ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НАРОДОВ МИРА/LITERATURE OF THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

THE AESTHETICS OF PROSE AND SOCIAL SATIRE IN THE MAQĀMĀT OF BADIʿ AL-ZAMĀN AL-HAMADĀNĪ

Research article

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Abstract

The given article dwells the Maqāmāt of Badiʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī highlighting their thematic breadth and incorporation of debates spanning literature, linguistics, theology, and contemporary events. The work's distinctive style and central character, Abu al-Fath al-Iskandarī, establish the maqama as a unique literary genre. While Isā ibn Hishām serves as narrator, Abu al-Fath functions as a complex figure from Alexandria, embodying both wit and social commentary. Portrayed as a trickster navigating societal injustice and economic hardship, Abu al-Fath reflects the socio-political and moral climate of the 10th-century Islamic world. Al-Hamadānī employs satire to critique corruption and analyzes societal psychology, using his maqamat to portray both the suffering of the common people and, in six instances, to offer panegyrics to Khalaf ibn Ahmad.

Keywords: thematic breadth, incorporation of debates, literature, linguistics, theology, Maqāmāt of Badiʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī, aesthetics of prose, social satire.

ЭСТЕТИКА ПРОЗЫ И СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ САТИРА В МАКАМАТАХ БАДИ АЗ-ЗАМАНА АЛЬ-ХАМАДАНИ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается Макамат Бади аз-Заман аль-Хамадани, подчеркивая его тематическую широту и включение в него дебатов, охватывающих литературу, лингвистику, теологию и современные события. Отличительный стиль произведения и центральный персонаж, Абу аль-Фатх аль-Искандари, утверждают макаму как уникальный литературный жанр. В то время как Иса ибн Хишам выступает в качестве рассказчика, Абу аль-Фатх функционирует как сложная фигура из Александрии, воплощающая как остроумие, так и социальный комментарий. Представленный как трикстер, преодолевающий социальную несправедливость и экономические трудности, Абу аль-Фатх отражает социально-политический и моральный климат исламского мира X века. Аль-Хамадани использует сатиру для критики коррупции и анализирует психологию общества, используя свои макамы для изображения как страданий простого народа, так и, в шести случаях, для восхваления Халафа ибн Ахмада.

Ключевые слова: тематическая широта, включение дебатов, литература, лингвистика, теология, Макамат Бади аз-Замана аль-Хамадани, эстетика прозы, социальная сатира.

Introduction

The Maqāmāt of Badiʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī stand out primarily for their thematic breadth and the diversity of subjects they address. They are unique in incorporating debates on literature, linguistics, theology, and current events, securing their special place in classical prose. Al-Hamadānī compiled this rich content in his distinctive style, playing a pivotal role in defining the maqama as a literary genre.

Structurally, the Maqāmāt consist of rhymed and ornate prose passages that recount events, stories, or anecdotes centered around the character Abu al-Fath al-Iskandarī. His fictional companion, Isā ibn Hishām, narrates these tales. Notably, these two fictional figures embody various social facets of the 10th-century Islamic world. Isā ibn Hishām appears as the narrator and often a direct witness to events in maqamat such as "Baghdādiyya," "Asadiyya," and "Najmiyya."

The central figure, Abu al-Fath al-Iskandarī, who lends the collection its literary charm and incisive social commentary, is said to hail from Alexandria. Isā ibn Hishām, the narrator, is portrayed as a well-traveled merchant who survives through wit and cunning in a harsh world. Abu al-Fath is depicted as intelligent and cultured, skilled in poetry, debate, and literary contests. He frequently engages in linguistic duels and social satire, often emerging victorious due to his knowledge and eloquence.

Main results and discussion

Although known as a trickster, Abu al-Fath is not malicious. He avoids wrongdoing when possible, using wit and cleverness to navigate complex situations. His life experiences are rich and varied, and he exploits every resource available to achieve his goals. In some maqamat like "Qāriziyya," "Balkhiyya," and "Shiʿriyya," he appears as a young man; in others such as "Sijistāniyya" and "Wasiyya," he is portrayed as an elder. This continuity shows him as the protagonist across different stages of life.

