Irony, Archeology, and the Rule of Rhyme: Two Readings of the *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya of Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī

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Two contrasting approaches to the genesis of the Luzūmiyya rhymed in *Ṭasmu* serve as entry points into Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's (d. 449/1058) double-rhymed diwan, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. The first takes the seventh/thirteenth-century litterateur Ibn al-Qifṭī's account of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd's Mosque of Damascus excavations, which was read before al-Maʿarrī, as the inspiration for the poem. This reading elicits the metaphorical connection, through the *ubi sunt* topos of the Arabic *nasīb*, between the extinct Arab tribe Ṭasm and the long-lost civilization unearthed in Damascus, and, further, the high irony with which the poem predicts the ineluctable annihilation of Islam itself. The second reading interprets the poem as the product of the extreme double-rhyme strictures al-Maʿarrī has imposed on himself—here the rhyme in *-smu*. The use of Ṭasm/*ṭasm* (erasure, obliteration) inexorably drives the poem from the lore of tribal extermination to the lexical and motival world of the *nasīb*.

INTRODUCTION

The poet, man of letters, and scholar, Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, was in his lifetime already—and continues to be—regarded as an outstanding but extremely controversial poet, largely due to the religious and "philosophical" ideas and the mordant criticism of politics, religion, and humanity in general that he airs in his poetry. Some celebrate him as a free and independent mind, and yet a believing Muslim; others condemn him as a heretic and free-thinker (*zindīq*) or atheist (*mulḥid*). The body of scholarly and popular work on him is vast, repetitive, and often polemical.

Born in 363/973 to a prominent family of judges and poets in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān, southwest of Aleppo, Abū l-ʿAlāʾ Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Tanūkhī al-Maʿarrī was blinded by smallpox at the age of four. As a young man he garnered the reputation of a highly regarded provincial poet, writing socially and politically engaged *qaṣīda*s—poems of praise, blame, boast, elegy—and *ikhwāniyyāt* (poems exchanged with fellow poets) as well as shorter pieces of *ghazal* and description in the high classical Abbasid style. The years 399–400/1009–1010 mark his sojourn in Baghdad and the major turning point in his career. He traveled there in the hope of establishing himself in the literary circles of the cosmopolitan capital, where the eviscerated Abbasid caliphate was under Buyid control and the literary scene dominated by the two ʿAlawī Sharīfs and poets al-Raḍī and al-Murtaḍā.

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Having failed to make his way in the capital, he returned, disheartened and embittered, to Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān. His poetic career up until this point comprises most of the poems of his first diwan, *Saqṭ al-zand* (Sparks of the Flint). From 400/1010 until his death he lived a life of self-imposed seclusion and asceticism in his house in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān. He adopted the sobriquet *rahīn al-maḥbisayn* (inmate of two prisons)—that is, his blindness and his house (or, as he added later, reflecting his disgust with life in general, three prisons—his blindness, his house, and his body). It was also a period of astounding literary productivity: commentaries, epistles (most famously his *Risālat al-ghufrān* [Epistle of Forgiveness]), poetry collections, and teaching, counting among his many students the celebrated philologist Abū Zakariyyāʾ al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī (d. 502/1109). This is also the period in which he abjures *Saqṭ al-zand* and undertakes his second great poetic project, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (Requiring What Is Not Obligatory), commonly known simply as *al-Luzūmiyyāt* (The Compulsories)—the subject of the present study. He died in his home after a short illness in 449/1058.[1]

Although al-Maʿarrī is renowned for his pessimism and ironic play with the religious and "philosophical" ideas of his day, particularly in his programmatically double-rhymed second diwan, the ironic distance achieved in his Luzūmiyya rhymed in *–smu*, which opens "People will ask, What is Quraysh and what is Mecca?// Just as they now ask, What is Jadīs? What is Ṭasm?,"[2] nevertheless strikes us as quite extraordinary for the classical Islamic period. If, as I have argued elsewhere, the poems of *Saqṭ al-zand* are derived from the template of the high Abbasid *qaṣīda*, whose structure, themes, and motifs are then recast to create original poetic responses to personal and political challenges and obligations—performative responses to real-life challenges or situations (what I have termed "the poetics of engagement")—how then are we to understand the creative process in a poetry of withdrawal and seclusion, the "poetics of disengagement"?[3]

In the hope of revealing how al-Maʿarrī's creative process might have worked in *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, this study will explore two possible—and competing—avenues of poetic production, or inspiration, for the *Ṭasmū* Luzūmiyya, which is rare among the 1,600-odd poetic pieces of this diwan in that the Arabic literary tradition has preserved an intriguing account that purports to relate the "occasion" that inspired the poem's composition. The first avenue of approach, set out below in PART I, is based on this anecdote; the second, discussed in PART II, is based on the prosodic and lexical requirements imposed by al-Maʿarrī's idiosyncratic

1. A thorough and balanced biography and bibliography can be found in "al-Maʿarrī" (P. Smoor), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004), hereafter *EI2*. The literary and biographical entries on al-Maʿarrī in the classical Arabic canon have been gathered and edited in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bi-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. M. al-Saqqā et al., under the supervision of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 3rd prt. 1406/1986; photo-offset of Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1363/1944), hereafter *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*. The classical sources have been integrated into a comprehensive literary biography in M. S. al-Jundī, *al-Jāmiʿ fī akhbār Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-āthārih*, 2nd ed., ed. ʿA. H. Hāshim, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1412/1992; 1st ed. Damascus: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī bi-Dimashq, 1382/1962), which is most useful as a reference work through the detailed list of contents at the end of each volume and indices.

2. Jadīs and Ṭasm are names of ancient, extinct Arab tribes.

3. I have dealt with this issue in several unpublished papers presented at the 1999, 2001, and 2008 annual meetings of the Middle East Studies Association: respectively, "Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and the Poetics of Disengagement"; "Al-Maʿarrī's *Saqṭ al-Zand* and the Poetics of Engagement"; and "Genre and Hybridity in Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's *Saqṭ al-Zand*." My published papers on the same topic include "Qaḍāyā l-qaṣīda l-ʿarabiyya: Taṭbīq naẓariyyat al-adāʾ ʿalā Saqṭ al-Zand wa-l-Luzūmiyyāt. Madkhal fī shiʿr Abī l-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarrī, in *Proceedings of "*Qaḍāyā l-manhaj fī l-dirāsāt al-lughawiyya wa-l-adabiyya: Al-Naẓariyya wa-l-taṭbīq*"* (Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-Malik Saʿūd, 1431/2010), 333–49; "Min al-mujtamaʿ ilā l-muʿjam: Wajhā al-insāniyya fī shiʿr Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī," *al-Majalla l-ʿarabiyya li-l-ʿulūm al-insāniyya* (2015) (special issue, Proceedings of "al-Insān fī l-fikr al-islāmī wa-l-ʿarabī," Kuwait University, 11–13 November, 2013): 187–204.

programmatic project. The study will conclude by suggesting a hermeneutics that might help us in achieving a modern literary critical interpretation and evaluation of al-Maʿarrī's acclaimed but confounding doubled-rhymed, alphabetized diwan, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*.

PART I. IRONY, ARCHEOLOGY, AND STOPPING AT THE RUINS

The anecdote that purports to record the incident that prompted al-Maʿarrī's spontaneous composition of his Luzūmiyya with rhyme word *Ṭasmu* is itself of curious—not to say suspicious—origin. All known versions refer to a single source, Jalāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248). Born in Qifṭ in Upper Egypt, Ibn al-Qifṭī spent his career as an official in Aleppo, gaining the honorific titles *al-qāḍī l-akram* and *al-wazīr al-akram*, as well as being a prolific writer. Of particular note in the present context is that there he was the patron of the celebrated traveler and scholar Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229), who sought refuge with him in Aleppo in flight from the Mongol advance, and whom Ibn al-Qifṭī aided in the compilation of his renowned geographical dictionary, *Muʿjam al-buldān*.[4]

Ibn al-Qifṭī's account is found in his entry on al-Maʿarrī in his biographical dictionary of grammarians, *Inbāh al-ruwāh ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāh*:

> It was mentioned that one day in [Abū l-ʿAlāʾs] presence someone read that [the Umayyad caliph] al-Walīd, when he commissioned the construction of the Mosque of Damascus, ordered those commissioned to build it not to build any wall except on bedrock [lit., a mountain, *jabal*]. They obeyed, but they had difficulty finding bedrock for a wall in the direction of Jayrūn, so they kept digging in compliance with [al-Walīd's] orders until they found the top of a well-built wall, made of a lot of stones, that interfered with their work. They informed al-Walīd about it, saying, "We'll use the top of it as the base." "Leave it," he replied, "and dig in front of it to see whether its base was built on bedrock or not." They did this, and they found in the wall a gateway (*bāb*) over which was a rock inscribed in an unknown script. They washed the dirt from it and put dye on the inscription so that the letters became clear. Then they called for someone to read it, but they couldn't find anyone who could. So al-Walīd sought translators from far and wide, until there came a man who knew the script of the first Greek, called Latin (*līṭīn*), and read the writing on the stone, which read: "In the name of the First Creator I pray. When the world was created, in order for the characteristics of coming into being to attach to it, there had to be a creator who was not like those [created things]—as Dhū l-Sunnayn and Dhū l-Liḥyayn and their followers said. So, it was necessary to worship the creator of all creatures. At that time, the Lover of Horses (*khayl*)[5] ordered the construction of this edifice, with his own money, in the year 3700 of *ahl al-usṭuwān* [lit. the people of the columns].[6] So, if he who enters it sees fit to make good mention of its builder to his creator, let him do so. Peace." When he heard this, Abū l-ʿAlāʾ bowed his head in silence, and the whole group began to express their amazement at the matter of this edifice and [the people of the] columns by which it was dated, and the time-period that it was from. And when they were done, Abū l-ʿAlāʾ raised his head and recited:
>
> سيَسْألُ قَومٌ ما الحجيجُ ومكّةٌ   كما قال قومٌ ما جَديسُ وما طَسْمُ

People will ask, What are the pilgrims? What is Mecca?
Just as they once asked, What is Jadīs? What is Ṭasm?

4. "Ibn al-Ḳifṭī" (A. Dietrich), *EI2*.

5. Yāqūt's account (*Muʿjam al-buldān*, 5 vols. [Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.], 2: 466) gives *muḥibb al-khayr* (Lover of Goodness); cf. *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 54 n. 4. So, too, do some of the variant versions cited in n. 9, below.

6. It does not seem that *ahl al-usṭuwān* here refers to the Stoic philosophers, generally *aṣḥāb al-riwāq* (i.e., portico), but also *aṣḥāb* (or *ahl*) *al-usṭuwān/a*, for which see R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1881), s.v. *usṭuwān* (1: 22).

He ordered that this account be written down, so it was written on the back of a part of [his book] *Istaghfir wa-staghfirī*, by the hand of Ibn Abī Hāshim, his secretary, and most of those who copied the book have transcribed this account as it is found in the part where it was written down.[7]

This particular account of al-Walīd's excavation, which in all cases is traced back solely to Ibn al-Qifṭī, occurs, with the exclusion of the Abū l-ʿAlāʾ elements, under the Dimashq (Damascus) entry of Yāqūt's *Muʿjam al-buldān*, where it follows the more familiar and historically well-attested account of al-Walīd's building the Umayyad Mosque on the site of the Church of John the Baptist. It is only in Yāqūt's version that we find an identification of *ahl al-usṭuwān* as "a nation of ancient sages (*qawmun min al-ḥukamāʾ al-uwali*) who were in Baʿlabakk."[8] An abbreviated and corrupted version of this account occurs in ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Nuʿaymī al-Dimashqī's (d. 927/1521) *al-Dāris fī tarīkh al-madāris*. It traces the source to a book composed by *al-wazīr al-akram* (i.e., Ibn al-Qifṭī) and offers a charming variant: After the translation of the inscription is read to him,

Abū l-ʿAlāʾ is asked: "Who are *ahl al-usṭuwān*?" "I don't know," he replies and recites:
A people will ask: What are the pilgrims and what is Minā?
Just as a people have said, Who were Jadīs and who were Ṭasm?"[9]

Although Ibn al-Qifṭī's detailed account of excavations for the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus has no known provenance earlier than his seventh/thirteenth-century work, in its general outlines it is in fact not entirely incompatible with the Arab-Islamic sources or, broadly speaking, with current archeological-historical evidence, despite some apparent confusion with and corruption in related, derivative, accounts.[10] It is above all noteworthy that the fifth-century CE Byzantine cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyyāʾ) itself was a rebuilding and transformation of the second- to third-century Roman-period Temple of Jupiter of the Damascenes, the successor to the Semitic storm-god, Hadad. Furthermore, the eastern *propylaea* (that is, monumental gateway—the *bāb* of our text?) of the Roman temple are in Jayrūn, east of the Great Mosque. Also of note is that two corners of the *peribolus* (enclosure) of the Temple of Jupiter served as bases for minarets of the Umayyad Mosque.[11] These historical and archeological facts certainly give a ring of authenticity to the details of the inscription "in *līṭīn*" of a gateway in the direction of Jayrūn, as well as details of other variants of this account, and make us question whether what seems at first glance a seventh/thirteenth-century conflation or confabulation may actually derive from a no longer extant source.

