EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Anaquel de **Estudios Árabes**
ISSN 1130-3964 • e-ISSN: 1988-2645

ARTÍCULOS

Betwixt and Between: The Graffiti Found in Adab al-Ghurabāʾ by al-Iṣfahānī

Boutheina Khaldi
Institución: American University of Sharjah

https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/anqe.88139 Recibido: 18 de abril de 2023 • Aceptado: 13 de julio de 2023

ENG **Abstract.** Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d. ca. 974 AD) *Kitāb adab al-ghurabāʾ* (*The Book of Strangers*) is a collection of reports inscribed, engraved, and scratched by liminal figures, *i.e.* strangers, wayfarers, and exiles on walls, doors, and canvases. The significance of this book, this article argues, lies not in the topic of estrangement *en soi* but in the prosimetrum inscribed on surfaces, a phenomenon given little attention by literary scholars. The article sets out to explore the different shades of meaning of the term "*gharīb".* It argues that the "*gharīb"* in al-Iṣfahānī's book not only refers to strangers and their estrangement, but also to the *gharīb/adb* (novel, foreign) effect they strive to create in their textual traces. This *gharīb/adb* effect produced by these *ghurabāʾ* is what constitutes the book's uniqueness.
Keywords: Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *adab, ghurba*, graffiti, liminality, textual trace, estrangement.

ES Entre dos mundos: Los graffitis encontrados en Adab al-Gurabāʾ de al-Iṣfahānī

Resumen. El *Kitāb adab al-gurabāʾ* (El Libro de los Extranjeros) de Abū l-Faraŷ al-Iṣfahānī (m. ca. 974 d.C.) es una recopilación de informes inscritos y grabados por figuras liminales (es decir, extraños, viajeros y exiliados), en paredes, puertas y lienzos. La relevancia de este libro, argumenta este artículo, no radica únicamente en el sentimiento de extrañamiento en sí, sino en el prosimetrum inscrito en superficies, un fenómeno al que los estudios literarios han prestado poca atención. El artículo se propone explorar las diferentes connotaciones del término "*garīb*". La hipótesis de partida es que en el libro de al-Iṣfahānī, "*garīb*" no solo se refiere a extraños y su sentimiento de extrañamiento, sino también al efecto "*garīb/adb*" (exótico y novedoso) que buscan crear en sus rastros textuales. Este efecto "*garīb/adb*" producido por los *gurabāʾ* es lo que constituye la singularidad del libro.
Palabras clave: Abū l-Faraŷ al-Iṣfahānī, *adab*, *gurba*, graffiti, liminalidad, rastro textual, extrañamiento.

How to cite: Khaldi, Boutheina (2024). Betwixt and Between: The Graffiti Found in Adab al-Ghurabāʾ by al-Iṣfahānī. *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes 35*(1), 5-18. https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/anqe.88139

Introduction

The pioneering work of the tenth-century Abbāsid literary scholar and poet, Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d. ca. 974 AD) entitled *Kitāb adab al-ghurabāʾ* (*The Book of Strangers*) is singular in its originality[1]. Al-Iṣfahānī was the first to collect narratives of transit produced by passengers *en route,* only a few of which are found in other references[2]. Consisting of seventy-six treatments in both prose and poetry, the work addresses the feelings of lovesickness, yearning, longing, and suffering of these passengers kindled by their estrangement and dislocation. The originality of this work stems not from the topic *per se* -both estrangement and exile have been widely addressed in Arabic literature- but rather from the fact that the itinerants who produced this literary corpus used graffiti as their medium of communication. Drawn from a broad class spectrum, they left behind traces of their lives documenting their loss and perpetuating their memory. This article sets out to

1 Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb adab al-ghurabāʾ*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1972).

2 For a sociological reading of *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, see Ṭayyib Ghmārī, "al-Graffiti min adab li-l-ghurabāʾ ilā fann li-l-ightirāb", *ʿĀlam al-Fikr,* 43/3 (2015): 99-140.

study estrangement (*ghurba*) and novelty (*gharāba/adb*) within these textual traces while also considering the liminal figure and its relation to space through the lens of socio-anthropology.

Graffiti, as a form of subaltern epigraphy, refers to writings or drawings produced by scratching, scribbling, or spraying on a wall or any other surface in a public space[3]. It is "more often the result of spontaneous composition and [is] the handwritten creation of the 'man on the street'"[4]. Ernest L. Abel and Barbara E. Buckley define it as follows:

> [It] is a form of communication that is both personal and free of everyday social restraints that normally prevent people from giving uninhibited rein to their thoughts. As such, these sometimes-crude inscriptions offer some intriguing insights into the people who author them and into the society in which these people belong[5].

Though impossible to verify whether what he recorded is fact or fiction, al-Iṣfahānī's *Adab al-ghurabāʾ* has a personal and informal character lacked by other works[6]. Written toward the end of his life, it contains the essence of his experience; he was a witness to and a transmitter of these reports. He points to this himself in the book's preface, where he states[7]:

> إنّ أصعب ما ناب به الزمانُ ولقي في عمره الإنسانُ عوارضُ الهمّ ونوازلُ الغمّ، نعوذُ بالله منهما... وأعلاها درجةً في القوة: تغيّر الحال من سَعَةٍ إلى ضيق وزيادةٍ إلى نقصان وعلو إلى انحطاط... والذي بي من تقسُّم القلب، وحَرج الصدر، يسوماننني إلى مثل ما ذكرْتُه، ويبعثانني على مثل ما قدَّمْتُه. فأشغلُ النفس في بعض الأوقات بالنظرِ في أخبارِ الماضين، وأحاديثِ السالفين.
>
> The most painful thing that time inflicts on a man in a course of his life is the onset of worries and grief. We seek refuge [in] God from both. They occur in circumstances of which the most harrowing and distressing are changes in the conditions of life: from ease to poverty, from increase to deficiency, and from an elevated position to decline... The conflict in my heart and the anguish in my breast cause me to behave in this fashion, and to react as prescribed. So every now and again I occupy myself by reading accounts of bygone generations and stories about the ancients.

The psychological crisis that broke al-Iṣfahānī's heart toward the end of his life was due to poverty and destitution and thus made him seek and find solace in the accounts of *liminars* who shared his experience in order to surmount his own alienation and estrangement. Indeed, al-Iṣfahānī stipulates[8]:

> وقد جمعتُ في هذا الكتاب ما وقَع إليّ وعرفْتُهُ، وسمعتُ به وشاهدتُه، من أخبار مَن قال شعراً في غُربة، ونطق عمّا به من كُربَة، وأعلنَ الشكوى بوجْدِه إلى كُلّ مشرّد عن أوطانه، ونازِح الدار عن إخوانه، فكتب بما لقيَ على الجدران، وباح بسرّه في كلّ حانةٍ وبستان، إذ كان ذلك قد صار عادةَ الغرباء في كلّ بلدٍ ومقْصَد، وعلامةً بينهم في كلّ مَحْضَر ومشْهد.
>
> I have gathered in this book what I have heard or seen for myself, or learnt in other ways, about those who composed poetry when they were in the position of strangers, who gave expression to the grief they felt, and who revealed their complaints of love to every person driven from his home and far removed from his friends, by writing of their sufferings on walls and disclosing their secrets in every tavern and garden; for this has become the custom of strangers in every country and destination, and a distinguishing feature of theirs in every place and site.

A common practice among strangers in the course of their peregrinations was to memorize textual graffiti and commit it to writing[9]. Indeed, al-Iṣfahānī relied on various aural/oral and written sources. He "made a compilation not only of graffiti that he came across on monuments, but also in books and hearsay"[10]. He gathered these textual traces of estrangement and saved them from oblivion by "appropriating and incorporating the wall medium into the literary culture on equal terms with the paper medium"[11].

The preference of written over oral speech, that is visual space over sound, was a counter strategy to forgetting and forgetfulness. As early as the eighth-century, the Umayyad Bedouin poet Dhū l-Rumma (d. c. 735 AD) was aware of the merit of writing. He stated[12]:

---

3 J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor, "Ancient Graffiti in Context: Introduction", in *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, eds, J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor (New York, London: Routledge, 2011), 3.

4 The Ancient Graffiti Project, http://ancientgraffiti.org/about/

5 Ernest L. Abel and Barbara E. Buckley, *The Handwriting on the Wall* (Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1977), 3.

