

ADAB AND HISTORICAL MEMORY.
THE ANDALUSIAN POET/POLITICIAN IBN AL-KHAṬĪB AS
PRESENTED IN AḤMAD AL-MAQQARĪ (986/1577-1041/1632),
NAFH AT-TĪB

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In his description of a journey 1048/1638 from Damascus to Tripolis in Lebanon the Damascene writer Yahyā al-Maḥāsini complains about the destruction of Lebanese landscapes and towns which occurred in the course of the struggles of Fakhr ad-Dīn b. al-Maʿn and his rivals. As he also draws parallels between these catastrophes and the ill fate that had befallen al-Andalus,¹ his text reflects the historical memory of Muslim Spain in Arabic literature, a subject hardly touched upon in research yet.

Modern Arab authors may use the Andalus motive in order to evoke the glorious past of Islamic culture. Some draw a picture of Andalusian social order that enabled members of different religions to live together peacefully and insofar could serve as a model for the solution of today's problems in the relations between "Islam and the West".² Yet, al-Andalus may also be taken as an example for the decline of the Muslim community after its great days, and Muslims may regard the often bewailed³ fall of Islamic Spain, the lost para-

¹ R. Elger: "Der Raum als Zeichen göttlicher Macht und des Wirkens der Zeit im Libanon-Reisebericht al-manāzil al-maḥāsiniyya fī r-riḥla at-tarābulusiyya des Yahyā al-Maḥāsini (st. 1053/1643)". In: *Erzählter Raum in Literaturen der islamischen Welt*. Hrsg. v. Roxane Haag-Higuchi & Christian Szyska, Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 69-80.

² A. Temimi: "Attachement des Moriscos à leur religion et identité à travers la lecture des hadiths dans deux manuscrits morisques". In: A. Temimi: *Etudes d'histoire morisque*. Zaghouan 1993, pp. 61-68, p. 68.

³ See e.g. Sh. Arslān: *Al-hulal as-sundusiyya fī l-akḥbār wa-l-āthār al-andalusiyya wa-hiyya maʿlama andalusiyya tuḥītu bi-kull mā jāʿa ʿan dhālika l-firdaus al-mafqūd*. Beirut 1997, p. 10.

dise (*al-firdaus al-mafqūd*),⁴ as a paradigm for the defeats which the *umma* suffered time and again at the hands of western powers. In the history of al-Andalus examples of Muslim piety and heroism are found, side by side with cases of Muslim decadence and ineffectiveness⁵ which, in this perspective, finally led to the just punishment by Allāh.⁶ Historiography of al-Andalus can be a medium of criticism of the Muslims' disunity⁷ or a call for heroic defense against aggression and for martyrdom.⁸

In Yaḥyā's text some of these themes are included as well. But he also combines the presentation of the al-Andalus motive with a general meditation about human existence, thus increasing its moral and theological relevance. The problem that Yaḥyā discusses may be summarized in the following way: Since everything in the world, in the *dunyā*, is bound to destruction by an always menacing evil fate, how is life to be given sense, and, another question: how can some permanence be reached?

Since the connection between the al-Andalus motive and the problem of fate interested also other 17th authors—one may even say that it was one of the major themes in certain intellectual circles—it seems to be legitimate to give it some further attention. Apart from Yaḥyā al-Maḥāsini, some of his Syrian friends will be discussed, especially the Maghrebini scholar and *adīb* Aḥmad al-Maqqarī who spent some time in Damascus and who, with his work *Nafḥ at-ṭīb min ghuṣn al-Andalus ar-raṭīb wa-dhikr wazīrihā Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb* ("The breeze of the good scent from the fertile branch of Andalusia and the report on its minister Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb"), not only inspired Yaḥyā but also other Damascenes.⁹

⁴ See M. A. Maḥjūb: *Al-Andalus al-mafqūd*. Beirut 1969, p. 11; Arslān: *Al-Hulal*.

⁵ Arslan: *Al-Hulal*, p. 7.

⁶ M. 'Inān: *Nihāyat al-Andalus wa-tārīkh al-'arab al-mutanaṣṣirīn*. Cairo 1987, first published 1949, pp.16 f.

⁷ A. Amīn: *Zuhr al-islām*. Vol. III, Cairo o.J., p. 312.

⁸ 'Inān: *Nihāya*, p. 16.