However, an especially curious feature of this anecdote is the religious message of the inscription. It is quite precisely in the technical idiom of *kalām*—the Islamic discursive the-

7. Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāh*, ed. M. Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1369/1950), 1: 46–84 (no. 29), at 71–72. Ibn al-Qifṭī's full entry on Abū l-ʿAlāʾ is included in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 27–66, at 53–54. For al-Maʿarrī's *Istaghfir wa-staghfirī*, see Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh*, 1: 65; *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 48; Smoor, "al-Maʿarrī." For al-Maʿarrī's secretary, Ibn Abī Hāshim, see Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh*, 1: 56; *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 39.

8. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 2: 466.

9. Al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris fī tārīkh al-madāris*, ed. I. Shams al-Dīn, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1410/1990), 2: 286. See a close variant of this version in ʿA. Q. Badrān (d. 1346/1927), *Munādamat al-aṭlāl wa-musāmarat al-khayāl*, ed. Z. al-Shawīsh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), 357; and the related account in Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. M. al-ʿAmrawī, 80 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415/1995), 6: 3–4, where virtually the same ancient text is discovered but in a Greek inscription on a stone on the west (in another version, east) minaret of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and the date of 2300 of the people of the columns is given (*fī sanat alfayn wa-thalāthmiʾa li-aṣḥāb al-usṭuwān*).

10. See nn. 8 and 9, above; n. 13, below.

11. See "Dimashq" (N. Elisséeff), *EI2*.

ology developed in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries that adduced rational proofs to confirm religious beliefs—and, further, it presents the argument for a unique creator that is absolutely distinct from creation, which (coincidentally?) agrees with the specific formulation of *tawḥīd* as the absolute unity of God and His absolute distinction from His creatures, a principal doctrine of the Muʿtazilite school of *kalām*. This is an anachronism, both for the ancient *ahl al-usṭuwān*—whoever they may be—and for the period of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd.[12] Ibn al-Qifṭī's account thus provides a striking example of projecting not merely Islamic monotheism, but quite specifically early Islamic discursive theological discourse, *ʿilm al-kalām*, back to the ancient, and extinct, past.[13]

The concern of the present study, however, is not with the account's historicity or facticity, but with the literary drama and high irony that Ibn al-Qifṭī has produced through the interplay of this account and the famously sardonic blind poet of fifth/eleventh-century Syria. Al-Qifṭī's account relates that al-Maʿarrī, after brooding briefly upon hearing of the excavated "Latin" inscription, spontaneously composed the opening line (or a variant of it) of this Luzūmiyya. We are given to understand that the Umayyad account sparked al-Maʿarrī's poetic imagination, that is, it served as inspiration for this poem; it is implied as well that it is the whole poem, not merely the opening line, that this event generated.

Al-Qifṭī's juxtaposition of the excavation account and the poet's response has the effect of generating multiple levels of irony, for it produces in the reader a chain-effect of jolting realizations—each carrying its own ironic punch.

Taken on its own (as it appears in Yāqūt's *Muʿjam al-buldān*, in fact), the Umayyad excavation account depicts al-Walīd at a moment of great consolidation of Umayyad might and authority, which he is now in the process of embodying, presumably for all time, in the building of the magnificent and monumental Umayyad Mosque. The location for this commemoration of Umayyad–Islamic imperium was, no doubt, chosen not so much for its geographic convenience as for its geopolitical, imperial, and religious symbolism.[14] When the Romans conquered Damascus in 64 CE the Aramaean storm-god Hadad became assimilated to Jupiter, and the site of the Temple of Hadad, dating back no earlier than the first century BCE,

12. Al-Walīd ruled 86–96/705–715, while the origins of Muʿtazilism are usually traced to Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748). Though *tawḥīd* in the sense of "the unicity of God" (i.e., He has no [divine] partner) is strongly insisted upon in the Quran, His divine attribute of uniqueness and distinction from [the attributes of] others is a fundamental doctrine of Muʿtazilism. See "Muʿtazila" (D. Gimaret), *EI2*.

13. This is but one of many curiosities associated with Ibn al-Qifṭī's account and its cognates, such as the version, absent the al-Maʿarrī element, in al-Masʿūdī's (d. 346/957) history, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar* (ed. K. Ḥ. Marʿī, 4 vols. [Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1425/2005], 3: 131–32), where the text, in Greek, is interpreted or translated into gnomic *sajʿ* or "wisdom literature" by none other than the renowned first/seventh-century Yemeni transmitter of "biblical" lore, Wahb ibn Munabbih, who declares it to be from the time of Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd (Solomon the son of David). Variants of this version are found in Ibn ʿAsākir's monumental *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 2: 239–40, and quite a bit later in Ibn Kathīr's (774/1373), *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* (ed. ʿA. al-Turkī, 21 vols. [n.p.: Hajr li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ wa-l-Iʿlān, n.d.]), 12: 594–95. For this "Solomonic" cognate account from al-Masʿūdī, see N. Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 113, 106–9 (notes), 131–32 (refs.); F. B. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 107–8, 108 n. 243, who considers al-Masʿūdī's Solomonic inscription in the Damascus account the transposition of a Meccan topos. To the best of my knowledge, modern scholarship has not been aware of or has not engaged the Ibn al-Qifṭī variant.

14. In this respect al-Walīd's appropriation of the sacred site of the Cathedral of John the Baptist for the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus can be understood along the same lines as his predecessor ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān's construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem on a site sacred to the Jewish and subsequent Christian Byzantine religion and rule that it both subsumed and superseded. See "Ḳubbat al-Ṣakhra" (O. Grabar), *EI2*; Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest*, 85–134 (ch. 3), passim, and refs.

was appropriated for the Roman Temple of Jupiter, which was rebuilt and altered throughout the next two centuries. In 391 the Byzantines took it over for a Christian cathedral, which in the sixth century was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, whose head was "discovered" there.[15] In confiscating this very site for the Umayyad Mosque, in 86/706, even at the expense of contravening the original agreements between the Muslim conquerors and the Damascene Christians, al-Walīd was very accurately reading the symbolism of sacred and imperial rule. Further, if "taking the place" of the Christian Byzantines accorded with the Islamic doctrine of Muḥammad as the Seal of the Prophets and Islam as the fulfilment of earlier religions and empires, this site for the Umayyad Mosque constituted a clear embodiment of that doctrine of Islamic "dispensationalism." The unearthing of the ancient pre-Christian temple or edifice has the effect of projecting this ideology even farther back in time and thus further confirming its truth. In other words, the Great Mosque constructed on this site confirms and embodies the Umayyads as the divinely appointed successors not only to the Byzantine Christian empire, but also to the pagan Roman empire: it establishes a legitimate genealogy of empires. Central to this genealogy of empires is the monotheistic "philosophical" content of the inscription: this ancient ruler is presented as righteous but now gone, just as the Umayyads had to present Christianity to the Christian majority of Damascus—not so much condemned as superseded. The Umayyads are the next in line, chronologically but also morally, in this genealogy of empire—and furthermore, as per Islamic dispensationalist doctrine, the last in line: this is teleological time, what I have termed the ideology of Islamic Manifest Destiny.[16] The Umayyad participants are impressed, above all, at how ancient, noble, and god-fearing is the tradition to which they are now heir. Such would have been the presumptive contemporary Umayyad "reading" of this archeological episode.

In the context that Ibn al-Qifṭī has provided, the unearthing of the inscription is not merely amazing, but it is now being recounted in al-Maʿarrī's day, centuries after the demise of the first great Islamic dynasty (r. 41–132/661–750). From this late Abbasid perspective, this chronological and historical distance is highly ironic—*sic transit gloria mundi*: while the Umayyads were impressed by the antiquity of the ruins even as they themselves were undertaking a massive monumental building project, now both the ancients and the Umayyads are long gone.

Lest his contemporaries feel smug, Ibn al-Qifṭī then brings al-Maʿarrī into the picture and with him new layers of irony emerge. Although we can imagine that some tragic sense of *ubi sunt* may also have occurred to the Umayyad personages at the time of this purported excavation, it would have been just that, tragic pathos for the pious but now defunct ancients. Al-Maʿarrī's response is that if his contemporary Abbasids think they can take any satisfaction in the demise of the Umayyads, they have another think coming. Through his eminently simple, yet rhetorically brilliant use of the future tense, "people will ask" (*sa-yasʾalu*), al-Maʿarrī produces another chronological leap—now into the future—which has the effect of retrojecting the present into the past, thereby shifting the perspective of time, history, and teleology. He allows—or forces—his contemporaries to see themselves as the extinct and forgotten peoples about whom perplexed future generations will inquire but find no answer.

A final irony remains for us. Whatever the provenance or historicity of the anecdote, Ibn al-Qifṭī's account states that al-Maʿarrī had the account written down by his secretary

15. On the pre-Islamic history of the building and site of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, see R. Burns, *Damascus: A History* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005), 62–88; "Dimashq," *EI2*. On the Temple of Hadad date, see M. Abdulkarim et al., *Apollodorus of Damascus and Trajan's Column: From Tradition to Project* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003), 28.

16. See S. P. Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 2002), 152, 169–70.

Ibn Abī Hāshim in the manuscript of al-Maʿarrī's *Istaghfir wa-staghifirī* (Seek Forgiveness), the message of whose title seems to have been rendered irrelevant by the Damascus archeological find, at least as al-Maʿarrī's Luzūmiyya interprets it. Ibn al-Qifṭī lists *Istaghfir wa-staghfirī* among the works of al-Maʿarrī that he himself has seen, and describes it as a book of poems on such pious subjects as moral admonition, asceticism, and seeking God's forgiveness (*al-ʿiẓa wa-l-zuhd wa-l-istighfār*).[17] However, it is apparently no longer extant,[18] and Ibn al-Qifṭī does not explicitly designate al-Maʿarrī's *Istaghfir wa-staghfarī* as his source for the account.

Two further aspects of al-Qifṭī's account are of particular interest in the present context. First, it would appear that the discovery of this astounding passage from a now lost or extinct ancient people served to spark al-Maʿarrī's poetic imagination. The unearthed inscription is unsettling in two ways, a double shock-effect: the utter destruction of this once powerful (as attested by the edifice, etc.) nation and the pious theism, expressed perhaps as a parody of the Greek and Roman "ancients" in "philosophical" jargon, that the builder's message proclaims. The message is not one of ungodliness and rebellion meeting with divine retribution, such as we find in the Islamic lore of the destruction of ʿĀd and Thamūd, but it is a message—however much framed in the idiom of "rationalist theology" of *ʿilm al-kalām*—that must have been to the Muslims of the time in question every bit as "proto-Islamic" as the pronouncements of Muḥammad's prophetic predecessors of the Quran. Here, the godly and pious have been eradicated, a shockingly un-Islamic event. This then, it seems, is what generated al-Maʿarrī's jarring juxtaposition of the Islamic pilgrims or "Quraysh" (in the *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* editions, see below) and Mecca in the first hemistich with the extinct semi-legendary Arab tribes of Jadīs and Ṭasm in the second. Although the two latter tribes are not among the nations destroyed for their impiety in the Quran, the legends concerning their demise reveal a similar moral pattern in which the commission of outrages against tradition-honored tribal morals results in their mutual extermination and extinction (see below, PART II).

