

Adab* without the Crusades: The Inebriated Solidarity of a Young Officer's Hunting Epistle

MATTHEW L. KEEGAN

*Barnard College of Columbia University,
New York*

(mlkeegan@barnard.edu)

Abstract

The adab of the sixth/twelfth century is most often viewed through the lens of the counter-Crusade and the “Sunni revival.” It is generally assumed that Muslim solidarity was constructed through shared piety and an evocation of the pristine Islamic past. The hunting epistle of Yaghmur b. ʿĪsā al-ʿUkbarī (d. ca. 558/1163) offers a different perspective on how solidarity was imagined. It depicts a drunken feast, followed by a multiday hunting expedition, followed by a second drunken feast. Whereas these inebriated activities are full of fellowship, the return to God-fearing piety at the end of the epistle is marked by loneliness and alienation. Reading adab without the framework of the Crusades offers an opportunity to rethink the sensibilities of the period while contributing to our knowledge of adab texts written by authors whose works usually do not survive. Yaghmur’s epistle is preserved in the adab anthology of ʿImād al-Dīn al-İṣfahānī and attributed to an Arabized Turkish military officer who is otherwise unknown, but the anthologist claims to have edited the epistle, which suggests that Yaghmur is actually a coauthor.

* This article is dedicated to Michael Cook as a small token of my appreciation for organizing the Holberg Seminar and inviting me to participate. The intellectual fruitfulness of our annual meetings, as well as the lasting friendships and solidarities that developed from that seminar, have been crucial to my development as a scholar. This article is testament to that fact. The essay was originally part of a paper that I presented at NYU Abu Dhabi during a workshop organized by Christian Mauder, another Holbergian. The first part of that paper forms a companion article, which is forthcoming in the journal *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* and is entitled “Rethinking Poetry as (Anti-Crusader) Propaganda: Licentiousness and Cross-Confessional Patronage in the *Ḥarīdat al-Qaṣr*.” This article and, to some degree or other, all my scholarly work have also been greatly enriched by a fateful semester in the spring of 2011 during which I took Michael’s famous seminar on the Islamic scholarly tradition. For the warmth and rigors of those experiences and for much else besides, I am grateful. Thanks are also due to Guy Ron-Gilboa, Perla Alvarez, and the anonymous reviewers for their excellent comments on an earlier draft of this essay. The remaining oversights and errors are entirely my own.

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We turned against passion and swore ourselves to God-fearing devotion. We took refuge in the realm of right conduct and donned the armor of good behavior. We rectified our past faults and dreaded useless activity. We were afflicted with parting from that company and were driven to estrangement from those companions. . . . This is the story of the Passing Days (*al-ayyām*) among humankind and their effects on both elites and common folk. Their pleasures are like dreams and their wakefulness is like sleep. May God make us among those who triumph with everlasting Paradise.

—Yaghmur b. ʿĪsā, *Risāla ṭardiyya*, in *Kharīdat al-qaṣr*¹

Thus ends the hunting epistle (*risāla ṭardiyya*) attributed to a young military officer in Damascus named Yaghmur b. ʿĪsā al-ʿUkbarī (d. ca. 558/1163).² The epistle, whose problematic authorship is discussed below and which comes to thirty-six pages in print, is an account of a drinking party and a wine-soaked ten-day hunting expedition, followed by a second drinking party that lasts several days. The epistle’s turn to God-fearing devotion and good behavior in its final passage evokes in the narrator a sense of loneliness, nostalgia, and estrangement (*ghurba*). Although the inebriated activities of hunting and feasting are described in the final lines of the epistle as “useless activity” (*ḥābiṭ al-ʿamal*), they are nevertheless considered occasions of solidarity throughout the rest of the epistle. Ascetic piety, by contrast, appears in the passage quoted above as something that leads to a breakdown in companionship. At the same time, Yaghmur portrays the period of fellowship, drinking, hunting, and dispersal as an “account of the Passing Days among humankind” (*sīrat al-ayyām fī al-anām*). It is therefore not simply a story of Yaghmur’s personal experience but a more general account of fleeting pleasures in the face of the terrible triumvirate of Time (*al-zamān*), Fickle Fortune (*al-dahr*), and the Passing Days (*al-ayyām*).³ Yaghmur’s epistle begins by urging the reader to face the uncertainties of Fate (*al-qadar*) by seizing the day (*ighṭinām al-ʿumr*), but it ends with the recognition that all

1. ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr* (Levant), ed. S. Fayṣal (Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Hāshimiyya, 1955), 1:389. The *Kharīda* is modeled on earlier, geographically organized *adab* anthologies and is divided into four unequal sections by ʿImād al-Dīn himself: (1) Baghdad and its environs, (2) the Persian East, including Iṣfahān and Khurāsān, (3) the Levant (*al-Shām*), which includes Mosul and the Arabian Peninsula, and (4) Egypt and the West (*al-Maghrib*), including Sicily. Teams from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia have edited the anthology piecemeal over the course of decades, between 1951 and 1999, each addressing the portion of the anthology that covers their own region. I cite the *Kharīda* throughout the article by noting the region of the edition in parentheses (Iraq, Levant, East, Egypt, or West). For the geographically organized anthology of al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1039) and the history of *adab* anthologies more generally, see B. Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His “Yatīmat al-Dahr”* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

2. Although the edition of the text has ʿImād al-Dīn say that Yaghmur’s death took place in 508 or 509, this is impossible. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354. ʿImād al-Dīn met Yaghmur when he visited Damascus in 562/1166–67 or 571/1175–76, and he apparently completed the *Kharīda* in 572/1176–77. Thus, as Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has pointed out, Yaghmur must have died either in 568–69/1172–74 or in 558–59/1162–64. J. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 214.

3. I use capitalized translations in instances in which I take the words to be personified.

things come to an end and that the pleasures of this earthly life are as though they were in a dream.

At first glance, Yaghmur's epistle seems to be negotiating two diametrically opposed responses to the shortness of human life: one can either seize the day or turn to asceticism in hope for the next life. On closer inspection, however, the two responses are not truly opposed to one another in the epistle but rather temporally mediated. There is a time to seize the day and enjoy the pleasures of life with one's companions, and there is a time for turning to righteous conduct. The loneliness that comes along with asceticism and good behavior suggests that social solidarity is undergirded by shared pleasures rather than shared piety. At the same time, the concern for Islam and the next life is never truly absent, even as the characters in the epistle indulge in earthly pleasures, which are described as a kind of earthly version of Islamic paradise.

Yaghmur's epistle was written sometime in the latter half of what I call the "long sixth/twelfth century," a term that I have coined to refer to the century and a half between the Frankish conquest of Jerusalem in 492/1099 and the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 656/1258. The history of this period is well known because it is the era of the Crusades. By contrast, the *adab* of the long sixth/twelfth century has received scant attention, perhaps because it sits awkwardly between the lifetime of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) and the Mamluk period.⁴ Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* were once the boundary beyond which scholars of Classical Arabic literature deigned not to tread because of the supposed decadence and dullness of the material found in the later, "postclassical" period. Although scholars of Mamluk-era *adab* have successfully revitalized interest in the so-called decadent period, the long sixth/twelfth century remains largely unstudied.⁵ The major exception to this trend is the *adab* (both poetry and prose) written about the Crusades. For example, the *Kitāb al-I'tibār* (*Book of Contemplation*) of Usāma b. Munqidh (d. 584/1188) has been translated into English twice in the past century precisely because it is a source for the Muslim response to the Crusades, but major *adab* figures such as al-Wahrānī (d. 565/1179) and Bulbul al-Gharām al-Ḥājirī (d. 632/1235) are scarcely recognizable, even among specialists in Classical Arabic.⁶

4. S. von Hees, ed., *Inḥiṭāt—The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2017); M. Cooperson, "The Abbasid 'Golden Age': An Excavation," *Al-Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 25 (2017): 41–65. These two recent sources and the bibliographies they supply suggest the fruitfulness of this reevaluation.

