**Health, Suffering, Life, and Death in the Works of Abū al-‘Alā’ Aḥmad bin ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Tanūkhī al-Ma‘arrī (973–1057)**

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**Abstract:**

Using as a springboard the poetry of al-Ma‘rrī (973–1057), including excerpts from the acclaimed satirical text **رسَالة الغُفرَان** *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness) and his second collection of poetry, **لزوما لا يلزم** *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, better known as **لزُوميات** *Luzūmiyyāt* (Unnecessary Necessity), in this work I look at how the motif of suffering and the dichotomy life vs. death play a pivotal role in our physical and spiritual journeys on Earth as well as in the Afterlife (or lack thereof). Selected verses from al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry will help me unravel the tropes associated with humanity’s lifecycle in Arabic/Islamic writing as well as Western literature. Indeed, parallels, with pre-Islamic Arab literature—as in the case of the **قَصِيدة** *qaṣīdah* (ode)—the Qur’ān, Arabic, and *Aljamiado* literature hailing from the Iberian Peninsula, Swahili poetry written in **عَجَمِيَة** *‘Ajamiyah* (**الإَنكِشَاف** *Al-Inkishāfi*, The Soul’s Awakening, composed after 1749),[[1]](#endnote-1) and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308–1320) will elucidate al-Ma‘rrī’s message and possible solutions to human suffering.

**Keywords:** Arabic, body, death, faith, health, humanity, life, punishment, soul, suffering.

**الصحة والمعاناة والحياة والموت في مَخْطُوطَاتِ أبو العلاء أحْمَد بن عبْد الله بن سُليمان لتَّنوخي المَعرِّي (973–1057)**

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**ملخص:**

من خلال استخدام شعر المعرّي (٩٧٣–١٠٥٧) كنقطة انطلاق، بما في ذلك استخدام مقتطفات من نَصّه الهجائي الشهير "رسالة الغفران"، وديوانه الشعري الثاني، "لزوم ما لا يلزم"، المعروف بـ "اللزوميات"، ألقي نظرة على كيفية قيام فكرة المعاناة وثنائية الكون، أي الحياة مقابل الموت، بلعب دور محوريّ في مسيراتنا الجسدية والروحية على الأرض (الحياة الدنيا)، كما في الحياة الآخرة (أو عدم وجودها). ستساعدني أبيات مختارة من شعر المعرّي على كشف الصور البيانية المرتبطة بدورة الحياة البشرية في الكتابات العربية الإسلامية، وكذلك في الأدب الغربي. في الواقع، وبالتوازي مع الأدب العربي في الجاهليَّة -كما هو الحال في الشعر الجاهلي- والأدب العربي بعد ظهور الإسلام أُسوَةً بِالقرآن الكريم والأدب الإسلامي العربي وكذلك الجميادو، أي العجمية (نصّ غير عربي مكتوب بحروف عربية) المنحدر من شبه الجزيرة الأيبيرية، والشعر السواحيلي المكتوب بالعجمية (بحروف عربية) كقصيدة "الانكشاف" السواحيلية: صحوة الروح، التي تم تأليفها بعد عام ١٧٤٩،[[2]](#endnote-2) والكوميديا الإلهية لدانتي (حوالي ١٣٠٨–١٣٢٠). إنها جميعاً تُجَسّد رسالة المعرّي والحلول الممكنة للمعاناة الإنسانية.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** اللُّغَة العَرَبِيَّة, الجَسَد, المَوْت, الإِيمَان, الصِّحَّة, الإِنْسَانِيَّة, الحَيَّاة, العِقَاب, الرُّوح, المُعَانَاة.

**Introduction**

**أبو العلاء أحْمَد بن عبْد الله بن سُليمان لتَّنوخي المَعرِّي** Abū al-‘Alā’ Aḥmad bin ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Tanūkhī al-Ma‘arrī (973–1057), known in Europe as Abulola Moarrensis, is perhaps one of the most controversial writers in the Arabic/Islamic world. Indeed, al-Ma‘arrī’s caustic stance against organized religions and dogmas makes him not an outcast but rather a unique representative of human feelings and values that are universal and timeless.

**1. Dogmas Are Man-Made**

For al-Ma‘arrī, dogmas are man-made; they do not emanate from God. Falsehoods also are created by human beings. Free will (**الاخْتِيَار** *al-ikhtiār*) vs. fate (**الجَبْر** *al-jabr*, destiny, predetermination), this is what humankind has to ponder:

A mighty God, men evil-handed,

The dogmas of free-will and fate;

Day and Night with falsehood branded,

Woes that ne’er had or have a date.



(Nicholson 1969, 82; 226).

In other words, in al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry the philosopher and the bard unite to convey a tongue-in-cheek, at times satirical, whimsical, humorous, and/or pessimist outlook on life (past and present) and the Afterlife or, better yet, lack thereof:

The soul her centre hath in the highest sphere,

Unknown with bodies are the fields of air,

From one fold root our human branches strike,

And all, to eyes discerning, are alike:

Adam their ancestor, their bourne the mould,

Tho’ creeds and heresies be manifold.



(Nicholson 1969, 118; 248).

The reason why al-Ma‘arrī’ was not and is still not considered a renegade Muslim is the fact that “in most other poems he is, or poses as, a pious Muslim” (van Gelder 2012, 75). Indeed, as Reynold Alleyne Nicholson keenly pointed out, al-Ma‘arrī “had good reason to cloak some of his opinions, and being a sensible as well as a cautious man, he did not court persecution, though in fact the most heretical passages of his work are by no means the most obscure” (Nicholson 54).

Al-Ma‘arrī’ was born in present-day **مَعرة النُّعمَان** *Ma‘aarat al-Nu‘mān*, in northwestern Syria, and lived most of his life between modern Syria and Iraq, during the Baghdad-based Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258). At the age of four, al-Ma‘arrī lost his sight due to smallpox; yet, this physical impediment did not deter him from following his dream, or rather, studying, writing, and teaching, not necessarily in this order.

According to the acclaimed historian, geographer, warrior and staunch crusader-fighter **إسْماعِيل بن محمد بن عُمر بن شَاهَنْشَاه بن أيُّوب بن شَادي بن مَرْوان** Ismā‘īl bin Muḥammad bin ‘Umar bin Shāhanshāh bin Ayyūb bin Shādī bin Marwān, better known as **أبُو الفِدَاء** Abū al-Fidā’, Latinized as Abulfeda (1273–1331), during his lifetime al-Ma‘arrī had the satisfaction of knowing that, despite his physical shortcomings, his poetry was well-received and celebrated not only in his homeland but in the rest of the (then-known) world. For instance, on the incompatibility of Pride and true Glory, al-Ma‘arrī, states:

Think not, Abdallah, pride and fame

Can ever travel hand in hand;

With breast oppos’d, and adverse aim

On the same narrow path they stand.

Thus youth and age together meet,

And life’s divided moments share;

This can’t advance till that retreat,

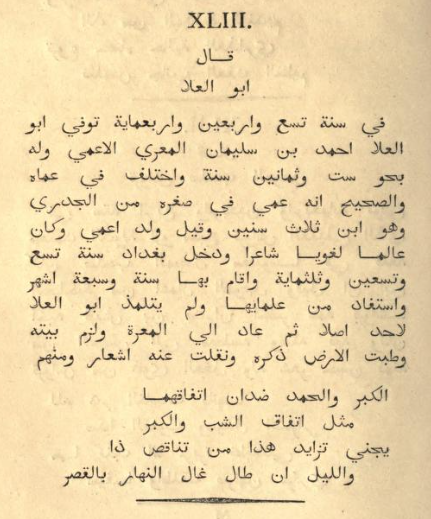
What’s here increas’d, is lessen’d there.

And thus the falling shades of night

Still struggle with the lucid ray,

And e’er they stretch their gloomy flight

Must win the lengthen’d space from day (Dacre Carlyle 127).



XLIII: On the Incompatibility of Pride and True Glory by Abou Alola (Dacre Carlyle 46).

**2- Monotheism and Death**

As mentioned above, al-Ma‘arrī was a gifted scholar, writer, poet, and teacher who lived and worked during the end of the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1250; 1261–1517). He hailed from a well-respected family; hence, despite his physical hurdles, he was able to receive a good education and even had the opportunity of studying in Aleppo (**حَلب** *Ḥalab*, present-day Syria), Tripoli (**طرابُلس** *Tarābulus*, present-day Lebanon), and Antioch (Antakya, present-day Turkey).

Al-Ma‘aarī was originally intrigued by the sublime poetry of **أبو الطَّيب أحْمَد بن الحُسَين المُتَنَّبي الكِنْدي** Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī al-Kindī, better known as **المُتَنَّبي** al-Mutanabbī (c. 915–965); yet, after some time al-Ma‘arrī eventually ceased to idealize his hero. Indeed, al-Mutanabbī served at the court of the Emir **عَلي بن أبو الهَيجَاء عبْد الله بن حَمْدان الحَارث ألتَّغْلِبي** ‘Alī ibn ‘Abū al-Hayjā’ ‘Abdallāh ibn Ḥamdān ibn al-Ḥārith al-Taġlibī, better known by his honorific epithet **سَيف الدَّولة** *Sayf al-Dawla* (Sword of the Dynasty), of the Twelver Shī‘a (**اثْنَا عَشَريَّة** *Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah*), Aleppo-based[[3]](#endnote-3) **الحَمْدَانِيُّون** Hamdānīd Dynasty (890–1004), (Canard; Bikhazi). Alas, despite his magnificent poetic style,[[4]](#endnote-4) al-Mutanabbī was extremely egocentric and politically too entangled with the Abbasid regime and its complex court politics. In fact, al-Mutanabbī composed a total of twenty-two panegyric poems dedicated to Emir *Sayf al-Dawla* (Hamori vii). Conversely, al-Ma‘arrī preferred a much simpler lifestyle, one that was not subservient to the powers-that-be and that was centered on introspection and ascetic contemplations.

