 124; D. Shawqī, *al-Fann*, 393.

<sup>640</sup> See the summary of A. Abd ar-Raḥmān’s *al-Ḥayāt al-insāniyya ‘inda Abī’l-‘Alā’*, (Cairo, 1944) in Saleh “Bibliographie critique, 229-230.

<sup>641</sup> Muḥammad Abū’l-Faḍl Badrān, “...den die Vernunft ist ein Prophet“-Zweifel bei Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī,” in *Atheismus im Mittelalter*, 66.

<sup>642</sup>Ibid., 74-75.

both thinkers, and he went even further claiming that Ma‘arrī excelled Descartes in doubt since the former never made a pilgrimage to Mecca while Descartes made one to Loreto.<sup>643</sup> One major point Badrān dismisses was that doubt constituted a constructive quality and was meant to serve the achievement of certainty in the case of Descartes, which we do not find in al-Ma‘arrī as will be shown. Badran’s comparisons and conclusions are selectively based on few verses of *Luzūm*. His comparison of al-Ma‘arrī with aforementioned thinkers is neither elaborated nor justified.

More plausible formulations on al-Ma‘arrī’s view on reason came from Laoust and Lacey. Laoust thought that al-Ma‘arrī’s was a critical rationalism in the sense that he made free use of his judgment and thinking in matters of dogma and law. Al-Ma‘arrī’s could also be considered a rationalism, which did exclude positive religions, but dismissed theological presupposition.<sup>644</sup> Laoust also mentioned that al-Ma‘arrī’s rationalism could be seen closer to that of Mu‘tazila without the vain controversies and dialectics of the latter.<sup>645</sup>

Lacey provided the following formulation:

By first, glorifying the mind, then saying that certain truth about matters is impossible, and finally mitigating the latter opinion by conceding that in some instances we can know things for certain, he is suggesting in effect that reason is to be valued in general for what it can obtain, but at the same time it must be seen as having severe limitation.<sup>646</sup>

In order to elaborate these assessments and to have a nuanced understanding of al-Ma‘arrī’s judgements upon the notion of reason, we need to turn to some verses in *Luzūm*. What follows next is a juxtaposition of various enunciations which provide different understandings of reason and its functions. It will be shown how al-Ma‘arrī counterposes the notion of reason with such notions as tradition,

---

<sup>643</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>644</sup>See Laoust, “Vie et Philosophie” 145.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid. The same is mentioned by Farrūkh, see Farrūkh, *Hakīm*, 153.

<sup>646</sup> Lacey, *Man and Society*, 93.



In many ways, al-Ma‘arrī’s rationalism is expressed through the dichotomy of reason versus tradition (‘*aql* vs. *naql*).

Traditions came down to us, and if they are true  
there is a value in them, but they are weak in transmission  
therefore consult reason and leave everything else for nothing;  
the mind is the best guide that  
the seeker has embraced.

jā’at aḥādīthu in ṣaḥḥat fa-inna la-hā  
sha’nan wa-lakinna fī-hā ḍa’fu isnādī,  
fa-shāwir al-‘aqla wa-truk ghayrahu hadaran  
fa-l-‘aqlu khayru mushīrin ḍammahu n-nādī. (Lz1.288.7)

Reason is the faculty that can distinguish the sound from the unsound. From various schools of thought one should take that which is confirmed by reason:

When the sound-minded man resorts to his reason, he  
makes little of the various schools of thought and  
holds them contempt.  
Take from them what reason confirms and let not stupidity  
dip you into their stagnating water.  
Their religions have become feeble in every aspect;  
so is there a mind which one can use to prop them up?

idhā raja’a l-ḥaṣīfu ilā ḥijahu  
tahāwana bi-l-madhāhibi wa-zdarāhā.  
fa-khudh min-hā bi-mā addāhu lubbun  
wa-lā yaghmiska jahlun fī ṣarāhā.  
wahat adyānuhum min kulli wajhin  
fa-hal-‘aqlun yushaddu bi-hī ‘urāhā. (Lz2.416.2-4)<sup>647</sup>

One of the most cited verses for referring to al-Ma‘arrī’s glorification of reason is the following:

Oh deceived ones, if you are endowed with mind  
then consult it, since each mind is a prophet.

ayyuhā l-ghirru in khuṣṣṭa bi-‘aqlin  
fa-s’alanhu fa-kullu ‘aqlin nabīyyū. (Lz2.428.5)

<sup>647</sup> Trans. by Lacey, *Man and Society*, 156. *Luzūm* is indeed full of verses juxtaposing tradition to reason: for more illustrating examples see also Lz1.139.8-9; Lz1.95.6-7; Lz2.100.1-2; Lz1.398.11-12; Lz2.124.8; Lz2.87.3; Lz1.158.5.

On the one hand one observes a notion of a rationalist prophetology. Like al-Fārābī, al-Ma‘arrī sees prophecy as an auxiliary to the rational faculty and as an essential ingredient in man’s perfection. On the other hand, the verse can be interpreted in more straightforward manner where prophets are seen superfluous and unnecessary in the face of human intellect. Similar but even more interesting locution is found in a *ghāya* in *Fuṣūl* which expresses an understanding of a relationship between God and human capacity. It reads: “The mind is a prophet, the thought is hidden, the perception is an observer, and the light of God supports all these three (*al-‘aqlu nabīyun, wa-l-khāṭiru khabī’un, wa-n-naẓaru rabī’un, wa-nūru llāhi li-hadhihi th-thalāthati mu‘īn*).<sup>648</sup> Mind and prophecy, again in al-Fārābian terms, might be seen as necessary components for human perfection. Thought (or intuition) is the other human capacity, present yet hidden. Perception is given for observation also of that which is hidden. This is an illustration of a full human capacity. All three are components and connected parts of one process illuminated by God, not necessarily of an anthropomorphic God, but of a generic benign rational presence.

The praise of moral reason finds its prominent place in *Luzūm*. Like ar-Rāzī, al-Ma‘arrī advocates moral reasoning as the only way to piety and righteous life and sees independent thinking as an authentic and powerful faculty for guidance:

The mind elucidates a clear path to piety,  
So follow its example.  
And no heart becomes dark while there is  
in it a burning coal of reason.

al-‘aqlu yuḍīhu li-n-nuski manhajan fa-ḥdu  
ḥadhwah. wa-laysa yuẓlimu qalbun wa-fī-hi li-l-  
lubbi jidhwah (Lz2.424.8-9)<sup>649</sup>

<sup>648</sup> See *Fuṣūl*, 208:10-11.

<sup>649</sup> Trans. by Lacey, *Man and Society*, 82.

Verses where al-Ma‘arrī turns to the human capacity of thinking and observing as innate ability to govern one’s life are many.<sup>650</sup> Here as well, al-Ma‘arrī’s rationalism is similar to Rāzī’s. To highlight just few more:

The sight of the eye does not show you anything truthfully,  
make a mirror for your soul through thinking.

mā turīka marā’ī l-‘ayni ṣādiqatan  
fa-j‘al li-nafsika mir’ātan mina l-fikrī. (Lz1.373.14)

A pearl-diver picked up no pearl of truth from people  
except with reflection and thinking.

lam yatanāwal durrata l-ḥaqqi ghā’iṣun  
mina n-nāsi illā bi-r-rawīyati wa-l-fikrī. (Lz1.373.3.)<sup>651</sup>

Like ar-Rāzī, al-Ma‘arrī seems to see reason as a capacity that can be developed, and used against myths and unreason:

Do sayings of the storyteller bear any truth, and we accept it  
or are they all trifles and obscurity?  
For the minds confirm that they [sayings] are all lies;  
the mind is like a plant, fruitful if cherished.

hal ṣaḥḥa qawlun mina l-ḥākī fa-naqbaluhu  
am kullu dhāka abāṭilun wa-asmārū?  
amā l-‘uqūlu fa-ālat annahu kadhḥun  
wa-l-‘aqlu gharsun la-hu bi-ṣ-ṣidqi ithmārū. (Lz1.320.3-4)

However, the poet, unlike ar-Rāzī, does not have any theory of how the faculty of reason is cultivated as a dominant power over all that which contradicts reason.

Al-Ma‘arrī clearly counterposes reason and tradition, religious teachings and dogma over which reason has the pragmatic, moral and intellectual advantage. The faculty of reason is the prime guide of moral life and it aids acquiring knowledge.

<sup>650</sup> See especially Lz2.22.11; Lz1.120.15; Lz1.331.8; Lz2.98.13-14; Lz1.376.7; Lz1.150.2; Lz1.214.10; Lz1.320.2-3; Lz1.331. 8-9.

<sup>651</sup> See also Lz1.418.6; Lz1.418.16; Lz1.373.3; Lz1.202.6.

#### 4.11. Reason constrained

Although reason is most precious (*anfasu*: Lz1.151.1), and an endless ocean (*wa-l-‘aqluka-l-baḥru mā ghīdat ghawāribuhu*: Lz2.98.14), its power diminishes against the power of fate. Although the mind is beautiful, above it there is fate (*wa-l-‘aqlu zaynun wa-lakin fawqa-hu qadarun*: Lz1.48.3). Fatalist statements where everything is subjugated to decrees of God occur a few times in *Luzūm* (e.g. Lz2.75.10; Lz2.261.2). However, the most powerful rival of reason is the corrupt nature of humans whose innate nature is prone to flaws (Lz1.132.4). Reason is incapable of making the unseen known to the humans and insufficient for making human lives better (Lz1.48.3; Lz2.124.13; Lz1.197.10; Lz2.232.2). The major cause of the insufficiency of reason, according to al-Ma‘arrī, is the innate by corrupt nature of humans. The enormous frustration which leads the poet to a haunting ambivalence is caused by the awareness that intellect is weaker than the evil disposition of humans and evil nature of the soul.<sup>652</sup> Here is the major difference from Rāzī. The human mind does not succeed in developing benign soul and the two are in perpetual clash (*fa-ṭab‘u wa-l-‘aqlu ḥattā l-mawti khiṣmān*; Lz2.373.14; Lz1.116.8). Ma‘arrī did not have a doctrine of soul but he had a clear and bleak view on human nature and human drives:

Men have not understood the good. Nay!  
They have been naturally disposed to evil.

Lam yaftanū li-l-jamīli bal jubilū ‘alā qabīhin. (Lz1.229.1)<sup>653</sup>

The inborn nature of each generation is an

<sup>652</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī does not present much philosophical contemplation on whether soul is material or immaterial, whether is it attached to body or how was it created, questions that al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā were concerned with. Neither does al-Ma‘arrī present soul with its tripartite division (vegetative, animal, and human) as it was done by philosophers. See for example Debora Black “Psychology: Soul and Intellect,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. P. Adamson and R. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 308-326; López-Farjeat, Luis Xavier, “Al-Farabi’s Psychology and Epistemology” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition). Al-Ma‘arrī was rather interested in soul’s nature and behavior once it came to be attached to human body and its affect on human nature. Unlike some philosophers who saw soul as good and a spiritual substance as opposed to body, al-Ma‘arrī thought soul was evil. On this Ṭ. Ḥusayn has made a comparison between Plato’s and al-Ma‘arrī’s views: see his *Tajdīd Dhikrā*, 267. For verses, see Nicholson, “Meditation,” 179. For more detailed discussion on soul, see Lacey, *Man and Society*, 77-79, n.14, p.122.

<sup>653</sup> Trans by Lacey, *Man and Society*, 86.

ignoble nature; there is not on earth anyone  
with innate nobility.

fa-ṭ-ṭab‘u fī kullī jīlin ṭab‘u mal’amatin  
wa-laysa fī l-arḍi maṭbū‘un ‘alā l-karamī. (Lz2.306.2)<sup>654</sup>

Unlike ar-Rāzī, offers no paradigm for suppressing the evil human nature and for cultivating a benign soul. Rāzī trusted reason, as we saw, because it was endowed to the human by the benevolent God, the One who could not provide anything but good. The full trust in independent reason was conditioned by the absolute trust in God. This is not the case with al-Ma‘arrī: because the poet is ambivalent towards God in seeing Him as both benevolent and malicious, he is also ambivalent to everything that is given by Him, even to the innate independent intellect.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored al-Ma‘arrī’s contemplations and moods about the notions of God, prophecy, and reason through registers of opposites. God appeared to be most ambiguous in *Luzūm* and the most present in poet’s meditations. Constantly conveying his trouble and unrest to the reader, the poet wavered between pious and blasphemous references to God, exposed his altering moods and his helpless efforts to come into peace with the Creator. Addressing God with a perpetual sense of rebel and with a sense of patent reliance at the same time created two dominant discourses in *Luzūm* dramatically shaping al-Ma‘arrī’s spirit throughout. The core of the ambivalence in matters of faith is primarily caused by the attitude towards God and by the perpetual alteration between trust and distrust in God. Unlike Ibn ar-Rāwandī, al-Ma‘arrī did not dismiss the scriptural God thoroughly and consistently, and frequently his God appeared as the almighty, omnipotence, and eternal God of scriptures next to one resembling a deist God. Unlike ar-Rāzī, al-Ma‘arrī did not develop a notion of God as a cosmic principle although frequently he talked of God exactly as such. Neither did al-

<sup>654</sup>Ibid., 87. See also Nicholson, “Meditations,” 179.

Ma'arrī put forward any consistent notion of theodicy although not once did he bemoan the existence of evil. Al-Ma'arrī endlessly wavered between fideist, deist and scriptural notions of God.

The prophetic institution for al-Ma'arrī is not subjected to definitive conclusions: he both criticizes prophets and their messages and sees them as a guide for a solely moral conduct. Revealed message is seen as a mischance and as an opportunity at the same time. Unlike universally accepted view of religion as the only way of controlling the corrupt human nature and the only guarantee for arranging human life, al-Ma'arrī pursues a completely moral value in religion and does not provide a vision of religion as a means for political utility and social regulation. With the social implication of religion, al-Ma'arrī alleviates the dichotomy between religion and irreligion and leaves a space and possibility for both.

Unlike Ibn ar-Rāwandī, al-Ma'arrī did not enjoy the play with dialectic reasoning for it led to nowhere, and although in many ways al-Ma'arrī's views were similar to that of ar-Rāzī's, he eventually suggested no mechanism for establishing the faculty of reason as the strongest human capacity. The poet praises reason and thinking, invokes intense reliance on intellect, and glorifies rational judgment throughout *Luzūm* in order then to show its deficiency, its weakness in the face of corrupt human nature and its imperfection. Against the inherently fraudulent human nature, reason appears deficient and insufficient.

This led al-Ma'arrī to a deep ambivalence towards humans: on the one hand he sees people as naturally evil and ignoble; on the other hand, he does not cease urging them to do good and be virtuous alluding by this towards the ethical potentiality of humans. While reading *Luzūm*, one is overwhelmed with a gloomy and bitter representation of human beings almost reaching to misanthropy where no improvement on human part is possible. The human potential is nullified in all respects. But then these sentiments are turned into a call for good morals and improvement of character time and again.

Having registered al-Ma‘arrī’s views on major themes of religion and faith, let us now see how they resonated within his society and milieu, what was their role in the shaping of al-Ma‘arrī’s image, how they were perceived and at his time and among posterity and, finally, whether they, in any way, caused him to be ostracized.

## CHAPTER 5. ISSUES OF RECEPTION AND PERSECUTION

It will be demonstrated in this chapter that even though during his lifetime al-Ma'arrī enjoyed an ambiguous reputation in terms of his faith and was occasionally accused in unbelief, deciding or defining his status as a believer or an unbeliever was not a prime issue. Important as they were, his religious ideas, although considered and discussed, did not constitute the dominant element of his social role and status. What mattered primarily during his life time was the authority he achieved through poetic virtuosity, excellent knowledge of Arabic, teaching activity, and his pious and modest life-style. With these values, al-Ma'arrī secured social acceptance and role that we saw through his social engagement in the local affairs of Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān and through his acceptance and recognition by the population.

The first part of the chapter will look at the accusations and denunciations that al-Ma'arrī encountered with during his lifetime, and at the responses which he provided to them. The second part, will examine the issue of persecution. It will be argued that *Luzūm* by itself could not have provoked any serious cause of persecution. The possibility of and the potential for persecution correlated not so much with the actual content of textual output and especially with its irreligious aspects, as much as with the social status, fame, authority, and prestige that al-Ma'arrī achieved largely (but not only) due to poetic excellence and virtuosity, intelligence and erudition. This assertion speaks against the notion of covert writing-*taqīya*. It also indicates the ease with which unorthodox ideas were disregarded or considered irrelevant to judgments of poetical and philological excellence. The final section will show how in later centuries al-Ma'arrī's reception was polarized between those who wanted to see him as a staunch unbeliever and those who attempted to establish an orthodox image for the poet.



### 5.1. Denunciations, Censures and Responses during Lifetime

A general thesis has been put forward that al-Ma‘arrī’s anti-religious views might have been possible due to poetic license.<sup>655</sup> This assumption, however, is quite inaccurate and needs to be nuanced and examined in relation to social and historical context of the given poet. This is not to exclude that poetry held stronger immunity against religious blames and accusations than assertive texts in other genres. There are some eloquent testimonies to this and one of them is by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jurjānī (d.1078) on the poetry of al-Mutanabbī with a reference to Abū Nuwās: “If religion were to disgrace poetry or erroneous faith were a reason to denounce a poet, Abū Nuwās’s name should have been erased from *diwāns* (*law kāna sū’ al-i’tiqādi sababan li-ta’akhuri shā’iran la-wajaba an yuḥmā ism Abī Nuwās min ad-dawāwīn*). But these two (religion and poetry) are different things and religions is detached from poetry (*wa-d-dīnu bi-ma’zilin ‘an sh-shi’r*).<sup>656</sup> One finds other examples justifying impious and irreverent poetry for its sound meter and correct syntax.<sup>657</sup>

However, let it be noted that the tolerant statements come mostly from literary critics reflecting a non-religious cultured milieu.<sup>658</sup> The matter stood differently for other groups of society such as legal scholar and members of ‘*ulamā*. In legal terms, poetry was treated as any other enunciation. Z. Szombathy has provided a thorough account of this matter, arguing that, for legal purposes, literary texts were not treated differently from ordinary speech, and that Muslim jurists refused to allow any distinct treatment on the basis of specific types of genres. “Texts are texts.

<sup>655</sup>See Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 240; Crone, “What are Prophets for?” 198.

<sup>656</sup>See ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jurjānī, *al-Wasāṭa bayna l-Mutanabbī wa khuṣūmihi*, ed. Muḥammad Abū Faḍl Ibrāhīm and ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Cairo, n.d), 64.

<sup>657</sup>Van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes towards Invective Poetry (Hijā’)* in *Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 81.

<sup>658</sup>Or by a ruler who wanted to be tolerant and who had no reason why not to be so: when the caliph Ma’mūn was asked to punish someone who condemned his religious policy, he refrained from doing and replied: “If he had been a theologian, I would have punished him. But he is a poet, so I shall not bother him:” see cited in van Gelder, *Bad and Ugly*, 32.