5. T. Bauer, "'Ayna hādihā min al-Mutanabbī!': Toward an Aesthetic of Mamluk Literature," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22.

6. Nizar Hermes has made a similar point regarding Ibn al-Qaysarānī (d. 548/1153), whom modern scholars tend not to recognize even though he was one of the most famous and important poets of his era. N. Hermes, "The Poet(ry) of Frankish Enchantment: The *Ifrañjiyyāt* of Ibn Qaysarānī," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20 (2017): 267–87. The translations of Usāma b. Munqidh are *The Book of Contemplation*, trans. P. Cobb (London: Penguin Books, 2008), and *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades*, trans. P. K. Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), reprinted several times. A small amount of work has been done on al-Wahrānī; e.g., E. K. Rowson, "Parody in Arabic *Adab*: The *Rasā'il* of al-Wahrānī" (unpublished paper); H. Fāhdrih, "Parodie im 'Mittelalter': Aus einem Werk des M. B. Muḥriz al-Wahrānī (gest. 1179–80)," in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler, 439–46 (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1994); al-Wahrānī, *Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-maqāmātuḥu wa-rasā'iluḥu*, ed. I. Sha'lān and M. Naghash (Köln:

The Euro-American fixation with the Crusades creates both a selection bias in favor of Crusade-related material and an incitement to a particular mode of discourse about the Crusades to the exclusion of other cultural and political concerns. One of the assumptions underpinning the modern discourse on the long sixth/twelfth century is that Islamic political ideology in this period was constructed and reinforced through a commitment to ascetic piety and to an imagined community rooted in the early Islamic past. Summing up several scholarly contributions on this topic, Daniella Talmon-Heller states that scholars have established “a firm link between personal piety and enlistment to the defense of Dar al-Islam.”⁷ Solidarity in the era of the Crusades has thus generally been imagined as a kind of “moralistic community” that was established through “propaganda” focused on “asceticism, humility . . . and sincere personal religiosity.”⁸

Given these assumptions about the centrality of personal piety in the counter-Crusade, there is a tendency to read the *adab* of the period either as propaganda or as an expression of the “Sunni revival.” Although the framework of the Sunni revival has been called into question, there remains a tendency to see the long sixth/twelfth century as an age of religious fervor.⁹ In particular, scholars have trained their attention on texts that urge ascetic piety and seek to portray counter-Crusading heroes such as Saladin as ascetic warriors. I have argued against using the term “propaganda” and its conceptual apparatus in a companion article entitled “Rethinking Poetry as (Anti-Crusader) Propaganda.” Propaganda and related terms like censorship do not effectively capture the ways in which poetry circulated as an elite discourse during this period, and they do not take account of the wide variety of topics addressed in *adab*. A survey of the era’s poetry suggests that this was not an age that was single-mindedly focused on the counter-Crusade and the Sunni revival but one that was full of Shi’ite poets, cross-confessional patronage networks, and licentious poetry.¹⁰

Yaghmur’s epistle represents a further opportunity to rethink the *adab* production of this period because Yaghmur foregrounds the rather un-ascetic behaviors of drinking and hunting. The epistle is preserved in ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 597/1201) massive *adab* anthology, *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-‘aṣr* (The palace’s perfect pearl and the register

Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1998). It should be noted that the date of the author’s death on the cover of this edition is given as 1575 CE, which is incorrect.

7. D. Talmon-Heller, “Historical Motifs in the Writing of Muslim Authors of the Crusading Era,” in *The Crusader World*, ed. A. Boas, 378–90 (New York: Routledge, 2016), 378. Surveys of this material can also be found in O. Latiff, *The Cutting Edge of the Poet’s Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

8. Talmon-Heller, “Historical Motifs,” 385. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Keegan, “Rethinking Poetry.”

9. A. C. S. Peacock summarizes this brand of revisionist scholarship and demonstrates that the Seljuks were pragmatists who, whatever their personal feelings, did not seek to enforce religious conformity. Sunni factionalism seems to have presented a bigger problem than sectarian disputes did. Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 247–85. Stephennie Mulder has offered a cogent critique of a sectarian paradigm for reading ‘Alid shrines in the long sixth/twelfth century, but due to her focus on certain kinds of sources and materials, she characterizes the atmosphere of the age as one of religious excitement. Mulder, *Shrines of the ‘Alids in Medieval Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3–4.

10. Keegan, “Rethinking Poetry.”

of the people of the present age), which covers sixteen volumes in print and is devoted almost exclusively to poetry. ‘Imād al-Dīn calls Yaghmur an “Arabized Turk (*min muwalladī al-atrāk*) and one of Damascus’s well-known military men (*umarā’ihā al-ma’rūfin*).”¹¹ What this epistle apparently represents is a text originally composed by someone who was part of a broader military elite but who was marginal to the world of *adab* and Arabic scholarship. We seem to have no other record of this Yaghmur, a level of obscurity to which I will return below.¹²

Of course, one can easily find medieval sources that laud the ascetic piety of Muslim warriors or of counter-Crusaders like Saladin (d. 589/1193) and Nūr al-Dīn (d. 569/1174). A chronicle like Abū Shāma’s (d. 665/1268) *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāhiyya* portrays these two rulers as entirely devoted to austere piety and the pursuit of jihad. For example, Abū Shāma relates the story of a certain pious recluse who asked Nūr al-Dīn why he played polo, saying, “I did not think that you would engage in frivolity and play, and torture your horses without some religious benefit (*fā’ida dīniyya*).”¹³ Nūr al-Dīn explains that in the seasons when they are not actively waging jihad, the horses become listless and lose the ability to charge and retreat in battle unless they are made to exercise. Through this anecdote, the historian Abū Shāma cultivates an image of Nūr al-Dīn in which activities that might be associated with rest, amusement, and pleasure are all inscribed within an economy of the *fā’ida dīniyya*. ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, the anthologist who included Yaghmur’s epistle in his *Kharīda*, also participated in this form of ascetic image cultivation on behalf of his patrons. For instance, ‘Imād al-Dīn composed the following quatrain in the voice of his patron Nūr al-Dīn upon the latter’s request:

I vow that I have no goal except jihad.
Repose in anything else is burden for me.
Striving achieves nothing without seriousness (*jidd*).
Life without the seriousness of jihad is a [mere] game.¹⁴

These snapshots of ascetic fervor insist upon subordinating amusement, idleness, and pleasure to the goals of jihad. By stark contrast, Yaghmur’s epistle considers pleasure and piety to be compatible impulses that are suitable for different moments or stages of life. Hunting and drinking with one’s companions are not conceived of as part of a

11. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354.

12. Hämeen-Anttila also discusses the tantalizing possibility of identifying this Yaghmur with another Yaghmur who died around the same time and whom Ibn ‘Asākir calls *al-faqīh al-muqri’*. Were such an identification confirmed, it would shed yet further light on the mock-asceticism of this epistle. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 214.

13. Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāhiyya*, ed. I. al-Zaybaq (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1998), 1:35.

14. Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn*, 2:242. Translated somewhat differently in C. Hillenbrand, “Jihad Poetry in the Age of the Crusades,” in *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, ed. T.F. Madden, J.L. Naus, and V. Ryan, 9–24 (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 14. The ideal of the chivalric Muslim warrior who is both brave and chaste is also a feature of the *futuwwa* and ‘*ayyārī* ideologies discussed in D. Tor, *Violent Order: Warfare, Chivalry, and the ‘Ayyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 246–51.

fā'ida dīniyya, either as military exercises that support jihad or as a way of reinforcing the solidarity needed for the battlefield. Instead, Yaghmur's hunting epistle portrays pleasure and solidarity as virtues in themselves. In Yaghmur's epistle, companionship and social solidarity are ideals that are best achieved through imbibing wine, inebriation, licentiousness (*khalā'a*), homoerotic liaisons, and hunting. In the remainder of this article, I offer a brief introduction to Yaghmur's identity and a few preliminary remarks on the place of this epistle in the history of *adab*, followed by an exposition and analysis of this remarkable and moving epistle.

Yaghmur and the Coauthored Epistle

Everything we know for certain about Yaghmur's life is derived from 'Imād al-Dīn's biographical entry, which precedes the epistle. 'Imād al-Dīn tells us that he met the young man in Damascus and praises him for his bravery and his intellect, while mourning the fact that he died so young.¹⁵ 'Imād al-Dīn says that he came across an autograph copy of the hunting epistle after Yaghmur's death, and he lists the epistle's themes to introduce the text to the reader. 'Imād al-Dīn also states that he revised the text before including it in the anthology:

وجدتُ رسالةً له بخطه ذكر فيها ما يتضمن مُعاشرة الإخوان وتعب الزمان والحثّ على اغتنام الفُرص
ووصف الصيد والقنص وشرب المُدام وتقلب الأيام. ونقّحناها وصححناها وحذفنا منها وأصلحناها وكلّناها
ورصّعناها وأوردنا منها ما وقع الاختيار عليه نظماً ونثرًا وأحيينا له بإيرادها ذكرًا.

I found his epistle, written in his hand, in which he discusses what pertains to brotherly fellowship, weariness of the age, incitement to seize opportunities, descriptions of the hunt and setting snares, drinking wine, and the fickleness of the Passing Days. I revised it, corrected it, shortened it, set it right, crowned it, and adorned it [with rhyming prose]. I presented its prose and its poetry according to what suited my choice and revived his memory by presenting it.¹⁶

'Imād al-Dīn's discussion of his extensive revisions, abridgments, and emendations calls into question the extent to which Yaghmur can be considered the "author" of the epistle. At the very least, we must consider it coauthored, since Yaghmur's original composition has been reshaped to some unknown degree by 'Imād al-Dīn. It may be that Yaghmur originally wrote the epistle in so-called Middle Arabic, a register of language that does not follow all the grammatical conventions of the high Qur'ānic or Classical Arabic. His status as a non-Arab who had achieved some level of assimilation into Arabic culture is marked by his identification as a *muwallad*, and thus he might not (at least in 'Imād al-Dīn's view) have been a true master of Arabic.¹⁷ Alternatively, the epistle may have been written in a plain style of Classical Arabic that lacked the level of rhyming prose (*saj'*) that was in fashion at

15. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354.

16. *Ibid.*

17. My thanks are due to Rachel Schine for her insights on the meaning of this term.

the time. When ʿImād al-Dīn states that he “adorned” the epistle (*raṣṣaʿnāhā*), he is likely referring to his use of the intricate form of rhyming prose known as *sajʿ muraṣṣaʿ* in which entire phrases are quantitatively paralleled. Ordinary *sajʿ* could be limited to rhyming words at the end of each phrase.¹⁸

It is also worth considering the possibility that Yaghmur was not a real person at all but simply someone whom ʿImād al-Dīn invented in order to compose an epistle of his own invention. The trope of a “found text” is well known from cases like *Don Quixote* by Cervantes (d. 1616 CE), and it is also found in Arabic literature in, for example, the *Risālat al-qiyān* (Epistle on the singing girls) of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) and in an epistle entitled *Waqʿat al-aṭibbāʿ* (The battle of the physicians) by Ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066), an edition of which is currently being prepared for publication by Ignacio Sánchez.¹⁹ If ʿImād al-Dīn did invent the epistle and its author, then what we have is an author imagining himself as an Arabized Turkish officer through pseudonymy, but he does not give any hint of this fabrication. The *Kharīda*’s explicit aim of compilation and memorialization suggests that when ʿImād al-Dīn says he met the author and found an autograph manuscript of the epistle, he really means it. He regularly informs the reader of how and in what form he encountered the texts he anthologizes, and he also includes some details about his personal encounters with the authors, as he does here. In this sense, ʿImād al-Dīn is a distinct and frequent presence in his anthology and does not disappear behind the material he anthologizes, as many anthologizers seem to do.²⁰ The fact that Yaghmur’s biography was not included in other biographical compendia or anthologies is hardly proof that he did not exist, given that ʿImād al-Dīn anthologizes several authors who are otherwise unknown and who belong to social classes whose discursive production would not have been preserved as part of *adab* in earlier eras. For example, the *Kharīda* contains poems by an unnamed love-poet (*ghazzāl*) who is described as a member of the sub-elites (*ʿawāmm*) of Baghdad, and by a one-eyed Damascene hawker of goods (*bāʿi*) who writes a poem about wanting to be left alone.²¹ Yaghmur’s inclusion in the anthology can be seen as part of the widening purview of *adab* anthologies in this period, which reflected the proclivities of the anthologizers.

In fact, Yaghmur’s epistle is not the only example in the *Kharīda* of the anthologizer engaging in abridgment and emendation of a longer prose work. The entry that precedes Yaghmur’s contains an epistle that ʿImād al-Dīn claims to have abridged (*ikhtaṣartuhā*), although he does not say that he corrected or upgraded the language. This other epistle, entitled *al-Nasr wa-l-bulbul* (The eagle and the nightingale), is a kind of pious allegory by

18. D. Stewart, “Sajʿ in the Qurʾān: Prosody and Structure,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21 (1990): 101–39, at 131–32.

19. H. Mancing, “Cide Hamete Benengeli vs. Migue de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of Don Quixote,” *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 1 (1981): 63–81. J. E. Montgomery, “Beeston and the Singing-Girls,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 17–24, at 20. I am grateful to Ignacio Sánchez for bringing this epistle to my attention and for sharing a preliminary draft of his edition.

20. On this question, see A. Ghersetti, “A Pre-modern Anthologist at Work: The Case of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 718/1318),” in *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-modern Arabic Texts*, ed. L. Behzadi and J. Hämeen-Anttila, 23–46 (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015), 27–30.

21. *Kharīda* (Iraq), 2:323; *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:271–72.

al-Muhadhdhib al-Dimashqī, a Damascene preacher of the sixth/twelfth century.²² At the end of the allegorical epistle, ‘Imād al-Dīn seems almost apologetic about its hortatory quality, saying: “This epistle ends with a sermonizing section (*faṣl wa-ḥikmah*), which is not the task of the book (*laysa min sharḥ al-kitāb*).”²³ This comment sheds light on how ‘Imād al-Dīn conceived of his *Kharīda* and tells us something of his editorial practice. Apparently, the *Kharīda* was not designed to be a sermonizing work. However, ‘Imād al-Dīn is willing to leave intact a sermonizing section in *al-Nasr wa-l-bulbul*, even as he abridges that same epistle in other ways. In other words, the act of anthologizing includes editing but not eliminating material that is deemed to lie outside the boundaries of the book’s tone, task, or genre.