⁹ The sources mention at least of nine persons:

Yaḥyā al-Maḥāsini (d. 1053/1643), *Nafḥ*, II 430-432; Khulāṣa, IV 463

Tāj ad-Dīn al-Maḥāsini (d. 1060/1650), *Nafḥ*, II 448, 459f.; Khulāṣa, I 456f

Abū Bakr al-'Umarī (d. 1048/1638), *Nafḥ*, II 446; Khulāṣa, I 99-110

Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Karīmī ad-Dimashqī (d. 1068/1657), *Nafḥ*, II 434; Khulāṣa, IV 273

As al-Maqqarī says himself, the Damascenes were very much interested in Andalusian history, especially in the career of Ibn al-Khaṭīb: They “liked Ibn al-Khaṭīb more than anybody else, as if he was the model for their group”.¹⁰ That is not surprising since Ibn al-Khaṭīb had been one of the greatest poets and *udabāʾ* of al-Andalus, and the Damascenes were people with a strong inclination towards *adab*.¹¹ Another reason was the fact that al-Maqqarī’s presentation of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who after a brilliant career as minister in the kingdom of Granada and successful fighter against Christian pressures fell in disgrace and in the end was killed by his enemies, offered a satisfying answer to the question of fate: Permanence, relief from the always menacing destruction by ill fate is not to be attained through pious renunciation of the worldly things—in the line of ascetic Sufis or of the *zuhdiyyāt* poems—, but by heroic deeds, like those of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, by describing those deeds and thus preserving their memory through historiography and the *adab* text.

Nafh at-tīb combines both characteristics, historiography and *adab*. Though mostly used as an important source for the culture and history of al-Andalus, offering excerpts from many otherwise lost earlier works, it is much more than that. In contradiction to the verdict of Levi-Provençal¹² who regarded al-Maqqarī “essentially (as)

Aḥmad b. Shāhīn (d. 1053/1643), *Nafh*, I 100 a.o.; *Khulāṣa*, I 210-217

Muḥammad b. Tāj ad-Dīn al-Maḥāsīnī (d. 1072/1661), *Nafh*, II 437; *Khulāṣa*, III 408-411

Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad ad-Dimashqī aṣ-Ṣāliḥī al-Akramī (d. 1047/1637), *Nafh*, II 441; *Khulāṣa*, I 39-42

Muḥammad b. Saʿd al-Kalshani (d. 1037/1627), *Nafh*, II 432, 442; *Khulāṣa*, III 468f.

ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-ʿImādī (d. 1051/1641), *Nafh*, I 62; *Khulāṣa*, III 203

Nafh at-tīb circulated in Damascus. The Sufi/scholar ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Kilānī ash-Shāmī, formerly al-Ḥamawī (1080-1157h, see al-Murādi: *Silk ad-Durar*. Kairo 1874-83, III pp. 46-48) sent a copy to the *adīb* Ḥusain Efendi al-Baṣrī. This is mentioned in letter written by al-Baṣrī, now in Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, Esad 3308. I am grateful to Henning Sievert, University of Bochum, who provided me with a copy of the manuscript.

¹⁰ A. Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh at-tīb min ghuṣn al-Andalus ar-raṭīb wa-dhikr wazīrihā Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb*. Ed. by Ihsān ʿAbbās, Beirut 1968, I p. 69.

¹¹ All of them, except al-ʿImādī are called *adīb* by Muh. al-Amin al-Muhibbi: *Khulāṣat al-athar fi ʿayān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*. Beirut undated. The question what an *adīb* exactly was in 17th century Middle East is still to be explored.

¹² E. Lévi-Provençal: “Al-Maqqarī”. In: *EI*² VI, pp. 187 ff., p. 188.

a compiler”, it can be argued that he was a subtle analyst of human life, though he unfolds—or disguises—his ideas about fate and the concept of memory in a presentation of history and biography.

Al-Maqqarī and his text

Al-Maqqarī was an intellectual with a broad range of interests.¹³ Beside his position as an eminent jurist, he had a considerable fame as a transmitter of prophetic traditions. We know that during his stay in Damascus he was highly appreciated and that many people joined his *ḥadīth* lectures.¹⁴ Also, he made a reputation as *adīb* which was based on his own poetic works, on his studies of the poetry and prose literature of al-Andalus in general and the works of Ibn al-Khaṭīb in particular. Al-Maqqarī’s interest in al-Andalus and his great politician and *adīb* may have been due to several circumstances of his life. Firstly, he witnessed the eviction of the last Moriscos from Spain in the year 1118/1609, an event that deeply troubled the Mediterranean Muslim world.¹⁵ Secondly, he had personal connections to Ibn al-Khaṭīb. Al-Maqqarī was born and raised in Tilimsan/Algeria where the Andalusian spent several years, and one of his ancestors had been a teacher of Ibn al-Khaṭīb.

Whatever was the decisive reason, al-Maqqarī started collecting material on the history of Islamic Spain still in Tilimsan¹⁶ and pursued this activity further on during his several visits to Marrakesh (1009/1600) and Fes (1003/1594, 1009/1600).¹⁷ From 1022/1613

¹³ For a good biography see G. Dugat: “Introduction”. In: *Analectes sur l’histoire et la littérature des Arabes d’Espagne par al-Makkari*. Publiés par R. Dozy, G. Dugat, L. Krehl, W. Wright, Leiden 1855-60, t. I, V-XCVI, also GAL, S II 407; I. Kratschkowski: *Istoriā Arabskoi Geograficheskoi literatury*. Moskau 1957. Transl. into Arabic by Salāh ad-Dīn Hāshim under the title *Tārīkh al-adab al-jughhrāfi al-‘arabi*, Beirut 1987, pp. 814 ff. The most important sources are: Al-Muḥibbi: *Khulāṣa*, I pp. 302 ff.; al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī: *Al-Muḥādarāt fī l-adab wa-l-lughā*. Ed. by Muḥammad al-Ḥajjī & Aḥmad ash-Sharqāwī Iqbāl, Beirut 1982, p. 172; Muḥ. al-Qādirī: *Nashr al-mathānī li-ahl al-qarn al-ḥādī ‘ashar wa-th-thānī*. Rabat 1986, I pp. 292-305.

