



Laughter Mechanisms in Andalusian Maqamat The Luzumi Maqamat as a Model

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Abstract

This study seeks to uncover the mechanisms of laughter in Andalusian maqāmāt ,taking the Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt as a model for application. It attempts to answer a central question: What artistic and linguistic techniques did al-Saraqusī employ in his Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt to produce humor and evoke laughter in the reader?

The importance of this question lies in the fact that laughter in the Arab narrative heritage particularly in the art of the maqāma is not merely a form of entertainment, but a critical and cultural tool that reveals various social, linguistic, and intellectual dimensions.

Through an analysis of the structure and stylistic components of the Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt, the study aims to identify the elements that bestow al-Saraqusī's discourse with its distinctive wit. The findings indicate that al-Saraqusī employed a wide variety of techniques and narrative strategies in order to achieve his humorous purpose. Among the most prominent mechanisms generating laughter are: repetition, with its implicit irony and reinforcement of mockery; the marvelous, which creates a striking contrast that provokes both astonishment and laughter; and the depiction of blameworthy traits, which becomes an effective means of producing humor through the exposure of behavioral contradictions and scenes of social deviance.

These findings confirm that laughter in the Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt is not incidental but a structural component through which al-Saraqusī reveals the reality of his time in an artful, indirect manner that intertwines critique and humor.

Keywords: *mechanisms of laughter, al-Saraqusī, Andalusian maqāmāt, Luzūmiyyāt, satire.*

Résumé

Cette étude vise à mettre en lumière les mécanismes du rire dans les maqāmāt andalous, en prenant comme modèle d'application les Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt. Elle tente de répondre à une question centrale : quelles techniques artistiques et linguistiques al-Saraqusī a-t-il utilisées dans ses Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt pour produire de l'humour et susciter le rire chez le lecteur ?

L'importance de cette question réside dans le fait que le rire dans le patrimoine narratif arabe, en particulier dans l'art du maqāma, n'est pas seulement une forme de divertissement, mais un outil critique et culturel qui révèle diverses dimensions sociales, linguistiques et intellectuelles.

À travers une analyse de la structure et des composantes stylistiques du Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt, l'étude vise à identifier les éléments qui confèrent au discours d'al-Saraqusī son esprit distinctif. Les résultats indiquent qu'al-Saraqusī a utilisé une grande variété de techniques et de stratégies narratives afin d'atteindre son objectif humoristique.

Parmi les mécanismes les plus importants qui génèrent le rire, on trouve : la répétition, avec son ironie implicite et le renforcement de la moquerie ; le merveilleux, qui crée un contraste saisissant qui provoque à la fois l'étonnement et le rire ; et la description de traits répréhensibles, qui devient un moyen efficace de produire de l'humour en exposant les contradictions comportementales et les scènes de déviance sociale.

Ces conclusions confirment que le rire dans les Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt n'est pas fortuit, mais constitue un élément structurel à travers lequel al-Saraqusī révèle la réalité de son époque d'une manière artistique et indirecte, mêlant critique et humour.

Mots-clés : *mécanismes du rire, al-Saraqusī, maqāmāt andalous, Luzūmiyyāt, satire.*



Introduction

Laughter, in its general sense, is an inherent human phenomenon through which we distinguish human beings from other creatures, just as we distinguish them through reason. Laughter constitutes a complex expressive mechanism at times expressing joy, and at other times expressing ridicule or scorn. It may also serve as an eloquent means of pleasure and enjoyment, as it generates within the soul a sense of cheerfulness, relief, and amusement. Thus, laughter is neither a superficial nor a simple phenomenon; rather, it is a psychological, cultural, and social activity in which awareness, language, and behavior intersect simultaneously.

The idea of employing humor and satire in literary discourse has not been absent across the ages. Writers and poets have found in it an effective tool for generating laughter and capturing the reader's attention, in addition to being a channel for expressing their ideas and perspectives concerning socially, politically, or morally sensitive issues. Humor has been used either for entertainment, amusement, and attracting audiences to the text, or for criticism and lampooning attacking an individual or a group by exposing flaws and highlighting blameworthy traits.

Consequently, humor emerged as a dual-purpose instrument that combines pleasure with message, and laughter with judgment. Satirical literary texts whether prose or poetry were not confined to a particular era nor restricted to a specific region. Laughter is a continuous

human practice, not monopolized by any particular author. Pre-Islamic satire is a striking example of this, as it constituted one of the most prominent avenues for producing laughter by publicly exposing the flaws of opponents. This demonstrates how deeply rooted the phenomenon of comic expression is within Arabic heritage since before Islam.

Its historical continuity further attests to the vitality and durability of laughter, as it remains strongly present even today in both serious and humorous discourse.