The unsettling message that the Damascus inscription reveals is that time (*dahr*) destroys both the just and unjust, the pious and impious. Quite at odds with the moral message of the Quran, this is the message of universal mortality and ineluctable fate—the message of the *nasīb*, the melancholy prelude to the classical Arabic poem, *qaṣīda*. Neither the pious Muslim pilgrims (or the Qurashī tribesmen of the Prophet) nor the sanctuary of Mecca will be spared the common fate. Although the Umayyads of al-Walīd's time might have read the inscription as a sign of their legitimate inheritance of a monotheistic tradition, al-Maʿarrī's late Abbasid reading exposes such Umayyad triumphalism as mere vanity, while at the same time disabusing his contemporaries of any similar triumphalist notions.

The source of al-Maʿarrī's perception is ultimately metaphoric and lies precisely in that most essential and conventional motif of the Arabic *qaṣīda* tradition, the stopping at the ruins (*al-wuqūf ʿalā l-aṭlāl*). Quite at odds with the Quranic interpretation of God's just destruction of ungodly peoples, the poetic motif of the poet stopping at the ruined abode of his lost beloved and her tribe stands in the poetic tradition as the poet's recognition of his own mortality. That is, he does not see in the extinction of the ancient people the divine destruction of the wicked "other," but rather the adumbration of his—and mankind's—inevitable fate.

The elements of this account, which is essentially Ibn al-Qifṭī's interpretation of the ancient ruins and of the genesis of al-Maʿarrī's poem, ultimately derive then from the elegiac

17. Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh*, 1: 68 and 65; *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 50 and 47.

18. See M. Saleh, "Abū'l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (363–449/973–1057): Bibliographie critique, deuxième partie. Études critiques modernes," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 23 (1970), 197–309, at 275.

prelude (*nasīb*) of the classical *qaṣīda*.[19] These elements—including the equally *nasīb*-derived question and al-Maʿarrī's negative answer ("Who are *ahl al-usṭuwān*?" "I don't know") of al-Nuʿaymī's variant (above)—are already fully developed in the poetry of the pre-Islamic age, the Jāhiliyya, where we find, for example in the *Muʿallaqa* of Labīd:

1. Effaced are the abodes, brief encampments and long-settled ones;
   At Minā the wilderness has claimed Mount Ghawl and Mount Rijām.
2. The torrent channels of Mount Rayyān, their tracings are laid bare,
   Preserved as surely as inscriptions are preserved in rock.

[. . .]

10. Then I stopped and questioned them, but how do we question
    Mute immortals whose speech is indistinct?[20]

And likewise in that of al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī:

1. O abode of Mayya on height and peak! It lies abandoned,
   And so long a time has passed it by!
2. I stopped there in the evening to question it;
   It could not answer, for in the vernal camp there was no one.[21]

In a final irony, the ancient inscription that provided for the Umayyads a decipherable text confirming Islamic dispensationalism and legitimate Umayyad dominion conveys in al-Maʿarrī's late Abbasid reading the same meaning as the indecipherable "mute" inscriptions of the *nasīb*ic ruins: man's mortality.[22]

Text and Translation of al-Maʿarrī's Ṭasmu Luzūmiyya (rhyme -smu; meter ṭawīl [faʿūlun mafāʿīlun])

١ سيَسْألُ ناسٌ: ما قُرَيشٌ ومكةٌ — كما قال ناسٌ ما جَديسٌ وما طَسْمُ

٢ أرى الوَقْتَ يُفْني أَنْفُساً بفَنائِهِ — ويَمْحو فما يَبْقى الحديثُ ولا الرَّسْمُ

٣ لقد جَدَّ أَهْلُ المَلْعَبَين فأَثَّلوا — بِناءً ولم يَثْبُتْ لِرافِعِهِ وَسْمُ

٤ وفي العالَمِ الغاوي بَخيلٌ مُمَوَّلٌ — وسَمْحٌ فَقيرٌ شَدَّ ما اخْتلفَ القَسْمُ

٥ وكَوْنُ الفَتَى في رَهْطِهِ نَيْلُ عِزَّةٍ — على أنَّ داءَ الدَّهْرِ ليسَ له حَسْمُ

٦ ويُرْزَأ جِسْمُ المَرْءِ حتّى إذا أَوَى — إلى العُنْصُرِ التّرْبيّ لم يُرْزَإِ الجِسْمُ

1. People will ask, "What is Quraysh? What is Mecca?"
   Just as people once asked, "What is Jadīs? What is Ṭasm?"

19. The essentially elegiac character of the classical Arabic *nasīb ṭalalī* (ruined abode prelude) in its lexical, motival, and mythopoetic aspects is explored at length in J. Stetkevych, "Toward an Arabic Elegiac Lexicon: The Seven Words of the *Nasīb*," in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. S. P. Stetkevych (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 58–129.

20. For the Arabic text, see the edition by ʿA. S. Hārūn, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1969), 505; for translation, S. P. Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 9–10. On the mythic, philological, and Orphic aspects of the questioning of the ruins in the *nasīb* (*suʾāl*), see J. Stetkevych, "Toward an Arabic Elegiac Lexicon," 105–19.

21. For the Arabic text, see the edition by M. Ibrāhīm, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1990), 14–28; translation in Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 26.

22. See Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals Speak*, 18–26. I thank the *JAOS* reader, whose remarks proved helpful in clarifying my final argument.

2. I see time wreaking destructions on men's souls
   And erasing, 'til no word or trace of them remains.
3. The people of the sporting fields of night and day strove earnestly
   To firmly ground an edifice, but no sign of him who raised it remains.
4. In this wayward world misers are made wealthy while the generous are poor;
   How vastly one man's luck differs from another's!
5. A man rises to high rank among his kinsmen
   Only so long as ill fate does not cut him down.
6. A man's body suffers until, when it seeks refuge
   In the earth, its torment ends.[23]

After the ironic jolt of its opening line, al-Maʿarrī's Luzūmiyya resolves into a contemplation of the unavoidability of the common fate, and a corporeal, rather than spiritual, view of life and death. Life is nothing but bodily suffering, and death the cessation of bodily suffering. There is no suggestion of salvation or heavenly afterlife, only the body's refuge (decomposition) in the earth. In the context of Ibn al-Qifṭī's anecdote, this appears to be the rational response to the obvious obliteration of a civilization whose piety and righteousness are preserved in—and only in, it seems—the "trace" inscription that the Umayyad workmen dug up.

In this first exploration of the poetic genesis of this Luzūmiyya, we have followed Ibn al-Qifṭī's account, which presents the poem as a spontaneous response to hearing of the unearthing of the ancient inscription of a long extinct but pious builder, an experiential spark of the realization that Arab-Islamic civilization will be obliterated as surely as any other that has gone before. Piety, virtue, and righteousness are no guarantee of worldly success and survival, much less of otherworldly salvation.

PART II. LEXICAL EXILE AND THE TYRANNY OF THE RHYME

Our second hermeneutical enterprise will take an entirely different tack.[24] While not denying that individual poems may have sprung from specific external circumstances, as indeed we are told about in several cases,[25] al-Maʿarrī's introduction to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, nevertheless, presents a very different approach to poetic production. While it does not rule out the possibility of experiential or external inspiration, his programmatic poetic undertaking imposes such unrelenting technical demands that it makes such external factors, whether

23. Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam: al-Luzūmiyyāt*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1400/1980), 2: 377, hereafter *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir; al-Maʿarrī, *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, ed. A. ʿA. al-Khānjī, 2 vols. (Beirut and Cairo: Maktabat al-Hilāl and Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1342/[1923]), 2: 261–62, hereafter *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī. The printings and editions of this diwan remain quite problematic (quite unlike the situation for *Saqṭ al-zand*)—an issue beyond the scope of the present study. Having reviewed quite a number of them, I have settled for the present purpose on Dār Ṣādir because of its accuracy and accessibility, and on al-Khānjī for its general reliability. I have labeled each individual Luzūmiyya according to the vocalized rhyme word of the first line, as this makes them easily distinguishable and easy to locate in any of the editions.

24. I have borrowed the phrase "the tyranny of the rhyme" from R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969 [repr. of 1921]), 53: "Were Maʿarrī a minor poet, the *Luzūm* would be a senseless *tour de force*. Some of it is not very remote from that description, and the tyranny of the rhyme exacts a crushing toll of repetition, monotony, banality, obscurity, and affectation." Cf. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's 1938f. work, *Maʿ Abī l-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 132–33, 148.

25. For example, al-Maʿarrī's intercession for his townsfolk of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān with the emir of Aleppo, Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Mirdās, concerning a disturbance that broke out after an incident at a local brothel. See Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh*, 1: 53–54; *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 35–36; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb* (entry on al-Maʿarrī), in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 140–41; Smoor, "al-Maʿarrī."

performative obligation or spontaneous experiential inspiration, seem both unnecessary and unlikely. Furthermore, neither the programmatic project of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* nor those of his many other poetry works from the post-400/1010 seclusion period can, in the end, be separated from his principled denunciation and rejection of the classical Arabic *qaṣīda* tradition, i.e., the panegyric poem (*qaṣīdat al-madḥ*), including his own youthful diwan, *Saqṭ al-zand*. In his preface to that work, composed during his period of seclusion, he writes:

> Now then, poets are like horses racing to the finish line: the inferior ones are outstripped and those that stop short are chided and overtaken. And I, in the prime and exuberance of my youth, was inclined toward poetry, considering it among the greatest accomplishments of the litterateur and the noblest rank of eloquence. But then I rejected it, as the newborn camel rejects the fetal membrane and the newly hatched ostrich chick its eggshell, out of disgust for an art, most of whose best works were lies and whose weak works were deficient and fruitless. [. . .] But I never came knocking on the doors of notables bringing poems to their ears, nor did I write poems of praise seeking rewards, but rather, all of that [poetry] was in the way of exercise and testing [lit. nature] the extent of my abilities.[26]

We must keep in mind that in rejecting the classical tradition, al-Maʿarrī is rejecting all those poets of that tradition who served as both his models and competitors—chief among them, the Abbasid master-panegyrists Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī, and, above all, al-Mutanabbī. Not only is their influence clear from reading al-Maʿarrī's *Saqṭ al-zand*, but his fervent devotion to al-Mutanabbī is credited by some anecdotes to his expulsion from the circle of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā in Baghdad;[27] even in his period of ascetic reclusion he composed commentaries on the diwans of these three poets.[28]

Al-Maʿarrī further explains his withdrawal from the world of the *qaṣīda* and of worldly affairs—which, according to the present argument, are the same thing—in his introduction to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. He opens by affirming his decision to compose a work in which he aims "at speech that is true and unblemished by lies, [. . .] in which there is praise of God, [. . .] a reminder for the forgetful, a wake-up call for the sleeping and negligent, and a warning against the great world which perpetrated such folly upon our forebears."[29] In doing so, he will arrive at a speech that is "stripped of lies" (*qawlun ʿurriya min al-mayn*).[30] It is crucial to take note of his claim—or recognition—that in abandoning the worldly poetry of the *qaṣīda*, he is ipso facto condemning his subsequent poetic production, *al-Luzūmiyyāt* in particular, to mediocrity.[31] Al-Maʿarrī concludes his introduction to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* by picking up from where his preface to *Saqṭ al-zand* left off:

26. *Shurūḥ Siqṭ al-zand [li-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī]*, ed. M. al-Saqqā et al., 5 vols. (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1406/1986 [photo-offset of Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1364/1945]), 1: 10 (pref. of al-Tibrīzī) and 1: 19 (pref. of al-Khwārazmī).

27. See Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb*, 76.

28. These, all titled in puns on the poets' names, are: *Dhikrā ḥabīb* on Abū Tammām (Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭāʾī); *ʿAbath walīd* on (Abū ʿUbāda Walīd ibn ʿUbayd Allāh) al-Buḥturī; and *Muʿjiz aḥmad* on (Aḥmad Abū l-Ṭayyib) al-Mutanabbī (otherwise entitled *al-Lamiʿ al-ʿazīzī* after its patron, the emir of Aleppo, ʿAzīz al-Dawla, assuming they are the same work). See Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb*, 107, 111. Although Yāqūt remarks that some of these were not willingly composed by al-Maʿarrī, they nevertheless reveal his range of poetic expertise. See also Saleh, "Abū'l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī," 275–76.

29. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 1: 5; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 1: 1.

30. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 1: 6; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 1: 1.

31. A principle of performative theory (Speech Act Theory), which I and others have applied to the interpretation and evaluation of the classical Arabic *qaṣīda*, is that the performative statement or "speech act" has no true/false value. Rather, it is a statement whose successful utterance effects a change of status and binds the participants in the act to an established set of mutual obligations—for example, the *qaṣīda* as pledge of allegiance to a ruler.

> I said previously that I rejected poetry as a newborn camel rejects its fetal membrane and an ostrich chick is eggshell, and [I rejected] the genre of poetry in which lying was considered permissible and in which the poet resorted to all sorts of suspicious things. As for poetry that consists of admonition to him who listens and a wake-up call to him who slumbers and an order to be on guard against the deceitful world and its people, who were created for nothing so much as cheating and deceiving, God willing it will be among those things for which reward is sought. I add to my previous apology that whoever follows this manner of poetry will produce weak poetry, because he strives for what is truthful and seeks speech that is pious. It is for this reason that much of the poetry of Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣalt al-Thaqafī[32] and those in Islamic times who followed his distinctive manner is weak. It is related that al-Aṣmaʿī said words to the effect that: Poetry is one of the doors to falsehood, so if something else is desired from it, it will be weak.[33]

Thus, it seems inevitable to al-Maʿarrī that what he gains in piety, veracity, and virtue, he loses in poetic excellence or aesthetic quality. In this regard, it appears that his demanding self-imposed rhyme program in *al-Luzūmiyyāt* is largely compensatory. On the one hand he substitutes the technical lexical and prosodic metric of his rhyme scheme for the traditional *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*, the classical standard for the aesthetic evaluation of poetry. At the same time—in terms of our understanding of the *qaṣīda* tradition of valorizing the performative success of the poem in its socio-political setting—the Luzūmiyya as poem is understood as, above all, a response to the challenge of al-Maʿarrī's self-imposed rhyme requirements, rather than a poem sparked by the challenge of a real-world event. The challenge to the poetic imagination is lexical, phonological, or prosodic, rather than experiential.

Al-Maʿarrī's scheme is highly complex, requiring not only double rhymes in each letter of the alphabet, but also all possible vowel endings:

> In this work I have imposed upon myself three constraints: the first is that it be ordered according to the alphabet [from first] to last; the second is that the rhyme consonant be followed by each of the three vowels plus *sukūn*; and the third is that each rhyme consonant be preceded by a [normally] non-obligatory second consonant, such as *yāʾ* or *tāʾ* or another consonant.[34]

In other words, he has not composed a series of poems and then organized them alphabetically; rather, the complex, elaborate, and all-encompassing rhyme scheme has determined the composition of the poems. However, we have to go further with our argument. On closer examination it becomes evident that al-Maʿarrī is not merely rejecting the performative poetics of the panegyric *qaṣīda* tradition, but he is proposing and promoting an entirely new poetic aesthetic standard or criterion. We can now understand that in rejecting the *qaṣīda* and the political-performative world to which it belongs, al-Maʿarrī had ipso facto to reject the standard of evaluation for that poetry—which, in effect, I argue, was its performative success. Al-Maʿarrī's new (post-classical, in my view) aesthetic requires that the poet be measured by his total mastery of his most basic poetic tools—rhyme, meter, and language (*ʿilm al-lugha*, including syntax, morphology, and lexicon). This is borne out in the many

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This is most clearly explicated in M. Y. al-Mallah, "Doing Things with Odes: A Poet's Pledges of Allegiance. Ibn Darrāj al-Qasṭallī's *Hāʾiyyah* to al-Manṣūr and *Rāʾiyyah* to al-Mundhir," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34 (2003): 45–81; idem, *In the Shadows of the Master: Al-Mutanabbī's Legacy and the Quest for the Center in Fāṭimid and Andalusian Poetry* (Highclere, Berkshire, UK: Berkshire Academic Press, 2012), 81–111. See also Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, esp. 180–240 (ch. 6).

32. A poet of the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, traditionally considered a *ḥanīf*. The poetry attributed to him is characterized by the "legendary" and "religious" elements, otherwise familiar from *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (stories of the prophets). See "Umayya b. Abi 'l-Ṣalt" (J. E. Montgomery), *EI2*.

33. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 1: 38–39; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 1: 31–32.

34. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 1: 30; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 1: 23.

other programmatic works of al-Maʿarrī, no longer extant but described, for example, by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī in *Irshād al-arīb*; chief among them in the present context is his *Jāmiʿ al-awzān*, which presents the same tour-de-force of meters as *al-Luzūmiyyāt* does of rhyme.[35]

Of particular note in the context of the challenge of *al-Luzūmiyyāt* to produce rhymes in every letter of the alphabet are al-Maʿarrī's disparaging remarks about the shortcomings of his illustrious predecessors in this regard. He notes that of the greatest pre-Islamic poets, what is related of Imruʾ al-Qays's poetry has nothing rhymed in such difficult rhyme letters as *ṭāʾ*, *ẓāʾ*, *shīn*, and *khāʾ*, and the diwan of al-Nābigha has nothing rhymed in *ṣād*, *ḍād*, *ṭāʾ*, etc. Of the Abbasid masters, al-Buḥturī has nothing rhymed in *khāʾ*, *ghayn*, or *thāʾ* in the recognized recension of his diwan; and as for the incomparable al-Mutanabbī, al-Maʿarrī finds fault in his not using the rhyme consonants (sg. *rawī*) with all possible end-vowels (sg. *ṣila*).[36] In devising his programmatic rhyme project, al-Maʿarrī is at the same time establishing a new aesthetic yardstick by which poets will now be measured: the poet's demonstrated ability to rhyme in all the letters of the alphabet and with all three end-vowels plus *sukūn*. This criterion is not part of classical Arabic poetics and aesthetics, however much such metrics and schemes become pervasive in the post-classical period.[37] Al-Maʿarrī is not so much abandoning the "horse race" of *qaṣīda* poetry as he is establishing his own "new rules of the game"—rules that guarantee that he will "outstrip" even the greatest of the Jāhilī and Abbasid *fuḥūl* (stallions, also, "master poets").

Several scholars have made important contributions toward formulating a new aesthetic for the interpretation and evaluation of al-Maʿarrī's literary accomplishment in *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, precisely in the terms that are of concern to the present study, that is, the close reading of the "mechanics" of individual Luzūmiyya poems.[38] While such studies may seem to make it difficult to see the forest for the trees, it seems to me that any assessment of the full literary structure is impossible without understanding the inner workings of its constituent parts, and then their relationship. Given the multitude of poems (around 1600) in the collection, this is a daunting task. Of importance to me is that these studies, although they do not employ the term, approach the poetic texts in a manner we could term "Stylistics." By this I mean, fol-

35. Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arūb*, 101–12, esp. 106 for *Jāmiʿ al-awzān*.

36. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 1: 30; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 1: 22–23.

37. A topic I hope to expand upon on a later occasion. Meanwhile, see S. P. Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to *Badīʿiyyah*: Orality, Literacy, and the Transformations of Rhetoric in Arabic Poetry," *Oral Tradition* 25.1 (2010): 211–30, accessible online at http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/25i/stetkevych.

38. Anthony Verity ("Two Poems of Abu'l-ʿAlā Al-Maʿarrī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 [1971]: 37–47) offers insights concerning the strong effects that can be produced by the unrelenting rhyme patterns, parataxis, lack of imagery, and other features, viz., that, in recitation, "each couplet rhyming inexorably with the last, the very regularity invests the words with a kind of inevitable (emotional) truth" (p. 42); that "perhaps we should not look for an intellectual progression of ideas, but examine how the images (which trigger off an emotional reaction) act upon each other by juxtaposition" (p. 40); and that the lapidary, paratactic structure, and compelling and heavy rhyme of certain poems create the effect of "public ritual cursing," "solemn communication," and of "the poet assuming the *persona* of official magician pronouncing anathema [on] his enemies" (pp. 45, 46). He also points to the direct impact that can be produced by the very absence of imagery (p. 46).

Although not as explicitly concerned with "stylistic" matters, Pieter Smoor's very close reading and analysis of al-Maʿarrī's anomalously long fifty-verse *tukannī* Luzūmiyya in the context of extensive comparisons with his *Saqṭ al-zand* and *al-Dirʿiyyāt* (Armor Poems, usually appended to *Saqṭ al-zand*) offer vast information on al-Maʿarrī's poetics—language, imagery, themes, etc., and the place of *al-Luzūmiyyāt* among his poetic works (P. Smoor, "The Delirious Sword of Maʿarrī: An Annotated Translation of his *Luzūmiyya Nūniyya* in the Rhyme-Form *Nūn Maksūra Mushaddada*," in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*, vol. 2: *Studien zur arabischen Dichtung*, ed. W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler [Beirut and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994], 381–424. On Stefan Sperl's important study, see below, and n. 40.

lowing most explicitly works such as Roman Jakobson's groundbreaking "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,"[39] the analysis of the text on the principle that all linguistic features of the text are meaning-producing. Thus, for example in *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, the formal aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, meter, and, of course, rhyme all contribute to the meaning of the text. How or whether these constituent parts contribute to a coherent and successful project is a further challenge, beyond the scope of the present study.

In my estimation, the starting-point for a contemporary reading and evaluation of al-Maʿarrī's *al-Luzūmiyyāt* in general, and the second part of the present study in particular, is Stefan Sperl's study in his 1989 book, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*.[40] Leaving behind both the Romantic and the "philosophical" approaches that characterized literary studies of *al-Luzūmiyyāt* throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Sperl devotes his analyses of selected poems to the medium of speech itself.[41] He understands al-Maʿarrī's project with its comprehensive and systematic approach to rhyme as analogous to works such as Johann Sebastian Bach's systematic exploration of all the major and minor keys in the Well-Tempered Clavier.[42] Key to our readings in the present study is his statement that,

> Furthermore, Maʿarrī's rules do not only affect the external shape of the *Luzūmiyyāt*. They have a great influence on the texture of the individual poems. This is evident even on purely theoretical grounds. The reinforced *qāfiya* restricts the lexical choice of rhyme words; by imposing a certain vocalic pattern, it also limits the range of morphological patterns a rhyme word can assume. Both factors have inevitable repercussions on phonology and syntax and all of these affect the semantic structure.[43]

In the context of the present argument concerning the *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya, the individual poems of *al-Luzūmiyyāt* would, according to the logic of this complex scheme, be generated lexically by the rhyme word. That is, in determining the genesis of the poem in accordance with our second approach, we have to begin with the idea that perhaps al-Maʿarrī's poetic task for the day was a rhyme in *-sm*, or more specifically *-smu,* and speculatively reconstruct a creative scenario from there. However different from our first experiential approach to the genesis of the poem, this, too, proves fruitful.

To start, we can speculate that a first possibility that comes to mind is a proper noun, Ṭasm. Within the originally oral-formulaic nature of Arabic poetry with its conventional poetic associations and formulae, the name Ṭasm virtually spontaneously generates its legendary mate, Jadīs. The two tribes are forever bound in Arab lore by virtue of their mutual annihilation (*wa-ammā Ṭasmun wa-Jadīsun fa-ʿafā baʿḍuhum baʿḍan*).[44] The traditional Arab accounts of this episode show a rich interweave of familiar folk motifs and offer a good deal of variation in detail, but, in general, the version provided in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* is representative:

> Ṭasm and Jadīs were among the inhabitants of al-Yamāma, which was at that time one of the most fertile, prosperous, and bountiful of lands. There they had all kinds of fruits, delightful

39. R. Jakobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," in idem, *Language and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), 121–44. See also "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry," ibid., 250–61.

40. S. Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd century AH/9th century AD–5th century AH/11th century AD)* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 97–154 (ch. 5).

41. Ibid., 99.

42. Ibid., 102.

43. Ibid.

44. In the pithy expression of the historian al-Masʿūdī, as cited in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. ʿA. R. al-Wakīl, 7 vols. (n.p.: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1967), 1: 107 n. 1.

