

A Literary and Gastronomical Conceit

The Boasting Debate Between Rice and Pomegranate Seeds - Mufakharat al-Ruzz wa'l-Habb Rumman or
al-Makama al-Simatiyya (The Tablecloth Makama)

Bearbeitet von
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C O D I C E S A R A B I C I A N T I Q U I

Herausgegeben von
RAIF GEORGES KHOURY

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HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG · WIESBADEN

Ibrahim Kh. Geries

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I have been especially fortunate with the interest Professor R.G. Khoury has shown in my work. His support and encouragement have made it possible for my study to appear as part of the *Codices Arabici Antiqui* series.

Needless to say, responsibility for the contents remains mine alone.

A word from the editor

Dear readers,

In 1999 volume VI of my series, *Codices Arabci Antiqui*, was published by Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, Germany. It was the first volume that was not from my hand, but by my colleague Professor Dr. George Kanazi, from the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, University of Haifa.

Now it is my pleasure again to present to you the following work as volume VII of this series, written by Dr. Ibrahim Geries, from the same department. It contains an edition of the interesting book about "A literary and gastronomical conceit - The Boasting Debate Between Rice and Pomegranate Seeds", and a very solid general study on the manuscript, its author and the text itself.

It is a special pleasure for lovers of old unknown and unedited texts to have one more belonging to a very well established tradition, which joins the "narrative form" to the "imaginary framework".

I am sure that this very well documented and presented *latīfa* will be properly evaluated; therefore I want to congratulate Dr. Geries for this performance and expect with much interest other such texts from the classical Arabic periods.

Heidelberg, May 2002

The Editor
Raif Georges Khoury

Transliteration

For the system of transliteration of Arabic characters in this book I have adopted the system used in the new edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

Consonants

ء	' (except when initial)	ض	ڏ	و	aw
ب	b	ط	ڻ	ي	ay
ت	t	ظ	ڙ	ي	iyy (final form ڻ)
ث	th	ع	'	و	uww (final form ڻ)
ج	dj	غ	gh		
ح	h	ف	f		
خ	kh	ق	k	ا، ى	aa
د	d	ك	k	و	uu
ذ	dh	ل	l	ي	ii
ر	r	م	m		
ز	z	ن	n		
س	s	ه	h	ا	a
ش	sh	و	w	و	u
ص	s	ي	i	ي	i

Long Vowels

ة a; at (construct state)

ال (article), al- and ئل- (even before the antero-palatals)

Short Vowels

PREFACE

In medieval times, the Arabs expressed themselves in a variety of ways when discussing the different topics and matters that appeared as central and basic to them in their daily lives. This can be seen on the religious-doctrinal level, the sociopolitical level, the cultural-materialistic level, or the artistic-aesthetic level. As a result, many literary genres appeared in classical Arabic literature. Some of these genres were known in the literatures of other nations in one way or another. Undoubtedly, the Arabs were influenced in this field by the literatures of those who preceded them, and in their turn they influenced the literatures of other nations later on. However, it is difficult sometimes to prove the existence of direct and clear connections between certain literary genres which flourished and developed in Arabic literature and similar genres that were known in the literatures of other nations with whom the Arabs mixed, such as the Persians, the Indians, the Greeks or in the heritage of the other Middle Eastern nations that mixed with them or came under their power.

Perhaps the most well known of the “international” literary genres, after narration and storytelling, are the genres that reflect conflict and contrast between opposites based on verbal conflict in all its types and varieties; Literary Debate, Débat, Tenson, Jeux-partis.¹

The verbal-conflict in Arabic literature wore all kinds of masks and it appeared in different forms or genres, of which the most well known types were vying in nobility, struggle for precedence, boasting debates, competitions, contest poems (*Nakā'id*) and the *Makāmāt* (Séances/Sessions/Assemblies/Standings) of later periods, which were in reality competitions and boasting debates, but were incorrectly considered as *Makāmāt* as well.

This interaction or mixture between *Makāma* and polemical genres resulted from the internal development of these two genres. The characteristic of fascination connected to the hero is considered a typical, generic element of the *Makāma*. In his attempt to show the skillfulness of the main character, the classical author of *Makāma* was motivated to diversify the literary-verbal types expressed by his character through gesture and speech in order to make it fascinate the audience (including inventive use of movement and “theatrical” scenes). As a result of this, the discourse

¹ See G.J. van Gelder, “The conceit of pen and sword: On an Arabic literary debate” in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, XXXII/2, 1987, p 329; J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, débat, pp. 172-174; M. Wahba, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Beirut, 1974, pp. 101, 268-9, 564-5.

in the *Makāma* is based upon the literary argumentative game of praise and dispraise of the subject itself, or upon debate and boasting between two rivals or opponents.² In addition to other factors, this development brought the genre of *Makāma*, which was considered imaginary literature at its birth, near to the polemical literature, of *munāżarāt*, *mufākharāt*.³ On the other hand, the tendency of polemical genres toward being imaginary to excess prepared the way to their being considered as *Makāmas*. Their creators tried to introduce them in a narrative form, according to an imaginary framework that established the conditions in which the verbal debate took place; these were the conditions for describing the debate, for reviewing the reactions that accompanied it and the effects that resulted from its articulation.