Acclaimed Dutch Arabist Geert Jan van Gelder (1947– ) considered al-Ma‘aarī’s poetry “gnomic” and “mostly short and epigrammatic” (van Gelder 2012, 75). In 1010, al-Ma‘aarī’ left Baghdad because of his disillusionment with the corruption and his outright refusal to pay homage to the Abbasid rulers.

From a religious point of view, for instance, al-Ma‘arrī was very skeptical of established religions with their fixed dogmas and strict precepts, as in the case of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism:

For holy fear the Hindu burns himself

(Muslim Jihad has never done as much),

Neither did Christian worshipers, nor those

Who followed Sabian [sic!][[5]](#endnote-5) or Jewish creed.)

He takes his body freely to the fire,

By his religion driven and his zeal.

Man’s death is but a very lengthy sleep

And all his lifetime but insomnia.

We’re bid farewell with prayer and despair

And left alone, unmoving, in the dust.

Should I be scared of earth, of Mother Earth?

Your mother’s lap: a splendid resting place.

When I am parted from my subtle soul,

Let no spring rains pour on the rotting bones! (van Gelder 2012, 77).

This epigram is a reflection on humanity’s ways of coping with death, as in the case of establishing a religion in order to address its fears, particularly the fear of dying. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Sabeans, with their sacred books, cannot prevent their respective believers from dying, regardless of the model life that they might have led during their lifetime on Earth. Once dead, the believer is left alone, in the dust. An earthly mother embraces his or her child; alas, mother Earth does not embrace the body of her dead child who is left alone, buried, and whose bones will eventually rot. Dust is what will remain. Indeed, dust is a recurring theme in al-Ma‘arrī’s works:

Our bodies of dust, they quake with a doubt uneasy

When, ceasing from all unrest, long-wandering mortals

Are aware of return to Earth, who of kin is nearest—

Best healer of pain, tho’ sound as a crow’s their health be.

For lo, to the clouds they soar in a vain ambition,

And tumble with souls athrill to the chase of honour,

And spears in the clash are shivered and swords are dunted.

For dross they would die; yet he that complains of hunger,

He wants but a little food; or of thirst, but water.

Nobility’s nature base blood hath corrupted:

Cross-breeding will mar the stock o a noble stallion.

And kings in their wealth deep wallow, but comes a suitor

Their bounty to taste, they prove a mirage deluding;

And sometimes ravin goads from his lair the lion

To prowl all night in sheepcote and camel-shelter.

If Fate’s stern hand on high ne’er trembles, surely

Thy trembling in hope or fear will avail the nothing.



(Nicholson 1969, 88; 231)

Interestingly, al-Ma‘arrī only includes some People of the Book (**الأَهْل الكِتَاب** *Ahl al-Kitabi*), or rather, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sabeans, since they all “believe in a sacred book.” Yet, it should be remembered that the category “People of the Book” also includes:

[…] Mineans and any other group of people with whom Islam had contact during its territorial expansion outside the Arabian Peninsula, who believe(d) in only one god and who base(d) their religion on a holy book, as in the case of the Hindus. The ancient Sabean and Minean pre-Islamic religions, though containing a few polytheistic elements, were not condemned by Islam. The kingdoms of Sheba, (930–115), and Mina (1200–650), the former in the South, the latter in the Southeast of the Arabian Peninsula, were civilizations that were deeply involved with the spice trade between Asia/Middle East and the Mediterranean (Levi 2020, 416).

Elsewhere though, al-Ma‘arrī does mention Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrians. Indeed, the dualism of Mazda whereby Good and Evil are in eternal conflict is portrayed by al-Ma‘arrī into our own, inner turmoil:

Methinks Allah divides me to complete

His problem, which with Xs is replete;

For I am free and I am too in chains

Groping along the labyrinthine street (Rihani 51).

In its stead, al-Ma‘arrī envisioned not a religion that “came down” (**تَنَزَّلُ** *tanazzalu*) from Heaven through revelation, an angel, and/or a prophet,[[6]](#endnote-6) but rather, a society in which humans relied on their own observation of the world, through which they could eventually arrive at the conclusion that there is indeed a Supreme Being (**أَلله** *Allāh*, God) who, once again, does not need human intermediaries:

The Prophets, too, among us come to teach,

Are one with those who from the pulpit preach;

They pray, and slay, and pass away, and yet

Our ills are as the pebbles on the beach (J. 2021).

Indeed, for al-Ma‘rrī, the Creator of the Universe does not need to send humans angels and/or prophets. Humans are quite capable of finding their path (**سَبِيل** *sabīl*) to God by simply using Rational Thought (***عَقْل*** *Aql*, Reason). Religious tenets, dogmas, and, most of all, religious (and political) leaders, are not necessary then. Unquestionably, they were seen as “noxious seed” that pollute Nature and, as common human beings also do, cause suffering and pain:

Among the crumbling ruins of the creeds

The Scout upon his camel played his reeds

And called out to his people — “Let us hence!

The pasture here is full of noxious weeds (J. 2021).

**3. إِيمَان** ***Īmān* (Inner Faith) and Life**

This freedom from human impositions when it comes to religion, or rather, to inner faith, **إِيمَان** *īmān*,[[7]](#endnote-7) led al-Ma‘rrī to respect all forms of life; hence, he advocated for a moral vegetarian lifestyle whereby all life forms are respected:

You cross the desert, a good chance send you diet;

You roam around, and so your living’s made;

You beg your bread in the name of “holy quiet,”

But more devout is he that plies his trade.

Abandon flesh for the oil of olive-trees,

And fare on wild-figs, not to rob the bees!



(Nicholson 1969, 113; 245).

In fact, an animal or its byproducts, such as milk, cheese, eggs, and honey were seen as living beings. Hence, by killing and eating living creatures and by injecting their byproducts humans would be cruel because, by doing so, they would be inflicting pain, suffering, and eventually causing death to living souls. Hence, al-Ma‘arrī considered this the worst crime that a human being could ever commit:

You are diseased in understanding and religion.

Come to me, that you may hear something of sound truth.

Do not unjustly eat fish the water has given up,

And do not desire as food the flesh of slaughtered animals,

Or the white milk of mothers who intended its pure draught

for their young, not noble ladies.

And do not grieve the unsuspecting birds by taking eggs;

for injustice is the worst of crimes.

And spare the honey which the bees get industriously

from the flowers of fragrant plants;

For they did not store it that it might belong to others,

Nor did they gather it for bounty and gifts.

I washed my hands of all this; and wish that I

Perceived my way before my hair went gray! (J. 2021).

**إِيمَان** *Īmān* (inner faith) is therefore the intimate counterpart of the external manifestation of our faith, be it Islam or, as seen above, any other monotheistic faith. Yet, for al-Ma‘rrī, “inner faith” does not need outer manifestations (i.e., fixed religious precepts) in order to be validated, or rather, it does not require adherence to **عِبَادَات** *Ibādāt*, namely, the rules that govern faith and religious service.



(Levi 2022a, 99)

In this respect, al-Ma‘rrī was more like a Ṣufi (**صُوفي** *ṣūfī*) since the latter concentrated on spiritual asceticism rather than a well-established, firm, religious dogma.[[8]](#endnote-8) Additionally, inner faith (**إِيمَان** *īmān*) compelled humans to respect all life forms and see that they do not suffer or, even worse, die:

The earth’s surface is but bodies of the dead,

Walk slowly in the air, so you do not trample on the remains of God’s servants.”

“We laugh, but inept is our laughter,

We should weep, and weep sore,

Who are shattered like glass and thereafter

Remolded no more (J. 2021).

This reverence for all living creatures led al-Ma‘arrī to contemplate the fact that if human beings did not have children then the latter would not suffer since his main goal was the establishment of an ideal society free from pain, suffering, and ultimately death:

I see but a single part of sweet in the many sour,

And Wisdom that cries, “Beget no children, if thou art wise”;

Religion diseased: whoso is healthy and hopes to cure

Its sickness, he labours long and meanwhile himself falls sick;

A dawn and a dark that seem—what signify else their hues

Alternate?—as stripes of white and black on a venomed snake;

And Time’s universal voice commanding that they sit down

Who stood on their feet, and those who sate, that they now up-stand.

Methinks, happiness and joy of heart is a fault in man:

Whenever it shows itself, ‘tis punished with hate and wrath.



(Nicholson 1969, 90-91; 233).

For al-Ma‘arrī, women should actually be barren, since this would spare Humanity suffering, pain, sickness, and despair. Happiness is only a momentary illusion since, once we enjoy happiness we are immediately punished for having indulged in bliss. Alas, there is no escape. Death will absorb us:

ما زلت في الغمرات لست بخاص

منهن فأشت على رجائك أو فِظِ

Hope as thou wilt in heat or cold,

It matters not amidst the surge

Of woes that whelmed thee from of old

And whence thou never canst emerge (van Gelder 2012, 43).