Physically, al-Hamadānī describes Abu al-Fath as of average height, with clear eyes and a full black beard. He represents the class of beggars, but unlike others, he employs polished language and charm in his supplications. He is a shapeshifter,

adapting to circumstances and using tricks to earn a living — shifting from eloquent orator to amusing con artist. His charisma often wins public admiration.

According to al-Hamadānī, the purpose of creating such a character was to portray the social realities of his time. Economic hardship and societal injustice forced intelligent and capable individuals to resort to cunning or deceit for survival. A lack of social recognition and systemic failures pushed many toward marginal professions such as begging or deception.

In typical maqamat, Abu al-Fath's name appears at the beginning, except in "Iblīsiyya," where his identity is revealed only at the end. While he is central in most stories, in some — like "Jālūniyya," "Nuhaydiyya," and "Baghdādiyya" — his presence is less prominent. Al-Hamadānī's Maqāmāt reflect the socio-political and moral climate of their era — a time rife with corruption, hypocrisy, and manipulation, when people pursued wealth by any means, lawful or otherwise. Like a skilled psychologist, al-Hamadānī analyzes the mentality and psychology of his society with subtle literary finesse and employs satire to criticize the newly rich exploiters. Simultaneously, he portrays the suffering and injustice endured by common people with emotional depth and poetic style. Fifty-two maqamat are attributed to Badiʿ al-Zamān, varying in theme and content. Six of these, according to analysis, praise Khalaf ibn Ahmad, the ruler of Sistan. Mustafa Shaqqa notes that maqamat such as Najmiyya, Khalafiyya, and Mulukiyya serve as panegyrics, writing: "Badiʿ al-Zamān composed six maqamat dedicated to Khalaf ibn Ahmad" [3, P. 111].

In the first maqama, Abu al-Fath al-Iskandarī appears as a wealthy merchant. In others — such as Balkhiyya, Isfahāniyya, and others — he is a traveling trader. In Sāsūnīyya, he leads a beggars' guild; in Khamriyya, he is an ascetic and pious imam who forbids wine and sin. In Qāzwīnīyya, he takes on the role of a warrior calling others to jihad; in Khuzwīnīyya, a tavern singer; in Basrīyya, an idle pleasure-seeker; and in Sijistāniyya and Waʿziyya, a noble preacher.

In Wasiyya, he is an experienced trader teaching his son business ethics. In Qirdiyya, he is a monkey trainer; in Musiliyya, a fraudster claiming to resurrect the dead and ward off disasters. In Khidrāniyya, Armāniyya, and Aswadīyya, he appears as a skilled swindler. In several maqamat, he is also a master poet, talented writer, or wanderer — as in Majʿiyya and Nuhaydiyya, where he is a destitute poet, having lost all possessions and unable to afford food.

This range of roles, professions, and sometimes-contradictory personas enriches the thematic diversity of the Maqāmāt. It enables the author to explore broad societal issues through a single fictional figure who embodies multiple professions and social roles of his time.

The Iranian scholar Alireza Zakavati Qaragozlu writes in his book: "Badi'al-Zaman speaks in the maqamat of what actually exists, not of what ought to be" [10, P. 11].

Through vivid portrayals of social dilemmas and real-life conditions, the author draws the reader's attention to the harsh realities and moral failings of society — not through didactic preaching, but by means of revealing, eye-opening narratives. His style does not aim to moralize directly but serves as an exposé and warning. The behavior and speech of his characters reflect the morals and ethics of his era as if in a mirror.

A good example is Dīnariyya, where the writer employs the slang and even curses commonly used by beggars and lowlifes of his time. In Rassāfiyya, he uses jargon from the world of thieves and burglars, thus uncovering the secrets of that social class.