6 Hilary Kilpatrik, *Making the Great Book of Songs* (London: Routledge, 2010), 27. It is worth mentioning that some of the *ghurabāʾs* reports are found in works that predated al-Iṣfahānī's such as Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad Ibn Sahl Ibn al-Marzubān, *al-Ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, ed. Jalīl al-ʿAṭiyya (Baghdad: Majallat al-Mawrid, 1987), 143-144 and Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, *Ashʿār awlād al-khulafāʾ,* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Ṣāwī, 1936), 60. Al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Diyārāt* also contains some of the *ghurabāʾs* reports. See Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Diyārāt,* ed. Jalīl al-ʿAṭiyya (London, Cyprus: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li- l- Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 1991), 88, 92-93, 100-101, 104-105, 112-115, 151.

7 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 20-21. Translated by Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh as *The Book of Strangers: Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 20 [hereinafter *BOS*].

8 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*. 21-22; *BOS*, 21.

9 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*. 57, 58, 72, 75, 79, 82-83.

10 Ragazzoli, "Introduction: Graffiti and the Written Page," in *Scribbling Through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity*, eds, Chloé Ragazzoli *et al* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 161.

11 Ragazzoli, "Introduction",164.

12 Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr *al*-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān,* ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Musṭafā Bābī l-Ḥalabī, 1965), I, 41. Cited in Pamela H. Smith, *From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022), 2.

اكتب شعري؛ فالكتابُ أحبُّ إليّ من الحفظ... والكتابُ لا يَنسى ولا يبدّلُ كلاماً بكلام.

> "Write down my poems, because I favour the book over memory [. . .] the book does not forget and does not exchange any word for another."

The tendency and proclivity to safeguard knowledge in a textual form was a natural result of the emergence of the written culture during the Abbāsid period[13]. With the adoption of paper in the 9th and 10th centuries, the written word found its way into anthologies, which made knowledge accessible to all, and ideas thus being exchanged much more rapidly.

The written anthology eventually had a pervasive presence, as it became the primary medium for recording and disseminating knowledge. The vast amount of knowledge being produced required classical Arab *littérateurs* to decide what should be passed on to subsequent generations by sifting through, judging, and assimilating that knowledge[14]. In his book, *al-Ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, The Abbāsid *littérateur* Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868/869 AD) discusses the important role played by men of letters for the process of knowledge preservation. He stipulates[15]:

إن لكل شيء من العلم، ونوع من الحكمة، وصنف من الأدب، سبباً يدعو إلى تأليف ما كان فيه مشتّتاً، ومعنىً يحدو على جمع ما كان منه متفرقاً. ومتى أغفل حملة الأدب، وأهل المعرفة تمييز الأخبار، واستنباط الآثار، وضم كل جوهر نفيس إلى شكله، وتأليف كل نادر من الحكمة إلى مثله. بطلت الحكمة، وضاع العلم، وأُميت الأدب، ودرس مستور كل نادر.

> There is always a reason behind gathering science, wisdom, and *adab*. Whenever learned men neglect to differentiate between different accounts and to recover works of ancient times and unite every precious content with its form and put together unique wise sayings, wisdom ceases to exist, knowledge is lost, *adab* perishes and rare works are extinct. If not for the learned men's recording of their thoughts in the course of time and inscription of the works of their ancestors in the rocks, knowledge would have been lost.

The *adab* of antiquity is perceived by al-Jāḥiz as being both beneficial and authoritative[16]. Indeed, al-Iṣfahānī found solace in the distilled collected experience of past generations (*akhbār al-māḍīn wa aḥādīth al-sālifīn*). The book as a repository of knowledge edified him intellectually and morally and served as a refuge from the adversity in his life.[17] *Adab* is also cumulative in the sense that it lengthens over time through a series of additions. Al-Iṣfahānī added the essence of his own experience to the pronouncements of *ghurabāʾ* from the past. Thus, al-Iṣfahānī's *Adab al-ghurabāʾ* serves as a guide for anxious minds in search of *tasliya* (consolation/ entertainment).

1. Why *Adab al-Ghurabāʾ*?

One might ask: Why did al-Iṣfahānī use the genitive-construct form, "*Kitāb adab al-ghurabāʾ*" to refer to the textual traces of strangers? Why not simply *Kitāb al-ghurabāʾ*? What makes the *adab* of strangers a specialized collection? This genitive-construct form reminds us of other book titles that bear the term *adab,* such as *Adab al-kātib* (Manual for Secretaries)[18], *Adab al-kātib wa-l-shāʿir* (Manual for Secretaries and Poets)[19], *Adab al-qāḍī* (Manual for Judges)[20], and *Adab al-nadīm* (Manual for Boon Companions)[21]. *Adab* is distinguished by its broad humanitarian concerns and focus. The term is originally derived from *daʾb,* which signifies way (*sunna),* path (*ṭarīq*), and custom (*ʿāda*) of the ancestors. Parenetical in nature, *adab* refers to the set of norms for conduct and customs inherited from ancestors and passed down to descendants to give them the general culture or educational background they need in their own lives[22]. During the Abbāsid period, the term *adab* was extended to include compiled works that contained prose or poetry fragments, anecdotes, and witticisms[23].

It bears noting that in the preface of his book, al-Iṣfahānī uses *ʿāda /daʾb* (habit/custom/norm) as an equivalent to *adab*: "for this has become the custom (*ʿāda/daʾb*) of strangers (*ghurabāʾ*) in every country and

---

13 Shawkat Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-century Bookman in Baghdad* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005); Konrad Hirschler. *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

14 Ibrāhīm Najjār, *Shuʿarāʾ ʿAbbāsiyyūn mansiyyūn* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997), I, 170–71; Rachel Hadas, "On Poetry Anthologies", *New England Review,* 19/ 4 (1998): 127.

15 Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr *al*-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* (Beirut: Dār al-Rāʾid al-ʿArabī, 1982), 5-6. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

16 Dimitri Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope", *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 101/1 (1981): 68.

17 In defense of books, see Pseudo- Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr *al*-Jāḥiz, *Al-Maḥāsin wa-l-aḍdād* (Cairo: Muʾassasat Hindāwī, 2019), 10.

18 Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī, *Adab al-kātib* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003).

19 Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Naṣrullāh Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-l-shāʿir* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Bahiyya, 2016).

20 Abū *l*-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad *al-Māwardī, Adab al-qāḍī* (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀnī, 1972).

21 Abū l-Fatḥ Maḥmūd Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Kashājim, *Adab al-nadīm* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1999).

22 Ch. Pellat, "ADAB ii. Adab in Arabic Literature", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/4, 439-444; an updated version is available online at: https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/adab-ii-arabic-lit (accessed 24 January 2023); S. A. Bonebakker, "Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres", *ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, eds, Julia Ashtiany *et al* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.

23 Pellat, "ADAB ii. Adab in Arabic Literature", *Encyclopædia Iranica.*

destination, and a distinguishing feature of theirs in every place and site"[24]. By bringing strangers into contact with each other across time and place, al-Iṣfahānī purported to convey *taʾdīb* (instruction and information (about strangers' shared experience of estrangement and their *daʾb* (habit) of channeling that experience into prosimetrum to engage and edify their readers.

What particularly calls our attention, however, is that besides *taʾdīb* (*taʿlīm*; education), the term *adab* also signifies *al-zharf wa ḥusn al-tanāwul* (elegant and refined style) and *al-amr al-ʿajīb* (*adb*: wonderful, strange thing)[25]. Thus, "*adb*" also captures the sense of foreignness, alienness, and strangeness[26]. The *adīb's* endeavor, and by extension *adab,* is to surprise and defamiliarize by how he describes things. It is interesting to note that like *adb*, one of the meanings of the word *gharīb,* as I will explain in due time*,* is the novel and unfamiliar. Like the *gharīb*, the *adīb* sets forth into unknown territory, a creative liminal space, "outside or partly outside the structures of reality"[27]. The *gharīb* as *adīb* transforms his/her experience of estrangement (*ghurba*) into unfamiliar texts (*adab*)[28]. The genitive-construct form, *"Adab al-ghurabāʾ"*, thus, should be read as an offered pun on al-Iṣfahānī's part.