If we take ‘Imād al-Dīn at his word, Yaghmur’s epistle is a coauthored text. It is impossible to know how much each coauthor contributed to the version we have in the *Kharīda*, although ‘Imād al-Dīn’s comments suggest that he has mainly altered the formal aspects of the text while maintaining (if sometimes rearranging) the plot and thematic content set down by Yaghmur. If I am right in supposing that the epistle is not ‘Imād al-Dīn’s pseudepigraphic forgery, what we have is a remarkable example of *adab* composed by a military man whose participation in *adab* was of the more amateur variety, rather than that of an *adīb*. The epistle is likely just a tiny drop in a boundless ocean of *adab* that did not survive because it was not written by the elite producers of *adab*. The *Kharīda* thus marks an early phase in an ongoing trend in which anthologies expanded their scope. A similar process can be seen in Konrad Hirschler’s study of reading certificates (*samā‘āt*), and these certificates reveal an increasing interest in documenting readers with nonscholarly backgrounds.²⁴ Although there is certainly evidence of hostility to the entry of sub-elites into elite spheres such as *adab*, these polemics had little impact on the practice of including nonscholarly readers in *samā‘āt*. In a similar fashion, the *Kharīda* includes a wider range of voices than earlier anthologies do, which seems to reflect a growing elite interest in the discursive participation of previously invisible authors.²⁵ The social transformations of education and *adab* in this period thus led to the blurring and intermingling of elites and literate sub-elites in the *samā‘āt* and the anthology.

It seems likely that authors who were not specialists in the *adab* tradition also produced and circulated their works in earlier periods but that much of it did not survive. As Adam Talib has argued with reference to poetry, the past preserved by *adab* anthologies is a “gilded cage” that can be deceptive, a point that is equally applicable to prose:

22. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:340.

23. *Ibid.*, 1:353.

24. K. Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 60–70.

25. T. Bauer, “Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–32, at 109–11; T. Herzog, “Composition and Worldview of Some *Bourgeois* and *Petit-Bourgeois* Mamluk *Adab*-Encyclopedias,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 100–129, at 105–6. The normative reaction against including nonscholarly readers in reading certificates “had little influence on the praxis of knowledge transmission,” but elite hostility to certain genres of writing that were seen as non-elite persisted. Hirschler, *Written Word*, 68 and 164–93.

We must not allow the colossal volume of anthologized material to dupe us into thinking that it is everything. . . . If ours is an anthological literary history, then it is also true that for the study of Classical Arabic poetry, the extra-anthological has been irrevocably lost. Whatever texts and whichever poets failed to make it aboard these anthological arks—whether because they were deliberately excluded or because they inhabited literary worlds that were for all intents and purposes sealed off from what we have to presume were the more elite worlds in which anthologists circulated—that extra-anthological past is undiscoverable today.²⁶

Perhaps Yaghmur’s epistle represents a fragment of a more widespread kind of *adab* that is otherwise lost, or perhaps this very notion that we have evidence of lost *adab* is a case of the anthology duping us into thinking we can see beyond the gilded cage. In either case, it should be remembered that our encounter with Yaghmur’s epistle is at least doubly mediated. It is mediated firstly by ‘Imād al-Dīn’s editorial interventions and secondly by the framework of the Crusades that overwhelms the modern study of the long sixth/twelfth century. Although it is impossible to recover the extra-anthological past, the study of a text that seems to have just barely made it aboard the anthological ark can perhaps shed light on some overlooked aspects of *adab*’s history. For example, Yaghmur’s identity as an “Arabized Turk” and as one of the “well-known military men” of Damascus puts his work into a category of *adab* produced by the Turkic military elite.²⁷ The role of this “non-Arab” group in the production of *adab* and the role of courts dominated by a non-Arab elite have often been dismissed or diminished.²⁸ Yaghmur’s epistle may have had a very limited circulation, given that ‘Imād al-Dīn found it in what may have always been a unique manuscript, written in the author’s own hand. The text is not known to survive independently of the *Kharīda*, which means that it would have probably flickered out of existence without ‘Imād al-Dīn’s intervention. However, it is likely part of a broader phenomenon of ephemeral texts by nonscholarly and non-Arab authors.

In spite of Yaghmur’s status as a marginal participant in *adab*, this elite soldier’s epistle clearly draws in sophisticated and original ways on both the poetic tradition of hunting odes (*qaṣā'id ṭardiyya*) and the narrative *maqāma* tradition. The poet Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī (d. 357/968) experimented with lengthening and narrativizing the hunting ode when he composed a 136-line *urjūza muzdawīja* (a poem in rhyming couplets in the looser metrical

26. A. Talib, review of *The Anthologist’s Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Tha‘ālibī and His “Yatīmat al-Dahr”* by Bilal Orfali, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139 (2019): 251–53, at 253.

27. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354.

28. The major exceptions are B. Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks,” *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. M. Rosen-Ayalon, 249–60 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977); U. Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Language: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988): 81–114; J. Van Steenberg, “Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication, and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 1–28; C. Mauder, *Gelehrte Krieger: Die Mamluken als Träger arabischsprachiger Bildung nach al-Ṣafadī, al-Maqrīzī und weiteren Quellen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2012); C. Mauder and C. Markiewicz, “A New Source on the Social Gatherings (*Majālis*) of the Mamluk Sulṭān Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī,” *Al-Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 24 (2016): 145–48.

form of *rajaz*), which describes a single day's hunt in elaborate detail. Al-Ḥamdānī's poem begins by referring to the treachery of the Passing Days and Fickle Fortune, and it ends with a seven-day-long feast of wine and meat.²⁹ These are also themes that Yaghmur's rhyming prose epistle includes and dwells on at greater length. Abū Firās's *muzdawija ṭardiyya* was therefore not, as Jaroslav Stetkevych has suggested, a "historical non sequitur—a never repeated formal curiosity."³⁰ In fact, the *muzdawija ṭardiyya* found fertile ground in the Mamluk period, as Thomas Bauer's study of Ibn Faḍl Allāh's (d. 749/1349) *muzdawija* has shown. Furthermore, the cognate narrative genre of the *risāla ṭardiyya* seems to have thrived both in the long sixth/twelfth century and in the Mamluk period.³¹ At the same time, Yaghmur's narrative bears certain similarities to the *maqāma* genre. As Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has pointed out regarding Yaghmur's epistle, "had it been written some five centuries later, it would probably have been called *maqāmat al-ṭard*."³² Its protagonists are, after all, the elegant and eloquent men who are so familiar from the *maqāma* tradition, but the narrative here is longer than in a typical *maqāma* and revolves around the themes of hunting and inebriated solidarity in the face of fickle fortune. It is to this narrative itself that we now turn.

Yaghmur's Epistle: Inebriated Solidarity

Yaghmur's prosimetric hunting epistle begins with a nonnarrative prologue and then launches into the story of a group of companions who engage in a drinking party and then set off on a multiday hunt that also involves a good deal of drinking. At the end of the hunt, they indulge in a second bout of drunken revelry. The epistle can usefully be divided into five unequal movements: (1) the nonnarrative encomium to youth and wine; (2) the narrator's companions introduced; (3) the drinking party and a mock sermon; (4) the journey, the hunt, and the second revel; (5) the repentance. The repentance and the mock sermon during the drinking party mark intrusions of ascetic piety into a world of dissolute behavior, but they also mark the moments in which group solidarity breaks down. The vocabulary of Islam (but not of asceticism) appears elsewhere, too, but it is less disruptive to group solidarity.