¹⁴ Al-Muḥibbi: *Khulāṣa*, I p. 305.

¹⁵ For the interest of the Ottoman authorities in the Morisco question and the settlement of Moriscos in Anatolia see: Temimi: *Etudes d’histoire morisque*.

¹⁶ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 108.

¹⁷ Al-Muḥibbi: *Khulāṣa*, I p. 303.

to 1027/1617 he held the post of an imam and mufti at the Qarawiyyin in Fes. During this time he wrote the biography on the Qāḍī Iyād (476/1083-544/1149), *Azhār ar-riyād fī akhbār ‘Iyād*, a text that in terms of composition—being a combination of biography and general history—was to become a model for al-Maqqarī’s later work. Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s historical books served him as sources for the general background of the Qāḍī Iyād’s life, certainly another reason for al-Maqqarī’s interest in the Andalusian poet/wazīr. In Fes, al-Maqqarī not only found ample opportunities to follow intensely the traces of Ibn al-Khaṭīb who had been murdered and buried in that city, but he also for some time enjoyed good relations with the Moroccan sultan, Maulāy Zaidān Abū l-Ma‘ālī. But later he fell in disgrace because he entertained too friendly contacts with a dissident tribe. He had to leave Morocco, went to Mecca for the pilgrimage and then settled in Cairo. Though a *mudarris* at the Azhar and married to a girl of the prominent family of the Sāda al-Wafā’iyya, he apparently was not very well integrated in the higher academic circles of that city.¹⁸ Several times he visited the Hijāz and Jerusalem, and in 1039/1627 finally came to Damascus. Obviously it was there that al-Maqqarī seriously started thinking about completing his studies on al-Andalus since he met with great interest in this subject from the part of Syrian intellectuals. Back in Cairo he arranged his material on al-Andalus in the huge work *Nafh at-tīb*.

The text consists of three parts. The autobiographical introduction of about 120 pages can be regarded as a first part. Al-Maqqarī, omitting the earlier phase of his life, speaks about his journey from Morocco to Cairo and his later experiences in the Middle East until he started composing *Nafh at-tīb*. The second part, more than 2500 pages, covers the history of al-Andalus from the Muslim conquest until the fall of Granada 1492. The third, around 1800 pages, presents the biography of Ibn al-Khaṭīb and an anthology of his poetry and other works.

The general tone of the work is set by a poem¹⁹ which concludes al-Maqqarī’s *khuṭba*. Here he introduces the theme of the irresist-

¹⁸ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh* I pp. 71ff., see also an-Qādirī: *Nashr*, I pp. 295f.

¹⁹ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I pp. 7-12.

ible working of bad fate in the lower world. Not even the powerful are spared, like the Umayyads and the ‘Abbāsids, not the scholars and the *kuttāb*. This is true also for the Andalusians, their country and the splendid city of Granada which was the “paradise of the world” (*jannat ad-dunyā*). They were all wiped out by a destructive time (*dahr*), as was Ibn al-Khaṭīb who is mentioned towards the end of the poem. Here al-Maqqarī also introduces the concept of historical memory: Of Ibn al-Khaṭīb “nothing remains except his memory”, because

Life is like a guest or a vision
that does not stay.

Admittedly, *Nafh at-tīb* is more than a monograph about the subject of fate. In the best tradition of *adab* al-Maqqarī introduces the reader into many aspects of Andalusian history and culture. He speaks about geography, politics, the scholarly achievements of the Andalusians as well as their production in the field of belle-létres, and, again and again, he presents biographies. The fifth chapter (700 pp.), for example, is devoted to those Andalusians who traveled to the east, the sixth (150 pp.) to the people from the Mashreq visiting al-Andalus. In spite of the importance of “*Nafh at-tīb*’s” second part in the construction of the whole work, al-Maqqarī says that it was written merely as a kind of prolegomena to the biography of Ibn al-Khaṭīb.²⁰ Surprising as this statement is, and though it may not always be wise to follow the hints of the author when interpreting a text, in this case al-Maqqarī obviously points to the right direction.