2. *Gharīb* and Its Derivatives

Ghurba in classical Arabic literature is a theme that has been often associated with *al-hanīn ilā l-awṭan* (homesickness). Seen as an effect of mobility and thus as absence from home, classical Arab littérateurs dealt not only with the *masāwiʾ* (disadvantages) of *ghurba*, but also *maḥāsin* (advantages). Before we examine the ghurabāʾs prosimetrum inscriptions, taking a close look at the derivative gh-r-b in the classical Arabic dictionary, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, can offer a fresh insight into the concept of *ghurba*.

Driven by religious, scholarly, and socio-economic motivations, mobility has been central to the Arab Islamic tradition. While "*ghurba*" signifies absence and separation from one's homeland, "*gharb*" and "*ghurūb*" encompass meanings that include rain (*maṭar*), tears (*damʿ*), tear duct (*masīl al-damʿ*), and the endless flow of tears (*al-damʿ inhimālu-hu mina l-ʿayn*). What all these derivatives have in common is the concept of profusion and abundance (*kathra, wafra, ghazāra*). Whereas rain –scarce in the Arabian Peninsula– is a symbol of life, growth, and transformation, "gharb" as tears (*damʿ*) stands for both negative and positive emotions; both sadness and joy. It is only by "*tagharrub*" and "*taghrīb*" (going westward), that in being distant and remote from one's homeland (familiar surrounding), that a person can achieve financial stability (*ighrāb: kathrat al-māl wa ḥusn al-ḥāl*). The two derivatives "*gharab*" and "*maghrib*" refer to gold (*dhahab*) and silver (*fiḍḍa*), hence financial gain. Notwithstanding financial stability, separation from one's comfort zone –the original habitus as opposed to the new one– causes distress and sadness. By adjusting to the new environment and making friends, this negative affective condition diminishes, the foreign becomes familiar, and the *ghurba* is transformed into companionship (*uns/ulfa*).

However, strangeness (*gharāba*) in the Arabic language can also be an aesthetic. The adjectival forms, "*gharīb*" and "*mughrib*," are associated with what is ambiguous (*ghāmiḍ*) and unfamiliar, the opposite of mundane (*ʿādī, maʾlūf*). "*Qawl gharīb and mughrib*" is an unconventional speech that breaks the predictable and congenial to stimulate the feeling of wonderment and surprise (*dahsha*), a feature that should be present in a literary work. Al-Iṣfahānī's *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*s novelty (*jidda, gharāba*), as discussed here in due time, rests in the use of graffiti as a communication medium. A dialogic text with multiple voices, that are both pithy and concise, the prosimetrum inscriptions produced by strangers *en route* to document their pain are both engaging and edifying.

3. The Concept of Liminality in the Context of *al-Ghurabāʾ*s Journey

We can apply Arnold van Gennep's theory of liminal space to *al-ghurabāʾ*s journey. Liminality is derived from the Latin words *limen* ('threshold') and *limes* ('boundary', 'frontier'). The concept refers to the middle phase of a tripartite process. Concerned with "ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another"[29], Van Gennep divides this process into three stages: "preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)"[30]. These rites may also apply to *al-ghurabāʾ*s journey. Rites of separation involve people's physical removal from their homeland and the activities of their daily lives. Rites of transition involve time spent in foreign environments away from their loved ones, "'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in [the] space-time of structural classification"[31], often in the company of other people with whom they

---

24 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 21-22; *BOS*, 21.

25 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, eds, ʿAbdullāh ʿAlī al-Kabīr *et al* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 2008), I.

26 "Defamiliarization" is a term coined in modern times by the Russian critic, Viktor Shklovsky. See Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917), transl. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

27 Scott Bartling, *Beyond Language: Viktor Shklolvsky, Estrangement, and the Search for Meaning in Art*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Stanford University, 2015), 140.

28 Bartling, *Beyond Language*, 123.

29 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, transl. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 10.

30 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* 11.

31 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine, 1969), 97.

exchange knowledge–van Gennep likens this exchange to a communion[32]. In *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, the exchange that is created from feelings of dislocation and uprootedness, and then experienced during the liminal state in the form of a dense prosimetrum repertoire, a mixture of verse and prose, inscribed into transitional areas, out of a "hunger for union with others"[33]. These textual markings thus function as testimonies of the *liminars'* experiences of their liminal space.

4. Graffiti As a Medium of Communication

Rather than being purely an inner phenomenon, alienation has a physical extension in space as well. It unfolds into the world "in a way that leaves manifest traces: not simply marks that tell a story of the past, but indications of a lived present, of a mode of inhabiting both place and memory"[34], as Jill Bennett argues.

> مَنْ وصل إلى هذا الموضع بعدي فلْيعجبْ من قصّتي، ولْيرْثِ لمحنتي. خرجتُ هارباً من الإملاق، وتضايق الأرزاق، فعُدل بي عن السداد، وتُهتُ في البلاد.

Indeed, "He who arrives at this place after me, let him marvel at my story and bewail my trials. I left, fleeing from poverty and strained circumstances, but lost my lucky hand and went astray in this land"[35], scratched a passerby on one of the fort's walls. One does wonder why an itinerant chose to share his feelings of estrangement on a wall in a public place. Perhaps it was because that public space gave the itinerant more chances to be seen and his message to be read[36]. It offers a possibility for *communitas*, indeed, an "equality of relations, comradeship that transcends age, rank, kinship etc. and displays an intense community spirit"[37].

The phenomenon of graffiti in *Adab al-ghurabāʾ* is a commonly acceptable medium of communication wherein the public space provides an outlet for people who occupy a liminal and interstitial space and want to express their attitude with regard to dislocation and estrangement. It levels the playing field by getting past all other factors, such as social status, that benefit some people over others. Graffiti is the only rhetorical form that affords such independent and free virtues and equality for all participants. That purpose is certainly manifest in the following example[38]:

> أبو عبد الله أحمد بن جيش التمّار قال: حدّثني أبي، عن بعض ولد أحمد بن هشام، عن أبيه قال: كنتُ في جملة عسكر المأمون حين خرج إلى بلد الروم، فدخل وأنا معه إلى كنيسةٍ قديمةِ البناءِ بالشام، عجيبةِ الصّور. فلم يزل يطوف بها. فلمّا أراد الخروج قال لي: من شأن الغرباء في الأسفار ومَن نَزحت به الدارُ عن إخوانه وأترابه، إذا دخل موضعاً مذكوراً، ومشهداً مشهوراً، أن يجعل لنفسه فيه أثراً، تبرُّكاً بدُعاءِ ذوي الغربةِ، وأهلِ التقطُّعِ والسياحة. وقد أحببتُ أن أدخل في الجملة، فابغ لي دواةً. فكتب على ما بين باب المذبح هذه الأبيات:

يا معشر الغُرباء ردّكُمُ	ولقيتُمُ الأخبارَ عن قُرْبِ
قلبي عليكم مشفِقٌ وَجِلٌ	فشفا الإله بحفظكم قلبي
إني كتبتُ لكي أساعِدَكمْ	فإذا قرأتم فاعرفوا كتبي

> Abū ʿAbdullāh Aḥmad Ibn Jaish al-Tammār told me. He said that his father told him on the authority of a son of Aḥmad Ibn Hishām that Aḥmad Ibn Hishām that Aḥmad Ibn Hishām said:
> I was in the army of (the caliph) al-Maʾmūn when the latter marched to Byzantium. He and I entered an old church in Syria which had marvelous paintings and in which he walked around at length. When it was time to leave, he said to me, 'When strangers on journeys and people far removed from their friends and companions enter a well-known place and famous site, it is their habit to leave behind a record of their presence in order to seek blessing in the prayers of (other) strangers, travellers, and people bereft of their kith and kin (on their behalf). I want to join in, so get me a pot of ink.' He then wrote the following verses midway on the altar gate:
> 'O strangers! May God grant you safe return, / and may you soon meet your loved ones. / My heart has been afflicted with pity and fear for you; / may God heal it by bringing you to safety. / I wrote in order to support you; / so when you read it, know that it was I who wrote it.'

Writing is essentially a social act and "implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative: it is the conjoint effort of author and reader"[39], as John-Paul Sartre once expounded. To write graffiti is thus "to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader"[40]. Indeed, along with the benefits of anonymity,

---

32 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* 31.

33 Malynda Strother Taylor, "Functions of Liminality in Literature: A Study of Georges Bataille's 'Le Bleu Du Ciel', Julien Green's 'L'Autre', and Assia Djebar's 'L'Amour, La Fantasia'", PhD dissertation (Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1998), 16-17.