Regarding the titles of Badi'al-Zaman's maqamat, it becomes clear that he often named them after mythological elements, the locations of events, or central themes. Although each maqama does not always revolve around a single topic, most tend to focus on issues such as judgment, begging, or deception, using Abu al-Fath's fictional exploits as a vehicle for exploration. Some maqamat are named after cities or regions, reflecting their urban Islamic-Persian cultural settings — examples include Balkh, Sistan, Kufa, Azerbaijan, Khurasan, Isfahan, Ahvaz, Baghdad, Basra, Bukhara, Qazvin, Mosul, Shiraz, Hulwan, Damascus, Marw, Nishapur, and Sari. Many of these settings are richly described, depicting daily life and social conditions.

Badi'al-Zaman also occasionally names maqamat after animals (e.g., Asadiyya – lion), foods (Maziriyya — cheese), or central topics (Waʿziyyah — preaching, Qariziyya — poetry). Other examples include Iblisiyya, linked to the devil (Iblis), and Mulūkiyya, which contains praise for Khalaf ibn Ahmad, ruler of Sistan.

Thus, the themes of the maqamat extend far beyond discussions of beggars or social critique. The central character, Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari, appears in many disguises — sometimes a talented writer, sometimes a cunning deceiver — always relying on his eloquence and verbal skill to achieve his aims, often for monetary gain.

Mustafa Shaqqa, in his analysis, identifies thirteen maqamat as exceptions that are not centered on themes of trickery or begging. These are: Jilūniyya, Ahwāziyya, Maziriyya, Maristāniyya, Waʿziyyah, ʿIrāqiyya, Rassāfiyya, Maʿzaliyyah, Hulwāniyya, ʿIlmiyya, Shiʿriyya, Khamriyya, and Bishriyya [10, P. 315].

One important theme in Badi'al-Zaman's maqamat is education and disciple training. For example, Asadiyya, Hamadhaniyya, and Jiluniyya are among the best illustrations of guidance for educating writers or novice students. In Asadiyya, Badi'al-Zaman demonstrates his eloquence and linguistic artistry through vivid descriptions of animals such as lions and horses, leaving a lasting impression. Additionally, Ahwaziyya and Waʿziyyah are rich in religious sermons and moral lessons, serving the purpose of ethical refinement in society.

The Maziriyya maqama is considered Badi'al-Zaman's masterpiece—his most detailed and beautiful work. It paints a comprehensive picture of urban merchants and the middle class — describing their homes, clothing, streets, wives, servants, cooking pots, bread, and water. Alongside these vivid details, he analyzes their psyche: materialism, miserliness, ruthlessness, manners, intelligence, wages, and moderate lifestyles. The Persian author Hamid al-Din Balkhi, a renowned maqama writer, praised Maziriyya as Badi'al-Zaman's finest work and even created a brilliant adaptation titled Sikbajiyya [12, P. 333].

In some maqamat, like Simriyya, Badi'al-Zaman reflects on historical figures such as Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Simri [2, P. 370]. In others, like Baghdadiyya, he addresses contemporary issues of his time, providing insights into Baghdad's conditions and events.

Nishapuriyya goes beyond highlighting oppression, describing those who unlawfully consume others' wealth — especially orphans, the weak, and the poor — without remorse. For example, Isa ibn Hisham narrates: "On a Friday, I was in Nishapur

and attended congregational prayer. I saw a man approaching a person dressed as a judge to seek judgment. When I asked, "Who is this man?" someone replied: "He is a parasite and a pest that feeds only on the wool of orphans, a locust on the necks of the poor" [2, P. 375]. Furthermore, maqamat often depict scenes from courtrooms and trials, highlighting the contradiction between official judicial rhetoric and the reality of corruption and bribery.

Iblisiyya revolves around the story of Iblis (Satan). The narrator, Isa ibn Hisham, encounters Iblis in a lush valley while searching for his lost camel herd. The valley is filled with rivers, flowers, and trees. There, a sheikh invites him to sit and asks, "Do you know any Arabic poetry?" Hisham recites verses by Imru' al-Qays, Labid, and Tarafa. Iblis responds by reciting lines from the famous poet Jarir, astonishing Isa with his mastery of poetry [8, P. 127].