Period.”<sup>659</sup> The most common practice by jurists was to demonstrate *kufṛ* through arbitrarily selected collections of examples instead of trying to establish abstract principles of identifying proofs for an author’s unbelief. In most cases, judgments were based on isolated motifs. Further, Szombathy showed that based on the notion of intent, two main approaches to literary text might be discerned: formalistic one, which did not take intent into account, relying on the literal meaning of a text thus ignoring motifs of jest and joking or playful language, and interpretative one, which took the notion of intent into account and allowed various and differing interpretations.<sup>660</sup> What comes next demonstrates that enunciations of unbelief in *Luzūm* did not go unnoticed due to their poetic medium. Certainly, the pious of the age accused al-Ma‘arrī in unbelief based on the selected verses of *Luzūm* expressing irreligion

That *Luzūm* provoked some members of pious circles during al-Ma‘arrī’s lifetime is obvious from the poet’s own commentaries on some of its controversial verses as mentioned above. We have only one preserved-*Zajr an-Nābih* (*Rebuking the Barker*). Yāqūt tells us that al-Ma‘arrī wrote this book because ignorant people talked about some verses of *Luzūm* in such a way as to harm the poet (*yurīdu bi-hā t-tashrīra wa-l-adhīyata*), and friends of Abū’l-‘Alā’ urged him to compose this book, which he did even though he was reluctant to do so (*wa-huwa kāriḥ*)<sup>661</sup>. According to Ibn al-Adīm too, the poet wrote both *Zajr an-Nabīḥ* and *Najr-az-Zajr* upon the request of his pupils who convinced their teacher to reply to the one who attacked him (*man ṭa‘ana ‘alayhi*).<sup>662</sup> *Zajr an-Nābih* is preserved in excerpts found in the marginalia of MS. Or. 5319 in British Library which contains parts of *Luzūm*.<sup>663</sup>

<sup>659</sup>Szombathy, “Literary Texts,” 472. See in the same place a characteristic description of this principle by Imam Shafī‘ī where the only difference of poetry as a speech is that it is a durable and widely known type of speech as opposed to ordinary form of speech; Muḥammad b. Idrīs ash-Shafī‘ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, 7:513.

<sup>660</sup>Szombathy, “Literary Texts,” 474, 478-81.

<sup>661</sup>Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1: 330; al-Qifṭī testified this was one of the books by al-Ma‘arrī that he saw; *Inbāḥ*, 1:95.

<sup>662</sup>Ibn al-Adīm, *al-Inṣāf*, 113.

<sup>663</sup>The MS. Or. 5319 is defective and does not have the beginning and the end of the first part of *Luzūm*. The excerpts were first noticed by Samuel M. Stern and then Amjad aṭ-Ṭarablusī, who prepared the edition on the commentaries found in MS. Or. 5319. This manuscript contains only extracts of *Zajr*. Each explanation on the MS. Or. 5319 ends with

It seems that the accuser was a theologian. He is frequently referred in the commentaries as *mutakallim* but based on the excerpts, one cannot deduce much about him. Most of the comments in *Zajr* reflect the themes discussed in the previous chapter. The topics are theological and religious. It is apparent that the theologian saw in *Luzūm* much that was directed against *‘ulamā*, questioned the notions of revelation, resurrection and Scriptures, as well as divine justice. Some of the responses by al-Ma‘arrī are apologetic and others are aggressive, offensive, and sophistical. The self-exegesis of the verses of *Luzūm* is digressive, full of quotes from the Qur’ān and Tradition.

One of the most cited verses “Wake up, wake up, o deceived ones, for your religion is a deception that came down to you from your ancestors” (*afīqū afīqū yā ghūātu fa-innamā dīyānatukum makrun mina l-qudamā’i*, Lz1. 24.7-8) was in *Zajr* redirected by al-Ma‘arrī against the People of the Book in general. Al-Ma‘arrī employed the polemical *topos* of the alterations of the Scriptures by Jews and Christians (*tahrīf*), and enhanced his point quoting Q2:79 (“Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say: “This is from Allah,” to traffic with it for miserable price!”).<sup>664</sup> Those verses were converted into a polemical reproach towards unbelievers who altered the true message of God. Al-Ma‘arrī further amplified his diversionary technique with Qur’ānic verses.

An apologetic stance for Islam is also made from these verses: “The book of Muḥammad, the book of Moses, the Gospels of the Son of Mary, and the Psalms forbade people [to do wrong], but people did not abide, thus the true advice of the Books was lost, and all the people became corrupt” (*kitābu Muḥammadin wa-kitābu Mūsā wa-Injīlu bni Maryami wa-z-Zabūru nahat umaman fa-mā qabilat wa-bārat naṣīhatuhā fa-kullu l-qawmi būrū*, Lz1.324.11-12). After a lengthy

---

“these are the words of Abu l-‘Ala from *Zajr*,” allowing one to assume that they go back to the lost book. Both authors suggest that the work was written at the end of al-Ma‘arrī’s life. Some commentaries are also found in UBL Or. 100 . See Stern, “Some Noteworthy Manuscripts”, 344-345; aṭ-Ṭarablusī, “Introduction,” in Al-Ma‘arrī, *Zajr an-Nābiḥ: Muqtaṭafāt* (Damascus: Maṭbū‘āt Majma‘al-Lughati l-‘Arabīya, 1965), 3-11.

<sup>664</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī, *Zajr*, 12.

explanation, there comes the conclusion that Islam is the truest of all religions and its message was corrupted by embracing tenets from other religions.<sup>665</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī frequently relies on the technique in which he takes over the role of accuser and blames the theologian (i.e. the one who accuses al-Ma‘arrī) in deficient knowledge of God’s words. For instance, the following verses were given a thoroughly orthodox meaning and turned against the *mutakallim*:

And the mind wonders at the laws of Magians,  
Hanifs, Jews, and Christians.  
Be alert and do not let things be wasted,  
and look[at them] with a thinking and percipient heart.

wa-l-‘aqlu ya‘jabu li-sh-shurū‘i tamajjusin  
wa-taḥannufin, wa-tahawwūdin wa-tanaṣṣurin  
fa-ḥdhar wa-lā tada‘il-umūra muḍā‘atan  
wa-nẓur bi-qalbin mufakkirin mutabaṣṣirin (Lz1. 398. 11-12)

Al-Ma‘arrī comments:

What an ignoramus this infidel [*mulḥid*] is and what little knowledge he has of *kalām*. Could anything admirable be denied or refused? Did not he hear God’s words about the *jinn*? “They said, “We have really heard a wonderful Recital!”” [Q72:1]. That is to say, they were amazed by its glory and inimitability. The wonder comes from amazement, not from denial and neglect of it. The mind is amazed by the grace.<sup>666</sup>

In addition, al-Ma‘arrī reinforces his accusing tone with the qur’aic quotations. This same technique is employed in the commentary of the following:

O child, calamities occurred to you, and  
your lungs are severely torn apart because of them.  
What is your sin that you are singled out from us?  
Indeed, you did not commit bigger sin than Suḥr

yā ṭiflu ḥallat bi-ka r-razāyā  
fa-anta minhā ṣarīmu saḥrī  
bi-ayyi dhanbbin akhadhta fī-nā

<sup>665</sup> See *Zajr*, 55-57.

<sup>666</sup> *Zajr*, 111-113.

lam tajni illa ka-dhanbi ṣuḥrī. (Lz1.387.3-4)

Most probably the accuser saw in the verses attack on God's justice. Al-Ma'arrī employs an aggressive tone against the accuser claiming that he saw in these verses unbelief because of his own doubts and of his own unbelief. Otherwise, it is clear that there is no denial in these verses. Further, al-Ma'arrī explains the verses in such a way as to mean that they were addressed to parents. There is a consensus among the people of law, al-Ma'arrī continues, that children are sinless and guarded by from God. And if the child is sinless and yet falls in misery, then the blame is on adults. In these words there is a warning to adults.<sup>667</sup>

In some commentaries, al-Ma'arrī's technique is to restate that which had already been stated, covering it with different guise. Let us look at the commentary of the following verses on reason and imam which has been cited above:

People hope for an eloquent imam  
to rise from the group of dumb.  
Belief deceits: there is no imam,  
except for the mind guiding us in the mornings and evenings.

yartajī n-nāsu an yaqūma imāmun nāṭiqun fī l-katībatī l-kharsa'ī  
kadhaba ṣ-ṣannu lā imāma siwā  
l-'aqlī mushīran fī ṣubḥihi wa-l-masā'ī. (Lz1. 65.5-6)

Al-Ma'arrī explains that when someone hears a statement which contradicts the law, his mind should be a guide for him, as if it were his imam. He goes on to explain that this verse does not depreciate Muslim imams (*laysa hadhā intiqāḍan bi-imāmi l-muslimīn*). It is rather like the saying "there is no fellow besides 'Ali," meaning that he has the greatest importance among many fellows. Further, the poet refers to rumors that in Yemen some thirty people claim to be the awaited imam and, on this account, they mistreat others and think that shedding blood is legitimate. Al-Ma'arrī's implication might be that the concept of *imamiya* is vulnerable in the sense that it can be claimed and manipulated by many, therefore 'aql remains the only true guidance. It seems that in this

---

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 94-96.

commentary al-Ma‘arrī confirmed the priority of reason only in such a guise which would mitigate the suspicion of this *mutakallim* and the like.<sup>668</sup> We observe the same in the commentary of the following:

O evil world, we did not know that people  
who pray are truly pious .

*yā ‘ālama s-sū’i mā ‘alimnāanna muṣālīka atqīyā’ū.* (Lz1. 52.2-3)

The verse could be understood as an enunciation against the idea of theodicy in the face of the evil world as well as against the pious. In order to mitigate criticism, al-Ma‘arrī explains that his words refer not to the whole world but only to those who have no loyalty to God like people of Thamud and ‘Ad. Further, he addresses the hypocrites who pretend piety and polemize against each other, and whose greatest interest is in commerce and wealth. True believers are less than rare crows, he writes. As for the prayer, reference is made to the qur’anic verse: “Woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers” (Q 107.4-5).<sup>669</sup> In the same manner, al-Ma ‘arrī explains the following: “I have looked for the religious people who are pious and not hypocrites, but I found instead stupid animals with no minds to guide them and no light” (*wa-qad fatashtu ‘an aṣḥābi dīnin la-hum nuskun wa-laysa bi-him rīyā’ū fa-alfaytu l-bahā’ima lā ‘uqūlun tuqīmu la-hā d-dalīla wa-lā ḍīyā’ū:* Lz1.52.12-13).<sup>670</sup> Thus al-Ma‘arrī restates his criticism of the pious legitimizing it with the reference to the qur’anic verses.

Al-Ma‘arrī also used linguistic ambiguities in his commentaries. In the following verse, the theologian most probably accused the poet in believing in the eternity of matter:

I insist my body does not decompose  
until it returns to the elemental matter.<sup>671</sup>

*ālaytu lā yanfakku jismī fī adhan*

<sup>668</sup> *Zajr*, 14.

<sup>669</sup> See *Zajr*, 8.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>671</sup> *qadīm*-perhaps also “original.”

ḥattāya‘ūda ilā qadīmi l-‘unṣurī. (Lz1.398.6)

After some digression on matters of body and pain, al-Ma‘arrī assured his readers that by *qadīm* he meant “ancient” and not “eternal.”<sup>672</sup>

The following example is a mixture of anger and wit flavored with qur’anic citations. The poem could have been seen as a transgression against the scriptures:

Resort to reason, and do what it finds graceful,  
for it is the best guide.  
And do not accept any decree from Torah for  
the truth has escaped it.

‘alayka l-‘aql wa-f’al mā rāhu  
jamīlan fa-huwa mushtāru sh-shiwārī.  
wa-lā taqbal mina t-tūrāti ḥukman  
fa-inna l-ḥaqqa ‘anhā fī tawārī. (Lz1. 394. 8-9)

Al-Ma‘arrī’s reply reads:

... [If I were to ask this theologian] “With reason or without [reason]?” What would his answer be? If he claimed that it is with reason then he revokes that which he refutes; if he claims that it is without reason then he is mad. What is meant is that you have the intellect for using it in giving and taking, in making benefit for yourself, and perform righteousness and charity... One has to tell this blamer about the following words of God: “Do they not consider the Qur’an [with care]? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy” [Q4: 82]. Is it ordered to reflect on the Qur’an with reason or without? The same is with this: “Take heed, then, O ye with eyes [to see]!” [Q59:2]. Is this preached to the ones with intellect or to the animals? And if the mind is not to be followed, why does then God tell us: “To those weak of understanding Make not over your property, which Allah hath made a means of support for you,” [Q4: 5].

As for the Torah, the poet again used the common polemical motif that it had been altered after the siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C, and that it is not the one which came down to Moses.

Aggressive and offensive language is employed in the commentary of the following:

How many of Muslims worshipped earthly pleasures,  
and you find him unburdened like a *dhimmī*.  
They lied to you when they urge for the right path,  
for all of them go astray with no guiding light.

---

<sup>672</sup>Ibid., 108-110.

Run away from those with your religion,  
for they robbed you and fought for the sake of money.

kam min muslimin ‘abada l-hawā  
fa-wajadtahu fī-mā yuḥillu ka-‘āqidi z-zunnārī.  
kadhibū in idda‘ū l-hudā wa-jamī’uhum  
yasrūna<sup>673</sup> fī tīhin bi-ghayri manārī.  
fa-uhrub bi-dīnika min awla’ika innahum  
ḥarabūka wa-ḥtarabū ‘alā d-dīnārī. (Lz1.407.15-13-408.1-2)

The verses were most probably seen as an attack against ‘*ulamā*’. Al-Ma‘arrī, however, turns them into verses urging piety. He calls them *mutakallim* ignorant and stupid in matters of religion and its foundations. For it is known, al-Ma‘arrī explains, that whoever is given to earthly pleasures is withdrawn from God and needs to be treated like an apostate. And this one is in a worse state than *dhimīs* since the latter, by paying tax, are freed from obligations. These are matters which should have been clear to any sensible man.<sup>674</sup>

Al-Ma‘arrī’s irony surfaces frequently in his response: an example is the comments on the verse which the accuser apparently took quite personally:

I see a learned man complaining to God about his ignorance,  
and yet many people rise up from dust and preach.

arā ‘āliman yashkū ilā llāhi jahlahu  
wa-kam minbaran ya’lū fa-yakḥṭibu minbaran. (Lz1. 354.8-9)

to which the sophistical reply is that the verse is not against any specific preacher, it is rather a glorification of God who is able to make something elevated out of dust.<sup>675</sup>

In the following example, al-Ma‘arrī uses the technique of giving to a phrase a different meaning:

Worship God and not His worshippers.  
The religious law enslaves yet logical thinking frees [one].

kun ‘ābidan l-lāha dūna ‘abīdihi

<sup>673</sup> “yas’ūna” in Zand’s edition, “yasrūna” in UBL Or.100 p. 119.

<sup>674</sup> *Zajr*, 118-119.

<sup>675</sup> *Zajr*, 83.



fa-sh-shar‘u yu‘bidu wa-l-qiyāsu yuḥarrirū. (Lz1. 326.12)

Most apparently, the verse was understood as an opposition between law and rational thought. Al-Ma‘arrī twists the phrase “law enslaves you” to mean that law makes you a worshipper of God (*fa-l-shar‘ yu‘bidu, ay yaj‘aluka ‘abdan*).<sup>676</sup>

*Zajr* shows that verses questioning the justice of God, the necessity of prophets and attacks on the ‘ulamā’ were denounced and censured already his life-time. Al-Ma‘arrī’s self-commentary is a good illustration of how a particular audience could have received *Luzūm*. Even though it was addressed to one person, it seems that the accusations were frequent, and *Zajr* could have been a response to common accusations coming mostly from theologians, and it seems, not from especially authoritative ones. The discussion illustrated that al-Ma‘arrī’s response contained aggressive and insulting language, it relied on linguistic twist, apologetic and casuistical techniques of argumentation, irony, paraphrase and restatement.

Another accusing tone was put forward by Ibn al-Qāriḥ, a mediocre grammarian and stylist, who wrote a letter to al-Ma‘arrī in order to discredit heretics like Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Abd al-Quddūs, Ibn ar-Rāwandī, al-Ḥajjāj and others. It is clear, however, that Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s charge was against al-Ma‘arrī too, albeit not explicitly. Instead of giving room to Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s provocation, al-Ma‘arrī replied with a lengthy answer which was to become his most playful and ironic composition known to us-his most famous *Risālat al-Ghufrān*. Ibn al-Qāriḥ wrote: “But I am furious about these heretics and apostates who make fun of religion and wish to instill doubts and skepticism among the Muslims, those who take delight in detracting from the prophethood of the prophets, God’s blessings be on them all, and who are so satisfied with their sophistication and invention.”<sup>677</sup> In his reply, al-Ma‘arrī did not engage with theology, and his condemnation of heretics was of a general

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>677</sup> “The Epistle of Ibn al-Qāriḥ” in Al-Ma‘arrī, *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, 13

nature. Much of condemnation of Ibn ar-Rāwandī consisted of linguistic discussions rather than engagement with the content of his works. Al-Ma‘arrī opened the discussion on heretics with rather banal statements like this: “Unbelief has always existed among mankind throughout the ages, to the extent that historians maintain that when Adam (God bless him) sent for his children and warned them about the Hereafter, filling them with torment, they called him a liar and rejected his words. And thus it continues until today.”<sup>678</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī’s references to the heretics were superfluous and certainly did not serve Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s aim to dig into the thought of the poet. About Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Abd al-Quddūs (d. 783), the famous poet accused in *zandaqa* during the reign of caliph al-Maḥdī,<sup>679</sup> Abū’l-‘Alā did not state an opinion, instead retelling Ṣāliḥ’s story and embellishing it with quotations from the Qur’ān and Hadīth.<sup>680</sup> Ibn ar-Rāwandī’s works were attacked one by one and discredited as weak and worthless with not a single reference to any of his criticisms of religions or theological discussions in them. Further in the letter, al-Ma‘arrī mentioned Ibn ar-Rāwandī in relation to the claims of extremist Shi’ites and to the rumors according to which Ibn ar-Rāwandī had followers who believed that divinity dwelt in him and empowered him with knowledge. “They falsely attribute virtues to him which the Creator and all reasonable persons attest to be unpolished lies. But with all this, he is one of the unbelievers and not to be reckoned among the noble and the pious.”<sup>681</sup> Then al-Ma‘arrī quoted the following verses attributed to Ibn ar-Rāwandī:

Thou hast apportioned people’s means of livelihood  
like a drunk, plainly in error!  
Had any man divided means of subsistence like this  
We should have said to him, “You’re mad, take an enrhine.”<sup>682</sup>

and concluded: “If these two verses could stand up erect they would be taller in sin than the two great pyramids of Egypt.”<sup>683</sup> We have seen in the discussions on God that al-Ma‘arrī had some

<sup>678</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī, *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, 2:41-42.

<sup>679</sup> See “Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd al-Quddūs,” in *EP*; see also *Risālat Ibn al-Qāriḥ*, 13.

<sup>680</sup> See *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, 2:57-58.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:119.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.* “Enrhine,” according to van Gelder and G. Schoeler, is a medicine used against several diseases: see *ibid.*, 2:245, n.400,

similar and not at all milder verses in *Luzūm* related to God's justice which ridiculed the notion of wise design and ideas of theodicy. Al-Ma'arrī's concentration on linguistic as opposed to theological issues was a form of evasion which he performed with a complete mastery.

As for al-Ḥallāj (d.922), the mystic poet who was put to death, al-Ma'arrī used him to attack people's ignorance in general when they worshipped stars, gazelles, and monkeys rather than discussing what al-Ḥallāj said and did. All the stories on al-Ḥallāj were false, according to al-Ma'arrī. He was revered by a group of mystics who believed in nonsense. Al-Ḥallāj "has to be regarded as a swindler, not as a man of penetrating understanding or quick wit"<sup>684</sup> even though not much is said and discussed about his beliefs. It is obvious that Ibn al-Qārī's letter did not serve its purpose. There is not much discussion on heretics who were the original cause of the whole correspondence, nor are there elaborate discussions on their thoughts. In both cases mentioned above al-Ma'arrī's response is characterized with evasions, diversions, and irony.

We have already seen in the first chapter that al-Ma'arrī's vegetarianism intrigued the curiosity of the Isma'ili chief missionary. This correspondence is preserved in Yāqūt's account on al-Ma'arrī. Yāqūt, in turn, had learnt about it from the account of a Baghdadi poet and a member of Nizām al-Mulk's circle Ibn al-Habbārīya (d.1110), called *Fulk al-Ma'ānī*, an anthology consisting of anecdotes in prose and verse, where al-Ma'arrī was presented in quite a negative light. Ibn al-Habbārīya (d. 1111),<sup>685</sup> according to Yāqūt, thought of al-Ma'arrī as an arrogant person who boasted too much about his own wisdom. After quoting the following verse:

You forbade intentional murder  
and yourself sent two angels of death.  
You claimed that we had a second return,  
could not it be without these two states?