34 Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 70.

35 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 69; *BOS*, 62-63.

36 Robert George Reisner, *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing* (New York: Cowles Book Co, 1971), 4.

37 Clare Madge and Henrietta O'Connor, "Mothers in the Making? Exploring Liminality in Cyber/Space", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 30/1 (2005): 93.

38 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 23; *BOS*, 21-22.

39 John-Paul Sartre, "Why write?" in *What is Literature? A Critical Anthology*, ed. Mark Robson (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 317.

40 Sartre, "Why write?", 306.

graffitists explicitly posit that visibility is a key attraction of the form[41]. The Abbāsid caliph, al-Maʾmūn (ruled 813-833 AD), is both a reader and a writer, an addressee and an addresser. He contributes to the wall talk and encourages passengers *en route* that are threshold people to respond to his etching. This communal dialogue between graffitists eliminates all social differences and suspends the hierarchical structures. The caliph ceases to be a caliph. He is now a mere participant.

Verses incised onto walls and doors along with notes and footnotes establish a kind of dialogue, a communication, and yes, a continuance:

> So-and-so al-Madanī was a miser. He would recite: *Say: He is God, One* (Qurʾān 112: 1) seven times in his donkey's nosebag when it was time to fill it and hang it on the donkey (without putting anything in it), so the donkey soon died. He then buried it and built a dome over it, writing the following on the wall[42]:

ألا يا حماراً كان للحُمُر سابقاً	فأصبح مصروماً على السيب في قبر
جُزيتَ الشعيرَ مُغرْبلاً	وأسكنك الرحمن في جنّة الحُمُرِ

فقيل له: وأين جنّة الحُمُر؟ قال: قراحُ الرّطبَة

> 'O Donkey who outstripped all other donkeys and who is/ now left alone by the flowing water in the grave./ May God recompense you with well-sieved barley fodder/ and make you dwell in the paradise of donkeys.' When he was asked where the paradise of donkeys was, he said that it was a meadow of clover.

Little time has since passed since it was found written on the tomb wall these two lines: [43]

الحمد للّه لا شريكَ له	ماذا أرى من عجائب الزمن
إن كان هذا الحمارُ في كفَنٍ	وقبّةٍ، إنّني بلا كَفَنِ

> "Praise be to God who has no partner, / what marvels of time I behold. / This donkey is shrouded and lies in a dome, / whereas I lack even a shroud!"

The above example evinces the view that wall writing enacts a form of "discontinuous communicative strategy through which people may engage in visual dialogue, relying neither on face-to-face interaction nor on the necessary knowledge of the writer's identity"[44]. "*Athar*" in Arabic (trace, mark) is used in the book to refer to both the passerby who disappears "*lam yaʿud la-hu athar"*[45] only to leave behind "*athar*"[46] (a trace). The message the passerby etches on writable surfaces is, hence, the "mark of the absence of a presence"[47]*,* to borrow Jacques Derrida's phrase.

Love also finds its way onto walls, for as al-Iṣfahānī reported[48]:

قرأتُ أنا أيضاً على حائط بُستان على نهر اللأبُلة هذين البيتيْن:

وما زاد قربُ الدار إلاّ صبابةً	إليكِ، ولكنّ المزارَ بعيدُ
فلا يُبْعدنْكِ اللّه يا فوزُ إنّني	أبيتُ وقلبي باللّقاءِ عميدُ

وتحته مكتوب:

إن كان لك بختٌ ستفْطن، وإن فطنتْ وتغافلتْ فما حيلتي؟

> I also read the following two verses myself on the wall of a garden at the Ubulla canal: 'The closer you get to the abode (of the beloved), / the more your longing increases; / May God not keep you away O Fawz, / for I have spent the night/ with a lovesick heart because of the meeting.' Underneath was written: 'If [you] have luck she will understand; and if she understands and still ignores [you], what can I do?'

Loneliness here is metaphorical. Notwithstanding the spatial closeness of the beloved, the graffitist is waiting in earnest for the rendezvous with her. The reader who reacts to these verses with an enigmatic note knows that the writer of the verses will read that note.

---

41 Amardo Rodriguez and Robin Patric Clair, "Graffiti as Communication", *The Southern Communication Journal,* 65/1 (1999): 2.

42 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 46; *BOS*, 42-43.

43 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 46*; BOS*, 43.

44 Avigdor Klingman *et al,* "Graffiti: A Creative Means of Youth Coping with Collective Trauma", *The Arts in Psychotherapy,* 27/5 (2000): 299.

45 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 63.

46 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 31.

47 Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 7; Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context" in *Glyph 1*, transl. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

48 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 51-52; *BOS*, 47.

Ancient graffiti also helps us glean wisdom from past cultures. A graffiti etching written thousands of years ago can be read and commented upon yet today, as al-Iṣfahānī suggested[49]:

ووُجد على جبلٍ بنواحي ديار ثمود كتابة منقورة في الصخرة تفسيرها: يا ابن آدم ما أظْلَمك لنفسك! ألا ترى إلى آثار الأوّلين، فتَعْتبر، وإلى عاقبة المُنذرين، فتزدجر.

وتحته مكتوب بخط عربيّ: «بلى ، كذا ينبغي.»

> An inscription engraved on a rock was found in the environs of the abode of Thamūd, and it was translated as follows: 'O son of man, how you wrong yourself! Why don't you consider the remains of the ancients, or the end of those who received warnings, and learn a lesson and restrain yourself?' Underneath was written in Arabic handwriting, 'Indeed, thus one should do.'

This interaction between ancient and "modern" graffiti clearly attests to the fact that graffiti is a universal phenomenon that indeed does survive the test and the ravages of time.

Women also took an active part in graffiti etching, "claiming space in a subculture where the walls did 'belong' to men"[50]. When the Abbāsid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (ruled 786-809 AD) went to al-Rayy, a Persian town, he was accompanied by his sister, ʿUlayya. When they reached al-Marj, she composed poetry in *al-Raml* meter, and at night, she inscribed some of the verses on a tent canvas. When Hārūn al-Rashīd entered the *ḥarem* tent, he saw her verses[51]:

ومُغترِبٍ بالمرج يبكي لشَجْوه	وقد غاب عنه المُسْعِدون على الحبِّ
إذا ما أتاهُ الرّكبُ من نحو أرْضِهِ	تنشّقَ يستشفي برائحة الرّكبِ

> "A stranger in the Marj is weeping out of sadness, / while those who comfort him in love are absent. / When the caravan comes from the direction of his homeland/ he smells it in the hope that its odor will cure him."

Hārūn al-Rashīd knew they were ʿUlayya's and that she was longing for Iraq and its people. Thus, he ordered her return[52]. ʿUlayya succeeded in conveying, albeit indirectly, the feelings of loneliness and estrangement that she felt being away from Baghdad. She thus relied on a "discontinuous communicative strategy" in lieu of face-to-face interaction.

Understandably, Hārūn al-Rashīd identified with ʿUlayya as he himself resorted to graffiti to vent his feelings of alienation and strangeness away from Baghdad. In one of his expeditions to Khurasān, he stopped by the town Ḥulwān in western Iran and carved onto a rock the following lines[53]:

حتى متى أنا في حلّ وترحالِ	وطول سعيٍ وإدبارٍ وإقبالِ
ونازح الدارِ لا أنفكُّ مغترباً	عن الأحبة لا يدرونَ ما حالي
بِمَغرِبِ الأرضِ ثم مشرِقِها	لا يخطرُ الموتُ من حرصي على بالي

> How long will I be arriving at places and departing, / continuing the long struggle in bad luck and in good, / far removed from my home, forever distanced/ from the loved ones who do not know my plight, / now in the western part of the earth and now in the eastern? / [My aspiration] is such that not even death preys on my mind.

Notwithstanding his splendor and fame, al-Rashīd is vulnerable. The rock inscription reveals this hidden vulnerability. It is only in a liminal space like Ḥulwān that he holds his caliphal identity at a distance and frees himself from all royal constraints. Al-Rashīd exposes himself emotionally to other *liminars* by expressing his homesickness and longing for his loved ones. Self-disclosure, "*bawḥ*", inscription as a mode of communication, alleviates al-Rashīd's "anxiety separation" and draws him close to other *liminars*. A ruler of the Islamic *Umma,* responsible for establishing order and maintaining peace in the caliphate, al-Rashīd had no choice but to give up all personal comfort in the interest of his subjects. By so doing, he immortalized his name.