The text that I introduce in this study belongs to this genre: an imaginary boasting debate or literary struggle for precedence that is introduced in an imaginary narrative frame or “*Makāma*” in its late form and shape, the *Suyūtī Makāma*.⁴

I found this *laṭīfa* (amusing text) appended to several manuscripts that include the book called *Fākihat al-khulafā' wa mufākahat al-Zurafā'* by Ibn 'Arabshāh. This *laṭīfa* is appended to several manuscripts of *al-Fākiha*, at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in the library of Leiden University and in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. It is likely that it was also appended to other manuscripts of this book in other libraries, especially in the Arab and Islamic world, to which I have not had access. I have not found any mention of it in any reference work, or in books on the history of literature, or in biographies, nor even in the catalogues of these libraries. No one has noticed it except for G.W. Freytag, the German orientalist, who edited the text of *al-Fākiha* and published it in Bonn in 1832. While speaking about one of the manuscripts on which he depended while editing it (the Paris manuscript), he made a remark about the existence of a text at the end of the manuscript containing a dialogue between different kinds of food, and

² See H. Massé, “Du genre littéraire “débat” en arabe et en persan,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, IV, 1961, p. 137-147; Van Gelder, op.cit., pp. 329-336; I. Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe: al-Mahāsin wa 'l-Masāwi*, Paris, 1977, Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 6-58; E. Wagner, “Munāżara” in *E.I.² VI*, pp. 565-568. Compare with Abd al-Fattah Kilito, *Les Séances, Récits et Codes Culturels chez Hamadhāni et Harīrī*. Ed. Sindbad, Paris, 1983, Chapt. 14, pp. 228-247; Pellat, “*Makāma*”, in *E.I.² VI*, pp. 111-112.

³ Kilito, *Les Séances*, pp. 228-247.

⁴ See below the chapter “Text-Structure”, p. 26-36.

he mentioned the Arabic sentence that introduced the text, which says: “in the original manuscript, was found” (*wa-wudjida binuskhat al-'asl*).⁵

The importance of this text does not lie only in its being a boasting debate (*mufākhara*) or fictional theatrical *Makāma* belonging to the ninth or the beginning of the tenth A.H. century (15th-16th century C.E.) only, but also in its message, material, expressions, and some of its important cultural references in the field of Arab cuisine at the end of the Mamluk period and the beginning of the Ottoman era, and in the field of firearms at that time. I have, therefore, included a special appendix with linguistic-idiomatic and historical-cultural explanations and comments.

In the process of preparing this appendix, and due to the nature of the text and the period in which it was written, I had to have recourse to a large and varied group of classical and contemporary Arabic reference books. In addition to different dictionaries and encyclopedias, I had to check old cookery books, market control books (*hisba*) and modern studies in these two fields. I also checked historical words and studies that deal with firearms and their use in battles at the end of the Mamluk period and the beginning of the Ottoman occupation of Egypt.

I also checked the historical texts which were written in that period describing its events and culture. I went over the manuscript of *Hazz al-kuḥūf fi sharḥ kaṣidat abi shadūf* by al-Shirbīnī as it contains rich cultural and civilizational material that describes Egyptian daily life during the Ottoman period, one and a half centuries after the date when the text with which we are dealing was written.

Preceding the text there is an introduction describing the manuscripts upon which I depended and another one identifying the text, its period and its possible author. Following is a literary analysis of the text.

In editing the text, I refer to the various readings and versions of the different manuscripts in the footnotes below the text, by means of Arabic numbers (the Indian forms used in the Arab East). However, I have put the historical, cultural, idiomatic-linguistic explanations and comments at the end of the text as an appendix and referred to them by Roman numbers (the Arabic forms used in the Western world, including the *Maghreb* (North Africa)).

I hope that this work may constitute a contribution to the revival of the Arab heritage in the field of fiction which does not lack clear theatrical

⁵ *Fākihat al-Khulafā'*, ed. Freytag, Bonn 1832-1852, Adnotationes criticae et correctiones, p. 67.

elements,⁶ and an aid to a better, more accurate and more thorough understanding of the Arab Islamic civilization over its long historical journey.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

I. (ا) in the Bibliothéque Nationale in Paris (B.N.), Ar. 3540. It was copied in Muḥarram 987 A.H. (March 1579). I have taken it as the basis for this edition.