Wa-nahayta 'an qatli'n-nufūsi ta'amudan

<sup>683</sup> Ibid., 2:119.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 2:83.

<sup>685</sup> For the reference on this author see Margoliouth, "Correspondence on Vegetarianism," 313, n.1.

Wa- ba‘athta li-qatlihā malakayn  
 Wa-za‘amta anna la-nā ma‘ādan thānīyan  
 mā kāna aghnāhā ‘anī l-ḥalayn?<sup>686</sup>

Ibn al-Habbārīya qualified this as speech of a crazy idiot (*kalāmu majnūnin ma‘tūhin*) who believed that there was no difference between death and murder. He called the poet an ignoramus who did not recognize the glory of religion, the sweetness of truth, the light of the Scriptures, and the joy of certainty.<sup>687</sup> Then Ibn al-Habbārīya made reference to a verse from *Luzūm*, urging the poet not to pretend to a power he did not possess:

You came to be feeble in mind and in religion!  
 Come to me so that you may hear words about sound matters.

ghadawta<sup>688</sup> marīḍa l-‘aqli wa-d-dīni fa-lqinī  
 li-tasma‘a anbā’a l-umūri ṣ-ṣaḥā’ihī. (Lz1.232.6)

Ibn al-Habbārīya continued to inform that the Ismā‘īlī chief missionary approached al-Ma‘arrī with the following words: “I am the one with feeble mind and religion and I have come to you for medicine, so cure me!” There was a long correspondence between the two, and in the end, the chief missionary asked al-Ma‘arrī to go to Aleppo<sup>689</sup> and promised a good amount of money if he accepted Islam (*wa-wa‘adahu ‘alā l-Islāmi khayran min bayti l-māl*).<sup>690</sup> Al-Ma‘arrī, Ibn al-Habbārīya reported, knowing that his choice was either death or Islam, poisoned himself and died.<sup>691</sup> Yāqūt was so intrigued by Ibn al-Habbārīya’s story that he decided to investigate it. So he obtained a volume of the correspondence which Ibn al-Habbārīya mentioned, but to his great surprise, he found out that the account contained a story different from the one told by Ibn al-Habbārīya.

<sup>686</sup> I do not find the verse in any of the two collections.

<sup>687</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:339.

<sup>688</sup> Both in Zand’s and in Yāzījī’s editions this seems to be wrongly vocalized as *ghadawtu*: see Zand, Lz1, 232.6 and in Yāzījī, Lz1.239.4

<sup>689</sup> Should be Cairo instead. For the inaccuracies in Yāqūt’s account, see Margoliouth, “Correspondence on Vegetarianism,” 314ff.

<sup>690</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 340.

<sup>691</sup> This cannot be true: we know that the correspondence took place in 1047 when al-Ma‘arrī was seventy-five, yet he died eleven years later (1058). We know this because the poet mentions that he began vegetarianism when he was thirty and continued it for forty-five years: see Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:343.

Namely, there was no mention about poisoning and, moreover, the correspondence between the poet and the *dā'ī* ended somewhat peacefully. There was no scenario of al-Ma'arrī's suicide.<sup>692</sup> The story is an early attempt to maintain for al-Ma'arrī an image of an unbeliever totally undermining his literary standing. The story of the poet's suicide was most probably wishful thinking and a part of making his image of an infidel,<sup>693</sup> the one which would be canonized within Hanbali circles later on, as we shall see.

Reading Yāqūt's account further, we learn the following about the correspondence between the *dā'ī* Shīrāzī and the poet. Hibat Allah, the chief missionary, wrote to al-Ma'arrī in order to inquire about a simple matter (*amrun khafīf*), namely the reason for al-Ma'arrī's abstention from meat. If this query could be answered sufficiently, the *dā'ī* would proceed to clarifying other issues. The *dā'ī* started his letter with praise for al-Ma'arrī's literary skills and intellect and presented himself a person whose intellect and faith were unsound (referring to Lz1.232.6) and who turned to al-Ma'arrī in order to inquire about the truth. More specifically, the *dā'ī* wanted to clarify whether abstention from meat was due to mercy to animals, in which case al-Ma'arrī pretended to be more merciful than the Creator who did not forbid eating meat, or whether al-Ma'arrī found it unwise, in which case he presumed to transgress God's wisdom.<sup>694</sup> Al-Ma'arrī stated the idea in his first letter that he had learned from the ancients that animals feel pain, and that was the reason for his abstention from. Further, al-Ma'arrī explained, it is known that sticking to vegetables secures good health. The third reason presented by the poet was that his low income did not allow him to have expensive food.<sup>695</sup>

The answer naturally did not satisfy Hibat Allah, neither did his suspicions about the poet's belief disappear as a result of this correspondence. In his second letter the *dā'ī* put the question of

<sup>692</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:340; 350.

<sup>693</sup> In the same way, than Ḥanbalī Ibn 'Aqīl declared that Ibn ar-Rāwandī was crucified for his unbelief: see Ritter, "Philologika," 17.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid. 343-345.

God's justice in a more rigorous manner and ascribed to al-Ma'arrī the language of heretics.<sup>696</sup> The *dā'ī* also expressed his dissatisfaction with al-Ma'arrī's constant evasions of questions he raised and his avoidance of direct replies. The chief missionary also offered to petition for increasing al-Ma'arrī's salary so that it would be enough to pay his servants and buy meat.<sup>697</sup> In his next answer, al-Ma'arrī, refused the offer and emphatically affirmed that after forty-five years of abstinence, he would never get back to meat. Ironically, al-Ma'arrī, who did not approve and admit any of what the *dā'ī* said, at the end of his letter praised the latter for being smarter than Aristotle and Plato.<sup>698</sup>

Hibat Allah replied in the last letter to al-Ma'arrī that he found people differing in their views about al-Ma'arrī (*fa-kullun yadhhabu fī-hi madhhaban*).<sup>699</sup> He claimed that he had protected al-Ma'arrī from words of blame and claimed in front of others that al-Ma'arrī's ascetic life and prayers pointed to his righteous belief. Hibat Allah's disappointment was that al-Ma'arrī did not open his thoughts to him though it was clear that he had hidden meanings in his writing.<sup>700</sup> In spite of a certain preacherly tone in the last letter by Shīrāzī, he referred to the poet as one of the glories of the age (*min maḥāsina z-zamān*).<sup>701</sup>

Certainly, al-Ma'arrī's vegetarianism is a part of his ethical commitment. Although it is difficult to know how consistently al-Ma'arrī cherished the view that the soul may be reborn in another species, his argument that animals feel pain and therefore their killing is sin, questions the hierarchic distinction of God's creatures and does not see humans as the most superior. It is also clear from the tone of his responses that al-Ma'arrī does not employ an apologetic language and justifies his vegetarianism with rather rational arguments.

---

<sup>696</sup>Ibid., 346.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid., 354

We have seen that accusations could come directly or indirectly from different corners: from mediocre theologians and literary men to authoritative men. Judging from the commentaries, *Zajr* seemed to be a response to explicit accusations put forward by a mediocre theologian. The writings of Ibn al-Qāriḥ and Fatimid chief missionary Hibat Allah, on the other hand, expressed suspicious attitudes, curiosity and implicit accusations to which al-Ma‘arrī responded by evasion, satire, and rational arguments, without apologetics. Having seen that al-Ma‘arrī’s writings could indeed provoke direct or indirect accusations of unbelief, let us now examine whether these accusations and denunciations might have led to persecution in such a way whereby it would affect al-Ma‘arrī’s writings and overall image.

## 5.2. The Issue of Persecution

It is well known that there were no fixed norms for persecution and execution of *zanādiqa*,<sup>702</sup> and individual cases were rather situational, made more complex with personal and political motivations and dealt with *ad hoc* conditions. This is what examples of persecutions and their motifs available to us indicate especially with regards to poets. Bashār Ibn Burd (d.714) is one of the most outspoken

---

<sup>702</sup>*Zanādiqa* did not constitute a well defined social group, and, as we have already discussed, the term *zindiq* meant different things. The accused ones could be either those believing in some kind of dualism or those who disregarded and even mocked Islamic beliefs and practices. An early ‘Abbasid poet could be accused for his libertine style in *zandaqa* as much as a Manichean. The official persecution of *zanādiqa* (launched by the caliph al-Mahdī in 778 and continued during the reign of al-Hādī) was conditioned by socio-political threats especially with the Manichean rivalry and their rationalistic strategy to win converts which could be appealing to many non-conformists, especially at the time when Islamic beliefs, practices and social norms were still in the making. *Zanādiqa* were presented as dangerous others and given repugnant images worth being persecuted. When the caliph al-Mahdī institutionalized the persecution through establishing an administrative body under the direction of a *ṣāhib az-zanādiqa*, it was more for gaining credentials as a defender of Islam and served for legitimizing purposes. Chokr, *Zandaqa*, 22-23; 235-308; van Ess, *TG1*, 416-56, *TG2*, 4-41; Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 64-69; J. Turner, *Inquisition in early Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 36-41. For an overview of the scholars who have seen the persecution of *zandaqa* only or mostly in religious terms see; M. Ibrahim, “Religious Inquisition as social Policy: the Persecution of the “Zanadiqa” in the early Abbasid Period,” *Arabic Studies Quarterly* 16, no.2 (1994):52-72. For the link between *Shu‘ūbiyya* and *Zanadiqa* see F. ‘Umar, “Some Observations on the Reign of the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī” *Arabica* (1974):139-140; see also Ḥusayn ‘Aṭwān, *az-Zandaqa wa-sh-Shu‘ūbiyya fī-l-‘Aṣr al-‘Abbāsī l-Awwal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1984). Some argue however that there is hardly any connection between the two movements, and that *zandaqa* did not have pro-Persian and anti-Arab characteristics: Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 161-173; Chokr, *Zandaqa*, 171; M. Ibrahim, “Religious Inquisition,” 59.

cases. The poet was accused in Manichaeism and even was said to have an inclination towards extreme Shi'a views. He certainly had many impious verses, and there were numerous anecdotes about his cynical attitudes towards religious matters (once he heard a singer singing his lyrics and exclaimed: "This is truly better than the [Quranic] chapter of the Mustering")<sup>703</sup> He was also known for libertine poetry which caused wantonness to women and the youth of Basra (*istihtāru nisā'i l-Baṣrati wa-shubbāihā bi-shi'rihi*).<sup>704</sup> His love poetry angered not only Basran men of piety but also the caliph al-Mahdī himself. It was said that because of his poetry, women and the youth of Baghdad became wanton.<sup>705</sup> About the causes of his execution here are conflicting views but many refer to his invective and impious poetry. According to some records, Bashār Ibn Burd attacked al-Mahdī through a poem which accused the caliph of abandoning the matters of the caliphate to the hands of his vizier Ya'qūb b. Dāwud who, too, was a victim of the poet's lampoon, and they eventually revenged by ordering to beat the poet to his death.<sup>706</sup> This was an act against *lèse-majesté*. Bashār's case is a demonstration of intricate and convoluted motivations for persecution and punishment combined with social, individual and literary factors.

Another well-known example is that of the arch-libertine poet Abū Nuwās (d.814) who was frequently accused in *zandaqa* because of his poetry. However, the real reasons for the imprisonment of Abū Nuwās, who was closely connected to the caliphal family, vary in sources and we do not have any account assuring that his imprisonment was because of his heretical views.<sup>707</sup>

<sup>703</sup> For more references see van Gelder, "Bashār ibn Burd," in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat Toorawa (NY: Gale/Cengage Learning, 2005), 91-96.

<sup>704</sup> Abū'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Yusū 'Alī Ṭawīl, 'Abd al-Amīr 'Alī Muḥannā, Samīr Jābir (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995)3:176-79.

<sup>705</sup> Z.Szombathy, "Freedom of Expression and Censorship in Medieval Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 7 (2007):9-10; Isfahānī, *Aghānī*, 3: 240-45.

<sup>706</sup> Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 3:240-45. See also Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh ar-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, English trans, 29:258. Apparently, getting rid of Bashār brought much relief to the Baṣran elite: see Szombathy, "Freedom of Expression," 20, n.45. More on the revenge against Bashār and indication that his death may have been a result of inter-personal agitations see Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 226-227; H. Kennedy, *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim World* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2005), 120.

<sup>707</sup> See, for instance, Abū Hifḥān's account where Abū Nuwās's following verse was cited as a proof of his unbelief: "O Aḥmad, you who is desired in times of calamities, come, my lord, let's disobey the Almighty of the Heavens (*Yā Aḥmadu l-murtajā fī-kulli nā'ibatin, qum sayyidī na'ṣi jabbāra s-samāwātī*), Abū Hifḥān, *Akhbār Abī Nuwās*, ed. 'abd as-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj (Cairo, 1953), 107. However, satirizing notable people and rulers or the strong habit of wine drinking are



What we do have, however, is a pronounced episode demonstrating that verses of unbelief could be used by personal enemies for the charge of *zandaqa* if need be. When Abū Nuwās was about to recite a new poem to a friend which could potentially cause strong accusation of unbelief, the latter stopped the poet and urged him to be cautious since his personal enemies could use the verses for their purposes and make them ground for attacking the poet (*inna laka a'dā'un yantaẓirūna minka s-saqātāt fa-yantahizūnahā li-yajīdū s-sabīla bi-hā ilā ṭ-ṭa'ni 'alayka*).<sup>708</sup> This anecdotal episode is a good illustration of situations where a text could be used for personal purposes.

Abū'l-'Atāhiyah is another case in point. According to sources, his persecution and imprisonment too were bound to personal antagonisms. A certain preacher Maṣṣūr ibn 'Ammār propagated Abū'l-'Atāhiyah's *zandaqa* by citing verses which otherwise hardly would cause any charge of unbelief: the declared problem was that the poet mentioned too much about death and destruction and never mentioned resurrection (...*innamā huwa fī dhikri l-mawti wa-l-fanā'i dūna dhikri n-nushūri wa-l-ma'ādi*).<sup>709</sup> The cause of his imprisonment however was mentioned to be the jealousy of the caliph al-Mahdī towards mentioning by Abū'l-'Atāhiyah the name of his most beloved slave woman 'Utba.<sup>710</sup> Of course, here it was not just jealousy playing a role: this was *lèse-majesté*. There are other illustrative examples: the poet Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-Quddūs (d.783) was known to have been arrested for his Manichean views and also for his irreligious poems. However, his political views cannot be dismissed since he most probably troubled the political authority by his

---

mentioned as causes for his imprisonment: see *ibid.*, 74; aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, 31:248-250. For a detailed survey on the sources, see Taher-Iraqi, *Zandaqa*, 251; Z. Szombathy, "Literary Works as Evidence of Unbelief," in *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam*, 481ff; Kennedy, *Abū Nuwās*, 23-24.

<sup>708</sup> See Abū Hiffān, *Akḥbār*, 46; for a good illustration of the story see Szombathy, "Literary Works," 481ff. Szombathy highlights the usage of religious charges for personal purposes with another conspicuous example: the story found in the *Tabaqāt ash-Shu'arā'* by Ibn al-Mu'tazz related to the 'Abbasid poet Alī b. Jabala who was said to hurt the dignity of the caliph al-Ma'mūn by dedicating a panegyric poem to someone else instead of the caliph. Al-Ma'mūn threatened to put the poet to death not because of hurting his pride but because of his verse of unbelief: see Szombathy, "Literary Works," 483-84.

<sup>709</sup> Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 4:6.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:40; Ibn Qutayba, *Ash-Shi'r wa-sh-Shu'arā'*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1958), 2: 792: (*fa-lammā balagha al-Mahdī ikthāruhu bi-waṣfihā ghaḍaba fa-amara bi-ḥabsihī*).

criticism after being disappointed by the Abbasid revolution which he had supported.<sup>711</sup> The early Abbasid poet Abbān al-Lāḥiqī (d. 816) was accused in Manichean tendencies and in *zandaqa*, however, he was never persecuted because of his allegiance to authorities.<sup>712</sup>

All these examples allow us to speak about *ad hominem* situations where religious accusations and charge of unbelief happened within a complex web of personal, social, and political relations. Frequently lampoons and satirical poetry against members or ruling elite would be the most profound reason to punish a poet. Invective poetry could be seen as violence and reacted in a violent manner accordingly. Counter-violence acts against humiliating invectives could include methods such as severe beating and imprisonment, and these punishments were conducted on the basis of either unwritten codes of honor or on the basis of legal and ethical principles of Islam. However, even with these principles, it is hardly possible to deduce an unambiguous treatment to offence caused by invective poetry. What we know is that very rarely were the poets officially punished for *hijā'*. Personal revenge by a victim of an invective poem always constituted a greater risk for the *hijā'* poet than official persecution.<sup>713</sup> What appears again as an underlying practice is the utilization or even fabrication of the ploy of heresy, impiety, and unbelief for applying punishments of various degrees if need be. It needs to be mentioned as well that in the majority of cases, the final decision maker would be the political leader and not the representatives of religious or legal authorities.<sup>714</sup>

Expressions of unbelief, counted as blasphemy (*sabb* or *shatm*) against God, Prophets and *Ṣaḥāba*<sup>715</sup> theoretically could be treated in legal terms. However, in Islamic tradition legal notions of

---

<sup>711</sup>See Taheri, *Zandaqa*, 211.

<sup>712</sup>See *ibid.*, 228-236.

<sup>713</sup>See van Gelder, *Bad and the Ugly*: 31.

<sup>714</sup>For reactions to lampoons and invective poetry, see Szomathy's "Actions speak louder than Words: Reactions to Lampoons and Abusive Poetry in Medieval Arabic Society," in *Public Violence in Islamic Societies: Power, Discipline, and Construction of the Public Sphere, 7-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE*, ed. Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009): 87-118.

<sup>715</sup>For a very general description of theoretically constituted blasphemy, see See D. Stewart, "Blasphemy," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. G. Bowering, P. Crone, WadadKadi et al. (Princeton/Oxford:

blasphemy were crystallized only with the works of Mālikī Qāḍī ‘Iyād (d.1149), Ḥanbalī Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328) and Shāfi‘ī Subkī (d.1355), not earlier. In the first centuries blasphemy was discusses within the legal context of apostasy (*ridda* or *kufr*)<sup>716</sup> which theoretically assumed capital punishment and which was practically circumvented most of the time.<sup>717</sup> However, as Lutz Wiederworld has argued, in the formative texts of *madhabs* blasphemy against the Prophet and *Ṣaḥāba* was not mentioned among the punishable acts of *kufr* and *ridda*, and the punishment of the offence was a later development.<sup>718</sup>

The contrasting conclusions of scholars regarding the blasphemy laws give us some idea regarding their ambiguity. For Instance, a *shāfi‘ī* scholar al-Muzānī (d.878) in his *Mukhtaṣar* of Shāfi‘ī’s *Kitāb al-Umm*, did not see blasphemers against God or Prophet as apostates (*murtadd*) and, accordingly, did not advocate the punishment of death. Yet another *shāfi‘ī* scholar, Ibn al-Mundhir (d.930) in his *Kitāb al-Ijmā‘* discussed the question of blasphemy against the Prophet under the theme of apostasy and concluded that the blasphemers should be put to death.<sup>719</sup> Whether contemptuous words against other prophets too were treated as blasphemy was also an ambiguous matter. On the one hand, there was the notion of Muhammad’s singularity, on the other hand, there was the general view that insult against any prophet is equally punishable. One of the most famous

---

Princeton University Press, 2013); Siraj Khan, “Blasphemy against the Prophet,” in *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ed. Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker, (ABC-CLIO, 2014), 59-68; Carl Ernst, “Blasphemy: Islamic Concept,” in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Islam: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* ed. Maribel Fierro (London: Routledge, 2013), vol. 4, 1-3.