Narratives of transit can also be read as a "polyphonic text", to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's term, or indeed a text that recognizes the multiplicity of itinerants' voices[54]. A wayfarer may not necessarily agree with the inscription of another wayfarer. He/she then uses the same space to voice a different perception by sharing his/her experience with other *liminars*. We can adduce here as an example al-Iṣfahānī's narrative about Abu l-Ḥasan Ibn Marwān al-Andalusī, who spent a full week in the city of Zhafār on his way to Iraq. After roaming its

---

49 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 87; *BOS*, 79.

50 Jessica N. Pabón-Colón, *Graffiti Grrlz: Performing Feminism in the Hip Hop Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 91.

51 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 52; *BOS*, 47-48.

52 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 52; *BOS*, 48.

53 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 30; *BOS*, 28.

54 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevskv's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 2.

districts and meeting its people, he came across a dilapidated palace on whose door was written in ink: ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbdullāh Ibn Dāwūd was here and he says the following[55]:

يا مَنْ ألحّ عليه الهمُّ والفكَرُ	وغيّرَتْ حالَهُ الأيّامُ والغِيرُ
نم للخطوب إذا أحداثُها طَرَقَتْ	واصبرْ فقد فاز أقوام لها صبروا
وكُلُّ ضيق سيأتي بعده سَعَةٌ	وكُلُّ فَوْتٍ وشيكٌ بعده الظَفَرُ

"O you who are harassed by anxiety and worry/ and whose circumstances have been changed by time and vicissitudes. / Stay asleep when misfortunes come suddenly at night! Endure, for people who patiently endured misfortunes have triumphed over them."

Underneath there was written in a different hand and different ink: Al-Qāsim Ibn Zurʿa al-Karajī was here. He read these verses and he says[56]:

لو كلّ من صبر أُعقبَ الظفر، صبرتُ، ولكن نجدُ الصّبر في العاجل يُفني العمر. وما كان أولى لذي العقل موته وهو طفل، والسلام.

"If everyone who patiently endured would be rewarded with success, then I would be patient; but I find that patient endurance in this world just wears out one's life and brings the grave closer. It would be better for the intelligent person to die as a child. So much for that."

Subjective experiences are always individually unique. They differ depending on the type of calamity or the opposite too perhaps –a joy– and its severity. While Ibn Dāwūd provides useful advice based on his experience of calamity, al-Karajī, based on his experience, refutes that advice and finds it unhelpful.

5. Writing Home

The peripatetic journeys not only through space, but also through time. To cope with dislocation, he/she displaces time by inscribing the past on the wall. In so doing, the absent past is conceived, perceived, lived, and perpetuated. Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Muhallabī, the vizier of the Buyids, is a case in point. On his way to Ahwāz, he spent few days in a hostel in Baṣra. Before his departure, he wrote on the wall of his hostel room the following lines[57]:

أحنُّ إلى بغدادَ شوقاً وإنّما	أحنُّ إلى إلف بها لي شائقِ
مقيمٍ بأرضٍ غبتُ عنها وبدعةٌ	إقامةُ معشوقٍ ورحلةُ عاشقِ

"I have a great longing for Baghdad. / What I long for there is a beautiful friend of mine, / who is staying in a place that I am absent from. / That the beloved should stay and the lover depart is a reprehensible innovation."

As a betwixt transitory site, the hostel provides freedom and anonymity to its guests[58]. The hostel room is a space of intimacy that evokes sweet memories of the beloved. By unburdening his heart on the hostel wall, al-Muhallabī not only reconnects with a distant home, but also recaptures the intimacy of the past[59]. Like other *liminars*, he creates a space of "longing and belonging"[60], a home in writing, to suspend time and alleviate the crippling feeling of homesickness. Through wall inscription, al-Muhallabī conveyed his reluctance to travel. His departure for Ahwāz was not a choice but a political obligation.

In the same vein, a peripatetic from Damascus registered his longing for his beloved on the wall of the monastery of Darzījān[61]:

لئن كان شحطُ البيْن فرّق بيننا فقلبيَ ثاوٍ عندكم ومقيمُ

"Though we are severed by a far distance, / my heart is still with you and dwells among you."

The itinerant is cognizant of his in-between-ness. He is neither here nor there. Notwithstanding geographical boundaries, his intimate revelation helps him bridge distance and endure loss. By vocalizing his memories through words and engraving them on the wall, he creates a textual territory wherein he welcomes other itinerants like a host and invites them to engrave their own readings.[62] Claiming space by sharing one's narrative of transit with others creates feelings of camaraderie and belonging among itinerants.

---

55 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 60; *BOS*, 55.

56 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 61; *BOS*, 55.

57 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 76; *BOS*, 68-69.

58 Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, "Hotel Babylon: Exploring Hotels as Liminal Sites of Transition and Transgression", *Tourism Management,* 27 (2006).

59 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994), 48.

60 Brigitte le Juez and Bill Richardson, *Spaces of Longing and Belonging: Territoriality, Ideology, and Creative Identity in Literature and Film* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019).

61 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 59; *BOS*, 53.

62 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 49.

6. A Risky Disclosure Perhaps?

While some wayfarers prefer to leave a trace of their presence by recording their full names on spots they have passed by: "al-Qāsim Ibn Zarʿa al-Karajī was here"[63], "so and so al-Dimashqī was here"[64], "the disconcerted and afflicted so and so was here"[65], others opt to obscure their identities: "ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbdullāh was here and for some reason he concealed his full name"[66]. A text inscribed into a public space is meant to be seen, read, and commented upon. The wall, as a visual communicative device, thereby becomes a symbol for a rite of passage[67]. Obscuring one's full name or leaving out one's name, however, gives the text a certain universality. The prosimetrum as a text ceases to be associated with one person, and it incorporates, instead, common life experiences to which many people can relate easily.

The type of message the wayfarer wants to convey may also determine whether he wants to disclose his identity or conceal it. A *liminar* may leave his homeland and endure all possible hardships to reunite with his beloved. Enjoying what Johannes Fabian calls "moments of freedom"[68], the *liminar*, a beautiful young man from Baghdad, has an affair with the son of a jurisprudent from Samarkand. This young man openly expresses his feelings to someone of his own gender, as he elucidates his feeling in the following lines inscribed on an undefined space –a garden's wall[69]:

لم يَخبْ سعيي ولا سفري	حين نلتُ الحظَّ من وطري
من قضيبِ البانِ في ميلٍ	وشبيهِ الشمسِ والقَمَرِ
لستُ أنسى يومنا أبداً	بفنا البستان والنَّهرِ
في رياضٍ وسْط دَسْكَرَةٍ	وبساطٍ حُفَّ بالشجرِ
وأبو نصرٍ يُعانقني	طافحاً سُكراً إلى السَّحَرِ
غير أنّ الدّهر فرّقنا	وكذا من عادةِ القدرِ

My effort did not fail, nor my journey, / for I was in luck with my beloved, / who sways like a ben tree branch/ and resembles the sun and moon. / I shall never forget our day/ in the expanse of the garden by the river, / in the meadows amid the plain, /on a carpet surrounded by trees, / Abū Naṣr embracing me until dawn, / overflowing with drunkenness. / But time has parted us, / as is the custom of fate.

Underneath them is inscribed the following words[70]:

الغريبُ ينبسطُ في القول والفعل لاطّراحه المراقبة وأمنه في هفواته من المعاتبة.

"The stranger acts and speaks freely because he has escaped surveillance and feels sure he will not be blamed for his lapses."

The loosening of former taboos and "structural obligations"[71], Victor Turner argues, is understandable in this liminal phase/zone where one's mainstream identity is held in suspension. Hence, "anything may happen"[72]. The lines inscribed on the garden wall reveal as much as they obscure. Despite the fact that the wayfarer prefers to remain anonymous, and he uses only a nickname "Abū Naṣr" to refer to his beloved, his love poems that populate the garden walls are circulated, shared, and memorized by the people of Samarkand.