An interesting parallel to al-Ma‘arrī’s views on suffering can be found in Qur’ān 7:94-95; yet, in this case the Holy Book declares that the relief to human suffering is through a prophet since, even though humans were created pure by God, Evil was able to seed corruption and injustice among human beings:

Whenever We sent a prophet

To a town, We took up

Its people in suffering

And adversity, in order

That they might learn humility.

Then, We changed their suffering

Into prosperity, until they grew

And multiplied, and began

To say: Our fathers (too)

Were touched by suffering

And affluence … Behold!

We called them to account

Of a sudden, while they

Realised not (their peril).

وَمَاۤ اَرۡسَلۡنَا فِىۡ قَرۡيَةٍ مِّنۡ نَّبِىٍّ اِلَّاۤ اَخَذۡنَاۤ اَهۡلَهَا بِالۡبَاۡسَآءِ وَالضَّرَّآءِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَضَّرَّعُوۡنَ‏ ثُمَّ بَدَّلۡـنَا مَكَانَ السَّيِّئَةِ الۡحَسَنَةَ حَتّٰى عَفَوْا وَّقَالُوۡا قَدۡ مَسَّ اٰبَآءَنَا الضَّرَّآءُ وَالسَّرَّآءُ فَاَخَذۡنٰهُمۡ بَغۡتَةً وَّهُمۡ لا يَشۡعُرُوۡنَ

(Ali, 369)

It is clear that for God, as expressed in the Qur’ān, the role of the prophet (any prophet sent by Him, from the first, Adam, to the last one, Muḥammad) is to fight evil actions. Yet, the presence of a prophet among His people, or those who choose to heed His advice and warnings, does not free people from suffering, trials, tribulation, and eventually death.[[9]](#endnote-9) Conversely, God’s message is to teach humankind humility and patience. This is the reason why God allows pain and suffering so that humans can be grateful, kind, and finally realize that evil does not happen by chance, but rather, it occurs by the will of God. Hence, humans have to be vigilant, proactive, and take full responsibility for their transgressions.[[10]](#endnote-10)

For al-Ma‘arrī, instead, human beings, through “intellect and reasoning” (**عَقْل** *‘aql*), can take control of their actions and, this time, willingly avoid evil, pain, and suffering. Indeed, life is sacred and it is our duty, as human beings, through reason (**عَقْل** *‘aql*), to see that we do no harm to others. Powerful leaders and divine prophets cannot guide us, nor can they save us. Human Reason (*‘Aql* ***عَقْل***) is thus the only key:

You’ve had your way a long, long time,

You kings and tyrants,

And still you work injustice hour by hour.

What ails you that do not tread a path of glory?

A man may take the field, although he love the bower.

But some hope a divine leader with prophetic voice

Will rise amid the gazing silent ranks.

An idle thought! There’s none to lead but reason,

To point the morning and the evening ways (J. 2021).

As for death, the Qur’ān highlights that it is inevitable: “**كُلُّ نَفْسٍۢ ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِ**, Every soul shall have a taste of death” (3:185), (Ali 172), and that death will find us, no matter where we are: “**أيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرككُّمُ المَوْت** Wherever ye are, Death will find you out” (4:78) (Ali 203). In al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry, death takes action and spends some time with human beings; yet, despite what people might do to the dead body of a loved one in order to preserve the image of his or her prestige while living, it is still a dead body:

Death came to visit him: he knit his brows

And frowned on Death—and never frowned again.

They gave him store of balm to join his folk,

But earth is balm enow for buried men.

Propped on his side, whilst in the tomb he lay,

To us he seemed a preacher risen to pray.



(Nicholson 1969, 94; 236).

**4. Inner Faith (*Īmān* إِيمَان), Divine Law (*Sharī’ah* *شَرِيعة* ), and Reason (*‘Aql* *عَقْل*)**

Ever since the first divine revelations[[11]](#endnote-11) to the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632), even though at first only at an embryonic and hesitant stage, Islamic Philosophy[[12]](#endnote-12) had the difficult task of often adjusting, adapting, fine tuning, and/or resetting its multifaceted theoretical and speculative tenets to the strict Islamic religious canon—divided into ***سُنَّة*** *Sunnah*, ***شِيعة*** *Shī‘ah*, and *Kharijism*,[[13]](#endnote-13) as well as the *Mu‘tazilite*,[[14]](#endnote-14) *Murjite*,[[15]](#endnote-15) *Qadarite*,[[16]](#endnote-16) *Jabarite*,[[17]](#endnote-17) *Jahmite*,[[18]](#endnote-18) and *Ashā’rite*[[19]](#endnote-19) religious movements/theological schools, to name just the most prominent of the many spiritual/sociopolitical subdivisions and ideological divides within Islam—firmly opposed to any form of philosophical thinking that could be interpreted as if it were even remotely questioning the very Nature, Oneness,[[20]](#endnote-20) Essence, and/or Existence of God, as well as human relationship with God. Hence, Islamic Philosophy saw a gradual yet increasingly asserting/assertive presence of:

1. ***عِلم الفَلسَفَة*** *‘Ilm al-Falsafah*, Islamic Philosophy per se. It is a “‘marginal’ discipline”, second to the “‘religious sciences’,” as well as the “‘foreign sciences’,” (Gardet 2B: 598);
2. ***عِلم الكَلام*** *‘Ilm al-Kalām*,[[21]](#endnote-21) (the Science of the Word), universally known as ***كَلاَم*** *Kalām*, or simply *Kalam*: it is the philosophical, dialectical, and theological speculation within Islam, mainly based upon Human Reason (***عَقْل*** ‘*Aql*), and Rational Examination;
3. Islamic Mysticism (***تَصَوُّف*** *Taṣawwuf*), as in the case of Sufism (***صُوفِيَّة*** *Ṣūfiyyah*).

Considered at best as “‘marginal’ sciences” (Gardet 2B: 597), *‘Ilm al-Falsafah*, *‘Ilm al-Kalām*, and *Taṣawwuf*, all aimed at attaining the same ultimate goal, i.e., enhancing our knowledge/deep understanding (***حِكْمَة*** *Hikmah*) of God’s Signs, (***آيَات*** *Āyāt*), or, better yet, becoming One with Him—as in the case of (Sufi) mystics/ascetics—in addition to decoding the signs of His creation (***خَلْق*** *Khalq*), as a way of eventually identifying with Him. The Intellect, or better yet, Human Reason (***عَقْل*** *‘Aql*) is therefore the key to unraveling and deciphering God’s Signs to us, first and foremost, the (universal) Truth (***حَقّ*** *Haqq*):

Soon We shall show them

Our Signs in the (furthest)

Regions (of the Earth), and

In their own souls, until

It becomes manifest to them

That this is the Truth […]

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ ۗ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

(Qur’ān 41:53; Ali 1302–1303).

**5. المَوْت Death, *نَفْس* *Nafs* (Human Soul), and *رُوح* *Rūh* (Spirit)**

Al-Ma‘arrī’s epigram about death ***ضَحَكْنا*** (*Ḍahaknā*, We laughed) is a wakeup call for Humanity. The first quatrain sets the scene: everything is ephemeral, or rather, everything in life has an end. Yet, human beings, in their haughtiness, believe that everything is forever. Hence, they laugh. Al-Ma‘arrī’s suggestion for us then is to turn this laughter into tears since the end is irreversible. Our lives are compared to glass: we will be shattered into a million pieces, never to become whole again. Interestingly enough, al-Ma‘arrī does not delve into the dichotomy ***نَفْس*** *nafs*—human soul that can be good or evil and that upon our death leaves the body in order to be judged in ***الآخْرَة*** (*al-Akhratu*, the Afterlife)—vs. ***رُوح*** *rūh* (spirit, that comes from God).[[22]](#endnote-22) Hence, human beings enclose in their bodies both *nafs* and *rūh*. However, in the second and last quatrains al-Ma‘arrī reflects on our earthly body and death: unlike an empty jug that can be filled again and again with wine, provided that it is not broken, our bodies decay and their remains are scattered to the four winds:

ضَحَكْنا وكان الضِّحْكُ مِنَّا سَفاهَة

يَحَطِّمُنا رَيبُ الزَّمَان كأننا

و حُقَّ لِسُكان البَسِيطة أن يَبْكوا

زُجَاج ولكِن لا يُعاد له سَبْكُ

لو كان جِسْمُك مَترْوكا بِهيئتِه

كالدَّن عُطِّل مِن رَاح تَكون بِهِ

بَعد ألتَّلاف طمِعنا في تَلافِهِ

و لم يُحَطَّم فَعادَت مَرَّة فِهِ

We laughed, and O how foolish was our laughter!

Dwellers on earth should cry and never cease.

Time’s vagaries crush us like glass; thereafter

We’ll never be remolded as one piece.

If after death you body kept its shape,

We might hope it will be revived again,

Just as a jug, emptied of wine, could be

Refilled, as long as it remains unbroken.

But all its parts have come undone and turned

To particles of dust swept by the winds (van Gelder 2012, 75-76).