<sup>716</sup> See F. Griffel, “Apostasy,” in *EF*; M. Fierro, “Andalusian Fatawa on Blasphemy,” *Annales islamologiques* 25 (1990):103–17.

<sup>717</sup> For various notions of accusation in *kufr*, i.e. *takfir*, and its ambiguous applications see “Introduction: What is Takfir” in *Accusation of Unbelief in Islam*, 1-24; van Ess, *Eine und Andere, Exkurs: “Verketzerung” (takfir)*, 2: 284–298; H. Kilany Omar, *Apostasy in Mamluk Period: the Politics of Accusations of Unbelief* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2001), 11-81; F. Griffel, “Toleration and Exclusion: Al-Shāfi‘ī and al-Ghazālī on the Treatments of Apostates,” *BSOAS* 64 (2001):339-354.

<sup>718</sup> L. Wiederworld, “Blasphemy against the Prophet and his Companions (*sabb al-rasūl, sabb al-ṣaḥāba*): The Introduction of the topic into the Shāfi‘ī Legal Literature and its Relevance for Legal Practice under Mamluk Rule,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* XLII/1 (1997): 39-70.

<sup>719</sup> See Siraj Khan, “Blasphemy,” 66.

companions of the Prophet, ‘Abd Allāh bn ‘Abbās (d.687) was frequently cited by those who would want to prove that blasphemous utterances towards any prophet too were equally unacceptable.<sup>720</sup>

Be that as it may, in the early centuries, blames were made based on blended notions of *zandaqa*, apostasy, and blasphemy without any general and stable legal norms of treating such issues. There were few attempts to classify possible types of *kufr* into clear categories. For instance, Zaydī Mu‘tazilite scholar Abū’l Qāsim Ismā‘īl al-Bustī (d. 1029) distinguished *kufr* through categories like ignoring the existence of God, anthropomorphism, departure from monotheism, and regarding God to be unjust (*tajwīr* or *taẓlīm*) or mendacious (*takdhīb*).<sup>721</sup> However, as van Ess stated, these categories were established according to Mu‘tazilī views and, thus they did not represent anything that was unanimously accepted by others.<sup>722</sup>

The question of al-Ma‘arrī’s vulnerability to persecution needs to be viewed in the light of the main points that the above discussion brought forth. Persecution and punishment would be triggered, like in most cases, by political and social factors. In legal terms, there was no unanimous approach as to how to deal with blasphemous enunciations.

Had al-Ma‘arrī provoked political, social or personal agitation, we might have a different story to tell about the poet. Had persecution or, to put it more bluntly, getting rid of the poet been an issue, there was much in his texts, particularly in *Luzūm*, that could serve that purpose. Yet we have a different picture and image of al-Ma‘arrī based on his reception and social prestige. The ongoing rumors about al-Ma‘arrī’s wicked belief did not lead to any official accusation of heresy,<sup>723</sup> nor was

<sup>720</sup> A later example is the influential shāfi‘ī scholar Ibn Sharaf an-Nawawī (d.1277) who stated in his *Minhaj aṭ-Ṭālibīn* that a blasphemer against any prophet should be punished. Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> See Szombathy, “Literary Texts,” 470.

<sup>722</sup> See van Ess, *Eine und Andere*, 2:1287; 1290.

<sup>723</sup> This would of course change the situation: being officially declared by authority or ‘*ulamā*’ as a heretic could abruptly change the reception of the person turning him into total *persona non grata* whereas previously being largely accepted. Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj is a case in point: see G. Bowering, “Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, ed. F.de Jong and B. Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45-67; 59. It has also to be mentioned that uneducated common in these cases could be easily mobilized against the declared heretic, and “given the right set of circumstances, the lower classes could display quite as ruthless intolerance towards perceived “wrongdoers” and “heretics” as any learned zealot or fanatical ruler.” Szombathy, *Mujūn*, 164.

he subjected to infamy or exclusion. On the contrary, he remained a notable man in his town, with established local and trans-local literary status and considerable symbolic capital; he was most often a social consolidator. His mastery of Arabic letters and his teaching activity and therefore his role and authority in the transmission of knowledge constituted a significant part of his social standing, as has been shown in the first chapter. He was also known as a pious man, an ascetic whose regular prayers are frequently mentioned in the sources.<sup>724</sup> It is difficult to know if al-Ma'arrī performed regular prayers in fact, however, it is important to note that he had this attribution.<sup>725</sup> Also, although al-Ma'arrī did obtain patronage from Aleppo, he was not a part of courtly environment and was away from courtly intrigues which most often shaped the image of poets. He was rather known for his modest and humble life-style.

One's social status would be most often directly connected to wealth but as sources present it, al-Ma'arrī did not possess wealth and run extremely modest life with a strict diet. We have seen that his poverty was his choice, he rejected patrons and money. The contrast of being famous and voluntarily poor could add more to his image as a decent man. Frequently, he is mentioned as a man of great generosity (*ghazīru l-faḍl*).<sup>726</sup> We have also seen that according to some opinions, al-Ma'arrī repented for his unbelief at the end of his life. Whether in reality al-Ma'arrī repented or not is not so much relevant: what is important is that this was a part of his reception and that this motif was used for apologetic purposes. What is also important is that al-Ma'arrī was not described with hypocrisy (*nifāq*) which was seen in a very negative light by medieval Muslims,<sup>727</sup> nor as a deviant who would threaten social order.

<sup>724</sup> Of course, performing prayers did not mean that a person could not be morally corrupt. However, commitment to regular prayers was mostly a sign of obedience and morally correct behavior, see M.H. Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 70-73.

<sup>725</sup> For mentioning by biographers of prayer as an honorific sign and as a positive attribute of status, see Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 156. In this regard, mentioning of eighty dirges present at the funeral of al-Ma'arrī could be used as an honorific feature too.

<sup>726</sup> See, for instance, al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat*, 257; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1:295.

<sup>727</sup> For this negative characteristic, see Szombathy, *Mujūn*, 281.

The example of the scholar to whom al-Ma‘arrī wrote a reply (*Zajr*) does not tell us much regarding the attitudes of ‘*ulamā*’ in general for few reasons. To start with, an ‘*ālim*’ could not speak on behalf of a group, ‘*ulamā*’. ‘*Ulamā*’ was far from being a homogeneous group, and the acts of its representatives would be always situational, based on concrete circumstances. It would be an exaggeration and misreading to claim that the ‘*ulamā*’ acted only and always according to pietistic and moralistic causes. They were practical men engaged in worldly affairs and responsible for cultic, legal, educational, administrative and cultural functions but these functions were not performed in the same way across places. Social arrangements, specific for each place, situation and context, affected ‘*ulamā*’ as much as any other class.<sup>728</sup> It needs to be mentioned as well, that most frequently, the target of ‘*ulamā*’ would be ‘*ulamā*’ themselves<sup>729</sup> and not representatives of other classes such as poets unless there was a social competition with them. There is also evidence demonstrating that an intolerant scholar was not particularly welcome and desirable.<sup>730</sup> Finally, it seems first of all from the offensive tone of al-Ma‘arrī in his *Zajr* that the accuser was not a major figure. In short, it was not the ‘*ulamā*’ who decided on al-Ma‘arrī’s social status. Their influence was, if at all, secondary.

That there was no official ban on al-Ma‘arrī’s works during his lifetime is not because he so successfully disguised unbelief in his writings or because the works were available only to the “safe” elite and distinguished *khāṣṣa*,<sup>731</sup> whose acquaintance with irreligious aspects of *Luzūm*’s

<sup>728</sup> For a discussion on ‘*ulamā*’ as a non-homogeneous group subject to social stratifications see al-Azmeh, “God’s Caravan,” in *Mirror of the Prince: Islam and the Theory of Statecraft*, ed. Mehrzad Boroujerdi (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 326-448, esp. pp. 363-68. For a complex relationship between ‘*ulamā*’ and caliph and revision of the theory that *miḥna* marked the final victory of the ‘*ulamā*’ over the caliph, see J. Turner, *Inquisition*, 118ff; Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 208ff; idem, “The Caliphs, the ‘*Ulamā*, and the Law: defining the Role of the Caliph in the early ‘Abbāsid Period,” *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1997): 1-36.

<sup>729</sup> This was the case with *miḥna*: see al-Azmeh, “God’s Caravan,” 363, and Ibn’Aqīl with the whole story of his Retraction is a case in point: See, G. Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl: Religion and Practice in Medieval Islam* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 3-8.

<sup>730</sup> For negative testimonies about intolerant scholars, see Szombathy, *Mujūn*, 198.

<sup>731</sup> The distinction between ‘*amma*’ and *khāṣṣa* is extremely vague and rough. One of the problems is that it is hard to identify the internal differences between these two groups: discussion see Szombathy, *Mujūn*, 155-158.

content would not threaten the general mood of society and would not incite any social disorder. It was not proscribed because for that time and place there was no need for that.

Here Fischer's observation that verses of *Luzūm* were transmitted through eyes and ears is fully plausible. For *Luzūm*, although marked by linguistic complexity and baroque style, could also be described as "catchy" and memorable, and this is mainly due to the form of *qīṭ'a*. *Luzūm*, as has been already explained, on the one hand was meant to impress because of its stylistic and formal virtuosity and on the other hand, to be memorized due to brevity of its poems and haunting thoughts bearing notions of "universal truths," wisdom, and appeal expressed through gnomic genre. With these qualities, *Luzūm* could have been available to the common too. The general conclusion then is that *Luzūm* was available and discussed during al-Ma'arrī's life-time.

Al-Ma'arrī achieved solid status and acceptance through his fame and prestige as a poet, a teacher, a pious and modest man, and a spokesman of his people. Let us also emphasize that he enjoyed a certain ascribed status too being born in the family of learned people and judges. All this constituted a set of social values which affected his reception and role during his lifetime. Al-Ma'arrī's claim for virtuosity and singularity was meant for distinction and not for exclusion. It was meant for prestige and enhanced social status eventually making the poet an insider.

### 5.3. Image in Posterity

The following section will highlight accounts on al-Ma'arrī by various historians and biographers with a purpose of constructing the image of the poet across time. This will, in turn, feature the selective manner through which al-Ma'arrī was read and portrayed in relation to matters of his belief. The discussion will demonstrate two major trends in al-Ma'arrī's reception in posterity. The first one which emerged from the Ḥanbalī circles, augmented al-Ma'arrī's image as unbeliever and gave his literary merit a secondary value. In response to this, the second trend, established in the

Ayyubid period, attempted to clear away the stigma of unbelief and build al-Ma‘arrī’s image around his literary prestige much as it was during al-Ma‘arrī’s lifetime.

In biographical works contemporary with his time, al-Ma‘arrī’s religious thought and faith are not as central as they were to become in later sources. The emphasis was on his literary erudition. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Tha‘ālibī’s (d.1038) account on the poet is based on the story he heard from Abū Ḥasan al-Maṣṣīṣī (d.1068), a poet and a disciple of al-Ma‘arrī. The latter testified to al-Ma‘arrī’s literary erudition and wit. There is no mention in this short account about the faith of the poet.<sup>732</sup>

The historian al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d.1071), in his *Tārīkh Madīnat as-Salām*, opened the part on al-Ma‘arrī with praise and admiration. The historian then talked about al-Ma‘arrī’s blindness, vegetarianism, and woolen clothes. Al-Baghdādī stated without further elaboration that the poet composed many books and imitated *suras* from the Qur’an. He added only in the end that there were rumors about his unbelief (*ḥattā ramāhu ba‘ḍu n-nāsi bi-l-ilḥād*).<sup>733</sup>

Abū l-Ḥassan ‘Alī al-Bākhazī (d.1075), after praising the poet’s excellence in *adab*, alluded to rumors about his unbelief (*wa-lakin rubbamā rashaḥa bi-l-ilḥādi inā’uhu*), but neither confirmed nor rejected them since there was no evidence to make any conclusion (God knows-*wa-llāhu ‘ālimu*).<sup>734</sup> He mentioned about a book by al-Ma‘arrī assumed to be an imitation of the Qur’an. Then he quoted a certain poet, Ibn Ishāq al-Zauzanī, who, in one of his poems, referred to al-Ma‘arrī as a barking dog in Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān who had lost his tie with faith (*kalbun ‘awā bi-Ma‘arat al-Nu‘māni lammā khalā ‘an ribqati l-iyman*).<sup>735</sup> Interestingly, al-Bākhazī continued his account by

<sup>732</sup>Al-Tha‘ālibī, *Tatimmat*, 5:16.

<sup>733</sup>Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat as-Salām*, 5:397-398.

<sup>734</sup>Al-Bākhazī, *Dumīyat al-Qaṣr*, 1:157.

<sup>735</sup>Ibid., 158.



quoting pious verses from *Luzūm* which he had heard from imam Isma‘īl aṣ-Ṣābūnī, a pious shaykh who met the poet in Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān.<sup>736</sup>

The praised one is God and the happy one is who fears Him,  
count on the remembrance of God and the pious,  
there are two reigns-one leads to the throne, the other one to the cross,  
if I am to choose, reason will lead me to the second one.

maḥmūdunā llāhu wa-l-mas‘ūdu khā’ifuhu  
fa-‘iddi ‘an dhikri maḥmūdīn wa mas‘ūdī,  
malkāni law annani khuyyirtu mulkahā  
wa-‘ūda ṣalbin ashāra l-‘aqlu bi-l-‘ūdī. (Lz1.289.10-11)

Al-Ma‘arrī probably plays here with the name of Maḥmūd Ghaznawī bn Sabuktigin (d.1030), a prominent ruler of Ghaznawid Empire, and his son Mas‘ūd, meaning that it is not them to be praised but God and the pious.<sup>737</sup> Al-Bakharzī clearly did not want to promote an image of unbeliever for al-Ma‘arrī.

Slightly later biographers, too, give rather neutral accounts on the poet without making matters of belief and unbelief central to their inquiry. ‘Abd al-Karīm as-Sam‘ānī (d. 1166) in the section dealing with the Tanūkhī tribe, declared admiration for the unique memory of al-Ma‘arrī who was good in poetry and wrote many books, one of which was deemed to be a parody of the Qur’ān. Sam‘ānī talked about al-Ma‘arrī as a famous poet, whose knowledge of the language was like an unending sea, but whose belief was a matter of discussion.<sup>738</sup> Abū’l-Barakāt Kamāl ad-Dīn Ibn al-Anbārī (d.1122), a student of Baghdad’s *Niẓāmiya* school under al-Jawāliqī who was in turn the student of al-Ma‘arrī’s most famous disciple at-Tabrīzī, did not tell much but added that there was a rumor about the poet that he as one of the *barāhima*, since he rejected prophecy. He repeated the words of al-Tha‘ālibī, restating that al-Ma‘arrī possessed abundant virtue, was erudite and

<sup>736</sup>Known as a pious shaykh of Islam, scholar of *ḥadīth*, and shāfi‘ī jurist (d.1070):

<sup>737</sup>Al: see Yāzījī’s explanation in *Luzūm* 1.312. 5-6.

<sup>738</sup>al-Sam‘ānī, *al-Ansāb*, 3:62.

learned in language and literature, although he was accused of unbelief. Al-Anbārī too refrained from a judgment on the poet's faith (*wa-llāhu a'lamu*).<sup>739</sup>

It is clear from the accounts mentioned above that al-Ma'arrī was primarily credited for his poetic talent, admired for his skills in poetry and his command of Arabic among his contemporaries and late-contemporaries. The rhetoric of accusations of unbelief appeared only at the level of rumors and anecdotes. However, already a century after al-Ma'arrī's death, drastic reactions towards al-Ma'arrī and *Luzūm* emerged from conservative religious circles. While we do not know of any ban on *Luzūm*'s circulation during al-Ma'arrī's life-time, we do encounter such a restriction in the mid-twelfth century. We know that unknown author of the Persian treatise *Bahr al-Fava'id* (*The Sea of Precious Virtues*)<sup>740</sup> included both *Luzūm* and *Fuṣūl* in the list of books which should not be read, copied and studied. The treatise was written in Syria, most probably in Aleppo, almost a century after al-Ma'arrī's death, and it seems that the author held quite conservative religious views.<sup>741</sup> The two books of al-Ma'arrī, according to the author, should have been banned and burnt. The definitive proof al-Ma'arrī's heresy was that he denied resurrection. The author of the treatise cited the following verses of *Luzūm* to prove his point:

Had your body been left in its form after perishing,  
we would have wished to mend it,  
like a wine-jug emptied from what it contained,  
not broken and once again refilled.  
Yet it [body] turned into scattered pieces  
and remained as dust in the wind.

law kāna jismuka matrūkan bi-hay'atihi  
ba'da t-talāfī ṭami'nā fī talāfihī,

<sup>739</sup>Al-Anbārī Abū l-Barakāt, *Nuzhat al-Alibbā fī Tabaqāt al-Udabā'*, ed. Ibrāhīm Sāmarrā'ī (Beirut: Maktabat al-Manār, 1985), 257-258.

<sup>740</sup> The treatise belongs to the type of "mirrors for princes" close to two other Persian works-the *Siyasatname* of Nizām al-Mulk (d.1092) and the *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk* of al-Ghazālī (d.1111). The difference of *The Sea of Precious Virtues* from these two, according to Meisami, is that it belongs to neither administrative nor philosophical types of the genre, but to the homiletic traditions. Moreover, its sources are completely Islamic. See *The Sea of Precious Virtues (Bahr Fava'id): Medieval Islamic Mirror for Princes*, translated and annotated by J. S. Meisami (Utah: University of Utah Press, 1991), vii.

<sup>741</sup>Ibid., viii.

ka-danni ‘uṭṭila min rāhin takūnu bi-hi  
 wa-lam yuḥaṭṭam fa-‘ādat maratan fī-hī,  
 lakinnahu šāra ajzā’ an muqassamatan  
 thumma stamarra habā’ an fī sawāfihī. (Lz2.420.1-3)<sup>742</sup>

The other books to be bunt, according to *Bahr al-Fawa'id*, were the book of *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'*, which was “total heresy,” books of Avicenna who was an irreligious infidel who denied resurrections and attributes of God, and the books of Abū Zakarīyā ar-Rāzī which kept people away from truth.<sup>743</sup> We do not know what the effects of this particular case were, but certainly al-Ma‘arrī’s reputation as an unbeliever and denier of Islam was crystallized in another circle to which we turn now.

The notoriety of al-Ma‘arrī as an unbeliever was maintained in the Ḥanbalī circles with the efforts of the prominent scholar Ibn al-Jawzī (d.1201), one of the most famous Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad, a theologian, preacher, and jurist who was highly esteemed by the caliph Mustafī (r.1170-1180). Ibn al-Jawzī preached a conservative version of Hanbalism for a large audience and was even granted by the caliph the duty to pursue heretics.<sup>744</sup> For Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Ma‘arrī was nothing but a staunch unbeliever.

If not an explicit unbeliever, then to Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Ma‘arrī would appear as someone confused, bewildered by doubts rather than as someone hiding his unbelief. There is a telling story to this in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Muntaẓam* going back to al-Ma‘arrī’s student at-Tabrīzī. One day al-Ma‘arrī asked at-Tabrīzī about his faith. At-Tabrīzī, knowing that his teacher was in a doubting mood that day (*al-yawma a’rifu i’tiqādahu*), replied: “I am no one but a doubter” (*mā ana illā shākin*) to which al-Ma‘arrī replied: “That is what your shaykh is too” (*wa-hakadha shaykhuka*).<sup>745</sup>

<sup>742</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>743</sup>Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> H. Laoust, “Ibn al-Djawzī,” in *EF*.