While some find freedom by airing their feelings in distant places and undefined spaces, others are discreet and reserved. Al-Iṣfahānī, the author of the book, relates his affair, in the prime of his youth, with a son of a leading officer in the caliph's army. The young man traveled to attend a horseracing event when al-Iṣfahānī visited him. When his return lasted longer than expected, al-Iṣfahānī became increasingly anxious. Before his departure, he inscribed the following lines on one of the vestibule's walls[73]:

يا مَنْ أظَلُّ بباب دارِهْ	ويطولُ حَبْسي بانتظارهْ
وحياةِ وجهك واحمرَارِه	ومجالِ صدغك في مداره
لا حُلْتُ عُمري عن هوا	كَ ولو صُليتُ بحرّ ناره

63 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 61.

64 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 59.

65 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 55.

66 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 52.

67 Ligia Lesko, "The Art of Graffiti as Inner-City Communication and as a Means of Public Literacy", 186, accessed January 2020, http://scholarworks.csun.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/140628/Lesko.pdf?sequence=1

68 Johannes Fabian, *Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1998).

69 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 87; *BOS*, 77-78.

70 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 87; *BOS*, 78.

71 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 27.

72 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 13.

73 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 84; *BOS*, 75.

> O! You by the gate of whose house I have remained/ and in awaiting whom I have detained for long. / By the life of your face and its blushing, / and the place where your earlock moves in its circling. / I would not, by my life, deviate from my love for you/ even if I were to burn in the heat of its fire.

By using this wall talk as a medium of communication, al-Iṣfahānī freely conveys his passion for the young man, a passion for which the latter disapproves[74]:

> ما هذه الشناعة، ومَنْ فسَحَ لك في الإذاعة، وما أوْجَبَ خروجَكَ عن الطاعة؟ ولكن أنا جنَيتُ على نفسي وعليكَ، مَلّكتُكَ فطغَيْتَ، وأطعتُكَ فتعدّيْتَ، وما احتشِمُ أن أقول لك: هذا تعرّضٌ للإعراض عنك. والسلام.

> What is this repulsiveness? Who allowed you to broadcast things? What made it necessary for you to stop doing as I say? But I am the one who has done wrong to myself and to you, for I made you king and you [turned into a despot]; I obeyed you and you transgressed. I am not ashamed to tell you that with this you risk that I leave you, Goodbye.

Worried about his reputation, he blames al-Iṣfahānī for divulging their secret. Unlike other accounts where the wayfarer chooses a public place to express himself, al-Iṣfahānī chooses a private space, the vestibule, to disclose his feelings for the young man. Hence, there is a risk that his family may have read the verses. Ironically, though, the young man uses the same medium; wall talk, to voice his disapproval about deciding to make the affair public.

7. Redefining the Meaning of Home

"Have mercy on the stranger in the distant land, / what a disaster he has brought on himself. / He left his loved ones. They did not benefit from life after his departure, / and neither did he"[75], wrote the Abbāsid poet, ʿAlī b. al-Jahm (d. 249 AD) on a wall on his way back to Damascus. Home is made up of the places and people that one loves or cherishes the most. It is the place for which someone feels the deepest affection no matter where he/she is[76]. While ʿAlī b. al-Jahm and other wayfarers are nostalgic for their loved ones whom they also left behind, others reject their homeland altogether as is clearly manifest in the following account. Al-Iṣfahānī reported that one of his relatives, a sheikh, read on the Khaḍrāʾ Rawḥ wall in Baṣra the following prosimetrum[77]:

> بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. حضر فلان بن فلان السّاوي، وهو يقولُ: هَرَبتُ من الإملاق والحسرة، فقذف بي الزمانُ إلى البصرة، فكانت أعظم البلدان بركةً عليّ، كسبتُ بها مالاً، وعقدتُ بها حالاً، وآخيتُ فيها فتياناً، وقضى الله لغلبة نحسي عوْدي ورجوعي إلى ساوة، فرحلتُ وأنا أقولُ:

أعْزِزْ عليَّ بفرقةٍ ورحيلِ	عن قُرب محبوبٍ ودارِ خليلِ
واللهُ يعلمُ أني مُتَحَرِّقٌ	لفراقكم ذو صَبْوة وغليلِ
أترى الزمان يسرُّني بلقائكم	بعد التفرّق والنوى بقليلِ

> In the name of God the merciful, the benevolent. So- and- so al-Sāwī was here and he says, I fled from destitution and misery. [Fate] cast me in Baṣra, and it was a most blessed city for me. In it I acquired wealth and improved my circumstances, and I became friendly with some young men. Because my bad luck prevailed, God decreed that I should return [...] to Sāwa. So I left, saying: How it hurts me that I must depart and leave / the vicinity of a beloved and the abode of a friend, / God knows that I am burning and full of passion/ and ardent desire not to leave them. / Do you think that time will please me by letting me/ meet them again soon after the separation and distance?

Underneath the prosimetrum is a response written by another passerby in a different handwriting in which he clearly identifies with the passerby from Sāwa: "God willing."

In the prosimetrum itself, the passerby redefines home. Home is not his birthplace, which he associates only with pain and misfortune, but rather his new abode where he feels at home, loved and cherished. The passerby's transitional space and period thereby expand to include much of his life. His experience of such "liminality" is not temporary. It is long lasting and Baṣra ceases to be only a rite of passage. It becomes home.

8. Political Alienation

Walls also carry traces of political resistance. Some wayfarers have taken recourse to using graffiti on walls to vent their deep estrangement from the prevailing political system. The following narratives illustrate that circumstance. The first narrative is about the vizier Yaḥyā Ibn Khālid al-Barmakī (d. 805 AD) who, while on his way to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd's palace, saw the following lines written on one of the courtyard walls[78]:

---

74 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 84-85; *BOS*, 75.

75 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 60; *BOS*, 54.

76 For more on the subjective meaning of home/homeland, see Noorani's, "Estrangement and Selfhood in the Classical Concept of Waṭan", 16-42.

77 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 89; *BOS*, 80.

78 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 45; *BOS*, 41-42.

انعموا آل برْمَكٍ	وانظُروا منتهى هِيَهْ
وارقبوا الدهرَ أنْ	يدور عليكم بداهيه

"Enjoy yourselves, O Barmakids, /and consider: it is an end-point. /Watch fate lest it inflicts disasters on you."

These two lines are clearly addressed to the Persian Barmakids' family, which was the most influential and powerful family of its time. The Barmakids provided support to the first five Abbāsid caliphs[79]. This graffiti predicts their downfall. However, one may wonder just why these lines were scrawled on the wall of al-Rashīd's palace. The graffitist must have been close to the caliph's entourage. He knew that Yaḥyā Ibn Khālid al-Barmakī would read these lines by virtue of his position as al-Rashīd's foster father and the vizier who visited al-Rashīd frequently.

To scrawl graffiti on the wall of the caliph's palace infringed on the sovereignty of the caliphate. Indeed, calamity soon did overtake the Barmakids. Their fall from favor took place in 803 AD. His son Jaʿfar was executed. Yaḥyā and his elder son al-Faḍl were imprisoned, and their property was confiscated[80]. Although there was no consensus on the reasons that led to their downfall, what historians now agree upon was that the Barmakids acquired great wealth, were arrogant, and simply assumed the caliphate's favor, which brought them enmity in the populace[81]. Yaḥyā saw the two lines scrawled on the wall as an evil omen. He was dumfounded and decided to return home[82]. His reaction underscores his fear of the threatening message that the graffiti writer had conveyed to him.

The second narrative is similar to the Barmakid in the sense that the peripatetic uses one of the walls of the caliph al-Mutawakkil's palaces (ruled 847-861 AD), also known by the name of *al-Gharīb* (The Marvelous), to scratch the following lines[83]:

أُنفقتِ الأموالُ واستُنفِدَتْ	وشُيِّد البنيانُ للدهرِ
فحين تَمَّ الأمرُ في مُلْكِهِمْ	صاحَ بهم حادٍ إلى القبْرِ
فصيّرَ الدورَ خلاءً ولم	يُمْهِلْ أخا عزٍّ ولا قَهْرِ

"Money was spent and used up/ and buildings were erected for fate to destroy. / When they arrived at the peak of their kinship, / a caravan leader cried out that it was time for the grave, / and he emptied the palaces, / giving no respite to either the powerful or the oppressed."