The quatrain ***ودِدْتُ و فأتِي في مَهْمَهِ*** (I Wish My Death Would Happen in a Desert Land), instead, is an inner reflection on al-Ma‘arrī’s own death whereby he speculates on where his dead body will be put to rest. His desire is to be buried where no one would bother him, away from hypocrites or unbelievers, and that includes Muslim scholars! It is clear, then, that al-Ma‘arrī totally rejected the hypocrisy of religious men and the promised comforts of the Afterlife. The desert land is thus for him by far better than human glory (in this life as well as in death) since the latter is insincere:

ودِدْتُ و فأتِي في مَهْمَهِ

أمُوت بِهِ واحِدا مُفْرَدا

به لامع ليْس بالمعْلم

وأُدْفَنُ في الأرْضِ لم تُظْلَم

I wish my death would happened in a desert land

Where shimmering mirages mark no roads.

There would I lie, all on my own, alone.

Be buried in unsullied, virgin soil,

Far from a man who says, “No peace on you!”

Or one who says, “Be greeted, earth!”

I fear you will make my resting place

Next to a traitor unbeliever or a Muslim.

“You’re pushing!” he will say; I shall reply,

“It’s they who did us wrong; I did not know.” (van Gelder 2012, 76-77).

**6. Aljamiado/Aljamia/عَجَمِي *‘Ajami* Script/خَرْجَه *Kharjah* (Final), and مُوشَّح *Muwashshah* (*Muwaššaḥ*, Girded)**

6.1. Aljamiado/Aljamia*/*عَجَمِي *‘Ajami* Script

The practice of writing a language in Arabic characters was/is common in many areas once dominated by Muslims or that are currently part of an Islamic country. This procedure is known as عجَمي‘Ajamī—from the Arabic عجمِيّ ‘Ajamiyyah Persian/Iranian, i.e., a foreigner—and it means writing the local language (considered “foreign” by the Arabs) in Arabic script. Aljamia or Aljamiado are the terms used in English to denote texts and corresponding literary corpora using Arabic script (though a bit modified) to represent a language other than Arabic (Levi 2019, 20).

Aljamia texts are found everywhere Islam extended its political and religious reach. In other words, *‘Ajamiyyah* **عَجَمِيّ** is a language used in the former or present Muslim world with lexical and, at times, morpho-syntactic interferences from Arabic. All languages that have had a direct or indirect contact with the Islamic world thus show a varying degree of lexical borrowing from Arabic and, through Arabic, other languages, as in the case of Farsi and Osmanli[[23]](#endnote-23) that, owing to their sociopolitical and cultural status, were able to lexically influence Arabic:

*عَجَمِي ‘Ajami* script[[24]](#endnote-24) is common to most areas of the world where the Arabic alphabet was or is still used to express another non-Arabic languages or dialects (Semitic or non-Semitic), as in the case of Albanian, Arwi, Azeri, Baluchi, Banjar, Bashkir, Bedawi, Beja, Belarusian, Berber languages/dialects, Bosnian, Catalan, Chaghatai, Chechen, Comorian, Dari, Dhivehi, English, Farsi, Fula, Greek, Harari, Hausa, Hebrew, Italian, Javanese, Jawi, Kashmiri, Kazakh, Kurdish, Kirgiz, Malay, Malgasy (Sorabe), Maltese, Mandinka, Maguindanaon, Minangkabau, Mozarabic (Iberian Romance), Nogai Tatar, *Osmanli*, Pashto, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Sardinian, Sicilian, Sindhi, the Sino-Tibetan languages (as in the case of Mandarin Chinese),[[25]](#endnote-25) Somali, Songhai, Spanish, Sundanese, Swahili, Tajik, Tatar, Tausung, Turkmen, Uighur, Urdu, Uzbek, Yoruba, and Wolof (Levi 2020a, 410).

In the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking areas of the world, *Aljamia* or *Aljamiado* is Portuguese and Spanish written in Arabic or Hebrew script. For instance, Portuguese texts written in *Aljamia* are found not only in present-day Portugal, but also in Brazil, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique (Levi 2020b, 2016, 2012). *Aljamiado* literature hailing from the Iberian Peninsula composed during the Islamic presence in present-day Portugal and Spain (711–1492)—as well as after the expulsion of Muslims and their descendants from Portugal (1496–1497), (Soyer), and Spain (1492; 1609–1614), (Jónsson)—encompasses a rich corpus of writings covering a wide range of topics, yet poetry is by far the most popular.

In **الأنْدَلُس** *al-Andalus*—Iberian Peninsula under Islamic rule (711–1492)—Muslims and non-Muslims spoke Mozarabic, a Latin-based language with many lexical borrowings from the Arabic language. Mozarabic was in itself divided among many different regional Romance language dialects or variants.

The term Mozarabic derives from the Arabic **مُسْتَعرَب** *musta‘arab*, in itself derived from the tenth verbal form **إسْتَعْرَبَ** *ista‘araba* (or fifth verbal form **تَعَرَّبَ** *ta‘arraba*) or rather, “to behave/live as an Arab and/or a Muslim.” Hence, by extension, it meant to be/become Arabicized/Islamized. The term was used to refer to people who, despite their Christian faith, felt more comfortable speaking, reading, and writing in Arabic, including using Muslim attire. Given that the Mozarabs knew how to read and write in Arabic—that is, they had access to the **مَدْرَسَة** *madrasa* (Qur’ānic School)—they also developed a form of writing in their own vernacular using Arabic script, known in Portuguese and Spanish as *aljamia* and/or *aljamiado*.

The *Mudéjares*—a Portuguese and Spanish rendering of the Arabic **مُدَجَّنُونَ** *Mudajjanūna* (those who were allowed to stay; hence, those who were “domesticated”, sic!)—were the men and women who remained Muslim (most of the time covertly) after their lands were retaken by the Christians during the Portuguese and Spanish reconquests (Levi 2013, 2).

The Mozarabic languages (**اللُغَة المُسْتَعربِيَّة** *al-Lughat al-Musta‘arabiyyah*) were thus an agglomeration of Romance languages and dialects whose lexicon was heavily influenced by Arabic (Levi 2020a). They were spoken in present-day Andalusia (Spain) and parts of central and southern Portugal during the Emirate of Córdova (756–929), the Caliphate of Córdova (929–1031), the *taifa* kingdoms (1009–1287),[[26]](#endnote-26) and the Emirate of Granada (1238–1492).

Texts, particularly poems, composed in Mozarabic covered a wide range of topics, as in the case of everyday life (including wine, food, lodging, sex, and music), human body, legal matters, love (or lack thereof), nature (including flora and fauna), praise, sociopolitical situations (where the poet used satire to address the issue(s) at hand and attacked the enemy), religion, and warfare. The themes of suffering and death (physical and spiritual) are present, yet they are embedded in some of the topics listed above, particularly religion and warfare.

6.2. *خَرْجَه* *Kharjah* (Final), and *مُوشَّح* *Muwashshah* (*Muwaššaḥ*, Girded)

The kharja, from the Arabic **خَرْجَه** *kharjah* (final), is the final refrain of a Mozarabic or an Arabic, five-stanza, four-to-six line (**بَيت** *bait*, house) poem, collectively called **مُوشَّح** *muwashshah* (*muwaššaḥ*, girded). Each stanza is of the same meter while each *kharja* shares the same meter and rhyme. Even though the *kharja* is attached to a *muwashshah*, most extant *kharjas* from the Iberian Peninsula show signs of clearly having been written in parallel to and not with the *muwashshah* to which they belong. Because of the meter and rhyme, the *muwashshah* also falls within the rich repertoire of secular music composed in the Islamic world, from the Maghreb and al-Andalus to the Middle East and beyond.[[27]](#endnote-27)

As for themes, a *muwashshah* follows the topics discussed above; yet, the most common subject matter is by far love (or lack thereof), (Rosen 169). Indeed, the voice of the beloved is usually incorporated in the *kharja*. However, “[p]anegyric poems and poems celebrating wine drinking are also common. Ṣūfī poets such as the Andalusians [**ابْن عَرَبِي**] Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) and [**الشُّشْتَاري** **أبُو الحَسَن**] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (1212–1269) composed *muwashshaḥāt* with mystical themes”.[[28]](#endnote-28) In the Middle East, though, elegies and personal/political satires are also very common topics. Most likely, *muwashshaḥāt* written in Hebrew hailing from al-Andalus made their way to the Eastern part of the Islamic world. The **رِثاء** *rithā’* (elegy) poems composed by**عُمَر بن مَسْعود المَحَّار**  ‘Umar ibn Mas‘ūd Maḥḥār (d. 1311) contained in the **دِيوَان سِرَاج الدِّين المَحَّار** *Dīwān Sirāj al-Dīn al-Maḥḥār* are great examples of mournful *muwashshaḥāt* (Tahqīq ‘Aṭā’ and Aḥmad ‘Aṭā’; Özkan; ʿAbd Allāh). Yet, they do not align with al-Ma‘arrī’s pessimistic views of life and the lack of hope for the existence of the Afterlife.