<sup>745</sup> See Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 16:23; Yāqūt has slightly different wording: *alyawma aqifu ‘alā’ i’tiqādihi*: Yāqūt, *Mu’jam al-Udabā’*, 1:303. There is a mention in Damīrī’s *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā* when the shāfi‘ī scholar Taqī ad-Dīn Ibn Daqīq al-Idwās asked about al-Ma‘arrī he replied “He is in confusion,” and this is the best thing that was said about him [al-Ma‘arrī]. Muḥammad bn ‘Alī ad-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥasan Basaj (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya, 1994), 2:388.

In his *Muntaẓam*, after mentioning some biographical details about the poet, Ibn al-Jawzī came to adopt a strict tone first on the matter of al-Ma‘arrī’s vegetarianism. He rhetorically posited the same question that was asked by Hibat Alla ash-Shirāzī: if God allowed eating animals, on what grounds does he [al-Ma‘arrī] refuse it? Further, Ibn al-Jawzī went on to conclude: “it is obvious that he inclined to Brahmanism which did not accept slaughtering of animals and rejected prophets.”<sup>746</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī proceeded to mention that the poet was widely accused of *zandaqa* and was one of *barāhima*, which is a matter clearly exposed in his poetry: “he refrains from meat, refutes the prophets, denounces religious laws and denies resurrection.”<sup>747</sup> Then Ibn al-Jawzī referred to a prominent Hanbali scholar from Baghdad ‘Alī Ibn ‘Aqīl (d.1119), who classified al-Ma‘arrī among such unbelievers as Ibn ar-Rīwandī and Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī. Ibn ‘Aqīl thought al-Ma‘arrī was an explicit unbeliever who claimed to be a Muslim inwardly (*taẓāhara bi-l-kufr wa-za‘ama anna-hu muslimun fī l-bāṭin*), just the opposite of hypocrites.<sup>748</sup> But this (the way of al-Ma‘arrī) was absurd, Ibn ‘Aqīl thought, and more stupid than the way of those who exhibited piety and belief and were unbelievers in secret.<sup>749</sup> Further, the Ḥanbalī scholar claimed that al-Ma‘arrī’s *Fuṣūl wa-l-Gḥāyāt* was a parody of the Qur’ān containing the most reckless words.<sup>750</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī went on to say that he had a look at the book called *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* and brought in the verses which he found fully demonstrating the poet’s unbelief. Verses quoted by Ibn al-Jawzī, shown below, would be frequently used by other biographers and historians who talked of al-Ma‘arrī later on:

Hanifs erred, Christians are misguided,  
Jews are puzzled, and Mazdeans go astray.  
People on the earth are of two kinds:

<sup>746</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 16:23. For the same accusation, see also idem, *Talbīs Iblīs* (Beirut: Dār al-Qibla, 1983):68.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid. For the milieu from which these thinkers emerged, see: H. Laoust, “Le Hanbalisme sous le Califat de Bagdad (241/855-656/1258),” *Review des études islamiques*, 27(1959), 67-128. For Ibn ‘Aqīl and his relation and influence on the Hanbali school, the extensive work remains G. Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl et la resurgence de l’Islam traditionaliste au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Damascus, 1963), see especially pp. 481-493.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid., 24

those with intellect without religion,  
and those with religion without intellect.

hafati l-hanīfatu wa-n-naṣārā mā ihtadat  
wa-yahūdu ḥārat wa-l-majūsu muḍallah  
ithnāni ahlu-l-arḍi-dhū ‘aqlin bi-lā  
dīnin wa-ākharu dayyinun lā ‘aqla lah (Lz2.201.5-6)<sup>751</sup>

The other is:

Religious laws cause hostility among us  
and leave us with a variety of hostilities.  
Isn't it due to the judgment of the prophecies  
that women of the Byzantines are considered lawful for the Arabs?

inna sharā’i‘a alqat bayna-nā iḥanan  
wa-awrathatnā afānīna l-‘adāwāti  
wa-hal ubīḥati l-nisā’u r-Rūmi ‘an ‘araḍin  
li-l-‘urbi illā bi-aḥkā l-nubuwwāti.(Lz1. 186.2-3)<sup>752</sup>

Ibn al-Jawzī also spotted the irony of some verses if *Luzūm* that we have mentioned in the chapter on God.<sup>753</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī took harsher tone with the following verses:

You say we have an Eternal Creator,  
we say, “We confirm what you believe in.”  
You claim that God exists beyond time and space, don't you?  
This is a statement that has a hidden message,  
meaning that we do not possess intellect.

qultum la-nā khāliqun qadīmun,  
qulna ṣadaqtum kadhā naqūlu  
za‘amtumūhu bi-lā zamanin,  
wa-lā makānin a-lā fa-qūlū  
hadhā kalāmun khabi’un  
ma‘nāhu laysat la-nā ‘uqūlū. (Lz2.179.1-3)

<sup>751</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup>Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 16:25.

The Ḥanbalī scholar interpreted this poem as an explicit attack on God: “Look at the stupidly of this ignoramus! He denies that God exists beyond time and place and forgets that God created both of them.”<sup>754</sup> At the end of his account of al-Ma‘arrī, Ibn al-Jawzī wrote:

We have been told that eighty dirges were composed on his grave by his friends and his students fond of him. These people are of two types: either ignorant ones who did not know what he [al-Ma‘arrī] was about or people careless of religion. Otherwise, how could they not understand that his poetry is such explicit unbelief (*kufṛ ṣarīḥ*)?<sup>755</sup>

To illustrate his point even stronger, Ibn al-Jawzī referred to Ghars an-Ni‘ma Ibn al-Ṣābī, a historian contemporary with al-Ma‘arrī, with the following story: When al-Ma‘arrī died some people dreamt that two snakes were eating a blind man’s flesh. The blind man called for help. Then the dreaming man asked who the blind man was, and was told it was al-Ma‘arrī, the unbeliever.<sup>756</sup>

Examining al-Jawzī’s account, we note that al-Ma‘arrī was blamed on the very account of obvious expressions of unbelief, and only a part of the text and not the whole of it served as evidence to unbelief. Ibn al-Jawzī who might be the first to quote intensively from *Luzūm*, did not bother with the overall spirit and content of the work, he was only interested in the parts which bespoke unbelief. His was a selective reading. That al-Ma‘arrī elsewhere in *Luzūm* sounded as a believer, did not bother Ibn al-Jawzī too much. *Luzūm* was judged on the basis of its literal appearance, and al-Ma‘arrī was seen as explicit in his unbelief. When adh-Dhahabī wrote about at-Tawḥīdī, he mentioned the statement of Ibn al-Jawzī according to whom there were three heretics in Islam—Ibn ar-Rāwandī, Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī, and al-Ma‘arrī. At-Tawḥīdī was qualified as the worst *zindīq* and the most harmful to Islam by Ibn al-Jawzī because he was not explicit in his

<sup>754</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>755</sup>Ibid.

<sup>756</sup>Ibid. Ibn al-Jawzī’s nephew, initially Ḥanbalī then Hanafī scholar Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī repeats almost verbatim in his *Mir’āt az-Zamān* the accusations against al-Ma‘arrī and quotes the same verses: see *Ta’rīf*, 143-180.

unbelief whereas the other two were (*wa-ashadduhuma ‘alā l-Islām Abū Ḥayān liannahuma ṣarraḥā wa-huwa majmaja wa-lam yuṣarriḥ*).<sup>757</sup>

Among those who largely relied on the Hanbali sources in order to emphasize the matter of unbelief is the famous Mamluk shāfi‘ī scholar and ultra-conservative historian Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr (d.1373). The historian opened the section on al-Ma‘arrī in his *Bidāya* by naming him a famous poet and *zindīq*.<sup>758</sup> Ibn Kathīr did admit that al-Ma‘arrī was talented and possessed a unique memory.<sup>759</sup> The historian confirmed that the poet was brilliant but not righteous (*wa-qad kāna dhakīyan wa-lam yakun zakīyan*).<sup>760</sup> Some say, Ibn Kathīr went on, that the poet composed his works playfully and jocularly (*majūnan wa-la‘ban*), and said with his tongue what he did not have in heart, and that he was a Muslim from inside and a *zindīq* from outside referring to Ibn al-‘Aqīl and Ibn al-Jawzī.<sup>761</sup> After mentioning the same verses quoted by Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Kathīr referred to the verse that al-Ma‘arrī asked to be inscribed on his gravestone: “This was the crime my father committed to me, and I have done so to no one” (*hādhā janāhu abī ‘alayya wa-mā janaytu ‘alā aḥadin*) to conclude that al-Ma‘arrī did not change his views regarding matters of belief at the end of his life, as some had assumed.<sup>762</sup>

Following Ibn al-Jawzī, in many accounts which appear in the subsequent centuries, al-Ma‘arrī’s praise, fascination with his linguistic and poetic skills were blended with the accusations of unbelief and quotations of verses indicating the poet’s wicked views. Historians such as Yāqūt, Ibn al-Athīr, al-Qiftī and adh-Dhahabī, besides providing us with much biographical data, integrated

<sup>757</sup>al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A ‘lām an-Nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnawūṭ (Beirut: Mu‘asasat ar-Risāla, 1985), 17:120. Of course, this would not always be the case, especially in theological discussions: we have seen that Hibat Allah was interested in the hidden knowledge that al-Ma‘arrī possessed.

<sup>758</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 12:72.

<sup>759</sup>Ibn Kathīr tells a story according to which on the way from Bagdad the poet warned his people to be wary of a big tree on the road. His companions did not see any tree but when they came close to the place they saw the roots of the tree that was cut. Al-Ma‘arrī, though blind, remembered and sensed the place of the tree on the way they passed once on the way to Bagdad. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 73.

<sup>760</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup>Ibid., 76.

into their texts opinions and excerpts from the previous sources demonstrating the ambiguous reputation of al-Ma‘arrī.<sup>763</sup>

On the other hand, efforts were made to present al-Ma‘arrī as a believer. In this case, the emphasis was placed on al-Ma‘arrī’s piety and his literary output. Most interestingly, some testimonies defending al-Ma‘arrī against accusations came from quite traditional circles. Anecdotal stories about al-Ma‘arrī’s true faith are transmitted from the shāfi‘ī scholar Ṣadr ad-Dīn as-Silafī (d.1180), a traditionalist and Qur’ān reciter (*al-ḥāfiẓ*) from Iṣfahān who died in Alexandria.<sup>764</sup> Ibn Khallikān recorded that Silafī was a student of at-Tabrīzī, which meant he had direct information about the poet.<sup>765</sup> Some stories about al-Ma‘arrī’s piety and diligent habits of prayer go back to as-Silafī who heard it from a person visiting al-Ma‘arrī and were transmitted by a few biographers.<sup>766</sup> According to as-Silafī, even if al-Ma‘arrī was not certain about his belief during his lifetime, he repented and came to the true belief at the end of his life (*tāba wa-anāba*).<sup>767</sup>

The most prominent among al-Ma‘arrī’s defenders, however, is Ibn al-‘Adīm (d.1262) to whom there have been many references already. Ibn al-Adīm came from a wealthy family of jurists from Aleppo and himself served as a diplomat to Ayyubids of Aleppo and Damascus. He was appointed to the chair of the prestigious Hanafī *madarasa* Ḥallāwīya in Damascus.<sup>768</sup> Ibn al-Adīm was religious (he performed pilgrimage to Mecca) and probably had an inclination to asceticism.<sup>769</sup> The Mamluk historian not only made frequent references to al-Ma‘arrī in his *Zubdat al-Ḥalab* and *Bughyat al-Ḥalab*, but also composed a separate book on the poet. *Kitāb al-Inṣāf wa-t-Taḥarrī fī*

<sup>763</sup> See Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’*, 1:303ff; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī-t-Tarīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Yusūf ad-Daqqāq (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1987), 8:339; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:84 ff; adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh al-Islām*, 30:200ff.

<sup>764</sup> See “al-Silafī,” in *EF*.

<sup>765</sup> Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān wa-Anbā’ Abnā’ az-Zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār aṣ-Ṣadr, 1978), 1:105; Margoliouth, “Introduction to Letters,” xxxvii, n.7.

<sup>766</sup> See the anecdote related to al-Ma‘arrī’s passionate and lengthy prayer accompanied by sobbing in Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 1:305; Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:86; adh-Dhahabī, *Tarīkh al-Islām*, 30: 206; Khaliqān *Wafayāt*, 1:113-114; aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7:64.

<sup>767</sup> See aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7:65.

<sup>768</sup> See “Ibn al-‘Adīm,” in *EF*.

<sup>769</sup> See D.W. Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and his World: Ibn al-‘Adīm and Aleppo as portrayed in his Bibliographic Dictionary of People Associated with the City* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 184.



*Daf‘i’ ẓ- Ẓulm wa ‘t-Tajarrī ‘an Abī ‘l- ‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī* (*The Book of Just Treatment and Inquiry for the Defense of Abū ‘l- ‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī from Injustice*) was composed with the sole purpose of defending the poet from false accusations. Ibn al-‘Adīm praised the poet for his great eloquence and literary skills. Those who criticized al-Ma‘arrī did so out of envy, he insisted. They accused the poet of lying and deception and threw upon him the stain of unbelief. Some did it by ascribing to him things he never said and some gave a wrong meaning to what he said. Disgraced in this way, Ibn al-‘Adīm lamented, his merits were turned into sins; they made folly and negligence out of his intelligence and asceticism driving him away from religion and Islam and attributed to him a wrong reputation. In Ibn al-‘Adīm's account, al-Ma‘arrī is the most faithful, pious, ascetic, erudite, and respected. Ibn al-‘Adīm's account served as a counterbalance to that image of al-Ma‘arrī which was produced and circulated by some conservative circles.

There were a few more accounts attempting to present an untarnished reputation for al-Ma‘arrī. The historian Ibn al-Wardī (d.1349), himself from Ma‘arra, also provided a positive account on the poet although he stated that some works of the poet demonstrated his confusion. The historian admitted that he cared for al-Ma‘arrī because of his origin but some of his works such as *Luzūm* did show that at the time of writing he was confused, fearful and hesitant (*ḥā‘iran mudhabdhaban nāfiran*).<sup>770</sup> Yet, some other works of the poet, according to Ibn al-Wardī, demonstrated his piety and true belief and acceptance of the prophets as it appeared in al-Ma‘arrī's pleasing work called *Ḍaw‘ Saqī az-Zand*, the poet's interpretation of his own Saqī az-Zand. Even if the poet had some skeptical views on religion, at the end of his life al-Ma‘arrī repented and became a true believer according to Ibn al-Wardī. The latter also referred to as-Silafī who, according to the historian, wrote a book about al-Ma‘arrī in which there was a story going back to a certain

<sup>770</sup> Zayn ad-Dīn Ibn al-Wardī, *Tatimmat al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*, ed. n/a. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1996), 1:349.

shāfi‘ī judge<sup>771</sup> who, after having had some correspondence with the poet in Bagdad, became assured of the righteousness of the poet. Since then, opinions on the poet were improved especially among the ‘ulamā’ (*ḥasuna ṣ-ṣannu wa-khuṣūṣan bi-l-‘ulamā’*).<sup>772</sup>

Another apologetic account on the poet came from Shihāb Ibn Faḍlallāh al-‘Umarī (d.1349), an official Mamluk administrator. Al-‘Umarī flavored his rather long account on al-Ma‘arrī with various “orthodox” episodes. In this account, al-Ma‘arrī appeared as a pious believer who went out only for visiting the mosque and who read the Qur’ān for various shaykhs.<sup>773</sup>

The most copious account of al-Ma‘arrī’s defense belongs to the Damascene man of letters and poet Yūsuf al-Badī‘ī (d.1662). His *Awj at-Taḥarrī ‘an Ḥaythīyat Abī’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī* (*Peak of Inquiry into Approaches to Abu’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*) contained detailed biographical information, excerpts from various works of al-Ma‘arrī, and presented the poet as a devout believer whose reputation suffered because of false accusations mostly by people envious of him. Al-Ma‘arrī’s prayers and fasting attested to his piety and devotion, and his works demonstrated his worship and fear of God.<sup>774</sup> The authors who spoke of al-Ma‘arrī’s piety and repentance, showed an apologetic stance and saw al-Ma‘arrī’s unbelief as incompatible with his poetic merit. In order to secure al-Ma‘arrī’s fame as a great poet and man of letters within orthodox circles, they sought to portray an unblemished image of him congruous with orthodox expectations. This happened with the growth of religious conservatism under Ayyubids and Mamluks, starting already under Seljuqs.

It has become obvious from this discussion that during the life-time of al-Ma‘arrī accusations of unbelief did exist and came from different parts of society. They, however, mostly carried a secondary nature in relation to al-Ma‘arrī’s reputation as a poet, a master of Arabic and a teacher. Al-Ma‘arrī’s social status and prestige was conditioned by many factors and most of all his

<sup>771</sup> See *TQ*, n.1, p.212.

<sup>772</sup> Ibn al-Wardī, *Tatimmat al-Mukhtaṣar*, 1:350.

<sup>773</sup> See Faḍlallāh al-‘Umarī, *Masālik*, 15:293-294.

<sup>774</sup> See Yūsuf al-Badī‘ī, *Awj at-Taḥarrī*, especially 33-35.

excellence in poetry and knowledge of Arabic letters, certainly not by his religious views. To that was added his piety, modesty, decency, and family background as we learn from the sources. The chapter also made a direct link between the social status and the issue of persecution. The discussion challenged the notion of *taqīya*-an assertion that religious or irreligious writings were the primary markers of al-Ma‘arrī’s status and acceptance. This notion also assumes that religious authorities determined what to be written and said and what not, an assertion which is far from historical reality and which thoroughly ignores the situational context in which al-Ma‘arrī lived and acted. It was only in subsequent centuries that al-Ma‘arrī’s reception was polarized between two major trends. The first one primarily portrayed al-Ma‘arrī as a denier of Islam and all religions, and his literary image was subordinated to his reputation of an unbeliever. The opposite trend placed the emphasis on al-Ma‘arrī’s literary merit, piety, and social standing and dismissed all the accusations of unbelief.

## CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this dissertation has, by historical contextualization and with the revision of analytical terms of reference previously applied to the study of al-Ma'arrī and his *Luzūm*, enhanced our understating of both al-Ma'arrī and the general dynamics of the period in which the poet lived and worked. Previous studies of *Luzūm* had shared the general assumption that a uniform, pietistic religious culture was the central driving force of society, even prior to the formal institutionalization of 'ulamā' under the Seljuqs, Ayyubids, and Mamluks. Most of these studies also assumed that, at the time of al-Ma'arrī, the dynamics of the cultural and intellectual life were entirely driven by the rigid dichotomy between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. Finally, previous studies, inattentive to and perhaps intolerant towards to any sort of incoherence, dissonance, paradox, and confusion, ended up presenting reductive — and, as a result, often superficial — studies of *Luzūm*. As a result, al-Ma'arrī has been presented as an eccentric alien and a complete outsider to his age. Likewise, *Luzūm* has been presented as a completely unconventional work.

One aim of this dissertation was to reassess the meaning and the value of contradictions in *Luzūm* through a study of ambivalence. While it is true that, in terms of its literary features, *Luzūm* is unconventional in some ways, its contradictory content does not really make it so odd. Demonstrated through a close reading of the text in light of these contradictions, especially those regarding matters of faith and religion, this work has shown that *Luzūm* is not as foreign or strange to its time as had once been assumed. Al-Ma'arrī wrote *Luzūm* at a time of great cultural and religious diversity, intellectual pluralism, and epistemological, political and normative anxieties. In matters of faith and religion al-Ma'arrī deliberately remained ambivalent in order to underline doubt, anxiety, and confusion over certainty. In fact, any statement of certainty in matters of faith and religion was severely rebuked by al-Ma'arrī. In the midst of competing truths and orthodoxies,

al-Ma'arrī, through determined ambivalence and through affirmation and negation of the same concept at the same time, positioned himself against all kinds of certain and categorical conclusions. Al-Ma'arrī's *Luzūm* was therefore directly informed by the heated intellectual and religious debates of the day — which, to his mind, led nowhere. In this regard, *Luzūm* must be seen as a genuine reflection of the intellectual and political environment in which it was created. It was neither as alien, nor as inappropriate to its age, as scholars have often suggested.