In the opening movement, the first-person narrator and persona of the author praises youth (*ṣibā*) as the soul of companionship. He describes the ideal brother-companion as someone who is generous, intelligent, powerful, possessed of youthful passion (*ṣabwa*), and slow to anger. The narrator says that youth itself urges us to "seize the day" (*ightinām al-ʿumr*)

29. J. Stetkevych, *The Hunt in Arabic Poetry: From Heroic to Lyric to Metapoetic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 205–22.

30. Stetkevych, *Hunt in Arabic Poetry*, 185.

31. T. Bauer, "The Dawādār's Hunting Party: A Mamluk *Muzdawija Ṭardiyya*, Probably by Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Faḍl Allāh," in *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, ed. A. Vrolijk and J. P. Hogendijk, 291–312 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

32. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 215.

because this world is fickle and inconstant.³³ Wine—and lots of it—is the appropriate response to and revenge against the vicissitudes of this world.

وليس للمقيم بها مقام ولا للمنتقم من صرّفها انتقام إلا بمداومة الصهباء في الإصباح والإمساء لصرف الهمّ
عن قلبه بصرف الراح وجعل قدحه الكبير من الأقداح ومباكرة دنّه وخمارة ومراوحة غوده ومزماره.

The one who resides in [this world (*al-dunyā*)] has no abode, and there is no revenge for anyone against its vicissitudes except passing around the ruddy red drink at dawn and at dusk to rid his heart of care with the purity of wine, making his goblet the largest one, hastening in the morning to his wine jug and his wine merchant, and turning in the evening to his oud and his flute.³⁴

Rather than waiting for the next world (*al-ākhirā*), Yaghmur urges his reader: *Carpe diem!* The poignancy of this introduction is heightened by the fact that the author died so young. As ‘Imād al-Dīn says of Yaghmur, “Fate (*al-qadar*) brought about the waning of his brilliant star and the stumbling of his galloping steed.”³⁵ The awful consequences wrought by the vicissitudes of Fate and the inconstancy of Time are therefore brought into stark relief in the *Kharīda* by the reader’s foreknowledge of the author’s early demise.

In the epistle’s second movement, the narrator introduces his companions and their habits. He tells us that God granted him noble companions (*fataḥa Allāhu lī bi-sāda umarā*).³⁶ These generous companions act as a bulwark against the vagaries of Time, “granting sanctuary when the Passing Days are unjust (*yuḡīrūn idhā jārat al-ayyām*).”³⁷ Their friendship is based on an intimacy that allows for indulgence in licentiousness and iniquity:

فلما اتفقت الشّهوات وزالت الشّبّهات شرعنا في استدامة المدام وأتبعنا الليالي فيها والأيام لا نفيق من صبوح
وغبوق ولا نسأم من خلاعة وفسوق ما بين نغم أوتارٍ ودلّف راووق مستوطنين منزلاً للخلوة
وارتشاف القهوة فاقترضى ما بيننا من اقتراح الألفه والتألف واطراح الكلفة والتكلف أن قسمنا الأيام والليالي
بيننا أقسامًا.

When our passions aligned and our doubts dissipated, we began to pass around the wine. We followed nights of revelry with days, not recovering from the morning draught or the evening draught. We had no loathing for licentiousness or iniquities among the melody of stringed instruments and the heavily laden wine jugs, as we settled down in a secluded spot to sip wine. The easy flow of affection and concord among us and the casting aside of discomfort and formality led us to distribute our nights and days among ourselves.³⁸

33. *Kharīda (Levant)*, 1:355.

34. *Ibid.*, 1:356.

35. *Ibid.*, 1:354.

36. *Ibid.*, 1:357.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, 1:358.

Friendship and solidarity with one's fellows are presented here as a way of protecting oneself from the vicissitudes of Time and the injustice of Fate. This form of solidarity is based not on a shared religious sensibility but on communal vice and a willingness to engage in licentiousness (*khalā'a*) and iniquities (*fusūq*) together.

In contrast to this social protection against injustice, the rogue-tricksters of the classical *maqāma* protect themselves against the injustices of the world by relying on their own wits. In the *maqāmas* of al-Hamadhānī (d. 395/1008) and al-Ḥarīrī, the rogue-trickster often excuses his deceptions with reference to the injustices of Time. For example, in al-Hamadhānī's *al-Maqāma al-qirdiyya* (The imposture of the monkey), the narrator witnesses a man putting on a show with a dancing monkey. When he finds that the monkey trainer is none other than his old friend, the rogue Abū al-Faḥ al-Iskandarī, he asks, "What is all this baseness? Shame on you!" Al-Iskandarī replies:

الذنب للأيام لا لي فاعتب على صرف الليالي
بالحمق ادركت المنى ورفلت في حلل الجمال

The fault belongs to the Passing Days and not to me,
so censure the calamitous nights.
With foolishness I gained what I desired,
and I swaggered along in my lovely garments.³⁹

In al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāma* collection, the eloquent rogue Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī sometimes makes more explicit reference to the problem of politics, noting that Fickle Fortune (*al-dahr*) has given power to deficient people (*ahl al-naqīṣa*).⁴⁰ His response to this unjust political environment is to use his eloquence and erudition to trick the ignorant and relieve them of their money. The success of his tricks is predicated upon adjusting his discourse to the context of the performance:

ليست لكل زمان لبؤسا ولا يست صرقيته نعمى وبؤسا
وعاشرت كل جليس بما يلائمه لأروق الجليسا
فعدت الرواة أدير الكلام وبين السقاة أدير الكؤوسا
وطورا بوعظي أسيل الدموع وطورا بلهوي أسر النفوسا

I wore attire appropriate for every Time
and was on intimate terms with its alternating states—happiness and misery.
I dealt with each companion according
to what suited him to give my companion pleasure.
With the transmitters of tales, I pass 'round speech,
and among those who pour out wine, I pass 'round the cups.

39. Al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt Abī al-Faḥ al-Hamadhānī*, ed. Y. al-Nabhānī (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Jawā'ib, 1881 [1298]), 32.

40. Al-Ḥarīrī, *Kitāb al-Maqāmāt li-l-shaykh al-'ālim Abī Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-Ḥarīrī ma'a sharḥ mukhtār ta'lif al-'abd al-ḥaqīr aṣghar 'ibād Allāh Silwistarā Disāsī*, ed. A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, rev. M. Reinaud and M. Derenbourg, 2nd ed. (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1847), 1:21.

Sometimes, with my exhortation, I make tears flow,
and sometimes, with my playfulness, I make souls rejoice.⁴¹

In the *maqāmas* of al-Ḥarīrī and al-Hamadhānī, the passage of time leads to the alternation between the two states of happiness and misery. The trickster is able to preserve his own safety and comfort in spite of this uncertainty only by taking advantage of the gullibility of others and by adjusting his own comportment to fit the context. The “companion” (*jalīs*) to whom Abū Zayd refers in the lines quoted above is both his audience and his victim.

Whereas the *maqāma*’s trickster skillfully manages to thrive in an uncertain world, Yaghmur’s narrator finds refuge from Time and its vicissitudes in his companions, who revel in licentiousness and frivolity. Their refusal to consider the economy of the *fā’ida dīniyya* is the condition of possibility for their solidarity. The aim of the narrator and his companions in Yaghmur’s epistle is not to take advantage of the ignorant in society but to surround themselves with like-minded fellows whose mutual generosity protects each from hardship. A further difference with the *maqāmas* of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī can be found in the role of the narrators. In the *maqāmas*, ‘Īsā b. Hishām and al-Ḥārith b. Hammām occasionally express shock and dismay at the tricksters’ dissolute behavior, even as they also travel with them and participate in their ruses. In Yaghmur’s epistle, the first-person narrator is the one who expresses his sincere admiration for the licentious life. One does not get the sense that licentiousness is a subversive anti-norm that is being presented to the reader so that it can be condemned. Nor does this licentious behavior situate the epistle outside of Islam, as shall be seen below. The licentious and iniquitous behavior of this intimate group of Muslim gentlemen is put forward as the highest ideal of fellowship, and each member takes a turn to put on a lavish feast, suggesting a high level of material wealth.