In the introduction—or first part—al-Maqqarī not only explains why and how he wrote the work but also gives a broad sketch of his own personal situation in that time. Put shortly, he deplores his fate that took him from his highly esteemed position in his homeland, the Maghreb, and forced him to emigrate to Cairo to pursue the precarious life of a stranger there. It is a story of the rise and fall of an intellectual, which shows some similarities to the life of Ibn al-Khaṭīb himself. Moreover, the introduction provides the general frame of reference for the treatment of the latter’s biography. It elaborates on the role of ill fate in man’s life, a motive which serves

²⁰ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I 107.

al-Maqqarī to make sense both of his own case and that of Ibn al-Khaṭīb. Now, it might be objected that human rise and fall is also the core theme of al-Maqqarī's presentation of Andalusian history in general. That is certainly true, but in the third part of the work al-Maqqarī often comments on the factual reports, in contrast to his treatment of the second part, thus revealing his special emphasis on Ibn al-Khaṭīb. And since these comments take up ideas from the introduction, they confirm the impression that al-Maqqarī regarded the biography of Ibn al-Khaṭīb as his main subject.

The world-view of al-Maqqarī and his friends

The *muqaddima* of *Nafh at-ṭīb* circumstantially speaks about the reasons which led al-Maqqarī to write the text. One of his closest friends in Damascus, Aḥmad b. Shāhīn (d. 1053/1643),²¹ urged him to gather his material on al-Andalus and Ibn al-Khaṭīb in a book. Al-Maqqarī who was then back to Cairo in 1039/1627 at first declined the plan mentioning several obstacles. Firstly, he points to his personal incapability for such an ambitious enterprise. This certainly can be regarded as a mere cliché. The second objection seems to be more serious: He had to leave most of his books on al-Andalus behind in the Maghreb, and in Egypt the libraries did not provide him with all this material. The third reason is the most interesting one, and al-Maqqarī gives it most attention. It is his situation as an insignificant stranger in Egypt:

I left the traces of my highness in my country,
and I am in Cairo forgotten.²²

Al-Maqqarī holds time responsible for this situation. Again and again he talks about time, using different words: *dahr*, *zamān* and, rarely, also *ʿaṣr*. He does not seem to make a difference between these terms, unlike the philosophers who regarded *dahr* as eternity and *zamān* as limited time. Following ancient Arab poets,²³ al-Maqqarī uses those

²¹ Al-Muḥibbi: *Khulāṣa*, I pp. 210-217.

²² Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 74.

²³ W. Montgomery Watt: *Free will and predestination in early Islam*. London 1949, p. 21; H. Ringgren: *Studies in Arabian fatalism*. Uppsala 1955; A. Arazi: *La réalité et la fiction dans la poésie arabe ancienne*. Paris 1989, p. 49.

terms as synonyms signifying different notions of time.

There is firstly time in the sense of “past time”, expressed in a verse about al-Maqqarī’s situation in the Maghreb:

There the tender youth was fine and green,
and the time (*dahr*) always was the season of spring.²⁴

More important in *Nafh* is the notion of time as an actor. Speaking about his homeland, the Maghreb, al-Maqqarī complains:

We were separated by a bad time (*zamān zālīm*),
it loves to separate what is bound together (*jāmi‘*).²⁵

Other examples of this type could be quoted.²⁶ They all show: When time appears as an actor it always pursues negative ends, as bad fate.

Similar concepts of time are found in texts of al-Maqqarī’s friends in Damascus. Yahyā al-Maḥāsīnī during his trip from Damascus to Tripolis/Lebanon often encounters the signs of God’s creation, the ‘*ajā‘ib* and *maḥāsīn*, but in the same time bewails the constantly endangered status of all these, because *zamān/dahr* does not allow for any permanence in the world.²⁷ Aḥmad b. Shāhīn, explicitly singled out by his biographer al-Muḥibbī for his *shakwā‘ alā z-zamān*, produced the following quite cynical verses:

No one shall ask me about time,
my blame of time is very long.
My blame is long as an age,
it accuses because my blame is connected with time’s sin.
The fatal blows of time have become accustomed to me,
had it killed someone else than me, this change would have hurt me.²⁸

The problem of the menacing fate in the *dunyā* is of course an old one in Islamic thought. Many authors before al-Maqqarī and his circle had dealt with it. For some of them the way of coping with it was the spiritual ascension of the Sufis. But this was not the way of

²⁴ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 14.

²⁵ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 14.

²⁶ E.g. al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 8; I p. 17; I p. 23.

²⁷ Elger: *Der Raum*.