Another aim of this dissertation was to provide some understanding of al-Ma'arrī's freethinking. In modern scholarship there have been two major trends in assessing al-Ma'arrī's religious thought. One presents al-Ma'arrī as a nonbeliever, a freethinker like Ibn ar-Rāwandī and Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī, who practiced dissimulation, *taqīya* because of the threat of persecution, and to therefore concealed his unbelief by contradictions. The other trend, however, presents al-Ma'arrī as a sincere and pious believer. This dissertation has shown that, in regards to the context of al-Ma'arrī and the milieu in which *Luzūm* was composed, notions involving dissimulation, including *taqīya*, concealed writing, and sincerity are not apt analytical tools.

These are the ideas that were proposed in this dissertation. In the first chapter, in order to contextualize my ensuing analysis of the *Luzūm*, I presented the intellectual, religious, and political states present in al-Ma'arrī's time. I also offered a survey of al-Ma'arrī's biography, works, networks, standing, and reputation. What resulted from this were some key observations. First, there were two main factors that reinforced a sense of doubt and confusion in al-Ma'arrī's work. One was his short stay in Baghdad and, as a result, his immersion in the rich cultural life of the cosmopolitan capital. The other was the constant political instability in North Syria, which provided yet another cause for his anxieties. Second, with regard to his *oeuvre*, this chapter showed how admonitory and didactic works constituted a large portion of his corpus. Some of his epistles are also distinct due to their interplay of humor, irony, and sarcasm. It is clear that *Luzūm* is not al-Ma'arrī's only work with

severe stylistic and formal constraints, as he applied rigid compositional rules to many of his works. Third, although al-Ma'arrī was an ascetic, he was also an active member of society, as can be seen through his teaching and writing. His social network consisted of students from a myriad of intellectual backgrounds and from different parts of the Islamic world, men of authority, and people from his hometown of Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān. Fourth, in regards to al-Ma'arrī's possible affiliation to shi'i trends, it was shown that, even if at one point the poet welcomed some Ismā'ilī or Qarmatī teachings, in the end he denied the legitimacy of all of them. Finally, this chapter showed that, next to his fame as a poet and prose-writer, al-Ma'arrī did in fact have the reputation of being an unbeliever during his life-time.

The second chapter was dedicated to the analysis of some of the literary aspects of *Luzūm*. I have argued that al-Ma'arrī composed *Luzūm* not only for instructive and didactic purposes for his students, but also in order to receive distinction and acknowledgement of his virtuosity. Al-Ma'arrī exceeded the exigencies of the traditional ways of writing poetry and applied extraordinary rules of versification and prosody that would ultimately exhibit his literary skills and excellence. The mannerist desire to strike and impress stood behind the creative dynamics of *Luzūm*. For al-Ma'arrī, language was the only medium where order and certainty could be established. He shows this through *Luzūm* as well as through his many other works that contain complex and exigent formal rigidity. While order and consistency through the medium of language can be demonstrated through verbal mannerism, confusion and anxiety can be demonstrated through the mannerism of angst caused by tension, contradictions, and ambivalence.

It is at this point that this dissertation shifts from the context and form of *Luzūm* to a critical examination of the notions of belief and disbelief, which are significant themes present in the text. The third chapter presented a general survey of some of the essential aspects necessary to the study of disbelief and freethinking. This showed that, despite a temporal gap, there are similar — if not

identical — sets of moods, motifs, and patterns present in both the European and ‘Abbasid histories of unbelief and freethinking, which make the use of comparisons legitimate. Further, there are possible links and channels between the two, as can be seen in the *Treatise of the Three Imposters*. I speculated on the possibility that al-Ma‘arrī might have been a link in this chain, especially when we consider the scope of his Andalusian network. This chapter also stressed that the consideration of *taqīya*, *sincerity*, and *persecution* cannot support any analytical contention if they are not properly related to both text and context. All of the previous analyses of *Luzūm* have failed to maintain this relationship between text and context, which has resulted in extremely reductive readings and definitions. This chapter argued that using ambivalence as a main interpretative tool in analyzing al-Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm*, and also in matters of belief and unbelief, supports a reading that provides a proper space for the presence of contradictions, doubt, and uncertainty. This also provides a more nuanced understanding of al-Ma‘arrī’s freethinking, which becomes apparent through moods rather than argumentative statements and does not have any imposing tone as is the case with other freethinkers. This chapter has also argued that, while reading *Luzūm*, attention must be paid to its polemical content, specifically to situational statements made against other religions and sects and their teachings. Statements that show adherence to Muslim teachings and preference to a generic Islam over other religions are neither occasioned by *taqīya*, nor do they necessarily express sincere belief in Islam, as has been suggested by contemporary scholars. These were, instead, denominational and generic statements with a specific polemical purpose.

The fourth chapter provided a detailed analysis of the notions of God, revelation, and reason in *Luzūm* in the light of ambivalent attitude al-Ma‘arrī expressed towards them. It was shown that al-Ma‘arrī displayed significant ambivalence towards notions of God which, by and large, shaped his attitude towards faith. As for his attitude towards revealed religions and prophets, this chapter showed how al-Ma‘arrī was torn between an awareness that religions are of no use and can even be

harmful —by making blunt statements about this — and the awareness that they also carry moral messages which ought to be followed. This dissonance remains unresolved in *Luzūm*. Al-Ma‘arrī also did not develop any specific paradigm of reason, something he is frequently celebrated for having done. While he praises the faculty of reason and urges people to turn to it, he simultaneously discredits its power against the corrupt human nature and turns, instead, to fatalistic statements. Al-Ma‘arrī’s ambivalence, therefore, makes him different from previous freethinkers with whom he has been frequently identified in contemporary studies.

The final chapter showed how the matter of unbelief was secondary to al-Ma‘arrī’s fame as a poet and teacher. His social status was maintained by his literary virtuosity and his excellence knowledge of Arabic letters. This chapter has argued that al-Ma‘arrī escaped persecution, not due to his successful application of *taqīya*, as it has been previously suggested, but because there was no need for persecution. There was in fact no social or political situation present that was conducive to his persecution. It was only well after his death that al-Ma‘arrī’s image was divided between two poles of reception: some made his unbelief his primary identifier, while others saw him as a pious believer in order to save his poetic merits. Such dichotomies and rigid boundaries were not present during his lifetime and they are only constructs among posterity.

Finally, it has become clear to me during this research that some aspects of al-Ma‘arrī and his works remain to be examined with a great care. I have in mind at least two themes which would require a thorough research. One of them would suggest locating al-Ma‘arrī in a bigger cultural and intellectual landscape of the Mediterranean within the scope of comparative literature and religious studies. The other one would suggest to examine al-Ma‘arrī’s influence and legacy in modern and contemporary Arab literary and religious thought some glimpses of which were provided in the introduction of this thesis.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Works by al-Ma‘arrī

*Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. Leiden University Libraries MS Oriental 100.

\_\_\_\_\_. Ed. ‘Azīz Zand. Cairo:Maḥrūsa, 1891/1895, 2 vols.

\_\_\_\_\_. Ed. Kamāl al-Yāziji. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992, 2 vols.

*Shurūḥ Saqī az-Zand*, ed. Muṣṭafā s-Saqqā et al. Cairo, 1945.

*Rasā’il Abī’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*. Ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rafa, 2005.

*Risālat aṣ-Ṣāhil wa-sh-Shāḥij*. Ed. A’isha ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1984.

*The Letters of al-Ma‘arrī*. Ed. David, S. Margoliouth. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898.

*The Epistle of Forgiveness*. Ed. and trans. Van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler. NY: New York University Press, 2014, 2 vols.

*Kitāb al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghayāt fī Tamjīd Allāh wa-l-Mawā’iz*. Ed. Muḥammad Zanātī. Cairo, 1938.

*Zajr an-Nābiḥ: Muqtaṭafāt*. Damascus: Maṭbū‘āt Majma‘al-Lughati l-‘Arabīya, 1965.

*Al-Lāmi‘ al-Azīzī*. Ed. Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Mawlawī. Riyadh, 2008.

*Mu‘jiz Aḥmad*. Ed. ‘Abd al-Majid Diyāb. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1988.

*Risālat al-Malā’ika*. Ed. Salīm al-Jundī. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1992.

### Other Primary Sources

Abū’l-Fidā. *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*. In *Ta’rīf al-Qudamā’ bi-Abī ‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*, ed. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Muḥammad Saqqā et al. Cairo, Dār al-Qaḥmīya li-ṭ-Ṭibā’a wa-Nashr. 1965.

Ad-Damīrī, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī. *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā*. Ed. Aḥmad Ḥasan Basaj. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya, 1994.

Adh-Dhabībī. *Tarīkh al-Islām wa-Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa-l-A’lām*. Ed. ‘Abd as-Salām Tadmūrī. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1994, 52 vols.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Siyar A’lām an-Nubalā’*. Ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnawūṭ. Beirut: Mu’asasat ar-Risāla, 1985.

- Al-Anbārī, Abū l-Barakāt. *Nuzhat al-Alibbā fī Tabaqāt al-Udabā*. Ed. Ibrāhīm Sāmarrā'ī. Beirut: Maktabat al-Manār, 1985.
- Al-Badī'ī, Yūsūf. *Awj at-Taḥarrī 'an Ḥaythiyyat Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī (Damascus:1944
- \_\_\_\_\_. *aṣ-Ṣubḥ al-Munabbī 'an ḥaythiyyat al-Mutanabbī*, eds., Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Muḥammad Shattā, and 'Abduh Ziyāda 'Abduh (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1963.
- Al-Bākharzī 'Alī, Abū l-Ḥasan. *Dumīyat al-Qaṣr wa-'Uṣratu-l-Ahl*. Ed. Muḥammad at-Tunjī. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993, 3 vols.
- Al-Baghdādī, Al-Khatīb. *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*. Ed. Bashār Ma'rūf. Beirut: Dār al-Gharbī l-Islāmī, 17 vols.
- Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghāni*. Ed. Yūsūf 'Alī Ṭawīl, 'Abd al-Amīr 'Alī Muḥannā, Samīr Jābir. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995.
- Al-Ḥamawī, Yāqūt. *Mu'jam al-Buldān*. Beirut: Dār Ṣadīr, 1977, 5 vols.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mu'jam al-Udabā' aw Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rīfat al-Adīb*. Ed. Iḥsān 'Abās. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993, 7 vols.
- Al-Jurjānī, Abd al-Qādir. *Asrār al-Balāghah*. Ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Al-Wasāṭa bayna l-Mutanabbī wa Khuṣūmihi*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū Faḍl Ibrāhīm and 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī. Cairo, n.d.
- Al-Khafājī, Ibn Sinān *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa*. Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya, 1982.
- Al-Khayyāt, Abū Ḥusayn Ibn Uthmān. *Kitāb al-Intiṣār: ar-Radd 'alā Ibn ar-Rāwandī al-Mulḥid*. Ed. H.S. Nyberg. Beirut: Dār Qābis, 1986
- Al-Mihzamī, Abū Hiffān. *Akhbār Abī Nuwās*. Ed. 'Abd as-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj. Cairo, 1953.
- Al-'Umarī, Faḍlallah. *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*. Ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jabūrī. Beirut: Dār-Kutub al-'Ilmīya, 2010, 27 vols.
- As-Subkī. *Tabaqāt Shāfi'īya al-Kubrā*. Ed. Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭanāḥī, Muḥammad al-Ḥilw. Cairo, Dār Ihya' l-Kutub al-'Arabīya, 1964.
- Ar-Rāzī, Abū Ḥātim. *A'lām an-Nubūwwa. The proofs of Prophecy*. Ed. and trans. T. Khalidi. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rasā'il Falsafīya. Philosophical Epistles*. Ed. P. Kraus. Cairo, 1939.
- Ar-Rāzī, Fakhr ad-Dīn. *At-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*. Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1981. 32 vols.

- Aṭ-Ṭabarsī, Abū Maṣṣūr. *Al-Iḥtijāj*. Annotated by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Khursān. Beirut: Mu'asasa l-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 1965, 2 vols.
- At-Tawhīdī, Abū Ḥayān. *Imtā' wa-Mūwānasa*. Ed. Haytham at-Ṭa'imī. Beirut: al-Makataba al-'Aṣrīya, 2011.
- Ath-Tha'ālibī, Abū Maṣṣūr. *Tatimmat al-Yatīmah ad-Dahr fī Maḥāsin ahl al-'Aṣr*. Ed. Muḥammad Qamīma. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Ilmīya, 1983, 5 vols.
- Ash-Shahrastānī. *Kitāb al-Milal wan-n-Niḥal*. Ed. W. Cureton. London, 1846.
- Aṣ-Ṣafadī, Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafayāt*. Ed. Turkī Muṣṭafā et al. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' at-Turātha al-'Arabī, 2008, 29 vols.
- As-Sam'ānī Abd al-Karīm. *Al-Ansāb*. Ed. Al-Mu'allimī al-Yamānī. Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīya, 1985, 12 vols.
- As-Suyūṭī, Jalāl ad-Dīn. *Bughyat al-Wu'ā*. In *Ta'rīf al-Qudamā' bi-Abī 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*, ed. Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn, Muḥammad Saqā et al. Cairo, Dār al-Qaṣmīya li-ṭ-Ṭibā'a wa-Nashr. 1965.
- Ibn al-Adīm, Kamāl ad-Dīn. *Kitāb al-Inṣāf wa-t-Taḥarrī fī Daf'i'l-Ẓulm wa't-Tajarrī 'an Abī'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī*. Ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Ḥarfūsh. Damascus: Dār al-Jawlān, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Bughyat Ṭalab fī Tarīkh al-Ḥalab*. Ed. Suhayl Zakār. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988, 11 vols.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*. Ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya, 1996, 31 vols.
- Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, ed. G. Makdisi. Beirut, 1970-71., 2 vols.
- Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū'l-Faraj, *al-Muntaẓam fī Tarīkh al-Mulūk wa-l-Umam*. Ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub 'Ilmīya, 1992, 17 vols.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Talbīs Iblīs*. Beirut: Dār al-Qibla, 1983.
- Ibn al-Kathīr, al-Ḥāfiẓ. *Al-Bidāya wa-n-Nihāya*. Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'arīf, 1991, 15 vols.
- Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī-t-tarīkh*. Ed. Muḥammad Yusūf ad-Daqqāq. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya, 1987, 11 vols.
- Ibn al-Qifṭī. *Inbāḥ ar-Ruwāt 'alā Anbāhi n-Nuḥā*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1986. 4 vols.
- Ibn Baṭūṭa. *Kitāb Riḥlat Ibn Baṭūṭa: Tuḥfat al-Anẓār fī-Gharā'ibi l-Amṣār wa-'Ajā'ib al-Asfār*. Ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im al-'Aryān. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' 'Ulūm, 1987.
- Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*. Trans. Franz Rosenthal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

- Ibn Khalliqan. *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa-Anbā' Abnā' az-Zamān*. Ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās. Beirut: Dār aṣ-Ṣadr, 1978, 8 vols.
- Ibn Rashīq. *Al-'Umda fī Maḥāsina sh-Shi'r wa-Ādābihi*. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981. 2 vols.
- Ibn Qutayba. *Ash-Shi'r wa-sh-Shu'arā'*. Ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1958. 2 vols.
- Ibn Taymīyah. *Majmū'a l-Fatāwā*. Ed. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān bn Muḥammad bn Qāsim and Muḥammad bn 'Abd ar-Raḥman, Cairo: Dār ar-Raḥma, n.d. 37 vols.
- Khasraw, Nāṣir-I. *The Book of Travel (Safarnama)*. Ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston J. Costa Meza, CA: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Majlisī, 'Alāma. *Bihār al-anwār*. Beirut, 1983, 11 vols.
- Zayn ad-Dīn Ibn al-Wardī, *Tatimat al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*, Ed. n/a. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya, 1996, 2 vols.

## Secondary Sources

- 'Abd ar-Raḥman, Āisha. "Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." In *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtany et al. 327-338. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ma' Abī l-'Alā' fī Riḥlati Ḥayātihi*. Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-'Arabī, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Qirā'a Jadīda fī Risālat al-Ghufrān: Naṣ Masraḥī mina l-Qarni l-Khāmisi l-Hijrī*. Cairo, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Al-Ḥayat al-Insānīya 'inda Abī'l-'Alā'*. Cairo, 1944.
- 'Abd al-Qādir, Ḥāmid. *Falsafat Abī'l-'Alā'*. Cairo: Lajnat al-bayān al-'Arabī, 1950.
- Abū r-Rab, Hanā'. *Athar Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī fī l-Adabi l-Andalusī*. Amman: Dar Books, 2009.
- Abrahamov, Binyamin. "The Barāhima Enigma; A Search for a New Solution." *Die Welt des Orients* 18 (1987): 72-91.
- Adamson, Peter. "High Five-al-Rāzī." In idem. *Philosophy in the Islamic World: a History of Philosophy without a Gap*, vol. 3, 48-54. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī." In *Islamische Philosophie im Mittelalter. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Heidrun Eichner et al., 199-217. Darmstadt: WBG, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Galen and Rāzī on Time." In *Medieval Arabic Thought: Essays in the Honor of Fritz Zimmermann*, ed. R. Hansberger et al., 1-14. London: Warburg Studies and Texts, 2012.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abū Bakr al- Rāzī on Animals." *Archive für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94, (2012):249-273.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Platonic Pleasures in Epicurus and Rāzī." In *The Age of al-Farabi: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, ed., P. Adamson, 71-94. London and Turin: The Warburg Institute - Nino Aragno Editore, 2008.
- Adonis. *Introduction to Arab Poetics*. Trans. from French by Catherine Cobham. London: Saqi Books, 1988.
- Ajami, Mansour. *The Alchemy of Glory: The Dialectic of Truthfulness Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988.
- Aḥmad, Shahab. *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Muslim*. Princeton/London: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- ‘Alāyilī, ‘Abdallah. *Al-Ma‘arrī dhalika l-Majhūl*. Beirut: al-Ahlīyat li-n-Nashr wa-t-Tawzī‘, 1981.
- Al-A‘sam, ‘Abd al-‘Amīr. *Tarīkh Ibn ar-Rāwandī al-Mulḥid*. Damascus: Dār at-Takwīn, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ibn ar-Rāwandī fī-l-Marāji‘ al-‘Arabīya al-Ḥadītha*. Damascus: Dār at-Takwīn, 2010). 2 vols.
- Al-‘Aqqād, ‘Abbās Maḥmūd. "Al-Ma‘arrī wa-falsafatuhu." *Muqataṭaf* 49 (1916): 465-474.
- Al-‘Azm, Sadik J. "The Tragedy of Satan (Iblis)." In idem. *Islam-Submission and Disobedience*. Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2014.
- Al-Azmeh, Aziz. "Freidenkertum und Humanismus: Stimmungen, Motive und Themen in Zeitalter der Abbasiden (8-13jh.)." In *Vielfalt statt Reformation: Humanistische Beiträge zum Dialog der Weltanschauungen*, 234-255. Ed. Ralf Schöppner. Belin, Alibri: Auflage, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abbasid Culture and the Universal History of Freethinking Humanism." *Critical Muslim* 12 (2014): 73-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God's Caravan." In *Mirror of the Prince: Islam and the Theory of Statecraft*, ed. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, 326-448. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ed. *Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī*. Beirut: Riad ar-Rayyes Books, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim Christian, and Pagan Politics*. London/NY: I.B. Tauris, 2001.
- Al-Garradi, Tahir. *The Image of al-Ma‘arrī as an Infidel among Medieval and modern Critics*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation: University of Utah, 1987.
- Al-Jundī, Muḥammad Salīm. *Tarīkh Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān*. Damascus, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Al-Jāmi‘ fī Akhbār Abī'l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī wa-Āthārihi*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1963.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dīn Abī'l-'Alā." In *Mihrajān al-Alfī l- Abī'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1945, 280-292.
- Al-Khulī, Ameen. *Ray'ī fī Abī al-'Alā*. Cairo: Jamā'at al-Kitāb, 1945.
- Al-Maḥāsini, Zakī. *Abū'l-'Alā', Nāqid al-Mujtama'*. Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1947.
- Al-Mallah, Majd Yaser. "Doing Things with Odes: A Poet's Pledges of Allegiance: Ibn Darrāj al-Qaṣṭallī's *Hā'īyyah* to al-Manṣūr and *Rā'īyya* to al-Mundhir." *JAL* 34. No.1-2 (2003):45-80.
- Al-Mallūhī Abd al-Muī'n. *Difā' 'an Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*. Mu'assasat ar-Risāla: Beirut, 1994.
- Al-Mana, Suaad A. "The Female Imagery in Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*." *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*. No. 4 (1992):21-50.
- Al-Rājkūtī, 'Abd al-'Azīz. *Al-Ma'arrī wā-mā ilayhi*. Cairo: al-Maṭba'a as-Salāfiya, 1926.
- Alshaar, Nuha. *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawḥīdī and his Contemporaries*. London/NY: Routledge, 2015.
- Al-Qanṭār, Kamāl. *Fikr al-Ma'arrī: Malāmiḥ Jadalīya*. Dār al-Fārābī, 2014.
- Al-Yāziji, Kamāl. *Abū'l-'Alā' wa-Luzūmīyātuhu*. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988.
- Ali, Samer. *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.
- Allen, Roger. *Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Amīn, Aḥmad. "Sulṭān al-'aql 'inda Abī'l-'Alā'." In *Mihrajān al-Alfī l- Abī'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī*. 49-64. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1945.
- Antoon, Sinan. "Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." In *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 925-1350*, eds. Terry DeYoung and Mary St, Germain, 228-234. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011.
- Arberry, Arthur J. *The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes*. London: Murray, 1950.
- Arnold, John. *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005.
- Asatryan, Mushegh. *Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: the Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-Tradition*. PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012.
- 'Aṭwān. Ḥusayn. *Az-Zandaqa wa-sh-Shu'ūbiya fī-l-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī l-Awwal*. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1984.
- 'Awāḍ, Louis. *'Alā Hāmish al-Ghufrān*. Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1966.
- Awn, Peter. *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption. Iblīs in Sufi Psychology*. Leiden: Brill, 1983.
- Badawī, 'Abd ar-Raḥman. *Min Tarīkh al-lḥād fī-l-Islām*. Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabīya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-n-Nashr, 1970.