The carta *del muerto* (letter of the dead) is a Spanish *aljamiado* translation of an Arabic text written in Arabic found between folios 9v–24r in a document called *Legajo de miscelánea*, ms. Junta 43, held at the Biblioteca Tomás Navarro Tomás, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid (Rosa Candás 45-46). The *carta del muerto* is of great importance because it is the only known translation of an Arabic text on Islamic death rituals in the Iberia Peninsula after the forced conversion/expulsion of the Muslims and their descendants (*Moriscos*) from Spain in 1499 and from Portugal in 1609–1612 respectively.[[29]](#endnote-29) Additionally, and more importantly, given that as of 1526 in Spain it was illegal to practice Islam, the *carta del muerto* is extremely important since it testifies to the funerary practices and beliefs of crypto-Muslim communities.

In the *carta del muerto*, at the **عَذَاب القَبْر** *‘aḍāb al-qabr* (punishment of the grave), the angel **رُومَان** Rūmān (or **ضَومَان** Ḍawmān) asks the dead man to tell him all about his good and bad actions while he was living (Rosa Candás 51). In other words, as it is mentioned in Qur’ān 17:14, the true accusers are the very deeds of the believer, not the angels in the Afterlife, since these actions testify as to what the believer has actually done during his/her lifetime:

(It will be said to him:)

“Read thine (own) record:

Sufficient is thy soul!

This day to make out

An account against thee.”

اقْرأ كِتاَبَكَ كَفَى بِنَفْسِكَ اليَوْمَ عَليْكَ حَسِيبًا

(Ali 697).

**7. *قَصِيدة* *Qaṣīda* (Ode) and the *Naqā’iḍ* (*نَقائِض* Flytings, Invectives)**

As in many cultures and societies around the world, the first literary compositions hailing from the Arabian Peninsula were of an oral nature whereby men and women[[30]](#endnote-30) would recite (short) poems, fairy tales, proverbs, sayings, aphorisms, adages, oracles, and epic poems highlighting the heroic deeds of a specific member/some members of their clan and/or tribe. Indeed, the poet had the task to sing/recite and pass on to the next generation these traditions and skills. The ***قَصِيدة*** *qaṣīda* (ode) and the *naqā’iḍ* (***نَقائِض*** flytings, invectives)[[31]](#endnote-31) were some of most popular poetic genres used:

*Naqā’iḍ* (biting refutations) are a type of lampoon in which two poets exchange satirical poems that make use of the same prosodic meter and rhyme. Although satire had already been a staple of Arabic poetry in the pre-Islamic era, *naqā’iḍ* were further developed and enhanced as an art form in the Umayyad period thanks to three poets: Jarīr, al-Farazdaq, and al-Akhṭal.[[32]](#endnote-32)

The ***قَصِيدة*** *qaṣīda* (ode, literally: intention), with roots in pre-Islamic poetry of the Arabian Peninsula and surrounding areas, is a positive (***مَدَح*** *madḥ*, laudatory, panegyric), negative (***هِجَاء*** *hijā’*, ironic, defamatory, satiric), or mournful poem (***رِثاء*** *rithā*, elegy, mournful song) found in many Islamic cultures. Its main characteristic is a single-end rhyme found in the entire ode, usually composed of 60–100 lines. All but the ***رَجَز*** *rajaz* (tremor) meter were allowed.[[33]](#endnote-33) As for the ***رِثاء*** *rithā*, they focused on the death of noblemen (***سَادَة*** *sādah*, lords) or horsemen (***فُرْسَان*** *fursān*) who died in battles.

The most famous collection of pre-Islamic poetry is by far the ***مُعلَّقَات*** *Mu‘allaqāt* (Hanging Poems/Suspended Odes), (Arberry 1955), which contains a total of seven long poems, most likely figuratively “hanging in our minds” as we read them and savor their exquisite style and message.

***تُمَاضِر بِنْت عمْر الحَارِث بن* الشَّريد *السُّلمِيَة*** Tumāḍir bint ‘Amr ibn al-Ḥārith ibn al-Sharīd al-Sulamīyah (c. 575–c. 646), better known as ***الخَنْسَاء*** *al-Khansā’* (snub-nosed gazelle, i.e., metaphor for “beautiful lady”), was a woman poet who lived in pre-Islamic/early Islamic Arabia who since her lifetime has been acclaimed as being one of the most talented elegiac poets (male and female alike). Indeed, “the most eloquent of her poetry were odes in lamentation of her two brothers, Ṣakhr and Mu‘awiyah who were killed during the pre-Islamic era” in a tribal battle (Al-Khansaa’; van Gelder 2012, 12–14; Pinckney Stetkevych).

Al-Khansāh belonged to the ***بَنو سُليم*** Banū Sulaym tribe in the Hejaz and her father was the leader of the ***شَريد*** Sharīd clan. The following ode laments the death of her brother ***صَخْر*** Ṣakhr who was killed as he was avenging the death of their brother ***مُعَاوية*** Mu‘awiyah:

What have we done to you death

that you treat us so, with always another catch?

One day a warrior,

the next a head of state;

charmed by the loyal,

you choose the best,

iniquitous, unequalling death.

I would not complain

if you were just.

But you take the worthy

Leaving fools for us (Siddique 2011).

In al-Khansā’’s poetry there are interesting parallels with al-Ma‘arrī’s views on death, or rather, that everything in life is ephemeral:

Oh, many a soul had won a pleasant life

Had she not stood in danger from her fates.

Things here are but a line writ by the pen

Of Doom; and love of them begins the line



(Nicholson 1969, 83, 227).

Yet, in *al-Khansā’* death takes away the brave only to leave on Earth the unworthy ones or, as she puts it, the “fools.”

**8. عَجَمِيَة *Ajamiyah* Poem الإَنكِشَاف *Al-Inkishāfi* (The Soul’s Awakening)**

The seventy-nine, stanza-long Swahili **عَجَمِيَة** *Ajamiyah* poem **الإَنكِشَاف** *Al-Inkishāfi* (The Soul’s Awakening), written in Arabic script,[[34]](#endnote-34) most likely was composed by poet and theologian ***سَعيِّد ابْد الله بن علي بن نَاصِر*** Sayyid Abdallah bin Ali bin Nāṣir (c. 1720–1820) after 1749, perhaps between 1810 and 1820. As in many Swahili terms of Arabic origin, the word *inkishāfi* derives from the seventh Arabic verbal form **إِنْكَشَف** *inkashaf* (being revealed), via the triliteral form **كشف** *kashaf* (he revealed himself to himself), (Traini 1966–1973, 3: 1270–1271).

This poem is a monolog on the ephemeral aspect of life. Indeed, as in al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry, also in *al-Inkishāfi* earthly wealth and human success are seen as temporary. Humans are seduced by the glamor of power; yet, everything will come to an end:

Kima ina ila ilio mbovu,

ilikithiriye ungi welevu;

I kalifu mno kuta kiwavu,

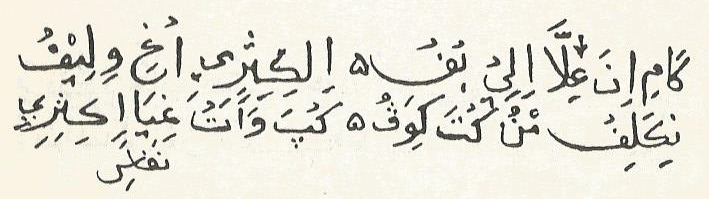
kupa watu ngeya ikithiriye.

And last of all Earth’s evils, ‘tis the worst,

and of sly peril ever teemedth most.

It strikes at human heart the mortal thrust,

dealing men’s death-blow e’ver and e’ver again



(Nasir 60; 61; 140).

However, unlike al-Ma‘arrī, the author of *al-Inkishāfi* beseeches his soul (**نَفْس** *nafs*) not to seek earthly wealth, but rather, to live a life “according to God’s will. That way, the soul will escape the eternal horror of Hell” (Mberia 93).

Conversely, in his **رسَالة الغُفرَان** *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness) al-Ma‘arrī portrays Hell as a place where all sorts of discussions take place (e.g., Arabic philology and poetry) at times presented in **سَجْع** *saj‘* (rhymed prose).[[35]](#endnote-35) Mere mortals and caliphs, as in the case of **يَمِين ألدَّوله أبُو القَاسِم مَحْمُود بن سبکتگین** Yamīn al-Dawlah Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn Sebüktigin, also known as **مَحْمُود غزوني** Maḥmūd Ghazni or **مَحْمُود زابُلی** Maḥmūd-i Zābulī (971–1030), Sultan of Ghazna (r. 998–1030),[[36]](#endnote-36) and the Arabian tribes of **عَاد** ‘Ᾱd and **ثَمُود** Thamūd (Qur’ān 7:65–79), all have perished:

Their story belongs to the Arabian tradition. Their eponymous ancestor ‘Ᾱd was fourth in generation from Noah, having been a son of ‘Aus, the son of Aram, the son of Sām, the son of Noah. They occupied a large tract of country in Southern Arabia, extending from ‘Ummān at the mouth of the Persian Gulf to Hadhramaut and Yemen at the southern end of the Red Sea. The people were tall in stature and were great builders. Probably the long, winding tracts of sands (*aḥqāf*) in their dominions were irrigated with canals. They forsook the true God, and oppressed their people. A three year famine visited them, but yet they took no warning. At length, a terrible blast of wind destroyed them and their land, but a remnant, known as the second ‘Ᾱd or the Thamūd were saved, and afterwards suffered a similar fate for their sins (Ali 358, note 1040).