²⁸ Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣa*, I p. 214.

al-Maqqarī, and—it may be added—not the way of his friends. Nearly none of these was active in a *ṭarīqa*.²⁹ Al-Maḥāsini in his above mentioned travelogue describes his relations with Sufis in the Lebanon and seems to have been close to become a member of the Maulawiyya order. But he declined the invitation of one of its *shuyūkh*.³⁰

Another friend of al-Maqqarī, Tāj ad-Dīn al-Maḥāsini, in some verses on the time-problem points to the submission to God as a means to evade the threat of time:

I complain about it to the Lord Whose graces destroy the blows of fate when they come, and they are helpful.³¹

Refuge to God is also considered by al-Maqqarī who even turns—at least temporarily—to a complete abandonment of the *dunyā*. In the course of his complains about his low position in Cairo he says:

I tamed my soul with asceticism (*zuhd*) telling her:
do not try to attain a high rank.³²

Having thus become a *zāhid*, al-Maqqarī tried to avoid the worldly affairs, among these the writing of the book on al-Andalus, but the story goes on. He traveled a second time to Damascus and was again urged to write. Then back in Egypt he abandoned the ascetic way and started the composition of the book.³³

In a similar way Ibn Shāhīn retired some time in his house after the death of his father in the year 1040/1630, and “wrote poems for himself”³⁴ until he left his reclusion and found some relief with al-Maqqarī:

The shelter of al-Maqqarī, my master, is very hospitable,
he is the place where I am rescued from time.³⁵

The verse is significant: Not *zuhd* rescues Aḥmad, but al-Maqqarī.

²⁹ Only al-Kalshani was a Sufi (and *adīb*).

³⁰ See Elger: *Der Raum*.

³¹ Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣa*, I pp. 457 f.

³² Al-Maqqarī: *Nafḥ*, I p. 74.

³³ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafḥ*, I p. 99.

³⁴ Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣa*, I p. 212.

³⁵ Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣa*, I p. 304.

Thus, inspite of all similarities, the ideas of the two authors differ from the ethics of the *zuhdiyyāt* poems like those of Abū l-ʿAtāhiya, “father of craziness” (130/748—210/825 or 211/826), that advocate a complete renunciation of the world. On the contrary they are keen to stabilize their position in the world, an idea that Ibn Shāhīn expresses in his letter to the Maghrebinian. In order to convince the latter to start writing, Aḥmad uses a rather peculiar argument:

I only wanted that his (al-Maqqarī’s) pen writes my name and that my traces are left inside his work, and that the memory of me is mixed with the memory of him; in the same way as my secret is bound with love to his secret. Then I saw that my shaikh was not going to give those good tidings, because he made me understand that I shall await success in the hereafter. He would not answer my wish. He withheld his pen from writing.”³⁶

What Ibn Shāhīn says here are central points in al-Maqqarī’s thought, as developed in the *muqaddima*. There is the idea of *zuhd*, directing all hopes for salvation to the hereafter. But also a lasting achievement in this world seems to be attainable according to Ibn Shāhīn or—to put it in another, from the point of literary criticism more sound way—, according to al-Maqqarī who in his text presents Ibn Shāhīn as a spokesman for his own opinion³⁷: the text guarantees permanence in the face of the all-destroying time by preserving the memory of those mentioned in it.

This idea of Ibn Shāhīn/al-Maqqarī lets us think neither of Sufism, nor of the *zuhdiyyāt*. When Abū l-ʿAtāhiya urges to accomplish pious deeds, he regards this as a service for God,³⁸ seeking salvation in the *ākhirā*. Ibn Shāhīn and al-Maqqarī seem to be closer to the ideal of *jāhiliyya* poetry that provided some of the themes of the *zuhdiyyāt*, but in its general outlook differs significantly from them, as Stefan Sperl has shown: In the ancient arab *qasīda* “man’s ultimate destiny is not the hereafter, nor will God redress the injustice of this life.” Human existence is seen in “terms of this world only” and “heroic

³⁶ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 103.

³⁷ He also explicitly approves the logic of his friend. See Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I p. 104.

³⁸ O. Rescher: *Der Dīwān des Abū l-ʿAtāhiya*. Teil 1. Die *zuhdiyyāt* (d.h. die religiösen Gedichte). Nach dem Druck 1909 aus dem Arab. Übersetzt, Stuttgart 1928, pp. 43, 72.

determination and recklessness are thrown in relief in deliberate challenge to man's ineluctable destiny."³⁹

Now al-Maqqarī did not, like the Arab heroes, fight his enemies with the sword. Rather he used the pen. Thus he was able to transcend the thisworldly life and to secure for himself an existence enduring even after his physical death. Thereby he adopts an ancient Arab ideal described by Arazi: "L'homme se doit triompher du temps destructeur, c'est-à-dire arriver à établir quelque chose de durable, si possible éternelle. Cet élément qui triomphe de la durée existe bel et bien; au delà de la collectivité ce sont les actions nobles et généreuses, inlassablement remémorées, surtout quand elles revêtent la forme poétique, qui en garantit la pérennité."⁴⁰ Certainly Arazi is right when he says, that Islam added a decisive new aspect to *jāhili* thought, introducing the idea that man is not completely wiped out by time. Only his worldly life perishes, whereas his after-life lasts eternally.⁴¹ Though Arazi concedes that the older pessimism lived on after the revelation,⁴² he adds that it became a marginal problem for the Muslims, surviving only in some *zuhd* poetry and several Sufi ideas: "Dans les métropoles et les cités, l'occasion d'affrontement entre l'homme ou la conservation et le temps revêt un aspect moins angoissant."⁴³ This seems to be reasonable in the first place, since the beduin ideals certainly weakened in urban society. But then, we find those ancient ideas still in later texts, in al-Ma'arri's poems as well as in the writings of some Andalusian *udabā'*,⁴⁴ and also among the 17th city dwellers in Damascus.