This paper focuses on a distinguished Andalusian corpus: the *maqāmāt* of Abū Ṭāhir al-Saraqusī al-Ishtarkūwī, due to the scarcity of studies dedicated to them and the limited scholarly engagement with this body of work.

We aim to extract the mechanisms employed by al-Saraqusī and to highlight his humorous and satirical style, in order to provide a clearer picture of the scenes he depicted through his linguistic craftsmanship. This will be achieved by answering the following central question:

- To what extent did al-Saraqusī employ mechanisms of laughter? Which mechanisms are most prominent in his *maqāmāt*?
- And does his corpus contain enough humorous and satirical material to classify it as satirical literature?

At the outset of our study, we note that the *maqāma* is an Arabic literary genre that typically relies on dialogue between two or more characters, with diverse themes and rhetorical and artistic features in its general sense. As for the Andalusian *maqāma* in particular, it was unknown in al-Andalus until the Eastern *maqāma* reached it. The



Andalusian writers received it as a new artistic form, although their production of it did not reach the abundance known in the East.

The strengthening of ties between the East and the Maghreb played a major role in transferring the art of the maqāma to al-Andalus, especially during the Almoravid period. Al-Ḥarīrī's maqāmāt spread widely in al-Andalus at the same time they were circulating in their original homeland. The Andalusians' fondness for everything novel and beautiful, their intellectual curiosity, and their eagerness to experiment encouraged them to embrace this genre. Consequently, several Andalusian maqāmāt appeared, among them:

- Two maqāmāt by Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Sharf al-Qayrawānī
- One maqāma by Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Ibn Shahīd
- One maqāma by Abū Muḥammad Ibn Mālik al-Qurṭubī
- One maqāma by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Futūḥ resembling the critical style of Ibn Sharf
- One maqāma by Ibn al-Mu'allim
- One maqāma by al-Faṭḥ Ibn Khāqān
- One maqāma by Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl written in imitation of al-Ḥarīrī
- And the Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt of al-Saraqusṭī al-Ishtarkūwī, which constitute the subject of this study

The Andalusian maqāma is distinguished by its themes that faithfully reflect the reality of Andalusian society. It addressed the phenomenon of indirect begging and mendicancy in an elegant and refined manner. It also served

as a social critical tool that depicted the traits, customs, traditions, genealogies, and professions of the

local population. In this way, the *maqāma* transformed from a purely literary text into a historical record portraying the details of everyday popular life.

We take al-Saraqusṭī's corpus as an applied example so that our study may be more precise and not remain confined to theoretical discussion without textual analysis.

Al-Saraqusṭī's *maqāma* (d. 538 AH) [1] consists of fifty Andalusian Arabic *maqāmāt* modeled on Eastern *maqāmāt*, such as those of al-Ḥarīrī and al-Ma'arrī.

Their events revolve around the adventures of Shaykh Abū Ḥabīb al-Sadūsī, narrated by al-Sā'ib ibn Tammām, his son Ḥabīb, and his daughter, whom he treats as a servant. These **maqāmāt** are distinguished by their rich and varied rhymed prose and by rhetorical eloquence reflecting the author's linguistic mastery and intelligence. Al-Saraqusṭī did not neglect the religious dimension; he presented moral and religious admonitions and offered vivid descriptions of Andalusian cities.

Al-Saraqusṭī did not deviate significantly from al-Ḥarīrī's style; he constructed a clear parallel between their protagonists. Just as we find Abū Zayd al-Sūjūjī in al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt*, we find Shaykh Abū Ḥabīb in al-Saraqusṭī's. And just as al-Ḥarīrī adopted al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām as his narrator, al-Saraqusṭī adopted al-Sā'ib ibn Tammām as his counterpart. He also composed fifty *maqāmāt* just as al-Ḥarīrī did, though he differed from him



by not assigning titles to his maqāmāt and by employing more distinctive, localized themes.

Al-Saraqustī portrayed his protagonist as a traveler, moving him across numerous Islamic lands in disguise to facilitate deceit and trickery, although al-Sā'ib exposes him each time. He did not limit his protagonist to deserts and wilderness; rather, he also transported him across seas, as al-Ḥarīrī had done, adding an element of the marvelous that produced imaginative scenes the reader perceives almost as reality such as mentioning the chick of the mythical bird al-Rukhkh, the enormous sea creature, and the lion after which he titled one of his maqāmāt. [2.]

Thus, al-Saraqustī crafted a series of adventures in rhymed prose, lending his maqāmāt an atmosphere of humor and amusement, preventing the reader from feeling boredom and encouraging him to continue reading out of curiosity and anticipation. Even if the element of suspense is not overwhelming, it remains clearly present.