Mountains shall melt and the deep seas shall freeze over. And how about our souls? Are they mortal or immortal? Alas, everything shall be destroyed:

Perish this world! I should not joy to be

Its Caliph or Maḥmud.

My fate I know not, save that I in turn

Am treading the same path to the same bourne

As old ‘Ᾱd and Thamúd.

The mountains (‘tis averred) shall melt, the seas

Surely shall freeze;

And the great dome of Heaven, whose poles

Have ever awed men’s souls,

Some argue for its ruins, some maintain

Its immortality—in vain.

The scattered boulders of the lava waste,

Shall e’er they mingle into one massed ore?

It sheer catastrophe shall fling in haste

The Pleiad luminaries asunder,

Well may be quenched the fiery brand of Mars;

And if decay smites Indian scimitars,

Survival of their sheaths would be a wonder!



(Nicholson 1969, 62; 210).

Similarly, death’s arrow in *al-Inkishāfi* is merciless and quick. Human beings have no choice but to surrender to death. Indeed, death takes away all earthly pleasures. Nor does fighting death prolong human lives. The time of the journey is set; we just have to follow it:

Mvi wa Manaya ukawafuma,

na kutubukia katika nyama,

Pasiwe mwatami mwenye kwatama,

au mwamba, “Nini, yalikuwaye?”

Wakazisalimu umri zao,

Hadimu Ladhati achenda nao,

Pasi nkohozi akohowao,

ao mwenye kwenda asiridhiye.

So doth Death’s Arrow, swift, to them make flight;

and deep into their mortal flesh doth smite.

No man, aghast, gasps of its swift affright,

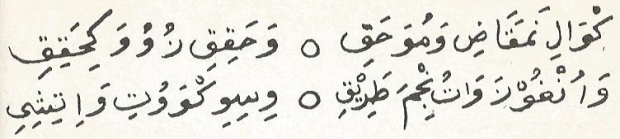
nor is there who could tell why were he slain.

And thus surrendering, their lives they yield.

Walks with them, Death, who doth all joys withhold.

Nor lingers one whose protest be upheld,

nor one who, from the Journey, can refrain



(Nasir 62; 63; 133).

**9. رسَالة الغُفرَان *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness) and the Divine Comedy**

In his satirical text **رسَالة الغُفرَان** *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness, composed c. 1033) al-Ma‘arrī narrates the imaginary story of a famous Arab grammarian, **عَلي ابْن مَنْصُور** **الحَلبي** ‘Alī ibn Mansūr al-Ḥalabī, most of the time referred to as **ابْن القَارِح** Ibn al-Qāriḥ, who sent a self-righteous epistle to al-Ma‘arrī whereby he expressed an interest in meeting him.

Indeed, Ibn al-Qāriḥ’ goal was to reprehend al-Ma‘arrī about his (alleged) heretical views. In fact, al-Qāriḥ was very harsh towards al-Ma‘arrī and did not mince words regarding al-Ma‘arrī’s non-canonical religious beliefs. The *Risālat al-Ghufrān* is al-Mar‘rrī’s elegant and erudite way of getting even.

The Risālat *al-Ghufrān* is thus al-Ma‘arrī’s clever response to al-Qāriḥ’s attacks: al-Qāriḥ, who in the story is already dead, is thus placed on a journey through death and “from a purgatory-esque location to Paradise, as well as short glimpse of hell,” (Lewis 2022).

The Islamic heavenly garden, of ancient Sumerian or Aramaic origin (Cohen 2011) is a place where Ibn al- Qāriḥ is taught many lessons on how not to judge others:

[…] al-Maʿarrī uses his parodic “heavenly garden” as a “ludic space” in which his self-righteous protagonist and addressee, Ibn al-Qāriḥ, as well as his (presumed) reader, is tested with riddles, both verbal and conceptual. Ibn al-Qāriḥ fails in what I claim to be a parody of a rite of initiation (a literary counterpart to the Prophet Muḥammad’s Night Journey and Ascension): he is constantly surprised and dumbfounded by God’s mercy (Stetkevych 2014, 2).

During this imaginary journey, al-Qāriḥ stumbles upon many famous philologists and poets of the Arabic language who lived before al-Ma‘arrī and al- Qāriḥ’s. Al-Qāriḥ points out to them their shortcomings as poets, heretics, and sinners. Yet, despite their faults, God pardoned their sins, or rather, despite their weaknesses, they were “heathen poets who have found forgiveness” (Britannica) because of the Grace of God. In Hell, al-Qāriḥ also has the chance of talking to quite a few **زَنَادِقَة** *zanādiqah* (heretics), including the Devil himself!

Hear ye who in the dust of ages creep,

And in the halls of wicked masters sleep:—

Arise! and out of this wan weariness

Where Allāh’s laughter makes the Devil weep (Rihani 72).

In the *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, al-Qāriḥ questions al-Ma‘arrī’s religious stance as well as his linguistic and literary talents. It is no surprise then that al-Ma‘arrī responded to these attacks with an equally strong strike on al-Qāriḥ the man, the linguist, the poet, and the (hypocrite) believer.

Similarities with Dante’s Divine Comedy are numerous and obvious. Indeed, scholarship worldwide is divided as to whether the connections are based on a direct tie with al-Ma‘arrī’s *Risālat al-Ghufrān* or if the parallels are instead due to the shared history of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures that functioned as a backdrop for the creation of their respective masterpieces. Most likely, it is a combination of the two.[[37]](#endnote-37)

As for the themes of knowledge vs. religion, life vs. death, punishment, sin, and suffering Dante is clear: knowledge and rectitude are human qualities that transcend religion and ethnicity. Hence, it is no surprise that pre-Christian Era as well as Muslim Era righteous individuals are placed by Dante in a special place of Hell, an area where they will suffer the least, namely in the First Circle (Limbo), a space for “virtuous pagans,” to use a Christian theology concept:

Earlier in the Inferno, a small group of Muslims turns up. Avicenna, Averroes, and Saladin are among those virtuous heathens who, along with Hector, Aeneas, Abraham, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, are confined to the first circle of the Inferno, there to suffer a minimal (and even honorable) punishment for not having had the benefit of Christian revelation. Dante, of course, admires their great virtues and accomplishments, but because they were not Christians he must condemn them, however lightly, to Hell (Said 69).

Despite Dante’s dislike for Islam—indeed, as most of Christian Europe of the time, he believed that Islam was just a heterodox branch of Christianity and that Muḥmmad was a renegade heterodox heresiarch (sic!)—Dante highly “admired and respected Islamic contributions to human knowledge” (Levi 2022, 109) since Islamic sciences and philosophy played a major role in forging “Western (Christian) civilization.” (McCambridge 29).

In the Divine Comedy, suffering is the guiding theme of the souls in Hell and Purgatory, not Heaven, since the latter is a place of eternal joy and partaking of God’s glory. For Dante, in order to expiate the sins committed during their lifetime, the souls of the sinners had to suffer both emotionally and physically. Yet, since sinners are dead, their bodies suffer in different ways. For al-Ma‘arrī, instead, pain and suffering are real and physical:

‘Tis pain to live and pain to die,

Oh, would that far-off fate were nigh!

An empty hand, a palate dry,

A craving soul, a staring eye.



(Nicholson 1969, 78; 223)

As mentioned above, in al-Ma‘arrī the dichotomy ***نَفْس*** *nafs*, or rather, the human soul that upon our death leaves our body in order to be judged by God in ***الآخْرَة*** (*al-Akhratu*, the Afterlife), and ***رُوح*** *rūh*, i.e., the spirit, that comes from God, is non-existent. Indeed, for al-Ma‘arrī all human beings enclose in their bodies both *nafs* and *rūh*.

Dante, instead, while he valued the inner soul (***نَفْس*** *nafs*), he also highly regarded virtue (***فَضِيلَة*** *faḍīlah* in Arabic). Hence, regardless of its origin, virtue had to be celebrated, even if it was inhabited by a non-Christian, as in the case of a pre-Christian “pagan” or a Muslim. Indeed, “according to Dante, inner soul [***نَفْس*** *nafs*] and virtue (***فَضِيلَة*** *faḍīlah*, where politics and power are inseparable) are qualities that transcend time, places, and religions.” (Levi 2022, 108)

For example, the physical pains of Muḥammad and his cousin ‘Alī in Inferno, Canto XXVIII: 30-31 are real. Without a doubt, their pain represents human suffering in the flesh as well as in the soul:

Mentre che tutto in lui veder m‘attacco, guardommi, e con le mani s‘aperse il petto, dicendo: “Or vedi com‘io mi dilaccio! Vedi come storpiato è Maometto! Dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Ali,m Fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto. E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui, seminator di scandalo e di scisma fuor vivi, e però son fessi così. Un diavolo è qua dietro che n‘accisma sí crudelmente, al taglio de la spada rimettendo ciascun di questa risma, quand‘avem votla la dolente strada; però che le ferite son richiuse prima ch‘altri dinanzi li rivada. Ma tu chi se‘ che ‘n su lo scoglio muse, forse per indugiar in su le tue accuse?” “Né morte ‘l giunse ancora, né colpa ‘l mena” rispuose ‘l mio maestro “a tormentarlo; ma per dar lui esperienza piena, a me, che morto son, convien menarlo per lo ‘nferno qua giú di giro in giro: e quest‘è ver cosí com‘io ti parlo”. Piú fuor di centro che, quando l‘udiro, s‘arrestaron nel fosso a riguardarmi per maraviglia, obliando il martirio. “Or di‘ a fra Dolcin dunque che s‘armi, tu che forse vedra‘ il sole in breve, s‘ello non vuol qui tosto seguitarmi, sí di vivanda, che stretta di neve non rechi la vittoria al Noarese, ch‘altrimenti acquistar non saría leve”. Poi che l‘un piè per girsene sospese, Maometto mi disse esta parola; indi a partirsi in terra lo distese (Sapegno 300–302).