Here we come to a highly interesting theological problem, the relation between time or fate and God. Does al-Maqqarī take the position of the infidels mentioned in Sura 45:24: "They say: There is only our thisworldly life, we die and we live, and only time (*dahr*)

³⁹ S. Sperl: *Mannerism in Arabic poetry. A structural analysis of selected texts (3rd century AH/9th century AD – 5th century AH/11th century AD)*. Cambridge 1985, p. 75.

⁴⁰ Arazi: *La réalité*, pp. 86f.

⁴¹ Arazi: *La réalité*, p. 96.

⁴² Arazi: *La réalité*, p. 102.

⁴³ Arazi: *La réalité*, p. 103.

⁴⁴ J. C. Bürgel: "Qasida as Discourse on Power and its Islamization: some Reflections". In: Stefan Sperl/Christopher Shackle: *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*. Vol. I, Leiden 1996, pp. 451-74.

makes us perish”? Or does he identify time with God, following some scholars who referred to the *ḥadīth qudsī* rendering the words of God “The son of Adam abuses *dahr*, whereas I am *dahr* since in My hand are day and night.”⁴⁵ Al-Maqqarī holds a middle position: Time for him is an actor independent from God, but he does not subscribe to the “atheistic conceptions”⁴⁶ of the *jāhilī* Arabs. According to al-Maqqarī there is more than time alone, which is the opposite of the Eternal God. But in any case, the existential problem of al-Maqqarī is that time threatens man, and he offers no other rescue from destructive time than to be kept in lasting memory without giving any explicit reference to Paradise or the Day of Judgement. This is the message of the biography on Ibn al-Khaṭīb, a message which comes rather close to *jāhilī* heroism.

Al-Maqqarī's biography of Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb

Ibn al-Khaṭīb was born in Lausha, the today Loja, some 50 km west of Granada. There, in the capital of the Naṣrid state, he studied and started his career as an author. With a eulogistic poem on the ruler Abū l-Hajjāj Yūsuf (733/1333-755/1354) he attained a post as a secretary and soon became *wazīr*. It was not unusual in al-Andalus that this title was given to poets who mostly were responsible for the correspondence of the ruler and often served as ambassadors. Ibn al-Khaṭīb participated in several missions to the court of the Merinids in Morocco, but according to al-Maqqarī also was deeply involved in the fighting against the Christian enemies.

In the context of our topic it is not necessary to explore whether al-Maqqarī was correct in this point. Important is the picture he gives of Ibn al-Khaṭīb:

In far away al-Andalus decline was near. People dared to kill the kings, committed highway robbery, thus stopping the traffic. This was due to the inclination of the traitors to stir up conflict. ... The infidel enemy took the chance, killed, and robbed Muslim property. He wanted to finish the Muslims' well-being, although he concluded peace-treaties in some instances.

⁴⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book “*Al-alfāz*”.

⁴⁶ Watt: *Free will*, p. 20.

... In this situation Lisān ad-Dīn repaired the cloth of al-Andalus. He defeated infidelity that had opened its mouth. He labored with words and deeds for the defense until victory came.⁴⁷

With these few words al-Maqqarī summarizes the history of al-Andalus during Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb's time. Indeed Granada was endangered. 740/1340 its troupes suffered a catastrophic defeat near Tarifa at the hands of Castilian and Portuguese forces. 744/1344 Algeciras surrendered after a long siege. Ten years later Granada's Sultan Yūsuf was murdered, but his successor Muḥammad V who—with one interruption between 760/1359-763/1362—ruled from 755/1354 to 793/1391 brought back stability to the country and started some successful campaigns against the Christians.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb had to flee from Granada 772/1371 after he was accused of heresy by the caḍi Abū l-Ḥasan an-Nubāhī and went to Morocco to the court of the Merinids. Muḥammad V of Granada who in this time was an influential player in Merinid politics convinced the Moroccans to put the former *wazīr* on trial in Fes and sent his successor Ibn Zamrak to take part in it. The accusation of heresy was based on a book written by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rauḍat at-ta'rif bi-l-ḥubb ash-sharīf* about mystical love, but according to al-Maqqarī the real background was a different one. He circumstantially describes how Ibn al-Khaṭīb promoted the careers of his friends and protégés, the caḍi an-Nubāhī and the minister Ibn Zamrak, before he comes to their role in Ibn Khaṭīb's destruction. Al-Maqqarī accuses them not so much personally, but presents them as agents of time (*dahr*) which victimized Ibn al-Khaṭīb after it brought him to his high worldly position.