Al-Saraqustī employed simply and without deliberate intentionality several mechanisms for producing laughter in his Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt. In this study, we

will highlight the loci of humor in his maqāmāt, emphasizing the most prominent mechanisms he used in constructing scenes of wit and satire.

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Chapter One: The Mechanism of Repetition

This mechanism relies on the repeated use of the same element, idea, movement, or sound within a surprising, contradictory, or unusual context, which creates a humorous effect for the recipient. It is one of the mechanisms acknowledged by Henri Bergson in his book *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*,

where he stresses that repetition, in itself, is not what produces humor; rather, it is the sensation that arises from reenacting the same action, statement, or sound that evokes laughter in us. He illustrates this through the example of a cat playing with a mouse: the humor does not lie in the cat striking the mouse directly, but in the "psychological play" symbolized by the cat's repetitive behavior.

This analysis reveals that repetition acquires a comic quality when it strips an action of its natural meaning and transforms it into an automatic, spiritless movement. The situation then appears humorous from the perspective of the "mechanical" dimension dominating human or animal behavior. [5]

This mechanism can be further clarified through two main components: Expectation, and Breaking the horizon of expectation, or deviating from what is familiar and logically anticipated.

The audience expects a certain outcome according to habitual logic, only to be surprised by the opposite. This creates a disparity between reality and imagination, logic and absurdity, the familiar and the unfamiliar. Such contrast

triggers mockery, satire, critique, and ultimately laughter, entertainment, and comedy.

Thus, repetition becomes not mere literal recurrence but a means of generating irony and destabilizing the structure of the discourse.

Al-Saraqusti employed the mechanism of repetition in his *Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt* through various forms and innovative techniques to provoke laughter, astonishment, and reflection. Among its most notable uses are: Repeating the same letter, word, or sentence at the beginning, middle, or end of a phrase. For example: "I am but a man among men, and this is but one of the *maqāmāt*, and this is but one of the tales," or: "I am but a helpless man overwhelmed by circumstances, and this is but one of the *maqāmāt*"...

Here, the repeated phrase disrupts the audience's expectation, who assumes that the author will vary his style but he does not. This produces an enjoyable verbal play that creates rhythmic beauty.

Al-Saraqusti deliberately intensifies this device, as in: "I see nothing in rhetoric more beloved to me than eloquence, and in eloquence nothing more beloved than silence", or: "I see nothing in the world more beloved to me than knowledge... than rhetoric... than eloquence... than prolixity... than speech".

The idea is constant listing "what the speaker loves most" yet the meaning changes each time in exaggerated and unstable ways, producing a humorous contradiction.



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He even ends by declaring his love for the opposite of speech, forming a strange paradox that invites ridicule and laughter. [6]

Comparing al-Saraqusti with other writers of maqāmāt, it becomes clear that he was among the first to employ repetition in this artistic genre as a comic tool.

Chapter Two: The Mechanism of the Fantastic

Al-Saraqusti used the element of the fantastic in narrating his short narratives as a way to provoke laughter and capture attention. The fantastic is one of the most effective mechanisms for producing humor in narrative literature. It relies on recounting supernatural events and depicting characters detached from reality, thereby creating an imaginative space where humorous paradoxes can arise.

This is especially evident in Maqāmāt al-Jinniyya and other Luzūmiyyāt maqāmāt.

Section One: Maqāmāt al-Jinniyya Al-Saraqusti recounts the story of a man named Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥimyarī, a farmer in a small village. One day, while working, he encounters a beautiful but exhausted jinniyya sitting on a large rock. He offers her food and drink out of kindness. In return, she grants him three extraordinary wishes:

- The ability to speak with animals,
- Instant return to his village,
- Turning any metal he touches into gold.

All three wishes come true.

The entire narrative constructs a fantastic world detached from reality. The mere existence of a visible, conversational jinniyya is illogical, and even more absurd is her ability to grant miraculous wishes despite being unable to help herself. This narrative contradiction generates humor regardless of any moral lesson embedded in the text.

The unfamiliar produces tension between the reader's knowledge of reality and the fictional world. When the mind fails to accept this new "reality," the natural response is "white laughter" a harmless type of humor directed at the absurdity of events rather than characters.

Al-Saraqusti also creates comedic characters through contradictory traits, such as the jinniyya who grants supernatural wishes while failing to meet her own basic needs. This contradiction is a classic source of humor because it reveals a rupture in logic and amplifies the absurdity of events.

The three wishes themselves, especially the ability to turn metals into gold by touch, generate humor due to their exaggerated impossibility. The fact that the jinniyya offers them out of confusion or embarrassment intensifies the comic absurdity.

The impossibility of events heightens the sense of humor and detachment from reality, while the farmer's unusual choices amplify the comedic effect.

Section Two: The Mechanism of Humor Through Character Traits

It is impossible to discuss humor in maqāmāt without addressing "comic traits".