> gardens, and lofty palaces. But over them ruled an unjust and tyrannical king from Ṭasm called ʿUmlūq [elsewhere, ʿImlīq], whose passions were totally without restraint. He treated Jadīs in a cruel and degrading manner. Among the humiliations they endured was that he ordered that they should not give a virgin of theirs to her husband until she had come to him so he could deflower her. So a man from Jadīs, called al-Aswad ibn Ghaffār, said to the chieftains of his tribe: "You have suffered a disgrace so humiliating it would make even a dog ashamed and angry! Obey me and I will restore your glory and expunge your shame." "How is that?" they asked. He replied, "I will prepare a meal for the king and his tribe, and when they come, we will raise our swords to them. I will get the king by himself and kill him and each of you will slay the man [he is] sitting with." They all agreed to this, so he prepared a meal and ordered his tribesmen to unsheathe their swords and bury them in the sand. Then he said, "When the tribesmen [of Ṭasm] come to you, strutting in their robes, take their swords, then attack them before they can take their seats, and kill their chieftains—for once you have killed them, the riffraff will be no problem." The king came and was slain, then the chieftains were slain, and then they attacked the common people, until they had exterminated them. Only one man from Ṭasm, named Riyāḥ ibn Murra, escaped and fled until he reached Ḥassān ibn Tubbaʿ [of Ḥimyar] and sought help from him [to avenge his tribe]. Ḥassān set out with [the men of] Ḥimyar. When he was three days from al-Yamāma, Riyāḥ said to him: "May you repel all curses! I have a sister, named al-Yamāma, who is married into Jadīs. No one on the face of the earth has eyesight as sharp as hers—she can see a rider three days away, and I'm afraid that she'll warn the tribe [Jadīs] about you. So order your companions to have each man cut a branch and hold it in his hand in front of him as he travels. Ḥassān ordered them to do this and they did. He proceeded on and al-Yamāma looked and saw them and said to Jadīs: "[The men of] Ḥimyar are on the move." "What do you see?" they asked. "I see a man in a tree, and with him a shoulder [of butchered meat] he is stripping to the bone or [perhaps it is] a sandal he is patching." They didn't believe her, but it was indeed as she had said. Ḥassān attacked them in the morning. He exterminated them, devastated their country, and demolished their palaces and strongholds.
>
> At that time, [the location] al-Yamāma was called Jaww and al-Qarya, but Ḥassān brought al-Yamāma bint Murra and ordered her eyes to be slit open. In them were veins of black, so he said to her, "What is this black in the veins of your eyes?" "It is a black stone called *ithmid* (antimony)," she replied. "I used to use it as kohl to line my eyes." It is said that she was the first person ever to use antimony to line her eyes, and that Ḥassān ordered that Jaww be (re)named al-Yamāma.[45]

Briefly we can note the theme of the fertile and prosperous polity undone by its moral failings, much as we read of it in the lore of the Dam of Maʾrib and the War of al-Basūs.[46] As in the latter, one abomination by one party sets off a chain reaction of abominations on both sides. However, while the cousin tribes of Bakr and Taghlib survived their forty-year war of blood vengeance, in the case of Ṭasm and Jadīs the laws of justice and then hospitality are violated by the two parties respectively, culminating in their mutual destruction. The Cassandra and Birnham Woods motifs likewise are incorporated in the lore of Zarqāʾ ("blue-eyed girl") al-Yamāma, the etiology of eyeliner, and in a rather circular manner, the naming of al-Yamāma.[47]

45. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. Ibrāhīm, 11 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr), 1: 629–30.

46. On the cautionary tale of the bursting of the Dam of Maʾrib, see Q 34:15–19 and the discussion in Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals Speak*, 23–24; on the War of al-Basūs, see ibid., 206–38, passim, and notes.

47. See also "Ṭasm" (W. P. Heinrichs), *EI2*. On the "textual" instability of narrative lore, see S. P. Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship: Qaṣīdah, Qurʾān and Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48 (2017): 1–37.

In sum, the proper noun Ṭasm is not merely the subject of pre-Islamic lore, but through that lore is semantically and verbally yoked to Jadīs, and the rhyme pattern -*sm*, having suggested Ṭasm, generates a conventional poetic phrase or formula, together with its mythic-folkloric and moral associations. In this reading, therefore, it is not the external experience—hearing of the unearthed Damascene inscription—that sparks the poem, but rather the rhyme letters themselves that have led to Ṭasm.

The associations that derive from the proper name Ṭasm are not, however, limited to the lore of extinct tribes and the formulaic pair of Ṭasm and Jadīs that encapsulates that lore and its moral. For the Arab poet and linguist (and al-Maʿarrī was both), Ṭasm also offers an etymological transparency that generates the remainder of the poem. The root *ṭ-s-m* means to obliterate or be obliterated and figures, as does its synonym *darasa* (to be effaced, to erase), as part of the poetic lexicon of the *nasīb ṭalalī*.[48]

Al-Maʿarrī's decisive mental or imaginative leap, however, is a dramatic abstraction of or imaginative projection across time, through which the pair of Ṭasm and Jadīs brings about what should be an antithesis or contrasting pair, the Islamic Quraysh and Mecca (or in variant versions, al-Ḥajīj and Mecca). The one is the embodiment of moral failing and obliteration—the Quranic message of the impious peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd upon whom Allāh wreaked destruction; the other is the embodiment of Islamic piety and virtue: Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe (or, the Muslim pilgrims), and Mecca, the sacred pilgrimage site of Islam. However, in this poem the poetic force of the *nasīb*, the ruined abode of the poet's lost beloved and her people, erased by wind, rain, and the passage of time, proves stronger than the moral messages of popular lore and religious doctrine: Quraysh and Mecca become synonymous with Ṭasm and Jadīs and will suffer the same fate. The remainder of the poem simply pursues the logical results of this realization, exposing the vanity not merely of the mighty, but of all mankind. The poem ends with resignation to the common lot. Disengaged from Ibn al-Qifṭī's account, our reading of al-Maʿarrī's Luzūmiyya loses some of the extra dimensions of irony that the Abbasid contemplation of Umayyad excavation and Grand Mosque project generated, but perhaps the poem stands best on its own two feet. Above all, in our second reading, we will see that it is the words, especially the rhyme word, that determine and carry the poem, rather than the Damascene excavation-inspired image of a long-gone ancient builder.

How does the rhyme word Ṭasm propel the remainder of the poem? Through a complex associative process that is phonological and semantic, the proper name and the word itself form a mythic-etymological complex that produces synonyms such as *yufnī* (annihilate) and *yamḥū* (erase, efface), as well as antonyms (*mā) yabqā* ([not] remain) and the hermeneutically ambiguous *rasm*, a "trace" (antonym) that invariably points to an obliterated encampment (synonym)—such that, in a manner discussed at length by Jaroslav Stetkevych, it generates the opposite meaning, becoming among the many lexical items in Arabic that mean one thing and its opposite (*ḍidd*, pl. *aḍdād*).[49] Hence, *r-s-m* means both to erase and to leave traces; most typically in poetry, it means for rain to erase a dwelling leaving traces on the ground. The "without a trace" rhyme of v. 2 (*wa-lā rasmu*) then provokes acoustically, semantically, and logically the "without a sign" (*lam . . . wasmu*) rhyme of v. 3. The play of sign versus erasure/obliteration of the *ṭasm, rasm, wasm* rhymes of vv. 1–3 leads, again in a manner that combines the acoustic, the semantic, and the logical, to the fate-associated rhyme words of vv. 4 and 5: *qasmu* (share, fate, lot) and *ḥasmu* (*ḥ-s-m*, to cut, sever, cut off), which take on

48. *Lisān al-ʿarab*, s.v. *ṭ-s-m*.

49. See J. Stetkevych, "Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 48 (1989): 81–96.

the sense of being decisive, that is, "final" (i.e., ineluctable, fated). The message of the rhyme sequence of vv. 1–5 then is that total obliteration is man's fate. Moreover, there is no moral force at work in the universe—virtue is not rewarded and vice is not punished—neither in this world nor in the next.

In the closing verse, *wa-yurzaʾu jismu . . . /. . . lam yurzaʾi al-jismu*, we find a powerful and radically simple expression of the same idea, now embodied in the flesh through the rhyme word *jismu* (body), given additional weight and substance through its repetition of words from the first hemistich in the rhyme (*radd al-ʿajuz ʿalā l-ṣadr* or *epanadiplosis*). The religious, mythic, gnomic, and poetic truisms of the first five verses are brought home in a very immediate image: the physical, suffering flesh and its inevitable decomposition after death. This image conveys the concept that life is nothing but bodily torment; the afterlife therefore is nothing but bodily decay and the attendant end of bodily torment. Without bombast or fanfare, but with striking economy and precision, al-Maʿarrī thus dismisses the Islamic creed of salvation, bodily resurrection, and the just rewards of the hereafter—whether of delights or torments.

Our second rhyme-and-lexicon-based hermeneutic approach, then, dispenses with the anecdotal circumstances preserved in, or provided by, Ibn al-Qifṭī, and instead reads this Luzūmiyya in light of al-Maʿarrī's own formulation of his programmatic poetic project. It further presumes that, given the complex rhyme scheme, the rhyme words play an exaggerated or intensified role in the generation or construction of the poem. Further, we argue that this phenomenon is not accidental, but rather is essential to al-Maʿarrī's new poetic aesthetic and therefore crucial to the hermeneutic techniques through which we attempt to trace the genesis of the poem and its meaning.

To buttress our reading of the Luzūmiyya rhymed in *Ṭasmu*, we turn briefly to a few other examples, and address two points: one is the role of the end vowel, particularly as al-Maʿarrī has made the systematic employ of all three *ḥarakāt* (*ḍamma, fatḥa, kasra*) plus no vowel (*sukūn*) part of his rhyme program.[50] The other is the importance of the choice of opening rhyme word and of grammatical case, which becomes apparent when we compare the *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya with one also rhymed in *-smu* and one in *-smi*. My argument is basically that (1) choosing the proper name Ṭasm for the opening verse gives that word a position of phonological and semantic dominance throughout the poem, and (2) its use in the nominative case reinforces that dominance through the grammatically unsubordinated (free-standing, agent, subject, predicate or *fāʿil, mubtadaʾ, khabar*) role of the nominative case in Arabic. This effect is strengthened in that all the rhyme words of the poem are triliteral substantives (*faʿl, fiʿl*)—a form that inevitably predominates, given that the Arabic morphological possibilities available for the particular meter and *-smu* rhyme pattern of this poem are extremely limited. Even so, as we will see in the examples adduced below, al-Maʿarrī's reuse—or recycling—of the same, very limited, and altogether simple group of rhyme words seems to be at the expense of a more probing exploration of the lexical and morphological possibilities.

Of our auxiliary examples, let us begin with a second Luzūmiyya, rhyme word *qismu*, that employs the same rhyme (*-smu*) and meter (*ṭawīl*) as the *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya. Further, this seven-verse poem features the exact same group of rhyme words: *qism* (lot, share; *qasm* in *Ṭasmu* Luz.), *wasm* (mark), *jism* (body), Ṭasm (the extinct tribe), *rasm* (trace), *ḥasm* (cutting short), and adds one more: *ism* (name).

50. The examples are just a select few of the considerably larger group of interlocking poems that include not merely all three vowels endings and *sukūn*, but also repetitions of the same double rhyme and vowel and the repetition as rhyme word of key words. As the diwan is alphabetically ordered by rhyme, the reader can easily locate more examples of these patterns and key rhyme words.