Though al-Maqqarī devotes many pages to the good deeds of Ibn al-Khaṭīb he is not silent on the problematic aspects of his character. Ibn al-Khaṭīb himself proved his ability to bring down political rivals several times in his career. One of his weapons were *hijā'* poems⁴⁸, but he also was a master of intrigue and treason. Al-Maqqarī makes it clear that Ibn al-Khaṭīb himself was conscious of this very fact. On one stage of his career when he suffered disgrace, the *wazīr*

⁴⁷ Al-Maqqarī: *Naḥḥ*, I pp. 78f.

⁴⁸ Al-Maqqarī: *Naḥḥ*, V pp. 138ff.

wrote a *waṣīya* addressed to the servants of the state and counsels them to withdraw from political life.⁴⁹ Obviously some time in his life Ibn al-Khaṭīb even considered the possibility of becoming a Sufi *zāhid*, but he did not pursue this plan further. Instead, he interfered in politics even during his last stay in Morocco. Ibn al-Khaṭīb wrote his famous book *A‘māl al-‘lām fī man būyi‘a qabla l-iḥtilām min mulūk al-islām* about those sultans who came to power before reaching maturity. The background was the discussion about the case of the three year old son and heir of the deceased Merinid Sultan ‘Abd al-Azīz (766/1365-773/1372). In contrast to many critics and also to the Naṣrid position, Ibn al-Khaṭīb justified the succession, certainly partly because the real ruler and representative of the Sultan Abū Bakr b. Ghāzī was his patron.⁵⁰ But though he had friends in Morocco he could not count on their help and confesses:

I did not know, before they attacked me,
that my friends were treacherous.⁵¹

Al-Maqqarī explains that Ibn al-Khaṭīb wrote this verse during an earlier crises, but he adds: “It is as if he talks here about the last trial in which he was destroyed by the *kātib* Ibn Zamrak and the *cadi* Abū l-Ḥasan.”⁵² After the description of Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s trial, al-Maqqarī explains that his fate was not singular but just one example out of a long series of similar cases. Also the Moroccan poet/politician Abū Ja‘far b. ‘Aṭīyya, he says, rose high, but fell deep. He was brought down by the *dahr*, “after he had reached utmost power.”⁵³ This is the last sentence in the chapter about the “case” of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, and therefore it deserves special attention. It seems to be a confirmation of a phrase al-Maqqarī formulates in his description of a dangerous sea-trip to Egypt: “Three things offer no security, the sea, time and power”.⁵⁴

The case of Ibn al-Khaṭīb shows that power is easily swept away. But the *wazīr* reached immortality because he is remembered. In

⁴⁹ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 145.

⁵⁰ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V pp. 180 ff.

⁵¹ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 120.

⁵² Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 120.

⁵³ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 188.

⁵⁴ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, I pp. 34.

order to demonstrate the importance of memory al-Maqqarī refers to Ibn al-Khaṭīb's counsels to a politician: "Your efforts strangled all the envious people. They are careful, except when you sleep. They do not talk openly until you are dead. You are happy because your deeds bring you to life after your death. Even if your end is prescribed, praise secures your eternal life."⁵⁵ These words serve as a resumé of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's case, which is confirmed by al-Maqqarī in the immediately following verse:

His deeds brought him back his life
as if he was awakened by public commemoration.⁵⁶

Ibn al-Khaṭīb is even put in a line with the greatest figures of Muslim history, the caliphs and the prophet himself. Al-Maqqarī: "We heard of their death. Only their memory remains, and the awareness of their character."⁵⁷

Attempting explanations

The world-view of al-Maqqarī and his friends mirrors an old topos of Muslim literature. There is an established tradition that combines the praise of the hero with the motive of destructive time.⁵⁸ We therefore have to discuss the question whether the *shakwā 'alā z-zamān* formulated by these people is to be taken seriously, as a response to some factual grievances they suffered. It can be argued that the literary mobilization of a topos, how old he may be, is inscribed in a present situation. It would not be convincing to regard this as a mere mechanical imitation of literary predecessors, especially in the case of al-Maqqarī and the Syrians whose thinking is so intensely focused on the problem of time. Thus we have to explore sociological and probably also psychological reasons for their dwelling on the "complaint about fate".

Regarding the ups and downs of his life and career, al-Maqqarī

⁵⁵ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 158.

⁵⁶ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 158.

⁵⁷ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, V p. 117.