The matter of feasting brings us to the third movement in the epistle: the Islamic drinking party in which a certain nameless, generous gentleman in the group takes his turn to host his comrades. The party begins with a heavenly scene full of boys, women, and wine, all of which evokes the imagery of Paradise. The pleasures of the hereafter become part of the here and now. A beautiful slave boy (*ghulām*) invites the guests into the house, and a second slave boy, even more beautiful than the first, invites them to drink. The second boy declares himself the messenger (*rasūl*) from the daughter of the vine, the bringer of happiness that is found in goblets. In other words, he is wine’s prophet.⁴² Drinking and music follow, and the guests are surrounded by “the houris and the boys” of paradise, suggestive of the erotic potential of both the male and the female companions of the afterlife.⁴³ The activities described are quite distinct from the ascetic notions of how to be Islamic, but this drinking party is a thoroughly Islamic one in Shahab Ahmed’s sense. That is, it is a hermeneutical engagement in Islamic meaning-making that explores paradox and contradiction within the textual and contextual expressions of Muslims’ lived realities.⁴⁴

41. Ibid., 420.

42. *Kharīda (Levant)*, 1:360.

43. Ibid., 1:361.

44. S. Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 165 and 409.

As the night goes on and the wine takes its hold on the guests, a pleasurable languor sets in, with poetry and stories being recalled and recited. Suddenly the leader of the group—perhaps the generous host himself—stands up and acts as a preacher (*qāma finā sayyid al-qawm khaṭīban*). He begins to reproach the others for “taking pleasure in what the miserly hand of Time has granted you and delighting in this [earthly] abode before the departure [of death].”⁴⁵ This preacher is not a pious gate-crasher reminding the assembled guests of their religious duties. Rather, he is quite drunk and having a bit of fun by pretending asceticism. Having confused his friends, he pauses and takes a large tankard in his hand, looking askance at it. He contemplates it for a moment, prolonging his audience’s bewildered anticipation. The drunk preacher then changes his tune and launches into a short poem in praise of wine. He urges his friends to “seize life and drink it up like aged wine.” Then, with a tongue that has been loosened by intoxication (*bi-lisān qad aṭlaqathu al-nashwa*), he harangues the crowd to stop chattering and drink: “Busy yourselves with wine instead of reciting poetry!”⁴⁶

The character of the preacher-host who turns quickly from asceticism to revelry recalls the figure of the gate-crasher in the *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* of Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī (fl. late fourth/tenth century). Al-Azdī’s main protagonist is called Abū al-Qāsim, giving the name to the text itself, and he begins by pretending to be an ascetic lecturing the revelers at a party. Like the preacher in Yaghmur’s epistle, Abū al-Qāsim takes long breaks in his harangue, making people think that he has finished. Unlike Yaghmur’s preacher, Abū al-Qāsim resumes his preaching over and over again until one of the braver revelers addresses him: “O Abū al-Qāsim! That is all fine and good, but everyone in the group drinks and fucks (*mā fī al-qawm illā man yashrab wa-yanīk*)!”⁴⁷ Abū al-Qāsim smiles when he hears this and quickly changes his tune from asceticism to obscenity (*mujūn*): “You swear by God it is the truth? [You are] cuckolds and slapstick jesters? Sons of coitus and pillow-play? Followers of the grilled [foods] and the baked? Worshippers of the wine cup and the goblet?”⁴⁸ Abū al-Qāsim then acts as the evening’s entertainment, regaling the revelers with entertaining and licentious discourse that is full of insults, jest, and obscenity. He gets increasingly drunk over the course of the evening and eventually passes out. By contrast, Yaghmur’s preacher pretends asceticism *after he has already become drunk*, and the ascetic performance seems to be part of the evening’s entertainment. The sermon itself operates as a kind of prank. It is clear that Yaghmur’s epistle draws on the tropes and themes of previous works of *adab*, such as the *maqāma* and the *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*, all the while creatively recasting them to fit within the narrative hunting epistle.

Yaghmur’s drunk preacher, having given up his momentary performance of piety, encourages his guests to relax, drink, and stay the night. His sudden reversal indexes the

45. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:362.

46. *Ibid.*, 1:363.

47. Al-Azdī, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī*, ed. A. Mez (Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1902), 6. For a slightly different translation, see E. Selove, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim: A Literary Banquet* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 36.

48. Al-Azdī, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*, 6.

two possible ethical responses to the shortness of life, mentioned earlier. One may respond by seizing the day and living for the moment or by focusing one's mind entirely on the hereafter. An awareness of mortality produces both reactions, and these two reactions coexist unproblematically, as Thomas Bauer has shown.⁴⁹ However, it would be hard to consider this inebriated preacher's performance secular or separate from Islam, even if (or precisely because) it would offend the sensibilities of *some* Muslims. Indeed, both the preacher's harangue and the description of the drinking party draw upon an Islamic vocabulary.

When the call to the dawn prayer rings out and the birds begin chirping, the companions are quite hung over. They prepare for breakfast, speaking to one another in gestures to avoid raising their voices and aggravating their hangovers. Then, suddenly, a messenger (*mukhabbir*) arrives and knocks on the door to tell them that a hunt is afoot.⁵⁰ Thus begins the fourth movement of the epistle, which consists of the journey to the hunt and the hunt itself. It begins with a parade of horses, followed by a day of travel to seek the hunt, during which they continue drinking so that "our day had not reached its midpoint before we healed our hangovers with wine (*inkasara bi-l-khamr khumārunā*)."⁵¹ When they finally dismount at dusk, a scene of sublimated eroticism unfolds, hinted at in the beginning of the stormy evening and at the end.

When the men dismount from their horses, they "embrace the beloveds" (*muqārafat al-ḥabāʾib*).⁵² According to the *Lisān al-ʿArab* of Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), the term *muqārafa* refers to sexual intercourse (*jimāʿ*) between a man and a woman, which suggests that there is an overtly sexual component to this evening embrace.⁵³ The companions eat and go to bed. While they are ostensibly asleep, a storm rolls in, bringing with it wind, rain, thunder, and lightning, all of which are described in exquisite detail. Two details in particular stand out and add complexity to this passionate and euphemistic storm. The first detail is that the narrator describes the plants responding to the life-giving rain as "an indication of the oneness of the Living, the Eternal," referring to names of God, and he later says that the rainwater comes from the river Kawthar in paradise.⁵⁴ The second detail worthy of note is a lengthy personification of trees blowing in the wind. The narrator compares the trees to drunkards who cannot stand up straight, saying that they draw near one another as if to hug and kiss, and this description seems to evoke the carousing of the companions themselves. Even more suggestive of the storm's eroticism is how each tree branch (*qaḍīb*) bends toward another branch "like a lover embracing a beloved."⁵⁵ The image of the beloved as a slender branch is common, especially in homoerotic poetry, but the word *qaḍīb* can

49. T. Bauer, "Raffinement und Frömmigkeit: Säkulare Poesie islamischer Religionsgelehrter der späten Abbasidenzeit," *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 2 (1996): 275–95.

50. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:364.

51. *Ibid.*, 1:366.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 9:281.

54. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:367–68.

55. *Ibid.*, 1:367.

also refer to the penis. The phallic allusion and the erotic metaphors used to describe the storm accentuate the tempest's sexual potentiality. As a way of concluding the storm, the narrator turns his attention back to his companions, saying: "We spent our night this way, and we obtained our desire" (*fa-bitnā bihā laylatanā wa-nilnā umniyyatanā*).⁵⁶ Bookending the storm with these two references to sexual activity and sexual satisfaction suggests that the storm functions as a euphemism for a night of passion. This storm is therefore both a way of expressing the sexual activities taking place and a way of bearing witness to the oneness of the Creator through the spectacle of the creation.

When morning comes, the company is invited to drink once more, but they are impatient for the hunt. They depart for their first day, the account of which includes an intricate description of each kind of prey. These hunting scenes make up by far the longest portion of the work, and they require a more detailed account than can be offered here. The catalogue of hunted animals is clearly a response to the narrative *ṭardiyya* tradition that would also find expression in the Mamluk period. At the same time, it seems likely that the idealized portrayal of hunting found in this epistle was part of a broader ideal of gentlemanly behavior.



Figure 1: The Barberini Vase, Louvre Museum, Paris. (Photo by Matthew L. Keegan, with permission of the Louvre.)

Consider, for example, the Barberini Vase, an Ayyubid-era copper-alloy vase with inscriptions and figural medallions.⁵⁷ It was made for an Ayyubid ruler during the last decades of the long sixth/twelfth century and now belongs to the Louvre in Paris. The engraved medallions depict hunting scenes and, in one case, two men practicing swordplay with one another. Geese, rabbits, deer, and a lion are all targets of the hunt, as if the vase

56. *Ibid.*, 1:368.

57. For a brief description of the vase, see "Vase with the Name of Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din Yusuf, Known as the Barberini Vase," Louvre website, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/vase-name-ayyubid-sultan-salah-al-din-yusuf-known-%E2%80%9Cbarberini-vase%E2%80%9D> (accessed June 29, 2020).

were a hunting poem etched in bronze. The military exercise that is depicted in one roundel might imply that these scenes cast hunting as a militaristic activity that is designed to train soldiers for jihad, but this vessel is likely better contextualized within Yaghmur's world of inebriated solidarity. This supposition is reinforced by the inscription on the base, which reads: "For the wine cellar (*sharābkhāna*) of al-Malik al-Zāhir."⁵⁸

Returning to Yaghmur's epistle, the adventure of the drinking and hunting party lasts for ten days.⁵⁹ At the end of the first day of hunting, the night is spent with "each lover lying with (*ḍāja'a*) a beloved," and we are given to believe that the following days and nights are no different.⁶⁰ After ten days of hunting and drinking, the narrator informs us that the group has become bored with their activities. They also seem to reflect on the bloodshed they have recently committed.

قلنا: إلى متى سفك الدما والفتك بالذمي وحتام نفرق بين الألاف ونفوق سهم البين إلى الاحلاف. فهل وثقنا
بالأقدار ونسينا تقلب الليل والنهار، وهل أمنا أن نصاب بما أصبنا به، وننتاب بظفر الزمان ونابه.

We said: How long will bloodshed and the murder of the beautiful beasts last? How long will we sunder beloveds and notch the arrow of separation between allies? Do we trust in the Fates? Have we forgotten the successive turning of nights into days? Are we secure from being stricken by that which we have wrought [on others] and from being afflicted by the talons and teeth of Time?

In this passage, there is a clear sense of regret about the hunting of animals who are referred to as *dumā*, a term that refers to adorned images or idols, but which is also used for beautiful, well-fed animals.⁶¹ Whereas the narrator's companions had been enthusiastic about the hunt earlier in the epistle, they have now soured on the affair through the realization that they, like the animals they have slaughtered, are hunted. The ruthless hunter of humankind is Time, which the narrator describes as an animal with talons and teeth. By imagining Time as an animal who hunts humans, the companions imaginatively reverse the violent slaughter that they have recently carried out and consider the animal experience of loss as if it were their own. In this way, the hunters come to recognize their own mortality with a vividness that the mock sermon could not achieve. With this change of heart, the band of brethren make their way back to settled society (*al-ʿumrān*). They come upon a peaceful garden, which leads them to a beautiful castle where they begin again to drink and enjoy the company of beautiful lads, all of which lasts an undetermined amount of time.⁶²

The fifth and final movement of the epistle finds the author and his companions turning to godly piety. The movement consists of only a few short lines. Although I have called it a repentance, it is marked not by the triumph of shared religious solidarity but by a feeling of sadness, nostalgia, and alienation. The end of the inebriated feasting and hunting leads

58. "Vase with the Name of Salah al-Din."

59. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:364–88.

60. *Ibid.*, 1:387.

61. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 14:271.

62. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:387–89.

to the demise of companionship (*ṣuḥba*) and the beginning of estrangement (*ghurba*), as the companions scatter into the countryside. The entire fifth movement, most of which was quoted at the beginning of this article, reads as follows:

وما زلنا على تلك الحال حتى استهلت من رجب غرة الهلال فخالفنا الهوى وحالفنا التقى وانتجعنا صوب الصواب وادرعنا ثوب الثواب واستدرکنا فارط الزلل وخفنا حابط العمل ومئينا من تلك الرفقة بالفرقة ودفعنا من تلك الصحبة إلى الغربة وتفرقنا في البلاد وتشتتت في الأغوار والأنجاد. وهذه سيرة الأيام في الأنام وفعالها بالخاص والعام لذتها كالأحلام يقظتها كالمنام جعلنا الله من الفائزين بالخلود في دار السلام.

We continued on in that way until the new moon of the month of Rajab appeared. We turned against passion and swore ourselves to God-fearing devotion. We took refuge in the realm of right conduct and donned the armor of good behavior. We rectified our past faults and dreaded useless activity. We were afflicted with parting from that company and were driven to estrangement from those companions. We scattered across the lands, dispersing in the valleys and the highlands. This is the story of the Passing Days among humankind and their effects on both elites and common folk. Their pleasures are like dreams and their wakefulness is like sleep. May God make us among those who triumph with everlasting Paradise.⁶³

These final sentences of the epistle bring us back to the question of frivolity. Yaghmur describes an abandonment of “useless activity” (*ḥābiṭ al-ʿamal*), which is more or less what Abū Shāma found so objectionable when he transmitted the anecdote about Nūr al-Dīn playing polo. In that case, the subordination of polo to the logic of jihad prevented it from being useless. In Yaghmur’s epistle, the hunt is an example of “useless activity” that cannot be incorporated into the economy of the *fāʿida dīniyya* that, Nūr al-Dīn claims, pertains to polo. Yaghmur does not express a single-minded devotion to piety, asceticism, and jihad. Rather, he presents asceticism as a period of life that comes after youthful companionship has faded away. The two impulses of licentiousness and asceticism are mediated temporally, such that there is a time for seizing the day, and there is a time for devoting oneself to the hereafter.