Badi'al-Zaman also composed maqamat encouraging the pursuit of knowledge, such as *Ilmiyya*, discussing the difficulties of learning, memorization methods, comprehension, and educational aspiration.

Biographical accounts reveal that Badi'al-Zaman used to recite these maqamat at the end of his classes, employing them as teaching tools in language and literature [6, P. 48].

Contemporary Arab scholar Mustafa Shaqqa notes that while Badi'al-Zaman's tone remains generally consistent, it varies with content. His maqamat exhibit literary freedom, expressive breadth, a unique style, sharp ideas, and elegant meanings.

He avoids digressions to maintain coherence and clarity. The most important stylistic features of Badi'al-Zaman's maqamat are:

1. Frequent use of poetry: He incorporates many verses — either quoting others or composing his own — to reinforce his ideas. No maqama contains fewer than five verses; some exceed twenty. These poems serve specific rhetorical purposes.

2. Blending prose and poetry: He skillfully mixes prose and verse, sometimes imbuing prose with poetic rhythm or enriching poetry with narrative elements.

3. Harmonious integration: Each maqama contains a balanced fusion of prose and poetry, enhancing readability and aesthetic appeal. In some moralistic maqamat, long poetic passages are interwoven with prose to form cohesive, engaging narratives.

4. Use of Qur'anic verses and Hadith: When suitable classical poetry was unavailable, Badi'al-Zaman drew from Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to support his points [10, P. 348–349].

This unique blend gives the maqamat a captivating style, with about a quarter of each maqama composed of verse. Many maqamat conclude with a poetic summary focusing on the changing nature of fate.

Al-Hamadhani's Maqamat feature a consistent narrator, giving the collection stylistic unity. Each maqama begins with: "Isa ibn Hisham said…"

And usually ends with the narrator recognizing Abu al-Fath by a familiar sign: "Isa ibn Hisham says: I handed over the silver coin I had received, he turned and departed. I tried to recall if I knew him. Eventually, I recognized him by his distinctive front teeth and said: "By God! This is our very own Abu al-Fath - grown older but still the same!" I rushed after him, placed my hand on his waist and said: "Aren't you our Abu al-Fath?..." [4, P. 61].

The text of Badi'al-Zaman's Maqamat is mostly concise, yet rich in literary, verbal, and semantic artistry.

Faris Ibrahimi al-Khariri believes Badi'al-Zaman's primary purpose was not to craft a narrative but to showcase mastery of eloquence and rhymed prose: "Badi' al-Zaman did not make the story the main goal in his Maqamat; rather, he used it as a pretext to accompany his crafted expressions with metaphor, allusion, simile, and proverbs, developing one after another. Thus, he did not focus on a specific topic but addressed various subjects" [12, P. 109].

Professor Shavri Zaif similarly observes: "It seems that the narrative form of the Maqamat was not Badi'al-Zaman's primary aim. Instead, he regarded the story as a thread to weave his rhymed prose and artistic style side by side, expressing beautiful words" [45, P. 62].

Al-Khariri further defines the maqamat's style as: "The style consists of producing rhymed prose and expressions that captivate the reader with rare vocabulary, poetry, and literary devices — both verbal and semantic" [6].

Badi'al-Zaman composes each maqama as a dialogue between Isa ibn Hisham and Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari, using the elevated literary style of the risala. His ornate vocabulary and mixed expressions exhibit unparalleled skill.

Regarding vocabulary and literary devices, Faris Ibrahimi al-Khariri states: "…his rhymed prose is subtle and free of affectation. He is like a skilled hunter who selects suitable words and places each in its perfect context. Words come to him from all directions, allowing him to choose those that best suit his intent and use them as he wishes" [12, P. 75].

Another stylistic feature is Badi'al-Zaman's vivid description and concise, apt dialogues between risala characters, bringing freshness to literature. Though narratives are brief, they vividly introduce social types.