II. (ج) in the Library of Leiden University in Holland, Or. 731. It is extremely similar to manuscript (ا). It was probably copied from manuscript (ا) or from the original from which manuscript (ا) was copied in Djumāda al-‘ūlā 996 A.H. (April 1588).

III. (ب) in the Bibliothéque Nationale in Paris, Ar. 3535. It was copied in Ramaḍān 1003 A.H. (May 1595).

IV. (غ) in the Bibliothéque Nationale in Paris, Ar. 3593. It was copied in Rabī‘ al-ākhir 1055 A.H. (May 1645). Chronologically, this manuscript is the youngest. However, from the colophon written by the scribe of the book *Fākihat al-khulafā'*, it seems that this manuscript was copied from the original, written by the son of the author of the book, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn ‘Arabshāh, and that this is the manuscript from which manuscripts (ا) and (ج) were copied, directly or indirectly.

⁶ See Sh. Moreh, *Live theatre and dramatic literature in the Medieval Arabic World*, New York University Press, New York 1992, pp. 104-122.

THE AUTHOR AND THE DATE OF THE TEXT

There is no direct reference in the text to its author or to its date of writing. Apart from this, I have not found any reference to this debate or *Makāma* in any index or biography or reference book. The introductory words to the debate in the four manuscripts are not specific in their reference to the name of the author. They do not define the text explicitly as a *mufākhara* or a *Makāma* either. They describe the text as a *latīfa* and the scribe of manuscript (ع) added the words *wāki'a zarīfa* ("an amusing event"). Despite this, these descriptive words can help us to identify the author of this text, and consequently its date and place of writing. In addition, the general nature of the text, combined with some of its expressions, may help us to define the period and place in which it was written.

The introductory phrase to the text in manuscript (إ) and (ج) goes as follows: "In the original manuscript, we found this: He wrote it from the beginning to the end."

In (ع) it goes as follows: "And he has from his own, God be merciful with him, a *latīfa* and a *wāki'a zarīfa*."

The scribe of (ه), however, found it sufficient to write the word *latīfa* at the top of the text. The introductory phrase of the text in manuscripts (إ) and (ج) implies that its author is the scribe of the original manuscript from which (إ) and (ج) were copied directly or indirectly. But who is that scribe? When did he live and where?

The writer must have lived in the period following the year 852 A.H. or 858 A.H. (the year when *Fākihat al-khulafā* was completed, according to Ibn-Khallikān or according to a misspelled phrase in some of the manuscripts printed editions of this book) and before the year 987 A.H. when the first manuscript of *al-Fākiha*, with the debate as its appendix, was copied, i.e. in the period 1448 (or 1454) - 1579 C.E.

The introductory phrase to this debate in manuscript (ع) supports this broad conclusion: a scribe who copied the text of *al-Fākiha* finishes his work of copying and then appends to it the text of the debate, announcing that "It is his text in its origin" (and not copied like the text of *al-Fākiha*). However, this phrase adds a new and important element. The phrase "God have mercy on him" suggests that the scribe of manuscript (ع) knows the

The author and the date of the text

author of the debate and that he had mentioned his name in the text, though he does not mention him in this specific phrase introducing the debate-text explicitly. The text is the colophon of *al-Fākiha* (unless we suspect the veracity of this scribe and consider his phrase as a blind copy of the original text from which he copied). Such suspicion would open the door for various suppositions).

Checking the ending phrase (the colophon) of *al-Fākiha* one notices that it is unique. Although its beginning looks similar to the beginning of other ending phrases and colophons found in several manuscripts and editions of *al-Fākiha*, it is completely different at the end: after the phrase in which Ibn 'Arabshāh mentions the date of completing the book "at the end of Rabī' 'Awwal" (858 A.H.), we find another phrase by Ibn 'Arabshāh in most of the manuscripts and printed editions and this is his invocation of God's care: "May God make its end and reward good and make its end better than its beginning through His grace and generosity."

In manuscript (ع) we find: "What was found in the original manuscript is this: It was begun and ended by the author's son, the one who is in need of God's forgiveness, He be exalted, 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ibrāhīm ibn 'Arabshāh al-Hanafi al-Anṣārī, may God treat them and the Moslems with His mysterious graces." This phrase is followed immediately by the scribe's colophon: "Its copying was finished on the blessed Thursday, Rabī' al-Ākhira 1055 A.H. by the weakest of human beings, the one who begs God's grace, 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad al-Djī'ān." The introductory phrase to the debate is written on both sides of the scribe's name in the shape of a turned up triangle.