Yaghmur’s rather pessimistic view of asceticism complicates the assumption that the fighting men of the Crusader period were driven by ascetic piety and the imagery of a pristine Islamic past. Modern depictions of Islamic politics are haunted by a distinctively Salafī imaginary in which the early Islamic past is the primary basis for solidarity. Although one can certainly find Muslim scholars expressing the idea that all activity ought to be interpreted in light of its *fāʿida dīniyya*, it is far from certain that such ideas roused the sentiments of the men tasked with fighting. Yaghmur’s epistle expresses an awareness of the ascetic ideal, but it comes in for mockery and is associated with the breakdown of idealized, inebriated solidarity. An even more sardonic view of asceticism is found in the work of ʿArqala al-Kalbī (d. ca. 567/1171–72), a licentious Shiʿite poet who was a boon companion to Saladin and considered himself the Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 200/815) of his age.⁶⁴

63. Ibid., 1:389.

64. Ibid., 1:209. For a fuller treatment of ʿArqala, see Keegan, “Rethinking Poetry.”

In one of ‘Arqala’s poems, he claims that asceticism is inspired not by piety but by a lack of material resources:

جَبَّ عن الدنيا إذا جَبَّتْ عنك بإكبارٍ وتزیه
فما ترى فيها فتى زاهدًا إن لم تكن قد زهدت فيه.

Shun the world if it shuns you,
standing haughty and aloof!
You do not find a youth renouncing worldly pleasures,
unless the world has already forsaken him.⁶⁵

Asceticism is, for ‘Arqala, a way of dealing with a world that has not provided plentifully. It is also noteworthy that ‘Arqala identifies youth as the natural period in which to indulge in enjoyment and pleasure, unless circumstances prevent one from that enjoyment.

Conclusion

The activities of the hunt, the lengthy drinking party, and the homoerotic interludes in Yaghmur’s epistle do not participate in the economy of the *fā’ida dīniyya* that Abū Shāma demands but rather uphold the inebriated solidarity of the hunt. It should be emphasized that the activities of this fortnight’s bender are not truly “useless,” as the epistle’s repentant conclusion suggests. Apparently useless activities such as drinking, hunting, and homoerotic activity seem to be a key part of the social glue that holds together this company of elite military men in the hunt and, one imagines, on the battlefield, regardless of the foe. Men such as Yaghmur were, after all, precisely the kind of men one would expect to fight the Franks or rival Muslims. If he or his anthologist-editor had wished to foreground the threat of the Crusaders and the importance of piety for unifying Muslim warriors, then he certainly could have done so. It is, of course, possible that many people were motivated to fight the Franks out of their devotion to Islam, but that does not necessarily entail ascetic piety. We risk projecting a Salafi imaginary onto these Muslims who might have found solidarity in the gentlemanly activities of wine parties and hunting. In the epistle, evocations of ascetic piety are mocked, as in the case of the intoxicated preacher, or they are the cause of disunity, as they are in the fifth movement of the epistle. However, more complex and playful mobilizations of Islamic language take place in the Islamic drinking party and the tempest. The epistle’s playful engagements with Islamic norms produce intimate social bonds that would have been crucial in the Zengid and Ayyubid worlds of confederated politics. Thinking about *adab* without insisting on the framework of the Crusades makes visible the complexities of the long sixth/twelfth century through texts like Yaghmur’s epistle.

The long sixth/twelfth century was not an era dominated by asceticism and religious fervor but one in which multiple conceptions of normative behavior circulated, often among the same people who portrayed their sovereigns as ascetics and their age as full of pious devotion. For example, ‘Imād al-Dīn celebrated Saladin’s revival of a pristine past in his

65. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:228.

panegyric poetry and prose, but when it came to the *Kharīda*, he did not see a problem with including Yaghmur's epistle or 'Arqala's poetry. The inclusion in the *Kharīda* of both sorts of material suggests that this epistle does not express the ethos of a "counter-public" that resisted the pietistic discourses of the day. Rather, the scenes of drinking, homoeroticism, and hunting seem to have been part of a normative conception of these behaviors that was Islamic in Shahab Ahmed's sense.⁶⁶ Hints of this Muslim warrior ethos that centered on wine and companionship can also be found in portions of Usāma b. Munqidh's *Book of Contemplation*. For example, Usāma mentions a certain 'Alī b. Faraj who lost a leg to infection, had it amputated, and kept fighting the Franks. In spite of his strength and bravery, Usāma calls this 'Alī a light-hearted man who invited his friends to his home to eat and drink wine. As a joke, it seems, 'Alī implied that he had wine and food to offer them, but when they arrived, he told them to go back and bring provisions themselves because, in fact, he had none.⁶⁷ A more apt example is that of Najm al-Dīn Īlghāzī (d. 516/1122), the Seljuk governor and warrior who defeated the Franks at Tell 'Afrīn in 513/1119. Usāma tells us that he would be drunk for twenty days at a time.⁶⁸ A Salafi imaginary of the sixth/twelfth century cannot take account of these values without transforming them into subversions of an official ideology. But the elite normative ideas seem to have been much more complex and fragmented than is sometimes appreciated.⁶⁹

If the atmosphere of the age had required asceticism or a direct link between fighting the Franks and a commitment to personal piety, one would imagine that 'Imād al-Dīn would have edited this epistle or removed it entirely. But although he claims to have edited and shortened Yaghmur's epistle to fit with the *linguistic* norms of his day, he appears to have seen no need to remove the rather dim view of austere asceticism expressed in it, much less the drinking and the homoeroticism. Yaghmur and his editor seem comfortable with embracing, within an Islamic framework, the alternation of raucous, wine-soaked solidarity on the one hand and alienated asceticism on the other. There were multiple conceptualizations of the relationship between Islam, austerity, solidarity, and revelry in this period. This epistle expresses one of them.

One may wonder to what extent Yaghmur's epistle reflected his lived experience. Did he thrive in the context of inebriated solidarity, as the narrator of his epistle does? This

66. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*

67. Usāma b. Munqidh, *Kitāb al-I'tibār*, ed. 'A. al-Ashtar (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2003), 238. The story differs slightly in the translation, perhaps reflecting a different edition; compare Usāma b. Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, 159.

68. Usāma b. Munqidh, *Kitāb al-I'tibār*, 203–4; Usāma b. Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, 131.

69. The work of Samuli Schielke also discusses (albeit in a modern context) the ambivalence and temporally mediated attitudes toward piety in everyday life. As he points out, "focusing on the very pious in moments when they are being very pious (in mosque study groups, for example) risks taking those moments when people talk about religion as religious persons . . . as the paradigmatic ones, and thus unwittingly reproducing the particular ideological aspiration of Islamist and Islamic revivalist movements: the privileging of Islam as the supreme guideline of all fields of life." S. Schielke, "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life," *ZMO Working Papers 2* (2010): 1–16, at 2. See also S. Schielke, "Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity, and Aspiration among Young Egyptians," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009): 158–85.

coauthored epistle is not, to be sure, straightforwardly autobiographical. It draws on and creatively refigures the tropes of the *maqāma*, the hunting poem, and the stories of false asceticism such as the *Ḥikāyat Abī l-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* and the stories of Abū Nuwās. Even if the epistle that survives in the *Kharīda* is more ʿImād al-Dīn than Yaghmur, its very presence in the *Kharīda* is significant. It shows that *adab*, even though it was an elite discourse, made a show of including new participants who fell outside the typical scholarly classes who produced *adab*.⁷⁰ Although Yaghmur’s epistle responds to the *adab* tradition, there are certainly features in it that may also have lined up with Yaghmur’s lived experience. It is possible to see this epistle as the expression of a young military man’s imaginative depiction of elite companionship. It is, like much *adab*, a case of “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,” to paraphrase the poet Marianne Moore. And in Yaghmur’s imaginary garden, the bonds of elite companionship and solidarity were not based in ascetic piety but were rather rooted in the drinking party, the homoerotic evening, and the hunt.

70. Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech”; Flemming, “Literary Activities.”

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