No cask, indeed, by loss of middle-board or stave, is opened as was one I saw, split from the chin to where one breaketh wind; while down between his legs his entrails hung, his pluck appeared, and that disgusting sack, which maketh excrement of what is swallowed. While I on seeing him was all intent, he looked at me, and opening with his hands his breast, he said: “See now how I am cloven! Behold how torn apart Mahomet is! Ali in tears moves on ahead of me, cloven in his face from forelock down to chin; and all the others whom thou seest here disseminators were, when still alive, of strife and schism, and hence are cloven thus. There is a devil here behind, who thus fiercely adorns, and to the sword‘s edge puts each member of this company anew, when we have gone around the woeful road; because, ere one return in front of him, the wounds thus made have all been closed again. But who art thou, that musest on the crag, perhaps to put off going to the torture adjudged thine accusation of thyself?” “Death hath not reached him yet,” replied my Teacher, “nor to a torment is he led by guilt, but that complete experience may be giv‘n him, I, who am dead, must needs conduct him here from circle unto circle down through Hell; and this is true, as that I speak to thee.” On hearing him, more were there than a hundred who stopped there in the ditch to look at me, and who through their surprise forgot their pain. “To Fra Dolcino do thou therefore say, thou that, perhaps, wilt shortly see the sun, if soon he would not hither follow me, to arm him so with food, lest stress of snow should give the Novarese a victory, which else would not be easily obtained.” When one foot he had raised to go away, Mahomet said these words to me; which done, upon the ground he stretched it to depart (“The Divine Comedy. Vol. 1 (Inferno)”).

An interesting parallel can be found in the *Luzūmiyyāt* where the angels of death and resurrection are a reminder of our transgressions here on Earth. Hence, the pain that we suffer in the Afterlife is real; yet, this pain eats our souls, not our bodies: “‘Thy two soul-devouring angels,’ the angels of death and resurrection.” “Izrail” (***عزْرَائيل*** *‘Azrā’īl*) is “the angel of death” (Rihani 98; 99) whereas ***إِسْرَافِيل*** *‘Isrāfīl* is the angel of resurrection.

**Conclusion**

Rather than being a heretic, or rather, a renegade Muslim, al-Ma‘arrī was a true free thinker who—through life experience, erudition, and inner faith—was able to express his visions on an ideal world governed by healthy ties among people, a place devoid of hypocrisy, and where life and death, though part of a necessary cycle, ordained by God, did not necessarily entitle (unnecessary) suffering. Yet, should physical (and spiritual) pain persist, then the best antidote, or gift if you will, is death:

What! shall a house be drest in glittering gold, and then

Its owners abandon it and presently go his way?

I see in the body a brand of fire: Death puts it out,

And lo, all the while thou liv’st it burns with a ceaseless flame.



(Nicholson 1969, 91; 234).

Al-Ma‘arrī was also aware that life is just a dream, at its worst, it is a disease. Human beings are thus like flowers and plants: they grow tall, full of glory, and then they eventually die:

Now sleeps the sufferer, but never sleeps

Thy sentry-star, O Night, in mirkest hours.

If yonder heaven unfading verdure keeps,

Perchance the shining stars may be its flowers.

Men are as plants upspringing after rain,

Which, springing up, even then begin to die—

Poppies and cowslips: one herd doth profane

Their bloom, another feeds on low and high.



(Nicholson 1969, 74; 230).

Upon analyzing most of his extant corpus of writings, I believe that perhaps the best way to describe al-Ma‘arrī (the man, the poet, and the philosopher) is that, in his own way, he was a man of faith (inner faith, **إِيمَان** *īmān*) who was outspokenly not at ease with the corruption within established religions (all kinds) and its leaders.

In his preface to the *Luzūmiyyāt* renowned Lebanese-American scholar Ameen Rihani (1876–1940) in fact states that, while talking to a ṣūfī in Damascus the latter believed that al-Ma‘arrī was a true ṣūfī. Indeed, his dedication to achieving unity with God is equaled by this ṣūfī to the fervor of the abovementioned Andalusian ṣūfī poet **ابْن الأعرَابي** Ibn ‘Arabī and of the Cairo-born ṣūfī poet **ابْن الفَارِض** Ibn al-Fāriḍ (1181–1234), (Homerin). Yet, unlike these and other ṣūfīs who came before and after him, al-Ma‘arrī was guided by and hence perhaps reached the Sublime through Reason (***عَقْل*** *Aql*). I would say perhaps because, even during his moments of certainty, al-Ma‘arrī was still not completely convinced of the existence of a divine order. I believe that Reason is thus the key to understanding al-Ma‘arrī’s stance against life and his predilection for suffering and ultimately death—the deep void where dust listens to its own echo:

Once, in Damascus, I visited with some friends, a distinguished Sufi; and when the tea was being served, our host held forth on the subject of Abu'l-Ala's creed. He quoted from the Luzumiyat to show that the poet-philosopher of Ma'arrah was a true Sufi, and of the highest order. “In his passionate hatred of the vile world and all the vile material manifestations of life,” quoth our host, “he was like a dervish dancing in sheer bewilderment; a holy man, indeed, melting in tears before the distorted image of Divinity. In his aloofness, as in the purity of his spirit, the ecstatic negations of Abu'1-Ala can only be translated in terms of the Sufi’s creed. In his raptures, shathat, he was as distant as Ibn ul-Arabi; and in his bewilderment, heirat, he was as deeply intoxicated as Ibn ul-Fared. If others have symbolized the Divinity in wine, he symbolized it in Reason, which is the living oracle of the Soul; he has, in a word, embraced Divinity under the cover of a philosophy of extinction.” (Rihani 17).