Text and Translation of al-Maʿarrī's qismu *Luzūmiyya* (rhyme -*smu*; meter *ṭawīl* [*faʿūlun mafāʿīlun*])

١	إذا ما تَقَضّى الأرْبعونَ فلا تُرِدْ	سِوى امْرأةٍ في الأربعينَ لها قِسْمُ
٢	فإنَّ الذي وَفّى الثلاثينَ وارْتقى	عليهِنَّ عَشْراً للفَناء به وَسْمُ
٣	زَمانُ الغَواني عَصْرَ جِسْمِكَ زائدٌ	وهُنَّ عَناءٌ بعد أنْ يَقِفَ الجِسْمُ
٤	سَأَلْتَ بني الأيّامِ عن ذاهِبِ الصِّبا	كأنَّك قُلْتَ الآنَ ما فَعَلَتْ طَسْمُ
٥	تُريدُ من الدُّنْيا خِلافاً لِما مضى	وأعْياكَ تدْبيرٌ به سَبَقَ الرَّسْمُ
٦	هو الدّاءُ لا يَنْفَكُّ يُشْكى ويُشْتكى	ولو شاء رَبُّ الناسِ أدْرَكَه الحَسْمُ
٧	مَضى الشّخْصُ ثُم الذِكْرُ فانْقَرَضا معا	وما مات كلَّ المَوتِ من عاش منْهُ اسْمُ

1. When you've reached the age of forty,
   Don't desire a woman of less than forty,
2. For a man who has reached thirty and raised it by ten
   Is marked for death.
3. Your body has grown too old for beautiful women;
   They are nothing but trouble once the body has failed.
4. To ask the wise men what happened to the long-gone days of youth,
   Is like waiting 'til now to ask, "Whatever became of Ṭasm?"
5. You wish the world had turned out different from what came to pass,
   For the plan you devised beforehand availed you nothing.
6. [Old age is] a disease that men never cease to complain of,
   But whenever the Lord of Mankind wishes, it may be cut short.
7. The person passes away, then his remembrance: together they disappear.
   But he does not perish utterly whose name still lives.[51]

Perhaps still under the control of this largely *nasīb*-derived lexical subset, al-Maʿarrī opts to explore not the *nasīb* motif of the ruined abode, with its legendary, mythic and—at least in his hands—even religious associations, but rather another of the convention-honored motifs of the *nasīb*, *al-shakwā min al-shayb* (the complaint against old age). Like the ruined abode motif, the complaint against old age offers a contemplation of the irretrievable past, only now it is the poet's own long-faded youth—with its once vigorous good looks so irresistible to young damsels—whose passing he laments. The poem opens in a mocking and chiding tone—find a woman your own age, because by the age of forty you are marked for death. The rhyme word *qism* also suggest that an older man should seek a woman who is "age-appropriate"—i.e., has the same portion of years. The second verse reminds us that old age is a harbinger of death; the third explicitly ties aging to the body with, as in the *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya, the rhyme repetition of the word *jism*, and laments that however many beautiful young women still abound, with the depredations of old age his body can no longer keep up—they are now nothing but trouble. The speaker then deepens the sense of the irrevocability of the past beyond the personal and immediate by invoking the ancient and the legendary—his own days of youth, however recent they may seem, are as irretrievable as the long-extinct tribe of Ṭasm. He turns in v. 5 to the regrets of old age, the wish that life had turned out differently, the disappointment that all his best-laid plans have come to naught; v. 6 expresses the still current commonplace that whatever one's complaints, the only alternative to

51. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 2: 378; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 2: 262.

old age is death. The first half of the closing verse 7 proffers the sort of resignation to oblivion we saw at the end of the *Ṭasmu* poem, and what would seem to be the logical progression of this poem: old age, debility, regret, and, finally, death: both the person and all memory or mention of him are slated for extinction. The curious thing in this poem, however, is the final hemistich. It is here that al-Maʿarrī introduces the new rhyme word, *ism* (name), and uses it to reprise a famous aphoristic verse (*ḥikma*) of his favorite predecessor, al-Mutanabbī:[52]

ذِكْرُ الْفَتَى عُمْرُهُ الثّانِي وَحاجَتُهُ   ما قاتَهُ وَفُضُولُ الْعَيْشِ أَشْغالُ

A man's high repute is his second life;
He needs food for sustenance, but all else [in this world] is mere distraction.

This closing hemistich dramatically undercuts or contradicts the dispiriting but inexorable progression of the six and a half lines—old age, death, and oblivion—and offers in its place a message of (immortal) life and identity (*ism*), i.e., undying fame. The rhetorical momentum building up to this surprise ending with its sudden spurt of hope is evident throughout the poem, but let us note in particular the final verse, where we find a grim and seemingly unstoppable march of words connoting passing away, extinction, and death (twice): *qaḍā* . . . *inqaraḍā* // *māta* . . . *al-mawti* lead to the closing phrase that brilliantly binds together immortal life with individual identity: *ʿāsha minhu (i)smu* (whose name still lives). Needless to say, for al-Maʿarrī, as for al-Mutanabbī before him, immortal name or fame is achieved through poetry.

In the context of the present argument, I want to emphasize the effect of the order of rhyme words. Although the rhyme -*smu* is the same in both the *Ṭasmu* and the *qismu* poem, the proper name Ṭasm does not have the commanding position in the latter that it has in the first. It does not perform the role of determining the tenor of the full poem (whether in terms of composition—which is, of course, speculative, or in reading). In the *qismu* poem, Ṭasm is relegated to the rhyme word of a one-line motif in v. 4 and, in the end (v. 7), a man's *ism* (name, repute, immortal fame) is victorious over the forces of extinction (*ṭasm*).

We find another Luzūmiyya in the -*sm*-rhyme, again in *ṭawīl* and with the same seven rhyme words—(in order) *ism*, *rasm*, *Ṭasm*, *wasm*, *ḥasm*, *jism*, *qasm*. It has the final rhyme vowel (*ṣila*) changed, however, to the vowel of the genitive case, hence -*smi*, and, moreover, all of the rhyme words function grammatically as objects of prepositions (or, largely the same thing, adverbial accusatives, such as *siwā* in v. 5).

Text and Translation of al-Maʿarrī's (i)smi *Luzūmiyya* (rhyme -*smi*; meter *ṭawīl* [*faʿūlun mafāʿīlun*])

١ لعَمري لقد أغْنَتكَ صورةُ واحدٍ   من الإنس في الأقوام عن كُنية وَاسْمِ
٢ ولكنْ بَيانٌ زيدَ فيكَ وإنّما   جرَينا من الأمرِ القديمِ على رَسْمِ
٣ وما كان فينا من سَجِيّةِ مُخْطئٍ   فقد وُجِدتْ في حيّ عادٍ وفي طَسْمِ
٤ إذا ما تفرّقْنا خَلَصْنا من الأذى   ولم يُحوَجِ الرّاعي المسيمُ إلى الوَسْمِ
٥ تحمّلْ عن الأرضِ المريضةِ غادِياً   ولا ترْضَ للدّاءِ العَياءِ سوى الحَسْمِ
٦ وما فَتِئتْ روحُ الفتى في نوائبٍ   تُمارِسُها حتى استَقَلّتْ عن الجِسْمِ
٧ صَبَرْنا لحكمِ اللهِ والنّفسُ حرّةٌ   وقد علمتْ فضلَ التّفاوُتِ في القِسْمِ

52. Al-ʿUkbarī, *Dīwān Abī l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī, al-musammā bi-l-tibyān fī sharḥ al-dīwān*, ed. M. al-Saqqā et al., 4 vols. ([Cairo]: Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1355/1936), 1: 288.

1. By my life, if a man has a human form among the tribes
   You have no need [to know his/to give him] a surname and a name.
2. [A name] is an excessive [= unnecessary] distinction for you;
   [In giving names] we have merely followed the trace of the ancient matter.
3. Whatever this flaw in our character,
   It was already there in the tribes of ʿĀd and Ṭasm.
4. When we disperse, we will be rid of the nuisance [of names],
   For he who grazes his herds on the open range has no need to brand them.
5. Pack up and depart in the morning from this diseased land;
   Don't resign yourself to this incurable disease, but cut [yourself] off [from it]!
6. A young man's soul (*rūḥ*) does not cease struggling against adversities
   Until it has become independent from the body.
7. Surely, we will bear with patience (*ṣabarnā*) God's decree, once the soul (*nafs*) is free [from earthly desires/vanity/temptation][53]
   And has learned [God's] grace in [assigning men] disparate lots.[54]

In this *(i)smi* Luzūmiyya we find that the reordering of the rhyme words and the adoption of the genitive case results in a sharp contrast, if not indeed a contradiction, to the *Ṭasmu* and *qismu* Luzūmiyyas. The poem opens its rhyme with the same word with which the *qismu* poem closed, *ism*, and in so doing sets the theme of the poem—the vanity of personal names. This inversion in order also reflects an inversion of meaning: al-Maʿarrī opens with a rejection of the importance of a surname or name—apparently merely having a human form tells us all we need to know. The second verse declares that a name provides altogether too much specification or individuation (again, quite the contrast to the immortal name and identity celebrated at the end of the *qismu* poem) and that in conferring proper names we are merely following ancient custom—indeed, as v. 3 tells us, it is a mistake or "character flaw" that goes as far back as the now extinct peoples of ʿĀd and Ṭasm. The theme in vv. 1–3 of the vanity of an *ism* and *kunya* is one that al-Maʿarrī has addressed elsewhere. In his *tukannī* Luzūmiyya (from *kannā*, to confer a *kunya*), the speaker adjures the addressee, "When my good fortune has come to an end, then leave me alone, don't give me an [honorable] surname" (v. 1).[55] Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 521/1127) explains in his commentary (as translated by Pieter Smoor):

> He says that giving a man an honorable nickname is only to be understood as an appreciation of his rank in society and as referring to his good reputation. This will continue as long as his luck holds out [. . .] . But when fortune has deserted him, the person who gave him the honourable nickname will start calling him by his ordinary name (*ism*); and when that happens, he will feel humiliated [. . .].[56]

53. I take the use of *ṣabarnā* in the *māḍī* (perfective) to indicate what is unquestionably true (rather than the past tense); and, as opposed to the spiritual *rūḥ* in v. 6, I take *nafs* in the sense of the desiring soul that leads one into temptation, as in Q 12:53: *inna al-nafsa la-ammāratun bi-l-sūʾi* ("Surely the soul commands one to evil").

54. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 2: 437; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 2: 303. The poem is stubbornly paratactic. In my reading I have taken the rhyme word of v. 1, *ism*, as the determinative theme of the poem, as supported by the examples from his other poems that I adduce below, and as is suggested by the argument for the dominance of the rhyme words put forth in this study. The poem is open to different readings.

55. The fifty-verse *tukannī* Luzūmiyya is the subject of Smoor, "Delirious Sword." See *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 2: 561–65; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 2: 384–88.

56. Smoor, "Delirious Sword," 381; Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī, *Sharḥ al-mukhtār min Luzūmiyyāt Abī al-ʿAlaʾ* [. . .], expanded ed. Ḥ. ʿAbd al-Majīd, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1998), 2: 325. Further, playing on his own *kunya* Abū l-ʿAlāʾ (father of high rank, nobility), al-Maʿarrī says that it is really Abū l-Nuzūl (father of descent, renunciation); another time, playing on his *ism*, he says that although his father named him Aḥmad (worthy of praise, *ḥamd*) most of what he has done is blameworthy (*dhamm*). Smoor, "Delirious Sword,"

With v. 4 the *(i)smi* poem takes a turn away from group, as well as individual, identity. In Arab-Islamic lore the scattering of a tribe marks the failure (moral, political, military) of the polity, as memorably encapsulated in the proverbial *tafarraqū aydiya Sabaʾ*, which invokes the Quranic lore of the divine retribution visited upon the iniquitous people of Sheba (Sabaʾ) in the form of the breaching of the Dam of Maʾrib, which flooded their once fertile gardens and sent them fleeing in all directions.[57] In the *(i)smi* poem, by contrast, dispersion and scattering are presented not as a divine punishment, but in a positive light: when we scatter, we are saved from the harm or trouble, as I understand it, of the vanity of naming. The concept of name or identity contained in the word *wasm* (its initially weak *w-s-m* root rather transparently related phonetically and semantically to the weak root *ʾ-s-m*) is disparaged, as the poem notes that once the tribe is scattered, a name is useless, even as a pastor who herds his camels on the open range has no need to brand them. The addressee, or perhaps the speaker is addressing himself, is told in v. 5 to "pack up his bags and depart" from the "diseased land." At first glance, this phrase reads like a Mutanabbian (self)-admonition to move on from a court where he is not well treated. But it suggests as well a "Waste Land," a polity that is both drought-stricken and morally diseased, and seems to be almost synonymous with al-Maʿarrī's oft-repeated term, *al-dunyā al-khādiʿa* (the deceitful world). When we add the second hemistich, which counsels detaching oneself ("cutting off") from an "incurable disease," v. 5 assumes an additional meaning or meanings—to isolate oneself from this corrupt and corrupting world through withdrawal and seclusion—as indeed al-Maʿarrī has done in his life. This reading of v. 5 then imposes itself on our understanding of v. 4, as well as on the following verse—what does al-Maʿarrī mean in v. 6 that the young man's soul fights adversities until it is independent of or free from the body? Is this a withdrawal from the "desires of the flesh," that is, a call to asceticism—or is he speaking of death? In both cases, the meaning now draws in the rejection of personal identity—we would perhaps say "ego"—that is promoted in the disparagement of personal names in vv. 1–4. Along with the concept of immortal fame that attaches to a personal name, as in the *qismu* poem, here one's name is reduced to nothing but another of the vanities and temptations of this deceitful world.