- Badawi, M. "The Genres of Classical Arabic Poetry: Classification of Poetic Themes and Poems by Pre-Modern critics and redactors of *diwāns*." *QSA* Vol. 5.No.6 (2010-2011):1-48.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Development of *qit'a*." In *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*. ed. Julia Ashtany et al., 152-154. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "From Primary to Secondary *Qaṣīdas*: Thought on the Development of Classical Arabic Poetry." *JAL* Vol. 11 (1980):1-31.
- Badrān, Muḥammad. "...den die Vernunft ist ein Prophet"-Zweifel bei Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." In *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, eds., F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta, 61-84. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1999.
- Baerlein, Henry. *The Diwan of Abu'l-'Ala*. London: NYEP Dutton and Co., 1909.
- Bar-Asher, M. "Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī (865-925)." In *Klassiker der Religionsphilosophie: von Platon bis Kierkegaard*, ed. F. Niewöhner, 99-111. Munich: Beck 1995.
- Bauer, Thomas. *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams*. Verlag der Weltreligionen: Berlin, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "In Search of "Post-Classical Literature": A Review Article." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11. No.2 (2007):137-167.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der Arabischen Welt des 9. Und 40. Jahrhunderts. Eine Literatur- und Mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des Arabischen Ġazal*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998.
- Bergé, Marc. "Genèse et Fortune du *Imtā' wa-l-Mu'ānasa* d'Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī." *Bulletin d'études orientales* (1972):97-104.
- Berman, David. "Disclaimers as Offence Mechanisms in Charles Blount and John Toland." In *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and D. Wootton, 256-273. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Berriot, François. *Athiismes et athiistes au XVIe siècle en France*. 2 vols. Lille, 1977.
- Berti, Silvia. "At the Roots of Unbelief." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. vol. 56, no. 4 (1995):55-575.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Charles-Daubert, R. H. Popkin. Eds. *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early Eighteenth Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des trois Imposteurs*. Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.
- Bianquis, Thierry, Shamma, Samir. "Mirdās, Banū or Mirdāsids." In *EP<sup>2</sup>*.
- Black, Debora. "Psychology: Soul and Intellect." In *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. P. Adamson and R. , 308-326. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Booth, Wayne. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. London/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

- Bowering, Gerhard. "Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy." In *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, ed. F. de Jong and B. Radtke, 45-67. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Brague, Rémi. "Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca: Leo Strauss's "Muslim" Understanding of Greek Philosophy." *Poetics Today* 19. No. 2 (1998):235-25.
- Bullivant, Stephen. "Defining 'Atheism.'" In *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. S. Bullivant, Michael Ruse. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Cachia, Pierre. "Dramatic Monologues of al-Ma'arrī" *JAL*. No. 1 (1970): 129-136.
- Calder, Norman. "The Barāhima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality." *BSOAS* 57 (1994):40-51.
- Canard, Marius. *Histoire de la dynastie des Hamdanides de Jazīra et de Syrie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hamdanids." In *EF*<sup>2</sup>
- Cantarino, Vicente. *The Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*. Leiden: Brill, 1975.
- Chamberlain, Michael. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Champion, J. A. *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Enlightened Erudition and the Politics of Reading in John Toland's Circle." *The Historical Journal*, 49:1 (2006):111–41.
- Chokr, Melhem. *Zandaqa et zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire*. Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1993.
- Crone, Patricia. *Islam, the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dahrīs." In *EF*<sup>3</sup>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Post-Colonialism in the Tenth Century Islam." *Der Islam* 83 (2006):2-38.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rebellion gegen Gott Formen atheistischen Denkens im frühen Islam." In *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, eds., F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta, 23–44. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1999.
- Coleman, Dorothy. Ed. *David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Curtius, Ernst. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.



- Dadoyan, Seda. *The Fatimid Armenians: Cultural and Political Interaction in the Near East*. Leiden: Brill, 1991.
- Daiber, Hans. "Abū Bakr al-Rāzī." In *Philosophie in der Islamische Welt*, 8-10 Jahrhundert, eds. R. Ulrich and R. Wüsch, Band1, 261-289. Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2012.
- Daftary, Farhad. *Historical Dictionary of Isma'ilis*. Lanham/Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Ismā'īlīs: their History and Doctrines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- De Blois, F. "Zindīk." In *EP*.
- De Smet, Daniel. "Ismā'īlī Theology." In *The Oxford Handbook for Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, 313-325. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Diez, Martino. "Teaching Arabic to the Angels: a Scherzo by al-Ma'arrī on Heavenly Morphology," in *Approaches to the History and Dialectology of Arabic in the Honour of Pierre Larcher*. 267-286, eds. M. Sartori et al. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Wandering around in Heaven: between Satire and Doubt." *Oasis* 16 (2012):101-105.
- Donaldson-Evans, K. "Two Stages of Renaissance Style: Mannerism and Baroque in French Poetry." *French Forum*. Vol. 7. No. 3 (1982):210-223.
- Druart, Thérèse-Anne. "Rāzī's conception of Soul: a Psychological Background too his Ethics." *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996):249-269.
- Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- El Cheikh, Nadia Maria. *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University press, 2015.
- Eliseeff, N. "Ma'arrat al-Nu'man." In *EP*.
- Ellenzweig, Sarah. *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660-1760*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Faith of Unbelief: Rochester's "Satyre," Deism, and religious Freethinking in Seventeenth-Century England." *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 44, no.1 (2005):27-45.
- El-Shakry, Marwa. *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University press, 2015)
- Ernst, Carl. "Blasphemy: Islamic Concept." In *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Islam: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Maribel Fierro, vol. 4, 1-3. London: Routledge, 2013.

- Ephrat, Daphna. *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni 'Ulamā' of Eleventh-Century Baghdad*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Fakhry, Majid. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism: A short Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1997.
- Farr, Narjus. *Abū l- 'Alā': Dirāsāt fī mu'taqidātihu d-Dīnīya*. Beirut: Dār aṣ-Ṣādir, 2011.
- Farrūkh, 'Umar. *Ḥakīm al-Ma'arra*. Beirut: Dār al-Lubnān lī'l-Ṭibā'awa'l-Nashr, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some Observations on the Reign of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī." *Arabica* (1974):139-140.
- Febvre, Lucien. *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*. Trans. B. Gottlieb. Cambridge, Mass., 1982.
- Fierro-Bello, Maria Isabel. "Andalusian Fatawa on Blasphemy." *Annales islamologiques* 25 (1990):103–17.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Accusations of 'zandaqa' in al-Andalus." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*. Vol. 5/6 (1987-88):251-258.
- Filshstinsky, Isaak. *Istoriya Arabskoi Litertury X-XVIII Veka*. Moscow, 1991.
- Fischer, Auguts. Abu l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī und das Buch "De tribus impostoribus." *Die Welt des Orients* (1950):416-420.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Der Koran" des Abū' l- 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1942.
- Force, James E. "Biblical Interpretation, Newton, and Deism." In *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Richard H. Popkin, Arjo Vanderjagt, 282-305. Leiden, 1993.
- Friedman, Yaron. *Nuṣayrī 'Alawīs: Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the leading Minority in Syria*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Frank, Richard. "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983):204-223.
- Friedmann, Yohannan. "Literary and Cultural Aspects of the *Luzūmiyyat*." In *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D.H. Beneth Dedicata*, ed. J. Blau et al., 347-365. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1979.
- Frolov, Dmitri. "The Circles of Khalīl and the Structure of *Luzūmiyyāt* of Abū'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī." In *Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures*, ed. P. Zemánek, 223-236. Prague: Oriental Institute, 1996.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

- Gabrieli, Franco. "La « zandaqa » au Ier siècle abbaside." In *L'élaboration de l'Islam, Colloque de Strasbourg, 12-13-14 juin 1959*, ed. C. Cahen, 23-38. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961.
- Ghali, Saad Elias. "Le Végétalisme et le Doute chez Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." *Bulletin d'études orientales* 32/33 (1980-1981): 99-112.
- Gimaret, Daniel. "Dahrī." In *Encyclopedia Iranica*.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms*. English trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Giorgi, Roberto. *Pur une histoire de Zandaqa*. Florence: La Nuova Italia editrice, 1989.
- Gilliot, Claude. "al-Silafī." In *EP<sup>2</sup>*.
- Goldziher, Ignaz. "Abū-l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī als Freidenker." *ZDMG* 29 (1975): 637-641.
- Goodman, Lenn, E. "How Epicurean was Rāzī." *Studia graeco-arabica* 5 (2015): 247-280.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Rāzī vs Rāzī: Philosophy in the Majlis." In *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Lazarus-Yafeh, S. Griffith et al., 84-107. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Time in Islam." *Asian Philosophy* 2. No.1 (1992): 3-19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rāzī's Myth of the Fall of the Soul: its Function in his Philosophy." In *Essays in Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George Hourani, 25-40. Albany: SUNY Press, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Epicurean Ethic of Muḥammad Zakarīyā ar-Rāzī." *Studia Islamica* 34 (1971): 5-26.
- Griffel, Frank. "Contradictions and Lots of Ambiguity: Two New Perspectives on Premodern (and Postclassical) Islamic Societies." *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review*, vol. 8. No.1 (2017): 1-21.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Apostasy." In *EP<sup>3</sup>*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Toleration and Exclusion: Al-Shāfi'ī and al-Ghazālī on the Treatments of Apostates." *BSOAS* 64 (2001): 339-354.
- Gruendler, Beatrice. "In Aristotle's Words...al-Hātimī's (?) Epistle on al-Mutanabbī and Aristotle." In *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, eds. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman, 89-126. Leiden; Brill, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption*. London/NY: Routledge, 2003.
- Gruff, Peter S. "Leaving the garden: Al-Rāzī and Nietzsche as Wayward Epicureans." *Philosophy in East and West* 64 (2014): 913-1017.

- Gutas, Dimitri. "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29. No.1 (2002):5-25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope." *JAOS* 101 (1981):49-86.
- Guidi, Michaelangelo. *La lotta tra l'Islam e il Manicheismo. Un libro di Ibn al-Muqaffa ' contra il Corano confutato da al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm*. Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1927.
- Hamori, Andras. "Ascetic Poetry." In *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtany et al., 265-269. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hanioglu, M. Şükrü. "Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art." In *Late Ottoman Society: the Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga. 27-117. London/NY: Routledge, 2005.
- Hanssen, Jens, "Kafka and Arabs." *Critical Inquiry* (2012): 168-197.
- Hartmann, Richard. *Zu dem Kitāb al al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghayātdes Abū' l- 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*. Berlin: Verlag de Akademie de Wissenschaften, 1944.
- Hassan, Wail S. *Immigration Narratives: Orinetalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Harrison, Peter. *Religion and Religions in the English Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Heck, Paul. *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion*. London/NY: Routledge, 2014.
- Heidemann, Stefan. *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien. Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqa und Harran von der Zeit der beduinischen Vorherrschaft bis zu den Seldschuken*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Heinrichs, Wolfhart. "Mannerismus" in Der arabischen Literatur." In *Islamwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen: Fritz Meier zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. R. Gramlich, 118-128. Wiesbaden, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Literary theory-the problem of its efficiency." In *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. G. E. von Grünebaum, 19-69. Wiesbaden, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Arabische Dichtung und Griechische Poetik*. Beirut: BTS, 1972.
- Hudson, Wayne. *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Lucci Diego, Wigelsworth, Jeffrey R. *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*. Surrey/Burlington: Ashtage, 2014.

- Humphreys, Stephen. "Banū Munqish." In *EP*<sup>2</sup>.
- Hunter, Michael. "The Problem of "Atheism" in early Modern England." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35 (1985):135-157.
- Husayn, Ṭāhā. *Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l- 'Alā*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'āif, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Al-Ma'arrif Sijnihi*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1935.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ṣawt Abī 'l- 'Alā*. Cairo: Maktabat Ma'ārif, n.d.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Ibn Warraq. *Why I am not a Muslim*. New York: Prometheus Book, 1995.
- Ibrahim, Mahmood. "Religious Inquisition as social Policy: the Persecution of the "Zanadiqa" in the early Abbasid Period." *Arabic Studies Quarterly* 16. No.2 (1994):52-72.
- Israel, Jonathan. *Enlightenment contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Men, 1670-1752*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Jacob, Margaret. *Radical Enlightenment: pantheists, freemasons, and republicans*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981.
- Katz, Marion Holmes. *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Kennedy, Phillip. *Abu Nuwas*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.
- Key, Alexander. "The Applicability of the term "Humanism" to Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī," *SI*, no. 100-101 (2005):71-112.
- Kohlberg, Etan. "Taqiyya in Shi'ī theology and religion." In Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds. *Secrecy and concealment. Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*. 345-379. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- John, G. Kennedy. *The Flower of Paradise: The Institutionalized Use of the Drug Qat in North Yemen*. NY: Springer, 1987.
- Kennedy, Hugh. *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim World*. Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphate*. London/NY: Longman, 1986.
- Khan, Siraj. "Blasphemy against the Prophet." In *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ed. Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker, 59-68. ABC-CLIO, 2014.

- Kilany, Omar. *Apostasy in Mamluk Period: the Politics of Accusations of Unbelief*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2001.
- Knox, P. E. and J.C. McKeown, eds. *The Oxford Anthology of Roman Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Krachkovsky, Ignaty. "Zur Entstehung und Komposition von Abū'l-'Alā's *Risālat al-Ghufrān*." *Islamica* 1(1925):344-356.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Arabskaya Srednevekovaya Khudozhestvennaya Literatura*. Moscow: Academy of Science Press, 1956.
- J. Kraemer, Joel. *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: the Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*. Leiden: Brill, 1992.
- Kraus, Paul. "Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte: Das Kitāb az-Zumurrud des Ibn al-Rāwandī." In idem., *Alchemie, Ketzerei, Apokryphen im frühen Islam*, ed. Rémi Brague, 109-190. Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 1994.
- Kremer von, Alfred. *Über die philosophischen Gedichte des Abul 'alā Ma'arri: eine culturgeschichtliche Studie*. Wien: Tempsky, 1889.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen*. Vol. 2. Vienna, 1877.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ein Freidenker des Islam," *ZDMG* 29 (1875):304-312.
- Kristeller, Oscar. "The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume 6, No. 6 (1968):233-243.
- Kristó-Nagy, Istvan. "Denouncing the Damned *Zindīq*." In *Accusation of Unbelief in Islam*, eds. C. Adang, H. Ansari et al., 56-81. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On the Authenticity of *al-Adab al-ṣaghīr* attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa' and the Titles of the *Kitāb al-ādāb al-kabīr*, *al-Adab al-ṣaghīr*, *al-Yatīma* and the Polemic against Islam." *AOH*. Vol. 62 (2009):199-218.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "La Lumière et les Ténèbres dans l'œuvre d'Ibn al-Muqaffa'." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. Vol. 61 (2008):265-293.
- Kors, Alan Charles. *Atheism in France, 1650-1729: the Orthodox Sources of Unbelief*. Volume 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1990.
- Kowalski, Tadeusz. "Pryba charakterystyki twórcy arabskiej." *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* IX (1933): 1–21.
- Knox, Norman. *The Word Irony, and its Context, 1500-1755* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1961.

Kurd 'Alī. *Khiṭaṭ ash-Shām*. Damascus: Maktabat an-Nūrī, 1983. 6 vols.

Lacey, R. Kevin. "An 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim's Syncretic Perspective of Cosmology: Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's philosophical poetical Reflections in *luzūm mā lā yalzam* on Make-up and Dynamics of the Universe." *The Muslim World* 85. No.1-2 (1995):122-146.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Man and Society in the Luzūmiyāt of al-Ma'arrī*. Unpublished PhD dissertation: Harvard University, 1984.

Lampe, Gerald Edward. *Ibn al-Muqaffa': Political and Legal Theorist and Reformer*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, John Hopkins University, Washington D.C., 1986.

Larkin, Margaret. "Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's Mu'jiz Aḥmad and the Limits of Poetic Commentary." *Oriens* 41 (2013):479-497.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Al-Mutanabbī: Voice of the 'Abbasid Poetic Ideal*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2008.

Laoust, Henri. "Le Hanbalisme sous le Califat de Bagdad (241/855-656/1258)" *Review des etudes islamiques*, 27(1959): 67-128.

\_\_\_\_\_. "La vie et la philosophie d'Abou'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri." *Bulletin d'études orientales* (1944):115-157.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Ibn al-Djawzī." In *EF*<sup>2</sup>.

Leaman, Oliver. "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *IJMES*. Vol. 12.No.4 (1980):525-538.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. "Anti-Religious Views in the Works of Ibn ar-Rāwandī and Abū'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī." *Studia Orientalia*. Vol.11 (2011):134-135.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism." *Modern Philology*, vol. 29, No. 3 (1932):281-299.

Luis Xavier, López-Farjeat. "Al-Farabi's Psychology and Epistemology." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Spring 2016 Edition.

Lund, Roger. *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response 1660–1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Mackenson, Ruth Stellhorn. "Four Great Libraries of medieval Baghdad." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1932): 279-299.