What is peculiar about this graffiti is that it was written after the palace had become a deserted ruin. The ruin is a topic subject to different readings and interpretations. The graffitist is also a reader who turned into a writer. This graffiti can thus be read as a lesson in humility. It invites the reader to contemplate life and reflect on death. It is also worthy of note that *al-Gharīb* palace was built by al-Mutawakkil in *Surra Man Raʾā* (Sāmarrāʾ), the second Islamic capital of the Abbāsid caliphate after Baghdad where the caliph al-Mutawakkil resided.

Having an eye for magnificence and a passion for architecture, the caliph lavished considerable attention on building the largest mosques and palaces in the Islamic world, *a sine qua non* for the perpetuation of his name in posterity. *Al-Gharīb* was not the only palace he built in Sāmarrāʾ. He built more than twenty other palaces, among which were *al-Badīʿ* (The Unique), *al-Mukhtār* (The Chosen), *al-Malīḥ* (The Beautiful), *al-Kāmil* (The Perfect), *al-ʿArūs* (The Bride), *al-Ṣabīḥ* (The Pretty), *Barkuwārā* (a Persian word that means 'The Blissful'), and *al-Jaʿfarī*. These are just a few that he built[84]. Boastful of his palaces, al-Mutawakkil asked the opinion of the man of letters and the transmitter of reports and sayings, Abū l-ʿAynāʾ (d. 895 AD). Abū l-ʿAynāʾ responded[85]:

رأيت الناس بنوا دورهم في الدنيا وأنتَ بنيت الدنيا في دارك.

"I have seen people building palaces in this world, but you have built the world in your palaces."

To have the funds for such extravagance, al-Mutawakkil resorted to all kinds of extortion, an act that led to discontent in the populace[86]. After spending these treasures to erect edifices, the wayfarer elucidates, upon al-Mutawakkil's death, that those fairy scenes left nothing but memory behind.

---

79 Kevin Van Bladel, "The Barmakids", *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three,* eds, Kate Fleet *et al* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 32-38; Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); C. Edmund Bosworth, "Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Kirmānī and the Rise of the Barmakids", *BSOAS,* 57/ 2 (1994): 268-282; Julie S. Meisami, "Masʿūdī on Love and the Fall of the Barmakids", *JRAS* (1989): 252–277; Syed S. Nadvi, "The Origin of the Barmakids", *IC* 6 (1932): 19-28.

80 Nadvi, "The Origin of the Barmakids", 19-28.

81 Meisami, "Masʿūdī on Love and the Fall of the Barmakids", 260.

82 Meisami, "Masʿūdī on Love", 45.

83 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ,* 47; *BOS*, 43.

84 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ,* 49; Muḥammad Saʿīd ʿAql, *al-Dawla l-ʿAbbāsiyya fī ʿahd al-Mutawakkil ʿalā -llāh*, London, e-Kutub Ltd, 2019, 156-158.

85 Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥuṣarī al-Qayrawānī, *Zahr al-ādāb wa thamr al-albāb*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1953), I, 280.

86 Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥuṣarī al-Qayrawānī, *Zahr al-ādāb,* 280-281; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2003), 274-277; William Muir, *The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline, and Fall from Original Sources* (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1924), 528, 530.

What is ironic about this graffiti is that its writer chose to scrawl it on one of the walls of *al-Gharīb* palace. "*Gharīb"* is a polysomic word, which means not only magnificence and uniqueness, but also alienation and estrangement. The writer indeed plays on this pun. What was once magnificent and unique only became deserted and abandoned, indeed proof that like any other man, the caliph was not exempt from death.

In lieu of weighing themselves down with thoughts of their demise, the caliphs chose to indulge in the pleasures of life to distract themselves from their death anxiety. This focus applies not only to al-Mutawakkil, but also to his predecessors and successors. Al-Iṣfahānī mentions that the caliph al-Muqtadir bi-llāh (ruled 908-929 AD) used to sing the following lines that he had heard from the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh (ruled 892 –902 AD) who in turn heard them from al-Wāthiq bi-llāh (ruled 842-847 AD). The lines are the following[87]:

إنعمْ بحسن البديعِ والكاملْ	مادامَ ريبُ الزمانِ كالغافلْ
كأنّني ناظرٌ إلى زمني	ما هو من بعد موتتي فاعلْ

"Enjoy the beauty of [the palaces] *al-Badīʿ* and *al-Kāmil/* as long as the misfortunes of time take no notice of you. // But it is as if I am seeing what [fate]/ will be doing after my death."

Indeed, the fear of fate and change of fortune is not only confined to average people who lead a normal life, but also extends to men of power. While caliphs immersed themselves in pleasure-seeking to avoid the fatality of death, al-Iṣfahānī, as he pointed out in the introduction of his book, and graffiti writers found solace in the idea that death makes people equal. The peripatetic meditates on life and death by resorting to graffiti. Graffiti as a consolatory text brings the peripatetic peace and alleviates his estrangement and suffering. A peripatetic put it nicely as follows[88]:

كل أمرٍ وإن تطاول أوْ دا	م إلى نقلةٍ وحال انقضاء

"Every matter be it long or be it lasting to an end it comes."

It is also worth noting that in his *Kitāb al-aghānī*, al-Iṣfahānī made a reference to wall writing as a form of political dissent in the Umayyad caliphate, a narrative which he did not include in *Adab al-ghurabāʾ* but is still worth mentioning here.

From a panegyric poet praising his patron, the governor of Sijistān then, ʿAbbād Ibn Ziyād Ibn Abīhi, the Umayyad poet Yazīd Ibn Ziyād Ibn Rabīʿa, nicknamed Mufarrigh al-Ḥimyarī (d. 688 AD), turned into a satirical poet (*hajjāʾ*) and his patron into a focus for contempt[89]. After his release from prison, on his way back to Syria, Yazīd used the walls of hostels to defame Ziyād Ibn Abīhi and his sons and ridicule their vileness and lack of generosity, a trait incommensurate with positive rulership. His invective poems were widely circulated at the time. Lambasting ʿAbbād for his fluffy huge beard, he says: "If only beards were hay/ we would fodder Muslims' horses"[90].

Reviled and upbraided, ʿAbbād's brother, ʿUbayd Allāh, the governor of Baṣra, arrested him, forcing him to erase all his scathing inscriptions from the hostels' walls with his fingernails before sending him to prison[91]. He did so until his fingernails were ripped from their nail beds and became thick with blood[92]. This act of effacing betrayed the power of graffiti and the danger it posed to Ziyād Ibn Abīhi and his sons' hegemony. Unabashed, the poet struck back: "What you have done water will wash away/ But what I have said will be firmly established in decayed bones"[93]. Indeed, Yazīd is very cognizant that the passion found in poetry is a real force to be reckoned with over time.

Concluding remarks

To conclude, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*s narratives of dispersal unite the estranged and routed who then compensate for their loss and estrangement by creating a new home in their writing. The textual traces of transit that the wayfarer leaves behind not only documents his/her presence, but also helps him/her feel at home away from home, and achieve a sense of belonging even though far away from that home. Graffiti helps the wayfarer make and own space, however temporary it is.[94] Al-Iṣfahānī, the author of this book, who experienced estrangement and routedness himself, however, takes the strangers' inscriptions a step further. By compiling them in a book, he not only preserves these inscriptions for posterity and from oblivion; he helps strangers create and occupy a permanent and lasting niche in the mainstream Arabic literary canon.

87 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 47-48; *BOS*, 44.

88 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-ghurabāʾ*, 88.

89 Khayruddīn al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām: Qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisāʾ mina l-ʿArab wa-l-Mustaʿribīn wa-l-Mustashriqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1986), 183; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982), I, 360-364; Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1974), XVIII, 426.

90 āha Ḥusayn, "Shāʿir al-ḥubb wa-l-bughḍ wa-l-ḥurriyya", *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī,* 1/1 (1945): 131.

91 Ṭāha Ḥusayn, "Shāʿir al-ḥubb"*,* 136; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 183.

92 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, XVIII, 434.

93 Al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām,* 183.

94 Andrzej Zieleniec, "The Right to Write the City: Lefebvre and Graffiti," *Environnement Urbain / Urban Environment* [Online], 10 (2016), 1.