Having renounced or rejected the individuality and "ego" associated with the personal name as a throwback to the practices of the iniquitous pre-Islamic tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd, whom God has annihilated, and, further, having called for the renunciation of worldly or earthly desires and a withdrawal into ascetic isolation, al-Maʿarrī closes his poem in an altogether different way from the previous two that we have discussed. He offers neither the *Ṭasmu* poem's utter denial of justice in this world and of any "afterlife" other than the decomposition of the (now mercifully senseless) corpse in the earth, nor the surprise call for immortal name and fame that concludes the *(i)smu* poem. Rather, he closes with resignation and submission to God's judgment: "Surely, we will bear with patience God's decree," that is, once—as the *ḥāl* constructions that make up the remainder of the line tell us—the imperious, desirous soul (*nafs)* is free (i.e., no longer a slave to desire) and has learned "[God's] grace (*faḍl*) in [assigning men's] disparate lots." The key to this final phrase is the meaning of *faḍl* (excellence, grace, bounty, favor) especially in the context of *faḍl Allāh*. The Quranic phrase *dhālika faḍlu llāhi yuʾtīhi man yashāʾu* (Q 5:57, 57:21, 62:4) provides a clear explanation: "This is the grace/favor/free gift of God, which he bestows on whom He wills." In collocation with the disparate lots of mankind, al-Maʿarrī is therefore declaring that after death we will realize that all of men's lots—however unfair or arbitrary they may have once seemed—are acts of God's grace. In the end, it is not the vanity of the *ism* that counts, but rather it is God's decree of our lot, the final *qism*, that closes the poem.

381–82 and refs. For his examples, see *tukannī* Luz., v. 1; *fuzūli* Luz., v. 2; *al-ṣummā* Luz., v. 6 (respectively *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 2: 561, 2: 348, 2: 416; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 2: 384, 2: 240, 2: 289).

57. See Lane and *Lisān*, s.v. *s-b-ʾ*; see also Q 34:15–19, and the discussion's relevance to the *nasīb* in Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 23-24.

The final verse of the *(i)smi* poem is constructed in reverse direction, if we compare it to the final verse of the *qismu* poem, which built up to a surprise ending. Here, by contrast, the verse's opening "Surely, we will bear with patience God's decree" is a bit of a surprise, even though it is not out of context in this poem. If we read the verse in reverse order, however, al-Maʿarrī has written, "we realized that the disparity in men's lots is an expression of divine grace (even if it is—or was—beyond our understanding), then we freed our 'egos' from earthly desires, and, having achieved that understanding and equanimity, we were able to bear with patience all of God's decrees." The mood of resignation and submission that the *(i)smi* Luzūmiyya achieves is, to me, quite moving, and all the more so in contrast to the unyielding rejection of justice in this life or the afterlife in the *Ṭasmu* poem and the ego-driven quest for immortality of the *qismu* poem.

A final example will attempt to demonstrate further the lexical-semantic web that al-Maʿarrī has woven throughout the double-rhyme scheme of *al-Luzūmiyyāt*. Here we examine the phonologically and etymologically generated cognation of two Luzūmiyyas: (1) the *-smu* rhyme that generated *ṭasmu* as the rhyme word and hence semantic kernel of the *Ṭasmu* poem, and (2) the *lamsi* Luzūmiyya, in the meter *wāfir*, which features the synonym and metathetic mate of *ṭasm*, that is, *ṭams*, as the rhyme word of its second verse.[58] A careful reading of this poem suggests that this shared lexical item (*ṭasm*/*ṭams*) could certainly as easily as the recounting of the Damascene dig have sparked our first poem. However different in tone and construction, both the *Ṭasmu* and *lamsi* poems depend thematically upon the transfer of the *ubi sunt* motif, the rhetorical query about the whereabouts of long lost peoples, from the abandoned traces (*aṭlāl*) of the beloved's departed tribe to the sphere of religion. Only now, al-Maʿarrī does not merely predict the future oblivion of Islam or the Muslims, as synecdochized in Quraysh (or the pilgrims) and Mecca (*Ṭasmu* poem, v. 1), but rather he declares all three Abrahamic religions already defunct.

Text and Translation of al-Maʿarrī's lamsi *Luzūmiyya* (rhyme *-msi*; meter *wāfir* [*mufāʿalatun mufāʿalatun faʿūlun*])

١ كأنَّ منجِّمَ الأَقْوامِ أَعْمى　　لَدَيهِ الصُّحْفُ يَقْرَؤُها بلَمْسِ

٢ لقد طالَ العَناءُ فكَمْ يُعاني　　سُطوراً عادَ كاتِبُها بِطَمْسِ

٣ دَعا مُوسَى فزالَ وقام عيسى　　وجاءَ مُحَمَّدٌ بِصَلاةِ خَمْسِ

٤ وقيلَ يَجيءُ دِينٌ غَيرُ هذا　　وأَوْدى النّاسُ بَينَ غَدٍ وأَمْسِ

٥ ومَنْ لي أنْ يَعودَ الدِّينُ غَضّاً　　فيَنْقَعَ مَنْ تَنَسَّكَ بَعْدَ خِمْسِ

٦ ومهما كانَ في دُنْياكَ أَمْرٌ　　فما تُخْليكَ مِن قَمَرٍ وشَمْسِ

٧ وآخِرُها بأَوَّلِها شَبيهٌ　　وتُصْبِحُ في عَجائبِها وتُمْسي

٨ قُدومُ أَصاغِرٍ ورَحيلُ شِيبٍ　　وهِجْرةُ مَنْزِلٍ وحُلولُ رَمْسِ

٩ لَحاها اللهُ داراً ما تُداري　　بمِثْلِ المَيْنِ في لُجَجٍ وقَمْسِ

١٠ إذا قُلْتُ المُحالَ رَفَعْتُ صَوْتي　　وإنْ قُلْتُ اليَقينَ أَطَلْتُ هَمْسي

58. This relationship is noted by Ibn Manẓūr (*Lisān*, s.vv. *ṭ-s-m*, *ṭ-m-s*), who defines both as extinct (*darasa*) and notes the metathesis (*qalb*) of the shared root. The *lamsi* poem therefore bears a relationship to the two other *qismu* and *(i)smi* poems discussed above. For the sake of clarity and brevity I limit myself here primarily to the comparison at hand. Of the many interlocking poems with many of the same rhyme words as the *lamsi* poem, see esp. the *wa-l-amsu* Luz. and *al-lamsi* Luz. (respectively, *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 2: 5, 2: 39; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 2: 12, 2: 33–34).

1. The tribes' astrologer is like a blind man,
   Before whom lie scriptures that he tries to read by touch.
2. He took great pains, but how long can one toil
   Over lines whose own writer has long since erased them?
3. Moses proclaimed his message, then disappeared; then Jesus arose;
   Then Muḥammad brought five daily prayers.
4. Some said another religion would come,
   And yet people still perish between tomorrow and yesterday.
5. Oh, if only religion could be new and fresh once more,
   So the ascetic could quench himself after five days' thirst!
6. Whatever happens in your world,
   It will never take away the moon and the sun:
7. The last of it is just like the first;
   Its wonders in the morning and evening are ever the same:
8. The arrival of the young, the departure of the old,
   The migration far from home, the alighting at the tomb.
9. May God cover [this earthly] abode in shame, for what she conceals—
   Like lies that are hidden in the depths of the sea.
10. When I speak the impossible, I raise my voice;
    When I speak certain truth, I whisper.[59]

Though still short, this *lamsi* poem is at ten verses distinctly longer than the other three, allowing for more thematic flow and less jarring parataxis. It lacks the lapidary and epigrammatic concision of the *Ṭasmu* poem, which has its punch at the opening verse, rather than, as here, in the final verse. In terms of the rhyme words, it is worth noting that two that are keys to the shared *nasīb*-derived meaning of the ruined abode, which is a dominant motif in all three of the previously discussed poems, find metathetic mates in this poem: *Ṭ/ṭasm* and *ṭams*, as noted above, but also *rasm* and *rams*, whose verbal root means bury, cover, efface; in fact, Ibn Manẓūr defines *ramasa* as *ṭamasa*! The rhyme in this (longer) *lamsi* poem is also less grammatically and morphologically restricted than that of the other three (shorter) poems, in which all the rhyme words are of the nominal triliteral *faʿl* or *fiʿl* form and in the rather limited uses of nominative and genitive cases. The morphological and grammatical monotony is at least slightly relieved in the *lamsi* poem by the use of a verbal form *tumsī* (she comes or does in the evening) and of the accusative case (direct object) with a first person possessive pronoun at the end of v. 10: *aṭaltu hamsī* (lit. I extend my whisper).

The *lamsi* Luzūmiyya opens with a compelling but not so simple image. In explicating this verse, we have to understand, first, that for al-Maʿarrī "the tribes' [or "people's] astrologer"—one who by consulting his astrology books reads the future in the stars—is a metaphor for men or scholars of religion, whose efforts at understanding their scriptures are as futile as the blind man feeling the texts he cannot see. What is intended here, although not named explicitly, is the Arab-Islamic idea of *ghayb* in religious and Quranic vocabulary: "what is hidden, inaccessible to the sense and reason—thus, at the same time absent from human knowledge and hidden in divine wisdom," "the unknowable," "divine Mystery," known only

59. *Luzūm*, Dār Ṣādir, 2: 437; *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānjī, 2: 44–45. The striking similarities, especially in rhyme words, between al-Maʿarrī's *lamsī* Luzūmiyya and a nine-verse poem, rhyme-word *ramsū*, also in the *wāfir* meter, by the martyred mystic poet al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) is a subject I hope to take up on another occasion. See Kamāl Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī, *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥallāj* (Cologne: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2007), poem no. 48, 277–78.

to God, as in the Quranic, "*al-ghayb* belongs only to God" (Q 10:20).[60] Certainly, the knowledge of man's destiny, of the future, or of the afterlife falls under the rubric of *ghayb*. Just as the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997) "compares astrology to the 'pretension to know the *ghayb*' and condemns both severely,"[61] so, too, al-Maʿarri compares and condemns the futility of both endeavors in the present poem.

The other side of the coin is added by v. 2: not only is the reader blind, both literally and figuratively, but the texts themselves have already been erased by those who wrote them, or those who wrote them are dead and long gone. The precise use of *ṭams* here is ambiguous: morphologically, as the *maṣdar* of the transitive form, it should mean that the writer went back and erased his own lines; at the same time, it could mean "whose writer has reverted to oblivion," i.e., is long gone. In our search for clarity we should keep in mind that in the tradition of the classical *qaṣīda*, the wind- and rain-worn traces of the ruined abode are conventionally compared to ancient writing—as in the example from Labīd, cited above. Perhaps in the classical Arabic context the erasure of the writing and the extinction of the writer are not such different things.

Of the two readings of v. 2, the disappearance of the writer offers a more direct connection to v. 3—itself not so straightforward. Clearly Moses "came, then disappeared," but the latter action, *fa-zāla*, is understood after Jesus and Muḥammad as well, although al-Maʿarrī shows caution by eliding it. In v. 4, al-Maʿarrī repeats the claim (*qīla*, "it has been said") that another religion will appear, but meanwhile people keep on perishing, "yesterday and tomorrow." That is, the cycle of life and death continues, with no new religion in sight. In sum, all three revealed religions have come and gone. They are now unknowable, incomprehensible, and yet a "new religion"—perhaps suggesting Messianic beliefs—however fervently anticipated, has not to date appeared.