1. For information on *Aljamiado* and *Aljamia*, please see Sections 6 and 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. للإطّلاع على معلومات خاصة بالجميادو أو العجمية، رجاءً أنظر الى القسم الخامس والسابع. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Twelver Shī‘īsm **اثْنا عشَريَّة** (the Twelve Imams) or **إمَامِيَّه** *Imāmīyyah*, is the major branch of Shī‘ah Islam. (Rizvi; Shomali) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Indeed, al-Mutanabbī is still considered one of the most prominent and important poets in the Arabic language today whose work has been translated into many languages. His proverbs and adages are very popular in the Arab world. (Arberry) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The editor of al-Ma‘arrī’s works, Geert Jan van Gelder, confused Sabeans with Sabians. Alas, he is not alone in this. Indeed, many scholars, including translators of the Qur’ān, confuse the two. Needless to say, scholars are divided as to the origin of the Sabeans/Sabians and conflate the two with the same spelling, namely: Sabians. The Sabians (**الصَّابِئة** *al-Ṣabi’ah*) were “also known as Nasoreans, Mandaens, or Christians of Saint John […] The **גינזא רבא** *Ginzā Rbā* (Great Treasury, c. 1st–3rd century of the Common Era) is by far the most famous and the longest (21 books) of their many sacred texts.” (Levi 2022, 124). For Qur’ānic references to the Sabians/Sabeans, please see: Qur’ān 2:62 and 22:17. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See Qur’ān 97:4 **تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّ‌وحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَ‌بِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ‌** “Therein come down The angels and the Spirit By God a permission, On every errand.” (Ali 1765) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The outer manifestation of religion, or rather, the dogmas and the rituals, are collectively known in Arabic as **الدِّين** *al-Dīn*. (Levi 2021, 12) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Sufism (**الصُّوفِيّة** *al-ṣūfiyyah*) or Tasawwuf (**التّصَوف** *al-taṣawwuf*), is way of life within Islam, particularly but not necessarily only within Sunni Islam, where the emphasis is placed on the believer’s self journey to asceticism through spirituality and mysticism rather than the mere mechanical repetition of religious practices. Most sufis are members of a **طريقَة** *ṭariqa* (congregation) led by a **ولييّ** *walīy* (master/custodian), who claims direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, and whose role is to assist in the individual journey to **حَقِيقَة** *ḥaqīqa* (truth). (Chittick; Cousins; Goldziher; Radtke and O’Kane; Schimmel; Sells) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Indeed, in Matthew 10: 34, Jesus says: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” *Good News Bible*, “The Gospel According to Matthew”: 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. **ابْن قُتَيبَة** Ibn Qutaybah (c. 828–889) is perhaps the most eloquent Islamic poet and scholar of all times who emphasized our responsibility as human beings and believers when it comes to being ethical, faithful, and humble. In other words, we have to accept the will of God and not blame others for our shortcomings. Ibn Qutaybah’s most important work is the **كِتَاب عيُون الأَكْبَر** *Kitāb ‘uyūn al-Akhbār* (Book of Choice Narratives) whereby he edited **أَدَب** *adab* (compositions) on a wide range of topics, from poetry and proverbs to friendship, personal character, and warfare. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The divine revelation to the Prophet Muhammad occurred between 610–632 of the Common Era. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The Arabic term for philosophy is **عِلم الفَلسَفَة** *‘Ilm al-Falsafah*, “Science of Philosophy,” the latter word is an obvious calque from the Greek “philosofía.” [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. **خَوَارْج** *Khawārij*, (singular **خَارجِي** *Khārijī*), literally, “those who left.” The Kharijetes were those who initially supported the caliphate of the fourth and last of the **الخُلفاء الرَّاشِدُون** *Khulafā al-Rashīdūn*, “the Rightly-Guided Caliphs,” ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (c. 599–661), Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, only to later reject him. They thus “left” ‘Alī’s party, the *Shī‘ah*, which they initially supported, as well as refused to recognize the new Umayyad caliph, Mu‘āwiya (r. 661–680). Their religious dogma differs from both the Sunni and the Shiites, thus constituting the third religious branch (denomination) within Islam. The “Rightly-guided Caliphs” were the first four leaders of the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Abū Bakr (r. 632–634), ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb (r. 634–644), ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 644–656), and “Alī ibn Abī Tālib (r. 656–661) were all very close companions of the Prophet Muhammad, hence their nickname “Rightly-Guided.” [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Even though it is a Sunnite theological school of thought, religiously speaking, the **المُعْتَزِلَة** *Mu’tazilah* (literally, those who remain neutral) converges with some major Shiite dogmatic points, such as human Free Will. It was divided into two branches, the Basra and the Baghdad schools which, among other beliefs, had different views of God’s divine attributes and justice, as well as on how the believer and unbeliever alike will be treated in the Afterlife. For further information on Free Will, **حُرِّية الإِرَادَة والاخْتِيَار** *Hurriyyah al-Irādah wa al-Akhtīyār*, and Predestination in early Islam, please see: Montgomery Watt. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The **المُرْجئة** *Murji’ah* theological school has views diametrically opposed to those of the *Mu’tazilah* as well as those of all other Sunni Muslims: it upholds the idea of postponing all judgments until later, since only God can judge human actions and thoughts. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Though the term **قَدَر** *Qadar*, literally “determination,” refers to God’s determination, or rather, He is the one who determines all events, actions, and thoughts, the Qadarites were firm believers in Free Will and Free Choice; thus, humankind has to take responsibility for its actions when facing God. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. From **جَبر** *Jabr*, “destiny;” members of the **جَبريَّة** *Jabriyyah* movement were early Muslim scholars who vehemently rejected Human Freedom of Will, given that all actions happened because they were (pre)ordained by God. The *Jabriyyah* movement was eventually absorbed, though obviously heavily revised, into the **الأشَعريَّة** *Ashā’riah* speculative theological school, see below. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Even though it is a neologism in Arabic, the word derived from the name of its founder, Jahm ibn Safwān, (d. c. 745-746). **جَهْمِيَّة** (*Jahmīyyah*) Jahmite doctrine is one of the first religious movements to openly ascertain the theory of the “createdness” of the Qur’ān; hence, God’s words are created, not eternal. Of the many attributes ascribed to God, Jabr only accepted two: “Creating” and “Power.” [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The *Ashā’riah* speculative theological school, founded by Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī Ismā’īl al-Asha’rī (874–936), was in a sense instrumental for finally setting aside Islamic theology from Christian spirituality and philosophy, though there were of course Muslim theologians who had written on “law, tradition, and mysticism” well before Ashar’rī. William Montgomery Watt. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 1962. xii. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Oneness: also known as **عِلم التَّوْحِيد** *‘Ilm al-Tawhīd*, “the Science of the Divine Oneness (Unity),” or rather, Theology proper. Even though it is accepted by all Muslims, regardless of their denomination and/or (sub)group, the *‘Ilm al-Tawhīd* has been a source of dispute when it comes to verbally describe and theorize its very existence from a philosophical as well as a religious point of view. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. **عِلم الكَلام** *‘Ilm al-Kalām*, literally, “Science of the Word (Speech),” also translated as “Scholastic Theology.” In sense, it is a distinctively Islamic religious field of study, though “for the treatises and the schools to be organized it required an external stimulus: discussions at Damascus with Christian theologians, the influence of Greek science and thought at Baghdād, and the defence of the values of faith against this influence.” (Gardet 2B: 592-593) [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. For further references in the Qur’ān, please see: Qur’ān 15:28-29; 16:102; 17:85; 19:17; 21:19; 58:22; 66:12; 70:4; 97:4. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. From the Arabic **عُثْمَانِيَّ** ‘*Uthmāniyyah*, i.e., Ottoman Turkish spoken/written, in *‘Ajami* script, throughout most of the Ottoman Empire (c. 1288–1922). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. From *‘Ajamiyyah* **عَجَمِيّ**, “Persian,” or “foreigner,” the term soon meant “gibberish,” or rather, “unintelligible language,” much like the Greek term *barbarós* (barbarian) applied to the “unintelligible” language spoken by people eventually encountered, particularly in North Africa; hence the term Berbers applied to autochthonous tribes of the Maghreb. In fact, in the Greco-Roman world, the term Berber came to designate different ethnic groups originally found in parts of present-day Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, but now scattered all across the Maghreb, the Sahara, and sub-Saharan region. Amazigh, pl. Imazigh (free men), is the preferred term over “Berber.” Some of the major Amazigh tribes/ethnic groups are the: Kabytes, Chawis, Rifains, Touaregs, Amazighs (Tamazight), Saharan Berbers, Chenwa, and Shleuhs. (Levi 2011) [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. The practice of writing Sino-Tibetan languages in Arabic script is also known as **شِيَوْعَردٍ** *Xiao’erjing*, or rather, “Children’s Script.” (Levi 2019) [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. From the Arabic **طائِفَة** *ṭā‘ifa* (party, division), the *taifa* kingdoms were a group of relatively small, independent Muslim kingdoms scattered through the Iberian Peninsula. There were three *taifa* periods, namely: the First *Taifa* (1009-1110), the Second *Taifa* (1140–1203), and the Third *Taifa* (1232–1287). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. For further information on the *kharjas* and the *muwashshaḥāt*, please see: Zwartjes 1997; Zwartjes 1995; Heijkoop and Zwartjes. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Alvarez 1998, 2: 564. **أبُو عَبْد الله محمد بن زيَاد** Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ziyād, better known as **ابْن الأعرَابي** Ibn al-‘Arabī (c. 760–846) was a renowned Arab poet, linguist, and philologist. **أبُو الحَسَن الشُشْتَري** Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (1212–1269) was a prominent Arab jurist, philosopher, and poet from al-Andalus who composed mono-rhythmic poetry in such a way that it could be sung accompanied by any kind of musical instrument. (Alvarez 2009; Corriente; Akkach) [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. For further information on *aljamiado* and Islamic texts, please see: Bernabé Pons. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. As for women poets, “[…] pre-Islamic poetry by women dates throughout a long period of time, spanning from the 3rd century [of the Common Era].” Herman, Aldhaeri, Muqbel, and Afaneh. Indeed, pre-Islamic Arab women were usually encouraged to compose elegies for the dead (particularly family members) and recite them publicly during poetry contests. Elmeligi; “Gender Relations of Pre-Islamic Arabs.” [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Singular: ***نَقيِضَه*** *naqīḍah*, slanderous poetry whereby the poet responds to another poet with the same meter and the same rhyme used by his adversary. Renato Traini. *Vocabolario Arabo-Italiano*. 3 vols. Rome: Istituto Per l’Oriente, 1966–1973. 3: 1556. Hall-Geister; Holmes; Hussein; Jorgensen. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Alqarni 97. **جَرير بن عطية بن ألخَطفي التَّمِيمي** Jarīr ibn ‘Aṭiyah ibn al-Khaṭafī al-Tamimi (c. 650–c. 729) was an eminent satirical poet hailing from **اليَمَامَة** al-Yamamah, **نَجْد** Najd, in present-day Saudi Arabia. He was one of the poets at the Umayyad court. **الفَرَزْدَق** al-Farazdaq (c. 641–c. 728-730), whose full name was ***هَمَّام بن غَالِب*** Hammam ibn Ghālib, is by far one of the most acclaimed poets of the Arab world. ***غِياث بن غَوْث بن الصَّلات بن طارقة ألتَّغْلِبي*** Ghiyāth ibn Ghawth ibn al-Ṣālt ibn Ṭāriah al-Taghlibī, better known as ***الأخْطل*** al-Akhṭal (the Loquacious, 640–708), was a celebrated heterodox Christian poet, hailing from the **نَجْد** Najd, who also lived during the Umayyad period. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. ***رَجَز*** *rajaz* (tremor) meter: A long syllable followed by a short syllable while the third syllable can be either long or short. (Frolov) [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Swahili *Ajamiyah* **عَجَمِيَة**. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. “A Visit to Heaven and Hell, by Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī;” al-Urfali. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Maḥmūd Ghazni was a very powerful ruler and founder of the Ghaznavid Empire (977–1186). He was the first ruler to adopt the title of **سُلطان** *Sulṭān* (authority, strength) and ruled over a vast empire that covered present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, northwestern India, and most of Iran. Yet, like all mortals, he eventually died (of illness). (Bosworth) [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. For further information on this controversy, please see the bibliography in Levi 2022.

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