Bibliography

Sources

Crone, Patricia and Moeh Shmuel. *The Book of Strangers: Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū l-Faraj. *Kitāb adab al-ghurabāʾ*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1972.
Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū l-Faraj. *Al-Diyārāt,* ed. Jalīl al-ʿAṭiyya. London, Cyprus: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li-l- Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 1991.
Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū l-Faraj. *Kitāb al-aghānī*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1974, 25 vols.

Studies

Abel, Ernest L. and E. Buckley, Barbara. *The Handwriting on the Wall.* Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977.
Antrim, Zayde. *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
ʿAql, Muḥammad Saʿīd. *Al-Dawla l-ʿAbbāsiyya fī ʿahd al-Mutawakkil ʿalā llāh*. London: e-Kutub Ltd, 2019.
Al-ʿArfī, Nasība. "Al-Gharāba wa shiʿriyyat al-maʿnā l-mubtakar fī l-naqd al-ʿArabī l-qadīm," *Majallat al-Lugha l-ʿArabiyya,* 43/21 (2019): 323-344.
Ibn al-Athīr, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Naṣrullāh Ibn Muḥammad. *Al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-l-shāʿir.* Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa l-Bahiyya, 2016.
Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas. Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994.
Baird, J.A. and Taylor, Claire. "Ancient Graffiti in Context: Introduction," in *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, eds, J.A. Baird and Claire Taylor. New York, London: Routledge, 2011, 1-19.
Bakhtin, Mikhail*. Problems of Dostoevskv's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
Bartling, Scott. *Beyond Language: Viktor Shklolvsky, Estrangement, and the Search for Meaning in Art*, Ph.D. Dissertation. Stanford University, 2015.
Al-Bayhaqī, Abū Bakr. *Al-Maḥāsin wa-l-masāwiʾ,* ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 2009.
Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art.* California: Stanford University Press, 2005.
Bonebakker, S. A. "Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres," *ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, eds, Julia Ashtiany *et al*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 16-30.
Bosworth, C. Edmund. "Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Kirmānī and the Rise of the Barmakids," *BSOAS,* 57/ 2 (1994): 268-282.
Derrida, Jacques. *On Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976.
Derrida, Jacques. "Signature, Event, Context" in *Glyph 1*, transl. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.
Al-Dīnawarī, Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003.
Eickelman, D. and Piscatori, J. *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
Fabian, Johannes*. Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1998.
Ghmārī, Ṭayyib. "al-Graffiti min adab li-l-ghurabāʾ ilā fann li-l-ightirāb," *ʿĀlam al-Fikr,* 43/3 (2015): 99-140.
Gutas, Dimitri. "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 101/1 (1981): 49-86.
Hadas, Rachel. "On Poetry Anthologies," *New England Review,* 19/4 (1998): 126-139.
Hirschler, Konrad. *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
Al-Ḥuṣarī al-Qayrawānī, Abū Isḥāq. *Zahr al-ādāb wa thamr al-albāb*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1953, 2 vols.
Ḥusayn, Ṭāha. "Shāʿir al-ḥubb wa-l-bughḍ wa-l-ḥurriyya," *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī,* 1/1 (1945).
Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr. *Al-Ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān.* Beirut: Dār al-Rāʾid al-ʿArabī, 1982.
Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr. *Kitāb al-ḥayawān,* ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Musṭafā Bābī l-Ḥalabī, 1965, 7 vols.
(Pseudo) al-Jāḥiz, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr. *Al-Maḥāsin wa-l-aḍdād*. Cairo: Muʾassasat Hindāwī, 2019.
Le Juez, Brigitte and Richardson*,* Bill. *Spaces of Longing and Belonging: Territoriality, Ideology, and Creative Identity in Literature and Film*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019.
Ibn Kashājim, Abū l-Fatḥ Maḥmūd Ibn al-Ḥusayn. *Adab al-nadīm.* Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1999.
Kilīṭū, Abdul Fattāḥ. *Al-Adab wa-l-gharāba: Dirāsāt binyawiyya fī l-adab al-ʿArabī.* Casablanca: Dār Tūbqāl li-l-Nashr, 2006.
Kilpatrik, Hilary*. Making the Great Book of Songs*. London: Routledge, 2010.
Klingman, Avigdor, *et al.* "Graffiti: A Creative Means of Youth Coping with Collective Trauma," *The Arts in Psychotherapy,* 27/5 (2000): 299-307.

Lesko, Ligia. "The Art of Graffiti as Inner-City Communication and as a Means of Public Literacy," accessed January 2020, http://scholarworks.csun.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/140628/Lesko.pdf?sequence=1
Madge, Clare and O'Connor, Henrietta. "Mothers in the Making? Exploring Liminality in Cyber/Space," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 30/ 1 (2005): 83-97.
Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-ʿArab*. eds ʿAbdullāh ʿAlī al-Kabīr *et al*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 2008. 6 vols.
Ibn al-Marzubān, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad Ibn Sahl. *Al-Ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, ed. Jalīl al-ʿAṭiyya. Baghdad: Majallat al-Mawrid, 1987.
Al-Māwardī, Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad. *Adab al-qāḍī*. Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀnī, 1972.
Meisami, Julie S. "Masʿūdī on Love and the Fall of the Barmakids*," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland (JRAS)* (1989): 252-277.
Muir, William. *The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline, and Fall from Original Sources*. Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1924.
Nadvi, Syed S. "The Origin of the Barmakids," *Islamic Culture* (*IC)* 6 (1932): 19–28.
Najjār, Ibrāhīm. *Shuʿarāʾ ʿAbbāsiyyūn mansiyyūn*. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997, 6 vols.
Noorani, Yaseen A. "Estrangement and Selfhood in the Classical Concept of Waṭan," *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 47/ 1-2 (2016): 16-42.
Pabón-Colón, Jessica N. *Graffiti Grrlz: Performing Feminism in the Hip Hop Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.
Pellat, Charles. "ADAB ii. Adab in Arabic Literature," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/4, 439-444; an updated version is available online at: https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/adab-ii-arabic-lit (accessed 24 January 2023).
Pifer, Michael. "The Age of the *Gharīb*: Strangers in Medieval Mediterranean," *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Worlds in Motion*, eds, Kathryn Babayan and Michael Pifer. London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2018, 13-37.
Pritchard, Annette and Morgan, Nigel. "Hotel Babylon: Exploring Hotels as Liminal Sites of Transition and Transgression," *Tourism Management,* 27 (2006).
Ibn Qutayba. *Al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982, 2 vols.
Ragazzoli, C., *et al.* "Introduction," in *Scribbling Through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity*, eds, Chloé Ragazzoli *et al.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 1-15.
Reisner, Robert George. *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing*. New York: Cowles Book Co, 1971.
Robinson, Chase F. *Islamic Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
Rodriguez, Amardo and Clair, Robin Patric. "Graffiti as Communication," *The Southern Communication Journal,* 65/1 (1999): 1-15.
Rosenthal, Franz. "The Stranger in Medieval Islam," *Arabica,* 44/1 (1997): 35-75.
Sartre, John-Paul. "Why write?" in *What is Literature? A Critical Anthology*, ed. Mark Robson. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020, 306-319.
Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique" (1917), transl. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.
Smith, Pamela H. *From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022.
Al-Ṣūlī, Abū Bakr. *Ashʿār awlād al-khulafāʾ*. Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Ṣāwī, 1936.
Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2003.
Taylor, Malynda Strother. "Functions of Liminality in Literature: A Study of Georges Bataille's 'Le Bleu Du Ciel,' Julien Green's 'L'Autre,' and Assia Djebar's 'L'Amour, La Fantasia,'" PhD dissertation. Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1998.
Toorawa, Shawkat. *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-century Bookman in Baghdad.* London: Routledge Curzon, 2005.
Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine, 1969.
Turner, Victor*. Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.
Van Bladel, Kevin. "The Barmakids," *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three,* eds, Kate Fleet *et al,* Leiden: Brill, 2013, 32-38.
Van Gennep, Arnold*. The Rites of Passage*, transl. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
Von Grunebaum, G. E. "The Aesthetic Foundation of Arabic Literature," *Comparative Literature,* 4/4 (1952): 323-340.
Zieleniec, Andrzej. "The Right to Write the City: Lefebvre and Graffiti," *Environnement Urbain/ Urban Environment* [Online], 10 (2016).
Al-Ziriklī, Khayruddīn*. Al-Aʿlām: Qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisāʾ mina l-ʿArab wa-l-Mustaʿribīn wa-l-Mustashriqīn*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1986.