The fifth verse produces an outburst of hope—or rather, it is despair. If only a new, fresh religion would come! This confirms our reading of v. 3, that, for this poem at least, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all dead, or at least moribund. A key to reading v. 5, and understanding vv. 3 and 4, is the word *khims*, which means coming to water or watering your camels on the fifth day—counting the day they drink as one, then three days without water, and the day they drink once more as five. Thus, as the commentators point out, the three days of thirsting involved in *khims* are here identified with the three religious law codes (*sharāʾiʿ*, sg. *sharīʿa*) brought by Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad of v. 3.[62] Of course, the Arabic word *sharīʿa*, as is well known, originally means "watering hole, way to water," so that for the Arabic reader there is a subliminal pun involved in the use of *khims* in this context. Then, v. 4 explicitly expresses the wish for a new religion, after (v. 5) the spiritual drought or spiritual "thirst" left by the old dispensations.

If the opening vv. 1–2 express the futility of man's efforts to discover his destiny, or the mysteries of the divine, and vv. 3–5 proclaim the failure of the monotheistic religions to satisfy man's spiritual needs or longings, vv. 6–8 express the resultant despair, that is, a resignation to the reality of an apparently pointless and unchanging cycle of life and death, in which men are mere victims of what is termed *dahr*. The world of *dahr*, of blind fate, is precisely the opposite of the world of the divinely and morally ordered world of religion. Above all, in the Arabic poetic tradition, the *qaṣīda*'s opening *nasīb* is where *dahr* rules supreme, where

60. "Ghayb" (D. B. MacDonald-[L. Gardet]), *EI2*. I am not concerned here with the mystical sense of the term. See also Q 6:59; 72:26; 3:174, etc.

61. H. Laoust, apud "Ghayb," *EI2*, 2: 1025b.

62. *Luzūmiyyāt*, al-Khānji, 2: 45: *khims* alludes to the five *sharāʾiʿ* brought by Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad.

time or fate has reduced once thriving abodes to ruins and the tribes and loved ones who once dwelt there to oblivion. Al-Maʿarrī's depiction of a world in which religion is dead is ultimately *nasīb*-derived.

Without a vision of or hope for the future, in this world or the next, man can foresee no world but this present, earthly one, *dunyā*, and it is this "lower" world that is the subject of vv. 6–8 and the condemnation of v. 9. We need to keep in mind throughout that *al-dunyā*, this world, is opposed to *al-ākhira*, the other world, the afterlife, but also—and exclusively and invariably in al-Maʿarrī's poetry—connotes all that is vile, depraved, and deceitful. In this *dunyā*, *dahr*, fickle and amoral fate, rules unopposed. In v. 6 al-Maʿarrī presents this world as essentially unchanging: whatever happens, the sun and moon will still be there, i.e., the endless cycle of *dahr*. In cyclical (as opposed to teleological) time, the beginning and end are just the same. Even the "wonders" (*ʿajāʾib*), which in other contexts—such as al-Qazwīnī's (d. 682/1283) *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* (Wonders of Creation and Marvels of Existence)—we might associate with divine creation, here conjure up expressions such as *yā ʿajaban li-l-dahri dhī l-aʿjābi* ("How amazing is the *dahr* possessed of wonders"),[63] which associate wonders with the vagaries of fate. The verbs *tuṣbiḥu* and *tumsī* (to come or become in the morning, in the evening), which we normally associate with change or becoming, here are part of an endlessly repeating cycle. In v. 8, this cycle is revealed to be the *nasīb*ic cycle of arrival and departure, which at the literal level refers to the transhumance of the Bedouin tribes, and at the metaphorical level the cycle of life and death. This verse is striking for its collocation of *nasīb*-associated words: *qudūm* (arrival), *raḥīl* (departure—esp. on the journey section that follows the *nasīb*), *hijra* (departure, migration), *manzil* (stopping place, camp site, dwelling), *ḥulūl* (alighting, settling), and, especially, as discussed above, *rams* (grave, tomb, dust, which root is metathetically related to the eminently *nasīb*ic word *rasm*); and it conveys in a compelling encapsulation the fate-dominated *nasīb* cycle of arrival and departure of the *dunyā*.

The *lamsi* Luzūmiyya closes with two verses. The first, v. 9, calls down an imprecation upon the *dunyā* presented in vv. 6–8: God should condemn it or cover it with shame. Al-Maʿarrī now refers to the world as *dār* (home, abode), another essential element of *nasīb*ic diction, and calls down this curse because of the lies (*mayn*) it conceals. I take this to refer to al-Maʿarrī's favored *al-dunyā al-khādiʿa*, which he frequently personifies as a seductress whose apparent charms lure men to perdition. Here he portrays the deceits and lies of this world as so well hidden to hapless man that they are like things that lie hidden at the bottom of the bounding sea.

A jarring conclusion follows in v. 10. How is this effect achieved? The message is straightforward: in this lying, morally inverted world, one feels free to speak openly the absurdities that are demanded, but fears to speak the truth—the simple hypocrisy with which we are all familiar. The verse gains rhetorical punch through its careful construction: the switch to the first person pronoun, which sets the verse off from the rest of the poem. The two grammatically parallel hemistichs, each with its conditional sentence that is mirrored in the double antithesis with the other: *muḥāl* (inconceivable, impossible, preposterous) vs. *yaqīn* (certainty, certain [truth, knowledge]) and "raise my voice" vs. "maintain my whisper." The Quran exhorts, "Do not cover the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth when you know it" (Q 2:42), as Allāh commanded His Prophet Muḥammad, *iqraʾ* (Q 96:1). Whispering, by contrast, is for conveying lies, rumors, or temptations, which is what Satan does (*al-shayṭānu*

63. The full expression continues: "the hump-backed flea with fangs" (*al-aḥdabi l-barghūthī dhī l-anyābi*), *Lisān*, s.v. *ʿ-j-b*; Lane, s.v. *ʿ-j-b*.

yahmisu bi-waswasatihi ṣadra l-insāni).[64] Al-Maʿarrī's proclamation, then, is a direct inversion of the moral order. Adding to the jolting and unsettling effect of this final verse is its grammatical and rhetorical setting off or separation from the first nine verses, standing not merely as the logical conclusion or reaction to the moral desolation of their *dahr*-dominated world, but disengaging from them to take on a free-standing quality, much like a *ḥikma* or aphorism, that claims objectivity and universal validity. In other words, v. 10 is not merely the words of the "speaker" within the poem, but it rhetorically jettisons itself from the poem and the poetic context to become the first-person speech of al-Maʿarrī himself, as if he is standing outside of the poem. The statement then seems to offer a total moral condemnation of the religious world of his time. Not surprisingly, it remains one of al-Maʿarrī's most oft-repeated lines, through to our own day. A further, and for the present study, final irony emerges from the fact that al-Maʿarrī faced accusations of being an atheist or free-thinker precisely because he stated openly and frankly what he thought, particularly on matters of religion.

CONCLUSION

This exploration of the genesis of al-Maʿarrī's *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya has followed two very different interpretative approaches, both of which attempted to place the poem within a context that might have inspired it and that might, therefore, provide a hermeneutics through which to interpret it, and others as well, as a first step to the interpretation and evaluation of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* as a coherent literary project or achievement. Although conclusions based on the limited examples dealt with here cannot be definitive—rather, they are still largely speculative—it is my hope that they will nevertheless provide a basis for further and deeper readings and interpretations of al-Maʿarrī's formidable poetic project.

The first reading takes an anecdote recounted by Ibn al-Qifṭī to explore the experiential inspiration of the poem that it presents. It argues that al-Maʿarrī's instantaneous realization, upon hearing of the temple dig and its inscription, that the fate of Islam will be no different from the fate of that long lost "philosopher-king," ultimately derives from the *ubi sunt* topos of the ruined abode theme that forms the core of the Arabic *qaṣīda*'s opening elegiac *nasīb* section. However, given the obscure—not to say mysterious—provenance of the Umayyad excavation that Ibn al-Qifṭī recounts, which is traceable only to him (despite its recognizable cognate in al-Masʿūdī), it seems more appropriate to treat Ibn al-Qifṭī's passage as a literary work in itself, rather than a factual account of al-Maʿarrī's spontaneous composition of his poem. This is not to say that Ibn al-Qifṭī's unique version of the excavations is a fiction—he did pass it on to Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī as historical fact—but rather that somehow in the centuries of transmission, no doubt involving both oral and written components, the Umayyad excavation account took the form that Ibn al-Qifṭī has presented. Whether al-Maʿarrī actually composed his *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya in response or whether the collocation of the striking account and the equally striking poem represents a flash of creative literary imagination on the part of some litterateur of the two intervening centuries, we have no way of knowing. However stunning, it is hard to know how this unique episode of poetic inspiration helps us interpret the other poems of *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, or how it contributes to our understanding of that poetic project as a whole.

The second reading situates the *Ṭasmu* poem within al-Maʿarrī's unique programmatic work and the poet's own description and explication of the strictures he has imposed on him-

64. Lane, s.v. *h-m-s*.

self, viz., rhyming in all the letters of the Arabic alphabet, adding a second rhyme consonant in all cases, and composing specimens of the above with all possible endings of three vowels and *sukūn*. Taking him at his word, we speculated that the *Ṭasmu* poem was sparked when (1) the proper name of the extinct Arab tribe Ṭasm came to mind as the poet tried to fulfil the -*sm* rhyme requirement; and (2) Ṭasm played a dominant role in the poem because it had to fulfill the -*u* vowel ending. The poem was generated by the lore of Ṭasm as a proper name, a lore in which violating the laws of protection and hospitality results in destruction, but which also shares the *ubi sunt* topos of the abandoned campsite of the poetic *nasīb*. The semantic transparency of Ṭasm as *ṭasm* (erasure, obliteration), an eminently *nasīb*ic term and concept, inexorably leads from the lore of Ṭasm and Jadīs into the lexical and motival world of the *nasīb*. Following a "Stylistics"-derived method along the lines proposed by Roman Jakobson, as well as the language-and-morphology-based approach adopted by Stefan Sperl, this reading proceeded through minute attention to the features of rhyme and grammar (including morphology and syntax), and acute sensitivity to the lexical and motival conventions of the Arabic *qaṣīda* tradition. In comparing the *Ṭasmu* Luzūmiyya with several "cognates," we determined that al-Maʿarrī assembled a very limited and quite simple group of rhyme words that he then used for a series of variations. Furthermore, in the case of the small group of phonologically related Luzūmiyyas examined in this study, the lexicon and themes seem to be circumscribed by the world of the *nasīb*.

Thus, based on a close reading of a very limited sample of poems, it appears that several factors seem to converge and interact to determine the general characteristics of the individual Luzūmiyya. The double-rhyme scheme severely limits the number of rhyme words and consequently the length of the poem. Al-Maʿarrī's rejection of the *qaṣīda*, with its major themes of *madḥ*, *fakhr*, *hijāʾ*, and *rithāʾ*, which form the climax and conclusion of the structural momentum, is tantamount to rejecting the development and momentum inherent in that formal structure—most typically the tripartite *nasīb–raḥīl–madīḥ* or, especially in the Abbasid period, the bipartite *nasīb–madīḥ*. Thus, it is not altogether surprising that, with a few notable exceptions, the individual poems of *al-Luzūmiyyāt* are short monothematic pieces dominated by, or trapped in, the motifs of the *naṣīb*, showing no direction or development into those other major themes (which may otherwise play a limited motival role) that dominate the masterpieces of his earlier collection, *Saqṭ al-zand*.[65] The interplay of these factors affects, too, the mood of *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, for the thematic world of the classical Arabic *nasīb* is one of irremedial loss, nostalgia, despair, the treachery of friends and loved ones, and passivity in the face of ineluctable fate. When the poet can no longer follow the *qaṣīda*'s formal trajectory, and therefore its sequence of moods, into the transitional quest or self-testing of the *raḥīl*'s central journey to arrive at the culminating celebration of agency and potency in the concluding *madīḥ* or *fakhr*, he becomes trapped in a psychological and thematic "no exit" of his own making.

65. On this issue, see Smoor, "Delirious Sword," passim.