[7]Since maqāmāt center on trickery, begging, and deception, their characters naturally possess behavioral and social flaws that reflect societal reality and produce contrasts between what should be and what is.

These repetitive traits create a stable comic framework because the reader recognizes that the characters do not change but repeat the same actions with mechanical persistence. Humor arises from this rigidity and the character's disconnection from logical reality.

Comic traits also carry a social dimension, as humor becomes a tool for judgment—either accepting the trait in a humorous context or rejecting it. Readers' reactions differ: some laugh at the ridiculousness, while others feel irritation or pity.

In Andalusian maqāmāt, the audience often accepts the trickster protagonist because the repeated mischievous behavior is depicted humorously. Though begging is morally condemned, al-Saraqusti softens its negativity through exaggeration and playful narration.

Henri Bergson states that laughter requires the suspension of emotion, since "laughter appeals to pure intellect." We laugh when expectations are disappointed or logic is contradicted. Thus, flawed behavior becomes comedic, though not always morally corrective.

Section Three: Maqāmat al-Fārisiyya In this maqāma, al-Saraqusti constructs contradictory characters by combining pious appearances with unethical behaviors. He portrays people who pretend to be righteous but whose actions reveal

corruption. This contrast forms the core comic irony, while also criticizing social hypocrisy.

He employs sarcastic language and humorous scenes that reflect his critical view of society, particularly in depicting beggars' use of deception to achieve their goals. Exaggeration is used to amplify undesirable behaviors and make them comical. [8]

He also relies on rhythmic linguistic devices such as rhyme, parallelism, and balanced structures adding musicality that enhances the comic tone.

Conclusion

This study has shown that al-Saraqustī excelled in employing mechanisms of humor in his *Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt* with remarkable skill and multidimensional depth. This allowed him to fulfill his literary, intellectual, and comedic aims simultaneously, offering texts characterized by enjoyment, cultural richness, and the ability to captivate the reader and engage them effectively in the narrative events. Through these techniques, he successfully portrayed Andalusian society in a satirical manner that reflects the social and cultural reality of the environment in which he lived. At the same time, he delivered implicit social criticism through humor and irony, targeting human flaws such as begging, deceit, and trickery while maintaining the humorous dimension that keeps the text enjoyable and convincing to the reader.

The analysis revealed that al-Saraqustī did not depend on a single mechanism to produce humor; instead, he



diversified between repetition, the fantastic, the mention of comic traits, exaggeration, and phonetic and linguistic paradoxes. He also blended several mechanisms within a single narrative, which helped avoid monotony and kept the reader in a constant state of anticipation, filled with curiosity about the development of events.

The diversity of characters, along with the nature of the situations and events, endowed the *maqāmāt* with a rich comedic quality. The comic characters were peculiar and exaggerated, creating the necessary humorous contrast, while the linguistic style rhyme, rhythmic parallelism, and *saj'* added an acoustic element that brought vitality to the text. Additionally, the social critique embedded in the * *maqāmāt* * showcased al-Saraqustī's skill in merging humor with moral instruction. Laughter thus became a means for reflection and social correction, while still keeping the reader entertained through the literary performance.

Based on these findings, the study recommends continued exploration of Andalusian literary texts and other works from the Arabic heritage through the lens of humor and comic effect. Such research could reveal new mechanisms not yet addressed in current theoretical studies, and may confirm or revise classical theories of laughter. It may also contribute to a deeper understanding of the function of humor in shaping social and cultural awareness. Furthermore, studying al-Saraqustī's *maqāmāt* highlights the importance of examining the relationship between humorous techniques and critical dimensions within literary texts, and how these can offer tools for analyzing characters

and social situations. This analysis can also be expanded to include other works containing elements of humor and the comic, with the aim of enriching literary and critical studies.

In sum, this study demonstrates that al-Saraqustī's *Luzūmiyyāt Maqāmāt* were not merely entertaining texts, but rather a fully integrated artistic medium combining humor, social critique, and literary adventure. This makes them a valuable model for the study of classical comic literature and opens new horizons for future research in this vital field.

Footnotes

1. Shouqi Dayf, 'Aṣr al-Duwal wa-al-Imārāt: al-Andalus, 1st ed., Dār al-Ma'ārif, Egypt, 1989, vol. 2, p. 522.
2. Shouqi Dayf, *Ibid.*, p. 522.
3. al-Rakhk: The young of the phoenix.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Sāmī al-Barūdī and 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Dāyim, Egyptian General Book Organization, Egypt, 1998, p. 56.
6. Bergson, *Laughter*, *Ibid.*, p. 31.
7. Bergson, Same source, p. 93.
8. Bergson, *Ibid.*, p. 17.