⁵⁸ Bürgel: *Qasida as Discourse*. See also W. Caskel: *Das Schicksal in der altarabischen Poesie*. Leipzig 1926.

certainly had some good reasons to complain about fate, but what about his friends in Damascus? Unlike the Maghrebini they were no strangers in their town. On the contrary, some of them even belonged to established Damascene families. The Maḥāsini were rich traders, Muḥammad b. Tāj ad-Dīn al-Maḥāsini could “live easily on the money of his father”.⁵⁹ Though al-Muḥibbī says about ash-Shāhin, that “he was not lucky in his worldly life”, the biographer concedes in another place that he owned a house in the city and a “castle” outside. Some frustrations of the Damascenes probably arose from their marginality in the system of cultural institutions under Ottoman rule. In general they had a broad education that included *adab* as well as *‘ilm* and probably Sufism. Only one of al-Maqqarī’s friends, Tāj ad-Dīn al-Maḥāsini, worked as a trader. The rest held some scholarly posts. Muḥammad b. Tāj ad-Dīn served as a *khaṭīb*,⁶⁰ Muḥammad al-Karimī as a *mudarris*.⁶¹ Aḥmad b. Shāhin obtained several qadi posts, among them that of a qadi responsible for the *hajj* caravan. These posts were rather low ranking in the Ottoman administrative and judicial system, and in general the Syrians, even those being highly educated, were excluded from the highest scholarly positions.⁶² It would be no small wonder had they reproached the Ottomans for this, but there are only few hints at their political attitudes. Al-‘Imādī is mentioned by al-Muḥibbī as someone who overtly criticized Ottoman rule, therefore running into great troubles. But we do not know whether this was due to a general anti-Ottoman opposition⁶³ or only to some personal affairs.

Al-Maqqarī at least implicitly criticizes the Ottomans in the first

⁵⁹ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, II pp. 448, 459, 460; al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāsa*, I pp.456-7.

⁶⁰ Al-Maqqarī: *Nafh*, II p. 437; al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāsa*, III pp. 408-411.

⁶¹ Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāsa*, IV p. 274.

⁶² R. C. Repp: *The Müfti of Istanbul. A Study in the development of the Ottoman learned hierarchy*. London 1986, pp. 55ff.; R. Elger: “Selbstdarstellungen aus Syrien. Überlegungen zur Innovation in der arabischen autobiographischen Literatur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert”. In: *Eigene und fremde Frühe Neuzeiten: Genese und Geltung eines Epochenbegriffs*. Hrsg. Von Renate Dürr, Gisela Engel und Johannes Süßmann, Frankfurt (Beiheft zur *Historischen Zeitschrift*, Herbst 2002), in print.

⁶³ Some aspects of a Syrian anti-Ottoman opposition are presented by A. Rafeq: “Social groups, identity and loyalty, and historical writing in Ottoman and post-Ottoman Syria”. In: *Les Arabes et l’histoire créatrice*. Ed. p. Dominique Chevaillier, Paris 1995, pp. 79-93.

part of the *Nafh*. In the description of his sea-journey from Morocco to Alexandria in Egypt he complains about the dangers Muslims had to fear from the Christian marines, especially those from Malta. The 17th century reader must have read this as a reproach of the ineffective Muslim, i.e. Ottoman military protection. Also one might think that al-Maqqarī urges Ottoman politicians to follow the example of Ibn al-Khaṭīb as a fighter against the Christians. But though his work may be read as a critique against certain Ottoman policies, it does not give positive advices for the politicians to follow. Rather the critique is channeled into the general statement that power is as fluid as the sea. The powerful shall not count on the value and the permanence of power. Political thinking is thus replaced by moral considerations which might be interpreted as a reflex of the author's exclusion from the field of power.

For certain kinds of intellectuals the literary tradition of *shakwā 'alā z-zamān* may have been attractive because of their psychological disposition, a disposition that can be characterized as "melancholy". Probably there are some differences to the European concept: Robert Burton 1621 described melancholy as an element of disorder which is set against the idea of an ideal order.⁶⁴ Because it questions all metaphysical certainty, its critics regarded it as a danger to piety and Christianity. Since the Middle-Ages melancholy ("acedia") was reckoned among the deadly sins, as a revolt "against God's creation whose beauty and meaningful order melancholy seems to deny."⁶⁵ Al-Maqqarī does not argue against the Muslim concept of God, the all-mighty Creator of the cosmos. But he definitely shares with European victims of melancholy the mistrust towards any possible improvement of mankind, and the inherent tension between God and the destructive *dahr* is certainly not resolved. What can be done from his point of view, is to produce literary texts that preserve the memory of the past-time hero, the author and his public.

Certainly, "the *shakwā z-zamān* is a poetry of setback and of impotence".⁶⁶ This is true also for the works of al-Maqqarī and his Syrian

⁶⁴ W. Lepenies: *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main 1969, p. 66.

⁶⁵ H. Böhme: "Kritik der Melancholie und Melancholie der Kritik". In: *Natur und Subjekt*, <http://www.culture.hu-berlin.de/HB/texte/natsub/melancho.html>

⁶⁶ A. Arazi: "Shi'r". In: *EF*, IX pp. 448-462, p. 450.

friends. But regarded from the angle of literary history, their texts, al-Maḥāsini's travelogue and especially *Nafh at-tīb*, constitute major achievements of *adab* literature. This is not surprising, since intellectual frustration quite often becomes a source of literary creativity. For this creativity against the odds of time, al-Maqqarī and his *Nafh at-tīb* provide a striking case from 17th century Arab culture.