Machut-Mendecka, Ewa. "The Living Stones of Tunisia: 'Izz ad-Dīn al-Madanī and the Theatre of Revival." *Oriente Moderno* 16(1997):125-132.

Zākī al-Maḥāsini, Abū'l 'Alā' *Nāqid al-Mujtama'a*. Beirut, 1963.

- Makdisi, George. *Ibn 'Aqīl: Religion and Practice in Medieval Islam*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Rise of Humanism in the Classical Islam and the Christian West with Special Reference to Scholasticism*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ibn 'Aqīl et la resurgence de l'Islam traditionaliste au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Damascus, 1963.
- Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. *Blindness and Autobiography: Al-Ayyām of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Martin, Craig. "Rethinking Renaissance Averroism." *Intellectual History Review* 17 (2007):3-28.
- Martin, John R. *Baroque*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- Massignon, Louis. "Mutanabbī devant le siècle ismaélien de l'Islam." In *Écrits memorable*, II, ed. Christian Jambet et al. 645-65. Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sur la loyauté d'al-Ma'arrī en matière de Tawhīd." In *Ilā Ṭāhā Ḥusayn fī 'īd mīlādihi al-sab'īn; Dirāsāt muhdāh min aṣḍiqā'ihī wa talāmīdhih*, ed. Abū al-Raḥmān Badawī. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "La légende *De tribus impostoribus* et ses origins islamiques." *Revue de l'histoire des religions*. Vol. 82 (1920):74-78.
- Margoliouth, D.S. "Abū'l 'Alā's Correspondence on Vegetarianism." *Journal of Royal Asiatic Studies*, (1902):289-332.
- McDermott, Martin J. "Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq on Dahriyya." *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 50 (1984):385-402.
- Mckinney, Robert C. *The Case of Rhyme versus Reason: Ibn al-Rūmī and his Poetics in Context*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Meisami, Julia Scott. *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry: Orient Pearls*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Trans. and annotated. See *The Sea of Precious Virtues (Bahr Fava'id): Medieval Islamic Mirror for Princes*. Utah: University of Utah Press, 1991.
- Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: Forgotten Heritage* Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Minois, Georges. *The Atheist's Bible: The Most Dangerous Book That Never Existed*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2012.



- Mirollo, James. "The Mannered and the Mannerist in Late Renaissance Literature." In *The Meaning of Mannerism*, eds., F.W. Robinsom and S.G. Nichols, New Hampshire: University Press of New England Hanover, 1972.
- Mohaghegh, "Notes on the "Spiritual Physic" of al-Rāzī." *Studia Islamica* 26 (1967):5-22.
- Montgomery, James. "Jāhīz: dangerous Freethinking." In *Critical Muslim* 12 (2014):15-38.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abū Nuwās, the Justified Sinner?" *Oriens* 39 (2013):75-164.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Leo Strauss and the Alethiometer." In *Renaissance Averroism and its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anna Akasoy and Guido Guglioni, 285-320. Springer: NY/Heidelberg.
- Morray, David. *An Ayyubid Notable and his World: Ibn al-ʿAdīm and Aleppo as portrayed in his Bibliographic Dictionary of People Associated with the City*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
- Motte, Warren Jr. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1986.
- Muhanna, Elias. "Contradictions and Diversity." *The Nation* (2016), 28-32.
- Mulsow, Martin. "Socinianism, Islam, and the Radical Uses of Arabic Scholarship." *Al-Qantara XXXI* 2 (2010): 549-586.
- Musawi, Muhsin. "Engaging Tradition in Modern Arab Poetics." *JAL* 33. No.2 (2002):172-210.
- Naaman, Erez. *Literature and Islamic Court: Cultural Life Under al-Ṣāhib b. ʿAbbād*. London/ NY: Routledge, 2016.
- Nagel, Tilman. "The *Risālat al-Ghufrān* and the Crisis of the Certainty of Faith." In *Actes du 10<sup>me</sup> Congrès de l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisant*. ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1982), 55-60.
- Nicholson, Arnold. "The Meditations of Maʿarrī." In *Studies in Islamic Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Persian Manuscript attributed to Fakhruddin ar-Rāzī, with a note on *Risālatu l-Ghufrān* by Abū ʿl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and Other MSS. In the same Collection." *JRAS* (1899), 669-674.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The *Risālatu l-Ghufrān* by Abū ʿl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī." *JRAS* (1900):637-720; (1902):75-101; 813-847.
- Niewöner, Friedrich. *Veritas sive Varietas: Lessings Toleranzparabel und das Buch von drei Betrügen*. Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider. 1988.

- Ormsby, Eric. *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: the Dispute over al-Ghazalī's "Best of all Possible Worlds."* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Osman, Hassan. "Dante in Arabic." *Annual Report of the Dante Society*. No. 73 (1955):47-52.
- Palacios, Asin. *La Escatologia Musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. Madrid, 1919.
- Pellat, Charles "Ibn Shuyahd." In *EL*<sup>2</sup>.
- Perlmann, Moshe. "Ibn Ḥazm on the Equivalence of Proofs." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 40 (1950):279:290.
- Popkin, Richard H. "The Deist Challenge." In *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Jonathan I. Israel, 196-217. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*. Assen: Van Gorcum&Co., 1963.
- Radwan, Noha. "The land speaks Arabic: Shi'r al-‘Āmiyya and Arab Nationalism." In *Poetry and History: the Value of Poetry in reconstructing Arab History*, ed. R. Baalbaki, S. Agha, T. Khalidi, 413-438. Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2011.
- Reinert, Benedikt. "Der Concetto-Stil in den islamischen Literaturen." In *Orientalisches Mittelalter*, ed. Wolfhart Heinrichs, 366-408. Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft, Band 5, Wiesbaden, 1990.
- Reiss, Edmond. "Medieval Irony." *Journal of History of Ideas* 42 . No. 2 (1981):209-226.
- Reynolds, Susan. "Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Skepticism." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6/1 (1991):21–4.
- Renan, Ernest, *Averroès et l'averroïsme*. Paris, Lévy Press, 1882.
- Rihani, Ameen. *The Quatrains of Abū' l- 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī: selected from Luzūm mā lā yalzam and Saqt Uz-Zind*. London: Grand Richards, 1904.
- Ritter, Helmut. "Philologika, VI: Ibn al-Ğauzīs Bericht überIbn ar-Rēwendī." *Der Islam* 19 (1931):1-17
- Robertson M. John. *A History of Free Thought: Ancient and Modern to the Period of the French Revolution*. London: Watts &Co, 1963.
- Robichaud, Denis. "Atheism in Renaissance and Reformation." In *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. S. Bullivant, Michael Ruse. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Schacht,Joseph. "Ibn Buṭlān." in *EL*<sup>2</sup>.

- Saleh, Mostafa. "Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (363-449/973-1057). Bibliographie critique." *Bulleten Des Etudes Orientales* 12 (1969):141-204, 23 (1970):199-309.
- Salhi and A. Abbasi. "Astrology between Poetics and Politics in the Abbasid Period: Abū 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī as a Case Study." *Journal of Semitic Studies*, LVII/2 (2012):347-401.
- Ali, Samer. *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages. Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past*. Notre dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.
- Sayfayn, Nāshid. "La Comédie Divine." *Al-Muqataṭaf* 81(1932): 201-205.
- Shākīr, Maḥmūd. *Abāṭil wa-l-Asmār*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1965.
- Shawqī, Dayf. *Al-Fann wa-Madhāhibuhu fī sh-Shi'r al-'Arabī*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 2005.
- Scheindlin, Raymond. *Form and Structure in the Poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād*. Leiden: Brill, 1984.
- Schielke, Samuel. "Islamic World." In *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. S. Bullivant, Michael Ruse. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Schmidt, Nora. "Abū'l-'Atāhiya and the Versification of Disenchantment." In *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750-1000 C.E.*, eds. Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos, 147-182. Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin Press, 2014.
- Schoeller, Gregor. *Paradies und Hölle*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002.
- Schoeller, Marco. "Zum Begriff des "islamischen Humanismus," *ZDMG*. Vol. 151.No.2 (2001):275-320.
- Shahid, Irfan. "Tanūkh." In *EI*<sup>2</sup>.
- Sherman, Jackson A. *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafrīq Bayna l-Islām wa -l-Zandaqa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Shearman, John. *Mannerism*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Shidfar, Betsy. *Abu'l-'Ala al-Ma'arri: Izbrannoe*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Abu-l-Ala Al-Maari*. Moscow: Nauka, 1985.
- Shihadeh, Ayman. "Theories of Ethical Values in Islam: a new Interpretation." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. S. Schmidtke, 384-409. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Shreoder, Winfried. Ed. *Reading between the Lines: Leo Strauss and the History of Early Modern Philosophy*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015.
- Shiblī Shumayl, *Falsafata n-Nushū' wa-l-Irtiqā'*. Beirut: Dār Mārūn 'Abbūd, 1982.

- Singer, Irving. "Aesthetics of Art for Art's Sake." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 2.No.13 (1954):343-359.
- Skinner, Quantin. "Meaning and Understanding in the history of ideas." *History and Theory*. Vol. 8. No. 1 (1969):3-53.
- Smoor, Peter. "A Flash of Understanding. The Book *al-Fuṣūl wa-l-Ghāyāt fī Tamjīd Allāh wa-l-Mawā'iz* by Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." *Bibliotheca orientalis* LXXI,No.5-9(2014):672-709.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kings and Beduins in the Palace of Aleppo as reflected in al-Ma'arrī's Works*. Journal of Semitic Studies Monograph no. 8, University of Manchester, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Ma'arrī's newly discovered Letter of a Horse and a Mule." *JAL* 12(1981):49-73 (Part I) and *JAL* 13 (1982):23-52 (Part II).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Theme of Travel in al-Ma'arrī's early Poems." In *The Challenges of the Middle East*, ed. Ibrahim A. El-Sheikh et al. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1982, 133-211.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Al-Ma'arrī Abū'l - 'Alā'." In *EP*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Maghrībī." In *EP*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Armour description as an independent Theme in the Work of al-Ma'arrī." In *Actes du 8<sup>me</sup> Congrès de l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants* (Aix-en-Provence, 1978), 298-303.
- Sperl, Stefan. *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of selected Texts*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Spink, J. Stephenson. *French Free-thought: from Gassendi to Voltaire*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 1960
- Stern, M. Samuel. "Some noteworthy Manuscripts of the Poems of Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." *Oriens* 7 (1954):322-347.
- Stetkevych, Jaroslav. "Lyrical Phenomenon in Context." *JAL* Vol. 6(1975):57-77.
- Stetkevych, Suzanne. Performative Poetics in 'Abbāsīd Poetry: Re-reading of Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī's Rā'iyyah Arāka 'aṣiyya al-dam'i." *Journal of Japan Association of Middle East Studies*. No. 29-2 (2013):107-144.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mina l-Mujtama'ar ilā l-Mu'jam: mina t-Taṣwīriyya ilā t-Tajrībīya fī Shi'r Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." *Al-Majallat al-'Arabīya li-l-'Ulum al-Insānīya* (2013):187-206.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Qaḍāyā l-Qaṣīdati l-'Arabīya: al-Manāhij wa-l-Manhajīyat Taṭbīq Nazārīyati l-Adā' 'alā Saqt az-Zand wa-Luzūmīyāt: Madkhal fī Ishkāliyyāt Shi'r Abī'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." In *An-Nadwa d-Duwalīya: Qaḍāyā l-Minhaj fī Dirasāti l-Lughawīya wa-l-Adabīya: an-Nazarīya wa-Taṭbīq*, 333-349. Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Malak Sa'ūd, 2010.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Ed. *Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics*. Farnham: Ashgate Varorium, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Umayyad Panegyric and the Poetics of Islamic Hegemony: Al-Akhtal’s Khafa Al-Qaṭinu (Those That Dwelt With You Have Left In Haste).” *JAL* 28 (1997):89-122.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Abbāsid Panegyric and the Poetics of Political Allegiance: Two Poems of al-Mutanabbī on Kāfūr.” In *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, vol. 1., 35-53; vol. 2, 92-105. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Stewart, Davin. “Rhythmical Anxiety: Notes on Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's (d. 449/1058) al-Fuṣūl wa'l-Ghāyāt and Its Reception.” In *The Qur'an and Adab: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*, ed. Nuha Alshaar, 239-272. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Blasphemy.” In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. G. Bowering, P. Crone, WadadKadi et al. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Strauss, Leo. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Strohmaier, Gotthard. “Ethical Sentences and Anecdotes of Greek Philosophers in Arabic Tradition.” *UAEI, Proceedings, 5<sup>th</sup>, Brussels* (1975), 463-71.
- Stroumsa, Sarah. *Freethinkers of medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rawāndī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and their Impact on Islamic Thought*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Religion of the Freethinker.” In *Atheismusim Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, eds., F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta, 45-59. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Barāhima in early *kalām*.” *JSAI* 6 (1985): 229–41
- Suleyman, Yasir. “The concept of *Fasaha* in Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji.” *New Arabian Studies* 3 (1996):219-237.
- Szombathy, Zoltan. “Literary Works as Evidence of Unbelief.” *Accusation of Unbelief in Islam*, eds. C. Adang, H. Ansari et al., 465-487. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature*. Gibb Memorial Trust: Exeter, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Freedom of Expression and Censorship in Medieval Arabic Literature.” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 7 (2007):1-24.
- Taheri-Iraqi, Ahmad. *Zandaqa in the early Abbasid Period with special Reference to Poetry*. Unpublished Dissertation Thesis. University of Edinburg, 1992.
- Talib, Adamet al. Eds., *The Rude, the Bad, and the Bawdy*. Gibb Memorial Trust: Exeter, 2014.
- Tamer, Georges. *Islamische Philosophie und die Krise der Moderne: Das Verhältnis von Leo Strauss zu Alfarabi, Avicenna und Averroes*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

- Ṭarabluṣī, Amjad. *La critique poétique des Arabes jusqu'au V<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'Hégire*. Damascus, 1956.
- Tuwātī, Muṣṭafa. *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa-s-Sulṭa fī l-Ḥadāra al-'Arabīya: Ad-Dawla al-Buwayhīya Namūmadhajan*. 2 vols. Tunis: Manshūrat al-Ma'had al-'Ālī li-Lugha, 1999.
- Taymur, Ahmad. *Abū 'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*. Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookstore, 1970.
- Tayyeb, Abdullah. *Abū 'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī as a Poet: an Aesthetic Appreciation*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation: SOAS, 1950.
- Thomas, David. *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq against the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Treiger, Alexander. "Christian Arabic Teology in Byzantine Antioch: 'Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭaki and his Discourse on the Holy Trinity." *Le Musōn* 124(2011):371-417.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Alexander Treiger, 'Aballah Ibn Faḍl al-Anṭāk," in *Christian-Muslim Relations, 600-1500, Online 1*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett. Leiden: Brill.
- Turki, Abdel Magid. "La réfutation du scepticisme et la theorie de la connaissance dans les "Fiṣal" d'Ibn Ḥazm." *SI* 50 (1979):37-76.
- Turner, John. *Inquisition in early Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.
- Tuve, Rosemond. "Baroque and Mannerist Milton." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Vol. 60. No. 4 (1961):817-833.
- Ulrich, Rudolph. *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Urvoy, Dominique. "La démystification de la religion dans les textes attributes à Ibn Muqaffa'." In *In Atheismusim Mittelalter und in der Renaissanc*, eds., F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta, 85-94. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Les Penseurs Libres dans l'Islam Classique: L'interrogation sur la religion chez les penseurs arabes indépendants*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1996
- Van Ess, Josef. *Der Eine und das Andere: Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten*. 2 Vols. Berlin/NY: De Gruyter, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology and Society*. Vol. 1<sup>st</sup>. Trans. J. O. Kahne. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Al-Fārābī and Ibn ar-Rēwandī" *Hamdard Islamicus*. Vol. 3. No.4 (1980):3-15.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ibn Rawandi on the Making of an Image." *Al-Ahbath* 27 (1978-79):5-26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought." *Al-Ahbath* 21 (1968):1-48.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*. 6 vols. Berlin/NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1991-1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some fragments of the Mu'āraḍat al-Qur'ān attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa." In: *Studia arabica et islamica. Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās* (1981), 151-163.
- Van Gelder, Geert Jan. "Bashār ibn Burd." In *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat Toorawa, 91-96. NY: Gale/Cengage Learning, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature." Part I. JAL 23, No. 2. (1992):83-108.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some Brave Attempts at Generic Classification in Pre-modern Arabic Literature." In *Aspects of Genre and Type in Pre-modern Literary Cultures*, eds. H. L. Vansitphout and B. Roest, 15-32. Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Genres in Collision: *Nasīb* and *Hijā*." JAL Vol. 21. No.1 (1990):14-25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Pointed and Well-Rounded: Arabic Encomiastic and Elegiac Epigrams." *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 26 (1995):101-140.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes towards Invective Poetry (Hijā') in Classical Arabic Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem*. Leiden: Brill, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Brevity: the Long and the Short of it in Classical Arabic Literary Theory." In *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. Rudolph Peters, 78-88. Leiden: Brill, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ibn Ḥayyūs." In *EAL*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī." In *EAL*.
- Vassalou, Sofia. *Moral Agents and their Deserts: the Characters of Mu'tazilite Ethics*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Wade, Ira. *The Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- Walker, Paul. "The Political Aspects of al-Rāzī's Philosophy." In *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Charles Butterworth, 61-94. Cambridge: Mass., 1992.
- Watt, Montgomery. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. New Brunswick/London: Aldine Transaction, 2009.

- Weltecke, Dorothea. "Orte des Zweifels. Zu Glaubenszweifel und Nichtglauben im lateinischen Mittelalter." In *Orte der europäischen Religionsgeschichte*, eds. Adrian Hermann, Jürgen Mohn, 363-392. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Atheism in Medieval Period." In *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. S. Bullivant, Michael Ruse. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Der Narr spricht: Es ist kein Gott." *Atheismus, Unglauben und Glaubenszweifel vom 12. Jahrhundert bis zur Neuzeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Beyond Religion: On the Lack of Belief during the Central and Late Middle Ages." In *Religion and Its Other: Secular and Sacral Concepts and Practices in Interaction*, eds., Heike Bock, Jörg Feuchter, Michi Knecht, 101-114. Campus Verlag, 2009.
- Wheeler, Joseph Mazzini. *The Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of all ages and Nations*. London: Progressive Publishing Company, 1988.
- Wiederworld, Lutz. "Blasphemy against the Prophet and his Companions (*sabb al-rasūl, sabb al-ṣaḥāba*): the Introduction of the topic into the Shāfi'ī Legal Literature and its Relevance for Legal Practice under Mamluk Rule." *Journal of Semitic Studies* XLII/1 (1997): 39-70.
- Witkam, J. Just. "The *Ijāza* in Arabic Manuscripts." In *The History of the Book in the Middle East*, ed. J. Roper, London: Routledge, 2013.
- Wootton, David. "New Histories of Atheism." In *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and D. Wootton, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. 13-53.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief." *The Journal of Modern History*. vol. 60, No. 4 (1988):695-730.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Unbelief in Early Modern Europe." *History Workshop* 20 (1985):82-100.
- Zakarīya, Muḥammad. *Ar-Rāhib al-Kūrī*. Ramallah: Muwatin, 2005.
- Zakeri. Mohsen. "Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-Ḳuddūs." In *EP<sup>2</sup>*.
- Zakkar. Suhayl. *The Emirate of Aleppo 1004-1094*. Beirut, 1971.
- Zaman, Qasim. *Religion and Politics under the early 'Abbāsids: The Emergence of Proto-Sunnī Elite*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Caliphs, the 'Ulamā, and the Law: defining the Role of the Caliph in the early 'Abbāsīd Period." *Islamic Law and Society*. Vol.4. No.1 (1997):1-36.
- Ziauddin, Sardar. "The Circumference of Freethought." *Critical Muslim* 12 (2014):3-14.