Abd al-Rahman Yaghi, author of *Opinion on the Maqamat*, believes these works can be viewed as short theatrical performances, as most maintain unity of action, place, time, and narrative thread: "The selection of this fourfold theatrical framework allowed the Maqamat to appear as short theatrical episodes, so much so that they can be called "the theater of al-Hamadani" [6, P. 50].

Editors and translators as unparalleled regard the high artistry of composition, eloquence, metaphorical creativity, and effortless rhymed prose in Badiuzzaman's Maqamat. Consequently, although its translation has been undertaken with great care and skill, only fragments of the work have reached us.

Meanwhile, al-Khariri, the foremost Persian *Maqamat* writer after Badiuzzaman, tended toward affectation and, according to most scholars, did not achieve Badiuzzaman's level of social critique — a widely acknowledged view among researchers.

Furthermore, the sweetness of language, the beauty and fluency of composition, engaging and vivid descriptions, similes, metaphors, and their harmonious combination have made this literary work truly deserving of the title *Maqamat of Badiuzzaman al-Hamadani*.

Additionally, the maqama genre as exemplified by Badi' al-Zamān al-Hamadānī's work is typically constructed around the concept of "inverted social masquerade," where the protagonist adopts a changed external identity to expose societal flaws — in this case, the hypocrisy and corruption of judges. This device enables the author not only to reveal mechanisms of social

injustice but also to highlight the contrast between the official rhetoric of power and its true nature. The style is marked by wordplay, quotations from the Qur'an, and ironic use of fusha (classical Arabic) alongside colloquial expressions.

Consider, for example, the maqama "About the Judge," where the hero uses his oratorical skills to deceive a judge and obtain material gain. The text follows a classic structure: exposition, quasi-moral conflict, climax, and satirical resolution. Stylistically, it relies on parallelism and anaphora, and is rich in Qur'anic allusions, lending the narrative a veneer of moral authority. However, through this pseudo-moralizing discourse, social hypocrisy is unveiled. The author demonstrates how language can be a tool both for truth and deception, depending on the speaker's intent and context.

In recent years, interest in the maqama genre has resurged in academic circles and in efforts to popularize classical Arabic prose. Modern translations of Badiʿ al-Zamān's maqamat appear in English, French, and even Spanish. Scholars such as Thomas Bauer and Devin Stewart emphasize the inter-genre nature of the maqama and its importance as a precursor to the early Arabic novella. Furthermore, from a postcolonial literary studies perspective, maqamat are analyzed as texts that shape the discursive identity of Arab culture.

Conclusion

In summary, Badiuzzaman al-Hamadani's *Maqamat* is considered the earliest exemplary work in the maqama genre within both Arabic and Persian literature. It unites expressive beauty and rhetorical embellishment with the artistic use of rhymed and crafted prose, while addressing and analyzing complex social and ethical issues of his society, all embodied in the central hero.

The inclusion of the protagonist drawn from various social classes of his time contributes to the thematic diversity of the *Maqamat*. This approach allowed the author to explore and critique the social conditions of artisans, merchants, and other members of the community.

The fate of the hero — falling into poverty and misery, which spiritually unites the episodes — reflects the social weaknesses of the author's era and depicts a figure who, through skill and intelligence, albeit resorting to trickery and deceit, follows this path out of social necessity.

Thus, in general, Badiuzzaman al-Hamadani's *Maqamat* presents a wide range of themes explained and interpreted in an elegant style blending poetry and prose. These thematic and artistic qualities have endowed the work with a distinctive identity, both in content and stylistic expression, within the realm of Arabic prose authored by Persian-speaking writers.

The analysis of Badiʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī's maqamat reveals three key conclusions. First, the maqama emerges as a unique genre combining elevated rhetoric with incisive social criticism. Second, the artistic and linguistic devices employed — ranging from parallelism to Islamic intertextuality — intensify the satirical effect of the narratives. Third, al-Hamadānī's works demonstrate the durability of these genre forms, influencing later Arabic literature and even European novellas. Thus, the study of the maqama genre holds considerable significance for both literary and cultural scholarship.

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Не указан.	None declared.
Рецензия	**Review**
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