This phrase adds a very important element of information, which helps us in our search for the author of the text and his period. The context suggests that the person intended in the phrase is the son of the author of *Fākihat al-khulafā*, 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn 'Arabshāh, and that he added the text of the debate, which he himself had written, to the text of *al-Fākiha*, which he here copied.

The fact that there is a great similarity between the beginning of the introductory phrase of the debate in (إ) and (ج) and the beginning of the ending phrase of *al-Fākiha* in (ع) leads me to give preference to this view over other possibilities. This similarity leads to the following notes and conclusions:

1. Although manuscript (ε) is relatively new (dating from 1055/1645), the ending phrase of *al-Fākiha* preceding the colophon is old and dates back to a period before 987/1579. This is confirmed by the existence of part of it in a manuscript from that year (the manuscript ⚫), and another part, much smaller, in a manuscript from the year 996/1588 (the manuscript ⚪).
2. The introductory phrase in manuscript (⠁) is missing. The scribe dropped some of its words. (By ‘scribe’ I mean here scribe of (⠁) or the scribe of the manuscript from which scribe (⠁) copied.) For one reason or another, this scribe dropped the name of the person to whom the pronouns in the introductory phrase refer, “He wrote it from the beginning to the end”. Then he used this phrase as part of an introduction to the text of the boasting debate rather than as a concluding phrase to the book (*al-Fākiha*).
3. The ‘mother phrase’, that was conserved in the phrase of (ε) and whose traces we find in (⠁), (⠃) and (⠋), ends the text of *al-Fākiha* and introduces the text of the boasting debate, which is defined as a *latīfa wa wāki'a zarīfa*.
4. The scribe (or the dictator) of the ‘mother manuscript’, from which descend all the other manuscripts that appended the text of the *Debate Between Rice and Pomegranate Seeds* to *al-Fākiha*, is most probably ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Arabshāh.
5. Most probably, the author of the boasting debate is ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn ‘Arabshāh. The ambiguity of the ending phrase of *al-Fākiha* in (ε) is explained by either of the following explanations:
 - a. Its scribe replaced the colophon of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Arabshāh in which he mentions the date of completing his work by another dating phrase for his own work and in doing so he separated the name ‘Abd al-Wahhāb from the phrase “he has from his own”.
 - b. Its scribe added the phrase of invocation of God’s mercy after that phrase.
6. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s reference to himself in the third person singular in the phrase “written by him” is not unusual. It is a continuation of his method in the text: “He wrote it from the beginning to the end”... “the son of the author”... “May God treat them...”.

7. Some scribes dropped the abridged introductory phrase because of its ambiguity and retained the phrase that indicates that what follows is identical to what was found in the original manuscript. This is the case of the scribes of (⠁) and (⠃) or the scribe of the original manuscript from which they drew. Some of them retained a fragment of the describing sentence of the following text: *latīfa*. This is the case of the scribe of (⠋).
8. This debate is not mentioned among ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Arabshāh’s works, which have been generally reviewed in well known biographies, and it is not mentioned in books and catalogues because of the fact that it is relatively hidden at the end of manuscripts of *al-Fākiha* (and is not even included in some versions) and because of its non-appearance as an independent work or in a work that bears the name of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Arabshāh.

I say this while aware of the possibility of the existence of other solutions. It can be supposed that the sequence of events goes as follows: Ibn ‘Arabshāh writes *al-Fākiha*. Several copies are made. Then his son ‘Abd al-Wahhāb makes a copy at the end of which he adds the phrase mentioned in manuscript (ε) in order to point out that he is the scribe who copied the book from beginning to end. Another scribe takes up and copies from ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s copy and keeps his phrase adding to the text of *al-Fākiha* the text of the debate, which he (the scribe) copied, announcing that it was written from the beginning to the end by him (*lahu min aṣlihi*) and NOT copied by him (*laysa min naskhihi*). Thus, a third scribe gets confused and he utilizes the phrase as an introduction to the debate and as evidence that its writer is ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Arabshāh, adding that phrase of invocation of God’s mercy after the name. The same may have happened to the scribe of the ‘mother manuscript’, from which the scribe of (ε) copied his text. Another scribe copies the book and adds the text of the debate, but he abridges some words from the introductory phrase, dropping the name of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb for some reason. This is also the case for the scribe of manuscript (⠁) or the scribe of the ‘mother manuscript’ from which he drew and the scribe of manuscript (⠃). A third scribe copies the book and appends to it the debate text leaving most of the introduction and finding it sufficient to retain the descriptive term *latīfa*. This is the case of the scribe of manuscript (⠋).